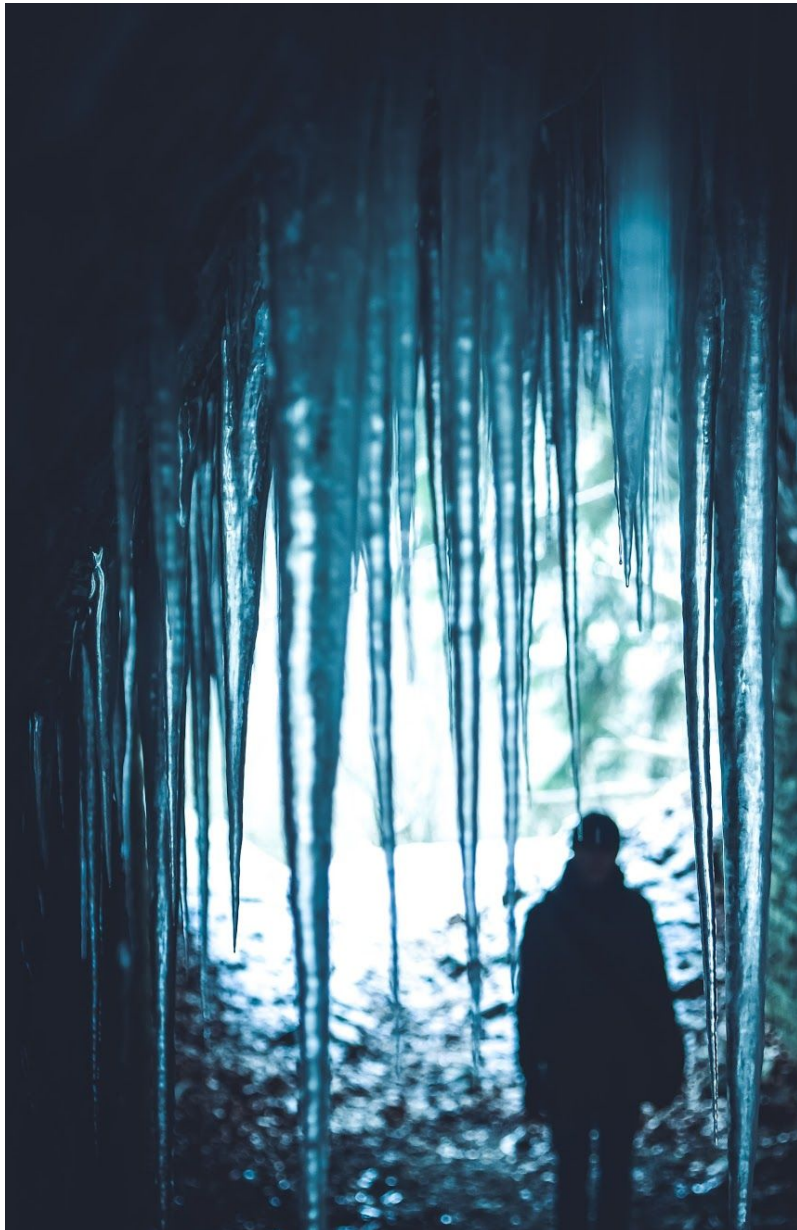


How to adapt and thrive in the age of anxiety

A workbook by Joseph Ciarrochi, Louise Hayes, and Ann Bailey



Change, chaos, and anxiety

Life is constant change. Even if it seems like life is stable and still, change is happening, change is coming for you and all of us. Some changes are so slow that we don't notice them, such as aging, seasons passing, and children growing up. Some change is rapid and obvious, like the loss of jobs and life brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. How do we best cope with change?

We need to understand that coping with change is not just a practical problem; it's a psychological one too. We react to change, especially negative change, with anxiety, fear, sadness, confusion, and anger. How we respond to these emotions is critical. For example, in response to the Corona pandemic, many people sought to escape their anxiety by doing destructive things. Some people denied the problem was even there and continued to engage in social contact and spreading of the virus. Other people overreacted, and started hoarding toilet paper and other products, as if the world was on the verge of ending. Both denial and overreacting are examples of responding poorly to the psychological part of change. Neither denial nor overreacting help you cope with change. In fact, such emotion control strategies are more likely to make things worse ¹⁻⁴.

So one of the most important principles in dealing with unwanted changes: don't "kick your own butt". Don't engage in actions that make the situation worse. This is clearly easier said than done.

This workbook will help you develop psychological strength and flexibility to respond effectively to unwanted threats and change. We base our approach on an evidence-based intervention called DNAV. DNAV is a mix of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Positive Psychology, and evolutionary science ⁵⁻⁹.

DNAV: Quick overview

Imagine you have a smartwatch with the disc like the below, and the dial that you can turn to either D, N, A.

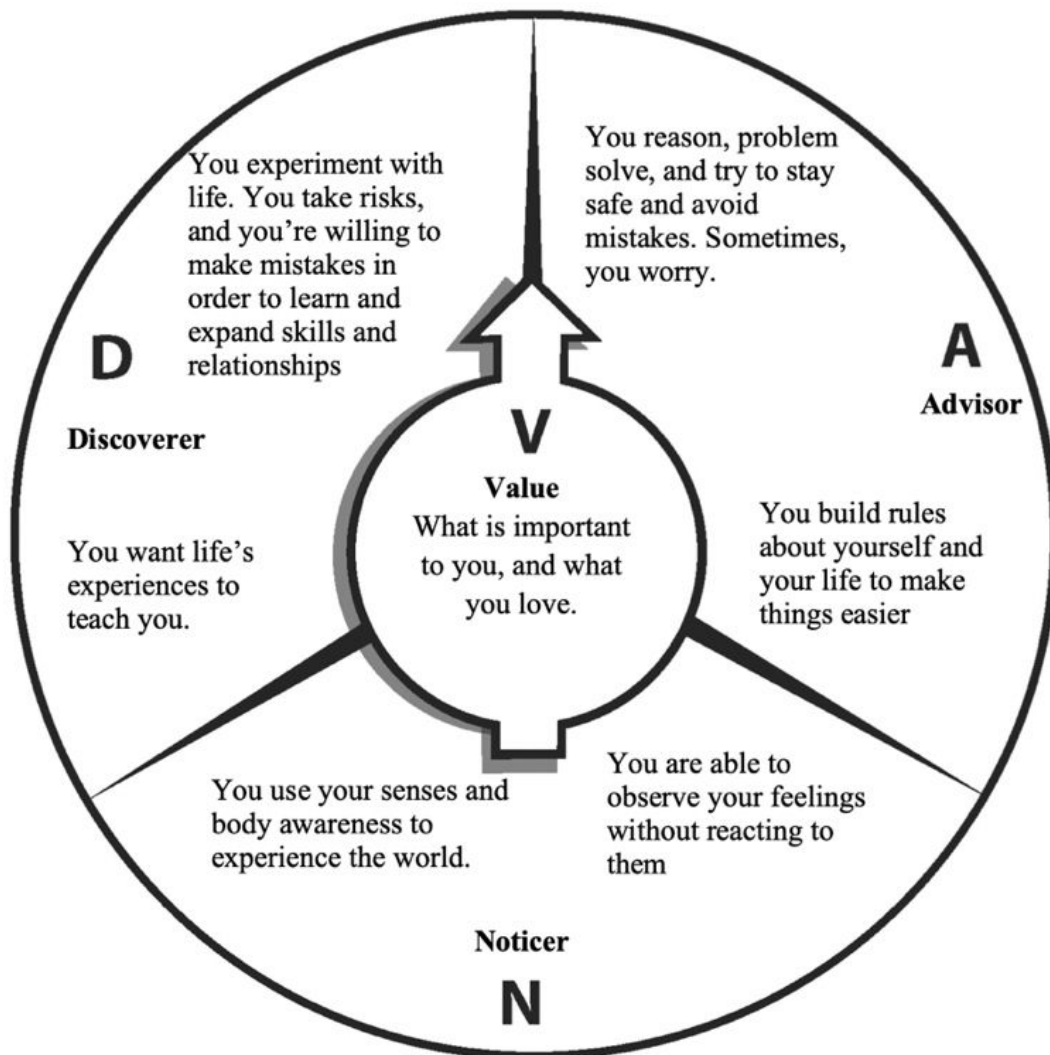


Figure: DNAV disk

D would be your Discover skills. D is your ability to use trial and error experimentation to broaden and build your skills, resources, and social connection, and find new ways to deal with a challenge.

N would be your noticer or skills, or your ability to notice what is going on inside and outside your body and use your situational awareness to do what's most effective in any given moment. Noticer is also about being able to respond, rather than just react, to your feelings. More on this later.

A would be your advisor skills, or your ability to use language to give yourself advice. It is your inner voice always evaluating, judging, and trying to predict. This inner voice is much like an external person who gives you advice. Or metaphorically, it is like a little person sitting on your shoulder, whispering advice into

your ear, such as “Be careful. Don’t say the wrong thing. Everybody is looking at you. Is your zipper up?”



Returning to the DNAV disk above, notice what is right in the middle of this dial: **V**, or Values. Your values, or what you want, what will make you turn the dial in the first place. Ultimately value represents the kind of person you want to be in life. You can think of values like a lighthouse that guides you through a storm.



Figure: Values are like a lighthouse guiding you through a storm.

Values are crucial to your ability to navigate change, grow, and improve. Let's spend a little time now thinking about your values before we move on to the full DNAV model.

Exercise: What do you value?

- 1) . Write down three values that are most important to you. You can choose from the list below or make up your own.

Being active	Belonging to a social group (community, racial group, school club)
Enjoying every moment	Relationship with family and friends
Being creative	Being good at art
Engaging in government,	Building your career

management, or politics	
Being independent	Expressing spiritual or religious values
Expressing a sense of humor	Challenging myself and learning
Caring for others/giving	Caring for myself (e.g., healthy diet, getting enough sleep)

2) Describe in a few sentences why each value is important to you. Focus on your thoughts and feelings and do not worry about spelling or grammar or writing quality

DNA-V walkthrough

Rather than continuing to discuss DNAV in detail now, why don't we get started doing it. You will learn fastest by doing. We will start with a challenging situation and then apply DNAV to it.

Write about an unwanted change or a challenging situation

Let's relate DNAV skills to something happening right now in your life. Think of a challenge you are facing. This can be work related or personal. Here are some example challenges.

- **Inner concerns.** Inner conflict, regret over past decisions
- **Time pressure.** Having too many things to do, too much responsibility or not enough time for fun
- **School/work challenges.** Dealing with a challenge at school or work
- **Family challenges.** Conflict or struggles with family members
- **Worry about the future.** Thinking a lot about what will happen and fearing bad things
- **Relationship challenges.** Difficulty with friends, romantic relationships, or co-workers.

The challenge I am facing is.....

Now, find some paper and pen for a writing task. You may not want to write about this challenge, but research suggests expressive writing will help you to see things in new ways and respond effectively to the problem ¹⁰⁻¹².

Aim for about 10 minutes of expressive writing.

During these ten minutes...

- Don't worry about writing perfect grammar or syntax. Just write what comes to mind with no particular structure
- Explore your deepest emotions and thoughts (nobody will ever read it, so let go)
- See if you can connect this challenging experience to other aspects of your life, such as childhood, parents, relationship with others, school, or work

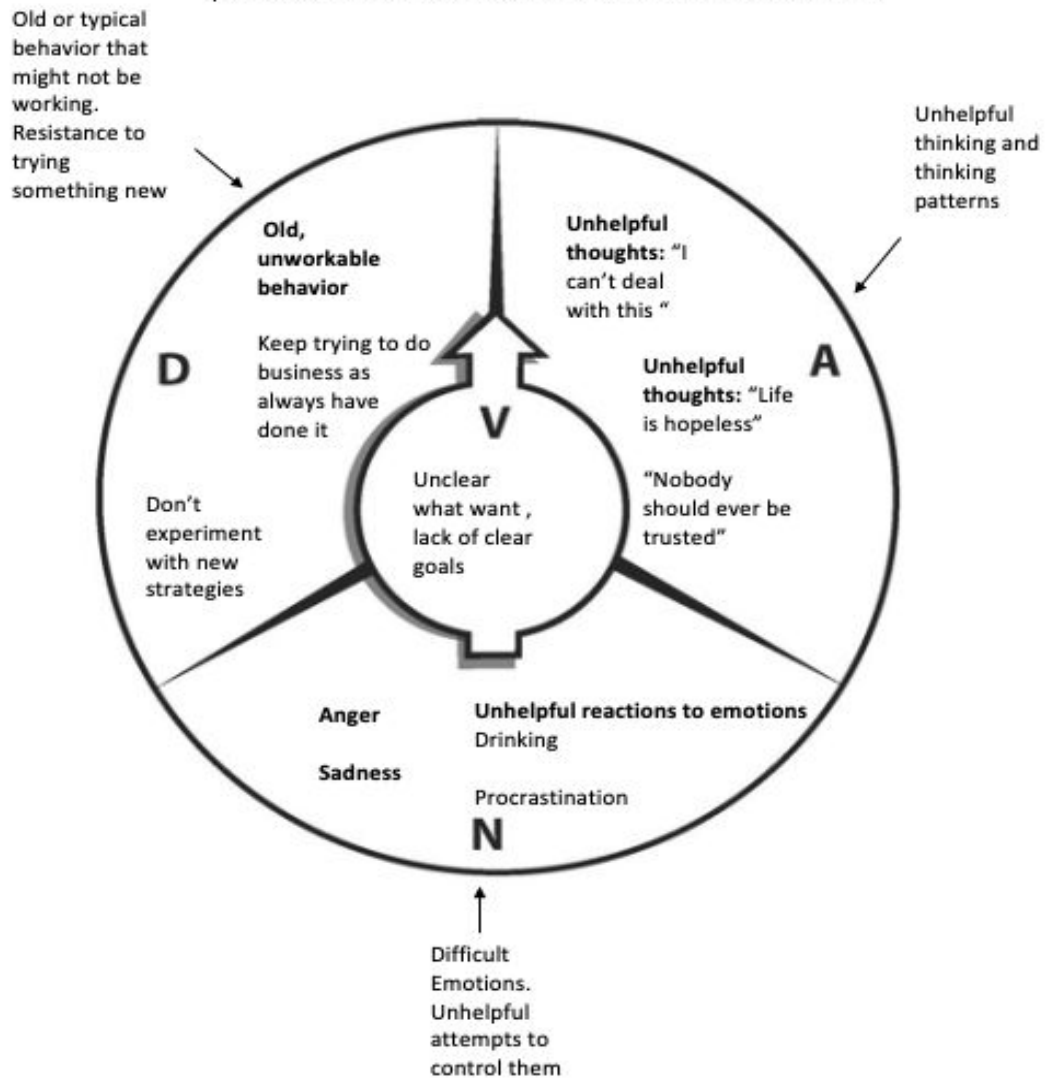
Ok, get a stopwatch, set it for ten minutes, and start writing!

Look at your challenging situation through DNA-V

If we are to tackle a problem, we first need to recognize the things that we do that may make the problem worse

In this section, we will take you on a quick walk through the DNAV model. This will help you to think in new ways about your challenging situation. You can use your DNAV in a way that is effective or highly skilled, or in a way that is ineffective, or self destructive. For now, let's look at what it looks like when your DNAV skills are used ineffectively. Below is an example of how someone might respond poorly to the stress of the coronavirus pandemic. You can think roughly of advisor as being thoughts, noticer being feelings and unhelpful attempts to control feelings, and discoverer being old versus new behavior. Below is an example DNAV disk completed by someone who is not responding well to the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure: DNAV example: Low skill reaction to coronavirus pandemic



Now, think about your challenging situation that you wrote about above. Let's see what you might look like if you were engaged in low-skill DNAV behavior. Everybody engages in low skill behavior, like a basketball player taking a bad shot, so don't worry if you feel like you are doing some ineffective stuff. The important thing is to become aware of what low skill looks like for you, so that you can better orient yourself to developing high skill

Figure: What your low skill DNAV disk might look like

D is a doer and tryer of new things. High skill involves doing things, often new things, that are designed to build value. Low skill involves doing things that don't work over and over again, failing to adjust to a new situation, and/or doing new things, but in an impulsive way.

What are old behaviors or typical things you do that are not helpful in your challenging situation? Write them under D.

If you were to react impulsively to your challenging situation, what unhelpful things might you do. Write these down in the disk (even if you didn't do them).

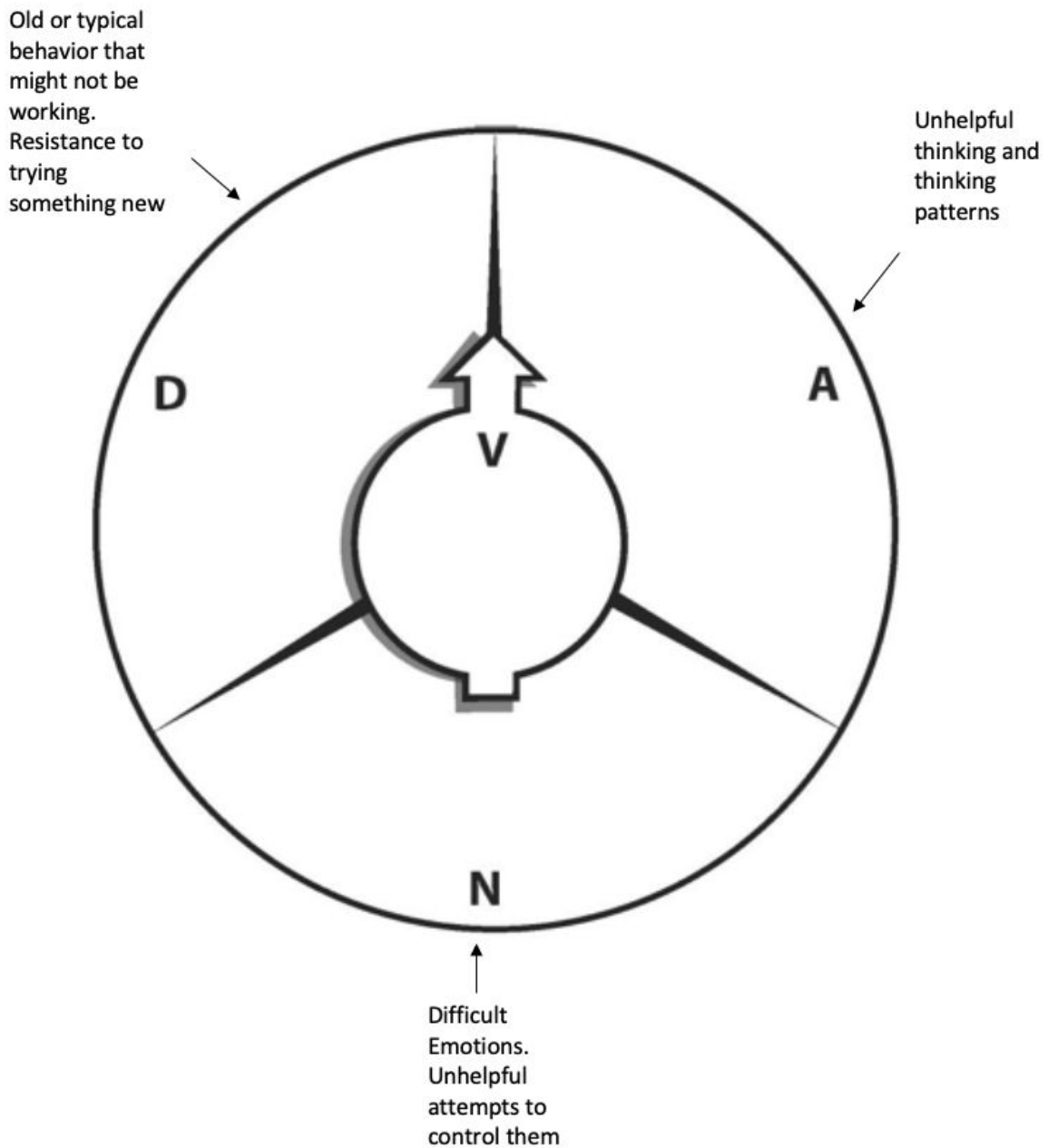


Figure: Low Skill examples

N is a noticer . High skill involves noticing emotions and learning to respond to them in a non-reactive way. Low skill noticers respond to emotions in ways that make things worse. For example, a low skill noticer might react to stress by engaging in: excessive worry, avoiding or denying reality, using substances like alcohol to escape feelings, dropping out of important life activities, and reacting poorly to other people.

What are some difficult feelings that are likely to show up for you in this challenging situation? Write this under N in the above disk. Noticing your feelings is the first step to learning how to manage them well.

We often react badly to feelings, trying to control the feelings themselves rather than seeking to adapt to the situation. Here are some common, unhelpful emotion controls strategies. Think about any unhelpful control strategies you might use in your situation, and write those under N.

8 Common emotion avoidance strategies that cause more harm than good

1. *Ineffective thinking* strategies. Worrying excessively about the future, Dwelling on the past
2. *Substances*. Using alcohol, food, or some other substance to try to feel good about yourself
3. *Stop doing things*..For example, drop out of activities, stop pursuing your goals,etc.
4. *Self-harm*. eg., self injury, deliberately doing things that are unhealthy.
5. *Social strategies*. Reacting badly to others. Bullying, avoiding them, apologizing too much
6. *Avoid and distract*. Seeking to avoid or distract from feelings by pushing thoughts away or excessive engagement in distracting activity like netflix binging
7. *Comfort shopping*. Buying things to feel better or more secure
8. *Obsessive behavior* Behaving in repetitive and obsessive ways that don't build value in your life

A is a thinker and problem solver. High skill involves using language in a practical way, for example for problem-solving. Advisor high skill also involves being able to drop language strategies, e.g. let go of worry, when language strategies are ineffective. In contrast, low skill advisor behavior involves overthinking or being influenced by ineffective or unhelpful beliefs.

Think about your challenging situation. What sorts of unhelpful things is your inner advisor likely to say to you? What happens if you listen to thoughts? If you listen to them, does it build value in your life?

Under A, write down unhelpful thoughts that are likely to show up for you.

V is someone who recognizes and affirms what is personally valuable, important, fun, or good. High skill V involves guiding one's actions by values. Low skill V involves having an unclear idea about values. Low skill valuer is like being a captain of a ship , but having no compass and no way of guiding the ship.

Think about your challenging situation. If you were to act completely inconsistently with your values, what would that look like? Write that under V.

Good work for completing a low skill DNAV disk. Everybody engages in low skill versions of their DNAV at some point in their life. Now you have a picture of how you might look if you are engaging in low skill of the DNAV. Let's turn to what high skill looks like, and see if we can build up your skills.

Increasing your DNA-V skill

D, N and A are different skills. You can also think of them as different spaces you can switch between, depending on what the situation demands. It's kind of like switching between rooms in the house, where each room has very different tools you can use.

Just to illustrate the idea, let's do a quick DNA switching exercise.

Let's get into advisor space. The advisor predicts and evaluates, so let's do that. Think about your future job prospects. Are they good or bad? Can you predict some risks in the future? Do evaluating and predicting for 20 seconds.

That is advisor space. It is full of words and evaluations and predictions.

Now let's get into noticer space. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Slow yourself down, there is no need to rush or react to anything. Now, as you think about your future, just notice what shows up in your body. Do you notice any sensations in your body that indicate tension? Scan from your head slowly down to your toes and just be a noticer. Are there tense sensations anywhere, say in your stomach or your shoulders? What is your facial expression? Relaxed tense?

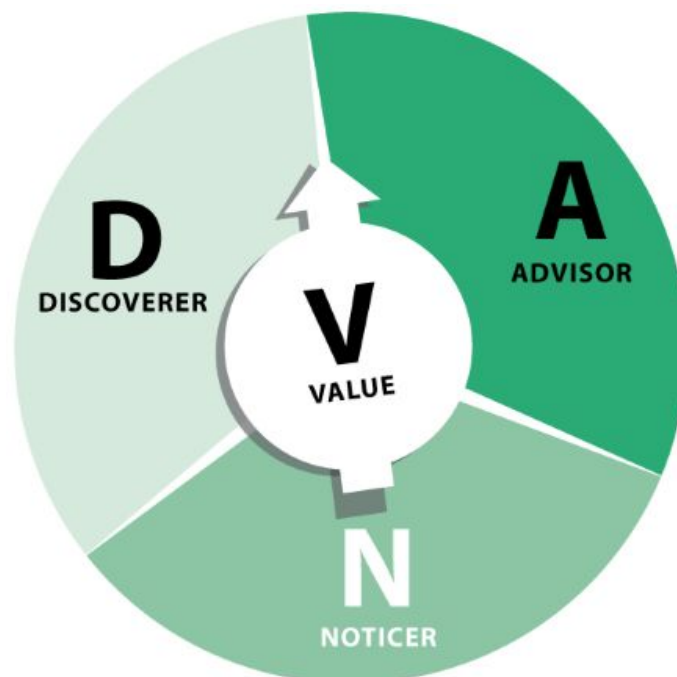
That is noticer space. We are noticing but not reacting. We are not rushing in any particular direction. Rather, we are pausing and taking a look around. There will always be time for doing.

Now let's get into Discover space. The discoverer does things, So let's do that now. Stand up and do something right now that you've never done before. It can be as simple as juggling three items in your office, or standing on 1 foot and singing the national anthem. It can be anything. Just try to do something you've never done before.

That's been a discoverer. We picked silly examples but the discoverer involves trying and testing important new things in life. Discover involves moving hands and feet.

Did you notice how different each of the spaces felt? Advisor space is very verbal and has a lot of evaluations and predictions. Noticer space is focused on the five senses and on inner experiences. The Discover is focused on doing things with your hands and feet and paying attention to how those things affect your life.

So one of your great skills is the ability to shift between noticer, advisor, and discoverer. How do we decide which space to get into? Remember the DNAV disk. The dial in the middle of that disk labeled value? Value is what helps you decide what skill to use.



Is thinking and problem solving helping you, that is, building value? Then stay in the advisor space. Is your thinking not helping, but rather just repetitive, distracting, and distressing (e.g. unhelpful worry). Then maybe it's time to move out of advisor space. If you're not sure where to go, we recommend you just move into noticer space for the moment. The simplest way to move into noticer space is to take a few slow deep breaths and notice your breath. When you need to ground yourself, your breath is always in the present moment and always there for you to find.

Now imagine you have spent plenty of time in advisor space problem-solving, and plenty of time to noticer space recognizing how you feel and making sure you don't overreact to your emotions. Maybe now it's time to switch into Discover space. It is time to take action and pay attention to whether that action is building value, or

not building value, or even making your life worse. The discoverer doesn't just behave randomly. The discoverer behaves in a way designed to build value.

Now that you've learned about DNA switching, let's take a deeper dive into each skill. Each skill consists of two parts

- 1) **Acceptance:** Each skill involves accepting some aspect of life as it is, not as we wish it should be. Acceptance does not mean giving up or not trying to improve things. It means being honest with yourself, and accepting that we can't always have a life completely free of stress, tragedy, mistakes, uncertainty, and loss
- 2) **Action.** Each skill has a set of actions that one can take to build value and vitality in life.

In developing skills, we could start anywhere: We could develop D, N, A, or V. Given advisor is such a big part of our life and our constant companion, let's start with A

Improving your advisor

Use language in a practical way and don't get trapped inside rigid ideas about yourself, others, or life

Accept

1. Accept that your advisor 's job is to help you avoid mistakes, not to be positive. How awesome would it be to have positive thoughts all the time. We would never have to worry about the future or ruminate about the past. But think about this. What would happen if we only had positive thoughts? We would be in trouble. For example, we would fail to notice when someone was looking to rob us or do us harm. We would not be able to imagine the dangers of smoking, poor hygiene, or riding a motorcycle without a helmet. Without negative thoughts, we would not be able to avoid a lot of mistakes.

Our advisor lets us imagine possible dangers and feel the emotions of that danger. Imagine someone advises us, "don't go near that bush, there is a poisonous snake there." We can save ourselves with "self advise": "I better not go near that bush, or I will be bitten." We might even feel anxiety when we approach the bush and avoid it. That is the power of the advisor. It creates feelings and helps us avoid

making mistakes, without having to learn through trial and error experience. We don't have to be bitten by the snake to learn! In contrast, a nonverbal animal like a dog would not be afraid of the bush until it experienced the snake, at which time it might be too late.

2. Accept that the advisor is like a problem-detecting machine that can't be turned off. The advisor is like a machine that is negative sometimes. But wouldn't it be nice to turn it off? Then we could have just a few moments of peace. People spend a lot of their lives trying to turn their advisor, for example, by over-drinking or distracting themselves with online media. But can the advisor be turned out?

Let's answer this question by getting into discoverer space and doing an experiment. For the next 3 minutes, try to focus only on your breath. Don't let your Advisor distract you. You know you are distracted by the advisor if you start to engage in evaluating. For example, you are distracted if you find your advisor saying, "you're doing it wrong," or "I think I'm doing it right." Both of these thoughts involve evaluations. So let's see if you go three minutes not having any evaluations and just focusing on your breath

Exercise: See if you can turn off your advisor (mind wandering)

Focus on your breath for three minutes. Each time you notice your advisor making any evaluation, make a mark below.. Get a stopwatch. Ready. Begin.

Did you find that exercise to be hard? Most people find it impossible. Even if you succeeded for three minutes, imagine trying to shut out the advisor for 10 minutes. Imagine trying to shut it out for an hour. Impossible! You cannot turn off your advisor. If you have ever done mindfulness exercises, you will know the truth of this statement. Your mind always wanders no matter what you do. That is your advisor looking out for problems.

3. Accept that your advisor, like any advisor, is sometimes wrong and can lead you in the wrong direction. Do you have somebody in your life that gives you a lot of advice? Are they always right? Is advice always useful? Probably not. The same is true for your inner advisor. Sometimes your advisor will say unhelpful things to

you, such as, “you’re not good enough”, “you’ll never survive this crisis”, “life is just not worth it”, or “you should never trust anybody.”What would happen if you listen to this advice? Bad things, right?

The image below illustrates four examples where the advisor has taken over your life and is not being useful. You may worry excessively about the future and experience anxiety, or worry about others, or worry about whether you are good enough, or ruminate about the past. When the advisor gains control, it’s like you are living in these different worlds and not in the present moment. Like you are stuck in future world or worry world or past world, and are not here, in the present moment.

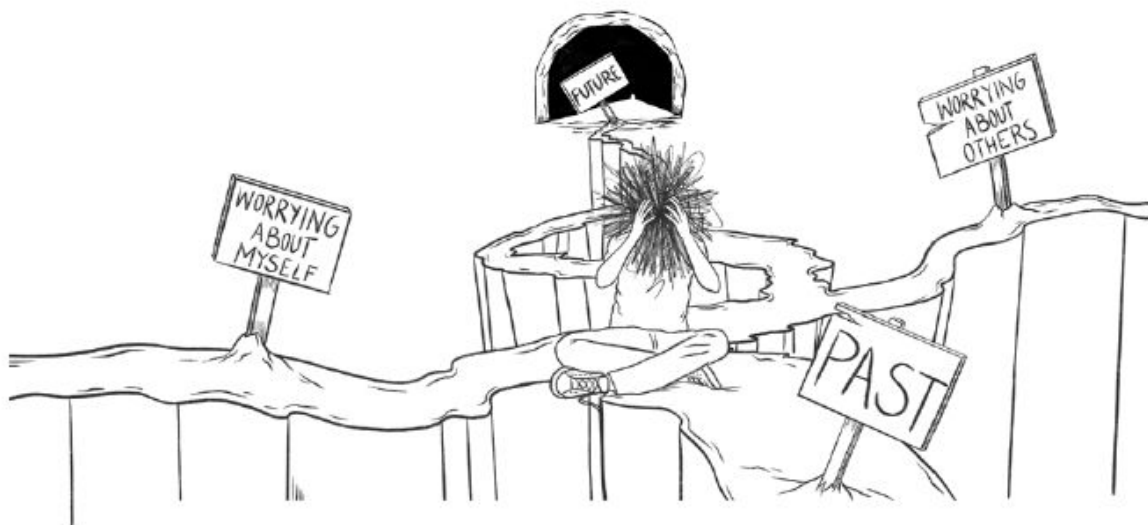


Figure 1: Trapped inside the advisor

We need to accept that sometimes we get lost inside our advisors world. The advisor is so convincing that we fail to notice that we are in an imaginary world, not the real world.

ACT

There are two key actions you can do when in advisor space. First, you can engage your advisor, for example, by problem-solving or generating useful rules of thumb for yourself (e.g., “If you persist, things will get better”). Second, you can disengage from your advisor, when it’s not being helpful, and move into noticer or discoverer space. Let’s talk about both options now.

- 1) Act by using your advisor effectively, that is, when it helps you build value**

How do you know when to engage your advisor? If you're confronting a problem or challenge, and you're thinking your advisor might be useful, here are some things you can ask yourself.

Is problem solving likely to help?

Is the problem hypothetical and probably unsolvable ("Will I ever be good enough")? Is it real (e.g., "Job loss", "sickness", "trouble with a coworker")?

Yes No

Is a problem likely to happen soon?

Yes No

Do you have some control over the problem?

Yes No

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, then it may be useful to engage your advisor. You might give the problem solving exercise below a try.

8 steps to DNA-V problem solving

1) Define the problem clearly. Be specific

2) DNAV your problem: What are low skill moves

Low skill D: What typical behavior do you do that might not help with this situation.

Why might you be reluctant to try something new?

Low skill N: How might you react ineffectively to your fear and other emotions

Low Skill A: What unhelpful things might your advisor say to you

3) DNAV your problem: What are high skill moves

Start with V. What kind of person do you want to be in this situation? What value do you want to put into play (e.g., connecting, being kind, challenging myself, being effective and caring for my family, caring for myself, etc).

*High skill D:*What new or nontypical behaviors might you engage in, in confronting this problem. Brainstorm solutions. Write a whole bunch of possible solutions below. Don't be afraid to think crazy.

High skill N. What difficult feelings are likely to show up for you when you're confronting this problem? What is the ideal way to respond to these feelings (see noticer below)? Should you react to your feelings? Can you allow them to come and go like weather?

High skill A: What are some helpful things you might tell yourself when confronting this problem or challenge?

4) Now shift to noticer. There's no rush here. Take a few slow, deep breaths and settle yourself into your body. Your body has as much wisdom as your advisor.

5) Shift into advisor. Look at the possible solutions you listed under high-skill advisor above. Write below and think about advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

Possible solution	Advantages	Disadvantages
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

6) Use your advisor to predict.

What solution do you want to try?.In preparing to implement a solution, it's useful to anticipate two things with your advisor.

6a) What are the potential benefits of the solution?

6b) What are the potential barriers to the solution?

If you encounter the barrier, what will you do?

If i encounter this problem_____

Then I will _____

7) Use your Discover to do and learn. Now it's time to act. You need to use your hands and feet to actually engage in an action that will start to solve your problem or challenge. Remember, action will sometimes bring up distress and uncertainty. Go to the discoverer section if you want us to strengthen your Discover skills.

- 2) **ACT to disengage from your advisor, when it is not helping you.** What happens when you have been thinking and problem solving and it isn't getting you anywhere? Maybe it's time to disengage from your advisor.

Is it time to disengage from the advisor?
Am I overthinking and getting nowhere?
Yes No
Is my advisor being discouraging or unhelpful?
Yes No

If you answered yes to either of these, then it's probably time to shift into a different space, such as noticer or discoverer. We explain these in the next sections.

Sometimes we are so caught up in Advisor, that we struggle to shift into noticer or discoverer. If this is happening to you, then there's a few ways to disengage your advisor. The key is to get some space between you and your advisor. Here are some things to try.

- 1) Write your difficult thoughts on a piece of paper. Notice that you are separate from the thoughts and don't have to listen to them.
- 2) You might want to try decorating the thoughts, using markers, crayons or whatever you have around. This may seem silly, but the key here is to learn to hold the thoughts lightly. Your advisor is not in charge of you. You are the one in charge
- 3) You might do a noticer exercise involving your advisor. Find a time and place that is quiet, and set your timer for 5 to 10 minutes. Now, let your advisor worry to ruminate or do whatever it wants to do. Your job is not to control the advisor. Your job is to notice the advisor and watch what it does. See if you can make space for the advisor, give it plenty of room in your head. The more

space you make for your advisor, the more space you have for yourself. You'll then experience your advisor as separate from yourself. That little bit of space between you and your advisor gives you the freedom to act.

We now bring the advisor section to a close. Before we move on to the next skill, let's take a look at the science behind advisor interventions.

The science behind advisor interventions

When we talk about “advisor” interventions, we are referring specifically to interventions that target unhelpful cognitive processes. There are two ways to target cognitive processes: Content focused and function focused.

Content focused interventions

Content interventions involve changing *what* you think. There is clear evidence for the benefits of helpful thinking patterns. For example, longitudinal research shows that people who have hope are more likely to develop wellbeing¹³, and people with self-esteem are more likely to develop supportive social networks¹⁴. Positive self-views are associated with increased life satisfaction and positive affect, and decreased negative affect and depression¹⁵.

The evidence indicates that people can be taught to use language more practically. Reappraisal interventions encourage people to change how they think about a difficult situation, and such reappraisal reduces the emotional impact of the difficult situation.¹⁶ Problem-solving interventions help people to accurately represent the problem and systematically work towards a solution^{17,18}. A meta-analysis shows a clear link between the use of cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving and low levels of anxiety and depression¹⁹. Longitudinal research suggests that having an effective problem orientation (seeing problems as a challenge rather than a threat) is linked to the development of higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect¹⁷. Intervention research suggests that reappraisal can diminish negative affect²⁰.

Function focused interventions

Function' interventions do not seek to directly alter what people think, but rather target the impact of that thinking on behaviour^{21,22}. For example, someone might think, “I will never be able to deal with this current crisis”, and this thought could have either a large impact on behavior (the person gives up) or no negative impact (the person persists and accomplishes the task on time). Function interventions involve teaching people to look at thoughts, feelings, or urges mindfully,

as events that can be observed but not reacted to. Function interventions disrupt the power of words so that words are experienced as arbitrary sounds, rather than binding truths^{5,23,24}. A simple way to experience a function intervention is to take an unhelpful thought (e.g., “I am not good enough”), and repeat it 500 times. Soon, the unhelpful thought will be experienced just as a collection of sounds, rather than words that must be obeyed. Levin et al.²⁵ reviewed 44 studies and found that this type of function intervention was used effectively across a broad range of problems, including substance abuse, depression, anxiety, avoidance behaviour, and self-harm.

Improve your noticer skill

Learn to consciously respond, rather than impulsively react to your emotions. Become aware of the valuable signals in your body, manage emotions, and increase situational awareness

Accept

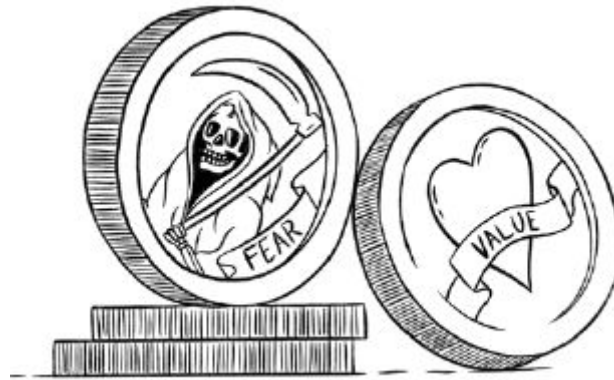
1) Accept that all feelings are normal and are valuable and essential sources of information. Unlike nonverbal animals, we humans judge our emotions to be “good” or “bad”. We clearly think negative emotions are bad. We say things like, “don’t be anxious”, “don’t think negatively”, “you need to control your feelings”, and “be positive.” A dog would never do this. A dog might be afraid when there is a threat, such as the presence of a larger, more dangerous dog. But it would not try to get rid of the fear itself. It would not seek to escape the dog. It would distract itself with positive thoughts or procrastinate in order to feel better.

We’ve already discussed above how so many attempts to control emotions backfire and make things worse. But society has taught us that some emotions are bad. This has led us to battle emotions and turn them into the enemy. Our body holds emotions and it too has therefore become an enemy.

This war with our emotions is not working. We’ve had a full seven decades or more of self-help books telling us to feel positive and think positive, and yet our positivity has not increased, and our level of anxiety, stress, and resentment has not come down. Perhaps we need to give up this battle. Perhaps it’s time to make peace with our emotions.

Not only is battle with her own emotions destined to fail, this battle cuts us off from the very things that we value. What if emotions are one side of a coin, with the

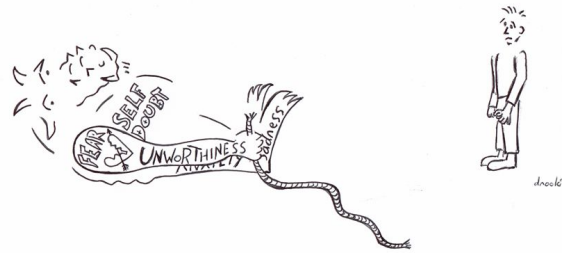
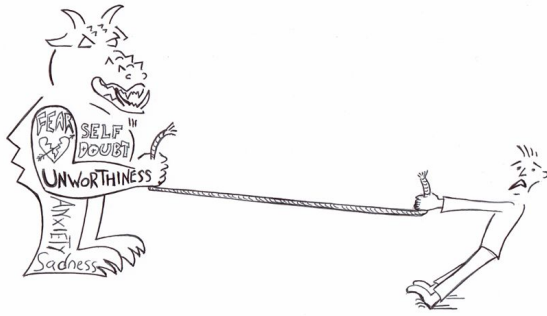
other side being value, as in the figure below. If we want to succeed, we have to be willing to feel the fear of failure. If we want to love, we have to be ready to feel the fear of loss. Think about anything you care about and that brings up positive emotions for you. Can you see that anything good in your life possibly brings with it some negative emotions, some pain, struggle, insecurity, loss, and disappointment?



2) Accept that you are strong enough to hold both positive and negative emotions and don't need to control them. So, if we don't seek to control emotions, how do we accept them? Acceptance is a tricky idea, because it often involves not doing something: not thinking too much, not overreacting to a bully, not procrastinating, not avoiding or distracting ourselves.

You might think of struggling to control your feelings metaphorically. It is like having a tug-of-war with the monster. We struggle and struggle and get nowhere with this monster, as in the below image (left panel). Indeed, the more we struggle with it, the stronger it gets. This is more than just a metaphor. There is clear evidence that people who struggle to suppress emotions often make themselves feel worse^{2,26,27}. The socially anxious person who avoids social situations tends to experience fewer positive events in life²⁸. The person who seeks to suppress painful thoughts will often have those painful thoughts diminish temporarily, only to rebound at a later time²⁹.

The alternative to struggling with the monster is to let go of the rope (image below, right panel). Let go of the struggle. We will give you concrete strategies for doing this in the next section. The first step to letting go of the struggle is to accept feelings and accept that control of feelings often fails. Let go of the idea that you can get rid of distress. Then something new can happen



Controlling feelings is like engaging in a tug of war with a monster that never grows tired

The alternative to control is to let go of the rope. Allow feelings to be, rather than struggling with them.

ACT

- 1) Act by pausing (don't react immediately unless your life is in danger). Then ground yourself in the here and now, and notice what is showing up in your body.** There is rarely a need to immediately react to feelings. How many times have we seen people send an email that they later regretted or say something in the heat of the moment that caused them problems for weeks and months and even years. Emotions are valuable signals, but we need to hear them in the context of our values. For example, when we are angry, we may want to lash out with a verbal tirade at a coworker. After all, anger is "telling us" that the coworker has done something unfair. But is the lashing out response usually the best? Probably not. We need to listen to the anger and then we need to weigh that information with what we care about. For example, we may care about having genuine connections and close relationships. Lashing out probably doesn't help with that value. Or we may care about managing a difficult person. Lashing out probably makes that difficult person even more difficult.

The three step noticer exercise below will help you to pause and respond effectively.

Three step noticer exercise: ACT

Aware of breath
Center awareness in your body

Tell yourself how you feel

Detailed steps

- 1) **Aware of the breath.** Take a few slow, deep breaths and ground yourself in the now. This step is not about making feelings go away. It is about noticing feelings so you will be able to respond to them in a valued way, rather than reacting to them in a valueless way
- 2) **Center your awareness on what is inside your body.** Scan your body for sensation. Is there tension in your shoulders, butterflies in your stomach, lightheadedness, sensations of hot or cold, pain somewhere? Focus on sensations in this step. Don't go too quickly into labeling it as a feeling (next step). The key thing is to break down feelings into a set of sensations. This way you'll experience feelings as what they really are, just a bunch of passing sensations, rather than what they say they are, a danger that must be controlled.
- 3) **Tell yourself how you feel.** Be honest. Are you feeling embarrassed or ashamed, in addition to feeling anger? Do you feel vulnerable in addition to feeling sad? Admit to experiencing the so-called "weaker" emotions, like anxiety, insecurity, and embarrassment. None of these emotions are bad. They are a normal part of human life. They only become unhelpful when we are unaware of them and we react to them in a stupid way.

2) Act by strengthening your mindfulness skills through practice. It is easiest to develop your noticer skills when you are not under pressure or stress. There are many mindfulness apps now available online, if you want to engage in structured mindfulness practice. The important thing to remember is this: structured practice isn't the only way to improve mindfulness. You can also practice mindfulness in ordinary activities, such as those involving a conversation with a friend, playing with the child, or having a cup of tea by yourself. All you have to do is find some activity that allows you to ground yourself in the moment and experience that moment with all of your senses.

Before we move on to discoverer, let's take a look at the science behind the interventions in this noticer section.

The science behind noticer

No behavior is inherently bad or good. Rather, the behavior is defined in terms of its usefulness for you in a specific context. This idea is especially important in the area of mindfulness. People often characterize mindfulness as inherently good, or as some magical pill that will make all stress and hardship go away ⁶.

However, we view “being mindful” as just another strategy and not an inherently good one. Indeed, research suggests that mindlessness can sometimes be beneficial ³⁰.

Mindfulness of emotions has two major components: the ability to identify and describe emotions, and the ability to respond in an accepting and nonreactive way to emotions³¹. Let’s consider emotion identification first. Emotions provide people with valuable information about how they are adapting, that is, about what they desire (or value) and whether the environment is supporting those desires ³². For example, anxiety is a sign that something undesirable might happen in the future, and anger is often a sign that some person is doing something undesirable and unfair ³³. People who report being unaware of their feelings struggle to adapt ³⁴, and are likely to engage in drug addiction to manage confusing feelings ³⁵, and to develop poor mental health and poor social connections ^{32,36,37}.

The second component of mindfulness of emotions involves the ability to accept and not necessarily react to feelings with unhelpful behaviour. Perhaps one of the most destructive ways to respond to emotions is to seek to avoid them, or engage in experiential avoidance. There is now clear evidence that experiential avoidance is associated with worse mental health and self-destructive behavior, such as addiction, withdrawing from life, phobia, obsessions, self-harm, excessive worry, rumination, and procrastination ^{1,38}.

Mindfulness of emotions appear to be modifiable in many evidence-based interventions, including those that explicitly improve mindfulness ^{39,40}, awareness and acceptance of sensory input ^{41–43}, skill at describing and labeling emotions ^{44–46}, and skill at responding to feelings in an adaptive and non-impulsive way ^{24,47}.

Improve your Discoverer skill

Watch out for old behavior and habits that don’t build value. Replace that old behavior with something new.

Do new things, or things you don’t typically do. Find ways to leave your comfort zone to improve your skills, resources, and social connections. Pay attention to what works, that is, what builds fun, value, and meaning in your life.

Accept

- 1) **Accept that some things you do in your life do not make your life better. We all have bad habits.** There are a number of reasons for this. First, we

might have learned to do something in one environment, but now that environment has changed. Or the current environment you're in is different from the original environment. For example, being open and honest may be great in a friendship group, but may not work in a toxic workplace environment or a bad relationship. Second, we might do unhelpful things because we get short-term rewards, even when there are long term costs. For example, the compulsive gambler may get joy from gambling short-term, but ends up spending all the family savings and destroying his life in the long term. Short term gains often drive us to our own destruction. Finally, behavior may be driven by unhelpful advisor statements ("I will always fail") or emotion control rules ("you should always avoid stress). Whatever the reason, know that if you are human, then you have some bad habits and ineffective ways of responding.

- 2) **Accept that trying new things can be distressing and difficult.** Being a discoverer means leaving your comfort zone. Whereas your advisor tries to keep you from making trial and error mistakes, you discoverer engages in trial and error behavior and often seeks out mistakes and feedback to learn. If you do something new or atypical, don't be surprised if your advisor goes a little crazy and warns you that you are doing something risky or embarrassing. One thing for certain. **If you don't do something new, then you will keep getting what you've always gotten.** The only way to break free from self imposed limitations is to experiment with life and explore. Life may seem safe in a cage, but remember there's so much more outside the cage.



ACT

1) ACT by being willing to choose to experience distress, in the service of doing new or different things. Here's where we completely flip the script. We are no longer going to be passive recipients of negative feelings. Rather we are going to choose to feel difficult emotions, when doing so builds value. We are going to choose to allow and even make space for difficult feelings in our life. Isn't that crazy? We don't choose willingness just for anything. We don't choose willingness if we don't value the activity. Why get yourself so worked up about something when it does even matter to us? Rather, we choose willingness for things that are important in our life. The willingness question below will help you to choose willingness in day-to-day life.

Discover through willingness

The willingness question is one you're going to have to ask yourself again and again. Here it is.

Are you willing to feel _____ (Insert difficult feelings)

In order to do _____ (Insert valued action)

Yes No

If you choose yes, you are ready. Put your action in the play.

If you choose no, that is okay too. Maybe the action isn't something you truly value. Or maybe you need to think of an easier action, one that you value but that brings up less distress.

Willingness is like taking a jump. You can take a huge scary jump, or you can take a tiny one. It's up to you.

The key is to sometimes say yes sometimes at least. "Yes I'm willing to experience distress to do my valued action."

2) Act according to what works. We are often caught up being right and winning arguments. What if instead of trying to be right, we focused on what worked? We call this having a “workability focus.” When you do something, what happens? Is that what you want to happen? If not maybe it’s time to try something new. Below is an exercise you can do to see how your actions are working in your life.

Think of some difficult situations in the last week and think about how you responded. Think of five such situations and write about them below.

The difficult situation	What you did	What happened next?	Did it work? Did it make life better in the long run

Science behind discoverer skills

There come times in everybody's life where what has worked in a past no longer works in a present. For example, a gym owner might have built a successful business by having people connect face to face in a small, intimate gym. This may have worked in the past, but may no longer work in the time of a pandemic like coronavirus. If the gym owner continues to insist on close, face to face contact, then the business is likely to fail. The gym owner might need to do something new, such as introduce online classes.

Because both ourselves and our environment are constantly changing, we need the ability to broaden our behavioral responses to adapt to these changes. Such expansion requires us to try new things, even when our emotions are screaming “No. It’s not safe.” We need to be willing to take risks and make mistakes, and learn how to better adapt from our mistakes. People who cannot broaden and build can get stuck in familiar, unhelpful behavioural patterns ⁵

Fredrickson’s Broaden and Build Theory suggests that positive affect and wellbeing broadens awareness, drives approach and exploratory behaviour, and expands social networks ^{48,49}. Positive affect essentially signals that the environment

is safe and it is ok to try new things and take risks. Research suggests that inducing positive affect leads to more creativity and big picture thinking and increased prosocial behavior and social support⁵⁰⁻⁵². Longitudinal research suggests that positive emotions predict an increase in valued activity⁵³. Thus, creating environments that signal safety and promote positive affect are likely to help individuals expand the way they adapt to difficult emotional events.

Negative affect can also lead to broadening and building. For example, the notion of posttraumatic growth suggests people can use trauma to broaden their behavioural patterns⁵⁴. Interventions that work to counter narrowing due to negative affect include exposure-based therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and many Mindfulness-Based Therapies. These have been effective in treating a wide range of conditions^{40,55,56}. Expressive writing is another way people can make contact with their negative experiences and broaden, rather than narrow, how they respond to those experiences^{11,12,57}.

Behavioural activation is another evidence-based intervention that helps people broaden and build beyond their current feelings. This intervention involves using activity scheduling to encourage people to engage in pleasurable or valued activities, even if they feel unmotivated or depressed⁵⁸⁻⁶⁰. These interventions often encourage people to ‘fake it till they make it’, that is, engage in valued behaviour before they have the “right” motivations and feelings. This shapes new responses in the presence of difficult emotions. People learn that anxiety does not have to mean “shut everything down and hide.”

Improve your valuer

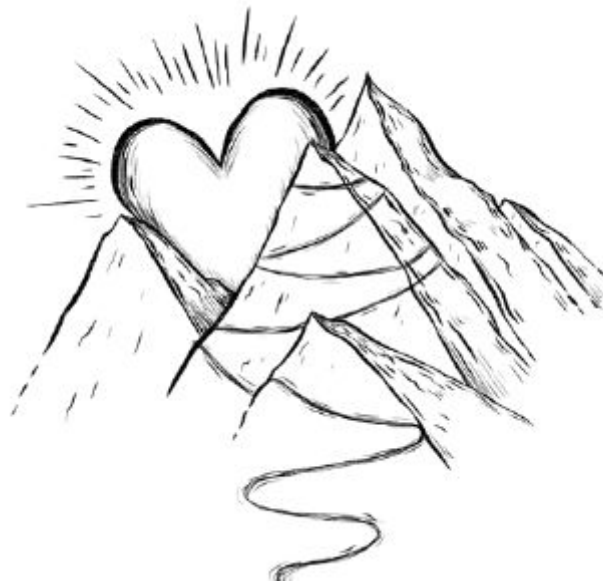
Clarify your valued direction and find ways to remind yourself of the kind of person you want to be.

Accept

1) Accept values are something you do, not outcomes you want from the world. We want life to be fair. We want others to treat us decently. We want the government to protect us from job loss.. We want all these outcomes, but that’s not what we mean by values. You don’t have total control over outcomes. What you do have some control over is your own behavior. Values here refer to qualities of behavior that you put into the world and that make it more likely that you’ll get the outcomes you want. You can think of values as a verb, something you do that others

might observe. Example values include connecting with others, being kind, being respectful, being active, being honest and fully engaging with an activity. When you act according to your values, it makes it more likely you'll get the outcomes you want, but does not guarantee outcomes.

So values are not the same thing as outcomes. It's also important to distinguish values from goals. Value is like a compass guiding you in your life. A goal is some concrete action that lets you know you are living your value. For example, in the below image, your value might be climbing mountains to challenge yourself. Your goal might be to climb this particular mountain. And the outcome might be that you get to the top of the mountain. Note that even if you fail the outcome (you don't reach the top) and the goal (you don't even start climbing the mountain), this can never counteract your value. No matter how many times you fail to climb this mountain, you can always value climbing mountains.



2) Accept that values are not something you permanently have, but something you need to constantly discover through doing. Unfortunately, there is no magic tablet you can consult to find out what your values are. You can use your advisor to try and figure out your values, but know that your advisor can be pretty clueless. The only way to find out your value is through doing, trying something out and seeing if you like doing it. For example, you may think you want to be a writer. But do you like writing? There will be many things you love doing that you don't know about, just as there are many foods that you would find tasty that you have never tasted. The only way to build value in your life is through doing and finding out.

Act

1) Act out your values in life. Every moment gives you a chance to put a value into play. Every moment gives you a chance to act. We can't necessarily say what you value, but we can tell you the kinds of activities that generally bring value to humans. These include: Connecting with others, giving, being active, challenging oneself and learning, embracing the moment, and caring for oneself ⁶¹. Explore your valued ways in the exercise below.

Think of a few types of activities you do for each of the six categories below. Then rate how important each activity is to you and how much pressure you feel to do the activity. This will help you explore what you value. A value will be something that tends to have high importance ratings. If you do something just because of pressure, then this is probably not a valued activity

How do you typically (write more than one):	Importance How much i want to do this because it is fun or personally important 1- not at all fun or important 5-Very fun our important	Pressure How much I do this because i feel pressured or I feel I have to do it 1- No pressure 5-Pressure
1. Connect:		
2. Give:		
3. Be active:		
4. Care for yourself:		
5. Challenge yourself/and or learn		

6. Embrace the moment:		

Act by always building value. Even if you have a pretty good sense of what you value, your preferences can change. The young person often values adventure. The new parent often values safety and security of loved ones. Priorities change as you change and as the world changes. To stay in touch with your values you need to keep doing and exploring.

Importantly, values are not merely ideas. They are actions. Without action, your life will be without value. If you get to a point where you are blessed with vitality and value and many good things, that is not the time to stop acting. Nothing is permanent, not even valued action.

Science behind valuer skill

Values give people a sense of meaning, purpose, and energy, and help them grow. Most people value connecting with others, giving, being active, challenging oneself, learning, and caring for oneself^{5,61}. Research on value clarification, or 'self-affirmation', suggests that having people complete writing tasks to affirm what they value can have benefits for wellbeing, self-control, self-efficacy, pro-sociality, and adaptive behavioural engagement^{62,63}. Value affirmation provides psychological resources that protects against emotional strain and improves cognitive performance

64 65-67

Conclusions

Well done. You have made it to the end of the workbook in your journey now can continue, hopefully with a few more skills to help you along the way . Remember that every journey requires a leap of faith. Faith means that no matter how much you doubt yourself, you can still make that leap.



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