

Chapter 13

The Practice of Alignment

"It's not an accident that musicians become musicians and engineers become engineers: it's what they're born to do. If you can tune into your purpose and really align with it, setting goals so that your vision is an expression of that purpose, then life flows much more easily."

~ Jack Canfield, author and motivational speaker

This Jack Canfield quote says it best, concerning the direct connection between vision, goals, and life-purpose. When we achieve this kind of alignment, we produce and "live-out" the very purpose that we were put on this planet to enjoy and experience. Purpose isn't always linked to a career; it could be linked to your role as a loving mother, or to a way of being in the world, as with someone who spreads kindness wherever they go. Most importantly, purpose is not something we *arrive at*; it is something that we *live and experience* every day.

I have had several BMW cars in my life. Not only are these incredible cars, I happen to really like their brand slogan of, "The ultimate driving machine," when talking about performance and

life mastery. If you watch BMW commercials closely, you recognize that they are not just promoting the quality of the car. What they are promoting is the quality of the *experience of life* as an owner of a BMW car. They want you to know that there is an exciting, purposeful journey that awaits you with a BMW, from point A to point B, inside and outside the car.

Hardly anyone knows the importance and value of “an experience” more than US companies, which invest millions of dollars each year to deliver a purposeful message to get you to purchase their products. Beyond the benefits of the product itself, they work hard in their advertising campaigns to let you know what life will be like if you buy their product. They are *guiding* you toward an experience, but ultimately you are responsible for defining and creating your experiences with any product that you “buy,” including ideas as well as cultural customs such as marriage and home-ownership.

The concept of creating your own experience couldn't be truer than for life itself. Since life *is* a form of gravity, we can either let life circumstances define us, or as I've said previously, determine how we are going to drive our life. We are, in essence, given an “ultimate driving machine” (our body, mind, and spirit), as well as guidance (through friends or coaches) toward experiences that would enhance life, but *we* are the ones that ultimately create our experience of life day to day. It's that simple.

In one very real sense, life is about creating the most enjoyable and memorable moments day after day, month after month, and year after year that over time become the motion picture of your life, with you as the main character along with a host of supporting cast members. If you viewed your life this way, what actions would you now prioritize daily, what would you think, say and do to promote the most authentic and best possible movie for the world to experience *you*?

I go to movies to experience a range of emotions from sadness, to joy, to hope; and, hopefully, an experience of total mind/body/spirit connection with the storyline and script. I'm “all in” from the beginning of a movie; I want to feel as if I am experiencing life from the vantage point of the characters on the

screen. The only difference then between life and the movies is that I cannot affect the outcome of a movie. In terms of life, however, if there is a "scene" that I'm just not happy with, I have the ability to create a new one. That is what I'm speaking about when I talk about driving your experience. *What* you want to create is your choice and, actually, so is the *how*. My purpose is to share with you the practices that I know that work for the pros in creating peak performance. Not that this is the goal for all of you; some of you are here just for a better relationship to stress. That's fine. What's important here, however, is that you know *how* to create peak performance; this way, you can begin working with these same tools to help you achieve the goals you have.

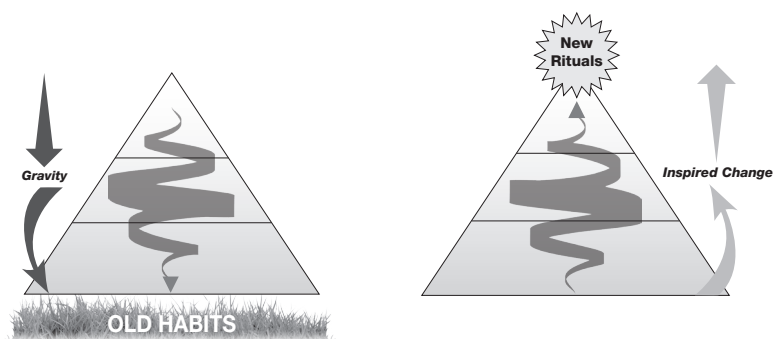
To this point in the book, we have looked at a myriad of aspects of our human self. If you have done the exercises at the end of each chapter, you have learned a lot about yourself - your strengths, your weaknesses, your dreams, wishes, hopes, and desires. You may now have some idea of your toughness quotient, meaning how strong, flexible, and resilient you are. You have learned more about your body, and what foods and activities are enlivening to you and which ones may be depleting you. Plus, you will have some idea of the gravity that you have in your life and how it affects you, as well as the thoughts that might be causing you stress or holding you back from achieving your goals. You may now even have an idea of what is needed to create some new rituals in your life.

Since the purpose of this chapter is to help you become more intimate with your own personal stress code, we need now to take the next step, which is to learn where you get most stuck in the process of living in the world of inspired change.

Inspired Change

We all have a personal stress code - which is a specific mix of tolerances and intolerances based on our life experiences and perspectives, our strengths, and our weaknesses. As I said earlier, the key to life mastery is identifying and unlocking your own personal code and using it to transform your relationship to stress (gravity). This way, you will spend most of your time and energy on

the right side of the triangle (below), which is the side of planning and action toward new rituals – rituals that will help you get what you want in life. As you spend more of your time on this side, you create somewhat of an upwardly mobile vortex, which brings you to higher and higher levels on the pyramid. People who train themselves to spend most of their time on the right side of this diagram work their way into a life where they are thriving. On the other hand, if you are spending most of your time on the left side of the triangle, where gravity is pushing you down into old habits that are not helping you satisfy your life goals, you will only exist in the world in survive or function modes.



So, how exactly do we create a life where we are spending more of our time on the right side of the triangle? Well, it's a fairly simple practice, once you get the hang of it, even if it's not always easy. But before we get into that we need a slightly more in-depth understanding of the Life-Mastery Pyramid, and the 4-Step Process of Inspired Change, including the critical aspects of each of these that are necessary for a basic practice. I want to start here because, as I noted in Chapter 9, you will never outperform your training. So assessing your current relationship to each of these steps is critical to understanding where you want to focus your training.

Step 1 - Gravity:

As I've spoken about throughout the book, gravity is stress and stress is gravity. They are one and the same, not good or bad, just

situations, circumstances, occurrences, or persons requiring our attention. The key practices for this first part of the 4-step process are:

- a) **Recognition/Awareness:** Developing awareness so that you can pick up on situations that require your attention. This step requires slowing down and putting attention into yourself based on what you are encountering in the external world. You must slow down enough that you become highly conscious of your thoughts and actions, as well as your emotions. It is through the process of recognition that we begin to gauge our reactions and responses to situations, and determine what is right for us and what is not. It is also the process where you see clearly the behaviors or habits of yours that are working for you and those that are working against you. Without awareness, no change is possible.

- b) **Perception Change:** Threat to Challenge (the flip of the coin). This is the stage where you refuse to allow yourself to believe that what is happening is “bad.” If you see something as bad, you will see what is happening as a threat, and will deal with it accordingly, which will not produce the outcomes that you desire, as they will be fear-based. Fear-based actions keep you trapped at the bottom of the pyramid at the survival level. Instead, if you see gravity as a challenge, you will address it as an opportunity for growth and expansion.

These are some of the statements that you can reflect upon that will help you identify how well positioned you are for handling gravity:

- ✓ I am great at recognizing when I am stressed, angry, or upset.
- ✓ I’m uncomfortable with feelings, and push them down when they arise.
- ✓ Once I see what needs changing, I feel excited about changing it.

- ✓ There are always areas where I could become better, and I can identify what those are very easily.
- ✓ I know what is best for me and what is not. When I see something that I know needs to be changed, I start working toward the change that I want to see.

Bottom line: to become proficient at step one, you learn to welcome your feelings and emotions, as well as your thoughts, which let us know what is important to us. From here, cultivate an attitude that whatever is showing up is for your benefit, and is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and move closer to what you want in life.

Step 2 - Process:

In the second step of the Inspired Change process, we are looking at our old habits, and sorting out the weeds, so to speak, from the grass. We take an inventory of the habits that may have contributed to the current gravity situation or crisis. In this stage, we also want to look at what change it is that we *really* want and why. Here are the key practices:

- a) **Investigation - Mock Crisis:** In the mock crisis, you want to connect to the *worst-case scenario* related to the situation in the moment by asking, "What path am I headed on if I continue this behavior?" (Note: it is crucial to sit with and experience the feelings that come up fully, rather than just process them intellectually. This will get you in touch with the true gravity of the situation.)
- b) **Real (Sustained) Change:** Remember, for change to be lasting, it must be internally driven versus externally motivated. You cannot sustain change that is not authentic to you; you simply will not be inspired to stay on track. So, as you are considering what changes you want, also look at the underlying motivation. Get clear on why you want the change.
- c) **Inspiration - Success Vision:** Once you get clear on what it is that you really want, take some time to begin to

cultivate the vision of your success. You want to envision what you will look and feel like, and what your life will look and feel like upon achieving the goal. You do not want to shortchange yourself on this step; it is the step that provides the fuel to change. Cut out inspiring images from magazines and make a vision board; surf the web and read about other people who have what you want; change your screen savers to reflect what you desire. Do whatever it takes to get yourself charged up; you will need it for the journey.

Here are some statements/questions for Step 2 that you can reflect upon that will help you identify how well positioned you are for handling process:

- ✓ How do I feel when I consider the worst-case scenario?
- ✓ I'm really done with this behavior; I will do anything to achieve a new reality.
- ✓ I feel excitement about achieving this goal.
- ✓ This change comes from my core values; it is something that I resonate fully with.
- ✓ I am ready to transform habits into new rituals. I feel confidence that I can do it.

Bottom line: to become proficient at step two; we need to allow ourselves to go deeply into the worst-case scenario, and play it out. If we cannot really envision the crisis, we will not change. Remember, even though we are programmed for stress, we are NOT programmed for change. In fact, most humans hate change; instead, we crave constancy, predictability, and comfort. In most cases, we will wait for a real crisis to hit before taking action; by then, it could be too late. This is why the mock crisis is such a valuable tool. Use it well.

Step 3 - Plan:

In this step, you are creating and working your plan of action. It includes specific tools, as well as actions toward new rituals that

you will be cultivating in support of reaching your desired goal. You also want to identify any and all barriers that you imagine may come up that could prevent you from reaching your goal. In this step, you stay closely linked to your personal stress code, which I will talk about in a little bit, and to specific practices that will get you to where you want to go.

Remember, working toward achieving a goal is a journey. It's not just about the end goal, but about *enjoying* the process. You can work toward a goal, but if you are not calm, centered, and enjoying the process, you are not thriving. Being here and now is most important. This way, you can make adjustments along the way. In working toward a goal, you will likely experience doubts and even setbacks from time to time; and there will be days where you may even question your original goal. This is natural; however, knowing in advance that you will be facing these kinds of situations will help you be better prepared. Key steps in this stage are:

- a) ***MESP (Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, Physical) Leakage Awareness:*** Each of us has a key area of leakage. If you don't know what yours is, review the initial set of questions I set forth in Chapter 2 to determine your predominant areas of leakage. You will know the correct answer by identifying the one with the lowest score. It may also be the area with which you have struggled for many years. Each of us has typically one primary area of leakage; however, you may have more. In order to crack your personal stress code, you need to know what it is, or which areas you struggle most in – because these are the areas where the breakdowns will occur first.

- b) ***Patch One Area of Leakage for 30-45 days:*** In order to change a particular behavior or create a new ritual of any kind, you must take specific actions that will support you in breaking the old habit(s) and creating the new one. This is a required specific and daily activity. I will say more about this in the discussion on alignment, which is next.

- c) **Mock Crisis Accountability:** This is the practice of remembering *why* you are doing what you are doing. Use this practice whenever you feel doubtful, uncertain, skeptical, or down. Bring your awareness to your worst-case scenario for several minutes and until you can remember why you decided to embark upon the change in the first place.
- d) **Personal Inspirational Pictures Daily:** As I noted in Step 2, visual images are extremely important in the practice of creating inspired change. In just seconds, pictures can put you in an inspired place; they can also remind you of your *why*, and keep you connected to your purpose in life.
- e) **Daily Coin Flip:** Use the Threat/Challenge coin to help you remember the truth about gravity. Remember, gravity is always present: How many stories have you heard of people who have tried and failed any number of times before “hitting it big”? What most people don’t realize is that those who succeed typically have many failures prior to their success; they just don’t see their failures as failures, but, instead, see them as an integral part of the learning process.
- f) **Committed Action - Correct Practice:** While these are two different concepts, I put them together because they spell out the essence of an important concept summed up by this popular quote: “practice does not make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect.” If you want to reach your goal, you’ve got to practice *correctly* and *regularly*. Committed action means a “no matter what” attitude, and necessitates daily engagement until the new ritual becomes automatic.

Some statements/questions for Step 3 that you can reflect upon that will help you identify how well positioned you are for handling the plan:

- ✓ Once I put my mind to something, there is nothing that can stop me.
- ✓ I have several consistent practices in my life.
- ✓ It is becoming easier for me to see stress as good.
- ✓ I have a number of inspirational pictures in my office and that I carry with me to remind me of what I most want in life right now.
- ✓ Once I start a new practice, I keep it up very easily.

Bottom line: to become proficient at Step 3, we need to form a great relationship with *practice* and with *learning*. In truth, we are all practicing becoming better at something - whether becoming a better parent, a better writer, or a better businessperson. Practice entails conscious awareness of our daily activities, as well as a compassionate hand with ourselves and others. We will not be perfect in our endeavors, so no sense in trying to be; that just creates more stress. Instead, develop steadfast kindness along with persistence and tenacity. This works much better all around.

Step 4 - Thriving:

This step is about becoming comfortable with your new rituals and the new levels that you achieve in the Life Mastery Pyramid. As you spend more time on the right side of the pyramid and get better at creating inspired change, you will reach ever-increasing heights on the pyramid. Eventually, all that you do will be "super-charged," so to speak; you will have found *your thrive*. This does not mean that you will never feel sad, fearful, or angry. While your emotions level out in this place, they still do occur; however, your relationship with them is significantly better, which means you can process them more quickly and effectively. You will also have an easier time recognizing old habits that are in need of transformation, as well as signs of leakage. But, at this level, you are so practiced at your new way of living and being that everything becomes easier. Even so, let's take a look at a few of the key practices and reminders for this step:

- a) ***Comfortable in Your New Skin:*** When you develop a new ritual, it seems odd at first, and it takes time and practice for it to become your norm, and for you to feel comfortable with it as your normal way of being. Think back to a “bad” habit that you transformed, or maybe are still transforming. How long did it take for you to transform it, and how long did it take you feel comfortable in your new skin? Remember, humans are genetically programmed to resist change; this is why new things feel so strange to us, and why it takes time for us to make them our own. Awareness of this will help you develop a plan for support for this transition stage.
- b) ***Recovery Pit Stops Every 90-120 Minutes:*** These become natural, and at this stage, you are so tuned into the need for these that your body starts to let you know when it’s ready. After a while, you will not need to set an alarm for breaks, you will do it naturally. Until that happens, though, set the alarm! You cannot thrive without regular oscillation.
- c) ***MESP Alignment Tied to Recovery:*** When first practicing with alignment, it is typically because you have fallen off track. In the thrive state, your MESP alignment practice can be used as an activity of recovery. In this case, it can inspire you in a moment.
- d) ***Toughness Awareness - Strength, Flexibility, Resiliency:*** As you work your way up the Life Mastery Pyramid, you will gain toughness. Toughness, which is a combination of strength, flexibility, and resiliency, is built through appropriate reframing of failures in combination with passionate persistence. Toughness is not about forcing or getting your way; a sign of thriving is having the maturity to realize that you are in a flow with life, and therefore need to remain flexible and present in order to handle the inevitable shifts and changes that occur *while* you are working toward your goals. Some of these

inputs may even result in you changing a particular goal, or re-prioritizing your goals. It is a key quality in cracking the stress code.

- e) ***Purpose Inspired Navigation:*** I started this section with a discussion on a purpose inspired life. Our purpose is connected to something deep inside that we have had for most of our life. It is a drive that we have had toward something - our reason for being here. It has to do with service toward others, since this is a key component of living a healthy human life. People who thrive connect daily to their purpose for being here, and allow that to drive their thoughts and actions.

Below are some statements/questions for Step 4 that will help you determine how well you are positioned to thrive:

- ✓ I know my purpose for being here, and I live it every day.
- ✓ I take frequent breaks and feel refreshed after most of them.
- ✓ It is becoming easier for me feel comfortable performing my new rituals.
- ✓ I wouldn't change much about my life; I love my life.
- ✓ What people say doesn't bother me much anymore; I am clear about who I am and what I want in this world.

Bottom line: Finding our thrive takes consistent effort at the practices outlined above; it also takes failure, which builds confidence, clarity, and life toughness. People who thrive are typically very honest about their weaknesses. In addition to compassionate persistence, it takes vulnerability to be successful at inspired change. Thriving people aren't afraid of their "leakages"; they have patched many of them and know that at any time they might require another patch, but are ready, willing, and able to step up and patch when necessary.

A thriving mentality is most critical to cracking the stress code. Know that when you are operating on the left side of the pyramid, the stress is heavier than when you are on the right. Don't get me

wrong, there is stress throughout the process of inspired change, but as you operate more from the right side of the pyramid and practice overcoming gravity to a point of proficiency, the type of stress changes.

Stress on the right side of the pyramid is mostly related to learning and discomfort around the unknown. As you move to higher and higher levels on the pyramid, your life will change: your income may increase, your sphere of influence may increase, and your job and friends may change, for example. Having a mentor or coach is recommended for anyone who wants to thrive in life; they will help you navigate this unknown territory by sharing some of their experiences with you while offering support in all sorts of ways, be it connections, resources, ideas, or encouragement.

How Much Time Does it Take, Really?

Lots of people that I train ask me how much time it takes to crack the stress code. The answer is always the same, and it's twofold: 1. *You don't ever get done cracking it*, and 2. *It depends*. Let me explain. First, cracking the stress code is an appealing concept because it implies that, with enough work, you can be "done with" stress. In reality, we are never "done with" stress. What you become "done with" is your struggle against it; instead, you learn how to thrive with it. However, each of us will always be dealing with gravity, throughout our entire lives.

My second answer relates to the reality that you can achieve such a high level of proficiency with inspired change that stress doesn't bother you or weigh you down much. In this case, you have fully accepted the realities of *life as stress*, and because you do not have an adverse relationship to your weaknesses and what is showing up in life anymore, you experience far more lightness and enjoyment, overall. This second outcome is what I am actually aiming for with this book. So, yes, you can permanently shift your relationship to stress, and with that, be free from its harmful effects.

Time related to this realization can depend on several factors, but there is one key factor in all of this – the degree to which we are *aware of* and *want to do something about* our suffering. Look,

none of us can escape the pain of existence; it is a fact of life. We lose people that we don't want to lose, or jobs, or money, or we falter because of our weaknesses and failures, and we feel pain about this. But we also tend to *add* suffering to the pain by telling ourselves stories that what is happening is "wrong" or "bad," or cannot be changed, or, even worse, that there is something wrong with *us*, which can lead to chronic depression and a myriad of other challenges. We might also become so inflexible in our beliefs that we become hardened and chronically angry or despondent. We may turn to a substance, like alcohol or drugs, or an activity, like eating, gambling, or shopping, to numb the pain. These are just a few examples of how we create more suffering from pain.

None of these outcomes would be necessary if we knew how to crack the stress code, which is all about converting life's pain, a reality every human must deal with, into inspired living. For example, if you learn how to become friendly toward gravity (stress), your mind will begin to consistently evaluate what happens in life as just "what is" - this is Good Stress. Then, you have the chance to transform the pain of "what is" into inspired living.

Because the mind will stubbornly resist this notion, you've got to practice flipping the Challenge/Threat coin, all day long, and day in and day out. That is, until you have built a new neuro-pathway and your mind *automatically* begins to equate stress with opportunity. This is the first and essential practice for *anyone* who wants to crack the stress code. Until you get good at this, you won't be in charge of creating your life experience; instead, gravity will be dictating your feelings and your moods. As a general rule, flipping the coin is easier when you are not dealing with crisis. In a crisis, however, it may be all but impossible to flip that coin, but if you are persistent it will happen eventually.

Here is a very good example of what I am speaking about. I was visiting with one of my clients, racecar driver Doug Herbert, at the track. Doug is a National HotRod Association (NHRA) and International HotRod Association (IHRA) Champion. He was readying himself for a practice drive when his phone rang. After answering the phone, within seconds he was on the ground sobbing; his agony was clear. He had just received word that his two young sons

- 17 and 12 years old - had been instantly killed in a car accident. The gravity of this situation was overwhelming; Doug was not only in shock, but in the midst of deep despair and immediate, almost interminable grief. This continued for months. While he continued to drive, the grief of the situation was paralyzing, and he had lost his zest for life. Meanwhile, I was working to help Doug focus on what he could be grateful for in this tragedy. Some days, this was more difficult than others.

Then, one day, I received a call from him. He said to me: "Terry, I don't want to race anymore. I want to create a driving school for teens, where I can teach young people how to deal with difficult driving situations. With the school, maybe I can help save the lives of young children." Doug went on to found BRAKES, which stands for Be Responsible And Keep Everyone Safe, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina. I knew in that moment that he had found his way through the gravity of the situation and out the other side. He was now in the beginning stages of inspired change - embarking up the right side of the Life Mastery pyramid.

Did this take time? Yes. But if we allow ourselves our process, and remain committed to thriving - even when the pain of life becomes so great that we'd rather die - we can overcome anything.

So, it does depend. It depends on how much you are suffering in your life, and if you really want to feel better - because if you do, you will find the way. The survival rung on the pyramid is not a fun place to be, either in the short run or over the long haul. Survival implies struggle, and with struggle comes stress. As a side note, there are many people who live simply; they avoid material goods in exchange for freedom. There are also others who intentionally put themselves in survival situations to test their skills. While these people may appear to be just surviving, they are actually thriving; they consciously chose the lifestyle or situation and have purpose alignment with it. So it's important not to be deceived by appearances, and better to speak with people about what they are up to before judging.

Nonetheless, the bottom line regarding any change is this: *you must be actively committed through your actions, day to day, to achieving it.* Only people who are committed to thriving will be able

to overcome the inertia created by gravity; otherwise, they will fall prey to compensatory habits related to leakage. Let me give you a personal example.

One thing that I was clear about as a young man was that not trying to live my destiny was more painful than trying and failing. This enabled me to connect to the four steps of inspired change and become actively involved in them as a *way of living* (gravity, process, plan, and thrive). I became determined to be my best self, and I knew by doing this that it would become obvious to me what my purpose and destiny was in life. And, in time it did.

There were times that I got stuck, and there would be leakage. In my case, back then, my Achilles heel was spiritual leakage - I had an outdated belief system about life and how it should be, and what was possible. Part of this related to my "Why me?/Why him?" story I was entertaining about my son Brandon. Eventually, the persistence of this story and the pain that it created for me was enough to wake me up and cause me to choose a different belief system, one that would cause me to feel good about and in life again.

In shifting my belief system to "God would never give me something I couldn't handle, and this is His way of shining His glory through both of us," I became instantly inspired to create something "good" out of the "bad" that I was *perceiving* and that was weighing me down. My life changed radically. I was suddenly aligned spiritually, and my mental, emotional, and physical aspects followed quickly; I had more energy, my mental clarity was back, and my emotions dissipated. When I looked back on the situation, it was the crisis as well as my realization of what my life would be like if I didn't change (mock crisis) that propelled me forward.

Over time, with awareness, I wouldn't get stuck as much in that one place. I learned and evolved my understanding, so I knew how to deal with that particular challenge when it occurred. But that didn't mean I never got stuck again. Of course I did, but I always knew where to look first - to my beliefs, specifically the "Why me?/Why him?" belief that would crop up again. You see, even though we have an epiphany about something, which essentially means a radical shift in how we view something, it does not mean that those old habitual ways of thinking or acting don't return. They do; the

weeds are always there. It simply becomes easier to pull them out and return our focus to the present moment, and to what we are creating.

The last point that I want to make about time, which I alluded to previously, and just now in this last paragraph, is this: We only have the present moment, in reality. The future is a product of our imagination. If you want to crack the stress code, the best chance you have to do this is to start right now. The choices we make today shape our future; it really is this basic. But somehow we think that there is magic to this - that somehow we will mysteriously be handling life better "tomorrow," when we aren't handling it well today. This couldn't be further from the truth! If you want a better tomorrow, create a better today, and then tomorrow will take care of itself.

Lastly, you must *anticipate* success in terms of cracking the stress code but not *expect* it. I know this sounds strange, but there is a very big difference between these concepts. Too many people become consumed by an end goal, and end up creating misery in the form of extra stress for themselves and others through obsessive "when is it going to happen" thoughts. *Remember, it never gets done*; so be your success now; don't worry so much about the future. Expectations cause us to become inflexible, and if we want to crack the stress code, we need to practice toughness training, which means cultivating strength, flexibility, and resilience. Anticipation is a much sweeter place to live and reside. This way, you are confidently, diligently practicing away. Over time, with this kind of patient practice, you will enjoy big leaps in progress; you will reach new plateaus on the Life Mastery Pyramid.

Cracking Your Personal Stress Code

Okay. Now we've arrived at the part that you have all been waiting for - your personal stress code. As I said earlier in the chapter, your personal stress code is a mix of tolerances and intolerances based on your life experiences and perspectives, your strengths and your weaknesses. If you want to crack your personal stress code, you need to first determine in which of the four aspects of human

development – mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical – you consistently experience the most “leakage.” We are looking, here, for your core wound that, essentially, continuously causes blowouts.

How do we find it? The quickest way to determining your personal stress code is to revisit the questionnaire starting on page 27 in Chapter 2 of this book. In which category did you have the lowest score? Now, looking back on your specific category, ask yourself the question: What is it that I do, think, believe, or say that consistently causes my energy to cycle down? It may not come to you right away, but if you ask the question sincerely, the answer will come in time.

The key is to write this down somewhere. The more specific you can be, the better. One way of writing it is: I notice that I do X when Y happens. Examples of this could be: I notice that I eat sugar when I feel stressed or tired (physical leakage); I notice that when someone brings attention to my performance that I blame the boss (emotional leakage); I notice that I’m regularly angry about what I see happening in our world (mental leakage); I notice that I don’t believe that I deserve good things in life (spiritual leakage).

These are all examples of “leakage” that could color our life experience, and cause us to sabotage efforts toward real change. At any given stage in life, we typically have leakage that can be classified in one predominant area. The leakage in this area causes the other three areas to be out of balance, too, but they are not the primary area. It’s not so important to get the category correct, as it is to get clear on the underlying problem. Our job, as I’ve said, is to dig deep and find the core wound.

It’s easy to think of the example I used above of eating sugar when feeling stressed or tired as just physical. It may be; but if the *core issue* is an underlying anxiety about life, it might be better to see this leakage as a mental or spiritual issue, and work with that. This is true even though there may be very real physical issues present. The point is, if we address a *symptom* rather than the *core issue*, we will not be successful in sustained change. For example, in the case we have been discussing, we could potentially address the overeating issue by supporting the person to get to a gym

to workout. They may be successful at taking off weight and may even start eating more healthfully, but if the underlying issue of anxiety isn't addressed, they will shift their compensation habit to something else. Who knows, they could become an exercise addict.

My point is to illustrate that key underlying issues cause leakage in *every* area - mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. But in terms of cracking the stress code, you want to land on your primary area of leakage right now; that is the one that we need to patch first in order for you to start having more success in the 4-Step Process of Inspired Change.

The Art of Creating Alignment

When most of us think about alignment, we think about our car. When our car is in alignment, the wheels are completely balanced, the car operates well, and there is even wear on our brakes and tires. When the car is out of alignment, and not corrected, our car won't run optimally. It may "pull" to one side, and the brakes and tires will wear unevenly. If uncorrected for a period of time, it may start to shake or vibrate. Eventually, we will have some sort of a breakdown.

Well, the same goes for us, but in our case, our "wheels" are our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects. When we have alignment in all of these areas, we are running well, and we can better apply ourselves to inspired change. When we have what I call "leakage" in one of these four areas, gravity (stress) is taking a toll, and we're not running optimally. If uncorrected, it will not only affect every other aspect, but it has the potential of causing a full-body breakdown.

We use the process of alignment in the third step (Process) and fourth step (Thrive) of the 4-Step Process for Inspired Change, *when we get off track*. The alignment process happens to also be four steps, and it is an essential tool for creating and sustaining inspired change. In the practice of alignment, we are bringing our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects into full function and harmony. When we have "leakage," we are not in alignment.

So, anytime you notice “leakage,” you will want to take a pause and create alignment.

Where do we look first? We look at *our* key area of leakage, our personal stress code - the one that we identified in the previous section. Typically the origin of the leakage goes back to that core wound. Most leakage stems from the core wound, even after we’ve done work to patch it. By the way, it isn’t a good use of energy to try to get rid of the core wound - that is generally futile - nor is it necessary to have a thriving life. What we want to do, instead, is to use the next few steps to reconnect to our inspiration for making the change in the first place. It’s a redirection of focus and attention. So, here are the four steps of alignment that you will want to practice anytime you notice leakage. There is a detailed example following this:

Step 1 - Mock crisis: To break an old habit, the supporting behaviors around that habit must first be interrupted with plenty of emotion and passion, because this will be the power to tip the scale toward a new and preferred created ritual. A life crisis is a time to produce the emotion and passion to accomplish this exercise, but in the absence of a real crisis, a mock crisis can be used to get the same result. In other words, by completing Step 1, the scale can begin to tip in the direction of change. Or, in the case that you have lost your way, revisiting this mock crisis will get you back on track.

As a reminder, here is how you do this: connect to the *worst-case scenario* related to the situation in the moment by asking, “What path am I headed on if I continue this behavior?” This will often result in you saying, “Oh, yeah, that is why I’m doing this; now I remember.” (Note: it is crucial to sit with and experience the feelings that come up fully, rather than just process them intellectually. This will get you in touch with the true gravity of the situation.)

Step 2 - MESP (Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, and Physical) assessment of the needs that you are *not meeting* through the behavior or situation: This is the process of getting in

touch with or reminding yourself of the life needs that you are not meeting by continuing to engage in the old habit rather than staying the course for a new ritual. Once you gain clarity about this, again and again, it is much easier to see and remind yourself of what you are missing out on by *not* making changes. For this process, you can complete an assessment for each area MESP, or just select your personal stress code – your primary area of leakage, and deal with that.

For example, if my physical is my lowest score, I need to make that my attention of focus while harnessing the other three capacities to empower the physical with all the alignment energy possible. It is better, as I said in the previous section, to focus on ONE area of change first and for 30-45 days, until some level of proficiency is built toward your new ritual. Making any change is difficult because of all the reinforcement associated with the old habit. Without attention and energy to MESP alignment, change is not probable. Remember, this starts with awareness of your primary area of leakage, and then a conscious, diligent mobilization of the other three areas in support of this primary area of weakness.

Step 3 – MESP (Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, and Physical) assessment of the needs that you *would be fulfilling* through changing the behavior or situation: In this third step, you identify all of the needs you are meeting through the change you are making. You want to use the strongest visual possible as the guiding force to develop new (or renewed) and needed leverage. Reference these visuals or your list often, to serve as reminders of why the change is needed and desired. Think about how you will feel, look, and think, and what you will believe about yourself once you have accomplished your goal.

You want to involve as many senses as possible, and take your time with this process – really get into it. This could be a picture of who you were in the past, who you want to become in the future, or even the representation of what success will

look like when your goals are met. This sounds simple, but it is effective. It takes incredible attention to focus and purpose alignment to make changes stick. Use every tool possible to get yourself back on track.

Step 4 - Evaluation and adjustment of practices until the new ritual is internalized and anchored: This process involves a couple of steps. The *first step* is to identify the actions and behaviors in each category (MESP) that are needed in order to put the change into place. The *second step* is to monitor your success levels with these supportive actions, tweaking as necessary. Step 4 is all about “look, see, and work the plan” *daily* to support the new gifted change. It took work to develop your new ritual, and it will take work to maintain the conditioned change.

For example, if I am now eating a healthier diet, and have achieved my optimal weight, I will need to know, daily, when my weight and energy levels are not at optimal output. Let’s say I’m away on vacation and I’m indulging in too many rich foods because I’m eating out more. If I’m checking in daily, I will notice when there is discrepancy. At this point, I acknowledge this and go back through the first three steps to realign and re-establish the change process, *right then and there*. Do not wait to do this! If I take the time to reconnect, it will allow me to get back on track by patching the leakage. In this case, if my leakage is physical and I see that my overeating is linked to not exercising, I will get myself outside right away and for the remainder of my vacation, because I know that exercise will *help* me make better food choices.

Going through all three steps will also fill me with the energy, focus, and passion that I had when the mock crisis or real crisis occurred. So, do all the steps; if you’ve fallen away from optimal rituals, you need an equal and/or greater force to bring you back.

This ongoing daily situational awareness will develop into a self-monitored accountability and coaching protocol that will keep you cycling up the pyramid from survival to thrive. Your fuel is the

inspiration that comes from alignment with your life goals and life purpose. This is the key to sustained change!

Remember, just because we want to change doesn't mean that everything will go smoothly or easily. We have setbacks, or sometimes even what we call "false starts," and we need to know exactly what to do to get back on track. If we have identified an area of change, but are unsuccessful at making the change, there will be additional MESP leakages to contend with. Engaging in the alignment process over and over again will help you mitigate the damage and get back on track.

Now that you have the knowledge of how to crack your own personal stress code, here is an example to help you understand how to use this tool while you are working on creating new rituals.

Quitting Smoking

Step 1 (Mock Crisis):

Example:

If I continue to smoke, I will die at an early age.

Step 2 (MESP needs assessment, negative choices):

Examples:

Mental - *If I continue to smoke, I will think bad thoughts about myself and continue to beat myself up.*

Emotional - *If I continue to smoke, I will feel disgusted with myself, and I will never find the courage to have the relationship that I want.*

Spiritual - *If I continue to smoke, I will believe that I am just no good, and will never ask for the raise that I really believe I deserve.*

Physical - *If I continue to smoke, my teeth will continue to turn brown and decay, and I will need to spend thousands of dollars to fix them.*

Step 3 (MESP needs assessment, positive choices):

Examples:

Mental - *If I stop smoking, I will feel proud of myself and my confidence will soar. I will look and feel better, and people will ask me what I have done.*

Emotional - *If I stop smoking, I will feel happy with myself for the first time in ten years, and that will help my chances of attracting a new love in my life.*

Spiritual - *If I stop smoking, I will start to believe that I am a good person and that I can face challenges in life and overcome them.*

Physical - *If I stop smoking, I can finally spend the money to whiten my teeth so that they look better. I will also feel more like riding my bike, which I like to do, because I won't be so out of breath.*

Step 4 (Evaluation and adjustment):

This process involves evaluating your original MESP behaviors and making the necessary adjustments. If you come out of alignment, the issue is related to some MESP leakage. Once you determine where the leak is, you can fix it by putting a new action into place, and examine your results.

The *first step* is to identify the actions and behaviors in each category (MESP) that are needed in order to put the change into action. You could have already done this when you created your initial plan in the 4-Step Process for Inspired Change. The plan, which is Step 3 of this process, includes all the actions that are needed for the change to take place, as well as the MESP behaviors that will support the plan. So, if your plan is to quit smoking within three months, your *how* will be the specific actions that you need to do, MESP, to actually have this occur.

Examples:

Mental - *I will write down all of the reasons I am doing this, and read them every morning before going to work, and every*

evening before I go to bed. I need to put up reminders on slips of paper throughout the house about what I will gain by making this change.

Emotional - *When I feel irritable, vulnerable or weak, I need to be able to call a friend and go for a walk or a bike ride to help with my emotions. I will also make sure that I take up one new hobby that is fun as a distraction for me when I'm feeling really low through this transition.*

Spiritual - *I commit to attending the weekly support group at the local health center for people who are quitting smoking. There I will find new friends who I can call on when I need to.*

Physical - *I will not go to happy hour after work for eight weeks, until I feel more in control in social settings. Instead, I will join a gym and go work out after work on Friday. I will also make sure to carry chewing gum around with me at all times for when I might get cravings, and that I have plans on Friday night to do something with one of my friends from the support group.*

Once you put these plans into effect, monitor your success levels with them, and tweak them as needed. You will want to monitor more vigorously in the early stages of implementation, so that you are not tempted to fall back into old behaviors. Remember, focus everything for the first 30-45 days on your primary area of leakage or weakness. In the above case, if your primary area of weakness is spiritual, use your mental, emotional, and physical energies to support you in the spiritual action you have identified above. Make that weekly support group the center of your life for a while. Take walks (physical) with group members, and talk to other group members for mental and emotional support. See yourself as successful and, perhaps, even helping other group members.

Change is a constant process of alignment and realignment. If you need help from a counselor or friend, then get it. You may want to tell your friends in advance what you are doing and that you may be calling to ask for their help. You can discuss in advance what that help may look like so that your friends are ready to receive your

calls and know how to respond. All of this planning helps to ensure that you will be successful at the change.

The worst thing to do is to under plan or to under anticipate what the change may entail. This is why getting help from others who have been through your particular type of gravity can be extremely helpful. They can give you ideas and guidance that you may not have even thought of.

Alignment and the 4-Step Process of Inspired Change

Now let's do an exercise. I'd like you to think of a goal that you have not achieved. Where on the 4-Step cycle did you put your X? Did you place it on the left side, which could indicate some difficulty in the area of how you perceive or process the gravity, or emotions related to it? If you put the X in the "old habit" section, did you put it here because you believe that you cannot change an old habit, or because you think that you have too many "bad" habits? Perhaps you put the X on the right side of the cycle, on the side of inspired change, but notice you lose interest or get distracted shortly after embarking on the change. Again, it does not matter where you tend to stall in this cycle; these questions are designed to help you tie into your core wound and primary area of "leakage."

What matters is that you have a sense of where you get stuck. As I alluded to before, with awareness and a commitment to work through these roadblocks, you will achieve a new set point from which your experience of life will improve dramatically. And here's the good news: The only thing that you need to do when you get stuck is to create alignment. That is all. So, ultimately, moving up on the Life Mastery Scale has everything to do with practicing alignment, over and over again. Alignment helps you to eliminate harmful stress so that you can achieve your goals.

Sometimes, we find ourselves thriving in one aspect of the cycle, only to be suddenly kicked backward to another stage. I love the Bible passage that states "when I do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 7:21). In this case, I take the verse to mean that the harder I push for excellence, the more gravity - in terms of bad

habits, negative thoughts of my mediocrity, as one example, and regrets – pulls me back down to the ground. The trick here is to know *in advance* that we are never done learning and evolving; just because we overcome one bad habit doesn't mean that others won't appear. Becoming your best self involves knowing that the experience of change and development is a form of gravity itself. It is a natural part of the journey.

We are creative *and* complex beings with an endless stream of desires, along with a potential boatload of mental and emotional nuances to be dealt with on a daily basis. We also don't operate in a bubble; we must have some basic level of cooperation with the outer world in order to thrive. Those who cannot achieve this are not likely to thrive – no matter how great their achievements. There are many examples of this. Vincent Van Gogh, Howard Hughes, Ernest Hemingway, and Philip Seymour Hoffman are some of the extraordinarily creative but tormented among us.

In all, your life as it is now, and as it could be, is entirely up to you. Gravity can control us, or we can have dominion over it. Which do you think is the least stressful path, ultimately?

Parting Reminders

The art of living successfully in the cycle of inspired change ultimately relates to how well you can manage leakage. Sometimes, you can manage leakage on your own, other times you may need the support of friends, family, and even professionals. Life presents many challenging situations. Our "job," so to speak, is to handle these challenges while keeping an eye on our prize, which is mind/body/spirit alignment.

To this end, I wanted to leave you with a reminder of the Stress Recovery Process. We need the right balance between stress and recovery in order to refresh and rejuvenate daily. If you are finding it difficult to see the opportunity in gravity, it could simply mean that you aren't recharging well enough.

The trick is being aware of your specific recovery needs, and to do whatever it takes to meet these needs, frequently and effectively. This will promote optimal results. Just like an EEG or an EKG, the

ebb and flow of this specific oscillation is necessary to sustain life-rhythm and harmony; they are also both crucial for completing the circuit of energy flow. You cannot have one without the other.

The ultimate marker of performance comes down to how well you manage this ebb and flow. Are you so highly in tune with your energy cycles *and* what recovery is needed in any moment that you can predict a positive outcome regardless of the performance requirements? I have coached many athletes in the process of optimal mind/body alignment, especially in the auto-racing world. Drivers traveling at or beyond 200 mph are moving very fast, but their awareness is in a slowed down state, to take in and interpret the motion data coming their way a football field a second.

The elapsed time is approximately two and half times the speed of driving on an interstate in the US, which means the closure speed is swift and full of obvious consequences. The faster we travel on a day-to-day basis simply means that we are more likely to collide into both moving and non-moving objects. The speed is not the problem. The real problem is *reaction time*, which is directly linked to optimum rest/recovery cycles. With good reaction time, you get great results under pressure, on demand.

I have trained many pilots from both military and commercial worlds over the years, and all of them use a pre-flight check list to ensure optimal equipment and safety, but how many of us do the same thing daily to begin our day and to stay on course to land the day in the safest and fastest way possible?

If you want to thrive in life, I invite you to take the learning that you've had to this point in the book and apply it to all phases of life. Take each phase and walk through the 4-Step Process for Inspired Change for ONE aspect of change in each key area - work, relationships with others, and relationship with self. Draw out the change: Write it down, visualize the process and the outcome, and get clear about what success looks like to you.

I recommend that you inspect and monitor your journal daily. You will want to place your attention on the journey, and not merely researching the destination. All of the changes that you desire in each of the key areas of life fall under one umbrella called "your

life.” Resist the urge to see these as separate, as they aren’t. Look for similar themes: See how your goals in each of these key areas complement one another; see how they all support your personal movie.

I call this a “Life Check Plan.” Use it at the beginning of each day, and throughout, to keep you anchored into what is most important to you. Just like pilots use flight plans, you will use your Life Check Plan to correct your course and navigate to ensure the best experience and outcomes. The Life Check Plan helps us to keep the big picture in mind, and the practice of reminding yourself of it daily will help you avoid potential flight turbulence and make safe landings.

As far as a practice, you can simply start the morning with a couple of minutes of meditation. Fill these few minutes with gratitude, thankfulness, and reflection before getting out of bed, while showering, or during the commute, to align the mind/body/spirit capacities to take off with optimal thrust and lift for the daily flight.

During the day, frequent recovery pit stops every 90-120 minutes will work to produce needed rest and recovery periods and remind us of our priorities. Consider the things that inspire and motivate us to live and to breathe and to experience the day fully. Remember, each moment adds to the movie of your life; make it the most present and conscious moment that you can. Align yourself frequently.

The commute home should be a repeat of the morning commute, filled with introspection and contemplation of how to resolve items tabled for the next day. The shift here is about moving toward a space of grateful reflection, which will guide us back to our home landing strip to interact with the life that awaits us there. Then, we start it all, intentionally, thoughtfully, and gratefully, the next day with a new flight plan and renewed spirit for life.

Code Reset for Chapter 13 ...

Think about a change you have wanted to make but haven’t yet been successful at it. Consider your personal stress code as it relates

to alignment, and how you might mobilize yourself now, with this new understanding, to get back on the cycle of inspired change.

You may even want to note when and where it is easy for you to remain aligned, and when and where it is difficult. This is called situational awareness, which is invaluable for setting yourself up for success. When you know when and where you thrive, you can plan your 30-45 day transition to make use of this valuable insight.