

Create  
Smarter



Not Harder

KATE PENNELL

# Create Smarter Not Harder

Engage the Innovative Power of the  
Subconscious Mind & Create Space for  
Productivity & Rest.

By Kate Pennell

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# About Me

I'm a life-long creative, faith-following, gluten free, mum of three. I love people. I love life and energy, peace and balance. Beauty. Abundance. I am a beautiful, wonderful, glorious, kooky, work in progress.

How about you?

I'm a lifelong student of human behaviour. I understand that to be a true master of something you must always have the attitude of a student, because of that I am continually learning, researching, and studying.

*The areas I love to play in are those of creativity and productivity, lifestyle design and balance, the power of choice and essentialism. What holds us back and draws us forward is a bit of an obsession.*

There always seemed 100 things that I **should** do. Even more that I **wanted** to do.

Overwhelmed, stressed, desperately spinning plates. It's why I started looking at how to work smarter – harder just created more of the same!

How can we **create** smarter?

I love to wonder. I love to research. I love to see the how and why of a matter.

I wonder things like, 'What would art with no limits look like?' 'What would life be like without procrastination or fear?' to name only a few.

Then I see how to make that real.

# How to Make the Power of Your Subconscious Mind Work for You



# So creative, it seems like magic: a step-by-step guide to unleashing your most innovative brainpower.

Our rational, conscious mind is a wonderful thing. But sometimes when we are looking for a solution, it can be a limited resource.

I'm always looking for ways to work **smarter**, not harder.

What if I could come up with answers in my sleep? I discovered that it's possible to do just that.

To the outsider, it can look as if someone were literally dreaming up solutions to situations.

What's really happening, though, is that a person who is skilled at this is first removing their overeager *conscious* mind temporarily from the equation, and then mobilizing the power of their *subconscious* minds through the power of a specific question.

It's not half as complicated as that last sentence suggests.

Questions are the key.

I learned how to make this work for me, and I'll show you how to do it, too.

# How does it work?

To understand better how the mind works, we're going to look at an analogy from science fiction: the Starship Enterprise from Star Trek—partly for its shape, and partly for the way the different departments interact.

The “bridge” of the ship is the place where most of the action appears to happen—it's the control center. Captain Kirk stands manfully on the bridge of the Enterprise, making decisions and giving orders—with an ego the size of a nearby planet.

Captain Kirk is, in fact, the perfect example of ‘ego’ from the point of view of psychology or personal development: he's our self concept or the representation of the constructed self.

- [The Oxford dictionary defines ego as](#) *“the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity.”*

Despite what he gets up to in the series, Captain Kirk's job is to ensure the success of his mission and the continual wellbeing of his crew and ship. It is up to him to receive and evaluate information, weigh options, and decide on the best course of action.

Our conscious brain work is like our own ‘Captain Kirk’, standing on the bridge of our mind, taking control and trying to make all the decisions.

Any problems or situations to be reviewed come here first to the bridge, and our conscious mind is very good at making those decisions.

However, like Captain Kirk, our ego can be a little too full of its own importance and overeagerness to solve issues. It often doesn't notice all the possible solutions, or make use of resources better suited to finding those solutions.

The bridge is only a small part of *The Enterprise*, however. Supporting everything happening on the bridge is engineering.

The bridge and Captain Kirk may look like the center, but without engineering, no one's going anywhere. Engineering is where the warp engines lay, and where all the data is stored from every mission and available databank.

The engines and the supercomputers in engineering never stop, never sleep—unlike Captain Kirk.

They receive instructions, then keep processing and working away until a solution is found.

In *The Enterprise* of our mind, the engineering bay is our subconscious mind. Always processing, it doesn't sleep like the conscious mind.

*The **WILL** to boldly go may be on the bridge of the ship, but the **POWER** to get there is in the engineering bay.*

# The Problem-Solving Power of the Subconscious Mind

Max Maltz likens the subconscious mind to a supercomputer or autoserer mechanism in his work (and subsequent book), [Psycho Cybernetics](#).

Maltz originally published this back in 1960, but his methods and ideas are still prevalent, and relevant, today. You can see the influence of his work in that of thought leaders such as Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins, and Benjamin Hardy.

**He explains that in the same way that a machine does not reason or judge, rather it just follows the task set it, so does the subconscious mind.**

A really simple example of this is when you're trying to remember someone's name. It bugs us, doesn't it?

The simple question of "what is their name?" is sent back from the conscious to the subconscious mind, where our search engine works away until three hours later, while washing up, we think "Jane!"

The original situation has passed, but the **subconscious** "engineering" has been working away to find an answer while our conscious mind has been doing other things. Now while we're doing something that doesn't involve high levels of brain power, the message can get through, "Hey, you on the bridge: Jane!"

Another example of the play between conscious and subconscious is how they work together when we need to make a decision.

For example, let's say I want to buy new shoes.

As I go about my daily tasks, I now start noticing people's shoes.

The file is still open on 'Which shoes do I buy?' so my data collection devices (eyes and ears) send information back into the control center (conscious mind) which does a quick evaluation (horrible color/looks comfy).

Did I notice people's shoes before? Not really.

Were people wearing shoes before that? Of course! I just didn't have a "scan and search" order set for "shoes".

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Buying shoes is a simple example, but the same principle is in action if we want to:

- change our job,
- find a course,
- meet a new partner,
- or discover a way to change an area of our lives.



***We can set an order to search and scan.  
The data comes in, and the amazingly powerful subconscious connects  
and compiles it, even when we are not consciously thinking about it.***

# How to Get It to Work for You

We know that asking the right questions are the key, and that we need to get the Captain Kirk of our ego to release its hold on the situation and take a break.

So now we can look at how to practically do that and set up our brains for finding creative solutions and success.

## Questions are the key.

A question is better than an opinion or affirmation for finding creative solutions.

Positive affirmations can be very effective for changing the programming in our subconscious, but it doesn't send the command to *do* anything: to search and connect.

I've been consistently working on this idea of setting my subconscious a question for nearly a year and I have noticed differences in my results.

Here is what I've learned, through trial and error, and some corresponding research.

## 1. Ask quality questions

Good questions invite action and expansion.

The subconscious loves making connections and having something to do, and it loves *good* questions.

Secondly, the focus of the question makes a difference.

A big difference.

If I send the question 'how can I feel less tired all the time?' it's a negative question.

The focus is on feeling tired, so that's what you are telling your computer to focus on. The resulting thoughts and feelings will reflect this focus.

'Tired' in, 'tired' out.

By rephrasing the question to:

***‘How can I re-energize myself this week?’***

the focus is positive, on energy and feeling energized, and the results will follow suit.

By setting a specific time frame of this week or tomorrow, you are also setting nice manageable parameters for your subconscious to play with.

I found that it was worth spending a little time phrasing my questions so they were positive and specific.

The five or ten minutes I spent weighing the question until it felt right and in line with what I wanted was worth it in results.

Choosing words that resonated with me meant that I was engaging with the question deeply.

Words have great power.

## 2. Get your ego to let go

When we hold on to our issues in our conscious mind, it can cause stress and frustration.

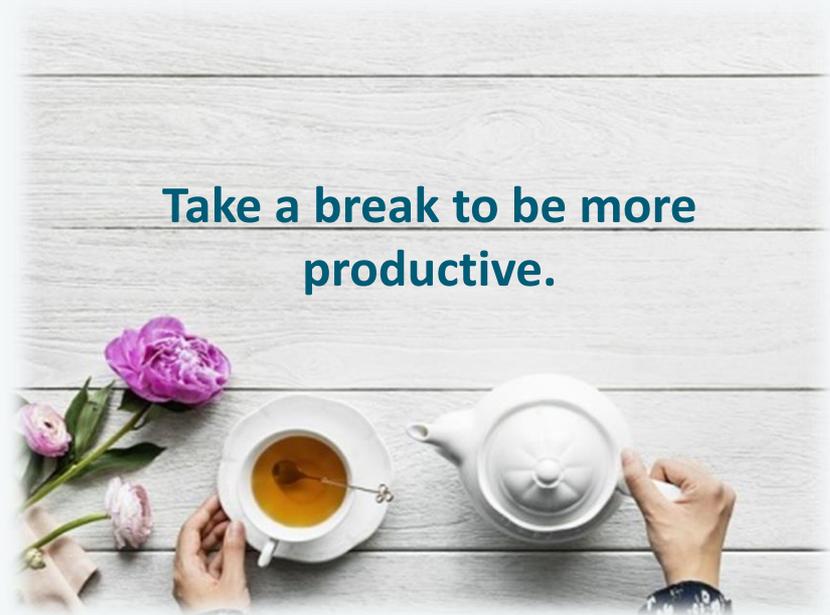
It's not surprising really: it needs *options* and *space* with which to consider decisions or have that insight.

Essentially, you need to take a break!

It might sound surprising to say that to find the solution, you should stop consciously working on it. Remember: Archimedes didn't have his 'Eureka' moment until he had his bath.

Sherlock Holmes, although a fictional character, would play chess or the violin when wanting the answer to something that had him stumped. I wonder how many times Arthur Conan Doyle did something similar as he allowed his mind to percolate his stories and ideas?

Personally, I find taking a break allows me release the build up of pressure in my thoughts, meaning that the only headbanging that I do is to music.



It is an effective short term solution.

It gives 'engineering' time to sort through data and make connections, send the results back up to the bridge and ...

'Eureka!'

## Take a nap to release the ego

Thomas Edison would regularly take a nap when faced with a problem. He is famous for taking a nap in his chair while holding two metal balls in his hands, which would drop and wake him if he fell into a deep sleep. The answer or insight would often be there upon waking.

Albert Einstein and Nikola Tesla were also famous for their napping habits.

Did you know that famous British prime minister Winston Churchill had a bed in the Houses of Parliament, and was convinced that his regular siestas and power naps were part of the success of his governing?

I used to laugh at the idea of a power nap—they're for grannies, right?

But I found I was wrong and that sometimes a brief bit of downtime refreshes my energy levels, and allows my subconscious mind to shine.

*The subconscious doesn't sleep*, remember, so a brief bit of shut eye effectively releases my conscious mind's hold on a subject so that 'engineering' can do what it does best.

## 3. Sleep, perchance to dream...

Napping is good, but what I find to be most effective is to ask a question at night, right before sleeping.

**In bed, nice and relaxed, I like to review my day and send a question to my subconscious to play with while I recharge my batteries.**

**I'm literally working in my sleep.**

*“During sleep, new synaptic connections are formed, and old connections are ‘cleaned up’. This can allow you to see patterns where none existed before.”*

Article [on neural plasticity](#) published in the ‘Frontiers in Neural Circuits’

Edison is said to never have gone to sleep without first setting his mind a question.

Those patterns mentioned in the quote are what give us the solutions and insights the next morning.

### **Write your pre-sleep question down**

Writing the question down before sleep helps me twofold.

It helps me to think about, and carefully form, the best question to give me the best answer. It also reminds me in the morning what I’d asked.

Writing it down at night to review the next day keeps me on track.

This has become a part of my nightly routine—a sort of mental hygiene. In the same way that I brush my teeth at night as part of my dental health, I also review my three wins and set my question in my journal as part of my mental health

### **Journal in the morning**

The technique of setting your question at night before sleep works really well in conjunction with morning journaling.

I’m talking about a form of writing where we do the following:

- move ourselves into a peak state of focus
- set our most valuable priorities for our day,
- sculpting our future before it happens.

Some use the habit of '[morning pages](#)', where they brain-dump, first thing in the morning, as they write without specifically filtering ideas.

Nedd Herrmann in his [work on brain waves](#) confirmed that there is something special about capturing your mental state upon first waking:

*“During this awakening cycle it is possible for individuals to stay in the theta state for an extended period of say, five to 15 minutes — which would allow them to have a free flow of ideas about yesterday’s events or to contemplate the activities of the forthcoming day. This time can be extremely productive and can be a period of very meaningful and creative mental activity.”*

**This creativity is vital.**

**It allows us to think from a different perspective and see what we couldn't see before.**

Don't make the mistake of thinking that writing morning pages is just for, say, creative writers. It can be used by anyone wanting to access their full range of brain power.

# Your Beautiful Mind

Our mind is amazing.

What I see in my personal experience and research on this topic is that it is possible to maximize our potential and productivity through a simple habit.

- ***Create a question.***
- ***Let that question resonate.***
- ***Trust your subconscious mind to come through for you.***
- ***Go do something else, like sleep.***
- ***Be ready and aware for the answer.***

Promoting greater balance and cohesion in my mind is important to me, as is working smarter—not just harder—to create what I want.

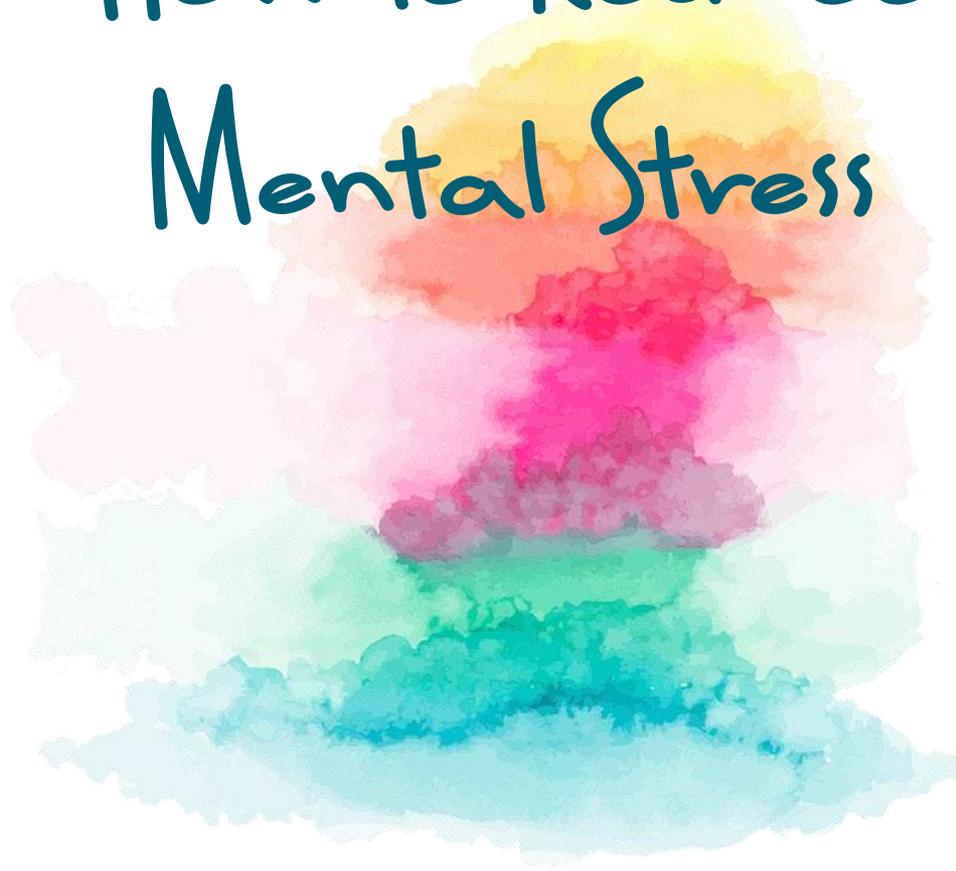
I'm no Einstein or Churchill, but by emulating their habits, I can better my own, and then let those habits improve my life.



***I'm having fun playing with this simple technique to increase my creativity, insight, and productivity.***

***After all, that's not something that I'm going to lose any sleep over, right?***

# How to Reduce Mental Stress



# A step-by-step guide to optimising your productivity, rest, and peace of mind: quality work, rest and play.



## A Beautiful Mind

In his work on the power of the subconscious mind, Max Maltz likens our brains to supercomputers.

He doesn't say that they *are* computers, but that they function in a similar way. Our brain receives, filters, processes, and actions vast amounts of information continuously.

He stated that the subconscious mind does not sleep or judge the information that it receives, but rather it goes to work on the task that it has been set.

What if we could deal with the root cause of stress?

Make win-win decisions?

Learn how to be effective in both our work and our recovery times?

I discovered how to do just that and I'd like to show you how.

By understanding the role of each part of the mind and how to harness the power of the subconscious, we can set ourselves up to be more productive and more creative.

### **Even while we sleep.**

We can become very good at consciously forming a question and then sending it back to our subconscious mind as a task to work on.

### **However, what happens when we have *too many files open*?**

Many people work with a multitude of tabs open across their computer screen, and usually a couple of program files too at the bottom.

I don't.

Here is why.

Having a long line of tabs open slows down my computer. It also slows me down.

Social media, while useful in context, is the leech of productivity and flow.

Pop-ups and pings, or just the temptation to look at email; they all interrupt my workflow opening the door to procrastination.

We work like this because of the common delusion that we can [multitask](#).

***A computer can, our brains can't.***

# Open Files

*One of the major causes of internal stress is unfinished decisions and actions.*

Think about that for a moment.

How many unfinished decisions and actions do you have as open files right now?

It is always amazing how much we have going on up there .

Marketing strategies next to shopping lists. Our family commitments vying for attention alongside work deadlines and projects. Fears, worries and doubts lurking like shadows behind it all.

*Wouldn't it be nice to have less noise and stress in our minds?*

If we don't close some of those files down, our subconscious mind will continue to work on them and send us reminders about them.

It's doing its job.

It is the role of the conscious mind to evaluate information, define decisions and actions plans, and create the action. When procrastination and overthinking are invited to the meeting, this follow through doesn't always happen, leaving us with files, work, and reminders piling up.

The mental 'office' becomes a stressful place to work. There is little desk space left for anything new and all time-off is cancelled for the near future!

# Reducing Overload

The keys to better subconscious freedom and mental health are found in creating the following:

- Optimal environments for work and rest
- Frameworks for specific tasks
- Win-Win decisions

## 1.1 Create space to have space to create.

You don't need a degree in organisational psychology to know that a cluttered work area does not make for clear thinking.

“Clutter is a lot of things in an untidy state, especially things that are not useful or necessary.”  
Collins Dictionary.

That clutter can be:

- **Physical** clutter on your desk
- **Digital** clutter in the form of social media, or messages on your phone
- **Environmental** distractions like noise, kids (or colleagues) asking you for things, or even other projects that vie for attention.
- **Internal** clutter — which is looked at in the section on focus.

Here is the sneaky thing about clutter.

Sometimes it is easy to spot — the bank statements I forgot to file or yesterday's notes.

However, sometimes things that appear useful and necessary can still create a cluttered environment, which can then impair our ability to function or rest well.

Our brain is constantly receiving, filtering and processing information from our surroundings.

Every item we see triggers information in our mind — like when we hover the cursor over something on our screens and a pop-up appears.

An example of how this may work: I glance at my course file on my desk:

Pop-up and raw information received, triggering a memo sent, assessment of info, filter engaged ('I don't need to do that now, I'm writing...'), then reconnection to the task in hand.

The whole sequence may only take less than a second — the speed of thought — but that distraction is a blip in my focus. It has cost me vital mental energy, time, and in the end will impact my productivity.

It can also trigger an emotional response of guilt, frustration, nostalgia, etc.

Emotions that I do not need to accomplish the task at hand.

## Action:

**Create space physically, digitally, and environmentally, reducing distractions and stress, and give your brain the optimal space it needs to work well.**

KonMari your work area, clear apps off your phone, set up an email notification that states that you do not answer emails before a certain time — as championed by Tim Ferriss.

***Do what it takes.***

These are not giant changes but they can make a big difference.

## 1.2 Rest. The Secret Ingredient To Success.



The new must-have status symbol, for all classes, is busyness and instant availability to others.

FOMO reigns supreme.

We isolate ourselves from our immediate contacts and environment in our desperate want for wider connectedness.

New technology may not need switching off and can be content to stay on standby.

However, **our brains are old tech.**

We need that time *to mentally recharge* and for our *subconscious mind to work effectively* in making connections and produce the results that we need.

In his book, 'Willpower Doesn't Work', author Benjamin Hardy explains the importance of creating optimal environments not just for work, but for recovery.

It flies in the face of the generation who answer emails from work at 10:30 pm and chats online with another person while on a date.

He identifies six areas we need to recover from *daily*: work, technology, people, food, fitness, and being awake.

**This recovery is not just physical, but mental.**

We need to stop working and also *thinking about* work.

This psychological detachment allows us to fully engage with our family or our fun activities.

‘When you’re at work, be fully absorbed. When it’s time to call it a day, completely detach yourself from work and become absorbed in the other areas of your life’.

Benjamin Hardy

Breathe.

Take time to know yourself and fill your batteries up with forgotten wonder and energies.

Play

Then go to work and create.

Don’t sacrifice your mental health or your relationships on the altar of Busyness.

**‘A change is as good as a rest.’**

No, it isn’t.

Work is work. Even if you’re ‘only just’ checking your email/social media feed/preparation for tomorrow. In addition to that, there is [the unpaid work](#) we all do at home.

***Rest is not an indulgence, it is essential.***

## Seven days work makes one weak.

*“There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither”*  
*Alan Cohen*

**Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is to relax.**

In the same way that we can set up our work environments for better productivity, we can do the same for our rest and recovery.

We can create habits — small changes in our lifestyle - that optimise the quality of our rest:

- Leave work at work (or at least in the car rather than in the house)
- Be ‘screen-free’ for at least half an hour before bed
- Schedule in some exercise - if you don’t like the gym then go for a walk or dance crazily around your house for half an hour.
- Write a list of 5 things you **used to** enjoy doing. Then do one this week.
- Write a list of 5 things that energise you, that will help to fill up your batteries. Create a date with yourself or look for ways to include them in your life. This week.

## Key 2: Frameworks for specific tasks

Dan Sullivan, founder of The Strategic Coach and author of over 30 publications, uses 3 distinct types of days to increase his productivity and creativity through effective time/energy management:

- The Focus Day
- The Buffer Day
- The Rest Day

Coach Jason Gardner's [short informal video](#) explains the system perfectly.

On your **focus day**, you go to work on your projects. Your objective is to productively create your content — whatever that content looks like for you. What Cal Newport calls your 'Deep Work', the long term, high-value work.

Your **buffer day** is your admin day. Here is when you do the filing, follow up on your emails, take care of your marketing posts, etc. Enjoy ticking things off your to-do list.

With a **rest day**, your aim is to regenerate. By scheduling rest in, it becomes a **set priority** and not a last minute thought when you're feeling stressed.

For those of us who have someone else writing on our timetable in the form of a job, setting whole days aside in this manner may not be practical.

However, by setting *blocks of time* aside in this way we can create higher clarity and focus on our tasks, thus increasing our productivity.

# Creating Peace of Mind

Working in this way helps to clear the **internal clutter**.

I no longer need all the anxious pop-up reminders from my subconscious to make sure I remember to do things.

When I know that I have something scheduled for a specific time, it **frees up my mind** to concentrate and fully engage on my present task.

Whether that task is writing, coaching, or having a date with my daughter.

By scheduling and assigning tasks I can create precious peace of mind. I know that I am working towards my specific goals over my week and that nothing will get missed.

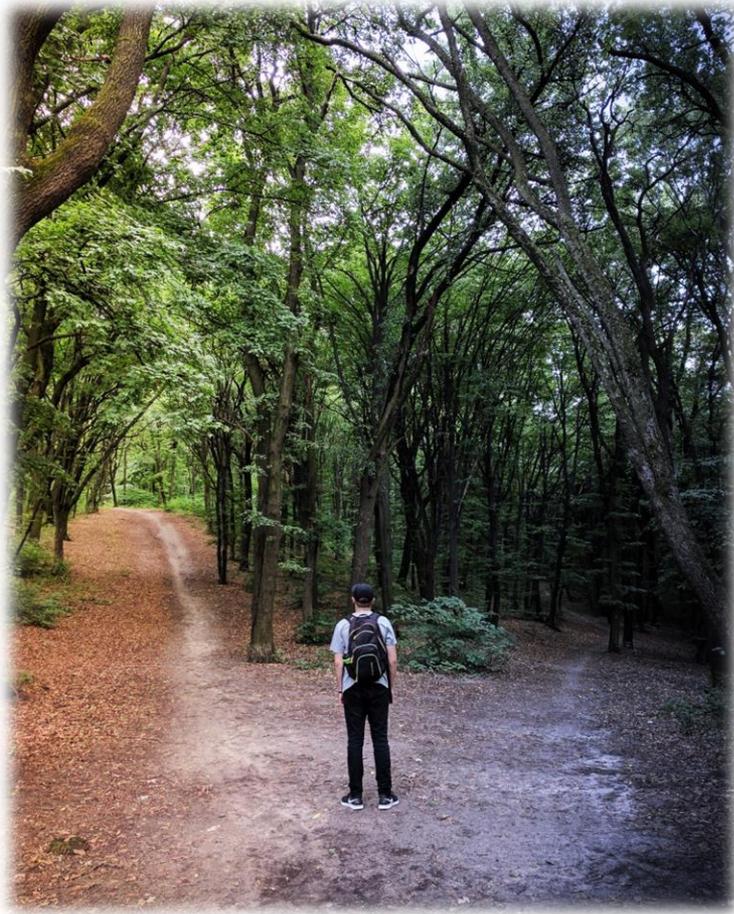
It can take a little practice but the discipline of fully engaging in the present assigned task does pay off.

If an ex-stress head like me can do it, so can you.

From feeling like cranial self-combustion was imminent, I now feel empowered and in control of my time.



## Key 3: Win-Win decisions are possible



The common view of decisions is that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to go.

Therefore, so the thinking goes, there has to be a right and a wrong decision.

We load our decision making process with stress and fear, which commonly shows up as procrastination/over thinking before the decision, and worry and second-guessing afterwards.

This can create a phenomenal amount of inner chatter and costs us highly in regards to our energy and peace.

*“We’re afraid that the wrong decision will deprive us of something — money, friends, lovers, status or whatever the right decision is supposed to bring us”*

*Susan Jeffers*

Author of ‘Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway’, Susan Jeffers, presents us with a No-Lose model:

the idea that whichever path we choose has things to offer us for our good.

I dare you to pause and think about that for a moment: *whichever decision is made, we can create wins for ourselves.*

**1 “I can’t lose — regardless of the outcome of the decision I make”**

The No-lose model starts us off with this belief.

“The world is a place for opportunity, and I look forward to the opportunities for learning and growing that either path gives me.”

That combined with the belief that *you can handle anything* is a powerful place to start!

**2 Do your homework, and make connections.**

Talk to people who know about the situation you want to step into. Use the power of intention to create what you want.

Consider your options intelligently in an informed way. [Greg McKeown’s Essentialism](#) practice of making one well-considered decision, so that you don’t need to make a hundred others, happens right here.

### 3 Establish your priorities , & 4 Trust your intuition

When we have our vision clear before us, when we are in touch with *what we want and who we want to be*, we can ensure our decisions are in alignment.

It may sound crazy to trust our intuition but sometimes our inner selves know what we want and our rational mind rejects it.

Sometimes it isn't a case of *making* a decision. Rather that of **releasing a decision** you have been connecting together in the background - in your subconscious, in your heart - and then choosing to agree with it.

### 5. Her last point is: Lighten up!

We can learn to trust ourselves and we can find benefit in every path we take. I take my decision and then walk the path, looking for what that path has for me.

Looking back doesn't serve me — that moment has gone, and I could miss out on what is right there in front of me.

We **empower ourselves** when we take responsibility for our decisions and if things turn out other than how we thought they would, we can learn and move on.

We can course-correct and create new opportunities for ourselves.

# Change your perspective and you can change your life

- Some changes in how you schedule your tasks and time.
- Some changes on how you approach decisions
- Creating space for yourself to think, rest, and be productive.

These are not difficult things to implement.

**However, they can go a long way to reducing feelings of mental stress and overload, creating effective habits and environments that help you to achieve what you want to see.**



# Don't Be A Stranger!

If anything has resonated with you in this, please get in touch.

You can find me either at [katepennell.net](http://katepennell.net) or over on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katepennell).

You can also find more of my writing over on [Medium.com](https://medium.com/@katepennell)

Want to rediscover & deepen your creative thinking & action? Want to create sustainable creative practice? Get in touch, I'd love to have a conversation with you.

I look forward to  
connecting with you.

A catalyst for those I work with.

I help people to understand who they are and where they are *now*...

Who they want to be and where they want to be *in the future*...

And then work with them to close the gap, providing support, tools, and insight to overcome blocks and gain momentum.

I really see, deeply listen, and champion the best that I see in people.

