

How to Operate your Brain Perfectly

or, alternatively:

A Practical Theory for Understanding Internal Mental Struggle and Negative Emotions and How to Counteract Them

The Conundrum

Most of us at some point in our lives will experience a mental struggle between one internal voice that urges us forwards and one that urges us to stop. The usual result of this struggle is a steady torrent of negative emotions of all manners and of varying intensities. Many of us spend large parts of our lives confounded by this struggle and distracted into alleviating the negative emotions that result. In fact, many of us become so entranced with this struggle and the resultant emotions that everything that we do becomes centred on the struggle and its results. So what causes this struggle? Much has been researched, pondered and written about in philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, and 'self-help' that focuses on the struggle and on the emotions. Much of this work focuses on the alleviating the results of the struggle – the emotions and the undesired behaviours that result.

How about if the focus to date on our mental troubles was on the wrong thing? How about if the struggle and negative emotions were not the cause of problems but were actually the symptoms of a deeper problem? If it the struggle and the emotions were caused by something else then alleviating those symptoms would only ever cause temporary relief because the real source of problems would remain intact and that source would keep churning out more symptoms of struggle and feeling bad.

The theory presented here aims to show that a deeper cause triggers the struggle and the resultant negative emotions. It also demonstrates that, through understanding the cause, anyone of us can use that information to work in harmony with our nervous system and our consciousness. This allows the almost complete removal of the struggle and of negative emotions and gives the subsequent results of massive increases in personal productivity, in competence, confidence and in feeling cheerful and content on a highly consistent basis. It gives us what we all truly seek: to feel better, to act better and hence to have the capability to fulfil our desires. Not only that, once you understand this theory you find that it's easy to do.

The Internal Struggle

The internal struggle happens for very good reasons and once we understand the reasons it becomes easy to understand why we feel bad and why we struggle to get certain things done. Basically, human evolution, which itself

evolved from a long line of other animals, has mostly occurred as the positive result of mechanisms that enhance survival probabilities. A great proportion of our nervous system and our brain evolved as a consequence of these survival mechanisms and they still act as the major force in interpreting and responding to real world stimuli. Our higher consciousness, which we can consider as the normal voice in our heads when things go relatively well for us, has evolved as the last part of our brain. It sits on top of an ancient nervous system that evolved for survival and reproduction and not much else. The struggle that occurs in our minds is a struggle for our higher consciousness to direct the rest of the mind, nervous system and hence whole body to go against our deeply ingrained survival mechanisms. Whilst possible on occasion, it proves extremely hard to do this on a consistent basis. Because we receive no instruction manual on how to operate our brains our higher consciousness generally remains pretty clueless as to how the rest of the mind and nervous system works and hence it does not know how to work in harmony with it to get things done. Instead we operate our minds very poorly and this continuously generates a range of emotions, usually negative, that hamper us and so we end up constantly in the thrall of a personal emotional battle.

The Cause of Emotions

Our emotions don't come about by accident. A mechanism exists that creates emotions and the great thing is that we can quite easily control that mechanism once we understand how it works. Like any mechanism it works on a very logical basis where a repeated input is converted into a respondent output. Once we understand that mechanism instead of being in the grip of our emotions we can instead consider our emotions as a guidance system. By knowing how that guidance system operates we can programme it to help us instead of continuously ending up thwarted by our emotions.

The mechanism works quite simply as this: First, we set a desire. Second, we take action to fulfil the desire. Third, we interpret our results to see if we have fulfilled the desire. Fourth, *we feel emotion as a result of the difference between our desired result and our actual result*. Thus, if we do not meet our desired result we will feel some form of negative emotion and if we do meet our desired result we will feel some form of positive emotion. This happens each and every time that we attempt to fulfil a desire, without fail and in all situations apart from two exceptions explained later. The type and intensity of the emotion depends on the size of the differential between the desire and the actual result and upon the size of the resources, in terms of time, money, possessions, or people, won or lost.

To illustrate the point I give a few examples:

It is your birthday but you are no longer a child and so you have less expectation and desire for attention and presents. However, you come home and find that your best friend has organised a party and all of your friends have come and each one has bought a present that you really want (which saves you having to ditch everything at the local charity shop the following

Saturday). In this situation your real result delivered far more than your desires and expectations with the result that you felt surprised, delighted, loved and exuberant!

You open the door for someone at work and you expect thanks. However, the person coming through says nothing and doesn't even acknowledge you. Because your desire and expectation for a thank you was not delivered in reality then you feel annoyed ("Ungrateful idiot!") or perhaps even angry ("You moron! I wouldn't piss on you if you were burning!").

You buy a raffle ticket thinking, "I never win these things, but you've got to be in it to win it," expecting to come away with nothing. However, at the draw you end up with the first prize. You exceeded your expectation and feel delighted!

As you can see in each example, the emotions triggered occurred in response to a real world outcome to a specific desire or expectation. Thus we can consider our emotional reactions as a guidance system that tells us if we are on-track or off-track. The problem for most of us is that we don't know that this mechanism exists and we don't know what creates the desires that the guidance system gives feedback to. Consequently, most of us end up in the sway of our emotions and feel helpless to take control of our lives and to move forward purposefully.

Survival Responses

When a desire is not met we perceive that something bad has happened to us. To the stimulus of a real result we must give a response. The commonly thought of responses are either fight or flight, however, other responses also exist: submission, reinterpretation and resolution.

Fight

If we fight then we seek to go against the cause of the stimulus and stop its reoccurrence through some form of prevention. This can often prove to be a desperate and high risk approach and is generally avoided. Even if the fight proves effective it still requires the use of much energy and resources and it often doesn't entirely remove the problem. It often only keeps the problem at bay and requires further action thereafter to maintain circumstances favourable to the winner of the fight.

Flight

If we take flight then we evade the stimulus so that we don't feel its effects. This is far less risky and generally doesn't require as much energy or resources. At times this doesn't prove sufficient if no places to evade can be found. This can lead to a fight or to submission.

Submit

If we submit to the stimulus then we accept the unpleasant effects that it brings. A balance will often exist where a person, or organism, feels sustained low level negative emotions because of this condition of having to accept

undesired conditions. If the emotions grow stronger then attempts at fight or flight might occur again. This kind of response often occurs when a person is highly dependent upon other forces outside of their control. For example, a child might find itself very unhappy at its treatment by its parents but it doesn't have the power to fight the parents and it cannot flee the parents as it is dependent upon them for its basic survival needs. A similar thing can happen to employees who end up dissatisfied. They find themselves unable to fight against the company and its systems and yet cannot leave because the company provides the money that sustains the employee. A majority of people feel sustained low level negative emotions because they find themselves dependent upon situations that contain a lot of unwanted conditions.

Reinterpretation

By consciously managing desires a person can accept their reality and lower or remove desires and expectations so that no deficit between real world results and desires exists. This eliminates the production of negative emotions. In certain situations this proves very useful and worthy if the desires will always prove impossible to fulfil (e.g. if you've missed the boat on something and won't ever get another chance then adjusting to that reality by no longer holding onto the desire will remove the negative emotions that the lost opportunity continues to give). Sometimes we simply need to let the passage of time occur so that certain events can come about to allow fulfilment of the desire. In this situation impatience and annoyance will make a person feel continuously sour so adjusting to a temporary undesired reality can make a person feel much better in the meantime. Despite this adjustment, sometimes a situation still feels so grievous that adjustment is unacceptable or simply unwise due to the level and intensity of the threat caused by a stimulus.

Resolution - Develop Competency

If we don't have the power to fight, if we don't have the option to flee, if we cannot stand to submit any longer and if adjusting to reality proves untenable then we have one option left – the best option – to improve the level of our competencies so that we can create better circumstances either free of irritating stimuli or else easily able to render them ineffective. By continually developing our competencies we can more easily and readily fulfil our desires. When we expand our personal powers to solve problems permanently then those problems cease to become problems and they simply become mere events. For example, at one time you could not read and to read anything was considered a problem until you developed your abilities and learned and practiced until now you can read with ease. Reading has transformed from being a problem into an event. Almost all of our problems in life can be changed into mere events through the development of competencies. This option takes time to develop and doesn't occur in an instant but it is the option that moves you upwards in life.

How Our Emotions are Triggered

Our brains function predominantly as a survival mechanism. Fortunately, for most people in most developed economies providing for basic survival needs does not prove very difficult and it doesn't take up all of our time or require a constant battle against the odds. Once those basic needs get fulfilled consistently and easily we can aspire to have, be or do greater things. However, the brain still operates from a basis of survival first and so it has a very, very pragmatic nature. It categorically will not let us 'do the impossible' and, in fact, I know of no quicker way to come to an abrupt stop and to feel bad in an instant than to persistently attempt to do the impossible.

By impossible I don't mean absolutely impossible, instead, I mean personally impossible *in the moment*. This is a crucial distinction; our emotional guidance system has this constraint as a permanent and unchangeable factor. It makes sense because if something is physically impossible in the moment then no amount of thinking about it will make any difference. Thus it is a waste of effort and resource to attempt it and if other overriding survival factors are at stake, whether real or imagined, then our survival mechanisms kick-in and we stop that activity and move onto something else. That's the logic by which the emotional guidance system works and it causes us a lot of personal trouble because on a conscious level we know that a lot of things that we want are absolutely possible. However, conscious rationalisation cannot overcome the practical default position that a set desire that is impossible in the moment will always remain that way *unless something changes*.

If we don't change then the emotional guidance system keeps churning out negative emotions designed to warn us that we cannot fulfil those desires. In ancient times that inability to do something might have caused harm or even loss of life so we often feel extreme and intense emotions with the purpose to get us out of danger and to *avoid pain*. Our emotional guidance system has almost no ability to rationalise. It merely responds to the difference between desired result and actual result and when a strong deficit exists it responds with a self-preservation survival mechanism. It does not know if a real physical danger exists and that causes a problem for us.

Our nervous system and primitive brain set up many desires in response to conditions of the body. When in need of more energy we feel hungry and seek out food and water. When weary we feel tired and go to sleep. On top of these bodily needs, we also set many objectives with our conscious and rational thinking. With many of these conscious desires no physical danger exists but we operate using systems evolved to respond to physical danger. Thus, if we persist in fighting against our more powerful survival responses, that always override our rational desires and intentions, then we set ourselves up to fight a very difficult battle. If we don't know how the mind works, then we don't know how to deal with this problem. Instead we avoid pain and we avoid facing up to our problems through indulging in distractions and procrastination. However, that same emotional guidance system that by default thwarts us still remains working to determine if we have fulfilled the conscious desire and when the result is a negative it churns out more negative emotions so after a while avoiding the pain of facing the problem also becomes painful. This can leave us in a state of perpetual anguish

because we feel bad that we cannot fulfil our desires and our avoidance and realisation of our lack of adequacy also makes us feel bad.

One conscious reaction is to fight against the survival response. This is where strong character comes into play. We develop courage, discipline, persistence, steadfastness, and other noble traits in order to subvert and overcome our survival responses. This still involves a lot of struggle and it often results in a stern nature but it still fights against incredibly powerful survival instincts and often proves inadequate.

The good news is that once we know how the mind works we can easily work in harmony with our survival instincts to achieve our desires *with very little struggle whatsoever*. By understanding that our emotional guidance system reacts powerfully to desires that prove impossible to fulfil in the moment, we can change our immediate desires so that we only set ourselves to do things that we already have the capability of fulfilling, or, in the case of necessary growth, to do things only just beyond what we currently have the capability to do. In this case only a small negative deficit between desired result and actual result exists which barely triggers a response from our emotional guidance system. Not only that but we end up obliged to set realistic and practical desires, which in reality makes those desires easier to fulfil.

Instead of ending up in a perpetual internal struggle against negative emotions, their symptomatic effects on our behaviour and often a lack of progress in life, we can completely turn things around. We can work in harmony with the mind and enormously reduce the probabilities of feeling bad; as a result we also set ourselves up to act with high productivity and effectiveness.

Survival Drives

The processes of evolution have developed most animals into almost pure survival mechanisms. Almost every primal function of animals is geared towards survival and then reproduction. Humans differ in that we can imagine, pursue and fulfil desires beyond survival and reproduction; however those abilities evolved later than every other function. If we bear that in mind and remember that for countless millennia our prime concern was mere survival then we can get a better grasp on why we behave as we do.

Our brain and nervous system is mostly dedicated to survival. The demands of physical survival almost always take priority and generally become the default position when deciding how best to behave *in the moment*. Consequently, although, at a higher level of reasoning, we desire to do our best and to create a better life, more often than not our survival drives rule the roost. These drives place more attention to not ending up extinct and hence the concept 'survival of the fittest' does not drive us. Instead 'extinction of the least fit' drives us. We pay far more attention to not ending up the worst in a situation than we do to ending up the best.

In ancient times, ending up the worst person in a given situation could more readily lead to death and extinction so we are finely attuned to avoiding such situations. However, once out of the danger zone and back to relatively comfortable survival conditions our primitive brain, nervous system and emotional guidance system has next to no concern about anything else. This can account for why so many of us can spend so much time struggling against ourselves to achieve higher aspirational desires and yet make little progress because those aspirations don't mean much to the rest of the survival mechanism. If the survival mechanism is mostly fulfilled and satisfied in the moment then all of those other concerns of the higher consciousness can be largely ignored as just irritating noise. This feels odd because our conscious thinking seems like the real 'us' and the conscious is almost entirely absorbed by its preoccupation with itself. However, this consciousness depends upon a system that is 95% or more devoted to survival and that alone. The real 'us' can only function when the rest of our survival mechanism is secure and nourished. The real 'us' can only achieve those higher aspirations either through a continuous struggle against the rest of the survival mechanism or, more intelligently but more rarely, by working in total harmony with it.

In order to survive without experiencing continuous crises and difficult conditions each one of us needs to develop the necessary competencies to fulfil our survival needs. The better we get at that, the easier it becomes to thrive and survive and we can get on with our business more efficiently. A lack of competency is one of the worst conditions that people can allow themselves to get into. For this reason, humiliation (a public demonstration of incompetence) is one of the worst emotions we can feel and desperation (a near total lack of competence to deal with even basic functions) is so repugnant to us. Conversely, we respect and feel very comfortable with confident people because anyone who exudes true confidence can do so because they have massive levels of competence to solve problems. One of the reasons why we find personal growth so rewarding is because it generally signifies that we have developed some aspect of our personal competence further and that means that in the survival stakes we will likely have an easier time of things.

Fear and fantasy

The two exceptions that we experience involving emotional responses are fears and fantasies. Here, instead of comparing real results to desired results, we compare imagined results (bad results in the case of fear and good results in the case of fantasies) against current results. This still triggers off emotions but in a reverse way to the normal mechanism. Fantasies feel great because they create positive emotions that come from the fulfilment of highly desired objectives. However, they must be tempered against the realisation that they might never come about or that attempting to fulfil them could well lead to disappointment or even disillusionment. The antidote to engaging in too much fantasising is to work out the processes that will fulfil the fantasy and start working on them, knowing and accepting that the only way to stand any

chance of living the fantasy is to work steadily on developing the things necessary for fulfilment. If we find ourselves unwilling to do whatever it takes to fulfil the fantasy then we must give up wanting it or else feel continuously disappointed.

Fears feel awful because they trigger negative emotions that come from threats to survival. Recognising the imaginative aspect of them we can adjust our thinking to look at things realistically and to reduce the risk of fears coming to fruition. A lot of fears come from seeking to do things that could prove a threat to survival, either physical harm or mental harm from humiliation and ostracisation that can lead initially to social disadvantage and eventually to possible physical harm. The antidote to fears is to develop the competencies that convincingly remove the threats to survival and/or to the fulfilment of desires.

The Formulation and Counteraction of Desires

Our desires generally come from two main sources. We have a lot of autonomous bodily needs that the primitive part of our brain controls and which also includes some instinctive responses such as jumping in fright when we stumble across a potential physical threat. Most of these desires occur simply to keep us alive. Some of them prove impossible to control consciously, such as stopping breathing until dead. Many of them prove difficult to control, such as running in fright from a real and present danger, but which we can control given sufficient purpose and practice. Generally speaking, unless we face extreme physical deprivation and live in a very dangerous environment we can usually easily fulfil these survival desires and so they normally do not cause our emotional guidance system to trigger responses.

The second major source is our conscious mind. This can absorb desires and expectations, such as those that our parents, teachers and culture give to us or it can actively choose and set desires and expectations. Within the overall set of desires are four major subsets: Objective Desires, Needs, Beliefs and Expectations. Fortunately we can easily offset each one so that through conscious control we can set up our desires so that we do not trigger negative emotions from our emotional guidance system.

Objective Desires

These are consciously created desires where we imagine that we want something and set out to get it. These days most people would refer to them as goals. They can be as simple as getting a cup of coffee through to creating a Fortune 500 company. A big reason why so many people feel negative emotions is that they set very high objective desires for which they don't have the capability to fulfil. This results in us being constantly being reminded by our emotional guidance system that we have failed to fulfil our desires in

reality. This leads to an almost perpetual state of feeling bad, sometimes intensely but more often, just continuously feeling dissatisfied.

To counteract the effect of attempting to do what our emotional guidance system indicates is impossible we must change our objective desires in the moment to things that we can do already or to fulfil things that we can almost do so that we stretch and grow ourselves but with a high possibility and probability of fulfilment.

Whilst simple in principle this actually takes some organisation to put into practice. We pursue our desires because they excite us and because we want the benefit of those desires. Naturally, we want those benefits immediately but we soon feel disappointment when we face the reality that we have not yet developed the competency to fulfil those desires immediately. That deficit and the feelings of inadequacy that result can easily derail the efforts needed to consistently develop ourselves until we can fulfil that major desire. We thus have to design a method to fulfil the steps necessary for final fulfilment. Once we determine the initial steps we do best to forget the final objective desire and instead focus intently on fulfilling those first steps. Otherwise, if we continue to focus on what we don't have our emotional guidance system will also focus on the often huge deficit between our final desired result and our actual reality and it will bring forth a great stream of negative feelings. This will make us feel despondent and will often lead to massive avoidance of the issues and eventually to quitting. For this reason we must take great care with the process of goal-setting and this gets explained further on.

Needs

Whenever we create a desire that we can only fulfil through the actions and results of someone or something else then we also create a need. These needs lie at the root of most neurotic behaviour because when we cannot control the fulfilment of our desires through our own personal abilities we start to become a little bit fraught. The level of intensity of that reaction depends upon how much value we put upon the fulfilment of that need in order to feel good, or at least not to feel bad. If we have a lot of needs then we feel negative emotions most of the time because we have little or no control over the fulfilment of those desires in reality and we will receive constant negative feedback and negative emotions because of this.

To counteract the immobilising effects of needs we have to reclaim our desires so that fulfilment is totally within our own personal power to create. That means taking responsibility for our own actions and recognising that we alone create the conditions for fulfilment, satisfaction and contentment. It requires a change of thinking. For example, the need for approval is a common complaint. In this situation a person decides that they can only feel good/worthy/happy if someone else shows approval of his or her actions or self. To turn this around that person must change their thinking along the lines of "Whilst I would really like it if Person X approved of me/my action, in reality I can choose to approve of myself and my action in this instance. If I prove

true to myself and my standards for good behaviour then I approve of myself. If I prove untrue then I will disapprove of myself and take action to counter that. I don't need anyone else's approval to justify myself, my actions or my position." If you have until now placed a lot of personal feelings of fulfilment upon the reactions of other people then it can take some getting used to, to think for yourself and favour yourself and to act independently. After a while though, you will feel more at peace with yourself and internally stronger because you determine your state of mind, not other people.

Beliefs

Whenever we choose to consider an imaginary and unproven factor as existent in reality then we create a belief. Many of us choose to live our lives using beliefs as constraints to what we will do and will not do and to what we can do and cannot do. When we create a belief we automatically create a desire that this belief is true in reality. If we then carry out actions, formulated on the basis of our beliefs, and find that our actual results do not meet our desired results because our beliefs did not hold true, then we will feel negative emotions as a result of that deficit.

To counteract beliefs we can do two things. My preference is to turn beliefs into theories that I can test for validity through experimentation. In this way I can test ideas and determine if I can rely upon them and I do so in a detached way so that I don't feel bad if a theory doesn't work, instead I will have learnt something useful in reality. In fact, as far as I can, I eliminate the word belief from my thinking, however, I know that many people hold sacred, or near sacred, beliefs. My advice in this situation is to construct your desires and your methods for fulfilling those desires so that you place zero reliance for the fulfilment of that desire upon the validity of that belief. In this way you will more likely fulfil your desire because you search for possible and probable ways for fulfilment and you act in a highly pragmatic fashion. You also avoid testing your belief, which means that you can still hold it as sacred.

Expectations

Expectations act as constraints upon our assessment and interpretation of an event. They set up little desires as to the quality and nature of what we do or what we experience. Consequently they often set up conflicting desires that make fulfilment difficult, if not totally impossible, and can often lead to not feeling good even when an important objective desire has been fulfilled. They tend to determine whether we feel satisfied once a major desire has been fulfilled.

Expectations tend to have a construction along the lines of "Factor A must occur in order for me to feel satisfied" such as in this following example. Imagine that you set out to buy a new pair of jeans. You have clear ideas about the style, colour, price and brand. You spend some time hunting around and can fulfil all of your desires except for the brand. You decide to buy the

jeans but don't feel strongly positive emotions because one expectation was not fulfilled, instead you feel dissatisfied.

We tend to absorb or evolve a lot of our expectations rather than consciously forming them. We decide on "what's right and what's wrong" by observing and picking up signals from the people and culture around us as well as from personal experience on what makes a satisfying result. I personally find them the most pervasive and the most difficult of all the types of desire to erase. Unlike objective desires, needs or beliefs, things that we can readily identify and change, we often don't become aware of our expectations until they result in negative emotions triggered by our emotional guidance system due to non-fulfilment. At this point it is too late to counteract them and if we are not careful we can easily get into a trap of feeling dour and sour that can lead to the avoidance of carrying out actions to fulfil objective desires because we perceive that doing so will cause pain but it is not clear why that will happen.

As a stop-gap measure for dealing with the result of unfulfilled expectations, once I recognise that I feel bad, I change my expectations to preferences and say to myself, "Although I would have preferred Factor A to have occurred it didn't and I accept that reality. Even so, I still fulfilled my prime desire and a lot of other preferences." Accepting and adjusting to reality proves very important in quickly overcoming negative emotions rather than labouring over them, which can often result in feeling even worse.

As a more fundamental measure I sit down and analyse my expectations. If I have fulfilled a task and yet feel dissatisfied I ask myself what else I would have to do to feel satisfied, or, if I find myself avoiding doing something, I take note of my instant emotional reactions such as "It's too hard!" "It's no fun!" "I don't know what to do!" I then assess the validity of those reactions. Attempting to do the 'impossible in the moment' is the fastest and most consistent way to bring myself to an abrupt halt. Now that I recognise the mechanism at work I can adjust my objective desires so that they become easier to do and I can change my expectations about personal standards of performance to preferences so that I don't get hung up on achieving impossible or improbable constraints. It is in the area of dealing with expectations that we need to apply our most accurate thinking and appraisal of reality.

Managing Desires

Knowing how emotions are triggered through measurement against desires we can now remove internal struggle by managing our desires so that we don't create resistance from our survival mechanisms *in the moment*. One very easy way that we can ensure no creation of negative emotions is to set few desires and to only set desires that we have the full capability to fulfil. In this way we will never create a deficit between the fulfilment of desires and our real world results. However, in our personal lives we generally seek to better ourselves and our conditions so few of us would be content to make no more progress in life. That means that we will continually face an internal

struggle unless we work in harmony with our mind and the emotional guidance system.

Firstly, we must continuously keep in mind that the emotional guidance system makes its assessments in the moment. Of course, we must make plans to construct better results and the emotional guidance system will always be 'listening-in' ready to receive desires as inputs. We have to manage this point of our thinking very carefully. If we take action and refer our progress against desires that are difficult to do or improbable to complete within the time and resources available in the moment then the emotional guidance system will interpret that as impossible and it will trigger off negative emotions and avoidance patterns. Instead we must direct ourselves to focus only on the next small step to be carried out in the moment and then, assuming that it is possible to do in the moment, we will carry it out without any resistance or struggle. In fact, because we fulfil the desire in reality we end up feeling good and cheerful. What a wonderful result, and such a turn around from the usual run of things!

Secondly, we must continually develop and expand our competencies so that things currently impossible to do in the moment become possible to do in the moment for us. That's easy to say but it is the thing that you will end up devoting a huge part of your life into carrying out. In my opinion, the purpose of life is to fulfil our desires and the process by which we make that possible is through the continuous development and maintenance of our competencies.

The Edge of Impossible

Now that you know how fickle and weak the rest of the mind is (it's not really, it's just that it works on a highly logical but very limited basis dictated almost entirely by survival needs), how can you hope to achieve the personally impossible? The answer for most people is to rely on strength of character so that willpower, discipline, courage, persistence, determination and so on win-out in the struggle of the mind. However, you can use a less troublesome, matter-of-fact method that avoids the struggle and allows you to learn, grow and expand relatively easily.

The development of personal competencies is a process of personal growth that can lead to lasting satisfaction as we fulfil more and more desires that we previously did not have the capability to do before but it also is a process that can lead to feeling a great amount of negative emotion varying from frustration and annoyance at not meeting small objectives to disillusionment and despair at not meeting strongly held desires no matter what efforts we make.

An understanding of the process of personal growth can help us to prepare for the trials ahead and to carry out those processes with greater effectiveness and with less emotional turmoil because we can recognise what causes the negative feelings and quickly adjust accordingly. The description 'personal competencies' refers to any condition in life that a person has personal control

over. It mostly refers to generic problem solving abilities through expanding levels of knowledge and skill but can also refer to creativity, resources (such as time and money) and any other attribute needed to fulfil a desire and over which a person can do things to either definitely control fulfilment of the desire or else significantly increase the probabilities of fulfilment of the desire with respect to uncontrollable factors.

Personal growth feels difficult because we must do the impossible; not the absolutely impossible but the impossible for us as things stand in the moment. We can imagine the full set of our competencies as a sphere with a hazy surface. Deep inside the core of the sphere lie all of the things that we can do with robust confidence; things for which we often have a surplus of ability such as walking, talking, reading, writing and other basic skills. We can think of them as routine production processes. We have such confidence in these processes that we no longer pay them much attention and any task involving the requirement to use such skills is simply an event and not a tough problem. If you could live your entire life from now with a requirement to only ever fulfil desires based upon these skills then you would live a life of full contentment, with no difficult problems and you would act with great confidence and certainty in everything that you do.

On top of this core lies another layer of activities. These are things that we have learned and have developed and yet they have not become routine processes. Sometimes we can learn or develop something sufficiently to solve a particular problem and then forget about it afterwards (such as cramming for a test). If we want to make the fulfilment of personal desires dependent upon these developments then we must transfer them into the core of competencies. Otherwise, to depend upon unreliable capabilities will often cause stress, uncertainty, and a higher probability of non-fulfilment of desires. These kinds of competencies require regular review and a lot of focus, effort and exercise to transfer into core competencies. Once they have become core competencies we can rely upon them with high levels of certainty and any plans that we make based upon using these competencies will see a very high rate of fulfilment.

Everything outside of the sphere lies in the realm of things personally impossible to do and the objectives of our efforts at personal growth seek to expand our sphere of competencies and to bring more and more things into the sphere of the personally possible. On the surface of the sphere lie all of those activities and developments that we are just learning and only just creating some competency with. The surface is hazy and porous because it represents the edge of impossible. At this point we can sometimes do new things but we quickly lose that capability unless we focus intently on making the currently impossible regularly and robustly possible for us.

It is at the edge of impossible that we feel frustration and annoyance most acutely. We set ourselves a desire to do something that we cannot currently do and so we set out to expand our capabilities from where we stand. Until we develop the necessary competencies we will not fulfil our desire and that will generate negative emotions. Consequently we must exercise wise caution at

this point. We must ensure that we focus on developing competencies that are *nearly* possible in the moment. This means that we work on the entirely pragmatic basis of just going a little beyond what we can already definitely do with consistency and also ensures that not too great a difference exists between any objective desire and real world results.

In the beginning part of this expansion the objective desire will often go unmet so if it is just a small difference then no great and debilitating emotions will be felt. Conversely, if we set very high objective desires for things that we cannot do then we will quickly feel acutely negative emotions. Seeking to fulfil impossible-in-the-moment desires is the fastest way to generate painful negative emotions and for the survival mechanisms of our nervous system to kick-in and bring all action to a rapid stop. We then often follow up with avoidance responses that cause us to procrastinate and to indulge in easy, possible, pleasurable and non-threatening distractions. In my opinion it is for this reason that many goal setting techniques end up causing personal misery because they encourage people to reach for the moon without backing up the process of achieving fantastic goals with the knowledge and methods of how to develop the necessary competencies, or how to harmonise with a nervous system that responds in the moment and avoids risks or doing the personally impossible. Highly sought after desires can be fulfilled but only by doing all of the intermediary steps between the start and the finish. Attempting to do highly sought after desires whilst struggling against the rest of the mind and nervous systems proves incredibly hard to do.

In seeking to fulfil high aspirations we end up spending a great amount of time at the edge of impossible and hence generally feeling bad, especially if a great gulf exists between what we are personally capable of now and what we finally want to be capable of. On top of that attempting to fulfil a time constrained goal with barely developed abilities greatly increases the probabilities of failure because those competencies cannot be relied upon. It is far better to focus on achieving goals through the use of core competencies than upon edge of impossible capabilities barely learned, understood or developed. Thus, when setting desires life goes a lot more smoothly when those desires can be fulfilled from core competencies. Expansion of those core competencies should always be occurring but reliance upon non-core competencies should generally be avoided as that reduces the probabilities of lasting success.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Too much simultaneous development at one time leads to juggling too many unreliable variables at once and to great frustration because too much time is spent at the edge of impossible. This places draining demands upon a person. We can feel threatened because we do not have the desired competencies and the emotional guidance system churns out plenty of negative emotions to move us from danger back into the safe zone (even though it might be a materially weaker zone with fewer opportunities, if we can still easily survive then that becomes the preferred position). Spending too

much time feeling incompetent gives a very skewed self-assessment. In reality we have many competencies but if no attention or recognition is given to them then we end up feeling very inadequate. The opposite of competence and confidence are inadequacy and desperation. These are very negative and debilitating states and feelings and we do ourselves a disservice if operate in ways that artificially induce such personal conclusions on a frequent basis. This frequently happens when we attempt to do highly impossible things in the moment (because the deficit between desire and real ability to fulfil that desire is so enormous) and never change our desires or our approach to the fulfilment of them.

For effective personal development and for the strong and reliable fulfilment of desires we do best to rely upon our core competencies and to rely upon new personal development only when it has advanced close to, or within, the sphere of core competency. When this is done it becomes a much more certain prospect that realistic goals can be fulfilled within a pragmatic timescale.

Summary

The source of all of our negative feelings and of most problems in life is seeking to have, do or be things in the moment that are not possible for us to fulfil in that same moment. Emotions continually come forth which indicate our failure to fulfil our desires. Our nervous system evolved to prevent us from experiencing pain and danger and to remove us immediately from situations that gave rise to pain or danger, whether physical or mental. The mechanisms involved in that process are so powerful that it takes a mighty struggle for the consciousness to wilfully override those systems and most of the time we fail to do that and instead end up participating in a drawn out internal struggle.

We can eliminate this struggle by adjusting our attitude when doing difficult things. Whenever we attempt to do something personally impossible to do in the moment, either because we lack the competencies or because it requires going through a process that we are unfamiliar with, then we do best to start off by accepting the realities of our situation. By recognising that the thing to be undertaken is most likely going to be difficult, frustrating, very time-consuming, and baffling and that we will find ourselves very inadequate and greatly incompetent until we go through the process and master the skills then we set up almost no positive expectations whatsoever and we prepare ourselves to accept the worse. If things do prove difficult then we don't get upset because our expectations either match our real results or conversely prove overly pessimistic so that we can exceed our expectations and we feel slightly good. In this way we can go about our business matter-of-factly and calmly as we would do if we already had the competence and this was an event and not a problem. This very pragmatic approach, that totally accepts the reality of our situation and doesn't seek to have what cannot yet be had, allows us to work in harmony with our nervous system. We create no resistance and go with the flow whilst seeking to guide our direction within that flow so that we arrive where we want to arrive.

The great advantage of this theory of the mind and emotions and the methods to work in harmony with these conclusions is that it focuses on the root cause of most of our personal problems – desires that we cannot fulfil. It does so by understanding how emotions are produced as a result of the perceived difference between what we desire and what we get in reality.

We don't have to give up our loftier desires but we do need to make sure that we don't focus on those end results in the moments when we want to take action. Instead we must carry out small useful tasks for which the cumulative effect will take us to final fulfilment of the overall desire. This, of course, is entirely logical but if we don't understand why we get the internal struggle then we battle away in a most ineffective (and often fruitless) manner to get things done.

Also this theory recognises that it is our lack of immediate competence to fulfil our desires that brings us to an abrupt stop each and every time. Hence we must seek fulfilment of desires through methods that depend on competencies that we already have or else we must work on developing the necessary competencies. We can do this most efficiently by recognising our own personal 'edge of the impossible' and then by focusing our efforts into bringing those things just on the extremities of that edge into the domain of 'personally possible.' When we combine these factors we work in harmony with ourselves and the internal mental struggle simply vanishes.

The Effect

You will find the effects strange at first. If you have spent most of your adult life battling against your inner nature, attempting to do the impossible and hence feeling a wide range of negative emotions on a regular basis, then to bring that to a complete stop feels very odd. You no longer feel strained, perplexed and confused and instead you set simple objectives that you can do, or will very soon have the competence to do, and you just get on with life in a highly productive manner. Not only that, because you set objectives that you can fulfil then you get the flip side of the emotional guidance system. You get a feedback of surplus and that makes you feel positive emotions from cheerful through to elated depending on just how great your surplus is.

The other amazing thing is that it happens so easily. Because you work directly on the root cause of fulfilling your desires, things just work easily and correctly. You don't need willpower because you work in harmony with yourself. You don't need motivation or psyching up because you focus on doing things possible in the moment. In fact, you hardly need strong character of any kind. Instead you think very realistically and pragmatically about your desires and you carry out the fulfilment of them in a very logical way and with high probabilities of success. You care less about the external signs and proofs of success because instead you focus almost entirely upon the real issue of developing the personal competencies to fulfil personal desires. When you do that you prove your power to yourself because you continually fulfil and satisfy your desires on an almost continuous basis. You end up

highly independent, highly competent and highly fulfilled. Not only that you feel good for most of the way too!

What Will Happen to You When You Apply these Principles

As you harmonise your consciousness with the rest of your nervous system, reset your desires and seek to expand personal competencies you will feel and behave in the following ways:

You will feel cheerful almost all of the time and even when operating at the edge of impossible you will take a playful and experimental approach to expanding capabilities. As soon as you find yourself turning away from an activity, the thought will kick-in "What about this is impossible in the moment?" and you will either break the task down to make it immediately easier or stop and think about the barrier to progress and what specific steps, or experiments, you can take to take you beyond that point.

You will rarely feel deep or sharp negative emotions because you select objective desires to pursue in the moment that tend to be relatively easy to accomplish. When unexpected events outside of your personal control happen then anger and disappointment are rarely felt because you hold few strong expectations for these kinds of occurrences. Instead you quickly accept reality and quickly adjust to the results of that reality and then move forward. If it becomes necessary to do deal with a difficult situation then you look to cover the angles as best as possible and then resign yourself to accept whatever else may come.

You will take a very pragmatic and impersonal approach to solving problems and fulfilling desires through recognising that only the adjustment of desires can eliminate negative emotions and that only by expanding personal capabilities and competencies can currently unobtainable desires ever be obtained. Emotions only serve as feedback and as survival responses and as such they are never a part of the real problem, only ever a symptom of it.

You will operate at outstandingly high levels of productivity because you consistently base making personal progress upon core competencies that you can perform day in and day out with great consistency and confidence in your abilities. By focusing on solving problems based upon what you definitely can do, you increase the likelihood of fulfilling personal desires. You eliminate procrastination through setting personally possible desires/goals/incremental steps in the moment.

You recognise, through self-awareness, what new knowledge, resources, skills, and solutions you need to fulfil long-term aspirations and you develop them well in advance of needing them. Then, when the time comes to use them, you have already moved them close to, or within, your personal core competencies so that you can rely upon yourself with the confidence that can only ever come from competence. You know that if you have to rely upon inadequate abilities for the fulfilment of desires and basic survival in any

endeavour that you will feel stressed, incompetent and perhaps even dangerously close to desperate. Knowing that you make sure that that never ever happens.

Because you have eliminated being paralysed and immobilised by the negative emotions and survival mechanisms that come into play when you attempt to do the personally impossible, you find that you have much more time for carrying out core competencies and for expanding them further. You also carry them out cheerfully because you set things up to make fulfilment, and hence good emotions, the usual result.

You will rarely need motivation to cause you to take action and on the occasions when it becomes necessary to lift yourself from torpor you do so making use of knowledge about our survival mechanisms and our prime aspiration to survive. You focus on what you will lose by not doing anything and how that will threaten your well-being and secondly you think about what you will gain from increasing core competencies and the robust self-reliance that they bring.

Where to Go From Here?

Check out my blog! www.nickpagan.com I go into more detail about how to manage your mind so that you maintain the crucial attitude that gets things done without struggle. I go into greater detail about some of the theory behind the ideas presented here. I also give lots of information on how to develop competence in both general ways and in highly specific methods that allow you to get things done with better results and with high effectiveness.

I already have many articles ready for release and a whole lot of other good stuff to come so please subscribe to the RSS feed so that new posts get delivered to you as soon as they come out. Please tell your friends and pass on this whitepaper to others.

For your interest, you might find the following articles of immediate interest in following up on points raised in this paper:

[Extinction of the Least Fit](#)
[Negative Affirmations](#)
[Pinnacle Goal-Setting Doesn't Work](#)
[Procrastination](#)