

**“Barking Up The Wrong Tree” Bonus:
Cut Section**

Hey,

It’s Eric. I always hated the “deleted scene” extras on most DVD’s because you’d look at them and be like, “Yeah. I know why you cut that. It sucked.” You got nothing out of watching those except seeing stuff they never should have shot in the first place. That’s no “bonus.” That’s filler.

Well, this section of the book didn’t get cut because it was lousy. So why isn’t it in that finished product you own? Well, the draft was too long and cutting words here and there was not gonna get it down to fighting weight. I needed to cut a whole section. So why did this part get the axe?

While I still feel these pages are a valuable addition to the confidence chapter, they’re not essential. The technique presented for balancing confidence and non-confidence is extremely hard to master. Yeah, it’s used by many top experts and it’s very powerful, but I think trying to do this would just give me a migraine or drive me batty. It works for some, but it’s not realistic for most people. (Heck, it may not even be *possible* for most people.) Also, the earlier draft and the published version both end up in the same place anyway: advocating self-compassion. So, because this section wasn’t essential and wouldn’t have a material effect on where the chapter ended, well... *snip-snip*. There you have it.

Note: this got cut relatively early so it was never professionally proofread and there are sections that aren’t as polished as I’d like. But it’s very interesting and pretty cool. (You get to read about UFO’s, Olympic errors, and George Orwell’s “1984.” Not bad.)

On the next page, I’ll tell you exactly where this section fits into final version, so you’ll be able to combine the two and read Chapter 5 as it was originally written.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. ☺

Thanks,
Eric

(About halfway down page 195, after you finish the sentence, “It feels like a contradiction,” that’s when to start the section below.)

Here’s a little secret: it is a contradiction. But for many top performers that contradiction is the key to their success. Let’s see how they leverage it and learn whether or not it can help you and I perform at our best.

And for that we need to go to 19th century Greece and talk about a really heavy discus. (Obviously.)

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This was insane. It weighed almost 30 pounds. It was the size of manhole cover. *Throw it?* He could barely lift it.

Robert Garrett, a 20-year-old Princeton student, looked at the discus and shook his head. It was 1896 and the first Olympics was only weeks away. He would never be able to do throw this thing. He had zero confidence.

Garrett had been lucky to make the track team at all his freshman year but after hard work he had risen to become its captain his junior and senior year. Though not the fastest runner, he was widely regarded in a number of field events like the shot-put and long jump.

When it was announced that Greece would resurrect the Olympics, Garrett, always itching for a new challenge, joined a contingent of Princeton and Harvard athletes who would make up the first US track and field team. Princeton professor William Sloane, who had been part of the Olympic organizing committee, encouraged his former

student to try the discus.

This, however, was easier said than done. US track and field teams did not compete in the discus. So Garrett literally had no idea what the thing looked like or how to throw it. And it being 1896 it wasn't like anyone could just email him a PDF of the information he needed. He signed up to compete anyway. Garrett said, "It seemed to me I had read about the discus in Greek history, but I had no idea what it was. Nevertheless, I checked that one too, figuring if it was simply a matter of throwing something I was big enough and strong enough to try."

Half a world away, the Greeks had brought throwing the discus to the level of an art form, the sport being a historical point of pride for them. They were quite confident about winning the event. Garrett was later quoted as saying, "I got into the discus thing never figuring I'd do anything but finish an absolute last."

But how do you prepare for something you don't know anything about? Luckily, Sloane was a classics professor and Garrett enlisted his help in getting ready for the games. But details about the discus were sparse. Believe it or not, they ended up getting most of their information from looking at the artwork on ancient Greek vases that depicted the original Olympics. With this rough data, Garrett commissioned a blacksmith in New Jersey to create an approximation of what the discus would look like so he would have something to train with.

But what he got back made his jaw drop. It was 12 inches across and weighed more than 25 pounds. Presenting it to Garrett, the blacksmith said, "If you can throw that thing, I'll give you a medal myself!" Garrett sighed. How the hell did the Greeks do it? He began training but it was just too heavy. No matter how hard he tried, he could barely

throw his discus.

The US team got on a boat headed for Athens and continued their training on the deck of the ship. But throwing the discus was not getting any easier. Garrett figured he might have more time to train with it when they reached Greece... but that was not to be.

The team hadn't realized that Greece was still using the old Julian calendar. They had miscalculated when the games would begin. Instead of arriving a leisurely two weeks before the event, they got there the first day of the games. There would be no more time to train. Garrett resigned himself to quietly bowing out of the discus before the event began. He didn't want to embarrass himself. But then something crazy happened...

Stepping into Panathinaiko Stadium, he saw the Greek discus throwers training... with something that looked less like a manhole cover and more like a dinner plate. Their discus was only 8 inches wide and less than 5 pounds. It seemed the date of the games wasn't the only thing Garrett had miscalculated. Borrowing a discus from one of the Greek team he found it to be “light as a feather.” He surged with confidence. Garrett could throw this little thing a mile. He decided not to quit.

The time had come to compete and the discus was the most anticipated event of the afternoon. The Greek athletes threw like ballet dancers, their technique as beautiful as it was effective. But Garrett still had no idea how to properly toss the thing.

So he just used the same method he had for the hammer throw, spinning like a top before launching it as far as he could. But a discus is not a hammer. On one attempt he dropped it before he could throw it. On another he accidentally launched the discus straight into the crowd, nearly decapitating spectators.

He only had one attempt left. And people were laughing at him. But Garrett was

laughing with them. He was still supremely confident. This discus was less than a fifth of the weight of his training discus. He knew he could put it into the stratosphere if he could just get the technique right.

Steely-eyed, Garrett lifted the discus for his final chance. A hush fell over the crowd. And with a bellowing grunt that echoed through the stadium he threw it one last time...

The crowd exploded with applause. The discus flew 29.15 meters; a shocking 19 centimeters better than top Greek thrower, Panagiotis Paraskevopoulos.

Burton Holmes, an American present at the games would write, "All were stupefied. The Greeks had been defeated at their own classic exercise. They were overwhelmed by the superior skill and daring of the Americans, to whom they ascribed a supernatural invincibility enabling them to dispense with training and to win at games which they had never before seen."

And it was true: Garrett had never seen a real discus until just before the event. He had no idea how to throw it. And yet he ended up winning the gold and setting a world record. Top throwers today train just as Garrett did, using a 20+ pound discus in practice.

He had been pessimistic all throughout his training but supremely confident at the event. This may sound delusional. Or utterly confusing. And it is. But research and anecdotal reports from top performers in other fields conclude something else: it might just be a formula for extreme success.

But can it work for us? Let's find out...

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If confidence has advantages and disadvantages, and lack of confidence has advantages and disadvantages, what if we just mash the two together? Yeah, I know, it’s ridiculous. Matter and anti-matter. Which leads us to dystopian science fiction...

George Orwell’s book *1984* is a classic. It presents a despotic, soul-crushing vision of the future. And it might also give us the path to awesome performance. (Is saying that a thoughtcrime? If so, I apologize.) The book introduced the concept of “doublethink”:

The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them... To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just as long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies – all this is indispensably necessary. Even in using the word doublethink it is necessary to exercise doublethink.

What’s that have to do with confidence and the lack of confidence? Orwell explains how the government uses doublethink to get what it wants: “If one is to rule, and to continue ruling, one must be able to dislocate the sense of reality. For the secret of rulership is to combine a belief in one's own infallibility with the power to learn from past mistakes.”

Hey, whaddya know... sounds a lot like getting the benefits of confidence with the benefits of lack of confidence at the same time. It’s a dystopian “have my cake and eat it too.” You might think this would manifest itself as a beneficial form of multiple personality disorder and you’d probably be right but what’s interesting is when you look

at top performers you see something that looks like doublethink again and again.

Nick Faldo held the #1 spot on the Official World Golf Ranking for almost 2 years. When Matthew Syed interviewed Faldo he described a perspective which can't be described as anything other than doublethink: “You have to be very calculating in selecting the right shot. You have to make a decision based upon a realistic assessment of your own weaknesses and the scope for failure. But once you have committed to your decision, you have to flick the mental switch and execute the shot as if there was never any doubt that you would nail it.”

Think this only applies to athletes? Wrong. You even see it at the highest level of arts and entertainment. Andrew Kevin Walker wrote the blockbuster movie “Seven.” When writing, Walker explains that you have to take a non-confident approach to push yourself to improve:

When you're writing, if you're super happy and having a fun time — you're probably doing something wrong. Good writing means being a perfectionist. And that means being at least semi-miserable. But that's a good thing. Perfectionism leads to rewriting... Before you show it to anyone else, are you really asking yourself, “Is this the absolute best it can be?” Are you being as hard on yourself as you can possibly be?

But being “semi-miserable” makes it hard to sit down to write at all. Andy's solution? A form of doublethink:

It's like selective memory. If you can't tamp down the bad experiences you've had writing — and they're numerous — almost actively forget them and refueling your optimism each time, then you'll just stop... I'm as optimistic about writing now as

I was at the beginning — which is completely delusional. Embracing delusion is really important. They say the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.” But if you’re not doing that in Hollywood, you’ll never survive.

And speaking of survival, doublethink is even found there too. When Laurence Gonzales looked at people who live through disaster situations what attitude did he say many of them shared? Yup, another version of doublethink: “Denying or distorting a bad situation may be comforting in the short term, but it’s potentially harmful in the long run because it will be almost impossible to solve a problem unless you first admit you have one. In contrast, having an especially strong belief in one’s personal capabilities, even if that belief is somewhat illusory, probably helps you to solve problems...” He says you can’t be in denial about the situation but you need to be in denial about your abilities. You need to see the world accurately to face the problems ahead, but you need to see yourself as Jason Bourne.

Again, this is a crazy combo, because most survivors are not superstar secret agents. But they need to combine accuracy with lack of accuracy for optimal results.

This, of course, begs the question: how the heck do you and I do that? I’ll be blunt: it may not be possible. Or even desirable day-to-day. This may be a quirk of top performers that fits with the intensifiers we discussed in chapter 1. You have to fool yourself only in certain areas. On a regular basis. And then forget you fooled yourself. And then remember again when it’s convenient, but not before. The human mind is quite adept at this, we’re all good at fooling ourselves – but not when it’s *deliberate* and needs to be reversed upon command.

As we saw with Viktor Frankl, our brains like a coherent story about our lives and ourselves, even if it’s not necessarily true. The vast majority of us are deeply wired for this. When there’s a discrepancy between our beliefs and reality we experience an unpleasant condition psychologists call “cognitive dissonance.” The world doesn’t line up with our vision of it. And it’s unpleasant. Your brain will naturally struggle to resolve the dilemma and revise the story. It doesn’t want the two ideas going to war in your head endlessly. *Simply put, it tries to revise your story to eliminate doublethink.*

Your brain isn’t primarily concerned with accuracy, it just wants the conflict to end. And if the idea being challenged is something we’re deeply invested in (especially if it has the social support of those around us) we often don’t cave to reality, we double down on our beliefs – even if they’re dead wrong. This is why it can be so hard to get people to change their minds, even about things that are obviously false.

The best illustration of cognitive dissonance is the case study that originated the term. And to discuss that, we need to talk about UFO’s. (Yes, one of the most important concepts in modern psychology was first documented in an event involving flying saucers.) In the book, *When Prophecy Fails*, Leon Festinger documents the case of Marian Keech and her group of followers that believed the world was going to be destroyed and they would be saved by spaceships.

One day Keech was writing and came to believe her dead father was actually controlling her hands, talking to her through the words she scribbled. (What he said was not all that impressive, frankly. The letter was mostly concerned with how Keech’s mother should go about planting flowers.) After hearing the story about the “contact”, her mom replied the way any sane person would: *you’re crazy and stop bothering your poor*

old mother with these insane ideas. Keech, of course, was undaunted.

She quickly realized that her deceased father was not the only otherworldly being she could communicate with, and soon she was writing messages from advanced life forms “who dwell at higher spiritual vibration frequencies” and lived on the planets Clarion and Cerus. They told her the Earth was evil and the aliens were going to cleanse the planet with a flood but they were going to send a spaceship to pick up Keech and her followers. It’s like an interplanetary Noah story but without the livestock. Where would they land? Times Square? Washington DC? The UN? No. West Virginia. The aliens said they had “contacts there.”

The group wasn’t very big and they hadn’t proselytized much. They were able to quietly have confidence in whatever crazy ideas they wanted, unchallenged. There was no one to disprove them. That is, until the day when the spaceships were supposed to arrive. Reality was about to come a knockin’...

Finally the big night came and the media swarmed around the location. The spaceship was supposed to arrive at midnight. The clock struck twelve and... nothing. Beliefs just faced off against reality and reality said, “Nope. Uh-uh. No way.” Two ideas, mutually opposed. Could they hold both in their heads like doublethink? Nope. They had given up everything for their beliefs. It had to be true. And the cognitive dissonance had to be resolved. So what happened?

At 4:45AM, Keech received another message from her alien BFF. The group’s devotion was being rewarded. The Earth would be spared. The group rejoiced. How convenient. But I’m certain Keech and her followers believed this. It was too hard for them not to. And they subsequently began proselytizing like crazy, spreading the word of

aliens from Clarion with contacts in West Virginia.

Okay, now it's easy to dismiss this as more crazy from a group of crazy people. But what Festinger realized was that this phenomenon is something we all do. Holding mutually exclusive ideas in our head is too stressful. So we tweak our story or ignore the facts rather than give up an idea which we've invested so much in.

Simply, we want to get to sleep at night. And worrying, "Have I lived my life all wrong?" is often too much to cope with. So we don't change our minds about politics, religion, or other deeply held ideas because it would let loose the floodgates on everything that makes our lives feel true and leave us staring at the ceiling in the wee hours of the morning. In fact, research shows this is why it's so common to "blame the victim." We want to believe the world is a just place and not chaotic, so when we see someone treated unjustly it's easier to say it's their fault than to revise all our ideas about fairness.

As one of the members of the group said the night of the spaceship non-arrival: "I've had to go a long way. I've given up just about everything. I've cut every tie: I've burned every bridge. I've turned my back on the world. I can't afford to doubt. I have to believe."

Can doublethink work? Obviously for some, yes, but if you're not already so inclined I don't think I'd recommend it. Being confident and non-confident at the same time would wrack most of our brains to the breaking point. Now if you're prone to insanity like RAAM champion, Jure Robic, maybe that's fine. Perhaps those with the right intensifiers have compensating factors that allow for this. So it's not something I'd encourage developing, even if it is possible, unless being an emotionally unstable

neurotic divorced from reality sounds appealing to you. For the rest of us we need closure – whether it's accurate or not. Andrew Kevin Walker agrees, saying that while balancing the two perspectives produces the best results it's not a fun attitude. He refers to it as, "the manic-depressive requirements of writing."

As in Chapter 1, this is an area where maybe we cannot or do not want to emulate how the top 1% achieves success. Being your own "Big Brother" is not a desirable goal. But if this is what produces success and it's not a good idea, what should we do? Don't worry, there's an answer. So we looked at confidence and it's got problems. We looked at lack of confidence and there were problems. We tried mashing the two together and that works for some but it's not realistic or desirable for the majority of us.

(Continue on page 195 at "So how about this: *what if we throw the whole confidence paradigm in the trash?*")

Sources:

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