

A green plush frog is sitting on a wooden bench. The frog's mouth is open, showing a red interior. A brown beer bottle with a blue label featuring cartoon characters is lying on the ground next to the frog's feet. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Prince to Frog ... and vice versa

Applied psychological techniques
to change yourself - or others.

Angelos Rodafinos, PhD
Author of Idiots are Invincible

Prince to Frog ... and Vice Versa

Change yourself—or others—using applied psychological techniques



Angelos Rodafinos, PhD

Author *Idiots are Invincible*

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Make sure you read [Idiots are invincible](#)! The fool proof ‘Ro’ method for solving problems, dealing with challenges—and enjoying the process.

Kind Words

Your book has literally changed my life. E. Tzavara

I paid 20 Euros and lost 18 kgs! Hmm, what did a kilo cost? A. Toubides

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

It was a touch in my soul. I would really like to get a Stress-Visa. You are unique. You make me laugh and at the same time, you help me help myself. Thank you for coming into my life! Zoe

Your book has been a pleasant company to me. You helped me see things from a different perspective. X. Alexiou

I wish to congratulate you for your writing style. I have read several related books and I would consider yours in the top rank. J. Anastasiades

I am so enthusiastic about your book! Easy to read, without complicated terms and theories, excellent humour! I found myself laughing while reading it at the beach, I could not stop. Others were watching me, wondering what was happening! Alexis G.

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

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Preface

We are all born beautiful babies, adored by parents and friends, with specifications and potential to become real princes. However, at some stage, approximately at our third or fourth decade—for some later, for others even earlier—most of us, instead of “princes” we turn into “frogs,” because of the maladaptive thoughts and habits that we adopt along the way.

How can one revert to a prince once again? One solution is wait for something magical, e.g., the kiss of the princess. The other is to read this book.

The book contents answer questions and address change related topics such as:

- Is change necessary?
- Can we change? Can we change others?
- Why don’t people change?
- When do people change?
- Changing beliefs, changing actions
- Behaviour change theories
- How long does a new habit take?

providing examples and step-by-step guidelines for effective change.

As JF Fog sums it up, behaviour changes involve efforts to a) stop or decrease a behaviour or b) start or increase a behaviour—once, over a time span, or long term.

What about you? Is there something you would like to change?

- Do you text while driving?
- Do you waste too much time on social media or on the Electronic Income Reducer (TV)?
- Would you like to stop smoking or drinking?
- Would you like to improve your nutrition?

- Do you find it difficult to adhere to your exercise schedule?
- Do you want to get over a relationship?
- Would you like to study more or to complete your assignments on time?
- Are you constantly late to work, school, or appointments?
- Would you like to be able to get up on time?

If you answered yes to one or more of the above statements, you are in good company. Most people would like to change one or more things in their lives—if only they could find a way.

If you are not happy with yourself or with the conditions in your life, do not lose hope, because you can change. If you follow certain steps, you can change your thoughts, your emotions, and your actions.

Yet, if you do not change your direction, you are probably going to end up where you are heading (quote made in China). Or as the late Zig Ziglar put it, *if you keep on doing what you've been doing, you're going to keep on getting what you've been getting.*

My story

Following six years of postgraduate studies in the US and Australia, I returned to Greece in 1993. By then I had already travelled around the globe three times. The cultures, the ideas, and the people I encountered challenged and shifted my way of thinking. Soon after, I started lecturing at tertiary institutions. Out of personal interest and in my spare time, I established a student club. I baptized it *The Winners' Club* or W.C.

I wanted to share my learnings and my ideas about the many ways of thinking about a given issue. My first audience was a small group of young and curious students. The group grew larger, and the enthusiastic feedback I received motivated me to offer similar training sessions and workshops to business companies. I realised that helping others expand their mind added meaning to my life.

Since then, I delivered several thousands of lectures to students, managers, executives, teachers, and general audience, both face-to-face and online. Eventually, I realized how boring attending a lecture or reading textbooks could be! When learning is not fun, motivation, persistence and achievement can suffer dramatically. I have invested a lot of effort to inject humour and fun into my presentations and books, to assist people to learn and grow while enjoying the process. According to their testimonials, this light play-and-learn approach works better than traditional lectures or dry textbooks.

More people kept asking for presentation notes. I decided to put the material together into this book—and then another book, *Idiots are invincible*. It took me more than three full years to produce what you are now reading. I first published this book in 2000 in Greek. Since then, it has been translated to Bulgarian and English. It became a popular self-help guide, which assisted many readers to change the conditions in their life—or their attitude about life. I have updated and rewritten the content several times to reflect current themes.

So, Does It Work?

The material of this book is based on an applied psychology and behavioural change course I developed and taught for several years. The course is about stopping or decreasing unwanted (e.g., smoking) and initiating or increasing desirable (e.g., exercise) behaviours, using applied cognitive and behaviour modification techniques. Researchers have tested these techniques with success in educational settings, fitness centres, business organizations, hospitals, mental health institutions, and prisons.

Students who enrolled at the course were first asked to review their life and examine its fit with their core values. They identified discrepancies between what is important to them and their daily actions. Then, they were asked to select a target behaviour, develop a change plan, sign a behavioural contract, and make a public commitment to change. They had to follow up and report their

progress during the semester in front of their classmates, which served as a kind of group therapy.

In the years that I taught the course, I saw hundreds of students accomplishing challenging changes, first in their thinking and eventually in their behaviour. According to their testimonials, they maintained a significant portion of these changes until today.



*Dr Ro's program has been an enormous success
for hundreds of students (not this one).*

According to my not-so-modest estimates, I believe that I have helped several thousands of my students, readers, and seminar participants accomplish significant positive changes in their lives or at least change the way they think and deal with their daily challenges. Many of them were kind enough to keep in touch and share their successes with me. Such feedback¹ brings me joy and gives meaning to what I do.

The book can serve as your manual for the accomplishment of changes in your thinking, your behaviour, and your life. Much like my students, you will learn the basic psychological principles and theories for change and then get your hands-on behavioural modification techniques. You will examine your values and your life. You will imagine desired improvements and design a course of action to achieve your goals. You will then identify potential

¹ Read some of the success stories at
rodafinos.weebly.com/reader-comments.html

obstacles and sign behavioural contracts. Your witnesses will hold you accountable.



Just sign here ...

Who Should Read the Book?

Anyone interested in behaviour change and in improving their lives or in the lives of people around them (which probably includes everyone). In particular, the content should be of interest to:

—general audience, independent of their professional or academic level and education.

—employees or managers in the private and public sector who aim for changes in their organization and the people around them.

—parents who are looking for effective ways and ideas to guide their children.

—educators, who, by profession, lead and inspire a great number of individuals.

—partners who wish to resolve certain issues and improve their relationship, etc.

Happy changing!

Dr Ro

Author *Idiots are invincible* & *Prince to Frog*

Introduction

Hundreds of millions of people are sadder and sicker than they need to be because they cannot control their own behaviour. Their own behaviour is standing between them and their dreams and aspirations—and they do not want it that way. They know they should change, they want to change, and they do not change. –Al Switzler

Many people live lives inferior to those they could be living. Overweight, unfit, smokers, overstressed and overworked individuals would prefer a healthier and happier lifestyle. The good news is that it does not have to be that way.

Who Wants Change?

Everyone wants better!

Most of the participants in my lectures and seminars express an intense desire to change personal habits and things in their lives. I have yet to meet someone who does not wish for some changes in their life. We all would love to become emotionally, mentally, and physically healthier.

Who Wants to Change?

Everyone wants change ... but no one wants to change. We want better, but with the least required effort, only if we do not need to change our behaviour, our habits, and our lives. We will examine the reasons why in the related chapter.

There is a little story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody:

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was

Everybody's job.

Everybody thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody would not do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

“The average person uses roughly only 5 to 10% of his potential” is a quote presented in self-help books and posted and reposted on the internet. Although it sounds promising, it is yet another popular myth. Truth is that we do use 10% of our neuron at any given moment, but we use 100% of our brain on any given day.

Because nobody gave us a manual when we were born, learning how to use our brain better, which is what we will do while reading this book, will help accomplish changes and improve our lives.

What About You?

What is it that *you* cannot bear any longer? What would you like to change? What do you want in your life? More money, less stress, better relationships, fewer problems, or more time?

Commonly Desired Changes

I bet that you too, like most of us, at some point, have already tried to change a habit. Let us see how you compare to the norms.

The most common point of time is New Year's Eve when we all review the previous year(s) and plan for the next. This time we are determined to break or make a new habit.

New Year resolutions are a tradition that goes as far as the ancient Babylonians who made promises to their gods to pay their debts. Each year, around January 1st (or a few weeks later for Chinese)

people still make promises to pay their debts or do an act of self-improvement.

What are the most common behaviours do people try to change? The most common category is physical well-being in the health and fitness section, which includes behaviours such as quitting smoking, reducing drinking, losing weight, eating healthy food, and exercise or sports.

Other categories include:

Finances: save money, manage debt, invest.

Social and relationships: increase quality time with family and friends, get married, have kids, meet new people.

Bad habits: reduce TV/Facebook/Video game time, stop biting nails, picking nose, other.

Career: improve performance, get a promotion, a better job.

Self-improvement: improve skills, stress, and time management.

Organisation: simplify, clear, file regularly, put keys away in the same place, deal with procrastination, set aside two hours daily for uninterrupted work, maintain a blog. Mental well-being: think positive, laugh more often, keep a gratitude journal, enjoy life.

Experiences: vacations, trips, events, and activities.

Altruism: volunteering, charity.

Reducing, reusing, and recycling. Spiritual: church, praying.

Unfortunately, education (e.g., complete courses, learn languages, play an instrument) is not a very popular category.

What Is the Success Rate?

Unfortunately, people forget most of these promises by February or within the first three months and quit trying. In fact, despite the confidence of the individuals who set the goals, the success rate is as low as 20%, which is discouraging.

Do not despair though, as those who follow certain guidelines and use specific techniques, such as the ones described in this book, have more chances. For instance, according to Richard Wiseman, goal setting works for men; announcing their goals to their networks and receiving social support works well for women. *Questions*

Several questions pop into one's mind:

How do habits form?

Why it is so difficult to adopt healthy habits, and so easy to follow unhealthy ones?

Why don't people change their habits—even when they know it is imperative to do so?

Why do others change easily?

What factors promote and assist change? How can we change ourselves or others?

Do we have the answers?

There Is No Magic Pill

“OK, at least, is changing easy or difficult?” The answer is ... yes.

If there was a magic potion or a Viagra-type of pill for changing the unwanted habit, I assume we would take it, ignoring the likely side effects. Changing behaviour is possible but it is more complicated than that.

After several decades of research on the subject, we do not have all the answers to the above questions. Neither have we managed to work out the magic formula and develop the blue pill for change (why do I have blue in my mind?).

If I knew the solution that works for all, 100% of the times, I would be filthy rich.² Nevertheless, the science of behaviour change is making progress, and research has come up with some solid findings and practical ideas that seem to work. Thus, behaviour change can be easier if you follow a set of guidelines. Our

knowledge is improving daily and technology advancements help to that end.

One Size Does Not Fit All

The methods and techniques presented in this book are not a standard formula or a panacea to all issues, but rather an effort to apply the existing knowledge on the function of our brain, based mainly on cognitive-behavioural psychological theory. There is a variety of theories and techniques that we will not discuss here.²

Some (but not all) of research findings seem to agree with the ancient wisdom and teachings of philosophers or modern popular self-help authors.³ It is also becoming apparent that these are not of the “One size fits all” variety.⁵

² By the way, I am an academic, not a clinical psychologist, and as such I can educate and offer advice, but I do not offer therapy, as I am not qualified. People who need professional counselling should look elsewhere.

² For the most comprehensive list of these up to date see Michie et al. (2013).

³ Several of the short stories and fables in the book have been plagiarised – I mean ‘adapted’ from famous self-development gurus, such as W. Dyer, D. Waitley, T. Robbins, Z. Ziglar, and others. I am proud to report that they too have borrowed extensively from the ancient Greek philosophers.

⁵ One size fits all: clothes that do not fit anyone.



*Everything that could have been invented has
already been invented—by us, Greeks!*

The Course We Will Follow

Dale Carnegie offered the following principle for effective teaching: “Tell the audience what you are going to say, say it; then tell them what you have said.” Here is a brief description of what you are about to read. The book is comprised of the following three parts.

Part I

The first part answers the question “whose fault is it?” It is all about realizing that we are constantly making smaller and larger choices. However, no change can happen unless we accept responsibility for our choices and our future. Although situations or other people may have influenced our present course, we need to realise that we are the captains of our boats.

Part II

The second part of the book presents the theoretical models of learning, forming, and changing thoughts, emotions, and actions. It aims to answer questions such as “How do we learn and form habits? Why don’t we change? When do we decide to change? Can we change our thoughts, or our emotions and our mood by will? If so, how do we do that?”

Part III

The third part is more hands-on. It presents a step-by-step approach, the blueprint to changing thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and outcomes.

Successful behaviour change involves planning and scheduling, requires commitment and focus to daily activities, as well as adjustments to our social and physical environment.

Readers will be asked to evaluate their lives, to examine the current situation and decide where they would like to go from here, and where they would like to be in the future. An awareness of the present conditions will most likely contrast with the desired situation. This creates cognitive dissonance and a healthy dissatisfaction, which in turn acts as a motivator to accomplish the required changes and achieve the desired goals.

The intensity of our desire, in combination with self-efficacy (the belief that we can accomplish a task and achieve the required results), determine a) whether we will select to engage in an activity, b) the effort that we will invest, and c) our persistence when we will face obstacles. As it is nearly certain that obstacles will surface, course correction and problem-solving skills are critical.

Finally, we will discuss the ability to remove oneself from the problem and view things in the right perspective. The epilogue offers tips on how to do just that and presents techniques that will remind you to act accordingly.

Your Job

Some of the ideas that I will present may surprise you. Remain critical and do not accept everything you read. You do not need to agree with everything I write here (you will be wrong, of course). Be a sceptic. Examine and crosscheck the information, if needed.



*Sure. Except, I am a bit sceptical about
scepticism.*

However, do stay open to my, sometimes strange, ideas. Keep your brain open because, as the adage goes, “A mind is like a parachute. It doesn’t work if it is not open.”

Oh, I nearly forgot! To achieve changes, you need both to read the book and to do the work. One thing you can be sure of. Neither the content of this book or any other therapy will work if you do not do your part.

Tips for Reading

Place the book at a spot where it is *easy* for you to access. Some people place it next to their bed so that they read a page or a chapter before they go to bed⁴ and one page or a chapter as soon as they wake up. Others prefer to read in the toilet! They claim that the conditions are conducive to learning. They can get away from distractions and focus on the task. Oh well if they think so ...

Others carry a copy on their phone or tablet and read a few pages using their downtime: commuting, waiting at the doctors, or during their lunch break. Reading can help you pass time pleasantly and advance your personal or professional development.

Use a bookmark, to know where you stopped. Studies show that highlighting or under marking does not work that well. I suggest you keep notes, and you try one of the ideas or exercises of the book

⁴ Several readers complained that as soon as they would get in bed and start reading my exciting book, they fell asleep, and the book landed on their face. I immediately engaged in active problem solving and reduced the size and weight of the super-improved new edition.

each day. Of course, if you purchased the e-version, these options may need to be adapted.

Repetitions, e.g., in the evening, just before you go to bed, will jog your memory and aid retention of the material. Finally, if there is something you liked or found useful, feel free to discuss it with your friends, instruct your kids, or tell your parents.

To teach is to learn twice. –J. Joubert

What I will ask you to do may occasionally seem like schoolwork. Well, you are right. You will enrol in a course, one that may turn out to be one of the most important courses of your life. Think about it. If 12 or more years of schooling have not helped you to achieve the level of personal and financial success and happiness you aspired for, reading this material may be yet another opportunity to improve your life. I just hope reading this book will not last as long as the school did.

Once you finish this one, keep reading and learning. Even if the present book is not exactly what you were looking for, keep reading material in the area that interests you (in fact, I have in mind another fantastic book ... of mine to recommend).

Cultivate an intense desire to keep learning and growing, so that you end up working smarter—not harder! Remember: the individual who does not read good books has no advantage over the one who cannot read them.

I will see you at the other end!

Part A: Choices

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. —Made in China (again)



Got the candle! Has the play started yet?

14. Imagine That!

Imagine it, write it, see it.

Imagination is a uniquely human ability, one that animals may never experience. Visualization or mental imagery allows us to create complex experiences in our mind.

Much like we can replace our vocabulary, the music we play in our mind and our thoughts, so we can replace the images and the films we view in mind. In fact, we are the director, screenwriter, producer, and actor in our personal movie theatre. We can play around with the scenario, adjust the size of the screen, the brightness, the colours, the speed, the location, the order of events, the sounds, etc. If you do not believe me, try the following exercise.

The Elephant with The Pink Bow Tie

I want you to close your eyes and imagine a large white movie screen that stretches from one end of your field of vision to the other. Now picture a small grey elephant that slowly enters from the left side of the stage. He has large ears, a long trunk, and swings his tail left to right, chasing away the flies. Make him walk faster, feel the stage rattle under his weight. Now put him on reverse speed. Travel into the future and turn him into an adult, three meters tall and three tones weight. He now covers the entire screen of your personal movie theatre. Time to zoom out, reduce him to keyring size and place a golden bell and a pink bow tie on his neck. Take the little elephant on your palm, caress his tiny trunk, pull his ears.



*God bless you! I have been trying to lose those
kilos for years now ...*

Well done. I assume you succeeded in visualizing all the details. If so, you have demonstrated your skills in directing and displaying a motion picture in your mind's theatre.

Here is a little test. When I asked you to hold the elephant in your hand, did you zoom in your palm, or did you watch yourself on stage from the distance, as if there was an outside crew with a camera operator filming? In the first case, you used internal imagery and in the second external imagery. Not to worry, both types are considered equally effective.

Why Use Imagery

Imagery has both cognitive and motivational functions. Cognitive functions include working on skills (e.g., imaging performing a specific task) or on strategy (e.g., imaging following a plan). Motivational functions include goal-oriented responses (e.g., seeing oneself completing an event successfully, or arousal functions (e.g., emotion regulation, to relax or activate and energise oneself). Let us examine some examples for each of these functions. Note that most of the examples may serve one, two or more functions i.e., they can have motivational and cognitive roles.

Cognitive Functions

1. Working on Skills

In the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, Dick Fosbury, eyes closed, rocked three or four times back and forth, seeing himself clearing the bar.

In front of the surprised eyes of the spectators, cleared the bar with his back-first technique, inventing a new technique in the high jump.

We can use imagery to rehearse a situation, in the absence of external input. Using all our senses we can perform a specific task in our mind by producing a simulation and imitating the real experience. While preparing for upcoming events we can mentally rehearse the process and train to improve our performance. Imagery provides the opportunity to prepare from within when conditions do not allow us to prepare outside, in the real field.

Learning, according to Waitley, includes wanting something very much, gathering the relevant and necessary information, internalizing it, trying it out, rehearsing the movement, handling the material, feeling the experience. Using this process, we learn how to write, talk, and drive. Most behaviours can become habits if we repeat them enough times.

Research showed that during mental imagery there is intense electrical activity in the brain resembling that of the real experience. The psychoneuromuscular theory states that imagery activates the same muscles as the ones used in actual movements. According to the symbolic learning theory, imagery creates a mental 'blueprint' that the central nervous system encodes.

Our brains can hardly tell the difference between a real experience and a vivid imagery session. The robot of our mind perceives as real what we view and what we say to ourselves repeatedly. Thus, vividly experienced thoughts and images shape habit.

How strong is the effect of mental imagery? A study by the University of Chicago demonstrated that basketball players who practised shooting free throws in the locker room using mental imagery significantly improved their performance compared to a control group. In fact, their free throw percentage was not far from the third group that practised the drill. Visualization may not be a substitute for skills and practice but enhances progress and boosts performance faster when you keep training.

Beethoven wrote five piano sonatas and his 9th Symphony when he had already lost his hearing, playing the tunes in his mind. He was unable to hear the loud applause when the symphony premiered in 1824. Want to hear something more shocking? People who have lost one of their legs wake up at night to go to the bathroom, trip and fall out of bed because they feel that the ‘ghost limb’ is still in place! For six months the brain believes that the lost limb is there, as it has been for so many years. The limb is gone but the pain is still there.

Golf Legends

According to legend,⁵ Major James Nesmeth was a prisoner of war, who spent seven years in a cell and in solitary confinement at a remote concentration camp in North Vietnam. The Major spent endless days and nights walking barefoot wearing his black pyjamas up and down the wooden, 2X3 cell. His inmates played music with imaginary guitars without strings and sound, and pianos with keys painted on a board, like the typists who type in their imagination. Mental rehearsal is a ‘synthetic’ experience. You rehearse inside when external conditions are not right.

Nesmeth decided to practice his game to avoid going crazy. He played a game of golf every day for seven years in his imagination. Inside his small cell, he experienced everything to the last detail. Got all dressed up, smelled the grass, heard the birds chirping. He used every club, watched the ball roll to the exact spot he had selected, hit every shot, scored in every hole, under all weather conditions. Four hours a day, seven days a week, for seven years. When he was released, he weighed only 57 kilograms. He competed in the next tournament and scored 74, way below his average previous performance (90). Journalists congratulated him: “Well done,

⁵ Sources: Zig Ziglar, Dennis Waitley, Canfield, and Hansen.

congratulations on your new self, on your new record.”
He replied, “Are you kidding? I have never needed four strokes in the hole number three in the last seven years ... I suck!”

2. *Working on Strategy*

Elite athletes use imagery and mental rehearsal extensively. They go through routines, visualizing the successful performance to optimise arousal and improve their concentration. When preparing mentally, model top athletes; they train within their minds before, during, and after a competition. Apart from visualizing how to perform a task, imagery can be used to mentally rehearse the whole strategy of approaching a game or a situation.

Apollo astronauts landed on the moon hundreds of times before they even launched the space shuttle two years later. When Neal Armstrong stepped on the moon, he said, “One small step for me, one huge step for humanity.” And then he added, “Just like drill.”



*One small step for me, several thousand miles
for my mother-in-law.*

“Yes, but I don’t play golf and I am not planning to compete in the Olympics or become an astronaut,” you might be thinking.

Successful managers and salespersons also use imagery.

“Yeah, right, I am not a manager either.”

All of us use mental imagery and rehearsal every day, even if we never realised or thought about it. A teenager goes over his pitch before picking up the phone to ask a girl out, starting with the first

“Hi” checking his tone and inclination a hundred times. The girl mentally rehearses what clothes to wear before selecting the top 7 outfits she will try on before the date. While driving, she prepares her excuse because she is late for her date. An employee mentally prepares for a difficult discussion with a colleague. She visualizes herself standing up confident and friendly, smiling, and shaking hands as their meeting begins. She then drafts her arguments and considers all objections and potential answers.

*Winners imagine what they want to achieve.
Losers what they want to avoid.*

Motivational Functions

3. Goal-Oriented Responses

A swimmer visualizes herself completing an event successfully. A soccer player sees the final score on the scoreboard before the match even begins. Greg Louganis, a four-time Olympic champion and the greatest diver of all time, used imagery before each perfect dive from the 10-metre platform or the 3-metre springboard. The acrobats in the circus do the same. Ukrainian Sergey Bubka, a former pole vault athlete and six-time world champion, practised his technique in his mind before each attempt. Figure skaters or gymnasts perform their triple rotation and never fail in their minds, before getting on the apparatus or the ice-skating arena.



Por favor, señor, qué quieres decir “Goal-Oriented?”

Do you dream of your goals and imagine achieving them? Young children do it all the time: “Let’s play doctors, astronauts ...” Why is it so difficult to apply the same process, imagining we achieve

our most important goals in life? Why don't we learn how to become winners by rehearsing thoughts and plans for success?

Trampettes And Red Carpets

Here is an example⁶ of how I visualize the outcome of an important event or meeting (e.g., a seminar, an interview on TV, a negotiation) to boost my confidence.

I visualize a thick red carpet laid in front of me, two trumpeters left and right, and the manager or customer welcoming me with open arms.⁷

-Dr Ro, I have been waiting all my life to meet you! Now, there is part of me that believes this may not be 100% true, but my other parts see the welcome committee; I hear the trumpets; I shake the manager's hand, and we talk comfortably, we communicate, we find common ground.

-Which of your products would you recommend for our company, Dr Ro?

-Hang on a second, we haven't gotten to that part yet; I'm still explaining how good I am ... but if you insist, I recommend my flagship seminar on personal and professional development ..."

-Awesome, we will take two of these, thank you so much!

-But I have not explained my fees yet.

-That is not a problem. When do we start?

4. Arousal Functions

Research shows we daydream at least 30% of the time during a normal day, in class, at work, when we are not so interested in what

⁶ Adopted from a talk by J. Myers.

⁷ Note that in case of a job interview, in my imagination, the manager is wearing red Long Johns and a striped party hat. His outfit helps reduce my anxiety.

is taking place. Our minds wander, even during demanding tasks, we travel elsewhere—not always to a happy place!

Imagery is used for emotion regulation, to relax or activate and energise oneself. Apart from the occasional mind wandering, which is unavoidable, you get to program and select your fantasy, if you wish. No matter how hard your day was, regardless of your financial situation, or your living conditions, you can use imagery to escape to a relaxing, idyllic location.

When you feel tired, frustrated, upset, when you think of something unpleasant or useless, or before you fall asleep, you can travel to your favourite destination. Depending on your preferences, this can be a dark cave, a forest hut, a ski lodge, or a sunny beach on a Southeast Aegean Island. Select your favourite spot, paint the sky with the colours you prefer, hang the sun or a few stars, decorate it with clouds and seagulls or furnish it with oak trees, and park it in a corner of your mind, so that it is easily accessible. Sit in a comfortable armchair or couch, lie on the thick carpet by the fireplace, or on the warm sand at the beach. Dim or brighten the lights, put the CD with the sounds you prefer. Then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths; relax.

If you want, you can review past successes, pleasant moments, beautiful relationships, plan a happy future with joyful events.

Walt Disney Techniques

Similarly, imagery can help mitigate the anger and frustration the idiots (managers, colleagues, partners, family members, drivers, traffic police, etc.) around us cause every day.

Imagine the ‘enemy’ (i.e., the one who does not behave *the way you want them to*) standing in front of you, yelling and aggressively pointing his finger towards you. Using Warner Bros. technology, enlarge his ears and nose, inflate him like a balloon or make him lose weight.

Change his hairstyle, add a wig or a wide bald spot, play with his outfit. Imagine how he would look when he is elderly and fragile, or when he was an infant. Shrink him in size until he fits in your palm. Pet him on the head and try to calm him down. “Shh, shut up, relax, everything will be fine!”



*Mike’s imagery training included telling his boss
to kiss ... a part of his body.*

Thus, with imagery, we can regulate our emotions. In addition, we can change the mood of those around us. We can generate arousal and excitement transforming the emotional climate in the discussion or influencing everyone in the group. Excitement is an incurable condition; the wind transmits it like fire to the forest. One can smell the burnt wood and see the smoke from miles away. Of course, we cannot achieve everything with enthusiasm—but we can do everything better with enthusiasm than without it! A prerequisite to accomplishing this is to first do one’s homework—in real or hypothetical or imaginary conditions.

*Nothing great has been achieved without
enthusiasm. —RW Emerson*

Instructions

I asked my old friend, Thomas Achtsis, a former Greek ski champion, whether he experiences negative thoughts before the slalom race, and how does he cope. “Of course, I do,” he replied. “I stand straight, take a deep breath, and see myself crossing the gates tightly without a single error. Then ... I smile!”

When you use mental rehearsal, here is how to do it right. Find 510 minutes and a place where they will not interrupt you (although you

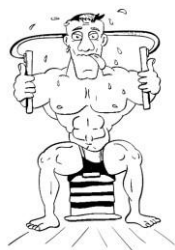
can also try the drill on the bus, at the office). Close your eyes and take a few breaths to relax. Feel confident and in control. Use words, sounds and images employing all your senses—auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory, kinaesthetic. Talk to yourself using a first (internal) or third person (external). See yourself as an active participant, rather than watching yourself from the distance. Apply facilitative imagery, i.e., see yourself succeeding. Concentrate on the task and go through the process, imagining each step, in detail.

Focus on the desired result, on the rewards of success and not on the penalties of failure, Waitley reminds us. We move towards what we think about every minute and every day. So, do not focus on the opposite of an idea, what you do not want to happen.

When you are done, take a deep breath, open your eyes and smile.

Using Imagery to Change Habits

Going on a diet or a fitness program for a few weeks or months may work in the short run. If you want permanent change, rather than pursuing a goal, you need to change your *identity*, i.e., you need to become the type of person who never misses a workout, who eats well every day, someone who takes care of his/her physical and mental health. Rather than working on a goal, work on being consistent and building lifestyle behaviours.



*I eat well, never miss a workout ... Can I go to
another book please?*

There is no need for major life changes. You can start small and accomplish tiny wins. Imagery can help in your early steps.

For instance, adolescents can practice saying no to a peer who offers them a cigarette by role-playing and rehearsing the situation in their mind. This way they build their skills and their confidence to refuse when the time comes. “No, thank you” they reply with a smile. It is easy; they have done it a dozen times in their minds.

“Oh, come on, have one, join the group.”

“I am not a smoker. I take pride in caring for my body and soul and being healthy and happy.”

“Well done,” they reply with admiration. “You look determined and in good shape. Good for you. Tell me, how do you do that? I wish I could quit smoking.”

This is the best-case scenario, I know. Peers will put pressure and ridicule and bully the adolescent. Again, research has shown that thinking ahead and preparing answers in your mind using mental rehearsal or in actual role-play situations improves assertiveness and adolescents’ communication skills.

We can use imagery to change the attributes of a type of food in your mind. Let us try to do that with chocolate, for instance. Imagine a piece of chocolate. Make it look ugly rather than attractive. Imagine it is old and stale. Bring it closer and see the tiny holes created on by small slimy worms (or hairy – depending on which ones you hate the most). Now, try to imagine what you would look like if you consumed the amount of chocolate you eat in a year within a single day. Consider the effects of excessive sugar consumption on your body and health. Obesity, cellulite, blood sugar and liver problems, clogged arteries and increased risk of heart disease, reduced collagen production, headaches. Think of the effects on your self-image. Your body is deformed; you are full of fat and flabby skin. Your thighs rub against each other, you cannot wear a skirt, you no longer fit in the trousers you liked so much.



*I must have drunk too much water—this can't be
my belly!*

Then consider the social consequences. People no longer look at you the same way they did when you were slim or go unnoticed on the street as if you are invisible. Some even avoid looking at you or approaching you because you are not a pleasant sight! You sweat easily with the slightest movement or temperature rise; you smell a different smell. You lack energy, get tired easily, you feel shame, ugly, and sad. Is it worth it? No? Good, now put that chocolate down.

Right after considering the negative consequences of the unwanted behaviour, also should consider the positive consequences of the desired behaviour (e.g., proper diet and nutrition). Imagine yourself as you would like to be. For example, imagine your slim and fit self at the beach, wearing a sexy tiny swimsuit. You feel attractive, full of energy and health. People of the opposite sex look at you with admiration and try to approach you. People of the same sex are jealous of your appearance and try to approach you as well. You feel content and very, very beautiful. Taking care of yourself pays off.

Note that imagery is not enough to change a habit. As we will discuss later, you also need to replace the unwanted behaviour with another that can generate the same emotions (e.g., pleasure) as the old one. You need to find ways to satisfy that desire for glucose when it arises. Make sure there is plenty of fruit and vegetables within reach. Wash the apples and the carrots as soon as you buy them and place them on a bowl on the table, so you do not need to put extra effort when you want to eat something. Grab a large yellow fresh banana and a cool slice of pineapple or melon and put them in the mixer along with some ice cubes and a bit of yoghurt or milk. Pour the healthy milkshake in your favourite glass. Sip and feel the cool taste in your mouth. Imagine the nutritious juice going down the oesophagus and into your stomach. Your Self No1 bows to thank you for providing high-quality fuel to run your brain and this wonderful machine you call body. The nutrients and vitamins are immediately absorbed by the walls of your intestines and

provide maximum energy with the minimum energy consumption for the digestion process.



If you own a car, sell it, and buy a juicer. It will take you further! –T. Robbins

Adjust the temperature to your pleasing, add your favourite music, close your eyes, and picture yourself at a nice location, filled with pleasant emotions. Write the script, direct, produce, and be the star in your personal film that can shape your habits and change your life for the better. If not, marketing experts will use the same method to sell their own ads. They will decide for you what to eat, what to drink, what to smoke and how to live. If you do not have a plan for your life, others do!

If you do not design your own life plan, chances are you will fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they have planned for you? Not much. –Jim Rohn

Application

Here is a final exercise that can help you interrupt your pattern and change negative thoughts into positive ones.

1. Visualize a large STOP sign, like the ones at intersections.
2. Tell yourself, "STOP thinking negatively" or "CANCEL".

3. Grab the vacuum cleaner and watch as it swallows all negative thoughts and feelings. Empty the bag in the trash.
4. RELAX, take a deep breath.
5. REPLACE the negatives with new, positive thoughts and images.



Failure to notice and stop negative thoughts is a violation incurring serious fines.

15. Stress and Anger

*If you want to make God laugh,
tell him your plans for today.*

You probably have a lot of problems. Most people do. You may believe that the way you feel depends on your problems and that if your problems remain unresolved, you will still feel the same way. Indeed, certain issues are not funny at all. Diseases, hunger, financial challenges. Save these for later when we discuss the 'Ro' method. For now, let us examine how to cope with daily stressors and minor issues. The taxi driver who cut you off, the employee who did not prepare the report, your partner who keeps nagging you.

I, too, used to get and stay upset for hours or days with insignificant events. Teaching psychology and helping people cope with daily challenges and life events has had a significant impact on how I deal with stress. I learned that stress is a part of life and that excessive and chronic stress has deleterious effects on our physical and psychological well-being. I trained myself in the use of the techniques I teach. Dealing with stress may involve altering the way you perceive the stressor, or your perception of your own coping abilities, or learning new coping skills and using them when needed. I learned to examine and change my perception to reduce the intensity, duration, and frequency of negative emotions. I also learned how to deal with problems. This chapter will present a few of these ideas.

The Joy of Stress

Stress is a normal, inevitable, and necessary part of life. The complete absence of stress is unnatural. If you do not believe me, answer the following question.

–Do you know someone who is not stressed at all?

You see, I know a few people, but they are dead! Only the dead have zero stress (as far as we know, that is). Our physiological response to stressful situations is natural and has no long-term harmful effects unless it is excessive in intensity, duration, and frequency. In fact, the lack of stress results in low motivation, boredom, and apathy, and can have similar effects to excessive stress. Consequently, a certain degree of stress, or optimal arousal in scientific terminology, is considered necessary. Most of the time, it is the excessive stress that is the problem.

Thus, from now on we will refer to the conscious and successful *regulation* of stress and its accompanying negative emotions, rather than its elimination. In other words, stress is not the issue. The issue is that we need is to learn how to manage it, increase or decrease it by demand, and use its power to our advantage.

Application: Use Stress to Your Advantage

They say pressure can make a person's performance better or worse by approximately 30%. How else can we explain the difference in the free throws shooting percentage between training and actual game situations? The diameter of the basketball hoop is the same size, the distance from the line is the same and no one puts a finger in your eye—which is why we call them free-shots, says Waitley. Is it ability that changes in games? No, it is one's psychological state. A high-performance individual learns to use stress in their favour, not against. Pressure can be a driving force and create a positive rewarding experience. Before the next big game or the big sale, remind yourself that the sweating and the pounding of your heart are a sign of alertness and readiness. Change debilitating anxiety to facilitative, simply by changing the interpretation of anxiety symptoms. Consider the increase in your heartbeats and the sweating to be “activation signals!”



Bloody hell. I never lost a free-throw in online games ...

Application: Sources of Stress

Stressed individuals usually have unrealistic fears and anxieties, magnify small problems, become angry easily, and often fight imaginary enemies and problems.

Think of yesterday. I bet there were periods during the day that you spent stressed because of ... [your responsibilities and the chores you had to complete, right?] Take 10 minutes to make a list of the things that stressed you out yesterday. If you succeed, try to do the same for the day before yesterday. I assume, recalling all the things that stressed you the previous days was not easy. Which shows that many of the things we are worried about every day are not as important as they seem when they occur.

It appears that we often create unnecessary stress on our own. The proof is that today you do not even remember the things you were anxious about yesterday or the day before. As one elder person put it, "I am an old man and I have had many problems in my life ... 95% of which never happened!"

Before we discuss stress and anger management more extensively, let us quickly examine the effects of excessive stress, just to illustrate what can happen if we do not invest some time to learn how to regulate it.

The Effects of Stress

George Pinteris, a distinguished Greek psychologist, and author, tells the following story of a middle-aged taxi driver, who, unlike his colleagues, drove carefully and calmly in the horrible traffic of

Athens. Pinteris, who was the passenger in the taxi, was late for an interview and thus restless and quite stressed in the back seat. The taxi driver could not help but notice his anxiety.

“Will getting stressed help you get to your destination faster?” the taxi driver asked Pinteris.

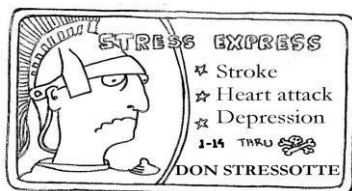
“You are right,” Pinteris replied, taking a deep breath, and calming down a bit. “Glad to see you can put things in perspective. Are you one of those unemployed psychology graduates?”

The taxi driver looked at Pinteris in the rear-view mirror, placed his right hand on the top left side of his shirt, and replied with a smile, “Heart attack!”

Stress is the subject of my book *Idiots are invincible*, in which I describe, among other techniques, the Stress-VISA, a credit card sized, plastic-coated card. On one side, under the title “What can happen to my health, if I continue acting like this?” is a list of the likely psychological and physiological effects of stress. So, whenever I get stressed, I pull out the Stress-Visa from a secret inside pocket of my jacket and review the effects of stress.

Some of the effects of acute stress include anger, irritability, frustration, racing thoughts, memory problems, inability to focus, poor judgment, upset stomach, tense muscles, chest pain and rapid heartbeat, dry mouth, and difficulty swallowing.

Long term effects include mental health problems, cardiovascular disease, obesity, sexual dysfunction, skin and hair problems, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, low energy, headaches, frequent colds, and infections, etc.



*A Stress-Visa free for life, with every five books
that you buy.*

I glance briefly at the list of questions on the other side of the Stress-Visa, designed to remind me that I need to change my thinking and reduce stress swiftly and effectively, e.g.,

–How is my behaviour helping me to deal with the situation?

–Can I do something right now, or should I accept the situation and focus my energy on something else?

The second question allows us to segue to the famous ‘Ro’ method, according to which 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.

It is not stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it. –Hans Selye

The ‘Ro’ Method

You probably have heard the Alcoholics Anonymous prayer, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”⁸

The AA prayer may appear to be a superficial or simplistic guide. On the contrary, it is extremely useful and wise. I have used it to develop the ‘Ro’ method,¹¹ which applies to every single problem a person may face.

Hence, the first step in dealing with a problem should be to examine whether we can do something to change it. If the answer is positive, and the issue is important, the next steps are to evaluate the possible

⁸ The alternative version goes like this: “Lord, give me coffee to change the things I can and wine to accept the things I can’t.” ¹¹

According to Psychic medium Susan’s predictions, the value of the Ro method will be recognized seven years after my death.

options, gather information, seek advice from the right people, and act.

However, if the problem cannot change, or you cannot act right away, you better accept it and manage your emotions, or change the way you look at the situation.

Unfortunately, most people mess up in the third part of the prayer. Carried away by their emotions they do not have the good judgement to stop for a minute to consider:

- a. whether they can do something to change the situation,
- b. its degree of priority over other requirements,
- c. the amount of resources (time and energy) they are willing to devote.

In fact, many people try to change things that cannot be changed (or at least not immediately). Others have not learned to distinguish which things are important and worth their valuable time and energy. They spend their resources recklessly and end up losing the battle for peace and happiness.

When it rains, I let it. –113-year-old man in response to a question about the secret of his longevity

The Two Bank Accounts

Dr Hans Selye (1987), the father of stress research, used the following analogy to describe the body's ability to resist stress. When we are born, our godfather (or our creator, if you prefer) opens two bank accounts on our behalf at an international bank. The currency in one of the accounts is energy and the other is time. We start our life with a certain amount of energy and time in each of these accounts. Some individuals' accounts are smaller, and some

are larger, depending on their genes. The savings are enough to last approximately 80 years.

As usual, there is a catch in the fine print. One can only withdraw from the two accounts—no deposits are allowed! Every time we face a challenge, to resolve it we need to withdraw a certain amount of time and energy from our accounts. Individuals who easily resort to their “deposits” and carelessly overspend may become bankrupt—physically and emotionally—much sooner than those who respond with caution, prudence, and without extremities and exaggerations.

So, learn to choose your battles wisely. Because you may win the battle but lose the war! You may, for example, earn money, land, houses, financial prosperity, but in the effort to acquire them you may lose your health. What good is money if you do not have the health to enjoy it?

*I would give up all my fortune for a few more
years of healthy living. —A rich dying man*



Arr! I am healthy AND rich!

Thus, a first step in dealing effectively with problems is to learn to distinguish between the things we can change and those we cannot. The second, to develop the habit of taking a quick time out to examine whether a stressor is worth our energy and time. Here are some examples.

The Traffic Does Not Care

How do you behave and how do you react in traffic jams? Indians are known for their excessive honking habits, Greeks for their rude

gestures to other drivers, while American's road rage can end up in shootings.

Let us take honking. We Greeks use car horns to express our frustration to the car ahead; for instance, if the driver ahead at the traffic light delays more than 2 seconds when the light turns green. I once saw a taxi driver who, out of habit, honked himself; he was first in the line at the traffic light. We consider native tribes who drum their tam tams to drive away evil spirits silly, but we smart Westerners press the horn to dissolve the traffic gridlock.



Many of us lost their jobs when car horns were invented. Tam-tams are too large to carry around ...

How do you react when stuck in congestion? Are you annoyed and frustrated? Does your blood pressure rise? Do you constantly look at the time and pass angry looks to other drivers? If so, next time remember that "The traffic does not care if you are in a hurry or not!" The traffic congestion will go on until it is over, Dyer argued.

How do you respond?

You can curse and swear, slam the doors when you return home, kick the cat.

Your son may ask his mother, "Why is Dad so upset?"

"Don't worry, it's the traffic's fault."

And as you drink the third whiskey, "Why is Dad drinking so much?"

"The traffic, it's the traffic."

"Why does Dad have liver problems? He is only 40 years old."

"Bumper-to-bumper traffic conditions, you know?"

“Why are mom and dad getting a divorce?”

“The traffic ...”

“How come Dad is dead already?”

“The traffic killed your father.”



*Quelle catastrophe! Who will drive his Porsche
in the traffic now?*

Meanwhile, while your family is mourning your unexpected and unfair loss, bumper-to-bumper traffic conditions, continue to frustrate millions of commuters, not caring about their health and well-being at all.

“Yes, but the problem remains” you may argue. Unlike other ordinary mortals, you can make different choices when you are stuck in rush hour.

Healthy Choices

How do you cope with negative emotions when you are feeling run down, stressed, or depressed? I bet you already have a set of coping mechanisms you use to change negative emotions and feel better. I want you to make a list of the most common coping methods you use to change how you feel.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5.

Now, do a quick check. Are the above methods adaptive and healthy? Can you change how you feel without using sugar, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, or other addictive substances?

Since you started making the list with your favourite coping mechanisms, why not add some new ideas of more adaptive and healthier methods?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Let me give you a couple of examples that will spark the creativity in you.

Marketing in Traffic Jams

Some people say, “I live twelve minutes from work.” That may be true ... at 03.00 in the morning, when you are accompanied by the police, as P. Hansen says in his book *The Joy of Stress*. Most other times, however, chances are high that there may be delays due to heavy traffic.

Hence, you can make different choices, such as choosing to get up earlier, so that you will not be surprised if some roads are busy. You should not be surprised anyway, because you have been commuting between work and home every day for the past four years—and you know what the conditions are like.

I used to behave like a mentally ill person when I got into traffic jams. Now? I sometimes open the window or get out of the car and introduce myself to the neighbour car drivers:

“Good morning, I am Dr Ro, author, and consultant; how are you today?”



G'day mate! Dr Ro here, how's it going?

If this approach does not fit your style, you could try other options. You could think about solutions to your personal problems, dictate an email, talk to other passengers, listen to a podcast, or learn a foreign language while driving (or riding the bus or metro) every day to work for two years. You can do anything else rather than choose to become crazy about the traffic, suggested Dyer.

Yet, most of us choose to look at nowhere, at the space outside the window, our brains on neutral—a behaviour that leads to a similar destination in terms of personal and professional development.

Select growth and self-improvement using your waiting or downtime that most others tend to waste. Do not look at your watch to measure how long it has been so that you know how upset you can be. Rather than fuming and raising your blood pressure consider waiting as a gift. Always carry a book such as the one you are reading in your bag (okay, I will publish it in a smaller size, and as an eBook—no more excuses for you), so that you can read while waiting at the bank, the bus stop, or when your appointment is late. Download podcasts and TED talks to listen to while working out, riding your bike in the countryside etc.

Change It, Or Accept It

Time to understand that in life there are two basic options: a.

to accept the conditions as they are, or

b. to accept the responsibility to change them.

Traffic is one example of the first category. Here is another one. Almost every day, as I ride my motorcycle to the city, I fall into one of the potholes that multiplied in many parts of the Greek roads following the financial crisis. I swear, I curse, and I move to the next one. Does blaming the government of the crisis help? I examine the two basic options according to the Ro method: a. can I do something about it or

b. do I need to accept the conditions as they are?

You bet I can, I decide. I can ask two or three good friends to spend a few nights (yes, nights; I do not want to get arrested) with me to help repair the road and fix the holes. Provided, of course, we are willing to devote time and energy. I can send letters to the municipality and write editorials in newspapers and web sites; I can collect signatures for an online petition; I can organize rallies with protesters; I can vote for another mayor or another political party in the next elections. Chances are that I will make a hole in the water, while the holes in the road will remain where they are if the country's economy remains as is. Yet, if I choose to do nothing of the above, I better understand that getting angry or complaining to the wrong people does not help much in resolving the problem.

If There Is Nothing I Can Do ...

“At least the weather is good in Greece,” I think as I pick up my motorcycle from the ground, shake off the dust and wipe the blood, and get on my way ready to deal with the next pothole or puddle with anticipation.

Next time you deal with a challenge, ask yourself whether you are willing to squander your energy and time for it. If the answer is no, then you better accept that you cannot always change the road, the external conditions or those around you. What you can control, I repeat, is that stuff that is happening inside you, i.e., your thoughts and responses to stuff that is happening outside you.

The problem is that most of us try to change things that do not change—at least not at this moment. So, we tend to unnecessarily

waste time and energy that we could invest in improving a skill, acquiring new knowledge, or having a good time!

If you can solve your problem, then what is the need of worrying? If you cannot solve it, then what is the use of worrying? –Shantideva

Diffuse Your Anger

Do you often get angry? Do the idiots around annoy you?

Two thousand years ago, Aristotle stated, “Anybody can become angry—that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”

Buddha said something similar. “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.”

Both wise men did not have access to the web. You do. You carry all the knowledge in the world in your pocket. Despite the wealth of resources available on anger (and practically any other topic), I bet you have never read an article on anger.

At least, read carefully now.

Anger is a secondary emotion, triggered by one of the primary emotions, fear (e.g., anxiety, worry), and sadness (e.g., loss, disappointment). Much like stress, anger is a normal, healthy emotion, which has motivated people to achieve positive changes throughout the ages. Also, anger and other negative emotions provide variety to our emotional world and a standard for comparison. Excessive anger is the problem.

Would you like to learn how to regulate your anger and reduce the frequency, the intensity, and the duration of your impulsive, aggressive, violent behaviour or verbal outbursts?

To start, understand that you cannot become angry without a related thought. An angry person believes that others have violated his/her rights or expectations. The latter fall into three general categories.

1. Expectations from Others

The angry person is wondering why others behave the way they do and not as they should, i.e., as s/he wants them to. Let us examine the underlying beliefs of a person who holds such expectations.

When expecting others to behave *the way they should*, the individual assumes that *there is a right way of behaving*. S/he also assumes that the right way is the way s/he believes others should behave. Consider the following. Every time you engage in a fight or an argument with your spouse, your friends, or your boss, you believe that you are *100% right*, right? Otherwise, you would not insist all that much.

Guess what. The other person is also 100% confident they are right—imagine that! Otherwise, there would be no argument. One of you would calmly listen to the other person's point of view, make an informed decision, and change their mind. "Gee, you are right! Thank you for correcting me." What are the chances that one of you is wrong? That is right, 50%. Thus, next time you pick a fight, consider that in 50% of the cases that you are 100% certain *you* are right ... you are wrong!



*—I am 100% sure you are right! -
No, no, YOU are right!*

A second assumption the angry person makes is that others *know how we want them to behave*. We need to remember that others cannot read our minds. For this reason, we should probably let them know what we expect. Now that we mentioned it, perhaps we too should pay attention to their needs and wishes. In short, we should ask and listen carefully, instead of assuming they know how we want them to behave, or how they want us to behave and treat them.

Even then, no matter how hard we try to explain our expectations, others may continue to misbehave. Perhaps it is time to accept that others will not always behave as they should, i.e., the way we wish—or as we think is right. People will pretty much do as they please.

Also, we need to avoid committing the fundamental attribution error when judging others' behaviours. We should carefully examine the influence of situational factors before jumping into quick conclusions and attributing someone's behaviour to internal factors (e.g., he is an idiot). We must be tolerant and look for factors that may have influenced their behaviour.

“She is probably tired or had a long day.”

“He is still young; he will figure this out later on.”

“She is old and frail, I should not expect too much.”

“He is upset and cannot think straight.”

“She doesn't know how to handle the pressure.”

2. The Justice Trap

The angry person wonders why the world is not the way it should be. Why is there no justice? This is yet another irrational expectation. Only a few people have realized that, unfortunately, the world is not a fair place. Time to acknowledge that the world is the way it should be. Whatever we do or wherever we go, there will always be some degree of chaos and disorder, noise, dirt, rudeness, illiteracy, and crime. I know it sounds pessimistic, but justice does not always prevail. This does not mean, of course, that we will not fight for our rights and for justice for all. We just need to be aware that the best man/woman does not always win.



He has more hair! That is not fair!

3. Anger with Oneself

The irrational expectations that we hold for our own performance are the third source of anger. “Why am I not achieving as much or doing what I should do?” would be a related thought. In other words, the person is sad or disappointed with their own actions.



*Oh no! Now I am angry with myself because I
get angry.*

How Can One Not Get Upset?

“How can I not get annoyed by the slow driver ahead of me who makes me miss the green traffic light?”

One must do what they can to get to their destination on time. Yet, I disagree with extreme reactions. You toot the slow driver ahead; a few minutes later another idiot makes a turn without indicating. Then it is your turn on the idiot’s seat; the car in front of you has advanced 1.5 metres in the traffic jam, but you did not notice because you are checking your messages. The driver behind you is tooting loudly very annoyed. You make an irritated grimace as you think, “Well, isn’t this great? Now that I filled the gap, we will have time to stop for coffee and pizza on the way.” And the tooting goes on and on.

*You never really learn to swear until you learn
to drive. –Car sign*

Wayne Dyer suggests, next time you leave the house on your way to work, tell yourself, “I will not let anything or anyone to ruin my day, because this is my day!” You know, of course, that someone else, in another part of the city (your teacher, your boss, a customer)

just got up at the exact same time and his only plan for the day is to make your life miserable. “Today I’m going to ruin Dr Ro’s day. I got him yesterday, let us see what I can do today, to make him feel really lousy!”

How do you know that? You know it because every day someone argues with you, someone treats you badly, someone cuts you off. The old lady with the blue hair, who drives at 25 kilometres per hour, whose only purpose in life is to make you late for work. Yet, that old lady holding tight to the steering wheel is there for a reason, like all things in life. She is there to teach you that you need to slow down and to calm down! So is the driver who violates the stop sign and the customer who yells at you. They are there for a reason, they have something to teach you. Note that if you are not a good student, the lessons will be repeated often.

I used to get very angry with bad drivers. I arrived at the office fuming, ready to describe the incident to anyone who made the mistake to ask me what was wrong, and to those who did not bother to ask me. “You won’t believe what happened to me on the way ...” And you go on to describe the incident in every detail. At the same time, the guy who cut you off is driving merrily around, without the slightest idea that he ruined your day.⁹

“Yes but, the expression of anger is healthy,” you may argue. It depends. While bottling up your emotions may be harmful to your health, expressing your anger does not make you less angry; it may even exacerbate conflict and create additional stress. Yelling loudly or taking out anger on inanimate objects to let off steam does not work either.

So, rather than repressing or expressing, try reappraising or at least learn how to accept your emotions and constructively communicate them in socially acceptable ways.

⁹ Adopted from Z. Ziglar.

As a good student, repeat after me: “I am not going to let anyone ruin my day, because this day is mine!”

Talk Sense to Yourself

What else can help manage anger?

Next time you get annoyed with someone else, the world, or yourself, talk sense to yourself. Try to replace unrealistic expectations with the following, “Others will not always behave the way I want them to. Why get upset because they are different to me and behave ... the way they know? Perhaps they don’t know any better.”

Then ask yourself the following questions:

- How is this behaviour (e.g., getting angry) helping me to achieve my goal?

- What can happen to me if I continue like this? What immediate or long-term effects can these negative emotions have on my well-being?

- What better way is there to achieve my aim?

- I may have missed the promotion or lost the race, but what options do I have now?

- What have I learned?

- Is there something I can do next time, so I do not run the same risk?

- How can I be sure that next time I will cover all corners and not allow any space for an unjust decision? (The right answer should be, by preparing so well that I leave no room for injustice and subjective judgment).

Other helpful clichés that can help you short-circuit and fight away any nasty negative feelings include:

- Getting angry is not mandatory. (Did you know that?)

- I may feel bad now, but it will not last forever.

–I am keen to gain knowledge and improve my skills so that I can control my thoughts and my emotions.

–This too shall pass.

You might even use imagery if you wish. Try the following:

When you get angry, see your thoughts enclosed within a small grey cloud of anger that is floating above your head. Spray the little bubble with the thoughts with a vaporiser and once it becomes soft and fluffy like a white cotton ball, pull out your mental mini-vacuum cleaner, and suck it in it until it disappears. Empty the vacuum in the garbage bin. Take a deep breath and move on.

“Well, surely you cannot be serious,” you may complain. “This is a childish technique.”

Do you really want to discuss what is childish? Try sweating, shaking, and getting a heart attack because of the traffic, or because someone did not behave.

Don't sweat the small stuff ... and it's all small stuff. –R. Eliot

Good. Your homework for this week is to count how long it takes before you get frustrated with someone or something during the day. Keep a journal or a log. You may find that the first day it only took 15 minutes. With training you may extend this period. When you get to 2 hours, you can resume reading this book.

Short Story: Nails in The Fence

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally, the day came when the boy did not lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, “You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won’t matter how many times you say I’m sorry, the wound is still there.” The little boy then understood how powerful his words were. He looked up at his father and said, “I hope you can forgive me father for the holes I put in you.”

“Of course I can,” said the father. (Author unknown)

Application: Decide How You Want to Feel

Think vividly of a recent unpleasant situation. The following questions may be useful in changing the way you feel about an adverse experience.

1. How do I feel about it?
2. How would I like to feel about it?
3. How do I choose to feel about it?
4. How do I feel about it now?

In this second part of the book, we examined the theoretical framework of change, why people resist change, when people decide to change, and several techniques for changing words, thoughts, and emotions. We also stressed the importance of learning

to reduce the intensity, duration, and frequency of negative emotions, and the two options of the Ro method.

The third and final part is even more applied. Here you will have to put the theory into practice and design your own personal change plan, following certain simple steps. In this part, you will examine your life and decide which area you wish to improve, select a maladaptive behaviour you want to change, and draw an action plan.

You will set your deadline and decide on your rewards and punishments and sign a behavioural contract that you will carry on, with a little help from a friend.

This is the end of the free sample.

...

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The Author (i.e., Me)



Dr Ro

I help others change their reality or manage their perceptions of reality, while they are having fun in the process—and, no ... I am not a drug dealer! I am a Behaviour Change Specialist, an Author, and a Keynote speaker.

I have lectured in general, applied, social, and work psychology at several Universities, and have been Program Director Social Sciences at Swinburne University, and Head of the Department of Psychology at City College, International Faculty of the University of Sheffield for nearly a decade. I have published numerous articles in academic journals and popular magazines, while I have appeared in several TV and radio shows. My first book *Prince to frog ... and vice versa! Applied psychological techniques to improve yourself—or others* has become a popular reading guide for people from all ages and backgrounds. My second book *Idiots Are Invincible* deals with stress and problem solving.

Today I (probably) live in Melbourne or Thessaloniki and work online.

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 building and cohesion, public relations, success and happiness, exercise, 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 were 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 Details¹⁰

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 site www.rodafinos.weebly.com
- Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/rodafinos>

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- via email rodafinos@gmail.com
- or SKYPE: Rodafinos

¹⁰ Experience has taught me that people change addresses and phones in just the time you happen to need them. If you happen to need me, I will probably have to change address and phone (to confirm my prediction above). So, if you cannot contact me at the above addresses, I suggest you do a quick Google search:

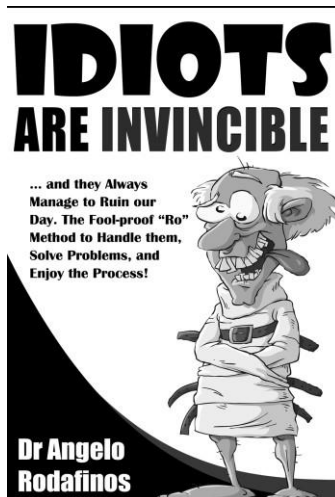
“Rodafinos and home page or contact.”

Clients

Dr Rodafinos' [list of clients](#) includes companies, educational institutions, fitness, health centres, etc.



Attention! The ‘Idiots’ Are ... Out and About!



Idiots are invincible: The fool-proof ‘Ro’ method to deal with stress, solve problems, and enjoy the process!

SUMMARY: The book helps readers from all walks of life who want the best information on dealing with stress and solving problems, to improve their life or the way they perceive it. It is filled with practical advice and examples presented with a large dose of humour. PS: Who are the idiots? The others, of course! Managers, colleagues, teachers, drivers, friends, spouses, mothers-in-law etc.

MORE: A ‘normal’ life is not always a ‘happy’ life! “...grant me the courage to change the things that I can change, the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two,” is a popular motto by Alcoholics Anonymous. Most of us fail in the third part, as we hopelessly try to change things that either are not amenable to change or unworthy of our time and energy.

Dealing effectively with either major life events or daily stressors requires the ability to maintain composure, take a time-out and ‘talk sense’ to oneself. Several applied psychological techniques, combined with examples and exercises assist the reader to make

positive changes towards a) either solving problems or b) altering the way s/he sees the situations.

The author presents the 'Ro Method,' a simple but effective problem-solving process, and moves on to describe the day of 'Don Stressote,' a modern Don Quixote de la Mancha and Ro graduate, who attempts to apply the theory in everyday life situations.

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