

“I recommend this to anyone trying to improve themselves and achieve the success in life they seek.” - Gary W. Noesner, FBI crisis negotiator

RESCUE YOURSELF *and* LIVE
the LIFE YOU DESERVE

Take
Control
of Your
Life



J. PAUL NADEAU



*Take Control
of your **Life***

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TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

The information contained in this book is based upon the research and personal and professional experiences of the author. It is not intended as a substitute for consulting with a healthcare provider. Any attempt to diagnose and treat an illness should be done under the direction of a healthcare professional.

The author does not advocate the use of any particular protocol but believes the information in this book should be available to the public. The author is not responsible for any adverse effects or consequences resulting from the use of the suggestions discussed in this book. Should the reader have any questions concerning the appropriateness of any procedures mentioned, the author strongly suggests consulting a professional healthcare advisor.

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*To my wonderful daughters, **Aimée** and **Cassie**, who have enriched my life in ways I could never have imagined.*

Testimonials

for “Take Control of Your Life” by J. Paul Nadeau
(Published by HarperCollins Canada)

“I came across your book by chance at the library in xxx, Ontario. My trailer is near there and I went to the library that day last September looking for videos to borrow. Instead what I found in a display of books they were featuring was your book. The title jumped out at me. I know with every ounce of my being I was meant to find your book. I have read motivational books before but was never able to finish them because they just did not speak to me. I would think, well that’s fine and dandy for the author but that’ll never work for me. Until I read *Take Control of Your Life*. It was as if you wrote that book just for me. So many things became clear as I read those pages. I wasn’t even half way through the book when I went online to order my own copy. I have since read it twice and always have it close by.

Just a bit of background on me. I was severely bullied as a child. I had very few friends and was mostly very lonely. As I got older and into high school I was still very much picked on. I did have a few friends, mostly from out of town. I also grew up in a very negative home environment. My mother, God love her, and I know she was only doing her best was very overpowering and bossy. I could not talk to her or explain how I was feeling. My father drank a lot and has a very violent temper and is always angry and negative. He treated my mother horribly their entire marriage. As I got older, I became more and more like him, full of hate and anger, and yes, a very bad temper.

When I came across your book last September, I was nearly 54 years old and in a pretty bad way in my head. My mother passed away in November of 2012 quite suddenly from bone cancer. I believe she had known of her illness and just did not tell us. I became very close to my mother as I got older. She was my rock, my sounding board and my mentor. Her loss hit me pretty hard. And although I have two lovely daughters of my own and a wonderful grandson, I literally started planning my own death. That was early on in 2013. I managed somehow to continue on with my life but wasn’t really living.

Fast forward to last September when I found your book, I had, once more been seriously contemplating ending things. I had grown to hate myself for being me because no one else likes me so why should I. Everything I ever dreamed about for my life never happened and at that time I’d felt that I had just had

enough. I figured my daughters would be better off without me anyway since I have nothing to leave them when I go.

Finding your book that day has forever changed my life! Your book literally saved my life!! You taught me how to turn those negative thoughts into positive ones! You taught me that I am worthwhile and that I am not ugly. You made me realize that my life can still be good and I can still dream big and achieve it by turning my thoughts around to positive ones. I can't begin to tell you how directly that book spoke to me. I also can't thank you enough for writing it in such a way that is easy for someone like me who was so negative to understand just HOW to turn things around. I work hard at keeping my "attic" clear of negative thoughts and when I find them seeping in I take out my broom and sweep them out and make sure the positive thoughts start speaking loudly to me so I can hear all the wonderful things they have to say. I never knew I could choose my mood. You taught me that. I now choose to be happy. I no longer care as much about what people think of me. I smile more and tend to give people the benefit of the doubt more often. I have worked hard on my anger issues and I feel I have it pretty much in control. I will not let it control me any longer. I now look hard at what triggers my anger when it rears it's ugly head and choose to attach better thoughts. It is working for me.

Thank you once more. I sure hope you find the time to answer this mail, as I would love to hear from you.

Sincerely,
Theresa (Terry) ***

From another reader, a high school student, two separate email messages:

Hi there!!

I bought your book from chapters a week ago, out of the 7 books I was carrying in my arms, when I opened up yours to read some of the pages the one that caught my attention was the page talking about morning routines and how you wake up and don't eat a healthy breakfast and hate your boss.... I can relate lol, so I decided to buy yours.

I've been stuck in a depression for 3 weeks now and it hasn't been this bad for 7 years. I'm 23 years old and I was diagnosed with anxiety, PTSD, depression, ADHD and bipolar disorder. I find self-help books really help especially about the law of attraction and now yours. I'm only 2 chapters deep in your book but it has helped me immensely and although it didn't cure what I'm feeling, it did help me change my thought process and I've been feeling much better since I started reading it.

I wanted to reach out and say thank you - your words and stories have been so powerful and mean so much to me so far and I'm excited to see what the rest has to offer. I also wanted to ask if you did mentor sessions? I've been on a waiting list for a therapist for years and I love your approach to life and your perspective on everything and need guidance and coping skills to help me deal with life.

Thanks so much and I hope to hear back.

Brie xx

**She followed up with:*

Hey,

I JUST finished reading your book and WOW. I am so happy and thankful for picking it up off the shelf at chapters. I'm sitting here in complete awe as I type this...

I can easily say this was the most powerful and influential books I've ever read in my life. the motivation and empowerment I feel after reading this book, is something I've never experienced. I feel like I shed out of my old body and am an entirely different and new person with the new headspace I've adapted from your book. the stories you told about being a police officer were also so impacting and I'm so glad and grateful you shared those with us in this book.

I can't thank you enough, I hope everything is going well on your end!!

And from another reader, also a student:

Hi Paul,

I just bought your book, "Take control of your life", 2 days ago and I read the whole thing in two days. This is also the first book I have ever read cover to cover. It has also inspired me to help myself and others who may have some feels like I have. One just happens to be a friend of mine on FB. I posted two pictures on my FB page to help me remember and to be stronger. One is of me wearing a superman T shirt which I bought right after I bought your book. It's to remind me to be strong and when I'm strong anything is possible.

I'll attach the two pictures if it will let me for you to see. Thank you for writing this book, I have already started to practice and exercise my mind and even write quotes from your book in a journal I have stated which also I write down how I'm feeling throughout the day.

Thanks again,

Mike T. - I am a survivor!!!

And from another:

Hello Paul.

I bought a signed copy of your book 'Take Control of your life' and met you at the Toronto First Canadian Place Indigo location a few months ago! You may recall our meeting as I was reaching for a James Patterson/ Clinton book and we struck up a short conversation.

Anyway, I finally got around to reading your book and wanted to send you a quick note as promised!

Some feedback: bottom line I really enjoyed it!

1. One of the things I really liked about the book was its authenticity. You brought your own life experiences as a police officer as well as experiences in the middle east to bring the messages to life. Most 'self-help' type books preach sound advice but lack punch if the author has not had relatable life experiences.

2. I liked the focus the book kept on the idea of the individual being ultimately responsible for his or her outcomes (positive or negative). I can tell you live your message and believe what you are saying. Also, I can see that you are on your own journey and are a practitioner today of what you preach. Keep it going and good luck!

3. The book is a healthy reminder that in the end our thoughts/ focus determines our outcomes in life. Garbage in/ garbage out - quality in /quality out! Degrees of determination ultimately determine success.

Finally, I liked the use of thoughtful quotes along the way which set the tone for each chapter. The book has helped me refocus and is a reminder that refocusing is something that needs to happen often along the road to achieving your goals.

Thank you,

best R. Dixon

From the author on a social media post:

Anyone remember the post I made about 3 months ago in which I mentioned that a resident at a homeless shelter had approached me on the street about the book I was carrying? It was my book "Take Control of Your Life." I'd left a few copies at a nearby respite center and was following up to see if anyone had asked to read them.

The man I met did. That's what he'd told me as we chatted on the street about what he thought. Some of you may recall the post and how that interaction made my day.

Well, here's a follow-up on that post. You'll never guess this

I received an email tonight, right before turning in. It's from Peter, and here's what he shared:

"Hello Paul,

you may remember me. I met you on The Esplanade. When I started to read your book Taking Control of your life. Shortly after I begun reading the book I met you walking on Esplanade carrying the book. I said how do you like the book. That's when you showed me your picture in the book and that you were the Author. I expressed that I had received the book from a bookshelf at the XYZ shelter. From the first day I picked up the book I couldn't put it down. I'm now reading it a second time. Your book has helped me reach goals I've been trying to reach for years. Thank You. Very empowering and showed me it takes more than just writing them down. Changing my thoughts and actions. Today I'm ready to leave the shelter system to move to Hamilton where I have a great support network in my recovery. A new place of my own and employment. I'm sure you now may remember me. I have been to libraries listening to motivational speaking you have done and some interviews. Thank you again J. Paul Nadeau.

From Peter.

PREFACE

It's been said that it's not so much what happens to us that matters; it's how we respond to what happens that does.¹ In my years as a trained investigator, hostage negotiator and international peacekeeper, I was privileged to meet and observe people from all walks of life, each with unique stories, attitudes and experiences. I watched how an almost identical set of circumstances frequently affected individuals very differently, due in part to their backgrounds, their ability to process thoughts and the value that they would attach to an event. I've witnessed very different responses from hostage victims who had experienced similar events, and I have marveled at the choices they made because of those events.

While we are each endowed with a fundamental ability to choose our responses to whatever injustices, hardships and dilemmas come our way, factors such as fear can and often do eat at our confidence. The resulting indecision, if allowed to rule and dominate, can quickly become a sad pattern perpetuating itself unconsciously—which in turn can easily become a syndrome. You may not even see it coming. This is the essence of being taken hostage by your 'self', whether external forces are the instigator or whether the cause lies entirely within your own personal perception. And once our "self" is made aware of our self-sabotage, this becomes the pivotal moment when choosing must occur—that is, the choice to continue the powerless-seeming state in which you find yourself, or to direct yourself to apply the un-hostaging principles set out in this book—to follow the guideposts I offer you and to exit the misery of hostage. Bear in mind that each adversity that takes you hostage can either defeat you or strengthen you, depending upon what you choose to do with it. Also bear in mind that choice—choosing—is an action. Action requires muscle. And change does not happen simply because we want it to. We must consciously exercise our minds to make it happen. We must choose the positive over the negative. The guideposts I have set out in this book will be there to lead you as you embrace this process of choosing and of change.

And in the process of guiding you out of a state of hostage, this book will challenge you to become more conscious of your thoughts, of the emotions they are evoking as they enter your conscious mind, and of the technique of interrupting those thoughts and emotions that cause pain or simply do not serve you or your overall goals, be they personal or professional or both. To this end, each chapter begins with a story that introduces a principle. May you enjoy the stories and learn from the principles. That's what I'm after for you.

PROLOGUE

My Journey to Manhood

Like many others, I was raised in an environment that required me to depend on myself at a very young age. My father was a violent alcoholic who often took out his rage on my mother, my siblings and me. For as far back as I can remember, I felt defenseless to protect my family and myself from my father; and at the age of about seven, I decided that when I grew up, I'd become a policeman so I could arrest men like my father. He never gave me the chance to arrest him, however. He killed himself before I would ever join the police.

Without my father as a role model, I had to learn about growing into a man by examining and modeling the behavior of others. As is often the case with abused children (and before I eventually found my way into manhood), I frequently misbehaved in school and was appropriately labeled a troublemaker. My delinquent classroom conduct assured me regular strappings. My grades were so poor that I developed the beliefs that I couldn't retain a thing and wouldn't amount to much either. That misguided way of thinking was reinforced in me by the very people who should have been building me up: my teachers.

I came to believe the bad-boy image others had labeled me with and suffered the sting of many wooden rulers on the palms of my hands for my disruptive behavior. A consistent failure, I somehow managed to graduate from one grade to another. I suspect that I passed simply because my teachers didn't want me in their classes the following year. I often felt humiliated and inferior to my classmates and they came to know me as a disruptive, rebellious, troublemaking bad boy.

Remarkably, in grade 7, things took an unexpected and wonderful turn. One of my teachers was preparing our class for a test. In his "Let's go, team!" speech to the classroom, he told everyone he expected them to pass—except for me. He singled me out, saying, "I know everyone is going to pass this test—except for you, Nadeau. I already know you're going to fail."

That was the pinch I needed to turn things around. I felt an over-whelming sense of shame and embarrassment, and for the first time, I studied my heart out. I was motivated to prove that teacher wrong. The next day I wrote the test; as was customary in that class, once the teacher had

graded the tests, he distributed the papers by first calling the person with the lowest grade to the front of the classroom, followed by the second lowest and so forth. I had always been the first to stand and collect my paper. I had become conditioned to believe that I was a failure and behaved accordingly. But on that day, the teacher didn't call my name first. Name after name, my classmates were summoned to the front of the classroom to collect their papers. I was the second last to be called. For me, that was a defining moment. For the first time ever, I discovered that I could do so much more than I had come to believe I could; and although my original motivation to succeed was misdirected, that was the day I began to believe in myself.

My former thoughts and beliefs about my abilities and limitations had been expectantly captured, and I was no longer a hostage to them—or to myself. From that moment on, I applied myself, and my life unfolded in ways I had once believed impossible. My quality of life changed drastically and wonderfully because I now attracted success by simply improving my thoughts, attitudes and actions. That new confidence led to an unbeatable attitude, and that attitude resulted in success with whatever challenges I chose to undertake.

I managed to “un-hostage” myself from the negative thoughts and beliefs that had once held me captive, and I eventually joined the police as I had promised myself years earlier. As an officer, I became a subject matter expert in many specialized areas of police work, including sexual assault and child abuse, hostage negotiations, international peacekeeping, anti-terrorism and criminal investigations. Each of those positions provided me with hundreds of opportunities to learn from experts how to help those who felt hopeless and in need. My work required me to study psychology and develop an understanding of human behavior necessary to recognize how people thought and behaved—both victims and perpetrators. I interacted and worked closely with dozens of highly skilled specialists from all walks of life, including behavioral scientists, psychologists, criminologists and university professors. I developed the necessary acute listening and communication skills needed to deal with every situation and individual I encountered, and eventually I became more than a “protector,” as I had first set out to become. Along the way I picked up valuable skills and discovered I could help broken, discouraged and misdirected people.

The lives I helped along the way were a testament to my childhood dream to serve and protect others. And in the process, I discovered that I too could crack and feel broken; but I also discovered how to repair my broken pieces. Human beings are not that different from one another after all. Perhaps we are far more alike than we are different. And it has been my experience that the key to healing lies in our ability to establish and nourish that

interconnectedness.

In conclusion, it is my conviction that what I've discovered on my ongoing journey will be of help to you too.

Introduction

Why a book on Taking Control?

With all the self-help books available on motivation and self-confidence out there, what makes this book different? The response to this question lies not only in the “what,” but in the “who,” and in the “how,” as you will discover as you wind your way through the chapters.

The “what” We as human beings are all too familiar with this fact: we are “hostaged” to the pressures of a world in a state of dynamic change and are often left feeling as though we need to be rescued; and we need support in varying degrees to navigate this increasingly and often overwhelmingly complex contemporary landscape. Support in this book comes from a series of guideposts that grew out of all the experience I lived during my career, and the stories I encountered of hostages who found their way to freedom.

The “who” We all—all—can find, in this book, a beacon of light in the darkness of a world that, for our best efforts, too often scares us with its uncertain future (which one might say is the main hostage-taker of our time). Accompanied by a host of hostage-taking fear factors—from the cultural phenomenon of breakdowns in personal relationships to job insecurity, terrorism, global warming and those little voices in our heads that tell us we’re not good enough, to name but a few—we are left feeling powerless against seemingly absolute power.

The “how” We all not only can but must develop a capacity to un-hostage ourselves, given that we have no choice but to navigate, loosely speaking, a hostage culture that’s a de facto consequence of modern life, the speed of which does not allow us the luxury of infinite time to find solutions to our discomforts. An underlying sense of alienation and panic has become not the unusual but the norm, whether we are conscious of its effects or not.

So, why a book on ‘becoming hostage’? Because this book dares to forge ahead with hope in the form of guideposts, tried and true, that can equip you with a personal sense of empowerment, whether your hostage challenge comes from outside yourself or within yourself—where you become your worst enemy. Hostage is hostage, whatever the cause of its existence, and must be met not with fear, but with confidence.

Why Me?

I hadn't planned to write this book. It was written after sharing a number of my law enforcement and international peacekeeping stories with myriad people, many of whom enjoyed and appreciated hearing the discoveries I had made in helping victims and suspects alike over the years and suggested I put what I had experienced to paper. Upon much reflection, I found myself compelled to share, in this book, what I had discovered, so that it could bring hope and help to those who read it—to you, the reader.

My professional life as a detective, a hostage negotiator and an international peacekeeper has been dedicated to the service of others, and has allowed me to develop a keen understanding of what protects people once adversity strikes. This, in turn, has given me rare and firsthand insight into human behavior—into how people may and do respond quite differently from one another when things go wrong. I've seen a broad spectrum of reactions among people, from those who choose to respond negatively to those who choose to respond positively, the latter determined to beat their setbacks. And beat them, they do. What is it that leads to such opposite reactions, I queried? And as I questioned and began to discover patterns, I began to document these reactions as guideposts in a diary, which led to the writing of this book.

I don't possess a degree in psychology or psychiatry. Rather, my knowledge of human behavior is founded in hundreds of firsthand encounters with victims (of abuse, neglect, substance misuse and hopelessness, among other undesirable and unfortunate human conditions), as well as with witnesses, innocent bystanders and criminal offenders. Most importantly, the combination of these encounters led me to discover certain fundamental principles that motivate an innate capacity for people to rescue themselves from a state of being held "hostage." As they tapped into their own latent motivation for survival and grabbed onto guidepost directions I held out to them—the result of which was that the cages and cells that once held them hostage were blasted open, leading the way to freedom of choice and direction—I realized, firmly, in my role as catalyst, that anyone, anyone, can be galvanized into action with the right stimulus. Furthermore, I discovered that self-sabotage operates in much the same way for anyone who falls prey to its crippling effects. It is a learned behavior, and not one into which one is born. The pattern of hopelessness that it perpetuates is often difficult, once ingrained, to modify and extricate. But it's not impossible. That which we learn, we can unlearn; and as self-healing takes place, with the right stimulus and direction, the results are astonishing.

Goals

My goal in writing this book was to help you identify the cause(s) that might lead you to hold yourself hostage or allow yourself to be held hostage to a personal or professional relationship, a career, a thought or series of thoughts, or any of the many other life situations and circumstances that can promote this syndrome); identify the subsequent learned behaviors that accompany and perpetuate the hostage state; recognize that the pivotal moment when self-sabotage occurs and takes hold of you, dominating your thoughts and shaping your subsequent actions, which in turn form a behavioral pattern of repetitive self-sabotage; and un-hostage yourself, freeing yourself from negative thoughts and feelings of regret, blame and worry. You have the power to take control of your life and your thoughts. I want you to remember that.

Now, most victims of self-sabotage have difficulty accepting the notion that it is we who choose to allow a hostage-taking syndrome of negative thoughts, self-destructive actions and inevitable subsequent behavioral patterns that follow to take control of us and dictate our outcomes. It is a choice, and one that can be unchosen once the key to our mindset has been turned and the door to understanding that choice has been opened. I view my role in the adjustment of your thinking process and the act of un-hostaging yourself as simply that of educator, facilitator or coach. In this book, I offer you not rules—for rules smack of the authoritative, and, if broken, can foster a sense of guilt—but rather, principles that act as guideposts, derived from a set of critical life skills that encourage you, the reader, to reclaim power and control over yourself: over your thoughts, choices and actions. I say “reclaim” because your power and control are never truly taken from you. More often, it is simply pushed into a dark room in your mind, waiting to be given permission to resurface. Only you can provide that permission. With determined application of these principles and faithful attention to—and application of—the guideposts, it will become second nature for you to perform the actions to un-hostage and reclaim your “self,” and to let go and discard whatever does not serve you and your best interests.

So, my ultimate goal is to share this process with you and to affirm, from firsthand experience (my own and that of the countless lives that have been positively impacted by adherence to the simple strategies laid out in this book), that a more confident, creative, hopeful you can resurface and leave the self-hostage experience behind permanently as you move forward with renewed purpose, passion and focus. And who, you might well ask, is included in the you for whom this book is intended?

You, the reader

When I began thinking about writing a book about hostage-taking that would reference my long career experience, I knew that book would prove eye-opening to those interested in a career in law enforcement, investigations or security. However, I also knew that the concept and reality of hostage-taking is not limited to its traditional definition of a person or a group physically taking someone hostage. I knew that we as humans are quite capable of taking ourselves hostage in any number of ways, for any number of reasons and with many manifestations, some recognizable, others less so. And while hostage-taking is an unfortunate fact of life with sped-up frequency in some regions of our current geo-political world, it is also a pointless and unnecessary syndrome enacted by individuals who fall into the trap of self-sabotage for a plethora of reasons beyond the scope of this current work. And so, the book has evolved into more of a direct conversation with you, the reader, from any and every walk of life.

You are anyone and everyone who realizes that your path forward, as well as the quality of your life on a more or less daily basis, is cluttered with self-defeating patterns and thoughts that leave you feeling as though you're not in control of your choices, and are indeed hostage to forces not only from the outside world (i.e. circumstances), but from within—for the two become so inextricably intertwined as to be two halves of a whole, often leaving you struggling for oxygen and for hope. May I assure you, dear reader, that we are all taken hostage by our thoughts at some point, at times repeatedly, despite who we are or what walk of life we have chosen. No one is exempt—not even the biggest and brightest of stars, of millionaires or billionaires, even of motivational speakers themselves. We are all capable of succumbing to the self-hostage phenomenon.

When I cast my mind back to my upbringing and my life overall, I recognize the times when I was hostage to factors that set me desperately searching for rescue. Rescue implied to me that an outside force, a person or persons, would appear to help me out of my unhappy circumstances. But no one appeared. No rescue was at hand. I could have sat on the rock of my solitude until I was a very old man, awaiting some nameless, faceless rescue party like someone lost in the wilderness. But when I realized that the wilderness was a landscape of my own making—and of my own mind—I began to feel a strong impetus to take action to get out of the uncomfortable place in which I had somehow landed. That rescue, I eventually concluded, could only come from within myself.

And so began the gradual evolution of the strategies you will learn about in the pages of this book. Whenever I have felt discouraged or been knocked down, I have spiraled right back to the things I've written about in these pages: the strategies I learned growing up and understood more deeply in the trenches helping others, strategies that have enabled me to adjust my life-navigation system when necessary for survival. These strategies are yours for the taking, and they will serve you for the rest of your life, whether you're a teenager having a tough time with bullying (psychological, verbal or physical); a grad student trying to pay off seemingly insurmountable debt while simultaneously striving for a career opportunity or even just a job; a struggling dreamer with goals you fear are unattainable; a professional in an unrewarding career; a person "trapped" in a complex, perhaps stifling or even intolerable relationship; or really anyone who, for any number of reasons, has temporarily lost focus and hope. This book is for you.

In this book, you'll discover:

The difference between being taken hostage by force and taking yourself hostage—the key concepts in both types share some psychological similarities, and understanding them will help you find the key to freedom;

The importance of regular “self-examinations” as a step to positive and lasting change from within—learning what your weaknesses and strengths are by being brutally honest during self-examinations can lead to self-directed action and self-improvement;

Who your “hostage-takers” are and how they can manipulate and control your beliefs and actions;

How these hostage-takers become your captors, and their effect on your internal monologues;

The role your power and control over yourself plays in your life, and how to reclaim that power and control once it's been hidden from you;

the importance of finding the root cause of your captivity and using that knowledge to help free yourself from whatever is keeping you captive;

The steps to take to free yourself from your captive and sabotaged state;

Stockholm Syndrome and how it can brainwash your thoughts and take you hostage;

Learned helplessness and how to recognize if you're in such a state and get the hell out; as the inimitable Winston Churchill so cleverly said, “If you find yourself going through hell, keep going”

How to make the right choices and decisions (based upon what you want and not what someone else wants or expects from you) via a process of thoughtful planning when faced with adversity, and how to summon the courage to make tough choices, take action and readjust if things don't work out the first time—just because you step off the path doesn't mean you have to keep off it;

The vital importance of taking positive action to reach your goals; simply thinking about doing something is not enough, but directed and positive action will help you reach your dreams;

How some things in life are “empty and meaningless,” and how you should keep them that way until you can attach the right meaning to them; and The importance of gratitude and faith to living a happier life.

Finally, throughout these pages I’ll be referring to self-defeating, intrusive and negative thoughts as “hostage-takers” and “zombies.” I’ll be discussing the importance of detecting who or what the offenders are, the methods they use to commit their “crimes” (their general modus operandi or MO), and how to effectively plan against their incursions.

In this book you will discover ways to recognize signs of an impending attack on your state of mind, and the methods to free yourself when you’ve been taken hostage by your thoughts. You’ll become a cautious “thought detective” and enforce the principles that, through thinking and choosing, will protect you from becoming a victim of a hostage-taking.

And so begins the journey into your future, where power and control belong not to the crippling forces of fear and doubt but to you. Yes, to you!

CHAPTER 1

Hostage

There are several definitions for the word “hostage,” but the simple one is this: a person whose freedom and movements are being directly or indirectly controlled by someone else under threat of physical harm and/or imminent death. This book, however, extends this definition to include the notion of taking oneself hostage. The hostage-taker differs in these two definitions: the first is an outside taker; the second, within yourself.

This chapter demonstrates the difference between being hostages by external forces and being hostages by the internal self. Someone taken hostage by another or others has no choice in the matter, whereas someone who hostages himself or herself may choose not to be a hostage. Thus, there is a simple difference: in the latter situation, you choose. It’s that straightforward. Understanding this key principle will help you deal with those times you find yourself becoming your own hostage.

April 2005

It was five months into the mission. I couldn’t believe I had made it to Jordan to serve as an international peacekeeper during the Iraq War. It was a decision I had wrestled with because of the danger involved and the fact that I would be leaving my precious daughters for several months, knowing that I might never return alive. But the thought of serving my country and making a difference, however small, outweighed my fears. I would be doing something greater than myself. My family’s permission to let me go made it a bit easier.

This mission was Canada’s way of not sending soldiers to the frontlines during the Iraq War. Instead, Canada had elected to deploy peacekeepers to train Iraqi police cadets. Our mandate was to train three thousand cadets every eight weeks in matters of self-defense, weapons, survival, criminal investigations, human rights, democracy and procedures of arrest. Initially, I was in charge of the Criminal Investigations Division, teaching human rights and investigative techniques, and with two instructors under my tutelage: Willie Burns, a wonderful Brit who fast became a true and lasting friend, and an Aussie, Jill Henry.

As the mission progressed, I was selected to join the Advocacy and Counselling Branch, winning out over seventeen other international trainers who had also applied for that position. I really thought I had heard everything until I met the brave Iraqi men who dropped by my office for counseling and told me their stories, often sad, disturbing and heart-wrenching.

My partner was a Finnish officer by the name of Jarmo Uttalla. Jarmo stood a foot taller than I and was one of the kindest men I had ever met. We had immediately bonded, as is essential when fighting an enemy, and had become exceptionally effective partners. We watched each other's backs vigilantly for ours was an unarmed mission, which added to the dangers we knew existed each and every day. We accepted these dangers while being able, nevertheless, to experience moments of normality: whenever the office wasn't busy with cadets in need, we would access a music directory on our computers, and I would try to stump him by playing just a few notes from a variety of hundreds of classic rock tunes for him to identify—he knew them all.

Soon after joining the unit, I also met an Iraqi colonel who had an office a few doors down from mine. He invited me into his office one morning and asked me what I thought about the academy. He asked if I really understood what was going on with the cadets. I answered that I did not entirely understand, acknowledging that there were layers of complexity beyond my scope of knowledge. He went on to explain that for many of these cadets, money and food for themselves and their families were so scarce that becoming a policeman made financial sense. It came down to survival. He said that keeping themselves and their families alive had lured many of them to join the police—and the ranks of terrorism, as it unfortunately turns out. He asked me to imagine an economy so bad that putting your life on the line for an income outweighed your decision between right and wrong. Many of these young men were seductively recruited into terrorism by the promise that not only would they and their family be provided for and taken care of comfortably, but if they completed a suicide mission their families would be cared for forever. In addition, their pictures would be mounted on a wall of heroes and they would be honored as such.

The colonel went on to say that these desperate men seeking jobs would often take on contradictory roles, such as the job of policeman but also of terrorist—not because they believed in any jihad, but because their families were starving and would be taken care of by way of recompense. He then informed me that there were terrorists among us in the guise of police cadets, and that efforts were being made to identify and extract them. This explained how some of my previous students had suddenly disappeared from my class overnight. He warned me to watch my back, a warning I took seriously. The colonel liked me and regularly invited me to join him for morning tea. Through

his guidance I became a much more informed and astute advocate and counselor, connecting with most of the cadets who came in to see me for help and consultation, just as I did in my role as an instructor.

We were very aware the academy could come under attack at any time; that was a given. Most of the cadets welcomed the efforts the west was making to help. Some did not. We also knew there were many extremists who co-mingled, undetected, among us, following direct orders from Iraqi terrorist cells. One of our greatest concerns was getting hit by a missile in the canteen area that fed about a thousand cadets and internationals at a time, three times a day. This seemed like the most logical place for an attack. By striking the canteen, the terrorists would wipe out, in one shot, as many of us as possible and receive international news attention.

Now, my usual morning routine involved going to the academy as the sun rose, before the cadets attended their classes, to file paperwork. I often had a number of transfer requests that needed to be signed by the academy director after determining which of the cadets should be expatriated back to Iraq for any one of a number of issues, including mental illness and extreme depression. Most of the cadets who attended the academy had not been adequately or properly vetted, and one of my duties was to determine who stayed and who went.

A couple of months after joining the Advocacy and Counselling Branch, a young cadet who had been dropping by my office regularly warned me that an attack on the academy was being planned from within. He knew it was going to be soon but didn't know exactly when. I alerted our security division immediately, but all would continue to be business as usual. Despite this information about an imminent terrorist attack, there was no question of sending anyone home; no international peacekeeper gets to go home during a war just because things are getting dangerous. Simply, we were required to remain strictly alert. But, as it turned out, we didn't have to wait long for the moment of forewarned crisis. A few days following the warning, on an early morning, with the temperature about 110°F (43.3°C) on the Jordanian desert, and a foul and fetid stench emanating from a nearby pig farm and lingering merci—lessly in the air, the moment arrived . . . a moment that my partner Jarmo and I had discussed and in anticipation of which we had strategized, as much as one can strategize over the what and where and when and how of any terrorist attack. The why had long since ceased being a question for us—we were trained to accept the de facto reality of acts of terrorism rather than ponder their senselessness.

And I was glad to be in Jarmo's company as the moment arrived on this morning among mornings. But on this morning among mornings, nothing would exist outside of the moment. Jarmo was at my side and we had just left the director's office, which was a few hundred feet through the desert from our building, after having our documents signed. We weren't far from our building when we noticed them . . .

For days, countless cadets—some terrorists and some their supporters—had been gathering makeshift weapons from within the camp: sticks, rocks and whatever potentially harmful implements they could get their hands on to attack and seize the academy as per the orders that their terrorist leaders had issued. Today was the day. Two hundred and fifty or so cadets were prepared to attack and had ventured out of their barracks, while another two thousand seven hundred and fifty cadets remained in their bunks, choosing not to participate. Not all of the two hundred and fifty to take up arms were full-blown terrorists, but they were ready to follow those who were. Suddenly, Jarmo and I were alerted to the swift approach of about forty of these armed and angry Iraqi cadets emerging threateningly from behind our building. With lightning speed, they surrounded us, obviously intent on giving us a severe beating—or worse. They had simple orders: to forcibly control and destroy the academy. As to whether they had been given the kill command, I can only speculate. But if I were a betting man, I'd drop all I had on that being a "yes." What was clear to me, however, in that moment, on that blazingly hot morning, was that not much of what I had discovered about terrorists mattered. Jarmo and I knew we were in for the fight of our lives; he glanced down at me, patted my head and said, "This is going to hurt, little buddy." I looked up at him and answered, "Yeah buddy, it sure is..."

Although I was momentarily frozen with fear at the thought that I might never see my two daughters again, I was determined to fight with everything I had, and quickly focused on meeting the attack of the angry mob. And as their menacing whoops and cries and screams smashed against my ears, my heart raced at breakneck speed as if it would puncture my chest of its own volition. But then, then, something startling occurred, when, almost simultaneously, within the chaos and cacophony, a distinct voice emerged. I could hear one of the men shouting my name: "Mr. Paul! Mr. Paul!" Dominating the screams, he was barking commands in Arabic; and without one of my trusted language assistants by my side, I had no clue what orders were being given. But suddenly, as suddenly as we had been grabbed with unmistakable force, the men released their grip on us and backed off en masse. The attack stopped and the circle they had made around us broke apart. Just like that. Yes. Stopped. Just stopped.

One moment we were hostages about to suffer a severe beating or death; the next moment, freed. Jarmo and I, as you can well imagine, were reeling with both the shock and the relief. But we waited with bated breath, and some skepticism, wondering what exactly had happened, and whether the reversal of taking us hostage was firm or was some ploy to play with us. Second-guessing the actions of terrorists is a futile and dangerous occupation at best. However, as they cleared a path for us—almost like the parting of the Red Sea—I mused at our good fortune, and that we were provided the opportunity to leave unharmed. We knew some blessing had occurred, a miracle I felt, with us the most grateful recipients.

As I regained my complete focus, I scanned for the cadet who had given the order to stop and, lo and behold, recognized him as one of my former students. He had the biggest grin on his face and kindness in his eyes. He gestured that we should make it to our nearby advocacy building, all the while with a radiant smile on his face, reflecting his own pleasure at having done the honorable thing. At that moment I realized we could find humanity in terrorism.

Jarmo and I made it safely out of the academy that morning, and I credit the miracle of our safe passage out of possible death to the fact that I had always treated that young cadet and each of my cadets with dignity and respect. He was rewarding me in his application of some unwritten law—a code with its own principles of justice—informal, yet based upon a unique sense of right and wrong.

The foregoing account, of course, is a situation of classic hostage-taking by an external force. And, believe me, notwithstanding the outcome of our being freed, the experience was, to say the least, traumatic—with all of the concomitant factors that accompany trauma: fear, panic, a sense of helplessness, a rapid rise in heart rate and blood pressure, among other reactions. What, you may ask, is the connective tissue between being taken hostage by external forces and being taken hostage by yourself? What are the markers that announce to you that you are under attack by your own thoughts and emotions and headed for a situation in which you sabotage yourself—your peace of mind, your freedom of thought and of choice?

Well, first and foremost, regarding thoughts and emotions that hostage your free and easy state of mind, it is essential to note the speed and urgency with which they arrive to encircle you (just as we were encircled physically by our would-be hostage-takers in our desert mission): one moment you're free of them; the next, they strike and have you in their grip. Being alert, prepared and ready to fight is crucial to your survival in a physical hostage-taking. And so it is with self-hostage-taking. Having the skills and energy to handle

hostage-taking thoughts and responses is critical. Knowing and, moreover, embracing the power of our own thoughts, and recognizing and acknowledging the power that the subcon-scious mind (which houses millions of thought fragments and emotional memories) can exert over the conscious mind, seemingly randomly and at will, and at any time, is absolutely essential to eradicating and nulli-fying the power of destructive, negative thinking.

Physical hostages, when seized, are deprived of the choice to move about freely and carry on with their lives as a result of the actions and demands being forcibly imposed on them by someone else. The hostages are held captive against their will and are at the mercy of the hostage-taker. To resist may realistically result in violence against them and death. Hostages often experience hopelessness and a complete loss of choice and control. And similarly, many of these factors apply to taking yourself hostage—or allowing yourself to be taken hostage emotionally or psycho-logically through corrupted thought processes. By doing so, you become your own gatekeeper—choosing to restrict your movements, actions and myriad better choices. Not because of the fear of losing your life, but because of the fear of taking positive action. And these factors apply when you find yourself hostage to toxic relationships—with yourself or with others—be it through negative self-talk of any kind, self-defeating internal monologues, a haunting sense of guilt long overdue for a purge, remarks from someone toxic to your self-esteem or perhaps crippling expectations imposed upon you by family, friends or employers. All are discouraging, all are disheartening and all are harmful to your overall sense of well-being and, moreover, to your actual well-being. And that's how you take yourself hostage: through that negative self-chatter telling you that you're not good enough, not worthy enough and a million other things that have right to be going through your head.

In conclusion, let's remember, and remember well, these two steps.

Step 1:

Understand the process of hostage-taking, and how taking yourself hostage or allowing yourself to be taken hostage happens, in your head or in a relationship, for instance. This the first and foremost step to rendering that process null and void.

Step 2:

Recognize, acknowledge and accept that you are endowed with an innate, dynamic, personal power to interrupt the process of taking yourself hostage. You have the absolute power to un-hostage yourself.

Next, let's examine two headline hostage-taking situations.

(I hope you enjoyed this introduction. For your copy, please visit on-line book stores, Amazon and most book stores in North America).

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