

# THRIVE IN CRAZY TIMES



*A Quick Read  
Ideas not Filler*

**S. Brady Gilchrist**

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[www.bradygilchrist.com](http://www.bradygilchrist.com)  
twitter: bradygilchrist  
Instagram: bradygilchrist

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*This book is dedicated to all those who stepped into harm's way to protect us all during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

# Introduction

Yeah, it is nuts right now.

**P**eople are struggling and asking questions they have never asked before. You know the saying “This too shall pass” and yes, we will see another side of this. I am an optimist by nature and a rationalist by design. See the truth, challenges and opportunities then act. Adversity is a great teacher let it teach you to grow and be successful in your pursuits. If you work on that this too shall pass.

The thoughts in this book work for me and I hope somewhere in my experience there are some nuggets you can adapt and make your own. This is a quick read by design. I wrote this short book to get you thinking. When the chips are down, we just want to get to the thoughts that lead to ideas which hopefully transform into actions. I hope that is what I have done here.

The fact that you are reading this means that you are a person who wants to work through these crazy times into a better version of the next. See the journey as a real opportunity and safe travels. Thanks for letting me be a part of your quest.

Brady

# The Moment

**W**hen is the best time to thrive? For many, the answer depends on something happening in the future. If I only have this, I will be better, If I only had this thing, money, person, home, car, job. Now is the best time to thrive. Thriving is a mindset. To make the best of what you have in front of you now. The act of doing well now will bring more into your life. When we live in a way that leans into contentedness, we are protecting ourselves from feelings of emptiness and are able to thrive.

All of us are fighting an uphill battle. It is the perpetual problem of a donkey following a carrot on a stick. You never get to a place where you feel content in the moment. This feeling is normal. The engines of consumerism and consumption require you to desire things that will fill the void you feel, even if that void is a fiction. Endless want distracts you and makes you feel you are living in a perpetual state of deprivation.

This is one reason there is such movement towards gratitude these days. It is more powerful to see the world from a position of appreciation. There is no thriving when we feel deprived. Those that thrive are more appreciative of what they have than what they do not have, and

collectively we have more than people have at any other time in history, even in the face of the Covid pandemic.

Have dreams, have desires. Get things you think will amplify you. I love photography, sailboats, flying and travel. These are the things I will spend money on. There is a point when we need to make choices about what we truly like, then insulate ourselves from the lure of a lust for everything in our consumer society. The market brainwashed us to want everything.

I create rules for what I spend on. My most central rule: if it will not fit on the sailboat, do not buy it. That really inoculates me from the nonstop bombardment of consumerisms tug at my wallet. When you spend on things that are truly important to you, you will move towards a more contented state knowing that what you have is special to have.

When times get challenging being empowered by what you have and why you have it goes a long way towards protecting your wellbeing. Consumerism wants you to believe that you do not have enough. Knowing that what you have matters is good for your self-esteem.

Living in constant want is not living. If you want something badly, make a plan to get it and work through the steps and setbacks. If that thing you want is not worth planning to get, then it is probably not worth getting. Use limited resources as a lens to examine what really matters to you. You need to be in sync with your deepest wants. It is better

to live in a present with our deepest wants and desires being realized. This is possible when you truly know what you want.

This need for me to be more in touch with what makes me feel most alive came from wandering among the dead. Under the streets of Paris, you will find the catacombs. As the city was expanding, the cemeteries were dug up and the remains of people moved to quarries under the city. Within the catacombs of Paris are the bones of 6 million people.

To wander in the dark, dank hallways of stacked femurs and skulls is a humbling experience. Never have I been more in tune with the words “we are only here for but a short time”. It was in the moment I decided not to waste it. Amplify the good and shun the bad. Do this repeatedly, and the odds of having a life you can enjoy are good. It took the dead to make me see.

The odds are history will not remember you. It will not remember me either, so what. When you are dead, you cannot really appreciate the attention. That does not mean do not do great things. It means do not do things for the sake of any greatness beyond the enjoyment of greatness for your own existence. We are here for but a short time. Living your greatest life is way easier than living the “great” life. Wealth and fame become less important the older you get.

Winston Churchill once said the farther you look into the past, the farther you can look into the future. To think that many of the mistakes we make have not come before us would be foolish. There is wisdom in history, philosophy, literature, and art. Make use of it to your benefit. What has come before us is there for us to use. So, use it.

If you are looking for lessons on thriving, look to the past. All the wisdom you could ever hope to understand is there. If you are feeling really stuck, take a gander towards Seneca and the Stoics.

Look to the past to understand your present and future, always lean into the wisdom of others. Philosophy is a great place to find wisdom and inspiration. It is there for the taking.

# Adaptability

I love being both a pilot and a sailor because they are both skills that require a high level of expertise and that you be ready to face adversity. During our lives we will face many forms of adversity. Adversity puts roadblocks in our carefully imagined plans. Adversity unchecked will conspire against us. Fortunately, there is a counter to adversity, and this is adaptability.

Having a few alternative options for the roadblocks in your way goes a long way to helping you nurture your adaptability. Being adaptable means we change, and we work to change our surrounding conditions. Thinking through what if scenarios for the enormous challenges we could face lets us get a head start on becoming adaptable. Imagining different outcomes, both positive and negative, gets our brains primed to adapt.

In these crazy times, we may need to adapt quickly. We may face illness, quarantine, economic hardship, loss, boredom, mental health issues and Netflix fatigue. There are many things that could toss a nasty wrench into our lives. The adaptable person can accept these challenges and create alternative solutions fast. The trick to being adaptable is knowing when to take an alternative step or knowing when to zig rather than zag.

As pilots, we practice worst-case scenarios, so we know what to do when the situation goes sideways. Being adaptable in uncertain times is easier when you have an unrestricted view of what could go dreadfully sideways. You can use the techniques of visualization to imagine some of the worst-case scenarios you may need to face. Explore them and try to see how they will affect other areas of your life - It may feel unnerving. Many people prefer ignorant bliss but thriving and ignorance rarely go together. The point of visualizing different scenarios is not to scare you, but to create a place from where you can identify potential solutions to the adversity you may face.

The goal of visualizing adversity and ways beyond it is that it helps condition you to be confident in being adaptable. Having a mental head start will empower. Anxiety and adversity go hand in hand, facing them down with visualization is the start of a good defence.

Get your biggest fears of the moment onto paper. Explore them in your mind and imagine how you could fix them. If there is an immediate threat, spend more time imagining and exercising solutions and options. Once you have worked it through, if the need is critical, then act. Acting on challenges is the very essence of adaptability. Being adaptable is the only solution and is a virtue that once understood and practiced will make you much more able to see where you can thrive.

When the world starts behaving in ways counter to our hopes, the only rational thing is to change our ways of

behaving. Change is hard. We are hard wired for safety. Our brains have developed to fight or flight, but these reflexes are born of fear, not the capacity to adapt. Thriving requires that you take the first steps to move from any adversity you will find.

Face fears take the hits and move beyond into the next.

# The Gift Of The Pause

**W**e all feel stressed by the pandemic and other world happenings. We all feel slightly out of sorts and not entirely in control. Scary news is enough to send even the steadiest of rocks slightly off balance. What matters is perspective. Truly, much of what we need to face over the next little while as the world finds its way forward is how to build a strong instinct and sense of just rolling with it. As they say, learn to flow like water by allowing the situation to move around you.

Much of what is happening is beyond our direct control. Trying to control that which is beyond our own direct spheres is a fool's enterprise, a tremendous misuse of our energy. Solve the gigantic problems in the company of others and the little ones with the virtue of resilience. Our biggest personal job in times of external shift is to maintain control of ourselves and to build our personal resilience, and it is a grand thing to get good at. It means becoming the strongest version of you.

The world is different now, so roll with it. None of us really knows how long this will last or what this will look like at the end. What we know is what the moment looks like. You know the saying - life happens while we are making plans for something else. For many of us now, the brilliant and wonderful plans we concocted in our heads are on pause

for a while. This is without question a time of two steps forward and one back. This pause is slowing us all down and forcing us into the moment with a little more clarity than many of us probably want. Being in the present for many is an uncomfortable place to be, but here we are. For the first time many of us are grounded in our surroundings, with many aspects of our lives changed and our focus being forced a little closer than we would like.

The social engagements, entertainment, and adventure we took for granted before 2020 now feel like special luxuries and far-off possibilities. The frenetic pace of constant distractions that defines many of our lives suddenly slowed down to something that feels a little strange. Modern life for many is like driving an Indy race, and suddenly we are all now behind the pace car and for who knows how long. As the world slows down, this is an opportunity to enjoy the view a little. Enjoy the pause and use it to gather energy for the next.

Sure, the uncertainty adds stress, but all change adds stress. For some families Covid has done more than just add stress it has been a genuine and brutal tragedy that those unfortunate folks are feeling all too deeply and I send them warm vibes. For those of us who have been fortunate enough to avoid the worst of Covid or the financial hardships, it would be helpful to seek the positive in the experience. The more positive we can be, the better we can encourage and support others.

In Canada we locked down hard in the spring of 2020. Those that could shelter in place did by the millions. It worked for the first wave; we kept the situation under control. It was hard. Our social networks went on hold, Zoom was not a replacement for hugging a friend. Our work lives migrated into a remote mode and it felt ok. It was a big novel experiment. We kept it going mainly through the sheer feeling of the novelty for the whole thing.

The novelty has worn off now and should more lockdowns head our way, a sense of frustration will completely replace the novelty. This will be a tipping point, a realization that perhaps the change may be more profound for at least awhile than we were ready to accept. This is when the stress manifests a little more strongly. There is always a feeling of uncertainty when the future we are planning comes out of sync with our capacity. This is the moment where real awareness and resilience need to strengthen. If ever there was a time to imagine the next version of you, this is it.

The gift of the pause comes when we stop treating this situation as a novelty and accept there has been actual change. What if we are entering a new normal? I am a believer that with all pandemics and economic challenges there will be resolution or more likely adaptation. This is just how it works and always has. The good news is that we live in a time of profound shared intelligence and science, even if politics is regressing. If there ever was a time in human history where resolution can come quick, we have the technology, capacity, and intention.

Wanting life to go back to exactly the way it was before all this started is not growth. Things were ok before but truthfully, we were coming to the end of a long economic cycle. Even before Covid, the cracks in the economic system were showing. Yes, the stock markets were looking strong but what was underlying them was not. Contrary to popular belief, all well on Wall Street does not equate to all well on Main Street.

Wanting life to be better and choosing to discard the things of the past that just were not working is part of learning to thrive. People get nostalgic for a lousy past because they lack the imagination or are too lazy to build an outstanding present or an exciting future. You do not want to go back to ho-hum normal you want your life to go towards the better, don't you? Better is a choice, not a place.

There are lots of interesting little things happening all around that have been sparked by Covid. Covid is shining a light on the good and ugly like no other crisis in recent memory. We find ourselves in a world war against an enemy that is not belligerent out of malice. We find ourselves with a keen awareness now of what real leadership means. We are in territory that we have not been in before. There are those among us who still remember the rationing and sacrifice of WW2, but they are not calling the shots or being asked for their wisdom. We are on our own and we are learning as we go. This is our collective test, and we are getting mixed grades.

There are millions of people who have been forced to rediscover resiliency before Covid, and we could learn from their determination. A recent example are the 5+ million Syrians who have found themselves without a home country or hope yet, despite the best efforts of the xenophobes are trying their hardest to survive and create new platforms from which to thrive. There are those who are helping and those who are hindering. There is an important reminder here, we are only as good as the way we treat people. When we show compassion and support to each other, hurdles are overcome, and we restore hope. In Canada we accepted 25000 Syrian refugees we put our money where our mouths were to help these people restart lives with hope and support.

With profound change, we need each other to get through it. The kindness of strangers and the kindness we give to strangers goes a very long way. Covid is no exception, and this is not the time to lose one's humanity this is the time to enhance it.

The great pause has seen our values shift. The rat race has lost its flair. We have curtailed consumption and productivity has gone down. The insanity of certain markets such as the behaviour of real estate, stocks and other securities has people for the first time scratching their heads and wondering where the actual value is. We are being forced into social bubbles. We are getting to know our friends again. We are being forced to find alternative ways of being productive; we are doing lots of soul searching. We are looking inward on mass in a way we

have never done before. People are learning, starting hobbies, taking to nature, giving back, and taking control of their surroundings. They do this because they are resilient, and they wish to thrive in the face of adversity.

The great pause is an opportunity for all of us to get off the treadmill for a moment to take in the view and look around and test where we are. For many the great pause is raising some important questions about what it is they want from their lives and this is a profoundly good thing.

Now in my fifties, I do feel that perhaps I am getting a clue. I am the first to admit that I have much left to learn and do not have it figured out. However, there is one bit of wisdom I am going to vouch for: Spend your energy on amplifying the good.

Amplify the good. It is a simple recipe and a simple way to look at circumstances with an eye towards creating the better. Try not to give credence to the bad or power to the negative. Amplify the good. The great pause has given you a chance to slow down. Take the gift, look around, catch your breath, and start thinking about what good you can amplify. Find those things that make you feel strong, happy and in control, then amplify them. Amplify the good. Amplify the good. Amplify the good.

The great pause has given you the gift of a course correction from the comfort of a holding pattern. Take this as a gift and rethink.

# Amplify The You

**W**e are complex creatures and capable of such amazing things. Our self-awareness is capable of so much good. I know this because we are all still here. We could have destroyed ourselves decades ago, but somehow, we resist the urge. That is the effect of collective and universal good nature in action, despite the best efforts of megalomaniacs.

In 2000-2001 I had the great fortune of being a crew member on a ship going around the world making a record of the planet at the turn of the millennium. While there were a few negatives, I can tell you that on balance there is more good than bad in the world. The problem is that good makes much less interesting reading and viewing than bad. So, despite our best efforts to paint the world as an ugly, horrible place, it is not. Good wins and it wins because people hold fast to values, some explicit or implied, but we set our anchors in the storms of life with our values and mostly escape the tempest unscathed, not always, but mostly.

I cannot tell you what values to hold strong because this is the code of you, and it is going to be uniquely you. Most of us have a built-in ability to know in our hearts what is good and what is bad. This runs across a spectrum, of course,

but we know what works for us and this helps find our way. It is excellent advice to avoid the jerks, and from our own perspective we know them when we see them. Of course, what makes someone a jerk in our eyes makes them a hero in someone else's. The greatest wasted energy in the world is that spent attempting to change the unchangeable. Change happens when it is ready, and that moment is obvious. It is better to focus on changes within ourselves before we inflict it on others.

Below is a list of values for you to ponder. It is not a complete list, but a starting point. What you do with them is up to you, but it is a fun place to start when we think about what it means to be "Me". Your values are yours. There is no secret that we gravitate to those who share similar values. I know that we must apply mental, emotional, social, and sometimes financial energy to the values we wish to hold closest. I have learned that I cannot be all things, but the things I choose I will be I will be.

### A Starter List of Values Achievement

Adventure  
Authenticity  
Authority  
Autonomy  
Balance  
Beauty  
Boldness  
Challenge  
Citizenship

Community  
Compassion  
Competency  
Confidence  
Contribution  
Control  
Creativity  
Curiosity  
Determination  
Discipline  
Education  
Fairness  
Faith  
Fame  
Family  
Financial  
Security  
Forgiveness  
Freedom  
Friends  
Friendship  
Fulfillment  
Fun  
God  
Growth  
Happiness  
Health  
Honesty  
Hope  
Humor  
Independence

Influence  
Inner Harmony  
Integrity  
Justice  
Kindness  
Knowledge  
Leadership  
Learning  
Love  
Loyalty  
Marriage  
Meaningful Work  
Openness  
Optimism  
Peace  
Peace of mind  
Pleasure  
Poise  
Popularity  
Power  
Progress  
Reason  
Recognition  
Religion  
Reputation  
Respect  
Responsibility  
Security  
Self-reliance  
Self-Respect  
Service

Spirituality  
Stability  
Status  
Strength  
Success  
Trustworthiness  
Truth  
Wealth  
Wisdom

This is a starter kit. Take what you want, contemplate, and run forward.

# Abundance Of Tools

**I**n the 1990s, I started one of the first online advertising agencies. I remember making presentations to skeptical corporations about how the internet would change the world. In 1999, I wired up a sailboat to do a project called A Digital Life. The idea was to explain to people how the world may change when things come out of their containers and we consumed digital stuff.

In 1999 we were seeing the emergence of things like Napster, the very beginning of blogging, and dabbling in postage stamp sized online video. The biggest impact of that time was the disruption of business models with digitization. Books were becoming eBooks, music was going digital, and a few years later so would video. Education was slowly evolving towards the online world where the classroom could be anywhere and not simply a classroom. Google was just becoming relevant, and the world that we now live in 20 years later was aligning. The effect of taking information out of its containers was to make it profoundly available.

Richard Saul Wurman the creator of TED once said in his ground-breaking 1989 book Information Anxiety that the average copy of the Sunday New York Times contained more information than the average person was likely to experience during their lifetime in 18th century England. In

the early 21st century, information is everywhere. It empowers us to answer the questions we have and seek the knowledge we need. This has put the knowledge to create change within our grasp. The ability to learn new things and seek new things enables our ability to thrive. Making sense and plotting alternative courses requires new knowledge, and it is everywhere for you.

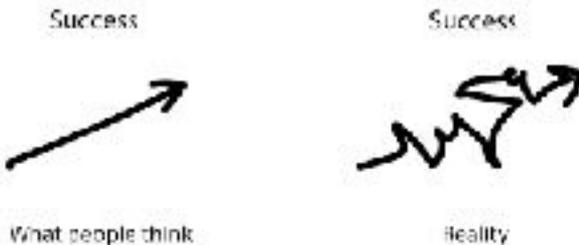
While the internet is wonderful, we all know that it is a rabbit hole that can obliterate our productivity with its ability to nurture the compulsion we all feel to wander. Sometimes we need to use the internet with intent and discipline, not simply a drug of distraction.

Stephen Covey always said to begin with an end in mind. If you want to thrive, you need to act with purpose. There are several ways to use the internet: entertainment or enrichment. Controlling screen time and being directive with our screen time can go a long way.

When the world no longer plays by predictable rules, equipping yourself with new skills becomes essential. There is an abundance of skills you can learn online. There is no excuse anymore for people to become obsolete or not equip themselves with skills that make their contribution relevant.

# Ebbs And Flows

**T**he plan, the plan. We are told we need a plan, and we do. A plan gives us those first few essential steps however, it is said that the first casualty of war is the plan. The world rarely behaves the way we want. Some of the most useful plans are a series of compass points telling us the direction to go, but not the exact steps to get there. The bigger the goal, the more plans you will need to create. Knowing where you want to be is important and getting there is never easy, but without a direction it is impossible. There is a wonderful cartoon which I have come across many times in my life which reminds me of how complicated this entire process can be. I don't know who had the original idea but, thanks.



Getting to where you want to be is full of different turns. We make progress and we fall backwards at the same time. Sometimes we move forward as the tide rises, and sometimes it pulls us back as the water ebbs. This is how the process works. Having a compass point makes all the difference. They say not to swim against a rip tide because you will tire and drown. Swimming against a raging current of change is just as dangerous. To escape a rip tide swim to where the current is not as strong then to shore. Same rules apply in life.

When the world cannot deliver, we pivot into a new direction. This is both a good and a bad thing. There can be a strong pivot desire at the first sign of things not going your way. So many people abandon a path at the first hint of the ebb, and this leads to shipwreck. Far too many people give up on their goals just because they appear more complicated than they first thought.

The successful stay the course until they are forced to change directions, either through calamity or extreme circumstance. The path is always going to be more complicated than you think. Accept that and keep your eyes on the horizon.

As the early sailors crossed the oceans, there were no maps, only directions, and even the expectations of the destinations were murky, but the directions were not. It is easy to forget that it is the direction that matters the most. If the direction leads to the desired destination, then do not waver in your journey.

Realism is the greatest tool you have for navigating towards success. Being true to your gifts and abilities and amplifying those towards the directions you have chosen is the path toward success. People often fail by having unrealistic ideas. Your ideas and your abilities need to meet somewhere in the middle for success to find you. It is the rational path that makes the difference.

People who know where they are going and head off with a realistic and rational view are rarely lost. These directions become our purpose. Many people wish to embark on a grail quest in order to find their “Purpose in Life” only to wander endlessly, waiting for a sign. The happiest and most driven in our world rarely have one purpose in life but find many purposes that allow them to use their skills in meaningful ways. You are the purpose in your life and the better you are at spawning rewarding enterprises and endeavours the greater fulfilment you will find. You know when you are in the right place because it simply feels right.

The age-old question of finding what you want to be when you grow up is such a burden for people. They wander the woods, waiting to be touched by divine inspiration. This is a wonderful form of self-indulgence and a wonderful way to hide from your abilities. The path is always played out before us and enabled by those simple words again - amplify the good. Amplifying the good is an act of purpose. If we are in our own ways all divine, then it goes to reason that finding good to which we can amplify is to be indeed

touched by the divine. You are your purpose in life, use the gift well and with care. As Spiderman was once told-” with great power comes great responsibility”. The responsibility is to choose the best of options before you-those that amplify your good and your most heartfelt values. Good brings in the tide.

The path will never be strait however, the directions can be true and if we head towards our desires by amplifying the good along the way, then it stands to reason you have already discovered the truest meaning of success in your life. Listen to your experience and the rewards will manifest. Like most people looking for a purpose, you might just find that it has been under your nose the entire time. When we live in crazy times, there is wisdom from the ages to heed. The human experience is the human experience, and it remains very constant through the ages. The language changes, but the challenges at the core remain shockingly similar. Take comfort that those before you have overcome and prospered and see the inspiration in that fact.

William Shakespeare-The Bard was a fountain of insight that we in the west resonate with. One of my favourite speeches are the words of wisdom that Polonius gives to his son as he heads off to university.

here, my blessing with thee.  
And these few precepts in thy memory  
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.

Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar.  
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,  
Bear 't that th' opposèd may beware of thee.  
Give every man thy ear but few thy voice.  
Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment.  
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy,  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,  
And they in France of the best rank and station  
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.  
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

The advice here is wonderful it will keep you out of trouble. To thine own self be true or as I like to reimagine hold your heart's course. You can live a good life by taking a few of Polonius' good thoughts. Of course, in Hamlet, Polonius was a jerk. The deeper lesson here is that if you are going to dispense noble and sound advice, you best live by it. We live in a world of hyperbole full of meaningless words from meaningless people.

If you are going to succeed on your quest that you must hold yourself to noble standards. Wonderful words are fine, but good deeds and honest application of self is truly where the rubber meets the road. If you say the right things and express none of it with your actions, how possibly are you then being true to yourself? Or are you acting and behaving like just another phony? life is better served by expressing oneself through strong and positive actions-talk is cheap.

People lie to themselves all the time, and it is those people who never really go anywhere. They spend their lives in the ebbs, it feels like progress because there is motion, but they never actually move forward.

In messed up times, you need to have at least a few directions that will help you master the art of purpose. To thine own self be truly true, and the path will be navigable.

# Elevators And Stairs

**C**hange is uncomfortable for most. Change because of situations beyond our control is even more uncomfortable. This is normal, accept it. We know we need to roll with it, but where to start? With the most uncomfortable, of course.

Change requires you to do one thing, and that is adapt. Fretting about the fact change is happening is not helping you thrive.

Change rarely happens to only one person at a time it happens on mass. There will be many people who just will not cope with change, but many others who will be very interested in adapting. Paying attention to how they adapt will give you ideas. When things are going to seed, it is always bad to follow the laggards, lazy or unimaginative. These are the people who get left behind.

It is so easy to allow change into your life as a weight dragging you under and if that is the mindset you have towards it - Good luck. Perspectives are important, especially when the odds are stacked against you. People usually perceive changes as being “Big” and while some of them are, most are not life threatening. Unless faced with true imminent disaster which is unrecoverable and the only

thing I know that can do that is sudden death, all else is manageable to a degree, even serious illness.

There is a saying in the investment world, “markets take the stairs up and the elevator down”. Things go wrong quickly. Change can be like an elevator taking us down from where we were. Once that elevator goes down, then one must take the stairs back up. In life it is the same. We all ache for the simple solution that when change befalls us, we want to get back in that elevator and get back to where we started, which may not be possible. Simply put when big shifts drag us down it is time for the stairs.

So, we take those stairs back up. The difference this time is that you can choose each step to take. We take steps with caution or several at a time, but interestingly we are always looking to where we are going. Typically, in elevators we are not paying attention to the destination. Stairs are different.

When the elevator of change lands us on an unfamiliar or unwelcome floor that is where we begin again. First, let us figure out what floor we are on. Are we at the bottom where we have nothing and need to seek shelter or food or are we a little higher where our basic needs are taken care of or are we even higher where change will have little impact or are we somewhere in-between? Usually, we find ourselves somewhere in-between. Covid forced many people onto unfamiliar floors.

An unexpected ride in the elevator of life can have an impact on your mental health. With illness and death, the steps we need to take are those of grief and they are well documented. Go learn about them if you need too. If you are suffering from depression or other mental health challenges, seek help. There are therapies and tools available - use them. If you are suffering from addiction, seek help. If the downward elevator has brought you to any of these places, not taking advantage of the services, science and help available is the same as staying on that downward elevator.

So, given that we are not struggling with mental health distress, hopefully we know what floor we have ended up on, it is time to think where we need to go. Do we aspire to reaching an even higher floor in the clouds or a lesser floor with a decent and more affordable view or do we want a floor with more interesting design and better neighbours, or do we want a floor in a unique building? Do we even want to move back up? Feel empowered, not defeated because you have been given the gift of choosing your next.

With stairs you put one step in front of the other. In an elevator, you just travel in one direction without thinking. Most of us after a while become oblivious to the directions we are going; we suddenly find ourselves simply along for that elevator ride. The one thing about most stairwells is that every floor has a landing. A place to rest to get off the climb. For each few steps we take, the landing gives us a

chance to take stock of where we are and where we have come from.

Using stairs as a metaphor, we can see how each step, landing or floor can be a measure of mindful progress.

Visualizing your return after an unwelcome elevator ride is easy to do, but it requires that you know where you want to be. Some steps we quickly take, such as protecting our income in a recession or planning a funeral, but others like shifting life goals and desires can take longer. Going step by step and stair by stair we adapt to change, and we do it in a methodical, measured way. Sometimes elevators do not work as you expect, but stairs always work the same way - one at a time.

# Embrace Errantry

Errantry A wandering; a roving; esp., a roving in quest of adventures.

**S**o, no, I am not sending you into the world on a grail quest, but I am sending you on a quest. The world is full of surprises which you need to experience firsthand. We human beings are an amazing bunch we create wonder. Nature is its own architect of the amazing, and it is all around us to experience. One of the nicest of all human experiences is the feeling of contentment and engagement, which comes from the gift of being surprised. It is the unexpected that makes us feel engaged or intrigued. You do not get it sitting on a couch or being afraid of your own shadow, especially in a pandemic.

We have all been hobbled by the concept of social distancing. It was a catchphrase that comes with profoundly negative vibes. It is language that made us afraid of each other. We should be afraid of disease and we should take precautions against it. As the truth and dangers of COVID-19 continue to amplify, not being smart about how we govern our actions is absurd. The argument that masking is an infringement of liberty is the argument of the stupid. I have told you before as a pilot we strive to stay ahead of the aircraft to avoid getting surprised. Masking is one way to stay ahead of the virus.

There are intelligent ways of coping. Social distancing and isolation are having a negative impact on the mental health of millions. We do not so much need to distance ourselves from society as we need to maintain personal distance by making Covid transmission hard. Keep your distance and work on new ways of maintaining your social cohesion. It means choosing to wear a mask and avoiding places where the risks are going to be high.

Smart people do not play Russian roulette. Smart people make choices based on consequence and they avoid obviously bad outcomes. Hoping that one will not get sick is not an effective for managing during a pandemic. Thinking the virus is not dangerous is not a strategy when facts tell us otherwise. It is amazing that working collectively to squash the collective threat of COVID-19 has become political. Sometimes our collective stupidity boggles my mind. Covid does not care what you think, its biological software in the form of RNA that can do nasty things to you. If you take no precautions against Covid and are in a high-risk group, challenging the virus with your views on liberty or death will not end well for you. It is hard to thrive on a ventilator.

We stay home when we need to, and we isolate and quarantine when the dangers dictate, we must. As I write this vaccines are starting to slowly roll out. There is hope. So, knowing that we are headed into a brighter day does it not make sense to hold the fort until the calvary arrives. Yes, it really does. People are going to die needlessly

because they were simply being reckless. Stupid is a lousy epitaph.

However, I believe that even given that the ways we interact are changing and social bubbles are a new normal for the next little while. We need to adapt so we can remain connected to the larger world around us. For many of us, this means finding new things to do. Our old social habits may not be the wisest of options for the present moment. While the duration of this shift is unknown, with the Spanish Flu of 1918 the changes in behaviour lasted for several years. Many of the strategies for managing the Spanish Flu pandemic are not dissimilar to what we are doing now. While they are unpleasant, they do work and while it feels as if changing our behaviour is overwhelming, remember this is but a blip. While nobody can guess what the impact will be, we know that we will persevere and adapt and find fresh ways to amplify and enjoy our lives. I know this because this is what we do. Society adapts and strengthens. So shall we, and so say we all.

So, if the world differs from what we were expecting of it, perhaps we too must become different. Perhaps we too must do other things. Change forced upon you with little say is an invitation to change. To try the new is not a bad thing.

When Covid started, I did like we all did in Canada. We did our part to flatten the curve. We did this because we wanted to give our public health care system time to adapt and ramp up to deal with the pandemic. We all did our part

to hunker down and buy the system time. The government did the same thing. 8 Million Canadians who found themselves out of work received a lifeline of money from the federal government of \$2000.00 a month. This was the magic formula that let the healthcare system build resiliency. I started writing this in September 2020 as we moved into uncertain territory, bracing ourselves for whatever the second wave holds. Turns out the second wave is a disaster and change has been forced upon us.

In the months between the beginning of Covid and now I have changed for the better. I do things now that I never did. I have become profoundly more adventurous. While I am not traveling around the world or sailing great distances, I have followed into the path of words laid down by TS Elliot.

“We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

The pandemic’s pause created new patterns. I love photography, so I did much more of it. I refreshed skills and learned new ones. I re-engaged with looking at the world. I am writing this short book and finishing 3 others. I stopped driving everywhere and started walking, paying attention to everything around me while maintaining a safe physical distance. The effect was to feel engaged again, not like I was hiding in a bunker waiting for the end of days.

The second big thing I did was to purchase a bicycle, my first in 20 years. Toronto, where I live, is a city that tries hard to be for people. Not an easy feat in North America where car culture became the dominant force in urban design. What I discovered in the first 300 kilometres of riding was that I live in a city of wonderful trails and shared open spaces. The Toronto that had been invisible to me was suddenly open and all around. It was as if I had moved to a new place and it was invigorating, healthy and fun. Physical distancing, not social distancing, being cautious and changing old patterns made a profound difference. I will go walking or riding, taking wrong turns, hoping to find something new every day. It works. Riding along a trail in downtown Toronto, a series of purposeful random wrong turns took me past the Nestle factory where the smell of chocolate was so wonderful. It was like being a child on Christmas morning. Seriously, I was giddy with the smell of chocolate. So strange and so cool, this gift from the random.

None of these things would have happened without the pandemic and a reasonable approach to risk. I now go out on random adventures seeking errantry makes for a refreshing new appreciation of the world. This falls into the category of amplifying the good. As the world moves beyond from the pandemic and we try to get back to whatever normal may be, I am grateful that my next normal is a newer, more interesting normal. The ways I changed my patterns during the pandemic are going to have a lasting positive impact on my life. This applies to all of us, but especially those of us who have patterns that have

evolved over the years. The more old dogs try to learn new tricks, the younger they feel. This applies to the rat race obsessed millennials out there too. Learning new tricks is the trick to staying vibrant.

Rediscover your world. The Covid pause and forced behaviour shift is an invitation to change. If you take command of the opportunity, it will empower you. If you resist it, then you may find yourself disappointed and depressed. The new normal is the normal you manifest in this present moment as you wrestle with change. Be playful, you might just surprise yourself in wonderful ways.

# The Ideal You

**O**ur responsibility to ourselves is to take hold of the circumstances we find ourselves in and through clarity and force of will craft the best version of ourselves

Thriving means choosing the directions that best define the complexity that is you. You can change directions and skills during your life. Taking a stand to reinvent towards the best version of you is a strong and affirming action.

Taking a stand is the starting point for choosing the activities that will express the ideal you. The challenge is knowing what the ideal you is. In times of fundamental change, it is important to take time to reflect on your successes. While we spend more energy on the bad things in our life, it is more useful to reflect on our success and talents. We thrive on successes, not failure.

Most of us do not reflect enough on our personal abilities, talents, power, and success. Our successes are a great indicator of where our future successes will be. Because it is impossible to re-live our lives with age sometimes comes regret. It is common and normal. It is what we do with that regret which defines the days and opportunities ahead. For many regret is the trigger of a downward spiral, the end of dreams. This is tragic and far more common than you

might believe. Life rarely takes the path you expect, but that does not mean that a similar but different path cannot be hacked into your present and future. Having some miles under your belt helps crystallize knowledge of what matters most to you. Be thrilled and appreciative of your experience, especially the good.

When we revisit the good, we create a powerful tool from which we can launch again into the future. Regret is the signpost that brings your passions and interest back into focus. Wisdom of experience lets you see the traps and pitfalls that may befall you. Having an inventory and appreciation of your strengths lets you see where your energies should go.

Most regret is a fantasy reminiscence for a life you wish you could have had. Trust me, regret is a useful tool, as painful as it seems. It is with regret that we can finally provide a bit of clarity for what it is we should do now. Regret is the experience of life. It tells us both what we should focus on and what we should not focus on. Any regrets you have, especially in times of profound change as the sand shifts below your very feet should be treated as insight. Insight is the first step towards clarity. Clarity is what you get when you look at experiences and choices with a critical eye to distill what is most meaningful to you. Clarity of experience is the raw material that you will use to build your future.

I have a secret weapon I use for manifesting gratitude. I take lots of pictures and they are my prosthetic memory. It thrills friends when I can reach back into the archives and

bring back the vividness of adventures; we shared 20 years ago. I also use this extended visual memory, which I call my “re-memory” to appreciate just what a great ride it has been, especially when the ride gets a little bumpy. Being able to reflect on the good keeps me on target for more future good. It helps me be in touch with the various purposes I have had during my life.

I cannot tell you what to be. I cannot tell you what your purpose is. We rarely understand purpose in our younger years. If blessed, we have an abundance of passion for something. If we are truly lucky, we are intrigued by something that truly lights us up, challenges, and transforms us into more powerful people. If this thing can also transform into a lucrative career, count your lucky stars because you are one of life’s lottery winners. This sadly is more the exception than the rule. Not to pursue a deeply held passion will have a negative impact on you at some point, especially if you have a talent for it.

What do you have to lose by not finding the things that allow you to contribute to the best of your abilities? This is what will drive our thrive. A time of rapid and profound change is the only time where you can truly revisit and right the wrongs of your regrets. How strangely counterintuitive.

The purpose, the useful life, is closer than you think. When the path you are on gets washed away by the storm, you really do not have any option but to craft a fresh path. That path should integrate all the things you now know about

yourself. Your regrets and past decisions can become your new building blocks. When change comes to us, there is a chance to live well again. As for your purpose, as you put the bits of your experiences and abilities under a critical eye, I suspect that for the very first time you may see exciting possibilities for yourself. For the first time in your life, you may finally examine the bits to define what the best version of you should be.

People do not change when they are comfortable, we need to be stressed into action. If you did not feel that you took the time to thrive as you were stumbling through life up till this point fear not the world is rebooting for most of us. Use this to your advantage.

Take the time to appreciate yourself and get moving down the path you now know now from experience feels more right-the best expression of the complex and unique individual that is you.

# Making Lemonade

**Y**ou know the saying when the world hands you lemons... Well, as I write this the news feels dire. The fear is that the global economy is staggering over a cliff. The word economic depression is being bandied about, and this is never good. Depressions go hand in glove with misery. The road ahead gets muddied and people get displaced and marginalized. Grim stuff. So, screw it. There is a genuine need for a “WE SHALL OVERCOME” attitude here. Do not be victimized by misery. One of the defining social ills of the great depression was that the hardship led to a profound sense of hopelessness. The great depressions hopelessness lasted for nearly a decade. Hopelessness is the killer. It is a foe to be stared down and beaten into submission or better stared down and beaten to death.

Yes, the world could change, jobs lost, companies bankrupted, and people left hanging. Yes, economics can turn sour, it happens, and yes, it creates a certain amount of misery that obliterates people. Resolve not to be one of those.

In aviation we anticipate. See the danger before the danger sees you. In security there is another saying that is useful- “Get off the X” which means when under threat MOVE! If in a dangerous place, leave that place. When the world gets

challenging, the first defensive strategy is to be aware. Know what could hurt you and get off the X before you get hurt. While simple advice, it is amazing how many people choose delusion in the face of adversity only to wonder why they were impacted. If danger is coming, GET OFF THE X.

It is like the old joke. Man finds himself in a flood. He asks god to help him survive. A man in a boat comes by and offers to take him to safety-the man declines-God will come and save me. The waters continue to rise, and another boat comes by-the man refuses this one saying god will save me. The waters rage and rise and again the man asks god to save him. A helicopter arrives and he refuses the help saying god will save me. Helicopter leaves. You can see where this is going. Man drowns, gets to heaven, and asks god why he did not save him. To which god reply's I sent two boats and a helicopter. Then god tells him to go to hell for being such a jerk. Yeah, it is an old joke, but for many it is how they think. When the situation turns dire, it is time to think about moving on. Waiting for obvious disaster is stupid. Be honest with yourself are you sitting around waiting for disaster to strike? As the song says, know when to hold em, know when to fold em. Sage advice.

# Turn Down The News

“In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” - Eric Hoffer.

You want to thrive in a time of crazy change-it is why you are reading this. I feel the same way and together we are rethinking how to approach this crazy time in a way that leaves us stronger and more resilient than we were before.

There is no shortage of things to worry about these days. There are actual threats to the foundations of our stability. To say the sands are shifting under our feet would be an understatement. Creating stability is profoundly important. Creating stability, especially mental resilience, is the first step to coping with change. It is hard to make rational choices when our minds are not calm. Learning to cope with change, especially undesired change, and all the negative emotions that go along with that is our first challenge. Most of what is happening is beyond our control to stop, but within our control to manage how we react to it. The good news is small steps here make the journey.

Understanding reality is important. Part of thriving is developing a rational view of the world as it presently is, and not as we would like it to be. It is a rational view of reality that lets you choose the best decisions. The world

changes, yet human beings are so resistant to accept that fact. People make choices based on their hopes, expectations, and fears.

You see this all the time with investing. When the market turns from bull to bear, so many people are unwilling to take their losses and run. The delay to act when the writing is on the wall because you desperately want it going in your favour is the false belief that leads to ruin. It is natural to want the world to line up to your desires and worldview, but a rational view helps protect you from that false belief. A rational world view is armour that will protect you.

The easiest way in a time of change to practice rationality is to recognize irrational herd behaviour and steer clear of it. We all suffer from the effects of bias and understanding how we are susceptible can help protect us from the effects. We need to be of our own mind, especially when all around us appear to be losing theirs. Bias comes in many forms and robs us of our ability to think critically. Rationality is driven by fact and an obvious ability to discern fact from fiction or ideology. In times of change, being rational gets you clear of the traps the irrational fall into.

During this time of Covid there is a raging debate about masks-it is a debate that reveals the power of rationality, irrationality, and bias. Thriving starts with surviving. The science says masks protect you. The rational mind accepts this. The irrational mind says that masks take away liberty. The rational view understands that a virus only a few

microns in size does not give a hoot about liberty. It is just a thing that has a certain amount of genetic programming that causes a cascade of adverse reactions within our immune systems. The rational view would be to do everything that we can to make sure it never gets the chance to have its effect.

Thriving means striving to see the world as it is, not as you wish it to be. Only then are you in a better position to think rationally. Rational thinking is hard in a world that is trying to drive you down a rabbit hole at every turn. If you have ever believed in a conspiracy theory, you need to work on your critical thinking. If you think chemtrails are a real thing, then good luck. We have an obligation to exercise our intelligence as rational people, those that do not end up doing the bidding of others.

The best defence is to break from the rabbit hole. It is hard to thrive when the world around is feeding and amplifying all the bad and marginal news it can find. Thriving also means avoiding the echo chamber of negativity that is playing out all around us. Taking a break from being addicted to news and especially the wild west of social media is good for your mental health. There are important things we need to be aware of in our local communities that influence our behaviour and are useful to know. However, most of the profound negativity we are consuming daily does nothing to bolster our confidence, the negativity just drives anxiety and fear. Constant bad news saps the capacity to thrive because it is emotionally exhausting. To

compound the problem, most of the bad news that hits us does not have any real relevance to our lives at all.

People get addicted to news because they cannot find anything else better and more productive with their time. Living within echo chambers of negativity or biased views is not what people who thrive do. Those that thrive find better ways to use their time than get caught up in the cycles of negativity, and rarely will you see those that thrive get caught in the cesspool of anger and resentment that you can find in social media comments.

Stepping away from the noise is a good way to take a break from the firehose of the negative and practice your rationality. There are simple tools to do this. Taking a media diet is a good way to this. Getting out of the noise loop of modern media will help us figure out what information and news are essential to the life choices we are making. News for the sake of news is procrastination, laziness, or at worst addiction. People addicted to the news and worse, those addicted to propagating meaningless and vitriolic comments in the social media space are not those that thrive. Those that thrive get out of this trap.

Being rational means knowing who has their hooks into you. Clarity is the first step towards escaping this. A media diet is a good place to start. Fact not opinion is the orientation of a rational mind. Proof is truth. Opinion is opinion. I hold truth to a quantifiable standard of inquiry to which opinion cannot.

Most people can manage the problems they face no matter how daunting they first appear if they approach them with a rational perspective - paying to absolve your credit card debt is not something we could call rational, getting on with a payment strategy is. Being rational takes effort and honesty. Surrounding yourself with irrational thought and behaviour will not do you any good. A media diet will teach you how powerful this influence is and how it really clouds your view of what is it you need to do. Take a media diet by turning down the noise and do something else. 10 Minutes of general news a day is enough. Choose to get your news from professional journalists. Truth matters and fake news seldom comes with accreditation. The New York Times is not fake news and nor is it dying.

In 2000 I was a crew member on board a 75' boat circumnavigating the world, making a record of the planet at the turn of the millennium. We posted daily photographs and posts about the adventure. We did this before blog was even a word. We had internet access, but it was via satellite which was incredibly expensive making surfing impossible. Because we were at sea, there was no cable tv and no newspapers. We had shortwave radio and occasionally we would listen to the various world services, but honestly the news had no relevance to us. Weather reports mattered and not much else. We could download brief email via Inmarsat from family and friends that contained little bits of relevant stuff. For every day at sea, we would be in port for two days. We learned what we needed to learn from the people we met. We decided our safety based on questions we asked. We met other people as people and with limited bias

and prejudice. The world did not suck, mostly because we were away from media stories that told us otherwise. It was an important lesson. The best news is no news.

Not that the world is always nice or perfect but truthfully even traveling in unfamiliar cultures and meeting strangers there were no human connections we could not make. We were living in the moment. Our world perspective was one of relevance. The crazy part of the entire adventure was that we ourselves were news. We made headlines wherever we went. They shared our stories. We were the good news and because we avoided the bad news that most people cannot escape; we were happier. In fact, not being immersed in the bad things that happen to others makes you happier and more compassionate when faced with a situation where you can lend a hand. It is easier to be a better person when people do not scare you.

Not being under the negative thumb of negative influence makes you happier. The most profound impact on our adventure was that we could enter new moments without bias. That does not mean we did not exercise the caution of common sense to avoid danger, but it meant we did not see the world through a negative brush. Knowledge is useful, but there is a difference between knowledge, information, and propaganda. Knowing the differences and avoiding the latter is the first step towards thriving.

A media diet will make you both smarter and happier and better equipped to deal with negativity and danger with a much more positive and rational outlook.

Knowing how to gain perspective on things that amplify the best parts of your life will be a big part of enabling your ability to thrive. It starts with the stuff you put into your head and what you share with others. I believe that it is better to spend my media time learning something useful. Spending my time watching people fill my head with negativity between commercial breaks just seems like such an unhealthy gig.

# Meditation

If we are the sum of stuff that we put in our heads is then it makes sense that to thrive perhaps we need to undo damage we have done by allowing our thoughts to run wild and without purpose.

The changes we are all facing now have a negative impact. Negative mental effects can lead to many challenges with anxiety and depression being the most common. When the pressure and uncertainty mounts, we feel the effects. Knowing stormy weather may be ahead and the effect it may have, we can make course corrections to minimize its effects.

Those that thrive understand they are human. They understand that there is complexity and fragility in that experience and do the best they can to navigate around that complexity. Those that do nothing suffer the most.

Getting in touch and learning to get in touch with your thoughts matters. Having a healthy respect and appreciation of your thinking is something quite amazing. The good news is that there are simple tools that can build mental resilience.

There is a meditation craze going on. It is a craze that is worth the hype. Learning to sit and observe thoughts and

the churning of your brain is one of the greatest gifts. I was a huge skeptic of meditation, but after practicing the skill several times a week for the last 4 years, I know it works to make me more resilient to challenges of the moment. My first experiences were dreadful. I was not a fan of the idea at all. Then one day I bought a gadget, the Muse headband, which is a hybrid EEG. It is a cool device pioneered by a company in Canada. It listens to brainwaves and gives warning when your thoughts wander all over the place. Over time, I could use the device to learn the skills of reducing the random noise the rattles around in one's head. After four years I must admit that the ability to spend 20 minutes a day exercising my mental ability to focus and just sit within the flow of my own thoughts has been profound. I would say my life works better because of it.

My experience with meditation has been useful. It has dramatically improved my personal resilience, ability to cope, and enhanced my ability to thrive in adverse conditions. Your mileage may vary, but I would suggest starting down the path would be useful. I am going to suggest that practicing meditation will be a good way to occupy the time you are spending now seeing red replying to crazy comments on social media.

Meditation has many health benefits, and it is a worthy journey. I found the Muse to be an excellent route towards the practice, but there are many options. Guided breathing Meditations are a good place to start and you can find them everywhere. There are apps and YouTube videos, books, and online sessions. Give it a go. I would also suggest doing

some reading on the subject. Meditation is one of those useful lifelong practices that after a while you will find remarkably pleasurable.

It is like learning how to take a brief vacation into your head when you want. It will surprise you how loud it can be between your ears and how sweet that place is as it quiets.

While meditation is not a complete solution for mental fitness, it is a good place to start if you are feeling the pressures mounting. For your mental health and your ability to thrive, an ounce of prevention is worth pounds of cure. Meditation is an ancient and free practice that has existed for centuries as an antidote to life's challenges.

# Are Sheep Happy?

**W**e all know the program by now. Feel unsatisfied? Buy stuff! Feel better. Feeling returns. REPEAT. There is a reason self-help is an 8-billion-dollar industry (thanks for buying the book-hopefully after this you realize that seeing a vision of self and putting one foot in front of another is a good strategy for nurturing contentment in life.)

Consider the poor sheep. They like to hang around in flocks, they spook easily, and it takes almost no effort for a sheepdog to get them to do what they want and when they separate from the flock; they become fodder for wolves. So, as a sheep you stick together doing what other sheep are doing and at the end of doing and flocking someone comes along shears your coat and makes something more useful and valuable out of it. You are left without a coat. REPEAT.

Now consider the sheepdog. He gets to do what he loves. Please his master and mess with sheep. The sheepdog lives his dream. Sure, you could say that a sheepdog is not a sheep, so it is in his nature not to act as a sheep. That is true and you are not a sheep either, so why do so many people act like them? The bottom line is that human beings can be sheep or sheepdog, so choose which one you prefer to be. You can even be the wolf.

So, the question is, why do so many people want to be sheep? Even when they think they are being unique they are still behaving like sheep.

I would rather be the wolf. Sure, pack politics can be a challenge and eventually unless you die in a hunt or from disease, they will send you on your lonely way to vanish. However, while the going is good, the going is good. Wolves know what they do. They hunt. Wolves are part of a team. Wolves understand the power of leadership. Wolves wander the world. Nobody fattens a wolf for the slaughter or their fleece. Wolves do stuff, they hunt, travel, and make more wolves and best of all they howl at the moon. Who do you want to be? If you want to be a wolf, the one thing you need to get into your head is that sticking to the same pasture day in and day out forever-well, that is for sheep.

Modern marketing and consumerism want us behaving sheep like. We buy stuff we do not need, and we delude ourselves with the fake status in the guise of luxury brands. Nothing motivates people to make stupid choices more than the idea that others are better off. FOMO the fear of missing out is some strange sense of entitlement-Sheep. Why do they get to do that, and I do not-this as a motivation is profoundly infantile. I chuckle when I see people crowding beautiful places so they can get the Instagram pic to prove they earned the “Look at Me Badge”. It feels like people are trying to level up in the game of life as seen through the envy of those on social media than appreciate how lucky they are. - Sheep.

This sense of entitlement drives markets for useless goods. People spend money they do not have to purchase an illusion of superiority. Sheep. In times of changes and challenge, this pervasive mindset will be the end of people. When you cannot cover the interest payments for the ego toys, it is going to get ugly. If you define yourself by false status buckle up because an existential crisis is waiting for you. When you cannot afford to fund the illusion for the pretend life you are projecting, be prepared to be outcast by the others playing the same game. You really need to ask yourself; do you want to go down with the Jones?

What is the solution - see the game and act accordingly? A man measured by rented or leased toys is a man headed for disaster. Choose if you want to be one of the brainwashed sheep. The real wakeup call when we buy for status and not meaning happens when we go to sell the stuff we overspent on, turns out it is not worth much. Status purchases devalue fast. Rethink why you buy. Use money to amplify your life, not impress someone else. One has a good return on investment the other is for sheep.

If you take on debt to buy status, you will end up more broke than you might imagine. False status is just false. Do you know what and how you want to be? Sheep do not thrive well when the chips are down. The world happens beyond our rose-colored perceptions of it. When we live in an illusion, the brutality of the truth will hurt us more. Have your eyes open and intentions free of the influences to keep up with the heavily indebted and vacuous Jones's. The greatest wealth in the world is the wealth of freedom

and options. I have always said live humbly but have a five-star escape hatch if you need a treat. When people back themselves into a corner because of pursuing fake status, they eventually find themselves locked up in a prison of debt. Their crime, not thinking about the consequences.

I have been able to take grand adventures in life because I kept options available by never trying to deficit fund an illusion of a life. Keeping away from the traps of fake status will do wonders for you. Opportunity always knocks, but the challenge is having the flexibility to follow when it arrives. Being trapped in an illusion seriously limits options.

Think more strategically about money and silly status seeking conformity. Sheep do not hunt they get hunted. Your call.

# Amplify The Food

Most of us have more time on our hands during this strange time. The frenetic pace of modern life has been conspiring to kill us. Hippocrates said Let food be thy medicine and let medicine be thy food. It is apparent given the scourge of diabetes and obesity in the west that we have made a total cock-up of that advice. So as the pace slows down would this not be a great opportunity to learn some better health habits - especially around food. Covid is making us fatter because we are getting into bad habits. It is time to take back the power.

This is the time to enjoy the luxury of eating well and learning to prepare food well. Spend some time and create the pantry of creativity you always wanted. Learn to create healthy food because you have the time to do it. Grocery shopping is one of the key adventures we still have in the mindset of a pandemic. Turn the shopping trip into an adventure. Take a world trip through your sense of taste and smell by being brave in choosing some exotic options.

We all spend far too many hours watching wonderful and enticing cooking shows on television, and this is your opportunity to take back the power and become the master chef. From a selfish perspective this is a great time to amplify the food, you could be healthier, you could find activities to enjoy with your small groups and when all this

is over and we can hang with strangers, you get to become a hero of culinary amazement. It is a win for all.

Food is medicine both for the body and the mind. It is an adventure we can all have during messed up times, which can lead to so much opportunity. Sharing of meals is one of life's greatest gifts. Getting great at enjoying and sharing the experience will not only amplify the moment it sets you up to enjoy life with a little more gusto.

This is a journey you can take on your own at any level of skill. Cooking is a hobby, pastime or profession, and there is a world of wonder waiting for your discovery. Take advantage of the great pause to amplify the food for both your health and for your joy.

Go read a cookbook! Level up your cooking skills and your curiosity. Super-sized stupidity is how many approach their relationship with food. We know that obesity is bad. There is no fiction in the connections between being obese (BMI (body mass index) > 35) will lead to all kinds of nasty outcomes for you. If you are fat (I have gained my COVID-19+ and I am not impressed), there are lots of tools to become un-fat. The science of living healthy is freely available. It is all around us it is just waiting for you to find it. When over 40% in the west are obese, you need to ask some serious questions about what is wrong with the attitudes of people.

Many treat food profoundly wastefully. 30-40% of the food that North Americans buy goes to waste. When times get

lean eating the food, we buy is an excellent way to stretch the budget. There are so many forms of affordable cuisine in the world and learning to prepare a few feature recipes will do wonders.

In a busy society, food becomes a secondary thought which leads to the rise of fast food and less than optimal prepared meals. We rush through our lives eating to get on to other things. When we do this, we deprive ourselves of so much. Food and the culture of food are one of the greatest adventures you can have. It is an adventure that is both exciting and easy to share. The big Covid pause should finally give us time to chew our food.

When wave one of Covid hit people went into hardcore hoarding mode. Toilet paper, hand sanitizer and many other things people thought they needed more of. But how many people truly provisioned for the voyage. Our relationship with food tells us a great deal about our relationship with life. When Covid hit, I started thinking like the sailor I am.

Long-distance sailing is fun. It is an exercise in both self-reliance and resilience. Being a successful long-distance sailor means thinking forward. Planning long voyages away from shore takes serious planning. Since there are no supermarkets in the middle of the Atlantic, you need to have what you need onboard. The pantry needs to be intelligently stocked. Things need to be eaten to preserve freshness. Freezer and refrigerator space on small boats is in short supply, if you have any at all. We need to pick food

that will last and is versatile with different ingredients so we can make interesting meals.

When provisioning for a voyage we consider many factors, especially the calorie requirements for the crew. Knowing that we need to provide an excellent source of healthy energy for a period gives us a framework to plan against.

Provisioning for a voyage is the art of becoming completely self-reliant for a period. You always have a week or two more than you need, and then some emergency or survival rations should you need even a little more. There is a sense of freedom that comes with knowing what you have and that you have enough to enjoy in different ways. Maslow would be proud of the act of provisioning as it checks off a very important category in the hierarchy of needs. It is one less thing to worry about.

When times are challenging, the act of provisioning can help you think your food priorities and the different culinary adventures, you will have over the next while. Being impulsive with food choices is bad for your health. What I love about the act of provisioning for a voyage is its directness. It is a very direct relationship with the experiences you can expect over the time of the voyage. It is fun and deliberate. It is easy to eat healthy when you plan for it. It is easier to control your portions and snack when you have thought this through. It is easier to economize your food spend when you deliberately purchase what you need. Provisioning and planning can help save the planet by reducing waste.

Once you get into the provisioning mindset, it becomes very easy to be creative with your food options and choices. The power of mix and match for meals is fun. On a voyage we have limited ingredients, so getting creative becomes part of the adventures. Sometimes on a voyage the weather will turn on you and make cooking in a rocking galley impossible and that leads to meals with little or no prep required but hearty enough to provide the energy the crew needs to keep going. Maximizing a finite supply in creative ways is both fun and interesting.

There is confidence that comes with having enough to create healthy food in any condition with simple ingredients and in simple surroundings such as the tiny galley of a small sailing yacht. There is also a profound confidence in knowing that you can successfully provision to stay fed and happy over the longer term.

Food is an adventure and the more adventurous you get with your explorations and ability, the more interesting your life will be.

In tough times eating better, not wasting food and learning to appreciate both our budgets and ingredients is an excellent way to protect yourself from uncertainty.

A friend of mind lived through the collapse of the Soviet Union in eastern Ukraine. Things got so bad after the collapse of the system that people were literally starving to death. This was in the 1980s there was no money. My friend

and her mother were so poor that they could not even afford bread. What kept them alive was their vegetable garden, a knowledge of preservation and the magic of barter. When the world turns foul, the cultivation, preparation and enjoyment of food can become a form of universal currency. A resilient person needs to have a working knowledge of this. Someone with a strong appreciation and skills with food is always better off than someone without. No burger joint in the middle of the Atlantic either.

There is power in having a healthy and intelligent relationship with food and typically the better and more thoughtful the relationship, the better our health.

I take tremendous satisfaction from the discipline from the art of provisioning and shipboard cooking. Knowing you can take well care of the necessities goes a long way to creating a safer and happier place. Knowing how not to starve when you worry about scarcity is a powerful skill.

# The Oil Well Strategy

**I**n the 1930s came the idea of the American dream, that notion that hard work entitles people to their heart's desires. Even if it feels like it should be written somewhere in the constitution, it was a marketing idea and a powerful one. The challenge is that overtime they have twisted the American dream into many things they expect you to buy. They have perverted the core of the American dream into an idea that we are all entitled to achieve great things. This is not true the American dream does not entitle anything. This is a mass delusion at best and a deception at its worst.

In the book *The Age of Absurdity: Why Modern Life Makes It Hard to Be Happy* Michael Foley points out the central confidence trick of capitalism is convincing everyone they can be a millionaire. We live in a system that creates a perception of entitlement with access to forms of credit unheard of a generation ago. The American dream has become a shell game of acquiring stuff at great expense and at significant financial risk using the double-edged sword of consumer credit. People have allowed their lives to be levered up worse than an investment bank with a cocaine problem, all because they believe the American dream entitled them to have everything they wanted without a filter.

The pandemic is pushing on the foundations of consumer credit and the pillars are shaking. When we live in houses of cards build on a shaky financial foundation that can be brought down when the cash flow diminishes, we are in trouble. When we live debt riddled and pay cheque to pay cheque, the implications are grievous. The pandemic had the effect of hitting the economy with a downgrade of gross domestic product (GDP) that was monumental. A full rebound is a matter of great speculation and conjecture.

The economy contracted significantly. It is like removing blood from your body. Take enough out and things just will not work properly. That kind of shock means less consumption. Less consumption means less demand, and less demand means fewer jobs. It is a cascade. While we are all hoping for a return to the pre-Covid normal, I am not convinced. There are rebounds in the economy, but the question I cannot shake is how resilient is that rubber band. I think the pain is here to stay, and we need to rethink how we prosper in this alternative version of capitalism. Printing money as governments are doing is not a long-term solution.

In the 1950s, the golden time of the company man emerged and the idea that powerful companies created strong opportunities and jobs for life. The post-war period was one of massive growth and opportunity. Home ownership, automobiles, education, suburbs, shopping malls, you name it. There was a transformation happening: people were living well, building comfortable nests, and enjoying the emotional stability and security of good jobs and

reasonable wages that went with it. There was greater equality of earnings in the west than there is now.

They say that that period really ended in the 80s and for the last 40 years it has been a pretty dramatic decline in both equality and earnings, and it is true. Yet we still hold on to this golden vision of the 1950s American dream as if it is the norm. It is not, it has gone and hoping that it will come back is silly.

The world now might as well be on a different planet from the America of the golden growth age. While we strive for the image of the 1950s perceived harmony, it is just an illusion.

Technology is the defining economic force today. Not the economies of scale, mass production and the Petro economy that drove the American dream of the 1950s.

Technology especially technology defined and integrated with the modern miracles of machine learning and artificial intelligence is an animal very different from what people are used to. Machines traditionally have been tools. While these tools were great at what they did, the most important intelligence in the loop still belonged to a human being. People were necessary to use, manage, and operate the tools. This is not the case now. Our tools are becoming smarter than we are. Machine learning changes the rules. Adaptive algorithms change everything.

The office is unnecessary for far too many work environments. The offices are for people. Intelligent process, especially machine intelligence does not need people. Machine intelligence can replace people. Machine intelligences do not need desks or office space. As companies reduce their need of office space, so will they reduce their need for people as the technology which has now been put to the top of the list becomes an even more integral part of crafting the companies of the future.

Talking with friends who manage big companies is fascinating. There are little bits of wisdom that when taken together hint and at a fundamental shift in the economy in a post Covid world. A friend who transitioned a 500-person insurance firm to work from home in two weeks (They had disaster provisions in place) told me his only regret was signing a commercial lease two months previous. He did not see the office of old as relevant, nor would sizeable space ever be part of the future. Another friend who runs a multinational tech company explained how they put 10 years of innovation into action within 10 weeks.

Covid forced a profound leap forward for corporate America, and it is a leap that moves us closer to the future where people are just not as important. We are on the path of automation feared by most. Jobs that can be automated will be automated.

While this sounds alarmist, it is also true. On the flip side with every new technology and capability comes new opportunities and new jobs. The only unknown risk is how

long it will take for a new technology to establish a beachhead of alternative job possibilities. The first effect of technology is to cull before it cultivates. Since Covid has set the mandate to empower a new technology phase for business, expect challenges in the job market over the long term.

A big question way beyond this book is if because we can, should we automate? Past technology leaps hint that profits and efficiencies usually take precedence. If a change will improve profitability, reliability, and dependability, then that change will be implemented. Plan for it. If you have a job you feel is threatened by technology, then be aware and start thinking about reinvention sooner vs. later. If you think technology can do what you do, then it probably can. If it can do it cheaper than you, then you are on borrowed time. Reinvent.

Ultimately, these decisions will be made by policy makers and taxation. Intelligent software getting hit with an income tax is one-way governments may keep people working. Making the economics of automation less appealing is one way to keep people in their jobs. We will see what happens. My advice is to get ahead of the change.

Given all this change, there is one option that is getting more attention from both policymakers and the public. Universal basic Income where the state pays a little and you get to work for more is gaining in popularity. It is an expensive option but in times of rapid change universal basic incomes can keep people afloat long enough to create

new options. True blue conservatives hate these ideas, yet always fall flat in suggesting something better. Trickle-down economics and neoliberal ideas were not helpful for most people, but great for a few. Repeating that approach will not work this time.

The Job for life is an idea which is gone. The wisdom now is that we should expect many careers in our lives. I am a fan of this. While it means that our lives are a little less stable, it means that we can cultivate new skills and ultimately richer lives. The more the world changes around us, the greater the breadth of skills we require. The mono-dimensional careerist is a person of a bygone era. I have always been a fan of the concept of the competent man. The person who can do so many things. In this age the competent man is the competent person, and it is not gender specific. I have always found inspiration in Robert Heinlein's definition:

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects. – Robert Heinlein

I am such a fan of this thinking because being capable agrees with being resilient. The more we can do, the safer our futures will be.

## MY PERSONAL STRATEGY

I have had many jobs and different career paths in my time. From tending bar to pumping gas at an airport to Pilot to C-level executive. Jobs that I loved and Jobs that sucked the life and creativity out of me. The highest paying jobs always seemed to come with an express ticket into the prison of deficit funded status that so many people spend their lives crawling up the corporate ladder to achieve. As you can tell, this is not my favourite approach. In fact, it is my least. Selling my soul to the gods of corporate profits while expected of me was not fun at all.

There is a price for freedom, especially financial freedom, and that price comes in two forms: foresight and discipline. You need to know what you want. How you will invest in your dreams and then stay focused enough to allow them to manifest. It can lead to years of doubt and drought, but there really is no other way. In the simplest terms-have a plan, have many plans, and know the plans will be complicated and twisty then pray that those around you will help you keep the path. That is the secret. Have big goals and reasonable methods of achieving them. You cannot get what you want if you do not work for it. The universe will manifest nothing out of the blue-only you can do that.

Luck always favours the bold, and the committed. You are your own path to success. Expect the path to be hard and expect it to look nothing like you imagine it is going to look.

Accept that and all will be good. The fun part is inventing the path (In hindsight usually).

As you have figured out by now, I am of the mind that the rat race is for idiots. The rat race appeals to those whose plans are less than defined. There is a saying in business that sometimes the fight over the treasure is worth more than the treasure. It means that the fight becomes more important to people than the results. I saw this all the time in corporate politics, and in my humble opinion is the domain of morons. The treasure matters (whatever that may be for you) and fighting for more than it is worth is unproductive. The rat race encourages people to fight over the wrong things. These behaviours are counterproductive, create stress and make the climb of the ladder all that more agonizing.

Knowing what you want, need, and wish to amplify is the greatest gift you can give yourself. I cannot help you figure this out. However, I can give you a hint. Expect no windfalls in your life be grateful if one lands on you but do not expect one. Plan to work and work to enjoy the fruits of your labour.

The oil well strategy is simple. It is my counter to the rat race. Simply put, I do not do one thing. I do scores of interconnected things that all link to my skills but tackle the world differently. Each of these things I call an oil well and they are each small revenue producing entities. They do not aim high they aim to be productive. They produce a little stream of revenue individually, yet together they can

combine into a gusher when times are good. The oil-well strategy is an approach to crafting an independent career which is both resilient and diversified. It helps you survive shocks to the system by having enough diversity in your income to roll with change.

MY LIST IS SIMPLE THESE ARE MY OIL WELLS.

I am a business consultant (I leverage my past)

I am a writer and publisher

I am a part-time professor

I am a commercial photographer

I am a pilot

I am an inventor

I am a managing director

I am an investor

I create businesses that use all these skills jointly or severally.

I run nothing with the goal of being the biggest. Being the biggest in any sector drives competition towards you. I find things to do that allows me to become a medium fish in a small pond. I keep my expectations in line with the cycles I have available. I do not work over 50 hours a week and I put my energies at different times into each of these enterprises. I operate them within their niches and within their boxes. It is an approach that makes money and delivers the most valuable commodity on earth—optionality. If an enterprise fails, it is not the end of the world. If it succeeds wonderful, if it really succeeds, I sell it to

someone else who wants to drive it into the next realm of growth.

The simple definition of an oil well strategy is not to have all your eggs in one basket. An oil well strategy is a take on a resilient form of entrepreneurship, it is achievable only with clarity, capacity, and discipline.

In our messed up north American values system people are judged not on who they are but what they do. It is a view that forces people into perilous paths as too many of us value the ego story over resilience and freedom. Adapting an oil well strategy may seem foreign and dangerous, but in times of rapid change it is a strategy that can keep you safe and earning.

I look at my career is the sum of the parts I have created, not the titles they have granted me. If you know where you are headed, taking an oil well strategy to get there can have a profound impact on the joy you take from the journey. It makes you in the words of Nassim Nicholas Taleb --- Anti-Fragile. The post Covid world will be shocked in ways we cannot imagine now. Thinking about new paradigms of employment might just be good insurance.

Become the sum of your abilities and diversify who pays you for them. It is still possible to be successful and not sell your soul to the man. There are only four things in life you cannot rent: - True love, unconditional love, genuine friendship, and more time. Success can be bought, just ask any investor.

The wealthiest people are those that work to live and not live to work. Decide which one person you want to be and do it. As a final thought, I will leave you with this-Go google the story of the Mexican fisherman.

# Epilog

Life is composed of the bits. Enjoy mastery and satisfaction of the bits and the whole will come into its own. From this moment forward consider yourself to be in the solution because the road ahead is really of your own design.

We learn, we grown, we succeed, we face adversity, we grow again, we savour, we appreciate, and we continually repeat this.

This is life and it is fantastic, not always the easiest of journeys but fantastic none the less. From this day forward strive to always see that glass as half full and never ever half empty.



## About The Author

Sailor, pilot, artist, teacher, designer and agent of change. Brady Live in Toronto and enjoys the world. He Invents, creates and strives to amplify the good and the next.

An original dot-com entrepreneur and digital marketer he now works on projects that empower people, reduce the impact of disease and designs opportunities for post a carbon world.