

MO(MEN)TUM

The operating system for men who weren't given one.

OLLIE CHICK

A Note Before You Start

This is Draft One. You're reading it before anyone else.

This book will eventually be published on Amazon, properly formatted, properly edited, the full thing. But right now, I'm giving it away for free because I'd rather it reach people than sit on a hard drive waiting to be perfect.

I grew up thirsty for knowledge and skint. Couldn't afford the books that might've changed things earlier. If someone had handed me this for free when I was eighteen, obese, addicted, nihilistic, lying in bed at 4am wondering what the point was, it would've saved me years.

So this is my gift back. Download it. Read it. Send it to someone who needs it.

And if you have feedback, anything at all, a typo, a chapter that didn't land, something that hit hard, something that felt off, I genuinely want to hear it. This book gets better with honest input.

Email: hello@mo-men-tum.com

Every piece of feedback will be read. By me. Probably at 4am. Probably after a run.

Thank you for reading the draft. It means more than you know.

— Ollie

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For the man who told me I saved him. But really, he saved me.

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PROLOGUE

"You stopped me from killing myself."

A man said that to me in a park in Bath on a Sunday afternoon while I was tying gymnastic rings to a tree branch.

I didn't know his name. He'd been coming to our free meetups for about two months. Quiet. Shy. Always near the back. He arrived early that day, which he'd never done, and walked across the wet grass with a look on his face like he'd been rehearsing something all week. He stopped two metres away, said those six words, and walked off to warm up.

I stood there. Kiera looked at me. I looked at her. Neither of us spoke for a long time.

We hadn't done anything. We'd thrown some rings over a tree branch and said "come move with us" to anyone who'd listen. We weren't therapists. We weren't running a mental health programme. We were just two people in a park doing pull-ups. And somehow that had kept a man alive.

What that man didn't realise that afternoon was this.

He didn't save me from killing myself. He did something harder. He helped me actually live. Because until he said those words, I was building a life on a philosophy that said none of it mattered. That we're all just dust waiting to settle. That helping people was a nice hobby but meaningless in a universe heading toward cold nothingness.

Six words and the whole thing collapsed.

If throwing rings over a tree could stop a man from dying, then everything matters. Every conversation. Every session. Every time you show up for someone and don't even know you're doing it. The small things aren't small. They're everything.

I gave up my wage. I gifted the gym back to the community, turned it into a CIC, a community interest company, because it was never mine and it shouldn't have been. I walked away from the money because the mission was bigger than the money. Every decision after that afternoon was downstream of those six words.

I know the guy now. We're friends. He's one of the strongest people I've ever met, and I don't mean on the rings.

This book exists because of him. Because if one accidental community in a park, no funding, no strategy, just rings and a tree branch and some people who needed somewhere to go on a Saturday, could give one man enough reason to stay alive, then what happens when you do it on purpose? What happens when you build the system? When you write it down? When you hand it to every man who's drowning and say: here. This is the map. I drew it in the dark. It's not perfect. But it got me out.

The operating system I wish someone had given me at eighteen, when I was obese and addicted and lying in bed at 4am believing nothing mattered.

To understand why those words hit me the way they did, you need to know where I was before them. You need to see what I was. Because the distance between the kid in Chapter 1 and the man tying rings to a tree is the whole point.

So let me take you there.

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PART ONE: THE WAKE-UP

Chapter 1: Nothing Matters

I was eighteen and I believed that sentence. Fully. Not in the way teenagers say it to sound edgy or dark or interesting at parties. I believed it the way you believe the floor is under your feet. Gravity-level certainty.

Nothing matters. We all die. Who gives a shit.

The bathroom mirror was something I walked past with my eyes on the door handle. I hated how I looked. Hated it enough that I'd stopped checking. The scales were buried under a pile of clothes I hadn't washed in weeks. My bedroom was a cave. Curtains closed at midday, two monitors glowing, empty cans on the desk, plates crusted with whatever I'd eaten at 2am. That was my world. And I chose it, day after day after day.

I was addicted to everything and committed to nothing.

I know what you're thinking. Classic origin story. Goggins had it worse. Everyone's had it worse. Some kid reading this right now is going through something that makes my situation look like a bad holiday. I'm not claiming suffering Olympics gold.

Comparisons don't help when you're drowning. The water doesn't care how deep someone else's pool is. You're still drowning.

The nihilism wasn't a phase. It was a philosophy. I had arguments for it. Good ones. We live on a rock spinning through infinite nothing. Every civilisation that ever existed has collapsed. Every person who's ever loved someone has watched them die or died first. The universe is expanding into cold darkness and one day there won't even be light. In the face of that, getting a job and paying rent and pretending to care about your credit score felt genuinely, mathematically insane.

I'd lie in bed at four in the morning, screen light reflecting off my face, and run these thought experiments. What would happen if I just disappeared? Who would actually notice? My parents would be sad for a while. My mates would post something on Facebook. And then the world would keep spinning. Same speed. Same direction. Same nothing.

I wasn't suicidal. Not exactly. But I wasn't far from it either.

There's a zone between wanting to die and wanting to live where you just sort of exist. Inert, like a rock at the bottom of a river. The water moves over you but you don't. You watch your own life like it belongs to someone else. A rider on a horse, and the horse is sprinting toward a cliff, and you can feel the reins in your hands but you don't pull them.

That's what I felt like. A passenger.

The horse was my body, my habits, my addictions, my default patterns. It did whatever it wanted. Wake up late. Eat shit. Watch porn. Stay up until sunrise. Repeat. I wasn't choosing any of it. I was observing.

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I was selfish. Completely. I didn't think about other people. Didn't care how my mum felt packing me a lunch I'd eat and then follow with a full KFC, a full pizza, and four bars of Dairy Milk. Didn't care that my dad was up at 3am doing his post round so the family could eat. Didn't care that they needed every penny and I was stealing from them to fund a habit I couldn't name, couldn't control, and couldn't stop.

All I cared about was escaping the feeling inside me. And I'd use anything legal to do it.

Food was the main one. The one that embarrasses me most, so the one I have to tell you about first. My mum made me a packed lunch every day. Sandwiches, fruit, crisps. She handed it to me at the door. She dragged me to the gym every Saturday. Took me to the doctors. Weighed me. Changed my environment so I'd have a chance. She did everything she could.

And I'd eat her lunch. All of it. Then I'd buy a full KFC. Multiple pieces. Then a full pizza. Then the chocolate. Not fun-size. Full bars. Dairy Milk, Galaxy, the big ones. I smuggled Oreos into the gym in my bag like contraband. Stuffed them in the side pocket under a towel, hiding biscuits from people who could clearly see I didn't need them.

I stole money from my parents to fund it.

My parents weren't poor, but they weren't flush either. They needed every penny at times. And I looked them in the eye and lied. I manipulated situations to get cash. I became genuinely skilled at deception because the addiction demanded it. And every time I got away with it, the shame doubled, and the shame drove me straight back to the food because the food was the only thing that made the shame quiet down for five minutes.

And when they found out? They didn't throw me out. They didn't scream or shame me. They were still there. Still showing up. Still trying to help their son. I think about that now and it breaks me in a completely different way. The kind of breaking that's actually gratitude.

I forced myself to throw up. Starved myself for days. Then binged so hard I couldn't move. Binge, purge, starve, repeat. And nobody talks about this in men. Eating disorders are supposed to be a women's issue, so men with the exact same patterns just carry them in silence and pretend they're fine.

I wasn't fine. I was destroying my body and my relationships and my self-respect with KFC and Dairy Milk instead of drugs, and somehow that made it invisible. Nobody stages an intervention for a fat kid. Nobody sends you to rehab for chocolate. The substance is socially acceptable. So the addiction is invisible. So the suffering happens in silence. And it just gets worse.

But food was only one hit. I used everything.

Gaming. Thousands of hours. The kind of obsession that worried my parents and made my teachers write me off. I wasn't playing for fun. I was playing because the real world felt unbearable and the game world responded to my inputs. Kill a boss, get a reward. Clear a level, feel something. The dopamine was reliable in a way that real life wasn't.

Porn. Hours of it. Every day. The one nobody talks about and everyone is doing. I didn't enjoy it. It was just the fastest, cheapest, most accessible way to change how I felt. Bored? Porn. Anxious? Porn. Angry? Porn. Sad? Porn. The feeling arrives, the hand reaches for the phone, and within thirty seconds your brain chemistry shifts and the original feeling is replaced by something artificial, something that doesn't last, something that leaves you emptier than before it started.

The internet. Doom-scrolling. YouTube rabbit holes at 3am. Consuming content about nothing, for hours, because the consumption itself was the anaesthetic.

The mechanism was identical every time. Emotion arrives. Can't sit with it. Reach for the thing that changes how you feel fastest. Temporary relief. Deeper emptiness on the other side. Stronger emotion. Reach again. The baseline drops. You need more stimulation to reach the same height. The real world feels less and less accessible because the artificial version has warped your expectations.

The substance doesn't matter. Food, porn, gaming, scrolling. The loop is the same.

And the lying held it all together. The manipulation. The looking-them-in-the-eye-and-denying-it. My parents would ask where the money went. I'd have a story ready. I always had a story ready. Because the addiction didn't just teach me to eat or watch or play. It taught me to perform. To construct plausible explanations on the spot. To manage other people's perception of me so I could keep using in peace.

Every lie that worked tightened the loop. The shame of the lie drove me to the food. The food drove me to lie about the food. The lying drove the shame. Around and around. A loop with no exit. You can see the walls. You just can't find the door.

I'll be honest about something else. I still deal with this. The wiring hasn't changed. It's just pointed somewhere different now. Maybe running a thousand miles in thirty days is just another hit. Maybe building a business until 2am is the same obsessive loop with a more socially acceptable substance. Maybe the gym itself is a fix.

But the intention is different. The difference between destruction and creation isn't the intensity. It's the direction. Same engine. Same obsessive, all-consuming, can't-stop-won't-stop engine. Pointed at something that builds instead of something that breaks.

I don't know if that makes me recovered or just better at choosing my addictions. Some days I'm not sure there's a difference. But I know this: the version of me running at 5am is closer to who I want to be than the version hiding Oreos in a gym bag. And that's enough. For now, that's enough.

If you're in that loop right now, the food loop, the porn loop, the gaming loop, the scrolling loop, any of it, listen.

The loop is a behavioural mechanism. The emotion is real. The avoidance strategy is just pointed in the wrong direction. The solution isn't willpower or shame or a browser blocker. The solution is learning to read the signal and respond with something that actually fixes it.

We'll get to that. The whole book is about that.

But I needed to name all of it, the food, the porn, the gaming, the lying, because these are the ones men carry in silence and shame and never mention, even when they're being honest about everything else.

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I resented everything at the time. Of course I did.

I had no idea what I was doing with my future. I was eighteen. I was doing what older adults told me I should be doing, because they've got it all figured out, right? Go to school. Get your grades. Get a job. Follow the path. The path that nobody on the path seemed particularly happy about walking.

My mates were in similar spots. Not all of them. Some had jobs, girlfriends, plans. But enough of us were floating that it felt normal. We'd play League until 3am and talk about nothing and laugh at nothing and feel nothing and that was friendship. Nobody asked how you were doing. Nobody said, "Mate, I think we might be in trouble here."

We just existed alongside each other like furniture in the same room.

I look back at those friendships now and I understand something about them that I didn't understand then. We weren't bad friends. We weren't even failing each other. We were doing the best we could with the tools we had. And the tools were: silence, avoidance, and distraction. The same tools every man in this country is handed by default. The same tools that are keeping the suicide rate at 125 a week.

Nobody taught us how to say "I'm struggling." Nobody showed us it was possible to be honest and still be considered a man. So we did what men do: we sat next to each other in the dark and pretended the dark was normal.

I saw the worst in everyone. That was the nihilism doing its work. My parents didn't love each other, they were just too scared to leave. My friends didn't care about me, they were just bored and I was available. My teachers didn't believe in me, they were collecting a salary. The entire adult world was a performance. Everyone faking it. Everyone scared.

I believed all of that. It was airtight.

And it was completely wrong. But wrong in the way a locked room is wrong. From the inside, it feels like the whole world. My parents loved each other. They loved me. They were two people under enormous stress doing everything they could. And the nihilistic kid upstairs with his headphones on was too far gone to see it.

The shame was the worst part. Because I knew, somewhere under the fat and the excuses and the bitterness, that I was capable of more. That made it worse, not better. If I'd genuinely been stupid or broken, the nihilism would've been easier to maintain. But I wasn't stupid. I knew I was choosing this. I just couldn't figure out how to choose something different.

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The things that destroyed me became my superpowers. I didn't plan that. I didn't see it coming. But looking back, every one of the addictions and failures from those years gave me something I use every day now.

Gaming. I played for thousands of hours. Obsessively. The kind of obsession that worried my parents and made my teachers write me off. But the entire gamification system at CaliUnity came from that. The fifteen-level coach progression, the Skill Swirl map where you can see every movement you've unlocked and every one you haven't, the way we track progress like XP in an RPG. Gaming language. Reward architecture I absorbed from a decade of staring at screens.

And beyond the product, gaming taught me tunnel vision. It taught me how to sit with one problem for fourteen hours straight until I solved it. Systems thinking. Collaboration under pressure. An obsessive work ethic that people now call discipline but which started as addiction to levelling up.

Lying. This one's harder to say out loud. But the exact skills I developed to hide my addictions are now the skills that make me a good coach and a decent salesman. I learned to read people because I had to. Body language, micro-expressions, tone shifts, the tiny signals that tell you someone is hiding something or about to shut down.

I know how men think when they're in pain because I've been that man, running the same scripts, telling the same lies. When a client sits across from me and says "yeah I'm fine, just a bit tired," I know exactly what's underneath that sentence. The manipulation became empathy. The deception became perception.

The internet nearly killed me. Porn, doom-scrolling, isolation, hours of consuming nothing that mattered. But I wouldn't be who I am without the internet either. Goggins, Hormozi, Ross Edgley, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca. I found every one of them through the same device I used to watch porn at 3am. The internet is like money. It builds hospitals or it builds bombs. Same tool. Same raw material. The difference is who's holding it and what they point it at.

The shadows become the superpowers. The kid who couldn't stop eating is now the coach who understands emotional regulation from the inside. The liar is the man who can read a room in seconds. The gamer is building gamified fitness systems that actually change people's lives.

None of that happened despite the destruction. It happened because of it. The hard years became the adult toolkit. The raw materials were forged in the toughest stretch of my family's life, waiting to be repurposed.

Every shadow has a superpower hiding inside it. I've seen it too many times to call it coincidence. I've watched it in myself and in every person I've ever coached who made it through. The thing that nearly destroyed them became the thing that made them extraordinary. Suffering is suffering. But the skills you develop to survive are the same skills that let you thrive, pointed in a different direction.

The question isn't whether you have shadows. Everyone does. The question is whether you're going to let them control the wheel or hand them the map.

Same brain wiring. Same intensity. The direction changed.

If you hate yourself for the things you've done, the addictions, the lies, the damage, those traits don't go away. But they can be redirected. The obsession becomes focus. The lying becomes perception.

They won't redirect themselves. You have to do it. That's what the operating system is for.

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People talk about rock bottom like it's a single moment. A dramatic scene. You collapse in the shower. You crash the car. You get the diagnosis.

For me, rock bottom was a Tuesday in November that looked exactly like the Monday before it.

Nothing happened. That was the point. Nothing was happening. Nothing was going to happen. And I knew, in my gut, in my bones, in the part of my brain that still worked, that unless something changed, nothing ever would.

So I went to the gym.

I didn't want to. I didn't have a vision or a plan or a goal. I was just too tired to keep not going.

That morning meant nothing at the time. I did some half-arsed sets. I could barely bench the bar. I looked at the men around me, lean, tattooed, confident, moving through their routines like they owned the building, and I felt like an intruder. A zoo animal that had wandered into the wrong enclosure.

But I went back. Not the next day. Maybe three days later. And again. And again.

I remember specific things from those early sessions that probably seem insignificant to anyone else but that I carry like coins in a pocket.

The smell. That specific cocktail of rubber mats, old sweat, and the faint chemical tang of cleaning spray that wasn't quite winning against the reality of human effort. I hated it at first. Then I got used to it. Then I started associating it with something I couldn't yet name.

The sound of other people's effort. Grunting, breathing, the clang of plates, the rhythmic thud of someone running on a treadmill. In my bedroom the loudest sound was my own thoughts. In the gym the loudest sound was other people working. And there was something about being surrounded by effort, by the physical evidence that other humans were choosing discomfort on purpose, that made my own discomfort feel less lonely.

The first person who spoke to me. A woman in her fifties, doing bicep curls with two-kilo-gram dumbbells, who looked at me between sets and said, "First time?" I said yeah. She said, "Good for you."

That's all. Three words and a nod.

And I thought about those three words for the rest of the day because they contained something I hadn't received in months. Acknowledgement. She wasn't sizing me up. She wasn't judging. She just saw me. I was there. Good.

Something cracked. A hairline fracture in the wall I'd built around myself, small enough that I almost missed it. The kind of crack you only see when the light hits it at the right angle.

I didn't know what it meant yet. I wouldn't know for years.

But the crack was there. And cracks, if you're paying attention, don't close on their own.

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. And I'm literally running a thousand miles in November. Movember. The timing isn't coincidence. I'm already running close to a hundred miles a week in Bali, getting ready. Writing this book is my first step.

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Chapter 2: Rings Over a Tree

The park in Bath has a name. Victoria Park. But nobody calls it that. It's just "the park." The kind of green space where students lie on the grass in summer and dog walkers circle the perimeter in winter and nothing particularly interesting has ever happened in its entire existence.

Except once.

It was 2021. Lockdown had just ended but nobody felt normal. You could see it in the way people walked around each other on pavements, that weird six-foot swerve, masks still on, eyes down. Everyone had been alone for months and it had done something to them.

During lockdown, with every gym in the country shut, Kiera and I had started running free online classes. Bodyweight stuff. Calisthenics. Anyone could join. We gave away loads of content for free, workouts, tutorials, progressions, and slowly this little community started building online. People were craving connection. They didn't care about the exercises. They cared that someone showed up live, every day, and said "let's go."

When the restrictions lifted, we took it outside. Socially distanced, all that. Victoria Park. We'd sling a set of rings over a tree branch and train in the open air.

And then we started inviting anyone who wanted to come. Free. Show up, move, be around other humans. That was the whole pitch.

Every week. Same tree. Same branch. Same rings. We'd lug everything over, the rings, the parallettes, the spike balls. We'd stop and buy food on the way, get a little picnic together even though we were broke. And then we'd lug it all back at the end. Even when rain poured. Even when nobody showed up. Even when it was freezing and the grass was soaked and any sane person would've stayed home.

It was the best time of my life.

Kiera would text a few people. I'd post on a Bath community group. Casual: "We're training in the park on Sunday. 3pm. Free. Just turn up."

And they'd come. Three people at first, then eight, then twelve. Sometimes twenty. All ages. All levels. A fifty-year-old woman who'd never done a day of exercise in her life. A teenager trying to do muscle-ups and failing brilliantly. A bloke who'd just been through a divorce and didn't know where else to go.

Some of them could barely hang for ten seconds. Didn't matter. Nobody cared. You showed up. That was enough.

Nobody was selling anything. Nobody was being sold to. We were just people in a park, hanging from rings and falling off and laughing about it.

And in that space, something happened that never happens in formal settings. People relaxed. The act dropped. Not straight away. But over weeks, the fake version of themselves fell away and the real people came out.

The confident guy turned out to be deeply lonely. The shy woman turned out to be fiercely funny once she was comfortable. And the teenager who barely spoke? He became the best athlete in the group. Arrived early. Stayed late. Never said a word about it.

There's an Australian study that found men connect side-by-side, not face-to-face. Women bond looking at each other. Men bond working alongside each other. That's why the gym works. That's why the park worked. You put men shoulder to shoulder, give them something hard to do together, and the walls come down on their own.

Nobody had to say "let's talk about our feelings." The talking just happened. Between sets. After sessions. In the car park, steam rising off their bodies, everyone too tired to maintain the performance. Because the shared physical effort had created something that words alone never could: trust.

I watched it happen so many times that I could predict it. A new member, three or four weeks in, standing in the car park after a session. Someone asks a casual question. And the answer that comes back is real. Not "fine." "I'm fine." The most British sentence in the English language. Two syllables that shut down every conversation before it starts. But after a hard session, the script breaks. "Actually, my wife and I are struggling." Or "honestly, I've been drinking too much." Or "I haven't felt like myself in months."

These admissions never happened in the consultation room. They never happened over coffee. They happened in the car park, after a hard session, with sweat still on their shirts and the adrenaline still clearing. Because the body had opened a door that the mind had been keeping locked.

Brene Brown figured this out before me: vulnerability is the gateway to connection. But what I'd add is this: you can't force vulnerability. You have to create the conditions for it. And the conditions are: shared physical effort, in a group that holds both support and standard, over enough time for trust to accumulate.

That's what CaliUnity is. A vulnerability machine disguised as a gym. A place where the hardest part isn't the physical work. The hardest part is letting someone see you sweat. Letting someone see you struggle. Letting someone see you fail a rep and say "I'll get it next time" instead of pretending you weren't trying.

And in that small act of letting someone see you as you actually are, sweaty, struggling, trying, the connection forms. Because connection is built on honesty. And there's no honest place left in most men's lives where they can be seen without judgment.

The gym is that place. Or it should be. And building that kind of gym, that kind of community, that kind of belonging machine, is what I've spent the last five years of my life doing.

Because I needed it too. The man who builds the community he needs ends up helping other men find theirs. Selfish to selfless. Full circle.

The park taught me more about human behaviour than any book. Because the park was a laboratory without walls, without fees, without structure. Just humans in proximity, doing something hard together, and watching what emerged from the shared effort.

What emerged was community. Real community. The kind that texts you when you don't show up. The kind that notices when you're not yourself. The kind that, as it turns out, saves lives.

I didn't know what we were building. Looking back, it was the seed of CaliUnity, the gym, the community, everything that came after. But at the time it was just rings over a tree branch and a few people who needed somewhere to go on a Sunday afternoon.

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There was a guy who started coming about two months in. Quiet. Shy. Stayed near the back of the group. Did his exercises without much conversation. He'd arrive on time, do his thing, and leave without fanfare. I knew his face but not his name.

I remember the afternoon it happened. A Sunday, about 3pm. One of those English autumn days where the air has a bite to it and your fingers go numb on the rings within minutes. The grass was wet. The sky was grey the way Bath always is, like someone had painted the ceiling.

Kiera and I got there early to set up. The rings take a minute to throw over the branch. You have to get the height right, adjust the straps, test the hang. We were doing that when I saw him walking across the park toward us.

He was early. That was the first thing I noticed. He'd never been early before. Always exactly on time or a minute late. But today he was walking across the wet grass while we were still rigging the straps, and he had this look on his face. Nervous. Like he'd rehearsed something in his head and was trying to remember the lines.

I straightened up. Said something like, "Alright mate, you're keen." Something meaningless. He didn't smile.

He stopped about two metres away. Kiera was behind me, tying off a strap. The rings swung gently between us.

And he said this:

"Hey man, I just wanted to say. You don't know who I am. I'm quite shy. These events are quite quiet. But thanks to these meetups and thanks to you guys — you stopped me from killing myself."

Six words at the end. Six words that broke everything I thought I knew about the world.

He didn't elaborate. He didn't cry. He didn't wait for a response. He just said it. Flat, almost rehearsed, like he'd been carrying it in his chest for weeks and needed to put it down. And then he walked to his usual spot at the edge of the group and started warming up.

I stood there.

Kiera looked at me. I looked at her. Neither of us said anything for a long time.

I'd like to tell you I was wise in that moment. That I understood immediately what it meant. That some grand clarity descended and I saw my purpose and the path ahead lit up like a runway.

That's not what happened.

What happened was: I felt like the ground had shifted beneath me. Like I'd been standing on something I'd thought was solid, the nihilism, the nothing-matters certainty, and his words had punched a hole through it and I could see all the way down.

I couldn't get my head around it. We hadn't done anything. We'd thrown some rings over a tree. We hadn't started a charity. We hadn't launched a mental health campaign. We hadn't trained as counsellors or therapists or specialists. We'd just shown up, every week, in a park, and said: come move with us.

And that, that stupid, tiny, insignificant thing, had kept a man alive.

How do you go back to believing nothing matters after that?

You don't.

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The nihilism didn't die that afternoon. It died over the weeks and months that followed, as I turned that sentence over and over in my mind like a stone in a river. Polishing it. Wearing away my own resistance to what it meant.

If throwing some rings over a tree could do that, what could we build on purpose?

If an accidental community in a park could give one man enough reason to stay, what could an intentional community do? What could a gym do? A programme? A system? A book?

I know the guy now. We're friends. He's one of the strongest people I've ever met, and I don't mean on the rings. He showed up that afternoon and said the hardest sentence a human can say. He asked for nothing. He just wanted me to know.

But what he gave me was everything.

This is the thing that keeps me up at night. If he was one person who actually said it, how many others were there? How many people came to those park sessions, or joined the gym later, or just saw a post online, and it shifted something for them? And they never said a word?

We used to give handwritten cards to people when they signed up at Cali. We sent flowers when their relatives died. We gave free memberships to people going through hard times. We ran scholarships for people who couldn't afford it. None of that was strategy. It was just what felt right.

How many of those people did we actually help without ever knowing it?

I still try to make an effort to smile at people. To say thank you. To give gifts. Because you don't know. You never know. The small things aren't small. They're everything.

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Looking back, I can trace the arc now. From selfish to useful. From "I want" to "how can I help." And it happened so gradually that I didn't notice it until it was already done.

At eighteen, every thought I had started with I. I want to feel better. I want to escape. I want to eat. I want to watch. I want, I want, I want. Even the nihilism was self-obsessed. I'm in pain. I don't matter. Nothing affects me. The universe doesn't care about me. I, I, I, I.

During lockdown, something shifted. Instead of "I want to quit engineering," I started asking "how can I be useful?" I hadn't suddenly become a saint. I'd just run out of things the "I want" loop could give me. I'd tried every flavour of selfishness available. Eaten every KFC. Watched every video. Played every game. Scrolled every feed. And all of it had left me exactly where it found me. Nowhere.

So I turned outward. From exhaustion, honestly. The self-focused loop had run dry. I'd used up all the other options. And that's when the rings went over the tree.

I went from being selfish to being useful. It took months and years of showing up and helping people move their bodies and watching what happened to their minds when they did.

The arc of this entire book is one shift: "what do I need" to "what can I give." And that shift is the thing that saved my life. More than any framework or dictionary or system.

I see the same arc in every person I've ever watched transform. In my clients, in my friends, in the men who come to CaliUnity broken and leave whole. The shape is always the same. They arrive focused on themselves. I want to lose weight. I want to feel better. I want to look good. I, I, I. And that's exactly where they should start. The oxygen mask goes on you first. Always.

But somewhere along the way, if the environment is right, if the community is doing its job, the focus shifts. They stop counting their own reps and start counting someone else's. They stop thinking about their own transformation and start helping someone else begin theirs. The language changes. The posture changes. The whole person changes. Because the thing that was eating them alive, the self-obsession, the inward spiral, the endless loop of I-I-I, has been interrupted by something stronger.

Someone else's need.

And in meeting that need, in being useful to another person, they find the thing they'd been looking for in every KFC and every bottle and every scroll through nothing at 3am: meaning.

The quiet, specific, human kind. Being the reason someone's day was slightly better. Mattering to someone who isn't you.

That's enough. It was enough for me. It's enough for anyone.

So I made the gym first. Got it to the point where it could run without me.

The gym was my laboratory. Think about it. If I can't get someone to join the best gym in Bath, which has a risk-free guarantee and the best results in the city, how am I going to talk a man off the ledge? If I can't help someone get in shape, how am I going to stop someone from killing himself? I had to learn these skills first. I had to do this before I could do anything bigger.

So that's what I did. For years. And during all of it, I was writing this book in my head. I had this bigger thing in mind the whole time.

The flywheel now: the gym runs itself. I don't do anything in it. I don't take a wage from it. It's its own beast. It won Best Business in Bath. And I'm qualifying people all over the UK, giving away everything I've ever learned so they can build their own Calis, bring it to their local areas, help their own communities. Franchising the physical space is the next step. But I realised I could go a layer deeper.

Because CaliUnity almost forces connection. Think about it. You're holding someone up in a row. You're spotting someone's handstand. You're trusting another person with your body. Some people struggle with it at first, but eventually they love it. It's like being a kid again. Having fun. Failing and laughing about it.

Every November I did something for men's mental health. I ran four miles every four hours for four days. I did a half marathon every day for a week. I climbed a mountain in Vancouver eleven times in a row, 8,848 metres, the height of Everest, in sixteen hours. I ran 103 kilometres with five thousand metres of elevation gain in twenty-two and a half hours. All to raise money and awareness for men's mental health.

And during all of that, I was studying the charities. What they do, how they work, what's missing. Same thing we did with t-shirts in the gym. We sold other people's t-shirts first. Then we started making our own. I plan to do the same thing with Momentum. Raise money for other charities first. Learn what works. Figure out what men actually want by asking them, being in the trenches, actually being there. And then build something better. More efficient. Using everything I've learned from the business world to get maximum return on every donated pound.

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Sales was where it really started forming for me.

And I don't mean the car salesman thing. I didn't manipulate anyone. I genuinely sat across from people and thought: this is the most obvious thing to join in the world. It's a risk-free challenge. We have the best results in Bath. Why aren't they joining?

And I realised it had nothing to do with me. It had everything to do with the person sitting across from me. So I got obsessed with why people do certain things. Why they make decisions. What they give their power to. Psychology, cognitive behavioural therapy, neuro-

science, behaviour change. I studied guys like Alex Hormozi. Daniel Kahneman and Thinking Fast and Slow. Jim Kwik. Nietzsche. I went deep into the Stoics — Seneca, Epictetus, Epicurus, Zeno, Marcus Aurelius. I got obsessed with the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." I just wanted to understand.

And then something clicked. The same techniques I was using to help people decide to join the gym were the same techniques that helped men in other areas of their lives. When a mate called and said "I'm not in the mood today," I didn't say "get your arse up." I'd say, "No way. What changed from yesterday?" Or: "Cool, so what would your future self want?" It was the same thing. Same skill. Same curiosity.

I also started to look at words. I think people give too much power to words. And I started to realise that the patterns kept repeating:

Sadness is a lack of options. Create one. Anxiety is too many options. Decide. Fear is an imagined future. Act now.

Over a thousand sales conversations. Over years of coaching. The patterns repeated so reliably that they stopped being stories and hardened into rules.

And the more I helped, the more the nihilism cracked. Every man who walked into the gym broken and walked out slightly less broken was a vote against the nothing-matters thesis. Every success story was evidence that effort compounds and meaning exists and the universe, whatever it is, responds to action. Newton figured this out centuries ago. Equal and opposite reaction. You put effort in, the universe pushes back. Every time.

Until one day I looked for the nihilism, reached for that familiar certainty that nothing means anything, and it wasn't there anymore.

He'd taken it with him. The man in the park. With his six words and his nervous walk and his courage.

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The thing that nearly stopped me making Momentum was this exact book. Who am I to write this? I'm twenty-seven. I don't have a PhD. I've never worked in mental health. That voice, that question, is the thing that kills more dreams than failure ever will. And I had to write it anyway.

Fear is an imagined future. It's your brain projecting a version of tomorrow where you get embarrassed, rejected, laughed at. And that projection isn't real.

What is real is this: when I say to myself "who am I to host free meetups?" the answer is: the person whose meetups stopped a man from killing himself. When I say "who am I to write about behaviour change?" the answer is: the person who sat across from hundreds of men in sales conversations, onboarding conversations, coaching conversations, private conversations with men I was literally talking off the edge. Men who'd given up on life. Men whose addictions got so bad they had no hope. Men who were heading to jail. These principles have been through the fire. They aren't perfect. But they helped me. And they helped a lot of other people.

So for the guys out there who are like me, the ones with the engineering brain, maybe a bit of the type A personality (type A being autism, ADHD, right?) — this might help. And if it doesn't, that's fine. But I'm not going to let my selfishness of being fearful get in the way of my ability to be useful to someone who needs it most.

I simply don't care if this offends someone. People used to say we were hurting the trees by hanging rings from them. People said I was too young to own a gym. People said all sorts. I would rather hang some rings from a tree and save someone's life than not hang the rings and they hang themselves. Along the way, some people will get offended. That's okay.

I'm writing this for sixteen-year-old Ollie. The kid who was struggling and needed a map. If it helps him, that's enough. And if it helps you too, amazing. And if it offends you, I'd offer the curiosity to sit with that. Why are you offended? This person isn't trying to offend you. There's probably a treasure buried in that reaction. My sister helped me see that. She went through her own mental health journey and she read this book about something called the Diamond Process. And it said: all triggers are treasures. If you're in good shape and someone calls you fat, you don't flinch. If you're in bad shape and you know it, it hits different. The word is the same. You give it the meaning. No one can make you feel anything. Everyone else is just making noise. You decide what the noise means.

That's a scary thought. But it's also the most freeing one I've ever had. Because it means you're in charge. You're the master of how you feel. And I'd much rather live in a world where everything is my fault, how I feel, how I respond, what I do next, than hand that power to everyone else.

Where I am right now. Twenty-seven. Below minimum wage. Same thing every day. I don't buy anything. I live cheap. I run hundred-mile weeks. I just try to be useful and smile at people and be a good person.

I gave up my wage from the gym. I was always known as the coach, the guy who could help people. Then I became the coach of coaches. And then I decided to just gift the whole thing back to the community, turn it into a CIC. And my whole day was mine. And I was alone. Everything got stripped away. And I had to realise: you never retire as a man. As soon as you retire, you die. You always give back. You're always useful. Because that's what men are built to do.

I've just formed a new company. Momentum Movement CIC. I have nothing in the bank. I've got no wage. I'm starting completely from scratch. Blank canvas, like an artist. But in reality, I've got years of sitting across from people and helping them figure out what's best for them. Years of calling friends when they weren't in the mood and helping them see it differently. Years of taking people from selfish to selfless. No work is wasted. You are the output. Not the money, not the business. You.

And I have nothing to sell you. I have a podcast. It's free. I might release some t-shirts. I might ask for donations. I might sell something in the future. But right now, nothing. And I want to make every penny public. I think too many charities aren't transparent enough. I want to show exactly where everything goes. Every donated pound. I want Momentum to be a model for what a CIC should actually be. A real community interest company.

I still see myself as a rusty pipe that God flows through. My natural self is that eighteen-year-old Ollie. Selfish, insecure, only thinking about me. And it takes effort, daily, to vote for the person who wants to be useful, to give back. If I stop, I slide back. But every time I do something in that direction, it gets a little easier. Identity comes from repeated being. Every action is a vote. You either get better or you get worse. There's no standing still.

I know there are men out there waiting for their version of that afternoon. Waiting for their rings over a tree. Waiting for someone to say, in a way they can hear: you're not alone, you're not broken, and there's a way through this.

If this book feels like nothing, if it feels like throwing some rings over a tree, it might give one man what he needs.

And that is enough.

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Chapter 3: The Map They Never Gave You

One hundred and twenty-five men kill themselves every week in the United Kingdom.

A hundred and twenty-five. Every week. That's roughly one every ninety minutes. By the time you finish reading this chapter, statistically, another man in this country will have died by suicide.

The two most common words found in men's suicide notes are "useless" and "worthless."

Useless and worthless. Men don't kill themselves because they feel too much. They kill themselves because they feel they have nothing to offer. Because the story in their head says: the world would be better without me in it. I contribute nothing. I matter to no one. I am a net negative.

That story is always wrong. But it doesn't feel wrong when you're inside it.

What keeps me up at night. We're entering an era where AI can write your emails, build your website, create your presentations, answer your customer's questions, and generate your marketing campaign faster and cheaper than you can. The jobs that gave men their identity, their sense of usefulness, their answer to "what do you do?" are evaporating. Not in fifty years. Now. This year. This month.

If the two most common words on a suicide note are "useless" and "worthless," and the thing that's coming makes men feel more useless and more worthless than they've ever felt before, then what we're facing isn't a mental health crisis. It's an avalanche.

Either AI kills everyone, Terminator-style, or we live in abundance. Either way, men won't be linked to work output anymore. The question "what do you do?" will stop being a question about employment and start being a question about identity.

And what will we be linked to?

Human connection. Physical capability. Usefulness to other people. Community.

The things you can't automate. The things a machine can't replicate. The things this whole book is about.

That's the life I already chose. I gave up the salary. I gave up the security. I built something around usefulness because I couldn't see another way to live that made sense.

Complete freedom, all-in on human things. I live it already. I'm not special. I saw the wave coming and chose to build on the only ground that won't wash away.

The men who survive what's coming won't be the ones with the best CV or the highest salary or the most LinkedIn endorsements. They'll be the ones who know who they are when the job title is stripped away. Who have a body that works, a community that knows their name, beliefs they've examined, behaviours they've chosen, and something they've built that matters to other people.

The operating system. It matters more now than it ever has.

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These aren't weak men dying. Someone reading this is already thinking "that wouldn't be me" or "those guys had other problems" or the classic: "they should have just talked to someone."

Talked to someone. And said what exactly?

Telling men to "talk about it" without giving them a language for what they're feeling is like handing someone a map with no labels. Navigate. Find your way. But every road is blank and you've been told that asking for directions makes you weak, so you drive in circles until you run out of fuel.

The instructions men were given are useless.

"Man up."

Man up and do what?

"Don't be sad."

Okay. What should I be instead? And how do I get there?

"Stop overthinking."

With what? Which lever do I pull? Where's the off switch?

These aren't instructions. They're commands with no manual. They're like telling someone drowning to "just swim" without ever teaching them the stroke.

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I spent years watching men drown in this exact way. Not in water. In their own heads. In CaliUnity, the gym Kiera and I built after the park meetups, I'd sit across from a new member during their consultation and ask them how they were doing. And almost every time, the answer was some version of fine.

Fine.

The most dangerous word in the English language when a man says it.

Fine means: I don't have the vocabulary for what I'm experiencing, and I don't have permission to find out, and even if I did have the vocabulary I wouldn't know what to do with it, so let's just talk about reps and sets and whether I should eat more protein.

I've done thousands of these conversations. Literally thousands. Sales calls, consultations, onboarding sessions, check-ins, catch-ups, the conversations that happen between sets when a man's guard is down and the sweat has loosened something inside him. And every time, underneath the training goals and the body composition targets and the "I just want to feel better" vagueness, there's an emotion they can't name.

They feel it. God, they feel it. It sits on their chest. It wakes them at 3am. It makes them snap at their kids and drink too much on Fridays and scroll until their eyes burn. They feel it every day of their lives.

But they can't name it.

And because they can't name it, they can't change it.

It's the same thing when someone comes to me and says "I'm lazy." I go: cool, that's interesting. You're lazy. What do you actually do that makes you lazy? And they start listing behaviours. I stay in bed until noon. I don't go to the gym. I eat takeaway every night. And you realise, "lazy" is just a bundle of behaviours wrapped in a label. Change two of the behaviours and you're suddenly not lazy anymore. But nobody told them that. They thought lazy was who they were. It's not. It's what they do. And what you do can change.

Here it is. The thing I've learned, the thing nobody told me, the thing this whole book is about: you can't fix what you can't define. And the definitions most men are working with are broken.

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Every destructive behaviour I've ever seen, in myself, in my clients, in the men I've coached, comes from the same place. A man felt something. He couldn't name it. He reached for the nearest thing that changed how he felt. Alcohol. Porn. Anger. Withdrawal. Overwork.

Every act of self-destruction is an act of control.

The man who drinks himself unconscious is controlling his inner state. The man who punches a wall is controlling the pressure. The man who works eighty hours a week is controlling the fear of what happens when he stops. And the man who reaches the end of every control mechanism he knows, the man who can't see another way to make the pain stop, he is still, at the core of it, trying to regulate an experience that has become unbearable.

I don't say that to glorify it. I say it because until you understand that all human behaviour is an attempt to regulate internal experience, you won't understand why people do what they do. And you definitely won't know how to help them stop.

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This book is the map they never gave you. Nobody gave me one either. So I drew one. And I'm handing it to you because I wish someone had handed it to me. It's rough. It's drawn in the dark. But it points somewhere better than where I was.

I built it through years of getting it wrong. Through being that eighteen-year-old who couldn't name a single thing he was feeling. Through coaching men who were breaking apart and learning, one conversation at a time, what actually works versus what just sounds good.

And if this map is even slightly useful to one person, if it stops one man from believing the only option left is the worst one, then it was worth it. Every word. Every page.

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Before we go further. The mental health conversation needs sorting out.

If you are in crisis right now, if you're reading this and you have a plan to hurt yourself, put this book down and call someone. In the UK: Samaritans, 116 123, twenty-four hours a day, every day. Text SHOUT to 85258. Or go to A&E. Right now. The book will be here when you get back.

Therapy works. Medication works. Professional support works. I believe in all of it. I'd be a fool not to.

But.

Most men who are struggling aren't in some clinical emergency. They don't need a hospital. Most men who are struggling are having completely normal emotional responses to completely normal situations, and they just don't know what to do about it.

They don't need a diagnosis. They need a dictionary.

They don't need medication. They need a behavioural lever.

They don't need to "talk to someone" in the vague, general, stigma-reducing sense. They need to know specifically what they're feeling and specifically what to do about it.

Because here's what happens when a man does try to talk about it. He goes to someone. Maybe he has a bad experience. Maybe the person doesn't know how to listen. Maybe he cries his eyes out and then gets told to man up. And in the same breath, society is telling him there's no such thing as toxic masculinity and also that he needs to be more vulnerable. You can't approach a woman because you're a creep. But also men are weak because they don't approach women. You need to express your feelings. But also stop being so emotional.

What the fuck is a man supposed to do?

The mixed signals are everywhere. And I think men have it worse than anyone realises. Every direction is a double-edged sword. So most men just do nothing. They shut down. They go quiet. They say "I'm fine." And we lose 125 of them a week.

And by the way, everyone keeps saying "feel your feelings." What does that actually mean? Sit down and notice where it comes up? Is it in my stomach? Is it in my chest? Cool, and then what? I think sometimes the more power you give to these things, the bigger they get. The more you talk about it, the bigger it becomes.

What actually worked for me is simpler than that. When anxiety shows up, I go: cool. What are you scared of? Like, literally what? Talk to me. Let's run through it. Finances, how are we doing? OK. What else? Oh that thing, cool, so what is it specifically? And the second you zoom in on it, like actually take out the binoculars and look at it properly, it just fades. It's the same thing in sales. When someone says "I need to think about it," you don't panic. You go: "Yeah cool, what are you thinking about? Is it the money? Is it the time?" And suddenly the fog clears. Every single time.

You treat your brain the same way. You don't judge yourself for feeling scared. You get curious. Huh, that's interesting. Why is that? And you go deeper. With curiosity.

The gap this book fills. Alongside therapy and medication. Before them. After them. Between appointments.

On the days when the therapist isn't available and the feelings are loud and you need something to do right now, tonight, this minute. The operating system is the thing that lives in the gaps between professional appointments. It's the 3am tool. The "I can't afford therapy but I need to do something" tool. The thing a man can reach for when everything else is closed and the only voice in the room is the one inside his head.

My sister has been bipolar for about fourteen years. I've watched her journey. Watched medication help her stabilise. Watched her try to come off it and struggle. Watched the cycle of dependency that can form when medication becomes the only tool in the kit. I believe in medication. I also believe it works best when it's not the only thing you're doing. When there's a framework alongside it. When there's community. When there are skills that give you agency alongside the chemistry that gives you stability.

It's like Ozempic. I've seen people use Ozempic, get in amazing shape, and then lose it all within six months and end up ten times worse than where they started. Because the drug did the work, but the person didn't change. But if Ozempic kickstarts you into actually changing your habits? Then it's brilliant. It's like melatonin for sleep. Yeah, it might help you tonight. But having coffee at 8pm probably isn't helping. Being on your phone until midnight probably isn't helping. Not having a sleep schedule probably isn't helping. The pill handles the symptom. The behaviour handles the cause. Both matter.

This operating system doesn't replace professional care. It gives you a way to manage yourself between sessions. A language for the things you're feeling so that when you do talk to a professional, you can say something more useful than "I'm not great."

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The men who are dying, the 125 per week, they're not a different species from you. They're dads. Brothers. Mates. Colleagues. The bloke who serves your coffee every morning. The man who sat next to you on the train.

They looked fine. They said fine. And then one day they weren't.

The gap between "fine" and "dead" is not as wide as you think. And the bridge across it is not as complicated as the mental health industry sometimes makes it seem. The bridge is: a man who can read his own signals, match them to the right behaviour, and take one action.

One action. That's often the difference.

Create one option. Make one decision. Take one step.

The operating system is the thing that makes that one action possible. Because without it, the man doesn't know which action to take. He's standing at a crossroads with no signs. And he picks the worst road because it's the only one he recognises. The devil you know.

Give him signs. Give him a map. Give him the language.

That's what this is.

Because I know what it feels like to have no map. To be standing in the dark with no language for what you're feeling and no instructions for what to do about it.

And I know what happened when someone finally handed me a direction.

It was a gym. A woman with two-kilogram dumbbells. A man in a park. A framework that assembled itself on a run. And thousands of conversations that taught me, one mistake at a time, how people actually work.

This book is the assembled version of all of that. It's rough. It's incomplete. It's definitely not the final word on anything. But it's useful. And useful is enough. Perfect in its imperfection.

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PART TWO: THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Before We Start

Upfront. I was not smart enough to figure any of this out on my own.

What you're about to read is the result of about ten years of obsessing over behaviour, identity, and the definition of words. Hundreds of books. Sales books, psychology books, philosophy books, neuroscience books. Alex Hormozi. Jordan Belfort. Robert Cialdini's *Influence*. James Clear's *Atomic Habits*. Daniel Kahneman. The Stoics. Recovery literature. CBT textbooks. Anything I could get my hands on.

This is my combination of their work. My interpretation. I'm adding my book to their shelf, and I have to give credit where it's due. At any point where I've directly taken something from someone, I'll say so. For example, "sadness is a lack of options," I first heard Alex Hormozi say that on a podcast and I loved it so much I kept it. "Anxiety is too many options, you need to choose." Same thing. Those are his words. I'm quoting them because they're better than anything I could come up with.

Some of what's in here might feel world-changing to you. And your first reaction might be resistance. That's fine. That's normal. Your barrier might go up. All I ask is this: be open.

If you read a book for the sake of reading a book, you'll get nothing from it. If you read it with a question in mind, genuinely curious, genuinely asking "could this be true?", you'll get everything. The best way to learn something is to teach it, because when you know you have to explain it to someone else, you actually pay attention.

So when you read a definition, don't go "no, that's wrong." That's just your brain being lazy. Literally. Saying "no" is the shortest shortcut your brain has. It avoids having to actually think about something. Instead, try "huh." Try "when was the first time I felt that?" Try sitting with it for thirty seconds before you decide.

And if you still disagree? Email me. hello@mo-men-tum.com. I will read it. I will probably reply. And if you're right, I'll change the book. This isn't finished. It's a living thing. I want it to become a manual for men, built by men. I don't care about being right. I care about get-

ting closer to truth. None of this is 100% true for everyone. It was true for me. It helped the men I've sat across from. But your experience might be different, and I want to hear about it.

One more thing. Every emotion in this section comes with an action. Something you can do right now when you feel that thing. Because the problem most men have isn't that they don't feel. They feel everything. The problem is: what the fuck do I do about it?

It's like a tumble dryer. When the feelings stay inside you, spinning around and around, they get worse. Hotter. Louder. The selfish loop. Take that energy and put it into something, an action, a conversation, a person, and the tumble dryer stops. Problem shared, problem halved. This map tells you where to put the energy.

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Chapter 4: Emotions Are Signals

This might sound obvious once you hear it. But nobody in my life ever said it to me.

Your emotions are not your enemies.

They're information. Your body telling you what's going on and what to do about it.

Every emotion is energy. Real energy, moving through your body, trying to get you to do something.

I think most people get this backwards. What came first, the thing or the feeling? Most of us assume the feeling arrives independently, like weather. But I think it's the other way round. The thing happens first. The situation, the event, the circumstance. And then the body turns that thing into a feeling. The feeling is the body's way of getting you to do something about the thing. It's a signal. A specific instruction.

Sadness is energy that says: create an option. Anxiety is energy that says: make a decision. Fear is energy that says: act now. Anger is energy that says: enforce a boundary.

Each one is trying to get you to do something specific. And when you do the right thing, the emotion goes away.

People sometimes think I'm a psychopath. Or autistic. Or just wired differently. Because when something bad happens, I don't spiral. I don't rage. I get quiet for a second, and then I move.

They look at me like there's something missing. Like I should be more upset.

I feel the emotion clearly. I just read it now. My reaction to a wave of stress or anger or sadness isn't "oh God, what's wrong with me." It's "oh, thank you. Thank you, body, for the signal. I didn't even realise I was out of balance."

The body sent a signal. I received it. That's the whole thing.

Your emotions are a gift. A gift.

Think about it. Stress and burnout are your body saying "mate, you've been going too hard in the wrong direction and if I don't make you feel terrible right now, you'll push until something actually breaks." Without that signal, you'd drive yourself into the ground and never know why. The discomfort is the thing that forces the change. It's the body's last line of defence before real damage.

If everything felt good all the time, you'd never change anything. You'd stay in the wrong relationship. You'd keep running the failing business. You'd keep eating the food that's slowly killing you. Because why would you change? It feels fine.

Pleasure and pain. That's it. Those are the only two levers. Every decision you've ever made was moving toward one or away from the other. The people who learn to read their pain as information instead of punishment are the ones who actually change.

But we were never taught this.

We were taught that emotions are just feelings. Weather that passes through. So men, the ones I grew up with, the ones I coach, treat their emotions like background noise. Wait for it to pass. Suppress it. Drink, scroll, train, work. Anything to avoid sitting with it long enough to ask: what is this actually telling me?

And when the emotion doesn't go away, because it can't without the right behaviour, it stacks. Today's on top of yesterday's on top of last week's. The signal gets louder. The energy gets desperate. And eventually the man snaps. Or shuts down. Or does something destructive to let off the pressure because he never learned to read the warning light.

The loop is simple. Emotion arrives. You respond with the right behaviour. The emotion resolves. Done.

But when you avoid the behaviour, or pick the wrong one, or don't understand what the emotion wants, the loop stays open. The energy has nowhere to go. It warps into something you can't recognise anymore. Depression or rage or numbness or all three at once.

And then you end up in my gym, sitting across from me, saying you're fine.

The main ones. From my life.

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Sadness hit me hardest at eighteen. I didn't cry. Crying would've been a relief. Sadness at eighteen felt like concrete. Someone had poured it into my chest and it had set overnight and now I had to carry it everywhere.

I'd wake up and the first thought wasn't about breakfast or school or anything useful. The first thought was: what's the point? And that thought was so heavy and so immediate that getting out of bed felt like bench pressing a weight I hadn't trained for.

I didn't understand it. I called it depression. My parents probably called it worry. Theirs, not mine. They could see something was wrong and they didn't know how to fix it, so they did the only thing they knew how: they kept showing up. The internet called it a chemical imbalance. But years later, looking back with everything I've learned, I can see exactly what it was.

I had no options.

Sadness is your mind scanning your life and finding no way forward. Nothing you can do. Nowhere to go. Sadness is the feeling of being trapped.

And at eighteen, I was trapped. Living at home. No job. No skills. No direction. No money. Parents going through the hardest stretch of their lives but still there, still trying. A body I hated. Addictions that controlled me. When I ran the mental calculation, "What can I do to change this?" the answer, every time, was nothing. I couldn't see a single lever I could pull.

The behaviour that resolves sadness is the simplest one in this book, and also the hardest: create one option. One. That's it. Go and research options. Go and create them. Go and find them. Go and see what you can figure out. Go and find one single thing you can do. Because that's what this energy is for. It's telling you to move.

For me, it was the gym. Going to the gym was one thing I could do. One act of agency in a life that felt entirely passive.

Sadness doesn't need a grand solution. It needs evidence that a solution exists. Even a shit one.

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Anxiety came later. Mid-twenties. Building the business. CaliUnity growing. Coaching clients. Learning to sell. Learning to market. Learning to manage people. And every new skill opened three new doors and each door led to ten new problems and suddenly I had so many things pulling at me that I couldn't sleep.

Most men misidentify this one. They think anxiety is stress. Overwork. Caring too much.

Anxiety is too many options.

Your brain is running parallel simulations of every possible path. Should I focus on marketing or product? Should I reply to this client or that one? Should I raise prices or cut costs? Each decision is a fork, and your brain won't let you walk past a fork without glancing down both paths, and now you've got forty-seven paths in your peripheral vision and you can't commit to any of them because what if you pick wrong?

Anxiety. Computational overload. Your internal processor has too many tabs open and it's overheating.

The fix is simple. Decide. Pick one. Close the other tabs. The decision won't be perfect. It doesn't need to be. Anxiety can't coexist with commitment. The moment you commit, the simulations stop. The anxiety drops.

Fun fact. The word "priorities" didn't exist until about a hundred years ago. There was only "priority." Singular. The thing that comes prior. The one thing you put before everything else. We invented the plural because we wanted to pretend we could have five number-one things at once. You can't.

There's a book called *The One Thing* by Gary Keller that asks: what's the one thing you can do that makes everything else easier or irrelevant? That question changed how I think about everything.

I had seven things competing for my attention. I cut them to three. The anxiety dropped within hours. Hours.

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Fear is the one I'm most grateful for understanding.

The Stoics got there first. Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus. Blokes who lived two thousand years ago and figured out something that most modern self-help hasn't caught up with.

We suffer more in imagination than in reality.

Fear is your brain imagining something bad that hasn't happened yet and reacting to the imagination as if it's real.

The exam isn't killing you. Your simulation of failing the exam is killing you. The sales call isn't the problem. Your simulation of being rejected on the sales call is the problem.

I read Seneca at twenty-one. In a park in Bath, on my phone, between sets. A YouTube algorithm sent me a video about Stoicism and I followed the rabbit hole. And there was this line, I'm paraphrasing, but it said something like: the man who anticipates every misfortune suffers every misfortune he anticipates, while the man who waits for reality to arrive often finds it manageable.

That hit.

The fix: act now. Right now. Fear is a future-tense emotion. It lives in the gap between now and later. The moment you act, the gap closes. You're in the present. And what you find there is almost always less scary than what you imagined.

I've made thousands of cold calls. Thousands. The first second of every one felt like stepping off a cliff. By the third second, it was just a conversation. Every time.

One of my biggest breakthroughs with fear came from Tim Ferriss. He calls it fear setting. You literally play out the worst case. All the way. Don't stop halfway. Play it to the end. What's the actual worst thing that happens?

I know what the worst case looks like because I've lived it.

Me and Kiera. Sleeping on the gym floor. Gym mats in the spare cupboard at the side of the building. Cold. Wet. Twenty trains every night going over our heads. I can still tell you the times they used to come. We had to get there for 10pm to miss the cleaner and get up at 4am to miss the morning class. We were completely broke. Everything was failing around us. Nobody believed in us.

And I looked at her every night and said: "We win because we're willing to go through this."

Seneca talks about this. Practising poverty. Doing the thing you're most afraid of. And then when you're in it, you think: was this really what I was so scared of? I'm alive. It's fine.

Play it out all the way. Your brain is scared? OK. Play it out. What happens? Usually it comes back to: I'll die, or I'll be left alone. And when you realise we're all going to die anyway, and being alone is temporary if you choose to change it, the fear loses its teeth.

We had hard conversations at the gym recently. We had to raise prices. The choice was simple: have a hard conversation with our members now, or have a harder conversation with our landlord later. Same with staff changes. Have the difficult talk today, or have the impossible one in three months. Not choosing is still a choice. The universe will decide for you if you don't.

I'd rather be the person in the arena making the call than the person on the sidelines blaming everyone else.

And if you really want to kill fear, try this. Get rid of your mattress for a week. Sleep on the floor. Live off baked beans and toast. Wear the same clothes every day. And after a week you'll realise: you're still alive. You're fine. And the things that actually matter, your relationships, the sun in the morning, that first coffee, those were always there. You just couldn't see them under all the stuff you thought you needed.

Your health. Your family. Your friendships. Those are the things that actually matter. And you only figure that out once you've stripped everything else away.

I'll be honest about something, though. Fear as a driver fades. When I started, everything was fuelled by fear. Proving people wrong. Anger. Hatred. Those pushed me forward. But now? I don't really think about anyone else in terms of proving them wrong. Because the only revenge is success, and success grows so big that the people who doubted you become irrelevant. They shrink into your shadow. The only way they can win is if you think about them. So stop thinking about them.

Now the only thing that pulls me is usefulness. Being useful to people. And that's a quieter fuel. Harder to access on the bad days. But it doesn't burn out the way anger does.

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The one that nearly killed me was different.

Depression. The kind that turns the lights off inside you.

For years I thought depression was sadness that had gotten too heavy. Wrong. The way I experienced it, depression came from one thing.

Hiding.

I wasn't allowing myself to be me.

At eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I was performing a version of myself that I thought other people wanted. The funny one. Easy-going. Didn't take things too seriously. Didn't have opinions on anything that mattered, because opinions meant you could be wrong, and being wrong meant people could hurt you.

So I hid. Behind humour. Behind nihilism. Behind a screen. Behind a body so large that nobody could see the person inside it.

Depression is what happens when you suppress yourself for long enough. The gap between who you are and who you're pretending to be gets so wide that your brain can't hold it together anymore. It shuts down. You're not broken. You're just exhausted from the performance.

The fix for depression isn't "be yourself." God, I hate that phrase. It's simpler than that. Say one real thing. Out loud. To another person. One honest sentence. That's it.

I remember the first time I said something real to someone. In a gym, to a coach I barely knew. I said: "I don't actually know what I'm doing with my life and I think about that every day." He looked at me and said: "Yeah, mate. Same." And we both kind of laughed. And the relief was so immediate and so physical, I could feel it in my shoulders, that I understood something in my body before my mind caught up.

Hiding takes energy. Truth gives it back.

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It's very hard to be depressed when you're thinking about other people.

Careful here. I'm not saying suicidal people are selfish. From my own experience, and from years of watching this pattern in others, all suffering tends to orbit the word "I."

I'm in pain. I can't cope. I'm worthless. I'm stuck. My life. My problems. My failure. My shame.

When you're drowning, the world shrinks to a single person: you. The water fills your vision. The noise fills your ears. And the only voice you can hear is the one inside your head, and that voice is usually not kind.

But the moment the focus shifts outward, something changes. A small crack in the wall of self-obsession that lets in a sliver of light from somewhere else. Someone else's problem. Someone else's need. Someone else's pain that, for a moment, pulls you out of your own.

It happened to me in the park. I stopped thinking about my own misery and started thinking about other people's bodies. How to help this woman do a pull-up. How to modify this exercise for that bloke's dodgy knee. How to welcome the nervous guy who'd just walked in. Small acts of usefulness that, accumulated over months, rewired my attention from inward to outward.

Thinking about other people is the most reliable antidote to despair I've ever found. It doesn't erase the pain. But it puts it in context. Your suffering is real. And other people are suffering too. And you might be able to help one of them. And that, being useful to someone, is proof that you matter.

And mattering is the opposite of useless and worthless.

There's a book called *The Go-Giver* by Bob Burg that puts it simply: the amount you make is directly proportional to the depth and width of people you help. How many people, and how deeply you help them. People might not like hearing this, but investment bankers are very useful to a lot of people. That's why they earn what they earn. The wealth you create follows the value you create. Be useful first. Do it for long enough. The rest follows.

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I found all of these in my own mess first. Looking back and asking: what was actually happening there?

But they got sharper through coaching. Sitting across from people and watching the same patterns repeat.

A man came to me anxious about his career. We talked for an hour. Underneath it all, he had three job offers and couldn't pick. The anxiety wasn't about the jobs. It was about the choice. We picked one. The anxiety was gone before he left the room.

A woman who told me she was depressed. We talked. I asked: "What part of yourself are you not showing anyone?" Long silence. Then: "I hate my marriage and I've never said that out loud before." And something in her face changed. Relief. The relief of not pretending anymore.

A teenager terrified of performing at a calisthenics event. I asked what exactly he was scared of. He described falling from the bar, the crowd watching, the embarrassment. I said: "Has that ever happened?" No. "Have you practised the routine?" Fifty times. "So you're scared of something that's never happened and you've trained fifty times to stop." He laughed. We did the routine. He nailed it.

Every time, the pattern held. Name the emotion correctly. Match it to the right behaviour. Watch the loop close.

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There's one more emotion I haven't covered yet in this chapter, and it ties all the others together.

Loneliness.

Loneliness is different from the others. It's more like a volume knob. It makes every other emotion harder to deal with.

When you're lonely, sadness hits harder because there's no one to figure things out with. Anxiety gets worse because there's no one to help you decide. Fear grows because you're facing it alone. Anger turns inward because there's nobody to tell.

Loneliness is the multiplier. It takes every emotional signal and turns the volume way up. The same setback that a connected man processes in an afternoon, a lonely man carries for weeks.

And men are lonelier than they've ever been. The data is clear. Male friendships have declined consistently for decades. The average man in his thirties has fewer close friends than at any point in recorded history. Social media creates the illusion of connection while providing none of its benefits. And the pandemic accelerated the trend by years.

The fix is the same as sadness, applied to people: create one connection. One conversation with one person where you say one real thing. That's it.

Belonging is the second B. Without it, everything else is harder.

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People will say I'm oversimplifying. They're probably right. A real neuroscientist would read these definitions and find seventeen things I've gotten wrong.

But the Tube map bears almost no relationship to the actual geography of London. The distances are wrong. The directions are wrong. And it's one of the most useful documents ever created. Because it tells you which train to get on.

The man drowning at 3am doesn't need a textbook. He needs a Tube map. You're here. The exit is there. Get on this train.

I'd rather give someone a simple tool they actually use than a perfect theory that sits on a shelf. The definitions will evolve. They'll get better. But right now, today, they work well enough to close the loop. And "well enough to save lives" is a pretty high bar for something imperfect.

Use them. Test them. If they don't fit, change them. Email me and tell me why. But start with them. Because starting with something beats starting with nothing. And nothing is what most men have right now.

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This isn't magic. It's engineering. And like all engineering, it works regardless of who you are, how you feel about it, or whether you believe in it.

You don't need to believe in gravity for it to hold you to the floor.

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Chapter 5: The Behavioural Dictionary

This chapter is dead simple.

When you start feeling something, it gives you something you can do straight away. Fear? Play it out, write about it, talk about it. Anxiety? Get an A4 piece of paper and write out your options, then decide. Sadness? Create one option. Anger? Enforce a boundary.

Every emotion has an action. The action puts the energy somewhere useful.

A thing that really helps me: post-it notes. A4 paper. Kiera always gets annoyed at how much paper I go through, but getting things out of your head and in front of you changes everything. Some people need to see it. Some people need to talk about it. Some people need to write it. Whatever works. Just get it out.

Dog-ear this chapter. Bend the spine. Come back to it at 3am when your head is loud and you can't figure out what's going on inside you.

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THE INSTINCTS

These are your alarm system. They fire fast and they fire loud. The problem is your brain was built on the savannah. It doesn't know the difference between a lion and a difficult email. So you have to learn to read the alarm instead of just reacting to it.

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FEAR

Definition: Your brain imagining something bad that hasn't happened yet and reacting as if it's real.

What it looks like: Avoidance. Procrastination. Overthinking that feels productive but produces nothing. The thing on your to-do list that's been sitting there for weeks while you do seventeen easier things around it.

Behavioural lever: Do it. Right now. Jocko Willink says it best: just do. Immediately. Find something you can do and do it. Fear collapses the moment you step into reality, because reality is almost always less scary than the simulation.

Procrastination is fear in disguise. And if you're really struggling with a task, it's probably because you haven't broken it down enough.

My mum makes all the CaliUnity t-shirts. When I first gave her the job, I wrote her a big to-do list. Came back after a week. Nothing done. I thought, "Here she is being lazy." Then I went round to the house and she said, "Ollie, I don't know how to turn the laptop on." So I broke it down: press this button on the laptop. This is the password. Move the mouse to the bottom left. Click. Type "Cricut." Click on Cricut. This is the email and password. That cured her procrastination instantly. She knew exactly what to do and she did it.

Maybe your procrastination isn't laziness. Maybe you just need to break the task down until the first step is so small and effortless that you can't not do it. Start there. The momentum carries you after that.

Insight: The fastest way to kill procrastination is to make the first step embarrassingly easy.

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STRESS

Definition: Two forces pulling you in opposite directions. Your actions pointing one way while your values point another.

What it looks like: Tension in your shoulders. Short temper. The feeling that you're being pulled apart. Working harder and harder but going backwards.

Behavioural lever: Align or choose. There's always a trade-off. When you choose something, you're sacrificing something else. The stress comes from pretending you can avoid the sacrifice.

When we launched our first gym, we had to find thirty grand in two days. That was stressful. But the bigger stress was this: Kiera had two dreams. She wanted a gym. She also wanted to travel the world. Those two things pulled her apart. I wanted the gym too, but I also wanted to make her dreams come true. So we chose both.

We booked a flight to Canada for May. We launched the gym in October. Six months to make it work and make it run itself. We burnt the boats. We committed. And we made twenty-eight grand in two days, paid the bill, and the stress dropped.

But choosing both meant: no going out. No drinking. Saving every penny. Sleeping on the gym floor. No eating out. Working eighty-hour weeks. That was the trade-off. I could have chosen one thing and worked forty hours. I chose two and worked eighty. There are always trade-offs. You just have to choose.

Insight: Stress comes from trying to hold two things at once. Pick one. Or accept the cost of both.

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ANXIETY

Definition: Too many options. Too many open loops. Too many unmade decisions running at once.

What it looks like: Background hum. Can't sit still. Can't focus. Starting things without finishing them. Waking up at 4am with a head full of stuff you haven't done.

Behavioural lever: Decide. Pick one. Close the other tabs.

Right now, writing this book, I have three things going: qualifying personal trainers through the Academy, building Cali Online, and supporting Kiera with the gym. I still get overwhelmed. I still get that anxiety hum. Whenever it shows up, I whip out an A4 piece of paper and write out everything I need to do. Then I circle the one thing that's going to move the needle the most. I do that. Then I come back to everything else. The anxiety always goes.

People say they're multi-taskers. In reality they're probably not working on the one big thing that's actually going to make a difference.

Anxiety and fear are different, by the way. Fear is about one specific thing. Anxiety is about everything at once. The man who can't sleep because of tomorrow's conversation has fear. The man who can't sleep because forty-seven things are competing for his attention has anxiety. Different problem, different fix. If you treat anxiety like fear, it doesn't work, and you'll think the tools are broken when actually you just got the diagnosis wrong.

Insight: Anxiety isn't caring too much. It's deciding too little.

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SADNESS

Definition: No options. Your mind scanning your life and finding no way forward.

What it looks like: Flatness. Heaviness. The world losing its colour. Not wanting to get out of bed, not because you're tired but because there's nothing worth getting up for. I felt this most mornings at eighteen. What's the point?

I think sadness comes down to a lack of faith. Faith is the belief that the future will get better. When that belief goes, everything goes grey.

Behavioural lever: Create one option. One door. Apply for one job. Send one message. Go for one walk. Not a solution. Just proof that a solution could exist.

Insight: Sadness lifts when you find a door. Even one you don't walk through yet.

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ANGER

Definition: A boundary being violated. Something you value is being threatened.

What it looks like: Heat. Volume. The urge to destroy something or dominate someone. When suppressed: cold resentment, passive aggression, withdrawal.

I was a very angry kid. And I want to say something about that, because every emotion in this dictionary gets treated like it's a bad thing. It's not. Is anger bad if it stops a terrorist? Is fear bad if it stops you walking into traffic? Your body is trying to protect you. Your brain loves you and is looking out for you.

Anger is raw. Loud. It moves you before you've decided to move. The problem isn't the anger. It's that sometimes the alarm fires when there's no real threat. Your brain can't always tell the difference between a genuine boundary violation and someone cutting you off in traffic.

Behavioural lever: Enforce the boundary. Name what happened. State what you need. "This isn't OK. Here's what needs to change." Anger that gets communicated clearly resolves. Anger that gets suppressed turns into resentment. Anger that gets unleashed without aim causes damage.

Insight: Anger is the emotion of self-respect. The problem is never the anger. It's where you aim it.

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THE MOTIVATIONS

These are the emotions that pull you forward. They don't need fixing. They need feeding.

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DESIRE

Definition: The experience of wanting something you don't yet have. The pull toward a future state.

What it looks like: Restlessness with a direction. Can't stop thinking about the thing. Planning, researching, imagining.

Behavioural lever: Take the first step. One concrete action. Desire that stays in your head becomes fantasy. Desire that touches reality becomes ambition.

Insight: Desire without action is daydreaming. Desire with action is the engine of every achievement in human history.

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EXCITEMENT

Definition: High-energy anticipation. The body preparing for something it perceives as both challenging and rewarding.

What it looks like: Can't sit still, but in a good way. Talking fast. Eyes wide. Butterflies that don't feel like fear.

Behavioural lever: Channel it. Excitement is unstructured energy. Point it somewhere. Start the project, make the call, begin the workout. Unchannelled, it burns out as anxiety.

Insight: Excitement and anxiety are the same chemical cocktail. The only difference is whether you trust yourself to handle what's coming.

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HOPE

Definition: The belief that a positive future is possible, even if you can't yet see the path to it.

What it looks like: A lightness in the chest. The first crack in despair. The willingness to try one more time.

Behavioural lever: Protect it. Hope is fragile. It needs small, repeated evidence that the future might be worth reaching. One good day. One small win. One person who sees you.

Insight: Hope is not naivety. Hope is the minimum belief required to take the next step.

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FAITH

Definition: Trust in a process you can't fully see. Commitment to an outcome that isn't yet visible but that evidence suggests is possible.

What it looks like: Showing up when you can't see results. Training for months without visible change. Building through the silent period where nothing grows.

Faith. The word gets messy. Let me be specific.

The fact that you're reading this book means you believe, somewhere, that things can get better. That belief, however faint, however buried under cynicism and pain and exhaustion, is faith. Everyone has it. Even atheists. Even nihilists. The man who says he doesn't believe in anything has enough belief to eat breakfast and walk outside and draw another breath.

You're still here. The faith is still there. Buried somewhere, keeping the engine running.

And you can't connect the dots looking forwards. You can only connect them looking backwards. So the only thing you can do is follow your curiosity, your gut, whatever it is, with the faith that the dots will eventually line up.

When I mention God in this book, and I will a few times, I mean this: God is just the word we put on things we don't understand. The force that makes flowers grow and wounds heal and broken people rebuild. The thing that connects the dots in ways you can't see until you look backwards. Call it God, call it the universe, call it dumb luck, call it whatever makes it real for you. The label doesn't matter. The faith does.

Behavioural lever: Continue. Faith is a behaviour, not a feeling. You don't feel faithful and then persist. You persist and the faith follows. The action precedes the emotion.

Insight: Faith is what you have when evidence hasn't arrived yet but effort has already been spent.

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CURIOSITY

Definition: Encountering something you don't understand and feeling pulled toward it instead of away from it.

What it looks like: Questions. The urge to understand. Reading, asking, testing, experimenting.

Behavioural lever: Follow it. Curiosity is your brain's way of saying "this matters." The best things I've ever built started because something made me curious and I chased it. Every framework in this book started with a question I couldn't let go of.

Insight: Curiosity is the emotion that comes before mastery. Every expert started by being curious about one specific thing.

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THE BLOCKS

These are the emotions that stop you. They're signals you haven't processed yet. They accumulate when loops stay open. They dissolve when you do the work.

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GUILT

Definition: You did something and you know it was below your standard.

What it looks like: Heaviness. Avoiding the person. Lying awake replaying the moment.

Behavioural lever: Fix it. Face it. Move forward. Apologise if you owe one. Change the behaviour if it was wrong. It was attempt number one. You're not perfect. None of us are. As long as you take the lesson and try to make sure it never happens again, that's the biggest gift you can give to the person or the thing you feel guilty about. Living in guilt is just mental masturbation. Look at the thing. Ask yourself how you make sure it never happens again. Then move.

Insight: Guilt says "I did something bad." Shame says "I am bad." One drives repair. The other drives hiding.

• • •

SHAME

Definition: The belief that something is deeply wrong with you. That you are a bad thing.

What it looks like: Withdrawal. Silence. Can't make eye contact. The conviction that if people really knew you, they'd leave.

Shame only exists in the dark.

Behavioural lever: Share one truth with one person. Shame dies when it's spoken. Every time. It can't survive being seen. Say "this is who I actually am" out loud. To a person who doesn't leave.

Insight: Shame tells you that you're the only one. You're never the only one.

• • •

REGRET

Definition: Wishing you'd chosen differently. Trapped looking backwards at a moment you can't change.

What it looks like: Replaying scenarios. "If only I had..." Torturing yourself with the alternative version.

Behavioural lever: Same as guilt. Fix it. Face it. Move forward. It was attempt number one. Extract the lesson, commit to the correction, and let the moment go. Living in regret is just another form of mental masturbation. It feels like you're doing something productive but nothing is actually changing.

Insight: Regret has one job: teach you what to do differently. After that, show it the door.

• • •

RESENTMENT

Definition: Anger that was never expressed. A boundary that was violated but never enforced.

What it looks like: Bitterness. Keeping score. Passive aggression. Thinking about someone else's behaviour more than your own.

There's a saying: resentment is a poison you drink expecting the other person to die. Some people don't want to be helped. That's OK. Thank them for the lesson about yourself and move on. You don't have to go around saving everyone.

Behavioural lever: Say what you need to say, or accept that the person can't give you what you want and let it go.

Insight: Resentment punishes you while the other person goes about their day.

• • •

APATHY

Definition: The shutdown state. The absence of motivation, interest, or desire. Dead-battery quiet.

What it looks like: Nothing matters. Can't be bothered. Scrolling without registering. Eating without tasting. Going through motions that feel like someone else's routine.

Behavioural lever: Do one small thing. Tiny. Apathy doesn't respond to grand plans. It responds to tiny actions. Making the bed. Going for a ten-minute walk. Texting one person. Micro-actions generate micro-feedback, and micro-feedback is enough to restart the engine.

Insight: Apathy is not the absence of emotion. It's emotion's fuse blowing after sustained overload.

• • •

BURNOUT

Definition: Effort no longer producing reward. The thing that used to feel good now feels empty.

What it looks like: Exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix. Cynicism about work you used to love. Going through the motions.

I got burnt out doing consultations for the gym. One of my best traits, and one of my worst, is that I believe in people more than they believe in themselves. I knew my story. I knew I'd completely transformed. I knew we had the perfect system. So every time someone didn't sign up, I saw it as my fault. I need to get better. I need to learn more. That drive is what led me to write this book, which is amazing. But it burnt me out in the process.

I stopped believing in the product, even though we were the number one rated gym in the area. Because all I was seeing was rejection. The people who signed up got shipped off to the coaching team and changed their lives, but I never saw that. I wasn't on the gym floor anymore. I wasn't seeing the reviews. I wasn't coaching. All I saw was the "no" and never the transformation that came after the "yes."

I had to hire a whole sales team and step away. The lesson: make sure you have a feedback loop showing you that what you're doing is working. Otherwise you'll burn out wondering why you bother.

Behavioural lever: Change the reward. Burnout is a reward problem. The thing has stopped giving you anything back. You need novelty, rest, or a different way of seeing the impact.

Insight: Burnout is what happens when a machine runs without maintenance. Engineer the feedback loop.

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THE STATES OF MASTERY

These are the emotions you build toward. They're not endpoints. They're ongoing practices.

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CONFIDENCE

Definition: A receipt list. Think of it as a statistical metric. You look behind you, see all the things you've done, and think: yeah, if I project that forward, I can probably do that thing too.

Confidence without competence is delusion. Confidence with competence is earned. The word itself, "confide," means to trust. Confidence is trusting yourself because you have evidence that you're trustworthy.

What it looks like: Calm. Speaking without hedging. Moving without hesitation. Trust in your own ability based on receipts.

Behavioural lever: Make a promise to yourself. Keep it. Repeat. The score goes up every time you do what you said you'd do. It drops every time you don't.

Insight: Confidence isn't a personality trait. It's a stack of receipts.

• • •

META-CONFIDENCE

Definition: The confidence that you can build confidence. The belief that even if you lose everything, you know the formula to rebuild.

What it looks like: Resilience. The man who fails and starts again without spiralling.

Behavioural lever: Reflect on your rebuild history. Remember every time you started with nothing and created something.

Insight: The man who's been broken and rebuilt is more dangerous than the man who's never been tested.

• • •

COURAGE / BRAVERY

Definition: Action in the presence of fear. The fear is still there. You move anyway.

Bravery isn't something you have and then act on. You do the thing, and then you're noted as brave. The doing comes first. The label comes after.

What it looks like: Doing the thing with shaking hands. Having the conversation with a trembling voice.

Behavioural lever: Start before you're ready. Courage atrophies without use.

Insight: You're never brave before the moment. You become brave by moving through it.

• • •

DISCIPLINE

Definition: Doing what you said you'd do. Especially when you don't want to.

I actually reject a lot of the willpower and discipline talk. I just design my environment so I can't fail.

I get up at 4am every day. Have done for years. How? I leave my alarm downstairs and sleep upstairs. By the time I've walked down and turned it off, I'm up. I have a set bedtime alarm too. Not heroic. Engineering.

People say "I really want to get into running." Cool. Book the run club and tell your mate you're going tomorrow. "I want to get fit." OK, go online right now, buy ten sessions with a personal trainer, and pay the money. Otherwise you're just chatting shit. Making noise to make yourself feel better.

What it looks like: The alarm goes off at 4am. You get up. You don't want to. But you committed.

Behavioural lever: Remove the decision. Pre-commit. Book it. Pay for it. Tell someone. Make it harder to not do it than to do it.

Insight: Discipline isn't punishment. It's the thing that sets you free.

• • •

PATIENCE

Definition: Sustaining effort without immediate reward. Waiting for compound returns.

What it looks like: Training for months without visible change. Posting content into the void. Trusting the reps.

Alex Hormozi says something I love: patience is what you do in the meantime. If you're reading this book right now, you're being patient while your investments grow. You're not pulling the money out early. You're compounding. And that's amazing.

(By the way, credit where it's due. Hormozi is where I first heard "sadness is a lack of options" and "anxiety is too many options." Those are his. I kept them because they're better than anything I could come up with.)

Behavioural lever: Track the process. Measure inputs. Did you show up? Did you do the work? Then you're winning, even if the scoreboard hasn't updated yet.

Insight: Patience isn't passive. You're not sitting still. You're compounding.

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GRATITUDE

Definition: Recognising the value of what you already have.

What it looks like: Pausing. Noticing. The cold water hitting your face in the morning. The first sip of coffee. A friend who checked in. A body that works.

A hack that works every time. Imagine your eighty-five-year-old self waking up right now, in this moment. Your knees don't hurt. Your back works. Kiera's next to you. No flying cars or whatever. Just this. Ordinary Tuesday morning. And your eighty-five-year-old self is crying because it's so beautiful and he'd give anything to be here again.

You instantly feel grateful.

It's the classic thing. You only know you love her when you let her go. So imagine letting everything go, and then realising you still have it. Memento mori. Meditate on your mortality. Compare everything to nothing and suddenly everything is enough.

Behavioural lever: Name three things. Every morning. Specific. "I'm grateful that my knee didn't hurt on yesterday's run." Specificity makes gratitude real. "I'm grateful for my health" is a platitude. It doesn't work.

Insight: Gratitude and misery can't occupy the same moment. Pick one.

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HUMILITY

Definition: Knowing what you're good at. Knowing what you're bad at. That's it.

The word comes from "humus," from the earth. Feet on the ground, head in the sky. The only thing you really know is that you know nothing. And if you ever think you're done learning, you are done. Full stop.

What it looks like: Asking questions when you could pretend to know. Admitting you were wrong without falling apart.

Behavioural lever: Find rooms where you're the dumbest person there. Stay curious. The moment you stop learning is the moment you start dying.

Insight: Ego and growth can't coexist. One kills the other.

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MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Definition: The capacity to sustain effort and quality of decision-making under discomfort, fatigue, or adversity. It's a skill. Built through repetition.

What it looks like: The same quality of effort at mile 80 as at mile 1. The quitting thoughts are still there. You just act anyway.

Behavioural lever: Do hard things when you don't have to. Cold showers. Early alarms. The extra set. The conversation you're avoiding. Each one is a rep for mental toughness, and like any muscle, it grows only under load.

Insight: Mental toughness is not genetic. It's calloused. And you build the callous by choosing discomfort when comfort is available.

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HAPPINESS

Definition: Moments of alignment between what you're doing, what you value, and where you are.

When I was chasing happiness, I never found it. The moment I stopped chasing and started doing the things that made me happy, I felt happy. Simple as that.

Hormozi tells a story about his boss who said to him: "You came in on Monday looking really happy. I'm pretty sure happiness is just stringing together as many of those days as possible." That hit me. When do I feel most happy? I figured that out. And then I just kept doing those things. Hour by hour. Day by day. String them together.

What it looks like: Laughter that catches you off guard. The sense of being exactly where you're supposed to be. It comes and goes. But when it's there, you know it.

Behavioural lever: Figure out which hours of your day make you happy. Do more of those. Cut the ones that don't. Happiness isn't something you find at the end. It's something you build into the routine.

Insight: The happiest men I know aren't the richest or the leanest. They're the most aligned.

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FLOW

Definition: Total absorption. Consciousness disappearing into the work.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi wrote the book on this. Near-death experiences get you straight into flow. Anything that's just outside your limit, where the stakes are real and the challenge matches your skill. You can engineer it without the near-death part.

What it looks like: Three hours passing in thirty minutes. No internal narration. No self-consciousness. Just the work.

Behavioural lever: Match challenge to skill. Too easy and you're bored. Too hard and you're anxious. The sweet spot, just beyond what you can do right now but within reach if you stretch, is where flow lives.

Insight: Flow isn't magic. Set the conditions and it shows up.

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FOCUS

Definition: The elimination of alternatives.

Think of a marriage. You're eliminating all other partners. Think of a laser. It starts as scattered light, and you focus it into a beam that can cut through steel. Focus is commitment. It's choosing one thing and letting everything else blur.

What it looks like: Single-tasking. Deep work. Time disappearing. Saying no to everything that isn't the priority.

Behavioural lever: Choose the one thing. Phone off. Door shut. One tab open. Focus isn't a talent. It's an environment design choice.

Insight: What you pay attention to becomes your life. Choose it like you'd choose your investments.

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A note before we leave this chapter.

These definitions will evolve. They'll sharpen, refine, change as I learn more and coach more and live more. This is Version 1.0.

But the principle underneath won't change. Every emotion is a signal. Every signal has a corresponding behaviour. When you match the right behaviour to the right signal, the emotion resolves.

The operating system. Everything else is commentary.

How I actually use this dictionary. In the trenches. In the 4am moments. In the arguments with Kiera. In the failures that wake me up in a cold sweat.

I don't sit down with a checklist. I don't open this chapter and scroll through entries. The dictionary has to be internalised. It has to become reflex. The way a boxer doesn't think about ducking a punch. His body knows. The way a driver doesn't think about the clutch. His foot knows. The dictionary, practised enough times, becomes the same kind of reflex.

Something fires inside me. I feel the tightness, the heat, the constriction, whatever form it takes. And the question arrives automatically: what's the signal?

If it's tightness in my chest and a sense of being trapped: sadness. Create an option.

If it's a buzzing, scattered, can't-sit-still energy: anxiety. Decide something.

If it's a focused, specific dread about a single thing: fear. Do the thing.

If it's heat and the urge to shout: anger. Boundary violated. Name it and enforce it.

The identification takes seconds. The behaviour follows. The loop closes.

I'm not perfect at this. Some days I get it wrong. Some days I'm too deep in the emotion to step back and read it. Some days the old patterns win, the avoidance, the scrolling, the distraction. And then I come back. Curious. What happened? Which signal did I miss? Where did the loop break?

The operating system isn't a cure. It's a practice. Like the gym. Like calisthenics. Like anything worth getting good at. You don't master it once and then coast. You practise it daily. And some days you're sharp and the signals are clear and the behaviours flow. And some days you're a mess and the dictionary feels useless and you wonder if any of this works.

It works. Come back to it.

Keep this chapter close. Come back to it. Let it become a reflex. When something fires inside you, flip to the entry and ask: what's the signal, and what's the behaviour?

The answers are always here.

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Chapter 6: Words as Power

Most men think words are just noise. Sounds that come out of your mouth or appear on a screen. Interchangeable. Approximate. Close enough.

They're wrong. And that wrongness is costing them.

Language shapes perception. Perception drives behaviour. Behaviour builds your life. The words you use to describe your internal experience are the operating code of your entire existence.

When a man says "I'm depressed" and means "I'm sad," he gives himself the wrong instruction. Depression, in common usage, implies a medical condition. A chemical problem. Something that requires medication, therapy, maybe years of work. And for some people, it is exactly that.

But for many men, what they're actually experiencing is sadness. A lack of options. A feeling of being trapped. And the behavioural lever for sadness isn't medication. It's creating one option.

Label it wrong and you reach for the wrong tool. Like trying to fix a flat tyre with a hammer.

I see this constantly.

A man tells me he has anxiety. I ask him to describe it. He says he can't stop worrying about one specific thing. That's not anxiety, that's fear. Anxiety is too many things. Fear is one thing, imagined. The prescription for anxiety is "decide." The prescription for fear is "act now." If he follows the wrong prescription, he'll cut things from his life that don't need cutting and still lie awake worrying about the one thing he hasn't addressed.

Words matter. Precision matters.

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There's a hierarchy to this.

At the bottom: noise. Raw sensation. Something happening in your body that you can't yet label. Tightness in your chest. Heat in your face. A pit in your stomach. Just data, unprocessed, like static on a radio.

One level up: a word. You label the sensation. "I'm anxious." "I'm angry." "I'm stressed." Most people stop here. They've named it. They think that's enough. It's not.

Above that: a definition. What does that word actually mean? Not the dictionary definition. The operational one. What is the emotion telling you to do?

Then a behaviour. The specific action the emotion is requesting. And if you practise long enough, the whole sequence folds into a skill. Like driving. You don't think about the clutch anymore.

Most men are stuck at the word. A label without an instruction. A map without any roads on it.

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There's a difference between "I am anxious" and "I feel anxious."

Tiny difference. Grammatical. Barely noticeable. And the gap between the two sentences is the difference between identity and information.

"I am anxious" is an identity statement. It says: anxiety is who I am. It's baked in. Permanent. When you say "I am" something, your brain files it under identity, which means it actively seeks evidence to confirm it and resists evidence that contradicts it.

"I feel anxious" is an information statement. It says: right now, in this moment, I'm experiencing a sensation called anxiety. It's temporary. Data, not destiny.

Same three letters removed. Completely different relationship to the experience.

I coach men to stop using "I am" when they describe their emotional states. You're not depressed. You feel depressed right now. You're not angry. You feel angry about this specific thing. The shift from identity to information is the first step toward agency.

Viktor Frankl, the psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz, said: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

Language is the space. The words you use to interpret what's happening to you are the space between the stimulus and the response. Get the words wrong and the response is wrong. Get the words right and the response is right.

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A practical test. Run it tonight.

The next time you feel something, don't reach for the first word that comes to mind. Pause. Ask yourself: "What is this actually?"

If you feel a weight in your chest, don't say "I'm depressed." Ask: "Do I feel trapped? Do I lack options? Am I hiding something?"

If you feel scattered, don't say "I'm stressed." Ask: "Do I have too many things competing for my attention? Am I avoiding a decision?"

If you feel dread about tomorrow, don't say "I'm nervous." Ask: "Am I imagining a negative outcome? What exactly am I picturing?"

The practice of asking "what is this actually?" is the core skill of the entire operating system. Everything else builds on it.

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There's a phrase I use with clients that catches them off guard: "What do you mean?"

I'm genuinely curious. A man says, "I'm stressed." I say, "What do you mean by that?"

And almost every time, the pause that follows is the most productive moment in the conversation. Because he's never been asked to define it. He's always been told to manage it. Reduce it. Breathe through it. But nobody's ever said: "Before we manage it, can we figure out what it actually is?"

And when he tries to define it, the emotion reclassifies itself. "I'm stressed" becomes "I'm overwhelmed" becomes "I have three deadlines and I can't figure out which one to do first" becomes anxiety, too many options, which has a clear behavioural lever: pick one, do it, then do the next.

The word "stressed" is useless. It contains no instruction. It's a bucket term that people throw everything into. But "too many options without a decision" is precise. And precision creates action.

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There's a metaphor I keep coming back to. A river.

Heraclitus said you can't step into the same river twice. The water that was there a moment ago has moved on. New water has arrived. The river looks the same but it's completely different.

Language is like that. The words look the same but the meaning shifts. "Anxiety" in a clinical setting means something very different from "anxiety" on a podcast. "Depression" in a psychiatrist's office means something very different from "depression" between two mates at the pub.

But we treat the words as fixed. We hear "I'm anxious" and we apply one meaning, usually the scariest one, the one that implies something is wrong with the person rather than wrong with their situation.

What if we used the word differently? What if anxiety wasn't a diagnosis but a data point? What if it simply meant: this person has too many open loops and needs to close some?

I'm not dismissing clinical anxiety. Some people need medication and therapy and professional support. But many men aren't clinically anxious. They're operationally overwhelmed. And the difference between those two things is the difference between a medical condition and a behavioural problem. One requires a doctor. The other requires a decision.

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Truth and approximation are not the same thing.

Most of what we say to each other is approximate. "How are you?" "Fine." "Good day?" "Yeah, not bad." We live in approximation. And for small talk, that's fine.

But when it comes to your internal experience, the thing that determines your behaviour, your decisions, your relationships, your whole life, approximation will kill you. Slowly, maybe. But it'll kill you.

Approximate language leads to approximate understanding. Approximate understanding leads to approximate action. And approximate action leads to approximate results. Which means you spend your life getting approximately what you want, which isn't what you want at all.

The man who says "I need to get my life together" is approximating. The man who says "I need to decide between staying in this job or starting my business, and I've been avoiding the decision for six months because I'm afraid of the wrong choice" is being precise. And precision is the only thing that produces change.

I learned this in sales. The clients who gave me vague problems got vague solutions and vague results. The clients who could say exactly what was wrong, exactly what they felt, exactly where they were stuck, those clients improved. Fast.

Precision isn't natural. Your brain prefers the vague because the vague is safer. If you never define the problem clearly, you never have to face the solution. Vagueness is a defence mechanism.

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An example of how words operate as power, in a way most people miss entirely.

There's a metaphor I use in coaching. Your body doesn't interpret emotions with words. It interprets them with sensations. Tightness. Heat. Heaviness. Nausea. Buzzing. These are the raw data, the noise level in the hierarchy. And the word you choose to describe those sensations determines everything that follows.

Two men feel the same thing before a public speech. Same heart rate, same sweating, same stomach flip. One says: "I'm terrified." The other says: "I'm excited."

Same physiology. Different word. Completely different experience. The terrified man wants to run. The excited man wants to perform. The word created the reality.

This isn't semantic gymnastics. This is the actual mechanism by which language shapes behaviour. The word is the fork in the road. And most people take the fork without realising there was a choice.

The Behavioural Dictionary is, in the most literal sense, a language pack. An upgrade to the operating language your brain uses to interpret its own signals. Install the upgrade and the interpretations change. The behaviours change. The outcomes change.

It starts with a word.

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PART THREE: THE 5 B'S

The 5 B's were invented on a run. The origin story matters, and it's not very dignified.

I was running through Bath. Early morning, probably 6am, still dark. The smell of wet tarmac and cold air. The slap of my shoes on the pavement, the rhythm of my breathing fogging in front of me. Hormozi's podcast in my ears. He was talking about frameworks, about how the best ideas can be compressed into structures simple enough to remember without writing them down. And my brain started playing a game. B-words.

Business. Obvious. Behaviour. Brotherhood. Belonging, that felt right, that felt like the one that made people stick around. Then I was trying to find one for fitness, for the physical side, for the thing that started everything. Body. Body wasn't even named yet when I started the game. It arrived mid-stride, somewhere near the canal path, while I was out of breath and probably running too fast because I always run too fast when I'm thinking.

The whole framework assembled itself in about fifteen minutes. Five B's. Five domains. Five things a man needs to get right, in roughly that order. I said them out loud, gasping, between breaths, to nobody. By the time I got home I'd mapped the structure of this entire section of the book without meaning to.

The best ideas arrive on a road, moving, with your brain half-occupied by the effort of keeping your legs going.

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Chapter 7: Body — Control Yourself

Before anything else, there is the body.

The body is the first thing. The first place where you can test whether what you do actually matters. Push a weight. It moves. Run a mile. You finish. The feedback is instant and honest. Your body doesn't lie to you the way your brain does.

I was the heaviest I'd ever been when my parents dragged me to the gym. My mum every Saturday. My dad whenever he could after his postal rounds. They refused to give up on me even when I'd given up on myself. I couldn't bench the bar. I couldn't do a single pull-up. I got winded walking up the stairs. My body was a monument to years of choosing the easy option. Choosing the takeaway over the kitchen, the sofa over the park, the screen over the sun. It was the physical evidence of every decision I'd made and every decision I'd avoided.

And that was the first honest mirror I ever looked into.

Because your body doesn't lie to you. People lie. Your ego lies. Your excuses lie. But the mirror and the barbell and the scale and the pull-up bar are honest. They show you exactly where you are, right now, with no spin and no negotiation.

When my dad stood in the doorway and said "get up, we're going," he didn't know he was starting a chain reaction that would rewire my entire operating system. He thought he was doing what he always did. Providing. The same way he provided by walking through the rain at 3am to deliver post. The same way he provided by teaching me push-ups and every sport I ever played. What he was actually doing was placing me in the one environment where the link between effort and result is immediate and undeniable.

You lift the weight or you don't. You complete the rep or you fail. There is no argument, no excuse, no narrative that changes the physics. Gravity doesn't care about your backstory. Physics doesn't negotiate. It doesn't care if you believe in it. Gravity pulls whether you accept it or not. Your body responds to stimulus whether you understand the science or not.

I was terrible. For months. The kind of terrible where other people in the gym look away out of pity. My form was wrong, my breathing was wrong, my programming was nonexistent. I'd do random machines in random order for random amounts of time and call it a workout.

But I kept going. My parents kept showing up for me, kept refusing to let me quit. And somewhere in the chaos of those early sessions, something was happening that I couldn't name.

My body was responding. Slowly. Barely perceptibly. But responding. A rep I couldn't do last week, I could do this week. A weight that had been impossible became merely difficult. The walk to the gym got shorter. Not literally. But it felt that way.

And each of those tiny changes was a receipt.

A receipt of control. Evidence that what I did mattered. Proof that the world responded to my effort. That cause and effect still applied to my life, even though I'd spent years believing it didn't.

The body teaches you this before anything else: you are not a passenger. You are not riding a horse you can't control. You have reins. And when you pull them, something happens.

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The gym is the simplest possible version of the behaviour loop.

Action, Feedback, Adjustment, Repeat.

You squat. The mirror shows your form. Your coach says "knees out." You adjust. You squat again. Better. The feedback is instant. The loop is tight. The learning is fast.

Compare that to the rest of life. You make a business decision. The results show up in three months. The loop is so loose that most people can't connect their actions to the outcomes.

But the gym? Two-second feedback loop. Every rep tells you something. Every session confirms or denies your hypothesis. You become a scientist of your own body.

I don't think it's 10,000 hours. It's 10,000 iterations. And the fastest feedback loop for improving your mind is your body. You get instant, repetitive signal from body to mind every session. The body is the first B because the reps per hour are higher than anywhere else in

your life.

I tell every man who walks into CaliUnity: "Your body is your first laboratory." Before you try to fix your mindset, your relationships, your career, your finances, fix this. It's the fastest place to learn the skill of change.

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Movement precedes mindset.

You don't think your way into a new way of acting. You act your way into a new way of thinking. The body leads. The mind follows. And the gap between feeling like shit and feeling okay is, in almost every case, about thirty minutes of physical effort.

I've seen this hundreds of times. A man walks into the gym looking like his world is ending. Shoulders forward, eyes down, jaw clenched. He's had a terrible day.

But he's here. So he warms up. He's thinking about the rings. The handstand. The thing he's been working toward for weeks. You can't overthink your life when you're upside down. The session demands something of him. That's the therapy. It requires presence.

By the end, sixty minutes later, he's a different man. His problems aren't solved. But something inside has shifted.

He walked in feeling powerless. He walks out having proven, physically, that he can do hard things. And that proof changes the way he approaches everything else.

Every form of movement is a different tool. Hard weight session when I need a pump. Long run with someone who gets it when I need to talk it out. Hard solo run when I need to be alone with it. Stretching when I need to slow down. It's a toolkit. You use the tool the day calls for.

Chris Williamson says this well: when you get a pump in the gym, you're literally seeing what you'll look like three months from now. It's a positive feedback loop. You see the future you, today, for twenty minutes.

The proof that what you do matters. The receipt.

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The first time my body did something my mind didn't think was possible.

Four months into training. I couldn't do a pull-up. Not one. I'd hang from the bar like a sack of rice and try to pull and nothing happened. My arms shook. My face went red. My feet stayed exactly where they were.

I tried negatives. Jumping to the top and lowering myself as slowly as I could. Which at first was not slow at all. More like a controlled fall. But I did them. Every session. Three sets of whatever I could manage.

Weeks passed. The negatives got slower. Five seconds. Eight. Ten.

And one day, I grabbed the bar, pulled, and my chin went over the top.

One rep.

One shitty, grinding, form-destroyed rep that probably looked embarrassing from the outside. But from the inside, from the perspective of a man who had spent eighteen years believing his body was a prison, that single rep was a revolution.

My mind had said: you can't do this. You're too heavy. You're too weak.

And the body said: watch me.

One rep. The distance between "I can't" and "I can" was exactly one rep. Three seconds. And it smashed a belief I'd held for eighteen years.

Three seconds. Eighteen years of belief. Demolished.

The body teaches control. The raw, physical proof that what you do changes what you can do. That effort accumulates. That the impossible is just the not-yet-achieved.

I carried that rep like a trophy for weeks. Thought about it at night. Thought about it in the morning. It wasn't the physical achievement. It was the philosophical one. My mind had made a prediction: you can't do this. And the body had falsified the prediction. Which meant: how many other predictions is my mind making that are also wrong? How many things am I telling myself I can't do that I actually can?

That question changed everything. It's the question I still ask myself every morning at 4am when the alarm goes off and the darkness outside the window says stay in bed. Can I? My mind says no. My body says: we've been through this. We both know the answer. Get up.

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I now train calisthenics at a level that eighteen-year-old me would've dismissed as fantasy. Planche work. Front lever progressions. Muscle-ups on rings. Handstand practice. Skills that require years of consistent training. I went from obese to running ultramarathons, to powerlifting, to calisthenics, to teaching others, and now I'm about to run 1,000 miles across the United Kingdom.

Every one of those started with a single rep I could barely manage.

Progressive overload applies to everything. To business, start with one client, then three, then ten. To relationships, start with one honest conversation, then another. To courage, start with one small risk, then a slightly bigger one.

The body teaches this through experience, not theory. You live it. You feel the weight get heavier. You feel your capacity expand. And that lived experience rewires your relationship with effort in every other area of your life.

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Discipline is a funny word. Most people hear it and think punishment. Think restriction. Think gritted teeth and forced compliance and the crushing of desire under the weight of obligation.

That's not what discipline is.

Discipline is the act of keeping a promise to yourself. That's it. You said you'd train today. You train today. You said you'd eat protein first. You eat protein first. You said you'd go to bed by ten. You go to bed by ten.

Each kept promise builds something. Muscle, yeah. But something else too. A relationship with yourself. Trust. Self-trust. The slowly accumulating belief that you are a person who does what they say they'll do.

And that belief, compounded over months and years, is what people call confidence. But confidence isn't a character trait. It's a score. A running tally. Every kept promise adds a point. Every broken promise subtracts one. Your current confidence level is the sum of that equation.

The gym is where the equation starts. Because the gym is the simplest domain in which to make and keep promises. "I will train three times this week." Do it. Score goes up. Don't. Score goes down.

Nobody needs to motivate you to keep going. You just need to watch the score. And protect it. And refuse to let it drop.

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Something that stops men from starting. The body shame.

Walking into a gym for the first time when you're overweight, when you've never lifted anything heavier than a remote control, that takes more courage than most fit people will ever understand. The fit bloke doing bicep curls in the mirror has no idea what it cost you to walk through that door.

I know because I was you. I wouldn't take my t-shirt off. I wore a t-shirt in the pool because I had moobs. I'd be seen dead before I'd be seen shirtless. Every mirror was an enemy. Every fit person was a jury.

If someone judges you in the gym, if someone makes fun of you, it's because they're insecure. No one hates you from above. You'll never meet a hater doing better than you. The second someone makes fun of you, you've already won. The hate is the proof.

Nobody is watching, by the way. Nobody cares. The fit bloke with the bicep curls is looking at himself, not you. The woman on the treadmill is thinking about her own problems.

And the few people who ARE looking? They're looking with respect. Because they remember what it felt like to walk in for the first time. And every one of them, if you asked, would say the same thing: "Fair play, mate. Welcome."

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Your body is not separate from your mind. The split between physical and mental health is a fiction invented by a healthcare system that needed to put different departments in different buildings.

When you don't sleep, your emotional regulation collapses. When you eat poorly, your mood deteriorates. When you don't move, your anxiety increases.

Antonio Damasio proved this decades ago. He studied patients with damage to the part of the brain that connects emotion to decision-making. These patients could reason perfectly. IQ intact. Logic intact. But they couldn't decide. They'd sit in restaurants for an hour trying to choose between salads.

Descartes said "I think, therefore I am." He was wrong. It's closer to: I feel, therefore I decide. Without feeling, thinking produces nothing. The emotions aren't noise in the decision-making system. They are the system.

I didn't read Descartes until I was twenty-five. But I'd already figured this out in the gym. Every decision I made about training was driven by how I felt. The thinking came after.

Taking care of your body is the fastest way to take care of your mind. The body responds to input predictably. Sleep more: feel better. Eat well: think clearer. Train hard: regulate easier.

The body doesn't lie, and it doesn't negotiate.

The body is the first B. It's the foundation that makes the rest possible.

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Chapter 8: Belonging — Control Your Environment

Humans don't become themselves in isolation. They become themselves in relation to other people. And if you get the people wrong, you'll get yourself wrong.

This isn't a theory. It's biology. One of the most replicated findings in the history of psychology. Who you surround yourself with determines who you become. Your brain adapts, constantly, unconsciously, automatically, to the norms and behaviours of your tribe. You don't get a vote.

You don't decide to become like the people around you. You just do. The accent shifts. The vocabulary adjusts. The priorities realign. You barely notice it happening because the process is so gradual and so biological that it feels like your own choice.

It's not.

Or rather, it is, but the choice isn't "do I adapt to my tribe?" That happens regardless. The choice is which tribe you put yourself in.

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At eighteen, my tribe was a group of lads who stayed up until 4am playing video games, eating takeaway, and slowly falling apart. None of us said we were falling apart. We were having fun. But the trajectory was downward, and I was descending with it, matching the ambient level of effort and ambition and health because that was what the group modelled.

Nobody in that group trained. So I didn't train. Nobody talked about feelings. So I didn't talk about feelings. Nobody had plans or goals or any sense that tomorrow could be different from today. So I didn't either.

Then I started going to the gym. And slowly, my tribe changed.

The guys at the gym had different norms. They showed up early. They trained hard. They tracked their food. They had goals. And because I was around them, the specificity rubbed off. Nobody lectured me. Behaviour is contagious. The strongest signal in any room is what the people around you are actually doing.

Within six months, I was training consistently. Within a year, I was eating better. Within two years, I was coaching. My environment changed, and that changed my behaviour, and that changed who I was.

I didn't choose any of this consciously. That's the point. I didn't sit down with a journal and write "I'm going to change my peer group to improve my outcomes." I just went to the gym. And the gym had different people. And the different people had different norms. And the norms reshaped me without my permission or awareness.

If you're not thinking about getting better, you're probably getting worse. If you're not thinking about how your environment is making you better, it's probably making you worse. What you pay attention to grows. What you ignore, decays.

That's it. The group of lads drinking every Friday are normalising a behaviour that will compound over years. The colleague moaning about management every lunchtime is installing a belief system in everyone who listens. Environment is shaping you right now, in real time, toward something. The question is: toward what? And did you choose it?

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CaliUnity is the proof of this theory at scale.

When Kiera and I started the gym, we didn't have a business plan. We had a tree branch and some rings and a belief that people needed somewhere to go. But what we accidentally built, what grew out of those Saturday park sessions and into a physical space, was a belonging machine.

A place where the ambient behaviour was movement, effort, honesty, and showing up. Where the norms were: you train, you struggle, you ask for help, you help others, you come back tomorrow. A place where men who had never spoken about their inner lives found themselves speaking, because the tribe had made it normal.

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The man in the park was saved by belonging. By having somewhere to go every week where people knew his face, where his absence would be noticed, where his presence mattered even if nobody said it out loud. The calisthenics was a side effect. The community did the work.

Isolation distorts reality. When you're alone, truly alone, your inner narrative runs unchecked. The negative thoughts loop without interruption. The shame magnifies. The fear inflates. And there's no corrective input. No one to say, "Mate, that's not as bad as you think."

Isolation is a hall of mirrors. Every reflection is you, distorted, repeated, amplified.

Community is the antidote. A messy, imperfect community of people who show up.

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"I become the men I stand beside."

I wrote that on a whiteboard in the gym two years ago and I've never wiped it off.

The single highest-leverage decision you can make is: who do you stand beside? Physically. Regularly. In a room where real behaviour is visible.

Because that's the input. And the output, your health, your mindset, your ambition, follows directly from it.

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We're thinking about starting Momentum groups. Men meeting to move together, every week. For now, I still go to a run club every day. Even running 100-mile weeks, I almost never run alone. I have a calisthenics coach. I have a business coach. I've had coaches for years. I pay in time or money. Always.

Your environment is a proxy for your level of commitment. If you really wanted to learn French, you'd move to France. If you really wanted Olympic gold, you'd give up everything else for it. The question isn't "how much do you want it." The question is "what are you willing to give up." Commitment is the giving up. And your environment tells you the answer, whether you like it or not.

The number one predictor of wealth is your postcode when you were born. Read that again. Before you've done anything, said anything, chosen anything, where you were born predicts more of your financial future than almost anything else you'll ever do. That's how strong environment is.

Men connect side-by-side. Working, sweating, running, lifting. Shoulder to shoulder, doing something hard, where the talking happens as a byproduct and the honesty arrives without being asked for. That's when the walls come down.

The gym works because of this. The park worked because of this. You put men next to each other, give them something to carry, and the connection takes care of itself.

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A community that only validates you is useless. A group that tells you everything you do is fine, that your choices are always valid, will keep you exactly where you are.

The communities that change people hold you to a standard. Gently, sometimes. Firmly, often. But consistently. The people around you expect effort. They expect growth. They notice when you backslide and they say something about it.

CaliUnity works because it's both. Warm and welcoming and inclusive and also: get on the bar. Do the reps. Show up tomorrow. We'll help you, but we won't carry you. You have to move your own body. We're just here to make sure you don't do it alone.

Support and standard. That combination is the engine of belonging. Either one alone is incomplete. Support without standard is a comfort zone. Standard without support is a pressure cooker. Together, they create an environment where growth is inevitable.

Everyone cheers at the start. Everyone cheers at the finish. The people who need help are 70% of the way in. That's where the gap is. That's where I try to be. In the middle, when the novelty's dead and the finish isn't close enough to carry you.

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Social isolation is as dangerous as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by 26%. The single strongest predictor of recovery from mental illness is social support.

Men are dying from loneliness. Not all of them by suicide. Some by heart disease. Some by addiction. Some by the slow deterioration that comes from having nobody who knows the truth about how they're doing.

And the fix is absurdly simple. Find your group. Show up. Regularly. Let the proximity do the work.

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So what do you actually do? Embarrassingly simple.

Find a group that does the thing you want to do. Go. Regularly. Even if it's awkward. Even if you feel like an outsider. Even if the first session is uncomfortable and you want to leave halfway through. Go back. Again. And again.

Proximity does the work. Being near people who train makes training normal. Being near people who eat well makes eating well normal. Being near people who are honest makes honesty normal.

You don't need to change your character. You need to change your coordinates. Place yourself next to the right people and the right behaviour becomes the path of least resistance.

And the right group makes the wrong behaviour harder. That's equally important. If your Saturday mornings are spent at the gym with people who know your name and expect you to show up, then staying in bed until noon costs you something. Absence is visible. And visibility creates accountability.

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Kiera. My partner. The person who threw the rings over the tree with me and has been there for every step of what followed.

I am not the self-made man the origin story might suggest. I'm the man who was lucky enough to find someone who believed in the same thing and was willing to build it with me.

Belonging isn't just about groups. It's about the person who stands closest to you. The one who sees you without the performance.

If you have that person, protect the relationship like it's the most important thing in your life. Because it probably is.

If you don't have that person yet, start with the group. The group is where those people are found.

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One more thing about belonging, and it's personal to me.

Loneliness is a multiplier. It takes every emotional signal and turns the volume way up. The same setback that a connected man processes in an afternoon, a lonely man will carry for weeks.

When you're lonely, sadness hits harder because there's no one to create options with. Anxiety escalates because there's no one to help you decide. Fear grows because there's no one to act alongside. Anger turns inward because there's no one to express it to.

And men are lonelier than they've ever been. Male friendships have declined consistently for decades. Social media creates the illusion of connection while providing none of its benefits. The pandemic accelerated the trend by years.

The fix for loneliness is the same as sadness, applied to people: create one connection. One conversation with one person where you say one real thing.

Belonging is the second B because without it, every other B is harder. The body heals slower in isolation. Beliefs go unchallenged. Behaviour lacks the social reinforcement that makes it stick. Building without a tribe is grinding without a safety net.

Find one person. Say one real thing. Start there.

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A note before the story. I don't do one-to-one men's coaching. I have nothing to sell you. This isn't the opening of a funnel. I'm telling you what I used to do when I was on consultations with gym clients. We'd talk about health and fitness, but really I was trying to understand their behaviour. This book is where that went.

A man I'll call Marcus. Not his real name. The details are changed enough to protect him but true enough to matter. Marcus is one of hundreds of men I've had this conversation with.

Marcus was a software developer. Thirty-four. Worked from home. Hadn't left his flat for more than groceries in about eight months. He told me this on his consultation call, matter-of-factly, like it was a weather report. "Yeah, I just sort of stopped going out."

His belief system was sophisticated. He'd thought about it. People are exhausting. Social situations are fake. He was an introvert. He needed his space. The arguments were polished. Like they'd been rehearsed in the mirror.

Underneath all of them was one unexamined belief: "I don't belong anywhere."

That belief had been installed in childhood and reinforced by a decade of social experiences interpreted through that lens. Every awkward interaction confirmed it. Every friendship that faded confirmed it. A closed loop with no exit.

So we didn't start with belief. We started with body.

Come to the gym. Just once. You don't have to talk to anyone. Just move. Put your body in a room with other bodies.

He came. He was terrified. He told me later that he sat in his car for twenty minutes before walking in. But he walked in.

Slowly, over weeks, the belief started to crack. Nobody said anything clever. His body was in a room with other bodies, and the other bodies didn't reject him, and the absence of rejection was, for Marcus, the most important evidence he'd ever received.

Week four, someone said "nice work" after a set. Week six, he stayed for a coffee after the session. Week ten, he was training four mornings a week. Week fourteen, he told me CaliUnity was the only place he felt normal.

We didn't change his belief directly. We changed his environment, which gave his body new data, which gave his brain new evidence, which updated the belief automatically.

Body, Belonging, Belief. The order matters.

Marcus trains four times a week now. He coaches beginners on Saturdays. His flat is still his base but it's not his prison anymore. And the belief, "I don't belong anywhere," hasn't been argued with or talked through in therapy. It's been overwritten. By a thousand small experiences that said otherwise.

Belief changes through evidence. And the body is the fastest evidence generator you have.

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Chapter 9: Belief — Control Your Narrative

Your beliefs are running your life and you didn't write most of them.

The story you tell yourself about who you are, your identity, your capabilities, your worth, your future, was largely installed by other people. Parents, teachers, peers, culture, the internet. And now you're running on that code. Making decisions based on beliefs you've never examined.

Identity is a story you tell yourself repeatedly until it feels like a fact. "I'm not a morning person." "I'm not good with money." "I'm not the kind of guy who goes to the gym." These are beliefs you've repeated so many times that they've hardened into certainty.

And certainty, false certainty, unexamined certainty, is the most dangerous thing in the world.

"I'm not confident" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You avoid situations that require confidence. The avoidance gives you no evidence of confidence. The lack of evidence confirms the belief. And around you go, in a loop so tight it feels like identity.

But it's software. And software can be updated.

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There's an old Taoist story about a farmer.

A boy gets a horse. The village says: good fortune. The farmer says: we'll see.

The boy falls off the horse and breaks his leg. The village says: bad fortune. The farmer says: we'll see.

The army comes through, conscripting every young man for war. They pass the boy because of his broken leg. The village says: good fortune.

The farmer says: we'll see.

Steve Jobs said you can only connect the dots looking backwards. Shakespeare wrote "nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." The Stoics built an entire philosophy on the idea that we don't control events, only our interpretation of them.

The horse story says the same thing, but simpler. You don't know. You never know. The thing you're calling a disaster might be the best thing that ever happened to you, but you won't see it for years. And the thing you're celebrating might be setting up a fall you can't imagine yet.

We'll see.

Taken to its extreme, you only truly know at the deathbed. And by then you're dead. Which means we spend our entire lives interpreting events as good or bad when we literally cannot know until the story is finished. And the story is never finished until we are.

So what do you do with that? You stop labelling events and start using them. Not "this is bad" or "this is good." Instead: "What would it take for this to be the best thing that's ever happened to me?"

A genuine engineering question. Given this event, this reality, this thing that has happened and cannot be unhappened, what is the most useful thing I can build from the wreckage?

The answer is always there. Always. Sometimes it's obvious. Sometimes it takes years to see. But it's always there.

Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so. Shakespeare put it in Hamlet's mouth four hundred years ago. The Stoics said the same thing two thousand years ago. The Taoists said it even earlier. And they were all saying the same thing: the event is neutral. The interpretation is everything. And the interpretation is yours.

I've lived this. The nihilism that nearly killed me became the foundation of the operating system that now helps other men. The addictions that destroyed my teenage years became the superpowers I coach with. The hard times my family went through taught me more about blame, power, love, and forgiveness than any book ever could.

Was any of it good? Was it bad?

We'll see.

This is harder than "look on the bright side." It's a genuine search for the interpretation that produces the most useful behaviour.

The event is fixed. It happened. The interpretation is yours. And the interpretation determines everything that follows.

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I was a nihilist. That was my software. Nothing matters. People suck. The world is meaningless.

That belief controlled everything. My eating. My training. My relationships, my ambition, my willingness to try. Why bother getting in shape if we all die? Why bother building something if it'll all collapse?

The nihilism wasn't a mood. It was an operating system. Every decision ran through it.

And I had evidence for it. That's what made it so hard to shake. I could point to the stress in my house. To friends who'd let me down. The evidence was real. The interpretation was the problem.

Because the evidence for the opposite story was equally real. Parents who believed in me enough to keep showing up, even in the middle of their own mess. Friends who showed up, imperfectly, but showed up.

Both stories were available. Both had evidence. I was choosing one and ignoring the other. A habit of interpretation. A default setting that could be changed.

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James Clear writes about identity-based habits. The idea: most people try to change their behaviour directly, "I'll go to the gym three times this week." And that works for a while. But the underlying identity hasn't changed. You're a person-who-doesn't-go-to-the-gym forcing

themselves to go to the gym. The identity and the behaviour are in conflict. And in the long run, identity always wins.

The alternative: change the identity first. "I'm a person who trains." Then the behaviour follows naturally.

But how? Sticking quotes on your mirror won't cut it.

Through action. Every action is a vote for the person you want to become. Go to the gym: one vote for "I'm someone who trains." Eat protein first: one vote for "I'm someone who takes their health seriously." Show up when you said you would: one vote for "I'm someone who keeps promises."

Cast enough votes and the election is won. The identity shifts. Not all at once. Gradually. Vote by vote. Rep by rep. Until one day you realise you're not forcing yourself to train anymore. You're just training. Because that's who you are.

I went from nihilist to builder this way. Not through a single revelation. Through thousands of tiny actions that accumulated until the weight of evidence overwhelmed the old story.

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It's not Be-Do-Have. It's Do-Be-Have.

Most people operate on: "Once I AM confident, I'll DO the hard things, and I'll HAVE the results." They wait to become before they act. They wait for the feeling of confidence before they take the risk.

They'll wait forever.

You DO the thing. Show up, take the risk, make the call. Then you BECOME the person who does that thing. Then you HAVE the results.

Action precedes identity. Always.

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There's a popular concept, manifestation, that most serious people dismiss. And I get why. The way it's usually presented is magical thinking. Visualise what you want. Believe hard enough. The universe will deliver.

Bollocks. The universe doesn't know you exist and it definitely doesn't have a postal service.

But there's a mechanism underneath the bollocks that's real. The Reticular Activating System, RAS. A network of neurons in your brainstem that filters the flood of sensory information hitting your brain every second and decides what reaches your conscious awareness.

The RAS is programmed by what you focus on.

You're in a crowded room. Hundreds of conversations happening simultaneously. You can't hear any of them. Then someone across the room says your name. Instantly, your attention snaps to them. You heard your name through the noise because your RAS is permanently tuned to it.

Now apply that to goals. If you spend time thinking about what you want, visualising it, planning it, writing about it, your RAS starts filtering for information relevant to that goal. Opportunities you would've missed, you now notice. Resources that were always there become visible.

The brain works like this. Belief programs the filter that determines which parts of reality you notice. Believe you're worthless and you'll find evidence everywhere. Believe you can change and you'll start spotting doors you walked past a hundred times.

So when I say "control your narrative," I don't mean lie to yourself. I mean: examine the beliefs you're running. Ask where they came from. Test them against evidence. And if they're not serving you, update them. Deliberately. Through action. Through casting votes for the person you're becoming instead of the person you were told you are.

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A belief that nearly stopped me from building CaliUnity.

"I'm not qualified."

That sentence ran like a screensaver in my head for months. Every time someone asked me to coach them. Every time I thought about opening the gym. "I'm not qualified." And the sentence felt true. Airtight, even. Because I didn't have a formal coaching qualification at the time.

But the belief was doing a specific job. It was protecting me from failure. If I never try, I can never fail. If I never claim to be a coach, I can never be exposed as a fraud. The belief was a safety mechanism disguised as humility.

I see this in men constantly. "I'm not ready." "I don't know enough." "I need another qualification." "I need to get in better shape first." Each one is a protective belief. A reason not to act that sounds reasonable but is actually fear wearing a sensible jacket.

The test is simple. Ask: "If I knew I couldn't fail, would I still need this qualification?" If the answer is no, the belief is a shield, not a truth.

I started coaching without a qualification. I was honest about it. "I don't have a certificate. I do have five hundred hours of training and a hundred conversations that taught me what works." And people responded to the honesty. Because honesty is its own qualification.

I've since gotten qualified. Active IQ Level 2 and Level 3. Because qualifications matter. But the belief that I needed the qualification before I could start, that belief, unexamined, would've killed CaliUnity in the womb.

How many things in your life are being killed by a belief you've never examined?

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One more practical tool for belief change. Theory without application is just entertainment.

There's a concept I call belief auditing. Once a month, or whenever things feel stuck, sit down with a piece of paper and write the sentences you say about yourself most often. The scripts that run on loop. "I'm not good enough." "I'm not smart enough." "I don't have what it takes." "People like me don't get to do things like that."

Write them down. All of them. Don't filter.

Then next to each one, write the source. Where did this belief come from? Who said it first? A parent? A teacher? A bully? A coach who gave up on you? An ex who told you something in anger that you filed away as fact?

Most of the time, the source surprises people. The belief they thought was a fact turns out to be one sentence, said once, by one person, in one moment, that they never questioned. And that unquestioned sentence has been running their operating system for ten or twenty years.

You wouldn't run your business on software from 2004. Why are you running your life on beliefs from year eight?

Update the software. Test the beliefs against current evidence. If they don't hold up, if the evidence of your actual life contradicts the belief, delete it. Install a new one. Through action. Through evidence. Through doing the thing the old belief said you couldn't do.

Belief auditing. It takes twenty minutes. And it might surface the belief that's been holding you in place for the last decade.

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Chapter 10: Behaviour — Control Your Actions

Every meaningful change in my life came from the same place: a conversation.

A conversation. Between me and another person, where something was said that shifted the way I saw myself or my situation, and that shift produced a behaviour that produced a result.

That's why sales changed my life.

I know that sounds bizarre. Sales. The word conjures up sleazy car dealers and LinkedIn robots with too many emojis.

But the sales I'm talking about, the kind I learned over years of coaching consultations, is the purest form of behaviour change I've ever encountered.

A sales conversation, stripped of everything, is one person helping another person see something they can't see on their own, and then helping them take an action they wouldn't take alone.

That's coaching. That's therapy. That's parenting. That's leadership. That's friendship, when it's working properly.

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I've sat across from men and heard every version of the same thing.

"I don't have time." Avoidance. "I can't afford it." Lack of options. Sadness by another name. "I need to think about it." Too many options. Anxiety wearing a sensible disguise. "My partner wouldn't like it." Externalised fear. "I've tried before and it didn't work." Regret masquerading as logic.

Every objection is an emotion disguised as a reason.

"I don't have time" sounds like a scheduling problem. It's not. Nobody who wants something badly enough lacks time. You found time to scroll Instagram for two hours yesterday. Time exists. What doesn't exist is the emotional permission to prioritise yourself. And that's a shame problem, not a calendar problem.

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Action ends anxiety. The moment of highest anxiety is always the moment before the action. The second before you press send. The second before you walk into the room. That second is where anxiety lives, in the gap between intention and action.

And then you act. And the anxiety drops. Immediately. Because anxiety is a future-tense emotion and action puts you in the present tense.

This is the main thing about behaviour: behaviour is the only thing you actually control. You can't control your emotions directly. You can't control other people. You can control exactly one thing: what you do.

And what you do determines every outcome in your life.

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Every person you meet is trying to control their inner state.

Every one. The angry customer. The resistant client. The passive-aggressive colleague. The man who won't talk about his feelings. The teenager scrolling endlessly.

All of them are engaged in the same project: managing the way they feel. The methods vary. The sophistication varies. But the project is universal.

When you see people through that lens, not as difficult or broken or wrong, but as humans trying to regulate their internal experience with the tools they have, everything changes. Empathy becomes natural. Patience becomes easier.

Nobody is actually bad. They're just ignorant.

I know that sounds naive. Or arrogant. Or like something a twenty-seven-year-old would say who hasn't seen enough of the world yet.

I mean it. You can't both hate and understand someone at the same time. Try it. Think of someone you despise. Now imagine seeing their entire life, from birth, every moment, every influence, every wound, every choice, every consequence. Every time they were hurt. Every time they learned the wrong lesson from the right experience. Every time the world taught them something that was wrong and they believed it because they had no reason not to.

If you could see all of that, would you still hate them? Or would you understand them? I'm not saying approve. I'm not saying forgive. Just understand. See how the inputs produced the outputs. See the logic, even the terrible logic, that connects who they are to what happened to them.

I think you'd understand. And I think understanding and hatred can't coexist.

Which means: nobody is evil. There are people doing terrible things. But the terrible things come from narrow windows. Compressed perspectives where their own pain is all they can see. They can't see how their behaviour ripples outward, how it damages the people around them, how it compounds into suffering they'll never witness. They can't see it. The window is too narrow.

Widen the window and the behaviour changes.

I teach to replace ignorance with understanding. Because understanding changes behaviour in ways that punishment never will.

The operating system works because it widens the window. It gives you a broader view of your own internal world, which gives you a broader view of other people's, which gives you a broader view of the entire mess of being alive.

Ignorance is the enemy. It's always been ignorance. And the antidote to ignorance is exactly what you're holding in your hands. A wider window. A better map. A set of definitions that turns confusion into clarity and clarity into action.

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I've made thousands of cold calls. I've walked into rooms where I knew nobody. I've had conversations where I could feel my heart rate spiking and my voice threatening to crack. Every time, the worst part was the second before. Every time, the thing itself was fine.

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Behavioural volume.

The number of conscious behavioural choices you make per day determines the speed of your transformation.

Most people make very few conscious choices in a day. They run on autopilot. Wake up the same way, eat the same things, take the same route, respond to the same triggers with the same reactions.

When you're actively running the operating system, you make twenty or thirty conscious choices a day. Notice the emotion. Name it. Pick the behaviour. Act. See the result. Each one is a training rep.

More reps. Faster improvement. Same equation as the gym.

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A real sales conversation.

A man books a consultation. Forty-two. Works in finance. Hasn't trained in three years. His wife sent him. He doesn't want to be here.

I can see it in his body language before he opens his mouth. Arms crossed. Leaning back. Eyes scanning the gym like he's calculating the fastest exit route.

I start with Clarify. Not "what are your goals?" He'll answer that on autopilot. Instead: "What made you book this today? What happened?"

Silence. Then: "My wife's worried about me. I've put on three stone since COVID. I don't sleep. I drink too much."

Honest. More honest than most first answers. So I stay quiet and let the silence do its work. After a few seconds, he adds: "I think I'm depressed."

Now we're somewhere real. I ask him to describe what that feels like. "Like nothing matters. Like I go through the motions at work and come home and sit on the sofa and drink wine and watch TV and it's the same thing every day and I can't see it changing."

I hear it. Nothing matters. No visible change. No options. This isn't clinical depression. This is sadness. A man who can't see a single lever he can pull to change his trajectory.

I ask what he's tried. "Bought a Peloton. Did it for two weeks. Joined a gym near work. Went three times. Tried dry January. Made it to the tenth."

He's not lazy. He's tried multiple things. Each one failed because the loop never closed. The Peloton was isolated. The gym was anonymous. The dry January had no replacement behaviour for the drinking.

I paint the destination: "Imagine it's three months from now. You're sleeping properly. You've lost a stone. You've got a group of blokes you train with who actually know your name. And the wine is down to weekends because you've got something you'd rather do with your evenings. What does that feel like?"

His posture changes. Arms uncross slightly.

"That sounds... good."

"That's what we do here. Not just training. A place to be. People who notice if you don't show up."

He has two concerns: money and time. Money: I show him the cost per session versus the cost of his wine habit per week. The numbers are embarrassing in our favour. Time: I show him the schedule and ask him to pick two sessions. He finds them immediately.

He signs up. He comes twice a week. By month two, he's coming three times. By month four, the wine is weekends only and he's sleeping through the night and he's lost eleven pounds and his wife has stopped worrying.

He told me later that the thing that changed wasn't the exercise. It was that sentence about belonging. "People who notice if you don't show up." He'd been invisible for three years. At work, he was a face on a Zoom call. At home, he was a presence on the sofa. Nobody was tracking him. Nobody missed him when he wasn't there. He'd become furniture in his own life.

The gym gave him visibility. Real, physical, in-person visibility. His name on a whiteboard. His spot in the class. The nod from the coach when he walked in. The question when he missed a session. "Everything alright, mate? We missed you Tuesday."

Four words that changed the trajectory of a man's life. "We missed you Tuesday."

Those four words did something that no training programme could do. They made him feel seen. They made him feel like his presence mattered. They turned him from a face in a crowd into a person with a name and a spot and a role.

Belonging in action. The operating system applied to a real person in real time. The whole interaction, from consultation to transformation, followed the emotional logic we've been discussing. Identify the real emotion. Match it to the real need. Take the real action.

One conversation. Twenty minutes.

Sales. Coaching. Behaviour change. Same thing.

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This is what Hormozi calls the CLOSER framework, and when I first learned it, it changed how I understood every interaction.

Clarify why they're here. Label the problem. Overview what they've tried. Sell the destination, not the vehicle. Explain away concerns. Reinforce the decision.

I use it in sales calls. In coaching sessions. In conversations with my parents. In arguments with Kiera. In my own head when I'm trying to make a decision and can't. Clarify what I'm here to solve. Label the actual problem. Overview what I've already tried. Sell myself the destination. Explain away the concern. Reinforce the call.

It works everywhere because the mechanics are universal. Behaviour change is behaviour change whether you're selling a gym membership or deciding whether to leave a job. Same emotions. Same resistance. Same path through.

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Every objection a person raises falls into one of three categories. I learned this from studying both sales psychology and behavioural therapy, and it holds up in every conversation I've had since.

Environmental blame points outside. "The timing isn't right." "My schedule doesn't allow it." Reality-test it. When will the timing be right? What specifically needs to change? External responsibility delegates the decision. "I need to ask my partner." "My mate tried this and it didn't work for him." Put the responsibility back. Would your partner want you to keep struggling? Or would they want you to get help? Internal conflict is the hardest one to spot. "I'm not sure this is for me." "I've never been able to stick with anything." It's self-doubt wearing sensible clothes. Ask what specifically makes them unsure, then address that thing.

All three are emotions disguised as reasons. The environmental blamer is afraid. The external delegator is anxious. The internal doubter is ashamed.

Read the emotion. Address the emotion. The objection dissolves.

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I used to be terrified of sales. Asking someone for money made me nauseous.

Then I reframed it. Selling is giving someone something they need and asking them to invest in themselves. The act of buying is the first behaviour change, the first commitment, the first vote for the person they want to become.

The man who pays for coaching has just made his first behavioural commitment. He's put money down. He's invested. Investment changes his relationship to the process. You treat differently the things you've invested in.

Selling someone coaching is helping them take themselves seriously.

That reframe changed everything. Made me better at coaching, better at business, better at relationships. The skill underneath sales is the same skill underneath all of those: helping someone see what they can't see on their own and then helping them act on it.

This would be the perfect point to introduce my high-ticket coaching programme. £10k, six months, change your life. Except I don't have one. Keep reading. It's all free. I've got nothing to sell you.

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Every person you talk to has a gap. A gap between where they are and where they want to be. And every emotion they're experiencing is generated by that gap.

Frustrated at work? Gap between your current role and the role you want. Angry at your partner? Gap between the relationship you have and the one you want.

Your job, as a coach, a friend, a partner, a parent, is to make the gap visible and then help them build a bridge.

Not to close it for them. Nobody can close another person's gap. But you can help them see it clearly. And most people feel the gap without seeing it. They feel the discomfort of the distance without knowing what they're distant from.

Name the gap. Build the bridge. Close the loop. Behaviour change. Coaching. Sales. Service. All the same thing.

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Feedback is the other half.

Action without feedback is just movement. Noise. You're working hard but you've got no idea if it's the right direction.

The gym has the fastest feedback of anything I've found. Two-second loop. You lift. You feel it. The mirror shows you. The next rep adjusts itself. That's why beginners improve so fast in the gym and so slowly at everything else.

Business is weeks. Sometimes months. You launch something, then sit in silence waiting for the market to tell you whether you got it right. Brutal gap. Relationships are even slower. You change something about how you show up and the other person might not register it for months. You're flying blind on a prayer and a hunch.

Which is why the body comes first. The feedback is instant. And why building comes last, because the feedback loop is the widest, and you need years of practice with tighter loops before that patience feels survivable.

Volume times feedback. That's the equation. More reps, tighter loops, faster mastery. Gym. Sales. Marriage. Same maths.

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Chapter 11: Building — Control Your Future

The first four B's are about you. Body, Belonging, Belief, Behaviour. Internal. Getting your own house in order.

The fifth B is about everyone else.

Building is what happens when you've done enough internal work that your energy starts pointing outward. You're no longer in survival mode. The fires are under control. And now you have surplus energy, attention, effort, time, skill, and you need somewhere to put it.

Building is creation. The act of taking what you've learned and turning it into something that outlives you. Something that helps other people. Something that compounds over time.

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This is where the selfish-to-selfless arc completes itself. I've watched it in three places, always the same shape.

The CaliUnity customer journey was the first one I noticed. Standing at a whiteboard one evening, mapping it out. New member arrives. "I want to get in shape." I. I. I. I. Everything about them, which is exactly where it should start. They train for a few months. The body changes. The confidence builds. They start helping the person next to them. Small things. Spotting a set. Explaining a movement. Making the new person feel welcome the way someone once made them feel welcome.

Then six months in, they're coaching beginners in Saturday sessions. Volunteering their time. Giving away what they learned. The language has shifted completely. It's "how can I help this person?" now. Raving customer to unpaid advocate to someone whose identity is wrapped up in being useful to the community.

Selfish to useful. Every time. Same arc.

Second place I spotted it: my own career. "I want to quit engineering." I. I. I. "How can I be useful during lockdown?" You. We. Us. The rings over the tree. Everything that followed.

Third: the Academy book I wrote for coaches. Fifteen levels. Without me planning it, the structure mirrors the arc perfectly. Levels 1–5 are proof. Get your body right. Get your certifications. Show that you can do the thing. The selfish phase. The necessary one. You can't teach what you haven't done. Levels 6–10 are usefulness. Start coaching. Start helping. Apply the proof to other people's problems. You've earned the right. Levels 11–15 are giving back. Mentor other coaches. Build systems that work without you. Create things that outlive your direct involvement.

Proof. Usefulness. Giving back. Once you see the shape, you see it everywhere.

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There's a principle from recovery programmes that rewired how I think about everything: in order to keep something, you have to give it away.

Newton's third law again. To move forward, something has to push back. The rocket only flies because it burns fuel and throws it behind. You only grow because you give something away. Romans knew this before Newton did. They'd sacrifice troops in a strategic loss to gain a strategic victory. The physics of progress demands an exchange.

The sponsorship model. One man who's been through the fire walks alongside another man who's still in it. Someone who's lived it, offering what they learned.

CaliUnity does this. Coaching does this. This book does it too. Me giving away what I've learned, not to be generous but because the giving is what makes it real. The teaching is what solidifies the learning. The helping is what proves the help was worth receiving.

Goggins says this without saying it. He ran 10K. Then 20K. Then 100 miles. And then he told the world about it. The telling is part of the keeping. You share the lesson or it evaporates.

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Practical application: get your proof, be useful, give it back.

Proof first. "Why should I listen to you?" Every reader, every client, every student asks it. The answer can't be "because I read a book about it." The answer has to be "because I've done it." I went from obese to running ultramarathons. From addicted to coaching others through addiction. From nihilistic to building a gym that won Best Business in Bath. Receipts. Do the hard thing. Build the body. Run the race. Coach the client. Start the business. Prove it works through your own life before you try to prove it works through anyone else's.

Be useful. Take the proof and apply it. Help one person. Then another. Let the helping become the habit. Let the usefulness become the identity.

Give it away. Teach others to do what you did. Build the system that runs without you. Write the book. Create the programme. Train the coaches.

The arc always ends with giving. Giving is what turns individual progress into collective impact. Collective impact is the only thing that scales.

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There's a quote from the Book of Job that I think about.

God takes everything from Job. His wealth, his family, his health. Everything. And Job, sitting in the rubble of his life, keeps faith. He nearly gives up. He questions everything. He rages. He despairs. He argues with God. He demands explanations. He says things that would get him thrown out of most churches.

But he doesn't quit.

And then, after the suffering, after the questioning, after the raging, he sees something larger. He can't explain it. He can't rationalise it. He can't fit it into a neat moral framework where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. He just sees that his perspective was always too narrow to understand the full design.

I'm not religious in a church sense. But I'm deeply spiritual in the sense that I believe there's a pattern larger than any individual life. That the dots connect backwards, even when they look random forwards. That the worst chapter might be the setup for the best one.

When I mention God, I mean this: God is just the word we put on things we don't understand. The force that makes flowers grow and wounds heal and broken people rebuild. The thing that connects the dots in ways you can't see until you look backwards. Call it God, call it the universe, call it dumb luck, call it whatever makes it real for you. Jordan Peterson describes God as the highest order in your hierarchy of values. The thing you orient your life around, whether you call it God or not. The mountaintop you'll never fully reach but spend your life climbing toward.

I am a rusty pipe. And whatever you want to call the force that flows through human beings when they're aligned and useful, it flows through me when I'm useful and put others first. When I'm selfish, the pipe blocks. When I'm useful, it opens.

The serenity prayer says it better than I can: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I say that to myself most mornings. Not to a bearded man in the sky. To whatever it is that keeps me moving. Thy will be done. Help me to be useful.

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"I build things that build people."

I wrote that on a whiteboard at 2am and I've never been able to improve on it. I don't build for scale or exit multiples or LinkedIn clout. I build because building is the highest-leverage way to help people.

One conversation helps one person. One book helps thousands. One gym helps a community. One framework, if it's good enough, helps anyone who encounters it for as long as the framework exists, as long as they need it, adopted into their behaviour so it lasts beyond the immediate point of contact.

Building is service expressed as creation. And creation is the only way to play a long-term game with long-term people in a long-term way.

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The practical side of building is unglamorous. It's systems and processes and spreadsheets and meetings and things breaking and fixing and breaking again. It's hiring the wrong person and firing them three months later. It's launching a product nobody wants and pivoting to one they do. It's cash flow problems at 6am and client crises at midnight and the constant, gnawing uncertainty of whether any of this will work.

And I love it. Not despite the mess. Because of it.

Because the mess is the feedback. Every failure is a signal. Every broken thing is a lesson. Every crisis is a test of the operating system I built in the first four B's. Can I regulate under pressure? Can I make decisions with incomplete information? Can I stay disciplined when the dopamine of easy wins isn't flowing?

If yes: keep building. If no: go back to the foundation. Train the body. Reconnect with the tribe. Examine the beliefs. Practise the behaviour.

Building is not an escape from the inner work. It's the application of it. The arena where everything you've learned gets tested at scale.

I'm building CaliOnline now, an online coaching platform designed to take the principles from the gym and deliver them to anyone in the world with an internet connection. I'm building CaliAcademy, a coach education programme that trains other coaches to do what I do, so the impact multiplies. I'm building the Mo(men)tum podcast, a platform for the conversations men need to hear. And I'm writing this book.

Each one is a different bet on the same thesis: the operating system works, it can be packaged and transmitted, and when it reaches the right person at the right time, it changes their trajectory.

Some of these will fail. I know that. The failure rate for new ventures is brutal and I'm not arrogant enough to think I'm exempt. But the reps are the point. Build, test, learn, adjust, build again. The same feedback loop from the gym, applied at a different scale.

And the long game, the real long game, is this: in ten years, there could be hundreds of coaches trained in this framework, each one coaching dozens of people, each of those people impacting the people around them. The leverage is geometric. One becomes a hundred becomes ten thousand. And the founder, me, becomes increasingly unnecessary. Which is exactly the point.

Because the best things outlive the people who made them. And the best builders make themselves redundant.

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Wealth isn't money. Money is a side effect. Wealth is leverage plus time freedom. Leverage produces outcomes disproportionate to effort: writing a book, building a system, teaching a framework. Time freedom is choosing how you spend your hours.

Leverage plus time freedom. The engine.

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The moment I understood what building actually means.

This was 2023. CaliUnity had been running for about two years. Maybe eighty members. I was coaching a morning class. Eight people. Halfway through, a new guy walked in. Late twenties, nervous, clearly out of his comfort zone.

I welcomed him, showed him the basics, paired him with another member who could keep an eye on him.

Then something happened that made me stop mid-sentence.

The member I'd paired him with, a guy called Tom, been with us about a year, started coaching the new guy. I hadn't asked him to. Tom had been the nervous new guy twelve months ago, and he knew exactly what this man needed to hear.

I stood back and watched.

Tom said the right things. Demonstrated the right movements. Created the right atmosphere of calm competence that lets a beginner breathe. Didn't rush. Didn't overwhelm. Gave exactly what was needed, no more, no less.

This is what building means. A man who was changed by the community paying it forward to a man who just walked in. The system reproducing itself. The DNA of the community replicating in a new host.

Tom didn't need me in that moment. He had absorbed the principles, the welcome, the patience, the standard, the support, and he was transmitting them. Like a cell dividing.

That's a system. That's building. When the thing you created creates more of itself, you've built something that outlives your effort.

The funniest moment was a member asking me, "How long have you been working here?" I'd built the place. I'd just stepped away. Came back for a session and someone thought I was new. That was the moment I knew it was actually working.

CaliUnity runs without me now. Harvey manages the day-to-day. Kiera handles operations. The coaches coach. The members help each other. I'm building the next things, and the gym is growing.

The test of real building. Does it need you? If it dies when you stop, you built a job. If it grows when you step away, you built a system.

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Money. Because men have a complicated relationship with it and most of them won't admit it.

Money isn't evil. Wanting money isn't shallow. Making money isn't selfish.

Money is a tool. Like a hammer. You can build a house with it or you can hurt someone with it. The hammer isn't the problem. The hand holding it is.

The men with the healthiest relationship to money see it as a measure of value created. "I earned X because I created Y amount of value for Z number of people."

The men with the worst relationship worship it or demonise it. The worshippers sacrifice everything and discover that the money doesn't fill the hole. The demonisers refuse to pursue it on principle, then resent the people who have it.

Both positions are avoidance strategies. The balanced position: money is a byproduct of building things that matter. Pursue the building. The money follows.

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Long-term games with long-term people.

Naval Ravikant said it, and it's stuck with me like a tattoo on the inside of my skull. The biggest returns come from playing the same game for a long time with the same people.

The reason Elon's the richest man on Earth is that his long vision was going to Mars. No one was thinking that big. And along the way to Mars, he stumbled into rockets, satellites, payments, cars, AI. The things only he could see because he was aiming past everyone else's horizon. Long-term games with long-term people create compounds nobody else can touch.

Every great thing I've built has come from long-term games. CaliUnity exists because Kiera and I played the same game for years. The coaching framework exists because I stayed in the same conversations for a decade.

I'm playing the long game. With the podcast. With this book. I'm not patient by nature. Ask anyone who's worked with me. But I've learned, painfully and expensively, that the short game is a lie. The short game promises speed and delivers nothing. The long game promises nothing and delivers everything.

The reason most people stay in jobs isn't the money. It's the prediction. They can see the income coming. If everyone in entrepreneurship was guaranteed a decent exit in ten years — but nothing for the first ten — everyone would do it. It's just the uncertainty that fucks people. Not the work. The not-knowing.

Build for the long term. Build things that compound. Build things that build people. And play the same game, with the same people, for as long as the game is worth playing.

The fifth B is an ongoing practice of creation in service of others. The logical endpoint of the selfish-to-selfless arc. You start by fixing yourself. You end by fixing the world. Or your corner of it. One gym. One book. One run. One conversation at a time.

Building. It's what I do. And it's enough.

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PART FOUR: THE PHYSICS OF CHANGE

Chapter 12: The Mechanics

The physics underneath everything. Control leads to prediction leads to safety leads to peace.
Four words, one chain.

Your nervous system craves control because control is how it predicts the future, and prediction is how it keeps you alive. Anxiety is too many predictions running at once, tangling. Confidence is the state where your predictions match your reality. You've done this before. No gap. No panic.

The behavioural dictionary is interview prep for your own inner world. It takes the unpredictable and makes it predictable. Calms the nervous system enough that rational decision-making becomes possible.

Calm first. Think second. Act third. Most people get this backwards and try to think their way through a panic response. You can't. The rational brain is locked out when the alarm is firing. You have to make things predictable — know the emotion, know the behaviour — before the frontal cortex comes back online.

Most people think the prefrontal cortex is driving and the monkey is strapped into the back. It's the other way round. The monkey is driving. Has always been driving. The only thing you get to do is hand the monkey a map.

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Pain is physiological. Suffering is psychological.

The knee says: pain, 6 out of 10, left side, weight-bearing. The narrator says: you're done. You'll never recover. This is permanent.

The knee is honest. The narrator is a catastrophist.

I discovered this on a long run. Mile thirty-something. Everything hurt. And I noticed, for the first time, that the pain itself was manageable. What was unbearable was the story I was telling about it. "How am I going to do this for another twenty miles?" "What if it gets worse?"

When I dropped the story and just listened to the body, the pain was still there but the suffering halved. The event is one thing. The narration is another. The narration is always worse than the event.

Epictetus: "It's not things that upset us, but our judgments about things." Two thousand years ago. Most people still haven't learned it.

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A few laws underneath all of it, the stuff I come back to at 4am when something's stuck.

Feedback loops. Tight loop, fast learning. Loose loop, wasted effort. Broken loop, people give up. Behaviour equals volume times feedback. High volume with tight feedback produces transformation. Which is why the gym works and why a six-month product launch with no signal in the middle is brutal.

Framing is the lens. Same event, different frame, completely different behaviour. Framing isn't positive thinking. Positive thinking is lazy. Framing asks: what's the most useful way to interpret this event?

Specificity. Vague goals produce vague behaviour. "I want to get healthier" produces nothing. "200 grams of protein today" produces action. I've watched clients fail for years on the first sentence and succeed in six weeks on the second. Same person. Different language.

Environment beats willpower. Every time. The man who changes isn't the one with the strongest will. He's the one who set up his environment so will is rarely needed. Stock the fridge. Lay out the gym clothes. Delete the apps. Put the phone in another room. My alarm lives downstairs. Harvey knows I'm in bed by nine. Kiera takes the crap food out of the kitchen before it becomes a negotiation. Willpower is for people who like losing fights.

Compounding breaks people. Not the math of it. The waiting. Small behaviours repeated consistently produce disproportionate results, but month twelve outputs more than the first eleven combined. Most people quit in month two because they expect linear returns from an exponential process. The results always lag behind the effort. You have to trust the gap. I still struggle with this.

Minimum effective dose for overwhelm. One push-up. One honest answer. One closed loop. Momentum is harder to stop than to continue, but you have to start it.

And failure is feedback. Success says keep going. Failure says adjust. The men who improve fastest in the gym are the ones who fail most often. Same in business. Same in marriage.

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Princeton, 1973. Darley and Batson. Seminary students set up to give a talk about the Good Samaritan. On the way, they passed a man slumped, clearly in trouble.

The only thing that predicted helping was whether they were in a hurry. Of those told they had time, 63% stopped. Of those told they were running late, 10% did.

You can't pour from an empty cup. It's physics.

The selfish phase isn't optional. Fill your own cup first. Body. Finances. Mind. Energy into surplus. The oxygen mask goes on you first. If you pass out, you can't help anyone.

But hold the intention tight. The selfishness is the runway. The usefulness is the flight. The runway only exists so you can take off.

I learned this from Kiera. She wanted to do her first half Ironman. So I signed her up the next morning. Taught her to swim. Did the race with her. I was thinking about her the whole way. And I got to the finish line and realised I'd just done a half Ironman. But it felt easy. Because I wasn't thinking about myself.

I used that hack for every race after. Every ultra, every Ironman. I don't care about my finish time. I think about getting someone else through it who's struggling. The whole thing gets easier. Life is the same. We're all running the same race.

The arc of the book. The arc of the life.

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Chapter 13: The Trap of Power

People get uncomfortable with this chapter. Good.

Most men give their power away. They've been trained to.

Blame is the mechanism. Every time you blame someone else for your situation, you're making a trade. You're trading responsibility for comfort. And the exchange rate is brutal: every unit of blame you assign to someone else is a unit of control you lose over your own life.

If your boss is the reason you're unhappy, then only your boss can make you happy. You've placed the lever in someone else's hands.

If your parents are the reason you're broken, then only your parents can fix you. And since they're probably not equipped to do that, you've just guaranteed that you stay broken. Forever.

The blame-control paradox: the more you blame, the less control you have.

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"Life is not my fault, but it is my responsibility."

Fault is backward-looking. It's about who caused the situation. Responsibility is forward-looking. It's about who's going to fix it. Two entirely different questions.

You can spend your life answering the first question. You can build an airtight case for why none of this is your fault. And you'd be right. The case would hold up in court.

But the court can't change your life. Only you can.

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I had addictions. I got help. I studied everything. The Stoics, Buddhism, recovery programmes, behavioural science, neuroscience, cognitive behavioural therapy. Everything. I was trying to understand myself from every angle because no single framework explained the whole picture.

I studied the twelve-step model deeply. The sponsorship model — one man who's been through the fire walking alongside another man who's still in it. Connection as the antidote to addiction. That idea changed how I think about coaching, about community, about what CaliUnity actually is.

The first step in that model is admitting powerlessness. That your life has become unmanageable. I understand why it's there. It breaks through denial. It stops the ego from pretending everything's under control when the house is on fire.

But I think there's a better starting point.

You're not powerless. You're miscalibrated.

Your feedback loops are broken, not your character. The man who drinks every night isn't a broken person who needs to surrender before he can heal. He's a man who feels an emotion, can't identify it, and reaches for the nearest available behaviour that changes how he feels. The drinking is a control mechanism. A bad one. A destructive one. But a mechanism with identifiable inputs and outputs.

And mechanisms can be reprogrammed.

It won't happen easily. It won't happen overnight. You can't read a book on a Sunday afternoon and expect Monday to be different. Reprogramming takes the same time and effort that the original programming took. Years of wrong loops require years of right ones. The timeline isn't fair. It isn't fast. But it's real, and it works, and the evidence is everywhere if you know where to look.

I'm not saying recovery programmes don't work. They obviously do. Millions of people are alive because of them, and anyone who's found sobriety through that path has my complete respect. I'm saying there's a complementary perspective. One that starts with agency rather than powerlessness. A starting point where you have power, but you've been aiming it wrong. Where the work isn't surrendering control — it's learning to use it properly.

The Behavioural OS is that different entry point. A perspective that says the system isn't broken beyond repair. It's running on bad definitions and bad loops, and those can be updated.

Powerlessness as a starting point can become powerlessness as an identity. I've watched it happen. Men who've been sober for years but still define themselves by the thing they've overcome. Still carry the identity of someone who is completely at the mercy of a force they can't control. The label becomes the ceiling.

I've studied these models. I have deep respect for them. People are alive because of them. But I also believe that agency is the thing that changes lives. Not surrender. The acknowledgement "I'm struggling and I need help" is not the same as "I'm powerless." The first is honest. The second is a belief. And beliefs create the reality they describe.

You are not powerless. You are miscalibrated. And miscalibration can be fixed.

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There's a ladder I take clients up.

Bottom rung is blame. Someone else's fault. Maximum comfort, zero power. Above that, justify — not my fault, and here's why I can't change it either. Still no power. Then shame, which most people mistake for progress. "I'm a bad person." Feels like ownership. It's a trap. Shame doesn't produce action. It produces hiding.

Fourth rung up is awareness. You see the pattern. Haven't changed anything. But you can see it. The fifth is ownership — this is my responsibility and I'm going to do something. That's the breakthrough. Forward-looking. Action-producing. The top rung is creation. Building something new from the wreckage. Stopped managing the damage. Started making the alternative.

Most men live on the bottom two rungs their whole lives. They're comfortable there. It costs them everything.

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My parents got stuck in a blame loop. It happens to good people. My mum blamed my dad. My dad blamed my mum. Each had a case. They were two people under enormous stress, in a hard environment, without the tools to handle it differently.

They separated eventually. And the separation, painful as it was, gave each of them something the marriage hadn't: their power back.

The lesson is the hardest one in this book.

Your life is not your fault. But it is your responsibility.

You can hold both of those truths simultaneously. You can acknowledge that bad things happened to you, that people failed you, that systems disadvantaged you, that the hand you were dealt was worse than someone else's, AND take full responsibility for what you do next.

The "and" is everything.

Not "but." Not "however." And. Both truths. At the same time. Without contradiction.

You were dealt a shit hand AND you're the one who plays it.

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I see my dad's traits in myself. His impatience. His tendency to go quiet when he should speak. But also his strength. His stubbornness that looks a lot like loyalty. His work ethic that borders on self-punishment.

I see myself wanting to withdraw from Kiera when she needs connection. Wanting to snap. Wanting to repeat patterns I absorbed as a kid. The impulse arrives and I have to make a conscious choice to do something different. Every day. Daily. And some days I fail. Some days the pattern completes before I catch it and I say the wrong thing in the wrong tone and I see her face change and I know I just repeated something I wish I hadn't.

And then I repair. With honesty. "The pattern fired. I'm sorry. I'm working on it."

The operating system in its least glamorous form. A man in his kitchen catching a generational pattern three seconds after it fires and choosing, painfully, imperfectly, to interrupt it.

Real work. Everything else is commentary.

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There's an art piece I keep seeing in my head. Haven't made it yet. Maybe someone will.

A sculpture of a father shouting at his son. Life-size. You walk up to it and you judge the dad. What a prick. What kind of man shouts at his kid like that?

But then you walk to the side. And behind that dad is another dad shouting at another son. And behind him, another. And another. A hundred figures deep. A hundred generations of fathers shouting at sons, each one shaped by the one before him, each one passing down the only language he was ever taught.

And when you step back far enough, the hundred figures form a sentence.

Break the cycle.

Nobody is bad. My dad wasn't. His dad wasn't. The man reading this who sees his own father's worst traits firing through his own hands isn't. It's the environment. Generational patterns. Behaviour passed down like a family heirloom nobody asked for. Upbringing shaping upbringing shaping upbringing, all the way back to a man nobody remembers who was probably doing his best too.

It's not your fault. But it is your responsibility.

You might not fix everything. You probably won't. The patterns run deep and they're stubborn and some days they win. But anything you interrupt now, anything you catch and redirect and choose differently, makes life easier for your kids. For the next generation. For the son or daughter who won't have to sit in a bedroom listening through the floor because you decided, today, to do one thing differently than the man who raised you.

The work isn't perfection. It's progress. One interrupted pattern at a time.

My dad gave me push-ups and stubbornness and a refusal to quit. He also gave me patterns I have to fight every day. Both things are true. Both things are gifts, in different ways. And my job isn't to judge him for the patterns. My job is to keep the good ones, interrupt the harmful ones, and pass something better forward.

That's what breaking the cycle means. Not erasing the past. Building from it.

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Masculinity isn't the problem. The suppression is. The stoicism-without-outlet. The "boys don't cry." The equation of vulnerability with weakness. These are the additions that are killing men. 125 a week.

Remove the additions and the healthy core stands. Discipline. Courage. Responsibility. Protection. Provision. Service. Strength that includes the strength to be honest about what you're feeling.

The man who walked into the park and told a stranger "you stopped me from killing myself" is masculine. Deeply, authentically masculine. He did the hardest thing a man can do. He spoke truth when every part of his conditioning told him to stay silent.

Real men read their emotions. Upgrade the code and the core stays strong.

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I coached a man for three months who couldn't stop blaming his ex-wife for the state of his life. And I get it. She'd done things. Real things. Measurable damage. I'm not going to minimise that.

But he'd been carrying that grievance for four years. Four years of repeating the story. Four years of starting every conversation with "if she hadn't..." Four years of handing her, a woman who was probably not thinking about him at all, the keys to his emotional regulation.

I asked him a question one day that made him angry with me for about a week. "If everything you're saying about her is true, if she really did all of this, then she's been controlling your life for four years without lifting a finger. She goes to work, picks up the kids, eats dinner, sleeps. And you spend your evenings reliving 2022. Who's really in control here?"

He didn't speak to me for six days.

Then he came to the gym and said: "You're right and I hate it."

We started working. Not on forgiveness. We worked on reclaiming his attention. On redirecting the hours he spent in blame toward something productive. On building something, a fitness routine, a social group, a weekly schedule, that was his, that she couldn't touch, that belonged to the future instead of the past.

Within three months, he'd stopped mentioning her. He hadn't forgiven her. He'd just redirected his energy. The blame had been filling a gap, the gap where purpose should have been. Once the gap was filled with something real, the blame became unnecessary.

That's what blame does. It fills the gap. It gives you something to think about, someone to be angry at, a narrative to repeat. And the narrative is seductive because it's comfortable. It doesn't require change. It only requires repetition.

But the gap it fills should be filled with creation. With building. With forward motion. And no amount of blame will build anything.

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PART FIVE: BEING

Chapter 14: Being

There's a sixth B beyond the five. Being.

Body. Belonging. Belief. Behaviour. Building. And then, once you've done the work on the first five for long enough: Being.

Being is what happens when the system stops being a system and starts being you. When the dictionary is internalised. When the loops are automatic. When the skill disappears and what's left is just a man, moving through the world, responding to signals without the manual.

Like driving. You don't think about the clutch anymore.

I'm not there yet. Fully honest about that. I have moments of it. On the rings, mid-session, when the body knows where to go and the mind goes quiet. In a coaching conversation where the words arrive without scripting. At 4am writing, when the sentences come faster than I can type.

Those moments are rare enough that I notice them when they happen.

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Real freedom is wanting whatever you do.

Doing whatever you want is how I lived at eighteen. Scrolling, eating, avoiding, decaying. Captivity with better marketing.

Freedom is when the action and the desire align. When you don't need to force yourself because the thing you're doing is the thing you want to be doing.

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The purpose of life is to be useful.

Simple. Almost disappointingly simple. Simple things are usually the true ones.

Be useful. To yourself first. Get your body working, your mind stable, your behaviour under control. Then to the people around you. Then, if you choose, to the wider world, through building and giving.

When you're useful, the nihilism can't hold. Every person you help is proof that your existence matters. Usefulness is meaning. Meaning is the antidote to despair.

Frankl wrote: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

The whys that collapse under pressure are self-referential. I want to get rich. I want to look good. I want to be famous. They loop back to I. And the I-loop is where despair lives.

The why that holds up is always outward. Someone is waiting for you to be useful.

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There's a clinical question from dialectical behaviour therapy, developed by Marsha Linehan for people in genuine crisis. Read this carefully before you react.

The question is: "Why haven't you killed yourself yet?"

It's not asking why you should. It's asking why you haven't. Because the answer is the thing you're living for.

"My kids." "My dog." "I haven't finished the book." "Because fuck that."

Whatever the answer is — however small, however quiet, however impossible to explain to anyone else — that's your anchor. That's what kept you here when everything else said leave. And it was always enough.

If the question hit hard, sit with the answer. Write it down. Because the next time the darkness comes — and it will, because life is waves — you'll have something to hold onto. Your own answer. In your own words.

That's the most real thing you'll ever write.

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The endgame of this book is simple. When the next wave comes — and it will come — you know what to do.

You read the signal. Identify the emotion. Match it to the behaviour. Act. The loop closes. The wave passes. You're still standing.

You're not invincible. You have a system. The system works.

Because somewhere in a park in Bath, someone threw some rings over a tree. A man walked across wet grass. Six words were spoken.

And it turned out that mattered. More than anything else in this whole story.

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If anything in this book resonated, head to **mo-men-tum.com**. The OS, the full behavioural operating system with the dictionary, the check-in, the 5 B's assessment, is there. Free. No account needed.

Morning MO(MEN)TUM is a daily email and podcast. Something short at 5am to start your day. Sign up on the site.

If you want to support the run or get involved: **mo-men-tum.com**

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Epilogue: For the Man Who Saved Me

This is for you.

You walked across wet grass on a cold Sunday afternoon and said six words that changed my life. You didn't know you were doing that. You thought you were thanking someone. You thought you were giving a gift. But the gift went both ways. You gave me a purpose. You gave me a direction. You killed the lie that had been running my operating system for years and replaced it with something so simple and so true that I've built everything since on its foundation.

Small things save lives.

I don't know if you'll ever read this. Maybe you will. Maybe it'll find its way to you through an algorithm or a recommendation or someone who knows us both. And you'll recognise yourself in these pages. And you'll know, in your chest, the same way I knew it in mine that afternoon, that your courage made all of this possible.

The gym. The community. The coaching. The framework. The podcast. The run. This book.

All of it started with you.

With your willingness to say the hardest thing a person can say. Out loud. To someone who barely knew you. In a park. Before 9am.

But you didn't stay quiet.

You spoke.

And speaking saved us both.

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I know you now. We're friends. You're one of the strongest people I've ever met. And I don't mean on the rings.

Most men would rather die than do what you did. Most men would rather suffer in silence, drown in the dark, maintain the performance of being fine, than speak six words to a bloke they don't know in a park in Bath.

You weren't most men. And because you weren't, I'm not either.

• • •

This book is also for the man who's reading it right now and recognising something.

Maybe not the whole thing. Maybe just a chapter. Maybe just a sentence. Maybe just the knowledge that someone else has stood in the same darkness and lived through it and came out the other side with something to show.

If that's you, if you're in it right now, if the water is rising, if the horse has bolted and you're hanging on with both hands and the reins are cutting into your palms —

You're not weak.

You're not broken.

You're not beyond repair.

You're not the only one.

You're a man running a system without a manual. A human being trying to regulate an inner world that nobody taught you to read, using tools that nobody gave you, in a culture that told you the feelings were the problem instead of the signal.

The feelings aren't the problem. They're the data. And this book, imperfect, human, probably full of things I'll want to rewrite in five years, is the manual.

Use it.

Start with the body. Tomorrow morning. Set an alarm thirty minutes earlier. Do ten push-ups. Or five. Or one. Go for a walk around the block. Prove to yourself, through your body, that what you do changes what you feel.

Find your tribe. In person. A gym. A park session. A group of people who show up and move and don't judge you for being new or nervous or afraid.

Examine the beliefs. The stories you're telling yourself about who you are. Ask where those stories came from. Give yourself permission to rewrite them. Through action. Through evidence. Through casting votes for the person you want to become.

Act. Now. Not when you're ready. Because the readiness arrives in the doing.

Build. Once your energy starts pointing outward, create something. Anything. Something that helps one person. Take what you've learned and give it away. Because somewhere out there, a man is waiting for his version of the rings over the tree, and you might be the one who throws them.

Keep going.

Momentum is not a feeling. Momentum is a physics term. It means: a body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Stay in motion. Through the bad days and the worse days and the days when the operating system feels like it's failing and the emotions are loud and the behaviour is hard and the progress is invisible.

Stay in motion. Because the compound effect is real. Every rep accumulates. Every kept promise adds to the score. Every day you choose to show up instead of shut down is another vote for the man you're becoming.

Stay in motion. For the man who told me I saved him, but really saved me. For the 125 men who won't make it this week. For the boy you were at sixteen who needed someone to hand him a map and say: here. It gets better. I promise. I know because I walked this road and the other side exists and it's worth the journey.

Stay in motion.

For yourself.

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One more thing — and it might contradict everything I've just said. Or maybe it completes it. I'm not sure. I'm still working this one out, and the fact that I'm not sure is part of why I trust it.

Contradictions are allowed. In this book, in life, in the messy experience of being a human who is simultaneously flawed and trying. I've told you that emotions are signals and also that they can be overwhelming. I've told you that you have agency and also that the monkey is driving. I've told you that the selfish phase is necessary and also that usefulness is the purpose. Both things are true. At the same time. Without contradiction.

Because that's what lived thinking looks like. It contradicts itself. It holds two truths in the same hand and doesn't need them to agree. It says "I am strong" and "I need help" in the same breath and doesn't flinch.

If you take one thing from this book, make it this: the gap between who you are and who you could be is just a distance. And distances can be closed. One step at a time. One rep. One conversation. One kept promise. One morning where you get up when the alarm goes off and do the thing you said you'd do.

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. I said it early in this book and I'll say it again here. I'm running a thousand miles in November. Writing this book was my first step. Reading it might be yours. The rest is just more steps.

That's momentum. A physics term.

A body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Stay in motion.

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If you're reading this and you're in trouble, here are the numbers. Don't wait. Don't think about it.

UK: Samaritans — 116 123 (24 hours, every day). Text SHOUT to 85258. **Australia:** Lifeline — 13 11 14. Beyond Blue — 1300 22 4636. **International:** findahelpline.com

You're not alone. You're never alone.

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Years before I wrote this book, years before I even knew it would be a book, I had a picture in my head. A single scene that I replayed like a film clip on a loop.

I'm standing in front of Hormozi. I don't know where. Some event, some conference, some corridor backstage. Doesn't matter. And I'm holding a book. Five hundred pages. Five years to write. And I hand it to him and I say: you changed my life. This is yours. Use it. Don't even credit me. I don't care. It's my gift back.

That scene kept me writing. On the nights when the words wouldn't come and the framework felt stupid and the voice in my head said nobody's going to read this. That scene. That moment. The idea that one day I could hand something back to the man whose voice in my earphones on a dark morning run in Bath started a chain reaction that became the 5 B's, the dictionary, the operating system, the gym, the podcast, the run, this book.

I don't know if that moment will ever happen. Probably not. He's busy. I'm nobody. The world doesn't arrange itself around the scenes we rehearse in our heads.

But the book is real. And the dedication is real.

• • •

Dedicated to Alex Hormozi, who showed me that giving away the secrets is the most powerful thing you can do.

And to my parents. You did your best. It was more than enough. I understand you completely. And I thank you.

And to Kiera, who threw the rings over the tree with me and has been beside me for every single step of what followed. Without you, none of this exists.

And to David Goggins, whose voice in my headphones at 5am taught me that the mind lies and the body proves it wrong.

And to every man who's ever sat in the dark and wondered if it matters.

It does. More than you know.

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- Brene Brown — vulnerability research
- Steve Jobs — connecting the dots backwards
- Naval Ravikant — long-term games with long-term people
- Jocko Willink — extreme ownership, "good," discipline equals freedom
- Marsha Linehan — dialectical behaviour therapy

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This book is free. It will always be free.

If it helped you, share it with one person who needs it.

That's the only thing I'll ever ask.

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If you bought this on Amazon, thank you. Every penny goes to men's mental health. I make nothing from it. The reviews help it reach more men, and that's what matters.

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