

How to evolve,

Lead your life with intention

not just exist.

and achieve lasting success



Kapil Pankhania



Contents

Introduction.....	3
The Path of Discomfort.....	6
The Seeds of Stress	11

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INTRODUCTION

I firmly believe that everyone has a gift – a clear purpose for their life – within them waiting to be discovered; this gift is just wrapped in a series of questions before it can reveal itself. The greater your depth of questioning, the more insightful the answers you will receive, helping you to unwrap *your* personal gift – *your* purpose in life.

My name is Kapil. For most of my life, I paid very little attention to the kind of person I wanted to be in this world. I didn't have major goals or aspirations, whereas a lot of my close friends and family members knew exactly what they wanted to become. It made me feel like an odd apple – the one who hadn't got his life plan together and would always fall behind. As someone who felt lost and insecure, I would keenly observe what other people were doing around me. I would go to the places they went, explore the same interests they had, and pursue a career which felt normal in the eyes of others, rather than taking up something which resonated with me. Whilst others were finding their way in life, I was losing a part of me, day by day.

In 2017, I reached a breaking point. I could no longer carry on living a life which felt empty and worthless. A recurring thought would keep me awake at night: *I don't know who I am*. I had two options. I could continue having the same thought as my head hit the pillow every night. Or I could get my hands dirty and dig for answers. Having struggled to make a clear-cut decision, I decided to take the plunge and start digging.

Personal development was a topic which progressively became familiar to me. I spent hours listening to self-help podcasts during my cycle ride to work. I picked up several books

at my local bookstore which shed light on how to find meaning and purpose in life. One book which stood out for me was *The Miracle Morning*. The author, Hal Elrod, explained six specific daily habits which helped me reflect on the past and create a future that aligns with my individuality. Amongst these six habits, three of them resonated with me the most – reading, exercising, and visualising my future. It was time to put myself under the microscope and discover who Kapil really is.

As the days, weeks, and months rolled by, practising these new habits helped me discover various aspects of myself which I had never noticed before – such as what brings me joy, my core values which guide me during difficult situations, and how I could fulfil my full potential. More answers exposed further questions. Further questions led to greater curiosity. And it was this curiosity which sparked the idea of working with a life coach. This was an opportunity for me to develop even more positive habits that were relevant to me personally, such as waking up at an earlier hour than my normal waking time and keeping up with a diet plan. The most powerful shift in having a coach was making myself accountable for the goals that I set for myself. In fact, it was this transformative experience that inspired me to become a life coach.

Putting myself in the seat of the life coach was an opportunity to flip the script and help others achieve their own personal targets. The days of feeling lost and insecure were well past me; instead, for the first time in my life, I was feeling pure joy and fulfilment. Being coached and coaching others have given me the tools to help people shine a torch on their own potential. Asking open questions and making no room for judgement are fundamental in a coaching relationship. Providing a safe, exploratory space has given my clients the confidence and belief to make positive changes across multiple areas of their lives, such as developing a healthy work-life balance, managing stress, crafting a business plan, and structuring a daily routine.

Having worked with people from various walks of life, there is one fundamental pattern I have noticed in today's world: the demands and pressure we put on ourselves are ever increasing. We have become busy being busy, but rarely do we take the foot off the pedal and get a good glimpse of the big, wide world around us. Life coaching has shown me the value of slowing down and reflecting on where we truly want to make changes in our lives.

The simple act of helping others has revealed my personal gift: *to live a life of purpose and meaning by helping others to become the best version of themselves*. This includes you, too. What I am about to share are the practical steps and strategies that I have discovered through my first-hand experiences which have shifted me into a life of greater meaning, enabling me to view the world with more hope, positivity, and curiosity. Now you, too, can try them on for size and see where they lead you.

On a final note, there is no one-size-fits-all package to living a more fulfilling and productive life, so I ask that you take what sits well with you in the following chapters and leave what doesn't. No matter who you are, and the challenges life has thrown at you, I hope that this book offers you a spark bright enough to act today and change your life for the better.

Kapil Pankhania

THE PATH OF DISCOMFORT



When we are presented with two or more options to achieve an outcome, we are often drawn to the option that seems the easiest: the option that requires the least amount of time, effort, and energy. However, this strategy overlooks the fact that a more *difficult* option is much more likely to achieve the desired outcome. We are naturally resistant to choosing options that make us feel uncomfortable and uncertain. It is easier to avoid having a difficult conversation with a family member than it is to pick up the phone and clear the air. It is easier to run at a comfortable pace on the treadmill than it is to turn up the speed dial and take your fitness to the next level. It is easier to undertake a project at work which is less demanding of your time than it is to take on a larger assignment that is unfamiliar but may earn you a job promotion.

We are often immediately drawn to the options that seem easier in the moment, but in doing so we jeopardise our chances of a greater reward which could be gained from choosing the difficult option. The difficult options are often packaged with a number of unknown variables. Where there are too many unknowns, we naturally turn to the option that we are most familiar with. I've chosen a marathon of easy options, whether it involves my work, my health, or my relationships. The very moment in which an easy option was chosen I felt a great sense of relief. However, choosing the easy path time and time again eventually led to guilt and disappointment. It took a long, hard look in the mirror to realise that I was well and truly on

my way to a life of hiding in the corner, being comfortable, and never exposing myself to the idea of reaching my potential, in any shape or form.

The curiosity in me led to experimenting with the idea of picking options that would push me out of my comfort zone, with the hope that they would bring with them much greater rewards. I was now committed to taking an active role in how and why I moved through the world, navigating away from the smooth and open road in the comfort of a car and towards an obscure rocky valley in my bare feet. It was a done deal. Although it was intimidating, I was feeling full of energy and commitment to try something new. But I didn't quite know where to start. I turned to my good friend Google and searched '*Top 100 things which people are afraid to do*'.

Having browsed through a variety of sources, the one experience which stood out the most was the fear of speaking in public! It dawned on me that I had not once done this in my personal or professional life. Presenting ideas and delivering speeches to large – or even small – groups of people was not an experience I had under my belt. The thought of it made my stomach clench. I had spent most of my life being the quietest person in the room rather than being outspoken or opinionated. Nevertheless, I decided to let go of the excuses and embark upon a nerve-racking journey of public speaking.

I'll take you back to how this experience unfolded. I discovered the nearest public speaking club in my hometown of Cambridge. There were a lot of uncertainties and unknowns at this stage – the kind of people I would be meeting, the atmosphere of the room, whether I would be forced to speak on my first day. A wave of doubts flooded my mind. *What if I am not good enough? What if people laugh at me? What if this is just one big mistake?* Despite the fear that crawled over my body, I managed to set aside my hesitations and cautiously made my way through the double entrance doors.

As I followed the signs for ‘Public Speaking Club’ and found my way to the room, my eyes immediately caught sight of the stage. My heart began pounding but I managed to mask the panic when I was introduced to some of the regular members of the club. It was not until the last twenty minutes of the session that I was called to the stage to give a speech and given no time to prepare. I had thought I’d made a lucky escape, but it was only wishful thinking. There was no turning back to the comfortable road at this moment. As I took the stage, I turned to the diverse audience. Thirty pairs of eyes locked on mine. I took a couple of deep breaths. I opened my mouth. I wasn’t ready, but I needed to begin.

My words tripped over each other. My heart beat out of my chest. What was a two-minute speech felt like a lifetime on that stage. But I got through it. What in the moment felt like terror turned out to be just a brief phase of fear, which soon evolved into an overwhelming feeling of joy. I got a taste of the dark and dangerous rocky valley, but I was rewarded for my courage and determination. It was a wet and very windy cycle ride home that winter evening, but the sheer delight at what I had achieved made the tricky journey more than worthwhile.

The decision to try something new and put myself in the unknown was invaluable and far more rewarding than taking the comfortable option of turning my back on the opportunity. My public speaking skills were not great by any stretch at the time – in fact, far from it. However, the more time I spent on this craft, the more competent I became. It was a reminder that *slow progress* is better than *no progress*.

Since that first day, I have gone on to prepare public speeches for a vast number of audiences and have steadily built my confidence along the way. My doubts and fears sometimes made a surprise visit at the doorstep of my mind when I was called to the speaking stage, but over time they slowly lost their power over me. In return, I have grown into a more positive

and courageous person, and it all started with facing the unknown that awaited me behind those entrance doors in Cambridge.



‘Friends Meeting House’ – Public Speaking Classes in Cambridge

The willingness to escape our comfort zone gives us the strength to clear the hurdles of life much more cleanly. Your ability adapts and unwanted circumstances become more manageable to overcome. Putting yourself on the path of discomfort is the starting step to unlocking the greatest version of you.

What could *you* do?

To get warmed up, try this exercise over the course of one day.

- Acknowledge 1–2 moments in which you’re required to make a choice.

- Choose the option that you feel will help you grow and give you longer term satisfaction.

Here are some possible examples you could be faced with as your day unfolds:

- *Wake up as soon as the alarm goes off or press the snooze button.*
- *Cook a new meal or have one delivered to you.*
- *Spend time with the family during the evening or put your feet up on the sofa.*
- *Put more money towards a rainy-day fund or make an unnecessary purchase.*
- *Select a higher resistance level on the exercise machine or continue at a comfortable level.*
- *Create a plan for a new project/career or keep the idea on the shelf.*
- *Keep your phone away from your work desk to avoid distractions or have it within reaching distance.*

THE SEEDS OF STRESS



When was the last time you experienced a stressful situation in your life? Perhaps it was this morning, not long after you'd opened your eyes. Maybe stress took hold of you when you were overloaded with tasks at work or having a difficult conversation with someone close to you. Maybe it shows up on a daily basis and you're finding ways to fight your way through it. Given how fast-paced the world has become, stress has seeped into the cracks of our everyday lives in ways that were once unimaginable.

In a 2021 survey, Ciphir (an HR solutions company) asked 2,000 adults in the UK how many days, on average, they feel stressed each month.¹ The results are alarming. On average, the respondents reported feeling stressed 8.27 times a month – that is more than twice a week. What's more, one in every 14 people (7%) asserted that they feel stressed *every single day*.

The topic of stress is often discussed on a broad scale – the way it shows up at the workplace, in our relationships, and in relation to our lifestyle choices, health, and finances. With stress impacting our day-to-day lives in more ways than one, it has become impossible to ignore. I became fascinated with what is really going on at a granular level. I wanted to understand how stress develops at its earliest form before it evolves into something radical and gets a firm grip on us. I will illustrate this by painting a picture for you. Imagine walking through a forest and gazing up at the trees high in the sky. Notice their trunks and the several

¹ Ciphir, 'Workplace stress statistics in the UK' (2021)

thick branches growing from them. Catch sight of the numerous leaves dangling from each of those branches. Now imagine that the leaves themselves appear in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colours. Some of these forms represent different types of *stress*.

We (individuals) are symbolised by this fictional forest made up of many trees, some of which possess these leaves (stresses) that eventually develop over time. This leads to the question: why do some trees show signs of stress in the first place? In our forest, each tree is grown from just one seed, however, some seeds carry a specific characteristic which leads them to grow into trees carrying leaves that show signs of stress. In our lives, these particular ‘seeds’ are known as micro stress doses (MSDs). They represent small doses of our negative habits. Whether or not we are aware of it, it is *we* who choose to plant these MSDs, leading to varying amounts of stress showing up in our lives. Repeating these negative habits time and time again eventually leads to higher levels of stress, producing more trees possessing leaves of stress. One leaf could be showing a sign of anger, another leaf displaying signs of overwhelm, and another revealing low self-esteem.

Whilst it is we who embed our own MSDs, there is an important – and liberating – realisation to be made: if we are the cause of our own stress, we can also be the *cure*. Humans are very much capable of reducing the MSDs they experience day-to-day. An underlying point to be made is that one MSD which we embed at a single point in time does not necessarily cause stress. Instead, it is the *accumulation* of *multiple* MSDs which leads to weeks, months, and even years of stress. The average person experiences 10–15 MSDs during the morning alone! Can you imagine the numerous stressful behaviours that could show up as the rest of their day unfolds?

Let's look at how quickly and easily these doses of stress can build up right from the start of the day:

1st dose: *Waking up on time but choosing to press the snooze button on your alarm device.*

2nd dose: *Waking up again ten minutes later, this time forcing yourself to stay awake.*

3rd dose: *Switching on your mobile phone and reading a long list of unread work emails.*

4th dose: *Reading a social media post that causes you to become irritated or uncomfortable.*

5th dose: *Noticing how little time you have left to get ready for work, causing you to panic.*

6th dose: *Realising that the clothes you planned to wear that day are still in the laundry basket.*

7th dose: *Waiting an age for the hot water to activate in your shower.*

8th dose: *Your stomach is rumbling but there's no time to eat.*

9th dose: *Rushing out the front door only to realise that you've misplaced your keys.*

10th dose: *Just when it couldn't get any worse, the car needs de-icing before you can hit the road!*

The example above indicates that stress is not a result of a singular event, but instead it stems from repeating the smallest and simplest of actions. No one wants to feel stressed in the morning, yet we go through the list of unread emails from work as soon as we turn off the morning alarm. No one wants to be angry as they turn up for work, yet we are the ones who choose to yell at the driver who cuts us off in traffic.

The way you start your day might look very different to the one described above; nonetheless, it illustrates how easily we can accumulate these very miniature moments in our routine. Before you know it, your stressful morning becomes a stressful day. A stressful day becomes a stressful week, and so on. Again, it is we who plant these small, simple seeds into

the earth of our routine. A small, stressful moment such as reacting negatively to a social media post in the morning does not create a stressful life. Rather, it is the *accumulation* of what seem like insignificant snapshots in your routine, the MSDs, that goes on to develop a stressful life.

On the whole, signs of stress appear very clearly when they present themselves. However, they do not indicate how they made their way into our lives to begin with. To notice what could cause your stress levels to spiral, it is crucial to become *aware* of your daily habits. Somewhere in those habits, you could find a fistful of red flags, the MSDs, which give a clear indication that you are enabling behaviours leading to stress.

Waking up with anxiety was a long and stressful phase for me. The thought of going into the office to face a difficult boss and an overwhelming volume of work made me want to curl up in bed until the very last moment. I couldn't resist the temptation of scrolling through my social media feed, reading the headline news, and replying to messages on my phone – doing anything and everything to avoid the reality of what the day had in store for me. Having taken a step back, I noticed that my morning routine was a minefield of MSDs, and the situation was not sustainable.

Radical changes were made, which included leaving my alarm clock in the next room, forcing me to get out of bed. Also, I strictly kept my phone away from me for the first thirty minutes of the morning, using this extra time to get ready and make myself a cup of coffee without the rush. I was taking back control of how I started the day. It set me up with far more energy and positivity for the day as it unfolded. This was the fuel I needed to improve my relationship with my boss and better manage the numerous tasks that landed on my desk.

Up to this point, I have described stress in a negative light. However, not all stress works against us; there is also 'good' stress which we feel as a result of excitement and enthusiasm, without threats or fears lurking in the distance. This includes pursuing challenges

which make you feel good about yourself, such as competing for a promotion or training for a marathon. To determine whether an activity produces a positive kind of stress, pay attention to how that activity makes you feel. Does it genuinely make you feel happy and joyful? If so, that's an activity to add to the good stress column.

What could *you* do?

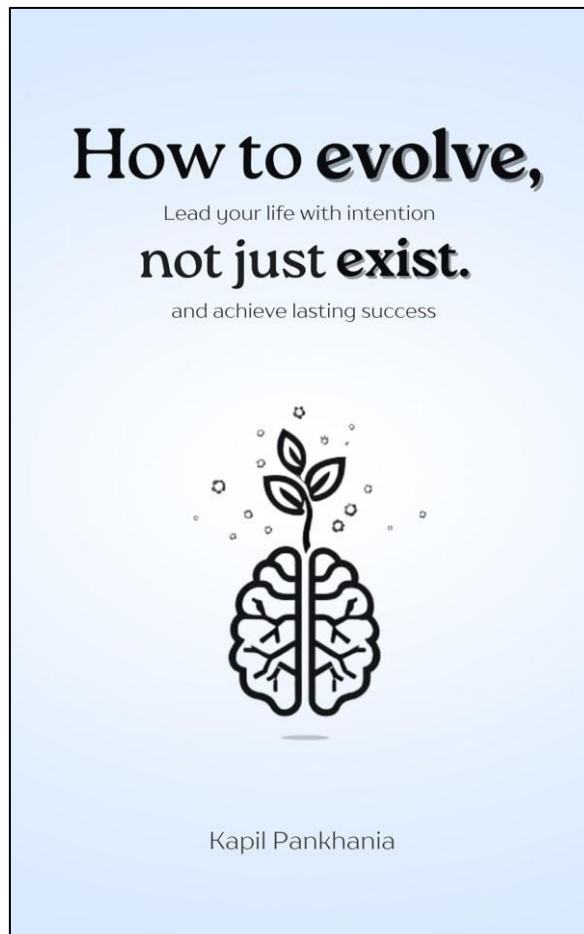
It's not possible to eliminate *all* bad stress, however, the following challenge is intended to help you begin the process of *noticing* your specific daily actions, determining which of these actions you perceive as your MSDs, then choosing whether to keep them in your routine.

- On a piece of paper, write a list of your daily actions. Use a similar format as the example given on page 13. Start with a short timeframe, for example the first hour of your day, the first half of your day, or your evening routine. If you are feeling extra determined, you can take account of your entire day.
- Highlight the actions which you perceive to be stressful (your MSDs).
- Choose just 1–2 of the MSDs you want to resolve.
- For each MSD, decide whether to *swap* this with a positive action, or *eliminate* it from your routine altogether.

Let your new routine play its course for at least a week and notice any changes in how you feel at the end of the day. Clear signals of positive changes can include:

- Better sleep quality
- Less worrying
- Increased motivation/energy
- Better decision-making

From my experience, resolving my MSDs which were attributed to the beginning of my day has been the most effective. A stress-free morning sets a positive tone which I carry around with me as the remainder of my day unfolds.



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