Preface

We all have stories to share, and embedded in our stories are the teachings we take away from our unique experiences—if we are paying attention.

I began writing my stories in high school when my parents gave me a blank journal as a gift. I was embarking on a yearlong foreign exchange program through my hometown Rotary Club, and my parents wanted me to remember that unique experience for years to come.

Throughout the years, I've continued to document my journeys. This has resulted in several published books and blogs. Each time that I reflected on my stories, I found more nuggets of wisdom.

This book is a collection of my favorite assumptions, insights, and life lessons gathered over the years and documented in my blog articles.

I hope that the benefits I've received from these lessons will benefit you as well. Sometimes the best way we learn is from each other.

To lifelong learning!

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Life: Are We There Yet?

"Are we there yet?" I asked. "Almost," replied Grandpa.

Each minute felt like an hour. After all, it was our first time visiting Florida since my Grandma and Grandpa had moved to Tampa from Wisconsin, and Walt Disney World was a dream come true for an eight-year-old. The anticipation was killing me. Everything I didn't know about Disney World was waiting for me to discover it.

In the daily events of our lives, *getting there* can mean a myriad of things. For our trip to Florida, it meant entering the gates of the Magic Kingdom. In other areas of our lives, there might be a new job, finding our soul mate, or buying our first house—it really depends on what we intend to accomplish and how we think we'll feel once we do.

But in the meantime, how do we stay present and enjoy the moment?

In his compelling book, The Power of Now, Eckhart Tolle writes, "The more you are focused on time—past and future—the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is."

By using common logic and without getting too esoteric, we can already be *there* in many ways—in our minds—but the only place we can physically experience is *here*—the present moment. The Now. Our powerful thoughts and imagination can take us in many directions—into the past or future—but the present moment is where all our power is.

The moment we have right now is our moment of creation. Everything else is simply our imagination.

But our imagination is directly affected by our thoughts in the present moment, and our future is changed by the thoughts that we hold.

Think of your thoughts like a pebble. If a pebble is dropped into a pond, it will start a ripple effect. Thoughts do the same. The thoughts you're thinking right now affect your future experiences. Thoughts have a ripple effect.

The challenge is one of anticipation—learning how to be happy in the present moment, even if what we are waiting for hasn't happened yet. Then, *getting there* will simply become the next moment and not the only point of the happiness experience.

As we finally pulled into the parking lot at Walt Disney World, I couldn't sit still—I was so excited. We finally arrived. We were *there*. But I had also felt the excitement of the whole experience, and this made the day seem that much sweeter. What could have been just the pleasure of the park became the full memory of the before, during, and after.

By keeping that mindset and applying it to my life, I have learned how to maintain an appreciation of the journey, not just the destination.

Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life

We all have the potential to create the life we want. But to do that, we first need to understand the power of our potential and the critical role that our thoughts play in the creative process.

Recently, I asked one of my transition-coaching clients about an employment opportunity; she replied, "I can't do that. I've never done that before." As we continued, I asked her about another option for her to consider, to which she remarked, "That's impossible. I've never even heard of that."

I noticed a pattern throughout our conversation: Her perspectives about everything in her life— her career, relationships, choices, and even new ideas— were coming from scarcity. She felt that her choices were always limited and there would never be enough for her.

"So, what do you really want? And what do you believe is possible?" I finally asked.

She had a tough time responding. Being so focused for so long on what she didn't want, she wasn't able to articulate what she *did* want. She'd lost her focus. She was wandering. And everything she was experiencing was a direct result of her chronic patterns of thought.

Thoughts are powerful. In fact, our thoughts create our reality as we experience it. Much like a captain navigating a ship, our thoughts take the wheel and steer our lives in different directions. Thoughts are reflective. Our life experience is a direct reflection of what we are focusing on—what we think about and what we believe is true. Beliefs draw our maps, and our expectations create our destinations.

So, if life is a journey, is your current expedition filled with blue tranquil waters or rough stormy seas? What has been your experience, and if it's not what you want, how can you change it?

When we change our thoughts,
we change our experiences.

Each of us has an *internal default setting*—usually formed in our impressionable early years—that becomes the foundation for a matching set of beliefs. These beliefs are sculpted and reinforced through chronic patterns of thought associated with

those beliefs. When our approach is positive, our beliefs will be positive. When our approach is negative, it's hard to reverse—and over time, negative thoughts create limiting beliefs.

Limiting beliefs are evidenced by statements like:

- "I have no choice."
- "Life is a struggle."
- "I made my decision and now I need to stick with it."
- "Things never go my way."
- "Other people always seem happier than I am."
- "This is just the cruel hand life has dealt me."

Most limiting beliefs have been created by simple observations—an experience or bad memory—or have been passed down by parents, teachers, or other role models who created them. Once established, a limiting belief can be difficult to overcome, especially when we are young and have less experience in life.

However, just because we've grown up with a belief doesn't mean we need to continue with that belief—especially if it's not serving us. Instead, by *reframing*, we can transform our negative thoughts to bring ourselves hope, clarity, and relief.

Reframing is the practice of seeing things from a different perspective—exercising our power of choice and deliberately choosing a different

thought—which, in turn, creates a different belief. Reframing gives us opportunities to see the upside of an event or circumstance even among feelings of disappointment or loss. Reframing helps us remain optimistic and hopeful.

Reframing gives us options, especially when we face limiting beliefs:

- "I have no choice," becomes, "*I always have choices, even if it's only with my attitude*."
- "Life is a struggle," becomes, "*Life can be challenging, but it's helping me grow*."
- "I made my decision and now I have to stick with it," becomes, "*I realize that things change, and I can always choose again*."

There are other ways reframing can serve us:

Allow space for acceptance. When something is frustrating or disappointing, it can be difficult to remain positive. By reframing a situation with a positive affirmation, we give ourselves room to discover new possibilities. What might have started as a problem can create momentum for a solution—a blessing in disguise. Reframing lets us look for the learning in each experience and teaches us that there is power and growth in acceptance.

It could be worse. It really could. Finding perspective in tough times can be challenging, but with practice and a healthy dose of humility, we can view our troubles as not so critical when compared

to the larger issues in the world around us. When we are faced with disappointment, reframing can bring a quick reality check that can lead us to appreciate what we already have and remind us that we are, indeed, blessed to have such freedom and abundance. Many people on the planet don't have it so good.

We are what we think. Becoming conscious of our thoughts takes a bit of work at first, but once we realize how much of our time is spent on unproductive thoughts (i.e., worrying, limiting beliefs), we can regain our personal power and momentum. Reframing quickly and easily transforms our limiting beliefs by simply becoming aware of them.

We always have options—even if it's by simply changing our attitude. And with time and practice, our limited beliefs can be transformed into *unlimited beliefs* so that we can start creating the life and the experiences that we really want.

Do These Skinny Jeans Make My Knees Look Fat?

That was the snippet I heard as I was passing by.

On the surface, the hot topic at work that morning seemed to be about skinny jeans. But it wasn't really about jeans—it was about fat knees.

Fat knees? Seriously?

So, I looked it up. And yes, a preoccupation over fat knees is, indeed, a thing. But what *isn't a thing* to somebody on the planet? And judging from a recent post about jeans with windows, the appearance of our knees is important—at least to some people.

Now I don't claim to have my finger on the newest fads or fashion trends, but I do have my eyes and ears tuned into topics on health and wellness. And the discussion that morning didn't sound like it was

coming from a healthy body image. It sounded more like body shaming.

Unhealthy obsessions over physical appearance are nothing new. And, unfortunately, the media reinforces these beliefs with advertisements that remind us of how much better off we'd be if only we were more attractive—or bought their products.

Even celebrities aren't immune. When Lady Gaga performed the Super Bowl halftime show, she was body shamed on social media for her exposed "natural" midriff. But Gaga didn't let the shaming stop her, responding: "I'm proud of my body and you should be proud of yours too…no matter who you are or what you do."

Whether it's knees, stomachs, legs, or whatever part of the body we obsess over, expectations of our youth-focused and beauty-conscious society will be forever unattainable. But that doesn't mean we need to play along with the dysfunction. Self-rejection feeds low self-esteem, which only makes it more difficult to remember that we're always worthy of love and support—especially from ourselves.

If it's self-love and self-acceptance we're looking for, then we need to learn ways to give ourselves that unconditional support, even in the light of conflicting social messages. We all seek validation, acceptance, and happiness. But happiness doesn't come from our outward appearance. *True happiness comes from within.* And this higher, unconditional

belief comes from paying attention to both our minds *and* bodies.

When we gain control over our thoughts, we reclaim our power to accept and care for our bodies.

And once we realize that our thoughts fuel our beliefs, we can stop creating our own fake news and start believing that our bodies can be acceptable.

Jillian Lampert, Chief Strategy Officer of The Emily Program—a foundation created to eliminate eating disorders—reminds us that many people think it is "normal" to feel bad about their body and to never feel good enough, thin enough, muscular enough, whatever. According to Lampert,

> "Enough is enough. The time is now to love the body you are in and take care of it because it feels good, not because it'll change how it looks. Why be the enemy of your body when it is your constant companion? Eat well, move well, cope well and sleep well and your body will be what it is designed to be. Quintessentially you!"

Having a battle with your body? Here are a few ways to call a truce and find more peace:

We are who we are. And this is good. Each of us is unique and has a different body size, shape, and form. Even if we desire to be thinner, stronger,

larger, or smaller, we are still going to have a natural body size due to bone structure, muscle tissue, and genetic predisposition. When we learn to accept ourselves and recognize that our beauty is natural, other details—like appearance—become secondary.

The body and mind are connected. There are significant studies about the mind-body connection and how our thoughts directly influence our health and well-being. When we discover that our thoughts and perspectives about our bodies are directly related our health, we can learn to replace old negative thoughts with healthy ones. A healthy mind feeds a healthy body.

Different strokes for different folks. Contrary to what the media tells us, not everybody is attracted to the same type of person. We are drawn to distinct types of cars: some people like sedans; some like SUVs. Our bodies also come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and so do our tastes. Don't let society tell you what is attractive—keep your own opinions.

Eat for fuel, not for feelings. It is important to see food as fuel for our bodies. When we use food to supplement emotions, it can be difficult to maintain nutritional balance and nourish our systems properly. If you have difficulty managing your emotions and are using food for comfort, seek help through your doctor, a counselor, or organizations like The Emily Program. Learn to see food as a positive and healthy supplement to your individual health and well-being.

Comparison can be chronic. And it's also a losing game. Remember: We are supposed to be different. The more we compare ourselves to others, the more we may feel inferior to them. Resist the temptation to fall into the trap of comparison and remember that others are having their own body experience just like we are. Focus only on yourself.

Exercise for health, not vanity. This can be a difficult shift to make, especially for chronic "gym rats." However, the reality is that exercise is meant to help us stay healthy, and a fit physique may be a wonderful result of a healthy lifestyle—but not necessarily the reason for sweating at the gym. All exercise not need involve joining a gym; it can be as simple as moving more intentionally throughout our day by using the stairs instead of the elevator or taking a walk during lunch. Be creative!

When in doubt, reach out. If you're having difficulties with body acceptance, don't be afraid to seek help. With a refreshed focus on health and wellness over the past few years, there are more resources for support than ever before from health providers, nutritionists, counselors, and fitness trainers. Check with your doctor about support within your health plan and reconnect with friends, family, or others in your community who are focused on body health and wellness. We were never meant to go through this life alone.

We Create Our Own Fake News

Meeting with a client over lunch one day, I couldn't help but notice his frustrations about feeling stuck in his job search. As he fleshed out the details of his career exploration process, each story turned difficult, tedious, or impossible. As the conversation progressed, I could observe him slipping deeper and deeper into his own doubts and fears, fueled by his assumptions and limiting beliefs.

Although my client has lofty career goals—many of which are realistic considering his skills and experience—his assumptions about details such as degree requirements or applicable work experience had become barriers. As he explained support for his reasoning, several of his conclusions didn't match facts or come from credible sources but rather from personal beliefs based in his past experiences or what others had told him was true.

Our conversation reminded me of how we've been taught to follow what friends and family say—and

to believe what radios, magazines, newspapers, televisions, and online media tell us.

But that has changed.

The explosion of technology in our society has produced an avalanche of new media sources and the advent of "fake news." The purpose of fake news is to cause confusion by making us question our beliefs using untrue information disguised as legitimate news. It's been designed to manipulate us and distract us from trusting our own conclusions, thereby creating assumptions and false beliefs.

Yet herein lies the irony: We are also subject to biased judgments that come from our own tightly held assumptions and beliefs.

We create our own fake news.

Although it is human nature to believe that our own conclusions are correct since our beliefs come from our experience, beliefs are not static—they're dynamic and change along with us as we grow. The more we learn, the more we sculpt our thoughts—the thoughts that create our beliefs. Clearly stated by Esther and Jerry Hicks in *The Law of Attraction: The Teachings of Abraham*, "A belief is only a thought we keep thinking."

The thoughts and beliefs we hold are establishing our direction and momentum in every decision,

every day—and, in turn, create the foundations of our attitudes, actions, and words. Knowing that our thoughts have tremendous power and momentum, it may be wise for us to pay attention to our own broadcast.

What news are we telling others? And what are we telling ourselves?

Challenging our own thoughts and beliefs is part of the critical thinking process. We can either create barriers to our growth by holding onto beliefs that no longer serve us—or we can choose again.

Curious? Here are tips to gain clarity about our beliefs and avoid creating our own fake news:

Challenge assumptions. It's easy to assume anything we read or hear as truth. However, we also need to keep in mind that "truth" is relative to the context in which a proclamation is made. The fastest way to examine our assumptions is to start with the question, "Why?" Answering that question facilitates a proverbial peeling of the onion—the process of discovering intentions and gaining increased insight and clarity into our beliefs and how they either support us or lead us astray.

Seek to understand. In Steven Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,* Covey introduces his third habit: Seek First to Understand; Then to Be Understood. This concept provides us with a simple truth—it's not always about *us* first. In order for us to make genuine connections with

others, we must first soften our stance and learn to understand others.

That was then, this is now. The past—though it still feels real—is simply data and our personal history. It is already completed. How we interpret our past and use that knowledge to make decisions in the present is what determines our future. But ultimately, it's only data. The interpretation of data will constantly change as we do, and being aware of this constant change allows us to shift our perspective and keep learning from the same event or circumstances years later.

Do the work. If we are genuinely seeking to educate ourselves about our changing beliefs, we need to be willing to let go of past beliefs that aren't serving us and create new ones that do. Remember doing homework for school? Doing the work on ourselves is the much the same. The consequences of taking a test without studying can be disastrous. In life, our homework is to seek to understand, learn about ourselves, and accept the reality that we are constantly changing. The test comes through the results of our choices.

Be your own worst enemy or best ally. Depending on whether we are learning from our experiences or not will be the strongest indicator of how we are supporting ourselves. By reacting to challenges with the same mindset every time, we are destined to repeat the same mistakes—becoming our own worst enemy. Or, with the knowledge that we are always growing and changing, we can choose a more

mindful approach and respond deliberately, therefore creating more satisfying experiences and becoming our best ally.

In the end, my client was grateful that I challenged him on his assumptions, but I reminded him that *he is the only one responsible* for creating his experience. By opening his mind to new information and challenging his own assumptions, he could be less susceptible to what he's told by others and the media, including himself—and potentially his own fake news. This powerful lesson is true for us all.