

IDIOTS ARE INVINCIBLE

**... and they always
manage to ruin our day.**

**The fool-proof “Ro”
method to handle them,
solve problems, and
enjoy the process!**



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British spelling of most common words has been used.

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Kind Words

“A scientifically-based integrative approach to dealing with stress, written in the most accessible way! The best of both worlds!” – Dr G. Sideridis, Harvard Medical School

“Your books have been monumental readings to me.” – G. Kyriakides, Training Director, Human Asset Ltd.

“You made me laugh aloud several times. I keep thinking about the cartoons and smile inside me. Congratulations for your wonderful book. You have done an amazing job!” – T. Maria, Lawyer

“A book for a lifetime! I have thought of a few dozens of friends that absolutely need to read it.” – C. Vovori

“A friend recommended that I should follow the Ro therapy. Thank you for your contribution in making our life more beautiful.” – V. Anthoulakis, Army Officer

“This is the first time that a book motivates me to contact the author. It is really a great piece of work. Well organized, combines theory and practice with a lot of humour. It can serve as a guide.” – S. Athina, Lecturer, Aristotle University

“I really enjoy readings your books! They improve my mood. They were exactly what I needed and have helped me in my personal and professional development. Keep writing in the same spirit.” – T. Elissavet

“Incredible writing style, with so much humour that someone may indeed consider changing his or her habits. Check it out. I do not know the author; I was impressed and just wished to express it.” – Andria’s blog

“If you could cast a spell on Angelos Rodafinos, what would it do? ... Make him write a third book!” – P. Megremis

To the members of the Idiots Club!

The President,

A. Rodafinos

Prologue to the English edition

Those who read the title of my book *Idiots are Invincible*, nod condescendingly in agreement: “Indeed, the author is right, they really are invincible,” thinking most probably of people other than themselves. I do not know who they are thinking of, but no one, until now, has happened to come across my book and agree: “Indeed, the author is right, *we* really are invincible.” I am beginning to think that perhaps idiots are mythical creatures, as I have yet to meet a single one!

The truth is that when I started writing the book, I also had “the others” in mind: the boss, the professor, the referee, the inept driver, the rude employee, the clumsy waitress, the delayed colleague, the annoying salesperson, the mother-in-law and generally anyone who doesn’t behave “properly,” i.e., “the way *we* would like them to behave!” [Obviously, I do not refer to mental retardation but to people who simply have a different outlook and behaviour to us].

At some point, however, I realized that as a manager, professor, driver, co-worker, I am often the idiot in other people’s lives. In their opinion I do not always behave *properly*, i.e., “as *they* would want me to!” Later, I also realised that more often I was the “idiot” for myself! Irrational thoughts and beliefs such as: “everyone must love me,” “my house must always be clean,” “I must be a good husband, lover, manager, father, son, friend ...” create problems and imbalances for us and those around us.

If some books can change your life, I am confident that the present book will change, if not the conditions in your life, at least the way you think and how you see your life – and for the better.

At least this is what several hundreds of the thousands of readers of *Idiots are Invincible* who have contacted me in the past few years have claimed.

If what you have tried so far has not produced the desired results, and if your approach to life is not working out the way you would like, it may be time to try something new – absorb the ideas described in the following pages and test the “Ro” method for yourself. You have absolutely nothing to lose but a little time.

In fact, if my prediction is right and the claim many readers have made is valid, the immediate benefits of reading this book are likely to include the following:

- More effective problem solving
- Better decisions and choices
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Less tension, anxiety, worry and guilt
- A stronger immune system
- A feeling of control
- Increased self-esteem
- A healthier body
- A more pleasant and satisfying life

Enough with the promotion.

At www.rodafinos.weebly.com you will find the ... *Idiots' Club* a.k.a *Boneheads' Academy Blog*, where you can share your stories and your ideas for dealing with idiots and adverse situations. Research (e.g., Pennebaker et al., 1988) showed that talking about the problem or confiding, even in the form of a diary or on a simple piece of paper – even if we just throw it away and never show it to the person who caused our emotions – is connected to more efficient operation of the immune system and better overall health. Arm yourselves with pen and paper and ... move over Anna Frank!

Record your stories concerning the town planning committee supervisor, the grumpy newsagent, your school teacher, the tax office clerk, your boyfriend or girlfriend, etc. Remember to add what you did to feel better and view things differently. Do not forget that we are often the ‘idiots’ for others (and that maybe at this moment they are writing about us) ... and even for ourselves.

If you like it, feel free to share the sample chapters in this e-book with your friends.

Happy reading!

Dr Ro

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Preface: The end



I think the most unfair thing about life is the way it ends. I mean, life is tough. It takes up a lot of your time. What do you get at the end of it? A death! What's that, a bonus? I think the life cycle is all backwards. You should die first; get it out of the way. Then you live in an old age home. You get kicked out when you're too young, you get a gold watch, you go to work. You work for forty years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement! You go to college, you do drugs, alcohol, you party, you have sex, you get ready for high school. You go to grade school, you become a kid, you play, you have no responsibilities, you become a little baby, you go back into the womb, you spend your last nine months floating ... You finish off as a gleam in somebody's eye.

– Reverse cycle life, Sean Morey

WHAT A NICE way to start ... from the end. Kind of unusual for a book. But this *is* an unusual book, for unusual people. I am confident that its content will mark the *end* of a period in your life and the beginning of another, becoming an important aid in reducing negative thoughts and emotions, and living healthier and happier. Now, off we go!

Story: Some escape!

On a cold and rainy winter's afternoon at an airport, a 12-year-old boy observed a number of passengers at an airport, waiting for an update on their flight. The flight was delayed and they looked worn out and glum.

"How come those people look so tired?" he asked his father.

"Perhaps because adult life is tough," replied the father.

"You mean I will also become like that when I grow up?" the twelve year old asked.

Taking a minute to think, his father responded:

"Some people manage to escape."



Is this how I'll be when I grow up? I think I'll pass!

Who manages to “escape?” What kind of coping strategies do people implement when faced with life’s challenges? Why is it that some individuals never seem to be able to cope while some others appear to face less adversity in their lives?

These are the questions that intrigued a number of distinguished researchers, including Paul Stolts, the University of Pennsylvania professor who shared the preceding story, and, of course, myself!

To begin to answer these questions, though, the first thing is really to understand, well, how you are doing.

How are *you* doing?

When asked this question, participants at my lectures and workshops are unenthusiastic. Many of them sound very frustrated. A

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common response is “Blah, I am constantly running around, too much stress!” As the conversation starts rolling, questions on the topic start falling along these lines.

“What is stress?”

“Is it normal?”

“Can stress be useful?”

“What are the health consequences of excessive stress?”

“I don’t have stress. Is this dangerous?”

To find answers to all of these questions, you will have to read the following chapters. To get us started, though, I will answer just a couple, selectively, right here.

The first thing to know about stress, really, is that many people believe that feeling stressed day and night is normal. Partially true. Excessive stress is like suicide. Negative emotions secrete hormones that affect our body. These same hormones may, in the long term, have negative effects on our health. Too little stress, on the other hand, may also be harmful!

When I ask “Who in this group thinks has the most problems to deal with?” most individuals put their hands up – they think it’s them.

Here are some more brief answers / teasers to frequently asked questions.

Q.: “Are there some “lucky individuals” who were born with superior resistance to stress? Is it possible to be completely “insensitive?” What can one do to reduce (or increase) stress?”

A.: “Yes. No. A lot.”

Q.: “If I read this book, will I be able to get rid of stress for good?”

A.: Okay, I will answer this one as well, for the sake of marketing the book. I guess the answer is similar to the one for the question “If I take a bath will I smell nice forever?” or “If I eat a lot, will I feel hungry again?” The reduction or, rather, the management of stress needs to be a continuous, life-long process.

Q.: “What’s in it for me if I reduce stress?”

A.: The benefits of stress management include, among other things, better interpersonal relationships, a stronger immune system and fewer diseases, making a significant step towards the realization of one’s full potential (if this can ever be achieved ...), and, obviously, wellbeing and a more pleasant and satisfying life.

Isn't it strange? When we have a headache or a stomach ache we share our problem with everyone around, visit the doctor, follow the prescription, try "alternative or complementary medicine,"¹ we even follow the advice of quacks.

On the other hand, when we suffer from excessive stress or are dissatisfied with our lives, we often do nothing but complain to people who are, overall, unable to help us resolve the actual stress problems.

At the same time, there is so much talk about stress on a daily basis without anyone ever saying enough. I sincerely hope that the content of this book will become a significant aid for the rest of your life.

In this relatively simplified manual, I have tried to summarize a series of theories and techniques alongside a number of everyday serious and funny applications. I have, as much as possible, avoided numerous references and academic citations to scientific studies. My goal is that everyone should understand the material. I assure you however, that (most of) what you are about to read is cross-referenced, with evidence and results from legitimate scientific research; apart, perhaps, from the folk wisdom that stems from the short tales cited. These proffer a common knowledge that has been available through the ages.

Q.: "Do you practice what you preach?"

A.: I was a champion at 15, a champion-worrier. I had received extensive training by that age. My parents were champions too! Apparently, the Greeks have a great national worrying team. Unfortunately, worrying never became an Olympic event.

"Do this, don't do that, you haven't eaten enough, wear this, watch out, you'll hurt yourself, be careful, you'll catch a cold ..."

This lasted for years. In fact, I went through the first 24 years of my life having no idea about the psychological theories and applications described in the following chapters. I certainly wish I had been exposed to them earlier! Truth is that although my life has improved a lot since I have read and mastered the related materials, I

¹ That is, therapies whose effectiveness has not been proven under well-planned and controlled conditions – otherwise it would have been classified as medicine!

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often neglect to apply them when under pressure. But they certainly have made a huge difference in the way I see the world and deal with challenges.

–Spiderman, are you going out? –Yes mom. –Put your robe on, you will catch a cold.

How our mind ... runs

Al Oerter was an American athlete. He won four consecutive Olympic gold medals in the discus throw and has been in top physical condition for at least 16 years. According to Dr Dennis Waitley, when he was in his forties, Al made the following statement:

“By the time I realized that success is 90 percent the result for how our mind runs and 10 percent the result of how we run, I already had the body of a senior citizen! Oh, if only I could be young, if only I could have had this knowledge earlier in my life.”

Before we venture too far into this book, too, I suggest we engage in some training for our minds. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, a single reading or a week of practice may not suffice to apply all of the good ideas that you will be exposed to here. They have to become habits and part of your way of life. You also need to hang out with the right people, those who will help you stay on the straight and narrow, when things get tough. Because, while I cannot guarantee that things will always run smooth, I can certainly guarantee that setbacks are inevitable.

Some of you may well wonder:

“Can we really learn psychological skills so as to feel better when things are not the way we would like them to be?”

I am confident that you will learn a number of valuable techniques *and* enjoy the reading. Go ahead, turn the pages, and flick through the book for a brief preview. No, do not read the end yet! For some reason, a lot of readers (including me) are tempted to do so. Resist the impulse!

THE WAY FORWARD

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is rather more theoretical, and as such, slightly “heavier” than the other two. All parts

fit together though and, as I have already advised you, should preferably be read consecutively. More specifically ...

Part I: A little theory

The first part offers a definition of stress, refers to the main sources of stress (which include “the idiots” in our life), and examines whether personality traits are related to the way individuals perceive and experience stress. The effects of excessive stress on physical and psychological health are discussed next.

Part II: Coping with stress

The second part distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy responses to stress and presents the basic principles of stress management.

You can't stop the birds of worry from flying over your head – but you can keep them from building their nest in your hair. – Martin Luther King

Although we cannot get rid of anxiety and negative emotions, we can reduce their *frequency, intensity, and duration*.

This section introduces the “Ro”² method, a simple yet sophisticated problem solving formula that can help you deal with annoying people, situations, and your own thoughts. Ro is an infallible method that can be applied to any type of problem you are facing today or may face in the future.

Part III: A day in the life of Don Stressote

Part Three of the book recounts a day in the life of Don Stressote – a modern-day Don Quixote.

The hero, who has just finished reading the theoretical section and is, therefore, a proud graduate of the Ro method, attempts to apply

² Any similarities with the renown “R-20” problem solving method (Russian twenty-year-old, mail-order bride), is purely coincidental.

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what he has learnt, from the moment he wakes up to the moment he returns home exhausted.

Armed with courage and stoicism, Don confronts the monsters and the dragons (the idiots³) of the 21st century: his partner who got to the toilet first and is now studying Rodafinos' book insensitive to the needs of others, the chubby guy in the tiny European lift who squeezes him into the corner, the traffic, his stupid boss, the disgruntled and impervious client, as well as the most difficult person of all – his own self and his irrational expectations!

Don differs from other mere mortals, thanks to his humour, his determination and commitment to his pledge *"I won't let any idiot ruin my day, because this is MY day!"* and his careful preparation of an action plan on how to deal with both small annoyances and seemingly unconquerable summits.



This is MY day!

Don's ability to maintain the appropriate distance from every problem is of the utmost importance. He can put things into perspective, offering every event the necessary attention and nothing more.

All this takes place in the final part. By that time, readers realize a) why they have read a few hundred pages of this book, b) who they really are, and c) what they are doing on this planet. They also get answers to a number of other philosophical and ... metaphysical questions.

³ The word used to have a completely different meaning. "Idiotis" in ancient Athens was someone who was self-centred and lacked concern for public affairs. In the present book, the term does not necessarily denote someone who is mentally retarded, but rather someone who is acting in a self-defeating or significantly counterproductive way, is incapable of reasoning that his/her actions may affect or harm others, or simply does not care.

Tips for readers

I have always been impressed by scepticism and the ability (or inability) of the human brain for critical thought. People are quick to believe that there are 300 billion stars in The Milky Way, our galaxy, without insisting to count them, but if you tell them that a wall or a staircase is freshly painted they need to test it with their finger. I admit, I used to be one of them, and made several mistakes, even when borrowing information for my lectures and my books. We are equally gullible to star signs, coffee-grind readings, psychics,⁴ and tarot cards without, for an instance, stopping to ponder the validity of every ridiculous and absurd theory we rush to embrace.

Some of the ideas presented in this book (much like my previous one *Princes to Frog and Vice Versa*), may initially appear slightly strange. However you perceive them, work to maintain a critical view. Do not accept everything you read. You are entitled to your own opinion.⁵ Think, question, and cross-reference the information.

The material in this book is suitable for readers with analytical thinking skills, those who are interested in stress and problem solving, and want to organize their thoughts or add more information to their existing knowledge.⁶ On the other hand, cognitive misers, those who wish to avoid spending a lot of time and effort reading everything there is to read about stress, may wish to skip the first part. In fact, if you happen to fit in the latter category and want to feel better *now*, make sure you read the Ro method (Chapter 8) and then go straight to the third part, which presents everyday applications of the theory described in the first two parts.

⁴ I have always wondered why we need to ... book an appointment before visiting a psychic.

⁵ You will, of course, be wrong... besides, who would be silly enough to argue with the expert? Yet, as we said, you do not need to agree with me on everything you read.

⁶ The book does not aim to replace the advice of your psychologist, psychiatrist, or other health professional. All information contained in this book has been checked for accuracy and published in good faith. However, the author/publisher accepts no responsibility on any grounds whatever, including liability for negligence, for the use or misuse of the information contained in this document.

Test: True or False?

Before we begin, why don't we – why don't *you* – perform a test to check your knowledge on stress.

Grab pen and paper (if you still remember how to use them).

Now write T (True) or F (False) for each statement on a piece of paper (else on a file on your note pad, iBook etc.).⁷

- Too many good things in a row can make you sick.
- Traffic congestion can raise your blood pressure.
- Stress, behaviour, and certain personality traits can increase one's chances of becoming ill.

- Most headaches are caused by muscle tension.

- Stress can affect the course of cancer.

- Stress is the best substrate for the activation and multiplication of various pathogenic microorganisms, as it decreases the effectiveness of the immune system.

- Individuals can moderate the frequency, intensity, duration and, as a result, the consequences or effects of stress.

- Personal development efforts, such as training in emotional management, health education, and behaviour modification (nutrition, exercise, and smoking cessation) contribute to better physical and psychological health.

- A sense of humour can buffer the effects of stress.

- Married people live longer and have 30 percent higher incomes.

I hope these questions have sparked your interest. The answers are ... somewhere in this book. It seems that you will have to read on.⁸

Let us begin!

⁷ The way in which you choose to complete the exercises listed onwards depends on the version of your book. If you are reading the eBook, you may be able to write on the screen, but I advise you against it. I also suggest you do not write on the printed book either; your spouse may feel jealous later and want to do the test as well.

⁸ All right, just for the impatient readers – not for you – here are the answers: All statements are true. Read on to find out how and why!

PART I: A LITTLE THEORY

I want to move to theory. Everything works in theory. – John Cash

ARE YOU stressed? If yes, join the club.

Stress can be useful or detrimental. A large number of studies have shown, however, that excessive stress is harmful for just about anyone. The extent of the negative effects of stress depends on a number of factors, such as genes, general physical condition, diet and lifestyle, etc. Do not despair though, because there are a number of cognitive and behavioural stress management techniques and methods to help you deal with stress and reduce its negative effects.

In this Part we will answer the following questions:

What is stress?

What or who creates stress?

Is stress generated from the outside or the inside?

If you feel pressure and stress, what senses allow you to experience these feelings? Can you see stress? Hear it? Catch it and kick it away? Can you smell stress? Taste it and season it?

Are some people born “stressed?”

Is stress “necessary?”

[Pages not available in the free version]

Chapter 8: The “Ro” method

*He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought
will never be able to change reality. – Anwar Sadat*

ONE THING is for sure: we cannot control other people or external events. We can, however, control our thoughts, regulate our emotions, and adjust our behaviour – to a large extent.⁹ Thus, what happens to us may be important, but it is certainly less important than how we perceive and respond to it.

You have probably heard the following Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.)¹⁰ serenity prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

At first, this advice appears to be simplistic. Indeed, there are two basic choices in life: a) to accept conditions as they are, or b) to accept the responsibility to change them.

Alas, most people struggle with the third part of the A.A. prayer. Carried away by their emotions, they do not have the clarity to take a step back and examine:

- whether the specific problem is amenable to change,
- if its priority is high, compared to other demands,
- the plan of action that they need to follow,
- the amount of time and energy resources they are willing to invest in order to deal with the problem (Rodafinos, 2007).

⁹ It may sound a little extreme and “robot-like,” but please bear with me for a couple of chapters before you reject the idea.

¹⁰ Also attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, among others.

Dr Ro

In the following pages, I will coach you in a simple problem-solving method, which is based on the serenity prayer, and is an application of the essence of the axioms and theory offered in the preceding chapters. The method can be used to deal with any kind of problem, large or small, important or not so important. Ladies and gentlemen, I present you the Ro method!¹¹

According to the Ro method, there are only two options for *any* type of problem life brings about: a) we can either do something about it, or b) we cannot. Once you understand and are able to make this clear distinction, you will stop overanalysing and making things complicated. Things are simple.

*A centipede was happy – quite! Until a toad in fun
said, “Pray, which leg moves after which?” This
raised her doubts to such a pitch, she fell exhausted in
the ditch not knowing how to run. – Katherine Craster*

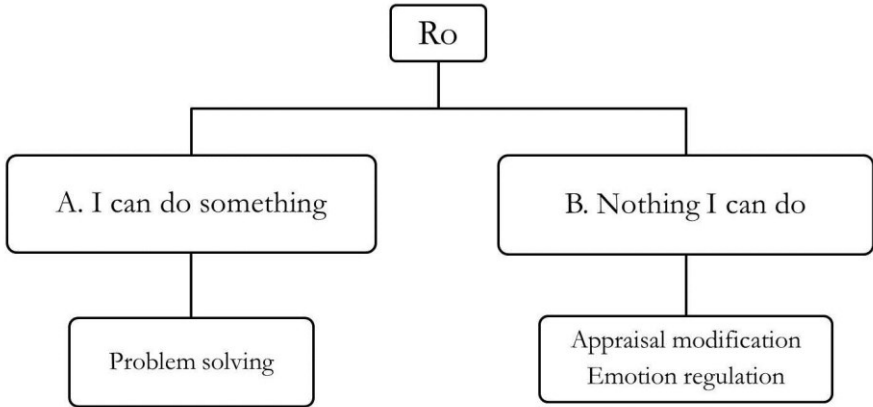
The Ro method will also facilitate decision-making by helping you identify the available choices related to each of the two options. It will help you answer questions such as:

“What can I do if *I can do something* about the problem and what can I do in case ... *I cannot do something?*”

The chart and the table that follow present the Ro method schematically.

¹¹ Ro as in “Ro”dafinos and p“Ro”blem.

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Exercise: Pick a problem

I now want you bring to mind an issue that you have been worrying about lately. In order to deal with it, we will work as a team: you, your good friends, and me if you wish. Do not sweat it; this will not be too hard. In a few pages from now, we will have solved it (or you will have forgotten all about it). Off we go then, one step at a time. The clock (page count) starts now.

First, get a pen and paper to record the problem.

What really concerns me is:

Have you made your choice of a problem/challenge? Now use the table below to consider your options.

*If you can fix the thing that worries you, then fix it;
otherwise do not waste precious time or energy on it.*

– Colleen Grant

Dr Ro

Options

A I <i>can</i> do something	B There is <i>nothing</i> I can do
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Strategy

A1 Problem solving	B1 Reappraisal	B2 Regulation of emotions
Steps: 1. Definition of problem 2. Evaluation 3. Alternative plans 4. Selection of solution 5. Implementation 6. Outcome evaluation	Psychological or cognitive techniques such as: humour, self-talk, reassessment, rational thinking, worst case scenario, searching for positive aspects, putting things into perspective	Physical methods such as: Massage, music, relaxation, meditation, physical activity, proper nutrition

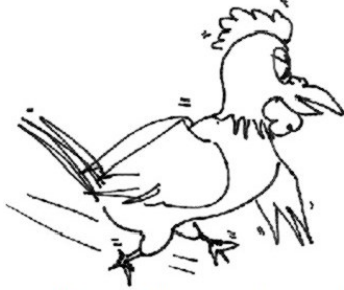
In the following chapters we will discuss some real life examples, while you will have the opportunity to work on a problem of your choice.



*I work out, watch what I eat, never smoked a cigarette
... Should I stay or should I go?*

Chapter 9: Scenario A - *I can do something about it*

A rooster is chasing a hen. The hen, while running is thinking: "If I stop and succumb, they will call me "easy." If I keep running, I will miss the opportunity. I know; I will just trip over!"



- Wait up... I just wanted your email!



LET US examine the first scenario: there *is* something that we can do to change the situation. Our task is to resolve the problem and control or alter the situation. It is imperative, therefore, to work on the problem itself or the conditions around it.

As previously discussed, problem solving is a healthy or adaptive coping strategy. When the conditions are amenable to change, *and* the issue is important enough, *and* we are willing to devote Energy and Time¹² to resolve it, then we better deal with it. Postponing our response or avoiding the issue at hand may be maladaptive.

¹² You will often hear – I mean read me say – I mean write – about our two most valuable resources, Time and Energy.

Dr Ro

[Pages not available in the free version]

Chapter 10: Scenario B - Nothing I can do right now

Granddad, what do you do when you can't do nothing, but there's nothing you can do?
– Huey Freeman

WHEN OUR efforts have so far proved fruitless and failure confronts us, two options remain to maintain our composure: to change our appraisal of the situation and/or work on regulating our emotions.

Both strategies are recommended when little can be done to alter the situation, at least at this moment. We will now examine cognitive techniques for changing our appraisal and discuss certain methods aimed at changing our emotions.

Reframing

“Men are disturbed not by the things that happen, but by their opinions about the things.” Centuries after Epictetus made this poignant observation, Rodafinos, another philosopher, plagiarized ... I mean *paraphrased* the concept to say that, “What you see or what you think is happening is not necessarily what is happening. There is no stress in any situation, unless ... you think there is. Things become as important as you allow them.”

The greatest progress of the last century was not the discovery of microchip or DNA sequencing. As William James argued, it was the realization that human beings can alter their life by altering their perception; the revelation that we can change our entire life without changing the external conditions.

Dr Ro

If our *opinion* of things is more important than the things themselves, we don't need to wait for things to change, as they often will not. All we need to change is the way we view things.

There is more to this, though, as there tends to be when we conveniently paraphrase ancient wisdom. In the Enchiridion and the Diatribes, Epictetus went on to say, "Of things, some are in our power and others are not." How true!

We cannot change the world *outside* us much of the time. We can, however, change the world *inside* us. Because we have complete control over our thoughts, we can alter the way we perceive external events.

In the words of Khalil Gibran:

Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life. Not so much by what happens to you, as by the way your mind looks at what happens.

Events may affect the course of our lives. Yet, as R. Holden said, "Circumstances and situations do colour your life, but you have been given a mind to *choose* what the colour shall be."



*So, what colour shall we use today? Salmon pink¹³
perhaps ...?*

Cognitive methods aim to alter our perception and reduce the effects of stressors. These often involve a conscious effort to reappraise the demands or redefine the importance of the stressful situation.

Is it plausible?

It is! Why else would two individuals react in a totally different manner when placed in the exact same situation, such as, for instance, a roll-a-coaster? One is exhilarated and the other needs disposable

¹³ If you are having difficulties in picking the appropriate colour, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_colors ... to become more perplexed.

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diapers. Their physical responses are very similar: raised heart and breathing rate, profound sweating, muscle tension etc.

The differences in responses – between fear and exhilaration – are due to differences in how they perceive the situation in their mind, how they feel about it on a cognitive level.

Most of what we see is only what we think about what we see. – Anonymous

According to the cognitive approach, we are able to examine and redefine what we conceived as a threat and what we did not.

By changing our perception of the situation, we are also able to influence the *fight or flight* response, i.e., our changes in our physiology, blood pressure, heart and breathing rate that we mentioned earlier.

Our appraisal of what is threatening is linked to our previous experiences. Yet, the interplay between external conditions and our previous experiences is not the sole determinant of how we perceive events. Our belief and value systems have a considerable influence on our perception and responses to events.

Healthy appraisal

Individuals who can generate a number of alternative responses to any given problem can usually adapt better to challenging situations. Such individuals have the ability to anticipate: “If what I want does not materialise, what else could happen? And, if this other thing does happen, how could I deal with it?”

They are prepared for the worst-case scenario:

“What is the worst thing that could happen to me?”

When everything is bad, it is good to know the worst, so that there is a comparison, argued Francis Bradley. Related comforting thoughts include “Truth is I am not in jail, I have not been hospitalized, I am not dead (at least not yet), I guess I am fine!”

Individuals with effective coping skills do not start drinking or smoking, do not quit, or give in to self-pity:

“Oh, mon dieu! Poor me! Why do bad things always happen to me ...?”

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These persons do not commit suicide because they failed an exam, their business is not going well, they broke up, or because their folks divorced. On the contrary, they examine the available options and a) act accordingly, b) change their perception of the problem or c) engage in emotion regulation.

Every exit is an entry somewhere else. – Tom Stoppard

Question: Can we control our emotions?¹⁴

We cannot always change the conditions to fit our desires – but we can always adjust our desires to the conditions.

With rare exceptions, we own our thoughts. As emotions stem from thoughts, we are capable of controlling the former.

Most people have a hard time accepting responsibility for their thoughts. They feel out of control; sometimes even controlled by their emotions rather than the other way round.

This is normal, though, or has become the norm, because our thoughts are very often fired by external stimuli. We quite easily get into the habit of responding to certain events with specific emotions, generating a force of habit over time.

Too often, we fall into the trap of replaying negative recordings and scripts that have become model emotional responses to specific situations:

“When such and such happens, I *have* to feel ... this way.”

A typical example is the infamous Greek “moontza,” the equivalent of the middle finger gesture. Let me explain.

According to Greek custom and tradition, when someone “decorates” us with a moontza, the extended open-five-finger palm, the conditioned response is to get back at him or her.

“Idiot” or “In your face, you jerk!”

The truth is that many have died of heart attacks in their effort to prove “how important they are,” and to respond to the offence of the traditional Greek moontza or an equivalent offence.

¹⁴ The present chapter includes extracts from chapter 15 of my book *Prince to Frog ... and Vice Versa*.

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“Do you know who I am?” they boast and retort, without expecting an answer, with the blood vessels on their neck all pumped up.

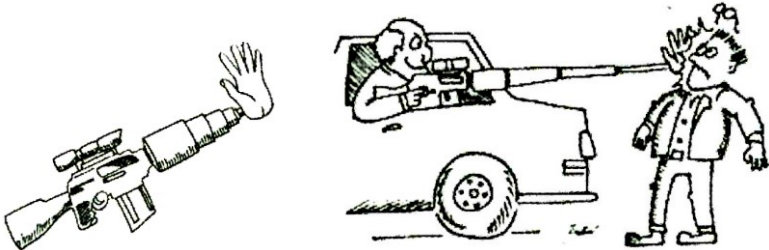
This learned response passes from father to son. Trust me, I know. My own father often used to “decorate” fellow humans with cute little or larger moontzas while driving. Observing with admiration my father, the role model of my childhood, I also acquired a certain proficiency in the use of the infamous moontza.

The problem is that all Greeks have become specialists attending similar traditional private courses, and often reciprocate:

“In your face, Dr Ro!”

What’s even worse is that, on a great number of occasions, others gladly throw a moontza in my face, anticipating my next move!

It surely must be a Greek custom, because to “barbarians” (i.e., non-Greeks) the moontza looks like a ... salutation! Hence, they do not become offended or feel the automatic urge to reciprocate. They just wave back with a Pan-Am [a.k.a. Botox] smile, unsure why the Greek passer-by is greeting them.



Now, you too can throw “moontzas” easily, quickly, and accurately by using the new MNTZ-16 moontza-shotgun. On sale now, while stocks last.

What is the end result? Because some of our emotional responses have become semi-automatic, this is how most of us come to believe that we are not really in control of our emotions. Nevertheless, just because certain responses to stimuli appear to be automatic it does not mean we *don't* or rather *can't* control them.

By the way, if we cannot control our emotional response, *who does?* Find them and send them to me for therapy ... to improve *your* mental health!

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We feel the way we think

Everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it.

– Confucius

A large number of psychologists favour and use Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) as a therapeutic model. According to Albert Ellis (1962, 1988), the founder of this particular technique, it is not the external event but rather our belief and value system that triggers our emotions after processing the event. Hence, if we change our way of thinking, our emotions will follow. Our values and beliefs, the moderating factors that act as our personal filters of the world are, largely, a result of learning – oh yes – and environmental influences.

Quite often though, many of our beliefs are outdated. They may be the result of information acquired through learning and experience, but are not necessarily correct today. Consequently, our thinking and our expectations on occasion may prove irrational or limiting.

Hence, every now and then, it is imperative to identify, re-examine, question our beliefs, and either change them or adjust them according to the new data.

If you never doubt your beliefs, then you are wrong a

lot. – Anonymous

Although we may not be able to control the fight or flight response, we can, with a little training, learn to re-examine and change our perception of what is or isn't threatening to us. Aside from automated, deep-rooted responses that have been ingrained in our genes through evolution (e.g., snake phobias), when and what we perceive as a threat in our everyday life is the result of our experiences, our beliefs, and our value system. By learning to control our way of thinking and our responses to events, we are in a position to regulate our emotions.

I should stress that modern cognitive psychologists also subscribe to Beck's statement that "we ourselves create most of our stress in our own mind." Indeed, most of us fight imaginary problems! Other times we tend to magnify various minor issues that may arise.

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Chapter 11: From theory to practice

The road to learning by precept is long, but by example short and effective. – Seneca

THIS CHAPTER puts the theoretical principles and the Ro method itself to the test, and presents specific examples and workable solutions. As you will observe, the examples more often focus on changing our appraisal rather than on changing the external event – simply because, as I noted earlier, events are not always under our control and amenable to change.

When dealing with a situation, our first goal should probably be to resolve the issue and alter the external conditions to our satisfaction. However, when this is not feasible, we need to re-examine our expectations, change our non-adaptive behavioural responses, and deal with our negative emotions.

As bonus, this section also contains several enlightening (and other times ... confusing) famous quotes on theory and practice, such as this one:

In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But, in practice, there is. – Yogi Berra

APPLICATIONS

As I have already stated, the Ro method can be applied to *any* problem. Let us put it to test on two challenging scenarios.

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Scenario Alpha: Financial problems

Assume I own a publishing company that is facing financial hardship. (The scenario can become very pragmatic for me, if you do not urge your friends to buy this magnificent book.)

Without thinking about it, I pass my negative emotions to my associates, employees, suppliers, and debtors. Frustrated as I am, I blame and curse the municipality, the system, the government, and whoever dares to appear in front of me. I take it out on my spouse, I might even explode at the kids, kick the cat, or even hurt Elias, my best man's little tortoise.

Scenario Beta: Health problems

Next, let us assume that I am the caretaker of a beloved relative who is suffering from Alzheimer or is becoming senile.

I am facing all the associated challenges, such as seeking medical support, finding a house nurse, and dealing with the related financial expenses. I invest a lot of my energy in cursing the usual suspects: the municipality, the system, the government. I take it on my wife, the kids, the dog, even Elias, my best man's poor tortoise.

However, deep down inside a little voice is telling me that blaming others (no matter how good I have become at it with all the practice), does not do me any good, in either scenario.

“So, what can one do? Try new tactics? Change course yet again?”

Hold on a minute; you paid good money to read this book, didn't you?

“We did, indeed.”

Well, then, read first, and make your comments afterwards.

In theory, practice is simple. – Trygve Reenskaug

THE MIGHTY “RRRO” METHOD ... IN PRRRRACTICE!

My ineffective responses (blaming others) have led me to a dead end. In due course I realise that I need to get my act together. In an attempt

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to put emotions away and use logic, I think of the two basic choices suggested by the Ro method:

- a) There is something I can do about the problem right now.
- b) There is not much I can do (at least not at this stage).

Let us re-examine the two scenarios above (Alpha and Beta), always bearing these two options in mind.

Option A: I can do something

Can I do something about the problem right now?

“Of course I can!” I resolve about Scenario Alpha above (financial problems). A brainstorming session with my associates produces a list with several possible actions: I can develop a new marketing plan for my product, come up with a more intelligent advertising campaign, organize fanfares, trumpet blasts and parades, offer freebies, train my staff, cut expenses, find a cheaper supplier, get professional advice from a coach or a mentor.

Alternatively or in addition to the above, I can arrange a group of friends and relatives to write letters to newspapers, ministers, everyone in charge, and even those out of charge. I can vote for the opposition party in the next elections, put up resistance, organize teams of citizens to revolt against the state ... after all, power comes from unity.

“Of course I can!” I resolve about scenario Beta too. I can attend training and educational seminars on the nature and demands of caring for Alzheimer patients and how to deal with these, I can contact and learn from others facing similar situations, I can join the related association. I can organize donations and events to raise awareness and motivate my fellow citizens and the state to help, write letters to newspapers etc.

Right! Now, there is a chance that my efforts will produce the desirable results, but there is also a chance that the outcome will not be the desired one. At this point, I may very well choose to try nothing more and give up.

On the other hand, frustrated as I am, I may vent my emotions to people who have nothing to do with my problem or those who cannot do something about it. At some stage, I have to realise that grumbling and complaining does not accomplish much in finding a solution. On

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the contrary, such behaviour can create additional problems: damage my relationships with my employees, suppliers, customers, my family, or the person who absolutely needs my support and positive attitude: myself.

Allow me to repeat that learning to distinguish between the situations we can control and those we cannot is of utmost importance. At the same time, we need to develop the habit to always examine whether we are really willing to allocate time and invest energy to change a situation.

Option B: Not much I can do right now

As we agreed, there are two kinds of worries in the world, those you can do something about them, and those you can't. Worrying too much about the latter is not very wise.

If the answer to the question "is there something I can do?" is negative, we are better off accepting the fact that *we cannot always control what happens outside us*. On the contrary, we have a lot of control – particularly after rigorous and persistent training – to what happens inside us, including our thoughts, emotions, and responses.

Again, the problem here is that most of us try to change situations that, at least at that particular stage, are not amenable to change. As a result, we pointlessly waste time and energy that could be wisely channelled into some other activity, efficiently and productively.

For instance, we could try to acquire further information and knowledge about the problem, studying those who have solved it effectively. We could work on and strengthen our relationships with other members of our family, relatives, or good friends. We could ask for help from our social support network, improve our skills, and enrich our repertory of coping strategies.

YOUR TURN NOW!

The time has come for us to work together on dealing with the problem you selected a while ago. The following form will guide you.

P“Ro”blem-solving form

1. Problem title (use your own words)
 2. Description of the problem (draw it, if you have to)
 3. Who is to blame – usual suspects (individuals or organizations)
My parents My teachers
Genes The stars
The company The system
God Other ...
 4. Does blaming help? (Please select one answer only)
- No ...
- No ...
 5. Can I **do something** to change the situation?
- Yes. Go to option A below.
- No. Skip A, and go to option B.
- Option A.** I can do something about it.
6. What can I do? (Brainstorming, evaluation of ideas)
 7. What more can I learn about the issue?
 8. Who can help?
 9. Is it worth my time and energy?
- No. Go to Option B below.
- Yes. Keep thinking. E.g., how much time and energy am I willing to invest?

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Part III: A DAY WITH DON STRESSOTE

A day is a miniature of life. When you have many beautiful moments, you have a beautiful day. When you have many beautiful days, you have a beautiful life. – Unknown



THIS IS the best part of the book. With originality, humour, panache, and affection, the following pages describe a day without stress. Our hero, Don Stressote (this is how I have baptized him; he is mine to do with as I please), like a modern-day Don Quixote, applies the theory you have been reading about in practice. He is a Ro method graduate, with a major in anti-stress!¹⁵

Having mastered the learning objectives of the previous chapters, he will face signs and wonders, maybe even ... blunders, but will come out smelling like a rose. He will successfully deal with his partner hogging the bathroom, will be stuck in a tiny lift with the chubby neighbour, will fight road traffic, and confront idiots –

¹⁵ As in anti-pasto ...

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including his boss, a disgruntled customer at work and, perhaps the most difficult person of all: himself and his unreasonable demands.

Let us spend a day with him.¹⁶ Move on Sancho Panza, watch and learn.

¹⁶ I challenge and invite you to share your ideas, experiences, and courage drills with others. E-mail me and I promise I will get you published and make you more famous than the great men I sometimes cite: Aristotle, Epictetus, Shakespeare, Rodafinos (I only mention the latter because of ... size) and the other lads.

End of the free part...

As folk wisdom has it, all good things come to an end. You have reached the end of the FREE part of the book “Idiots are invincible.”

Yet, this does not really have to be the end. Dr Ro, the president of the *Boneheads Academy* (AKA *Idiots Club*), invites you to a) join the club and tell us your personal stories in the related Idiot’s blog, and b) continue reading by purchasing the printed or the electronic version.

A gift with a MEANING!

There is no need to stop after buying your personal copy. You are allowed to order two or more copies, on the side for gifts - rather than aimlessly wondering around, searching for a last minute present for a friend’s anniversary, birthday, a dinner invitation etc.

You may also wish to visit [the author’s site](#) to find out about future events, watch video presentations, download free lecture material, articles, podcasts, and send your feedback.

The President
Angelo Rodafinos

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SPECIAL THANKS

To the dear readers who literally embraced the Greek version and shared their experiences with me online and by phone; some introduce themselves in person on the street, in shops, at the cinema, and joyfully describe the changes they accomplished in their lives.

To the most loyal “fans,” who read extracts every morning, applying generous splashes of *Eau de Ro* to get them through the day. I am flattered and will probably become slightly arrogant, but do not worry, carry on. I can take it!

To Klio Panourgias who assisted in the translation. To the friends and colleagues who have proofread drafts and suggested corrections.¹⁷

To Kostas Tsakonas, Lambros Lazouras, and Anna Konkouri who illustrated the text with their sketches.

Thanks to you, my dear reader, for taking the time to read this book. If you enjoyed it, please share it with a friend.

¹⁷ I have made every effort to acknowledge the original authors of short tales, quotes, and texts and to ensure their content is as accurate as possible. Wherever this was feasible, their names are cited in accordance with ethics and copyright law requirements. However, on certain occasions, these are either attributed to more than one source, or are orphan (i.e., of unknown origin; you know, the ones we tend to call “Chinese proverb”), and I have not been able to identify the copyright owner. If you know the source, kindly email me the information, so that I can make the necessary corrections in future editions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR (Self-praise ...)



Angelo (Kaissidis-) Rodafinos began his studies in the Athens Metchovion School of Marine Engineering because ... he was a top student in high school. Being a keen basketball player who loved sports he changed major and, despite the expectations of significant others, went on to study Physical Education and Sport Sciences at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He then went on to complete an MSc in Sports Psychology and Teaching at Ithaca College, New York, and a PhD in Psychology at the University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia.

An academic for nearly 20 years, Dr Ro taught general, applied, social, and work psychology at Universities, and has been the Head of the Department of Psychology at City College, International Faculty of the University of Sheffield for nearly a decade. He has published numerous articles in academic journals and popular magazines, while he has appeared in several TV and radio shows. His first book *Prince to Frog ... and Vice Versa! Applied Psychological Techniques to Improve Yourself – or Others* (in Greek) has become a popular reading guide for people from all ages and backgrounds. His second book *Idiots Are Invincible* deals with stress and problem solving.

Today he (probably) lives in Melbourne and is Program Director of Social Sciences at Online Educational Services, and Adjunct Senior Lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology.

TRAINING AND CONSULTING

A professional speaker and consultant for organizations and individuals, Dr Rodafinos presents numerous seminars and workshops on topics related to change, stress and time management, motivation, communication, persuasion and negotiation, management, team

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building and cohesion, public relations, success and happiness, exercise and nutrition, etc.

KIND WORDS FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

The worst part of the seminar was ... the break! – Nikos Anthopoulos

I really believe business around the world need to hear a voice of calm, positive, and realistic opportunities during tough economic times. I was most impressed with your positive and enthusiastic presentation style.

–Bill Lewis, President Extension Management Inc., USA

Congratulations for the presentation you delivered in Sheraton Sofia on Wednesday! It was exact, having in mind the audience, with humour, positive and easy-to-get message. – Draga Paskova, Human Resources Manager at Interamerican, Bulgaria

Today I thanked God for giving me the courage to get up and come to your seminar. I want to thank you as well for reminding us of the simple but basic truths in life. – Chris Vovori

A wonderful presentation. We wish it was more than six hours! I was not tired at all. It was interesting with lots of variety. – Panos Rogaris, Managing Director, Hellenic Telecommunication Insurance Co.

I regret that you are not in Sydney, because if you were here, maybe I could attend some of your lectures. They were one of the most interesting during the whole ExecMBA program of City College, Sheffield. – Marietta Kostadinova, MBA

CONTACT DETAILS

To organize a book show, a lecture, or a workshop for your company, club, association, high school, etc., view Dr Ro's schedule, to connect with him online, or to download free eBooks and presentations,

visit the official <http://www.rodafinos.weebly.com>

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or SKYPE: rodafinos

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CLIENTS

Dr Rodafinos' list of clients includes companies, educational institutions, fitness, and health centres etc.

