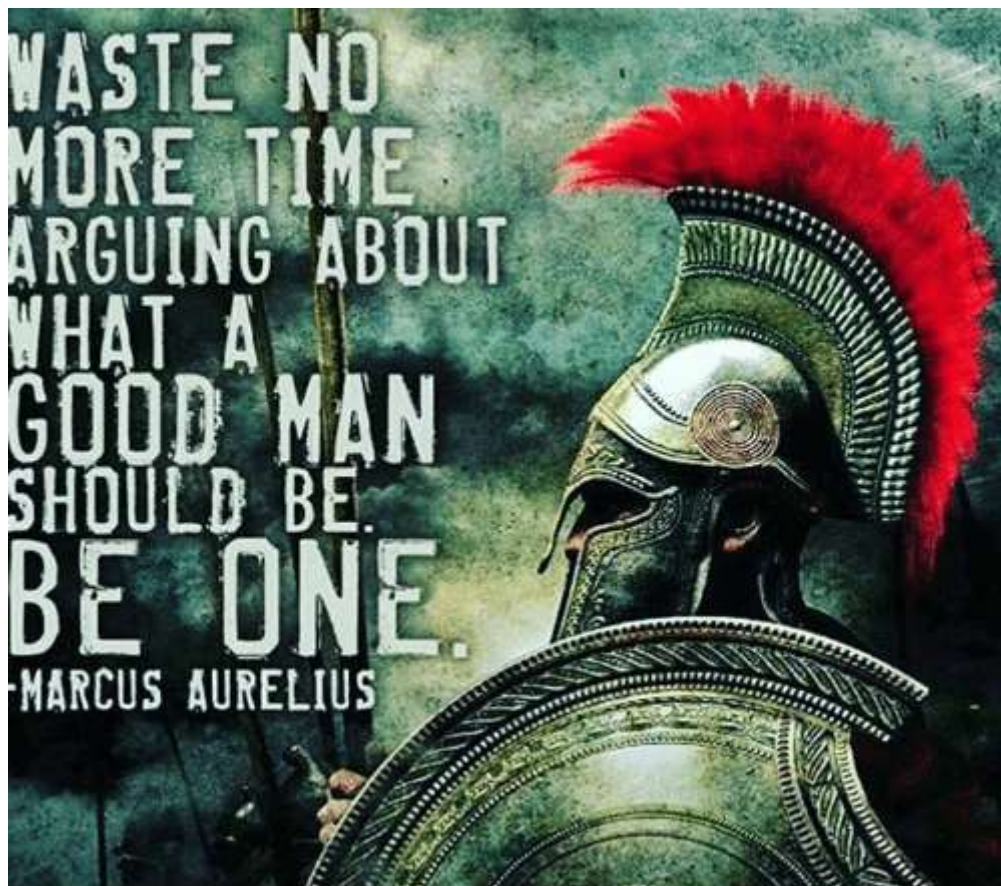




Stoic Plus

Practical Skills to help you find the "Good Life"





Session One

Many incredible, World changing people have followed the teachings of Stoicism. Just a sprinkling of Stoic thinking can radically transform one's life. The Philosophy has been stress-tested by the toughest situations.

learn some of the skills and tactics that can help you live a more productive, happy and contented life.

Negative Visualisations:



“Say to yourself in the early morning: I shall meet today ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, uncharitable men. All of these things have come upon them through ignorance of real good and ill... I can neither be harmed by any of them, for no man will involve me in wrong, nor can I be angry with my kinsman or hate him; for we have come into the world to work together.”

~MARCUS AURELIUS



When we think about the quote Marcus wrote to himself we must consider the context. Marcus was the Emperor of Rome, people thought of him as a god. He was one of the most powerful men that ever lived. Yet, even with all the power of the Roman Legions he still had problems, people around him wanted different things to him.

He prepared for every day thinking of the things that could go wrong. The purpose of this practise is to:

- Emotionally prepare for the possibilities of things going against you so you don't "fall apart" when it happens.
- When you think what might go wrong you can have a plan of how to deal with it. A building has an evacuation plan, if there's a fire the people in the building know what to do. Fire drills are a practical negative visualisation. We can use this example to practise things going wrong in our lives.

Every activity, crime, relationship, friendship think to yourself "what could go wrong here". If you can't make a plan to deal with the fall out - don't get involved.

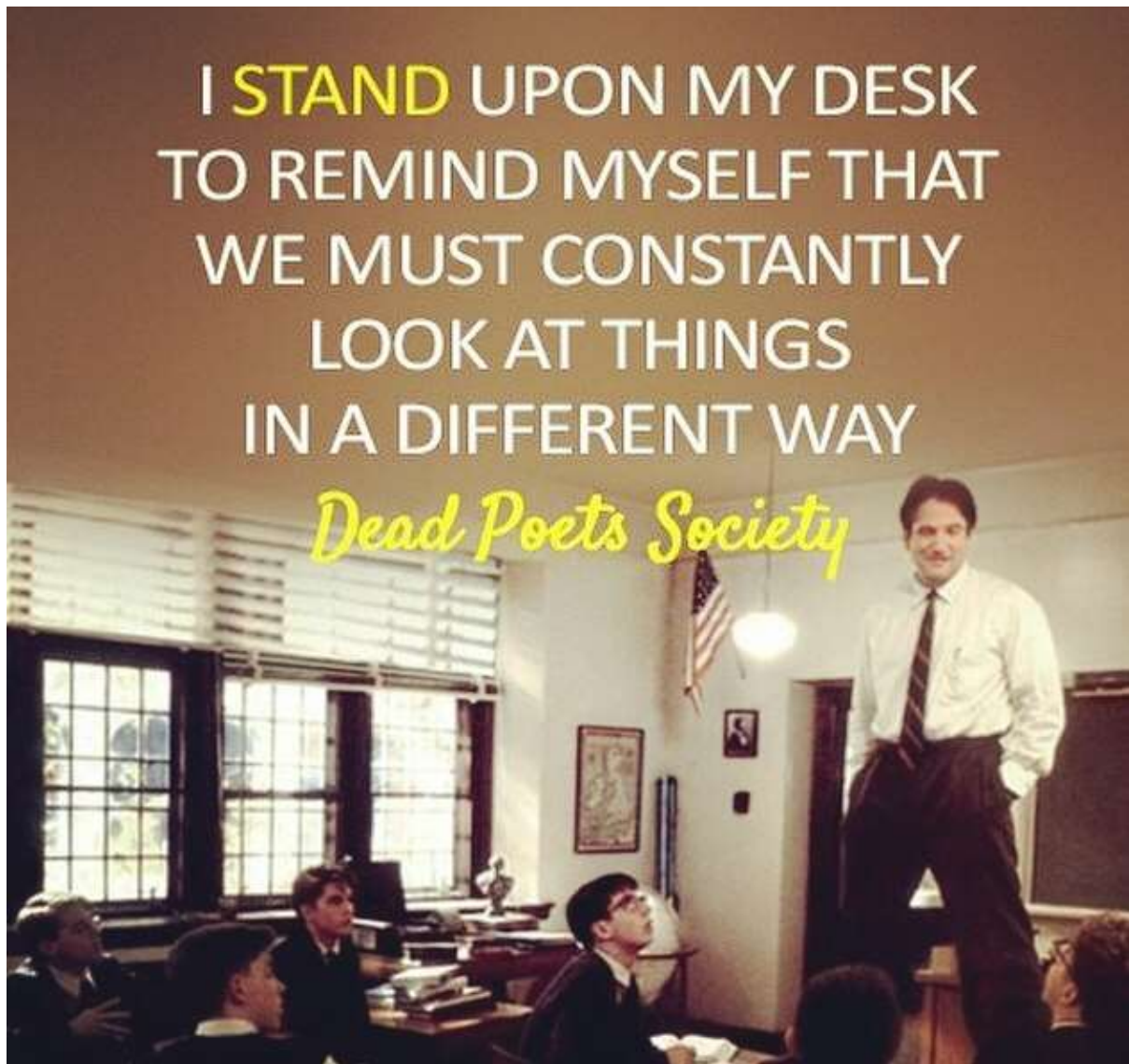
This skill is purely intellectual not emotional. You must use your Pre-Frontal Cortex not your Limbic (chimp) brain. Look at the situation coldly, like a firefighter looks at a building when he carries out the Risk Assessment.

The irony of Negative Visualisations; when you create a plan for what can go wrong you can create hope and be optimistic about your future as you know how to survive and possibly thrive no matter what.

Optimists are very often angry and frustrated people as they think everything will work out "just fine" for them. Most people in prison are optimists - they thought they'd never get caught!



View from above:



Marcus Aurelius wrote he should view his life from outer space. When we view events from the perspective of now, whilst we are in the thick of it, they can often become overwhelming.

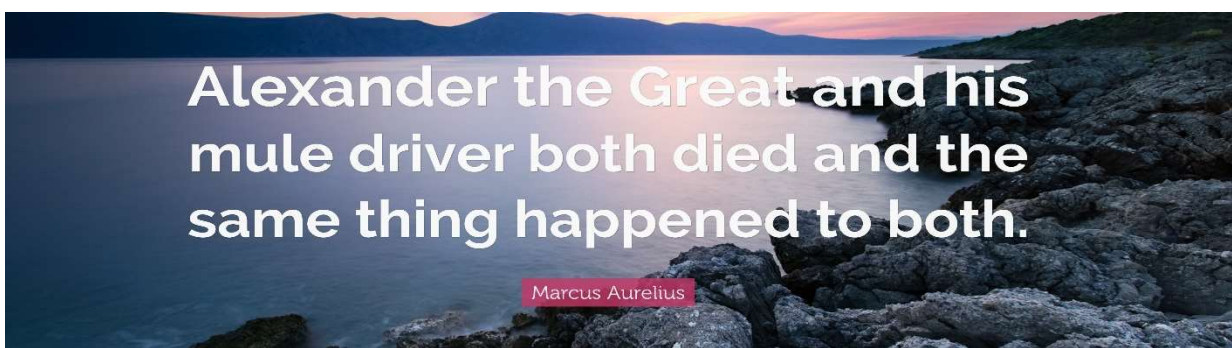
Think of an event in the past that caused you distress or anxiety; maybe coming to Prison or your driving test. At the time of the event it probably felt like the biggest thing that ever happened to you. Viewed from now you can see that prison might have been a really positive thing for you and your driving test was a mere blip when viewed in context with the other events in your life.



The "view from above" encourages you to look at your life from way up in the sky. You will quickly see the event that distresses you is no big thing and your life is no big thing, on this Earth, in this vast Universe. This can set you free from Chimp led worry sessions to do the best thing for yourself and other Human Beings.



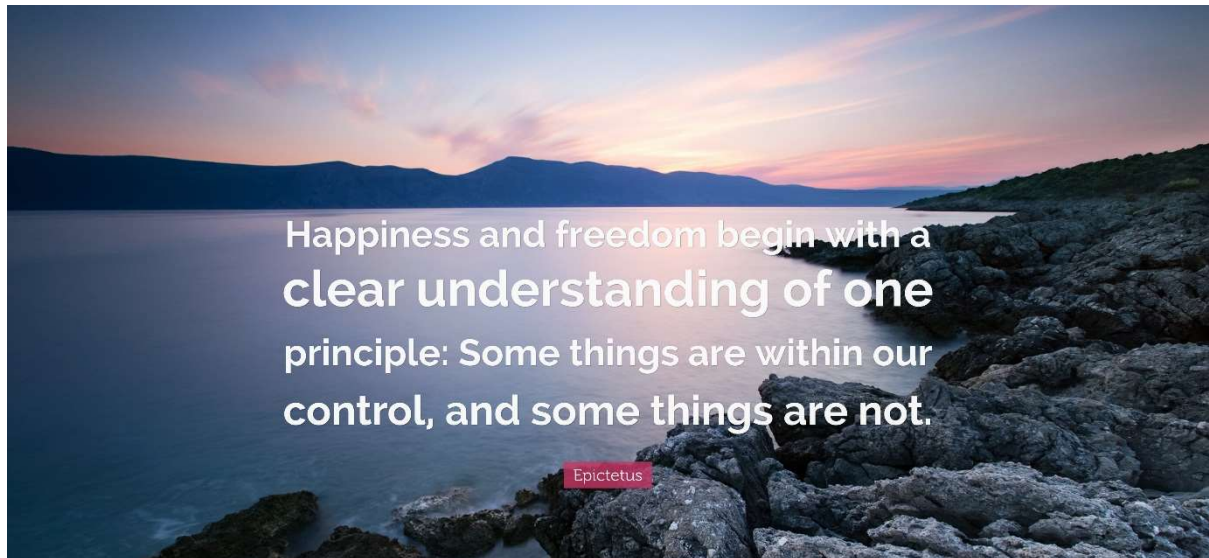
Charles Dickens (Christmas Carol - Scrooge) was a fan of the Stoics and used the View from Above to change Scrooge's life. You can use this skill to change your life too.



View from Above kept Marcus Aurelius humble, are you?



Session 2 - Control

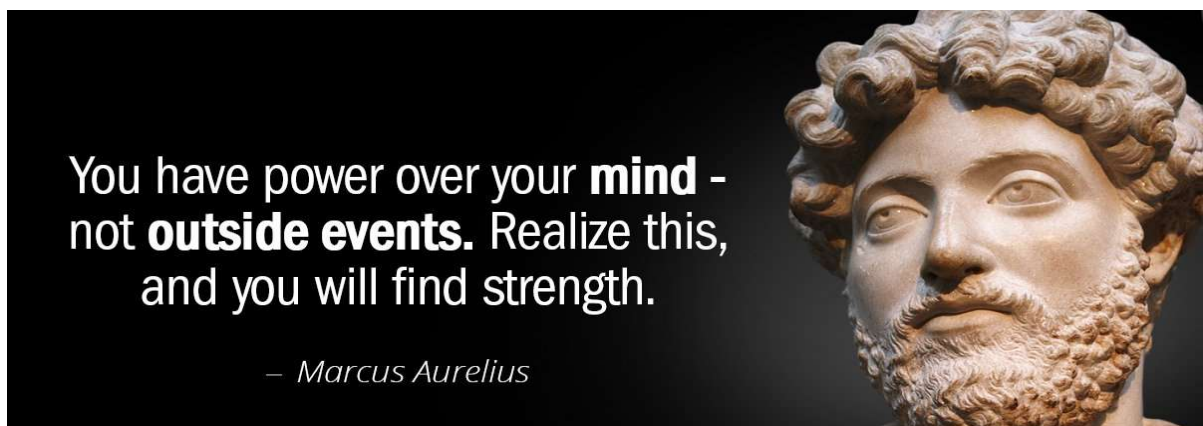


This quote is the cornerstone of Stoic Philosophy. The Stoics practised this constantly. When you think about the things which cause you stress and anxiety they are always things you can only affect or have no control over.

What do you think Epictetus means when he writes "freedom"?
Freedom from what?

All of the framework of Stoicism is linked to this concept. The more you think about and practise "can and can't controls" the happier and more productive you will become.

What you think, what you say, your behaviour and the goals you set, concentrate all your efforts on those 4 things and your life will go well.





Gap Awareness

Your inner chimp reacts much faster than you do. Our brains evolved to keep us alive in the African Savannah. Genetically we are more closely related to Chimpanzees than Lions are to Tigers and Rats are to Mice. This is why we overreact when someone cuts in the queue in front of us or when little things don't go our way. We have civilised the structures of society, unfortunately our brains have not kept pace.



The Limbic Brain (chimp) receives the information from outside world before the Pre-Frontal Cortex. Your inner chimp will save your life (if you're in a life threatening situation) but ruin your life if left to his own devices. We must practise taking time before we respond to events that happen around us - to get the best for ourselves and other human beings. The longer the gap between event and response the better the outcome usually becomes. This Gap allows the information to soak into the Prefrontal Cortex, this is the part of the brain that acts like a computer and the human being that we want to be. The Prefrontal Cortex can use past information to predict the future and to imagine how someone else may feel about a situation.



Session 3 - Re-Framing

Coming to Prison was really bad, worst thing that ever happened to you? The Stoics would demand that you look at your situation again to find some good in it. Think about it logically; you cannot change being in Prison, you can only change how you view it. The following passage from Epictetus explains how to find good from any situation.

"When considering the future, remember that all situations unfold as they do regardless of how we feel about them. Our hopes and fears sway us, not events themselves".

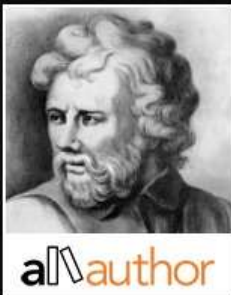
"Undisciplined people, driven by their personal dislikes and sympathies, are forever on the lookout for signs that build up or reinforce their unexamined views and opinions. Events themselves are impersonal, though thoughtful people certainly can and should respond to them in beneficial ways".

"Instead of personalizing an event and drawing sneering conclusions about yourself or human nature, watch for how you can put certain aspects of that event to good use. Is there some less-than-obvious benefit embedded in the event that a trained eye might detect? Pay attention; be a detective. Perhaps there is a lesson you can extract and apply to similar events in the future. In any event, however seemingly dire, there is nothing to prevent us from searching for its hidden opportunity. It is a failure of the imagination not to do so. But to seek out the opportunity in situations requires a great deal of courage, for most people around you will persist in interpreting events in the uncultured terms: success or failure, good or bad, right or wrong. These simplistic, polarized categories obscure more creative and useful interpretations of events that are far more advantageous and interesting!"

"The wise person knows it is fruitless to project hopes and fears on the future. This only leads to forming melodramatic representations in your mind and wasting time".



"At the same time, one shouldn't passively submit to the future and what it holds. Simply doing nothing does not avoid risk, but heightens it. There is a place for prudent planning and for making provision for situations to come. Proper preparation for the future consists of forming good personal habits. This is done by actively pursuing the good in all particulars of your daily life and by regularly examining your motives to make sure they are free of the shackles of fear, greed, and laziness. If you do this, you won't be buffeted about by outside events".



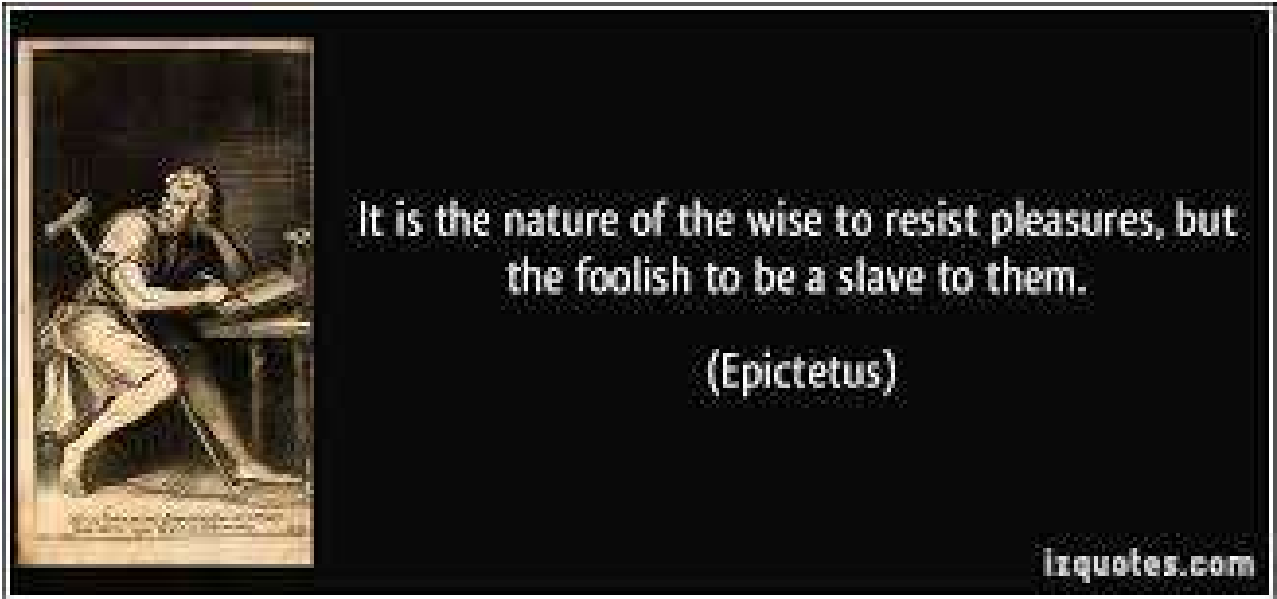
**Men are disturbed not by things, but
by the view which they take of them.**

-Epictetus

Re-Frame your situation to get the best out of it.



Reduce your wants.



The Government, big business and advertisers all want us to spend more money, take out more loans and jack up debt on credit cards.

We are bombarded with messages telling us "this new car will make you happy, the girl will fall for you!", "you must upgrade your phone", happiness is just around the corner if you buy this or that.

Consider all the things you have bought or been given have they brought you happiness? You probably were pleased with it for a while then very quickly wanted the next model.

Now think about things that give you deep happiness and contentment. These things are always the relationships we have and the achievements we have accomplished. The harder the achievement was the more happiness we get from it. The Stoics talked about "**Preferred Indifferents**" - it's ok to have stuff; relationships, health etc but we should not base our happiness upon those things. When we live a considered life we understand wanting things beyond our control will make us slaves.

Many men end up in prison wanting and chasing after things they don't need to live happy and fulfilled lives. Was that you?



Session 4 – Expectations

"There is no limit to a thing once it is beyond its proper measure. Do you need clothing? Simple clothing will suffice to cover and warm you. But once you go beyond satisfying that requirement and seek rich colours and silk threads, there is no limit to your avarice. It will grow and be impossible to fulfil, dooming you to a life of dissatisfaction and perpetual seeking. Keep your tastes and requirements simple. That way peace is possible. But remember that if you choose to develop the ability to live simply, do it quietly for yourself and not to impress others with how little you need."

- Epictetus

Maintain reasonable expectations of yourself, others, and situations. Do not demand too much from others, but be careful of demanding too little from yourself. Nobody is perfect and everyone will make mistakes. Demanding perfection is unrealistic and frustrating.

Keep your expectations in line with reality - do not expect the ideal. For example, if you have a doctor's appointment and you expect to walk into his office on time, you will most likely be frustrated by expecting this ideal.

If you expect your car to be repaired properly the first time, you will be upset when it isn't. The reality of these situations is the doctor will see you sometime after your scheduled time, the car will not be fixed properly the first time, etc. *While you cannot control the world, you can control your expectations of the world.*

Non master

Expectations
of others and
life in general

Expectations
of yourself

Master of Self

Expectations
of yourself

Expectations of
others and life in
general



Virtues



To the perfect Stoic the four "virtues" listed above are all that matter. When we live according to these virtues we can never go wrong.

Wisdom: The ability to work out difficult situations; to be able to apply knowledge to your everyday life

Temperance: The ability to be able to say "no thank you" when you've had enough. Being able to refuse things which are not working towards your higher goals.

Justice: The ability to know right from wrong. To be able to forgive when someone does wrong.

Courage: To be able to stand up for what is right. To be able to battle through tough times.

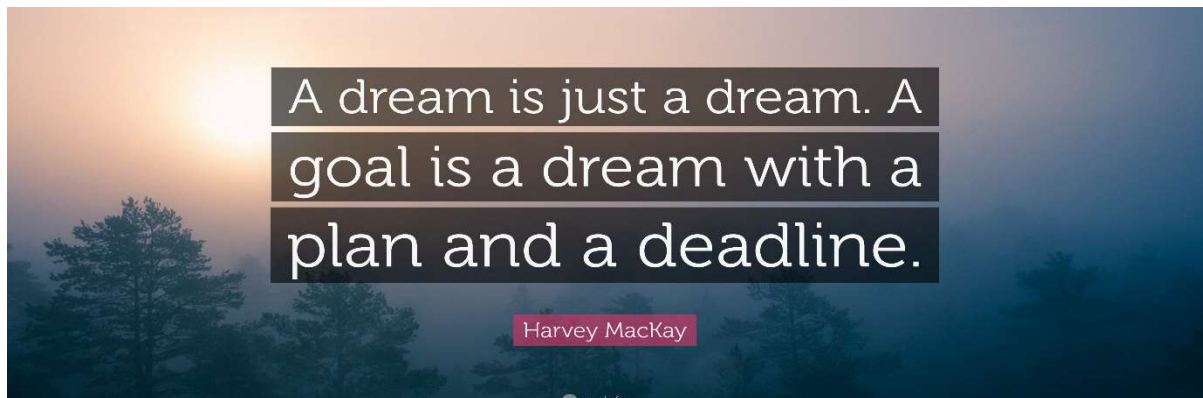
You may recognise some of the issues below that make us less than virtuous:

- **Wisdom** - How can we be wise when we think we know it all?
- **Temperance**- How can we "grind" out a disciplined life when we follow the crowd?
- **Justice** - How can we be just when we dismiss the people who mean the most to us?
- **Courage** - How can we be courageous when we are concerned what people think of us?

Which do you think is the most important virtue?



Session 5 – Goal Setting



Stoics at Huntercombe stress the importance of concentrating fully on 3 areas: what we think, what we say and how we act, everything else is out of our control – not our business. There is one other thing we must pay attention to, setting goals. The goals we set are important to move us forward (in the right direction). Think carefully when you set your goals, consider the following:

- Be careful of “gold medal goals” – what do you do when you get the gold medal? Instead think “I will become the best I can be at..... and fully commit to it”. This statement allows you to be ok if you don’t win gold and if you do win gold you can continue on your never-ending improvement journey.
- Do not make the goals anything out of your control. Being a millionaire or owning a Ferrari are examples of things way out of your control so should be avoided. Many people find themselves on the “Hedonistic treadmill” when they make these type of goals – always wanting more.
- Make relationship goals; how can I be the best dad, brother, son and friend. Write down what it takes to be the best you can be at these close relationships.
- What goals can you set today to improve your life? These can include enrolling on a course or committing to working out 5 times a week.



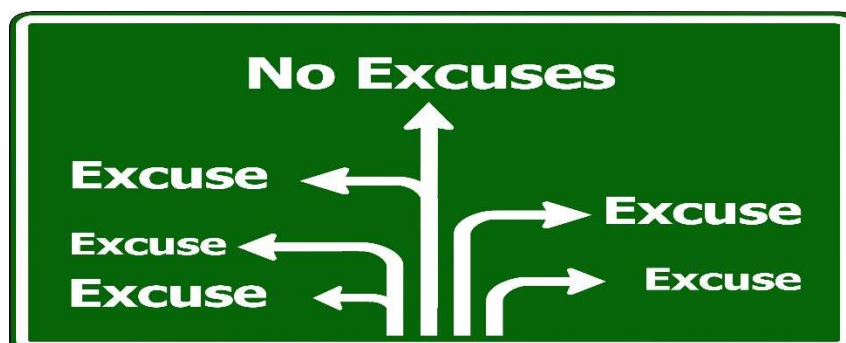
Excuses and Blaming

"Small minded people habitually blame others for their own misfortunes. Average people blame themselves. Those who are dedicated to a life of self-mastery understand that the impulse to blame something or someone is foolishness, that there is nothing to be gained in blaming, whether it be others or oneself. Blaming oneself puts you down, and is not the same as taking responsibility. Taking responsibility empowers a person, giving them a chance to learn from their mistakes and make changes". - Epictetus

How many excuses have you heard today? How many excuses have you made today? When you think deeply about excuse making you can establish that making excuses hands away your personal power.

John says he's only in prison because of a snitch. John will never be able to prevent himself coming to prison if he blames a snitch. John is in prison because he committed crime. Jane blames her weight on her poor diet as a child, Jane is 50 years old. Jane will never lose the weight she wants to whilst she blames the past and her upbringing. She has unconsciously robbed herself of the power to fix the problem. By genuinely owning the problem we give ourselves the best chance of fixing it. Being a proper grown adult is to take responsibility for ALL your thoughts, speech and actions.

Have you noticed how easily you notice other people's excuses and blaming? You pride yourself on your "Bullshit Detector" being able to spot excuse making from miles away. Have you ever noticed that your Bullshit Detector will not work on excuses and the blaming you do?





Session 6 - Comparisons



"Comparison is the thief of joy" - Theodore Roosevelt

The man above was a sickly child suffering from asthma. He was a cowboy, a hunter and Army Colonel. He went on to be the 26th President of the USA. He was shot in the chest, refused hospital, went on to present a 90 minute speech the same day, still bleeding. Can you imagine him making excuses? By any measure a real tough guy. His face is depicted on Mount Rushmore.

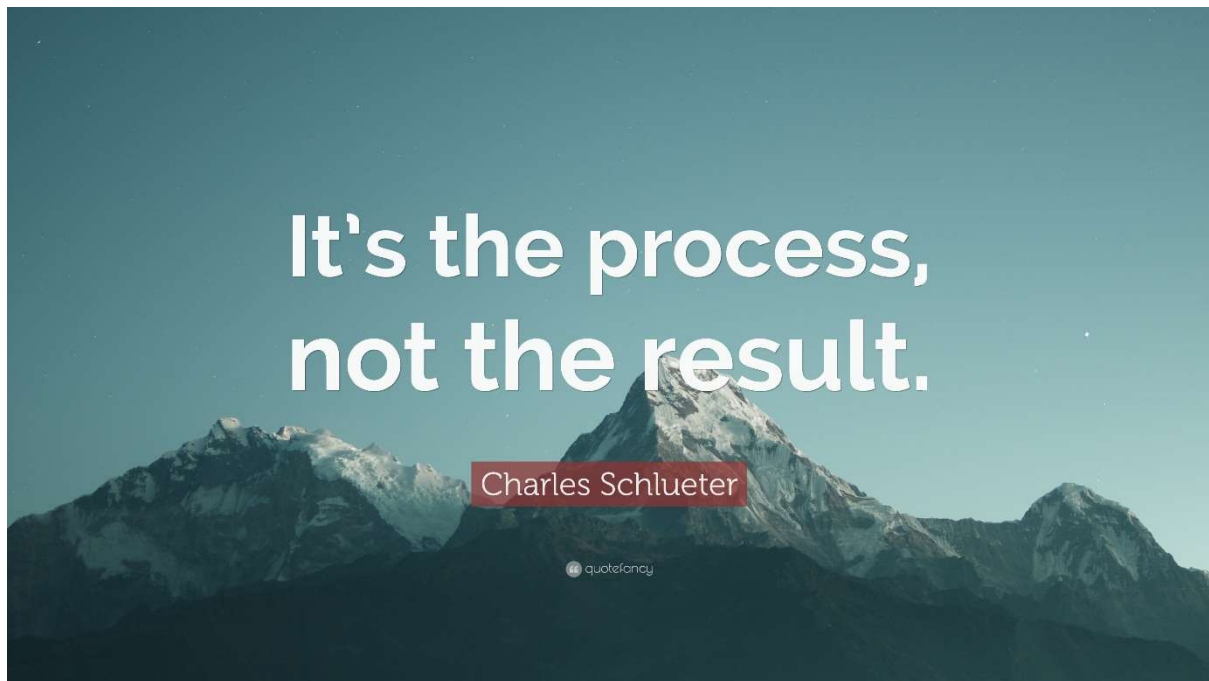
He is advising us not to compare our wealth, strength, looks or anything else with other people. **There will always be better than you.** Compare yourself with how **you** were yesterday. Tiny, daily improvements is all you need, over time you will be the best version of you. (The President carried a copy of Epictetus Enchiridion (handbook) with him, making numerous notes)

Before the invention of the smart phone we only compared ourselves to people we associated with. We are now bombarded with images of people living "perfect lives" with "perfect teeth" and "perfect abs" these people are only a tiny percentage of world's population and do you really think they are happy?

Don't be tricked. Do you think Theodore would have been?



It's all about the process.



We are in a results driven world; achieve the right grades, win the race, be top of the charts.

The irony is to be the most effective we must fully **focus on the process of what we are doing and not the results**. When we focus on the result our "game" suffers making us less effective.

Whatever you are doing focus on the best way of doing that thing.

Think of the energy you have wasted whining about, moaning about, and expecting about things that are out of your control.

Focussing on the process and not the result has the added benefit that if you do lose or you are unsuccessful you can look in the accountability mirror and know you did the best you could.

Plan, document then implement things fully in your control.



Session 7 - Ebb and flow



Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well.

(Epictetus)

IZQuotes

Good things, bad things as the saying goes "shit happens". Remember as William Shakespeare said:

There is nothing either good or bad
but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare

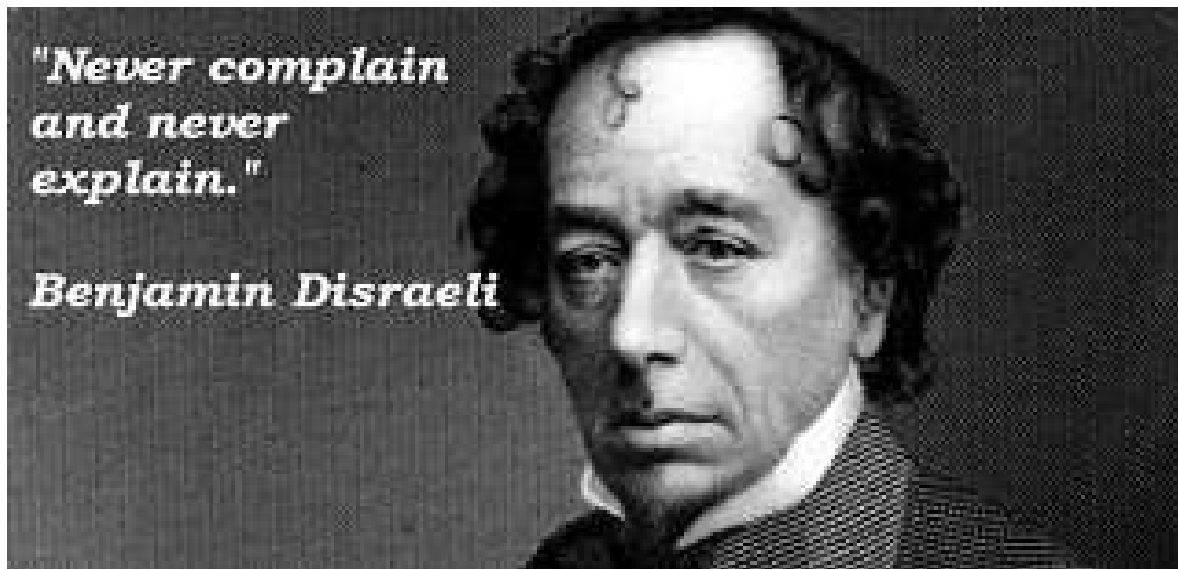


"Events are impersonal, but the masterful person will respond to them in beneficial ways. Ask, 'Is there some not-so-obvious benefit hidden in this situation that most people, who see only in simplistic terms, would miss?' Pay attention, be a detective. You may find something that will serve you well in a similar situation in the future." - Epictetus

Sit and consider the "good" and "bad" things that happen.... It's just life, don't take it personally.



Never Complain Never explain



This maxim was first coined by the British politician and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and adopted as a motto by many other high-ranking Brits — from members of royalty, to Navy Admirals, to fellow Prime Ministers Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill. The maxim well encapsulates the stiff-upper lipped-ness of the Victorian age, but the timeless wisdom it contains has made it a guiding mantra of powerful, confident, men and women up to the modern era including HM Queen Elizabeth 2nd.

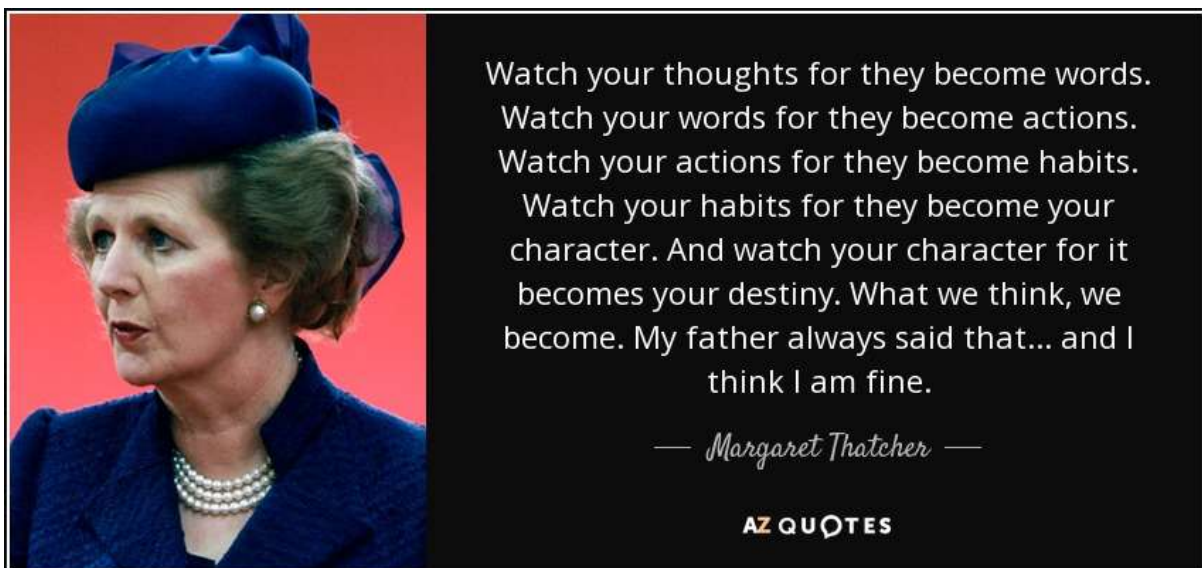
Although many people disagree with the United Kingdom having a Monarchy no one ever had a bad word to say about the HM Queen Elizabeth 2nd. One of the reasons for this is she never moaned or whined about situations. The Queen never explains her decisions or the way she lives her life.

The idea behind this is one should never have to explain anything as one's good intentions speak for themselves. Similarly, never complain about anything as no one is interested in our petty moans and groans.



Session 8: The System is the Solution.

As we know our chimp always wants us to take the fast and easy route. Our will power is only good for a certain amount of time. Studies have shown 80% of New Year's Resolutions fail in the second week of February. These people are not weak or pathetic they simply relied on will power and didn't set up a system.



The quote from Mrs Thatcher is thousands of years old and references setting up a system to guide and moderate our whole life.

It's a very stoic thing to do, set up a system so we can minimise or remove our chimp from the situation.

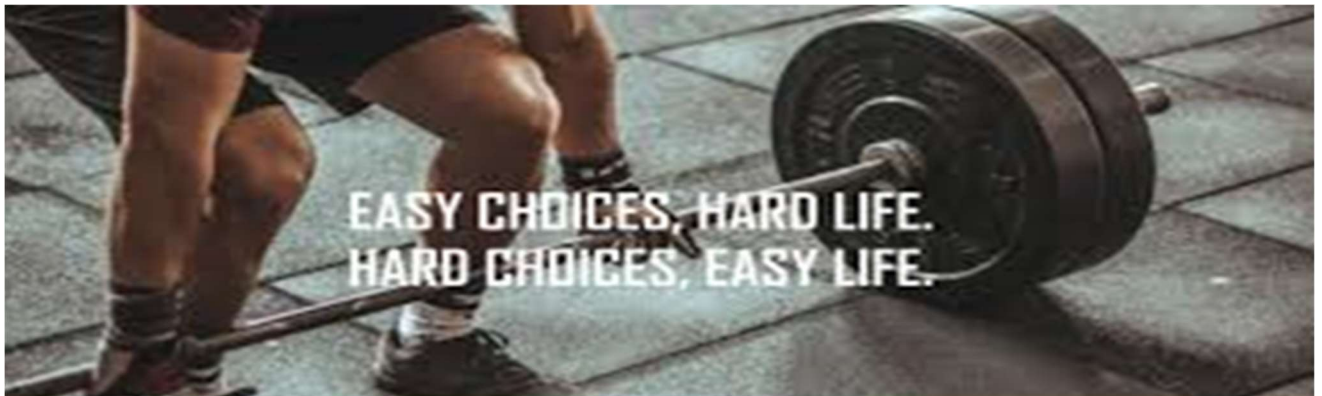
If you like eating sweets and biscuits and want to lose body fat, stop buying sweets and biscuits - there's a system.

You could lock the sweets and biscuits in a cupboard with a padlock; by the time you have found the key and unlocked the cupboard your pre-frontal cortex has had a chance to speak with your chimp to stop you eating the junk food - there's another system.

You can think of systems to deal with any area of your life to hold you accountable and give you the best chance of reaching your goals.



Choices



This is a universal truth when you are faced with an easy choice or a hard choice and you're not sure what to do, always take the hard choice. Your chimp will always want you to take the easy choice.

Your 13 year old son is on his Xbox it's a school night. You know if do not remove the Xbox from his room he will stay on it all night. It's the easy choice to leave him to it, you also know you've just made your life (and his) harder as he will not get up for school and will get into trouble for falling asleep in lessons. Hard choice: remove Xbox face up to the whining, moaning teenager but your life (and his) is easier as he will be ok getting up in the morning and won't fall asleep at school.

You may have a choice; sell drugs or work. The same rule applies. It may be the easy choice to sell drugs, something you know very well - it feels comfortable. You also know it's a hard life leading to prison and/or early death.

The hard choice alternative is the straight life, working 5 days a week for minimum pay (for a while). This hard choice leads to easy life, no looking over your shoulder for the police or other drug dealers, opportunities for promotion and inner peace knowing you're doing the right thing.



The Sword and the Shield – Practical Stoic skills to remember

- **Negative Visualisations:** This is a master skill that will help you prepare both emotionally and practically for whatever life throws at you. This is an intellectual practise not an emotional one (not a worry festival). Get your pen and paper out and write out emergency plans in response to what can go wrong, like fire evacuation plans.
- **Control:** "Some things are up to us and some things are not". Remember Epictetus' words. All we actually control is our thoughts, what we say, how we act and the goals we set. Focus fully on those 4 things, forget everything else and your life will go well.
- **View from above:** View your life from way up in the sky, even from space, this will give you perspective to see your problems aren't really problems in big scheme of things.
- **Gap Awareness:** Practise making the space between the stimulus (thing that's just happened) and your response (what you do about the stimulus) greater. This gives your Pre-Frontal cortex the chance to work out the best response to the benefit of yourself and fellow human beings.
- **Re-Framing:** Remember Epictetus telling you it's how you view events that cause the problems. Winning £15 million on the Lottery could be the worst thing that ever happened to you and coming to prison could be the best. It's all how we choose to view it.
- **Reduce your wants:** Wanting things beyond your control will make you a slave. Want a flash car and flash trainers? You need the money, where do you get the money? Crime. Reduce your wants, end your slavery to criminality.
- **Expectations:** Reduce your expectations of other people, your situation and how you think "things" should be. Increase your expectations of your own behaviour.
- **Virtues:** Everything you do should be in pursuit of developing your **Courage, Justice, Temperance** and **Wisdom**. Don't look for outside approval.
- **Goal setting:** Setting goals is one of few things we control. Set goals for relationships, work, fitness, hobbies and self-improvement. Then pursue the goals you have set. Write them down and stick next to your mirror. Read them whilst you clean your teeth.



- **Excuses:** "I only got locked up because of a snitch" - no! You were locked up for committing crime. When we use excuses we cannot fix the problem, we hand that power to the person or thing we blame. **Own the problem**, you can fix it. "I committed crime, I came to prison; I stop committing crime, I don't risk going to prison"
- **Comparisons:** The Stoics insist making comparisons is a very bad idea. Your chimp will want you to compare your looks, muscles, wealth etc etc with someone who has more than you. If you must compare, compare with someone who has less than you or with the millions and millions of men who have lost their young lives running towards machine gun fire! Compare yourself with how you were yesterday. Tiny daily improvements will make massive differences after a year or two.
- **It's all about the process:** The results of our endeavours are never ours. Our job is to always focus on the process. Want someone to like you? Focus on being a decent friend, the results are theirs. Want to be fit and strong with 6 pack muscles? Concentrate on training, eating and sleeping right - let the results go, they are not yours.
- **Ebb and Flow:** Understand that 'good' and 'bad' things will happen in your life. Accept them both, watch how both things affect you and how to get the best from them.
- **Never complain, never explain:** Are you interested in others moaning and complaining? Nope. No one is interested in your complaining. Never explain your actions; your actions should be crystal clear to everyone around you. Your track record of doing the right thing will speak for itself. Queen Elizabeth 2nd used this rule, to great effect!
- **The system is the solution:** Want to stop eating biscuits? Want to work out more? Do not try and use will power - this has been proven scientifically to fail. Our will power can only last for a short amount of time. Set up a system that makes it much harder for you to fail; don't keep biscuits in the house and make it a rule that you never take a lift, you always use the stairs.
- **Easy Choices = Hard Life. Hard Choices = Easy Life.** Your chimp will always want you to take the easy way out; lay on the sofa, don't go to work, steal the money, turn a "blind eye" etc etc . Take the hard choice your life will be better.