



How to master the mind and manage your potential

The quality of thinking and the personal development of key individuals is what differentiates the high-performance culture from the majority of poorer performing organisations. It is only through careful and precise learning and development that key players lead and install a culture of personal growth that enables the organisations to achieve high standards with their customers and the clients. This article explores the secrets behind successful personal development strategies that enable businesses to replicate that culture.



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Directors and senior managers of large corporations would love to know the secrets that drive very successful businesses. High-performance organisations are all internally driven with leadership, strategic focus and direction, passion and energy, and careful alignment of all resources. Organisations that experience superior quality and customer service, high growth in sales, profitability and the acquisition, retention and growth of new accounts, customers and clients are driven by one thing: the power of the mind of their leaders. The vision can only start with each key player in the business having the mindset and the behaviour of a leader.

Key drivers: leadership

The key driver of success is a disciplined will to achieve. It is not about a negative desperation to succeed; it is more positive than that. It is a strong desire to focus on a challenge and to know that, despite any and all barriers you will encounter, you will still have the ability to achieve your dreams. This comes from an inner motivation that very few people possess individually, but it can be created and sparked off with the entire workforce, given the application of the right behaviours and techniques.

We believe firmly that organisational success is fundamentally down to the quality of personal leadership that key players in the business demonstrate and live every day. It is no surprise that when a group of high-performing individuals form strong cohesive teams their members enjoy even greater success, delighting their customers, clients and consumers. The \$64,000 question is: what will cause this to happen? What has to happen for the ripple effect of continuous improvement to take place and to wash over the organisation positively?

Our belief is that personal leadership should precede everything else in driving business improvement and change. It has to grow from within, so that key players are in charge of motivation and aspirations, and can take the lead when others may not be able to see the way. The whole concept of personal leadership is the key challenge to which most businesses have not yet risen. We need to lead by example and model the behaviour that develops personal improvement, which is the cornerstone of organisational improvement. Many would say that the journey to improvement and change leadership starts with how to master the mind.¹

Challenge: how to master the mind

The key to personal change is controlling the mind. A focused mind is very powerful in achieving goals. The secret to achieve anything is in taming the mind and focusing it in the right direction.

Mastering one's mind and self is a goal set by many, but achieved by few. We firmly believe that many people never quite live up to what they could be, because they fail to take

charge of their thinking. Thinking is not enough; it is deciding and doing that is important. Too many dream of success, but fail to put these dreams into practice. These people go through life hoping that something will happen to them or they will magically be discovered by someone – they expect an *X Factor* moment.

You will be familiar with the analogy of the brain as a super-computer. We have an incredible potential resting neatly on our shoulders, but unfortunately we do not have an owner's manual for how to use it. We are lucky if we use 3–4% of our potential mind power to achieve our dreams. Most never try; they just accept their lot.

We hear personal stories of success and failure all the time – but mostly failure. Success stories are told with passion and the outcome is positive, but it is not always the case. People who do not achieve their goals often feel regret that they will never live their dreams. Time is a limited resource, and as each day passes we have less time to plan and to achieve our potential. So many people fail to plan and therefore plan to fail. They do not see the need to deposit a large injection of enthusiasm and planning to create a compelling future by 'starting with the end in mind'.

These non-planners go on hoping that some success will just happen to them, like winning the lottery. They fail to take responsibility for their future and their life.

Shocking retirement statistics

An interesting piece of research was undertaken in the USA with elderly people, mostly in their late 80s, in nursing homes. When asked: 'If you had your time again, what would they do differently?', the response was invariably: 'Love more, and leave relationships that were not working; take more thoughtful risks in business, set up their own enterprise, avoid the safe comfortable route through life, and take charge of their life.'

We do not want to wait for our readers to hit their 80s before answering the same question. Maybe now is a good time to decide whether you are willing to drive the process of planning to achieve your goals or just become a mere spectator of life. Make no mistake: the vast majority do the latter and let life pass them by. From our experience, only about 5% of people plan sufficiently to control their destiny. Phil Atkinson sees it in occupational and organisation settings; Alan Steel sees it with investors and private clients building a personal portfolio of assets.

We have always been keen to understand why some people are more successful than others. We have some the depressing news for you. Did you know that 87.3%² of people who reach retirement do not have financial independence? Did you know that this large number of people are dependent on the state and their families? With life expectancy increasing beyond



Personal goal-setting

You may wish to jot these down now. Working on this process will help you achieve your goals and compress the timeframe between setting and having what you want. Imagine the impact on your organisation of introducing this to all your staff.

- What are the five things that you value most in life? What five things would you stand up and fight for?
- Spend 30 seconds writing down the most important goals in your life right now
- What would you do if you won £1 million tax free? What would be the first thing you would do? What changes would you make to your life?
- What would you do if you had no physical or mental limitations on your abilities? What would be your dreams?
- What would you do and how would you spend your time if you only had six months to live? The answer to this question reveals your true values
- What have you always wanted to do but are constrained, scared or frightened of doing?
- Looking back over your life, what gives you your greatest levels and feelings of self-esteem? Exploring this helps you identify and indicates your personal area of excellence
- If you were given one wish and you could achieve any goal, what one thing would you do if you could not fail?

78+ to the mid 80s, many in the future will be virtually destitute and will experience a very poor standard of living and poverty in their later years.

After a lifetime of working, most retired people do not have the resources to live a comfortable old age. In the USA, the average is \$1,500 in savings with poor pension provision. In the UK the situation is worse. We know that fewer people are saving for their retirement. It is within their control, should they decide to take action early enough. Planning for retirement must start in early life. It is a life skill that most avoid learning. Putting trust in others, including the welfare state or charitable institutions, is a very bad idea, as anyone in the UK has witnessed in recent years. What is important is that if you put trust in others to secure a future, you give away your power to influence. When taking personal ownership, you are responsible for your future and you can take all the required steps. The great pension pot that could grow for your retirement will be determined through your planning, not others'.

Take charge of your life

Most of us do not know how to use our mind or how to programme ourselves for results, and we can learn from others who have achieved more in life. We can model ourselves on others. This is desirable because it short-circuits the process of learning. It is all about today taking control of life and being responsible for our actions. To indicate how some lose control of their life, consider the time taken to do the following:

- Shop or choose for a second family car
- Plan and organise the annual holiday
- Decide to master your potential and plan your life

Many will spend a great deal of time purchasing a second family car, visiting numerous dealerships or sellers and looking at the variety of vehicles on display. When it comes to holidays many will state that they spend weeks doing this. Yet when it comes to planning their life, the response we get is that many do not. In honesty, most people do not plan their life, they live it day to day – and many do not like what they live. If we fail to plan how we use our available time, we may not get the results we want. Taking responsibility, agreeing personal targets and projecting ourselves on the right path will do much to improve our chances of managing and, more importantly, creating our future.

Everything you are was once only an idea

Everything you have just now – whether material possessions, an energetic career or a loving family – was once no more than just an idea or a thought. You took these ideas and turned them into reality by taking decisive action. The more action you took, the more dreams and thoughts became reality. Your expansive thinking only becomes reality through taking massive action. The more action you are willing to take, the more your ideas and thoughts become reality.

Imagine that whatever you do, whatever actions you take or people you influence, it is impossible to fail.

Imagine you are very highly gifted and excel at everything you do. It is impossible not to succeed. Imagine rejecting all self-limiting beliefs – now. Imagine you have no personal limiting beliefs about what you can achieve. Imagine what you would look like achieving everything you wanted. What would people say about you and to you?

What would you do that you are presently not doing? What changes would you make to your work life? What risks would you take? What challenges would you accept and win?

Construct that list. Would you change your career, move on to other things, take that risk, initiate new behaviours to make relationships more passionate and more positive, develop new interests, run your own business, spend more time with your children?

Rehearsal and practice

Golfer Gary Player said: 'The more I practise, the luckier I get.' Life is not a rehearsal and personal growth comes about through repeatedly using positive behaviours. You know most people give up even before they have got started. Lots of people buy MP3s and books on self-development. We know that only 5% of these people will use the material they have purchased. Many never get past the first chapter. Only 1% of people who buy the material will see it through to the end.

If you put into practice the ideas in this article, in less than 10 days you will accomplish a great deal. If you complete all the exercises, write down your plans and take action, your dreams will become reality. More importantly, you will create a domino effect if you live and share the process with your colleagues,

your life partner and friends. Learning is about improving the community in which we live. It is our responsibility to share these thoughts with others and learn to develop a sound perspective to learning new behaviours. Very few recognise the power that they have within – maybe as few as a tenth of 1% of the population actually really live their dreams.

To make matters worse, many give up and do not take action. They have a low opinion of themselves and do not adopt a goal-setting and achieving frame of mind.

Goal-setters are winners!

So why is it that some people are more successful than others, have more fun, more friends and generally have a great time? This is down to their ability to create a challenging future and there is no other way to do this than through planning.

Research spanning back to 1953 at Harvard has suggested there is a very strong positive relationship between planning and achievement. A graduating class were asked how many had mapped out and planned their future life. Only 3% admitted to have taken this very seriously. The rest relied on luck, opportunity and hard work. Twenty years later, the surviving members of the class were brought together again and the 3% of the class who had gone to pains to plan their life had acquired more wealth than the remaining 97%!

Planning and objective setting is the keystone of the effective person, whether the plans are for business expansion or for developing a meaningful relationship with family and friends.

We may not always get the result we want, but we will get a result. By trial and adjustment we can continually plan and organise ourselves to focus upon what we want. If we do not know where we are going in life, how will we know when we get there?

Your lifeline

Think about your life and where you are going. Draw a lifeline, which should begin with your birth and end with your death. In between is your life, where you can log past and plan future achievements. What were the high spots? When did you feel a real winner? What have you achieved? When did you feel you had just conquered the world? Think now and write down all those positive experiences.

Assess your successes. Now comes the interesting part: planning your future achievements and goals. They can be focused on career, acquiring material possessions, building relationships, improving health and fitness, building a community, advancing personal development and spiritual goals.

Success does not equate only with wealth, material possessions and career achievement. Success can be anything you want it to be. It can relate to being a loving and caring parent or friend. It can relate to your emotional contribution to worthy causes. It could be running a marathon. Goal-setting and achieving those goals depends on what success means to you.

In seminars, Philip Atkinson always discloses some of the critical incidents that make up his lifeline, which include business, relationships and building a legacy. Nothing is as important as his family achievements, his consulting work and the publication of his books and articles. Marriage to Ann occupies a special moment and the two additional most important events in his life are the birth and growth to adulthood of his daughter Sarah and son Jonathan. If his life were to end tomorrow, these are the events he would want to relive briefly and remember, because they are to him what his life is about.

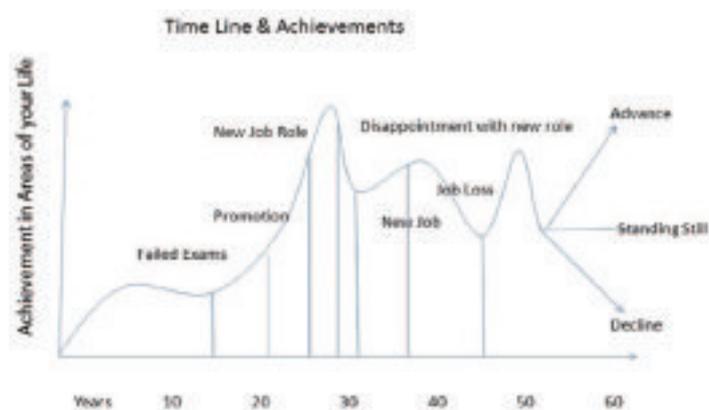
Now, think back along your lifeline. What was important to you? Now, more importantly look forward and ask yourself: *'What is important to me in the future? What do I really want from life? On what do I want to focus attention?'*



Steps to effective goal-setting

To achieve significant improvement in any business, organisation or team you need to ignite the members of that team with a commitment to do better – and therein lies the key to effective goal-setting.

- You have to truly desire the goal. It cannot be a vague wish, but something that you want for yourself. What do you want to be, do and have?
- You have to believe that you have the ability to achieve the goal; in other words, it has to be realistic and believable
- You have to write it down and be very specific, and the more sensory data you can supply the better. How will things differ from today? How will your behaviour have changed and what will people notice that is different about you?
- You have to define and list as many benefits that will accrue to you from achieving this goal; the more benefits you identify, the stronger your desire and the action you will take will enable you to succeed
- You have to measure where you are currently and the action you need to take to achieve your desired outcome
- Set a deadline for completion, which must be specific and quantifiable; make it challenging
- Identify the key barriers to achieving your goal and work through how you will tackle them; you might be surprised to find that most of the time these are self-imposed and well within your control
- What knowledge will you need to achieve the goal, and who are the key players who can help you? Focus your attention on building rapport with them as partners in your goal achieving process
- Have a clear image of yourself achieving the goal; imagine how you will feel when you have achieved it; what will people say about your achievement, and what has to happen for you to know that the goal is just about to be achieved?
- Write it down now; most people do not document what they want in life – write a detailed plan, and consult it and think about the goal as though you have achieved it already



Drawing your lifeline

Figure 1

Spend some time drawing your lifeline – see Figure 1. Think of the successes you want to create in the future. What is important to you? What do you want to do with your life? What will give you the buzz? Does it involve other people?

Draw a lifeline for your business and career. Now draw your lifeline for your relationships, your family and friends. Is your lifeline and its achievements increasing or decreasing? Do you find your lifeline is a straight line with little up or down movement?

Think now of the people whose lives you touch and influence. Think of those people whose life you share. Share your lifeline with them – but before you do so, explain the concept to them and have them draw their lifeline before you show them yours. Now, share your views. Look for similarities. Look for synergies. Look for complementary aspirations and also examine areas where there may be some conflict.

There is no limit to what can be achieved if you are prepared to stretch yourself. In Philip Atkinson's *Success Seminar*, he talks about eight key areas of one's life – see Table 1. They are in no particular order, but in today's high-pressure environment we often find that the business and career issues do tend to predominate.

It is an extremely powerful exercise to develop your lifelines for each area of your life and to spend some time completing Table 1.

There can be an overlap between goals within each area of your life and let us not concern ourselves with precise definitions of each, but focus on each of the goals, take a sheet of paper and write down your goals for each of the areas above. Take your time. Stretch yourself. If you want something – that BMW or Jaguar – write it down now. If you want a closer loving relationship with your children, write it down. If you want to run a marathon, write it down.

At first you have to experiment and brainstorm through your goals. Remember the question at the beginning of the article: *If you could not fail, what would you dare to set out to achieve?*

Conflicting and complementary goals

After you have defined your goals you may want to consider if there are any conflicts between your goals in various areas of your life – for example, a desire for swift career advancement, but not being prepared to commit to develop your professional credentials, qualifications and experience, as this would conflict in the short term with your goal of spending more time with your family.

Are there any goals that are mutually supportive and complementary? Examples of complementary goals are wanting to complete a marathon and encouraging your children to take up a sport. Further training to run a marathon may also support you in maintaining your health and taking preventative action on stressful parts of your life in business.

Summary

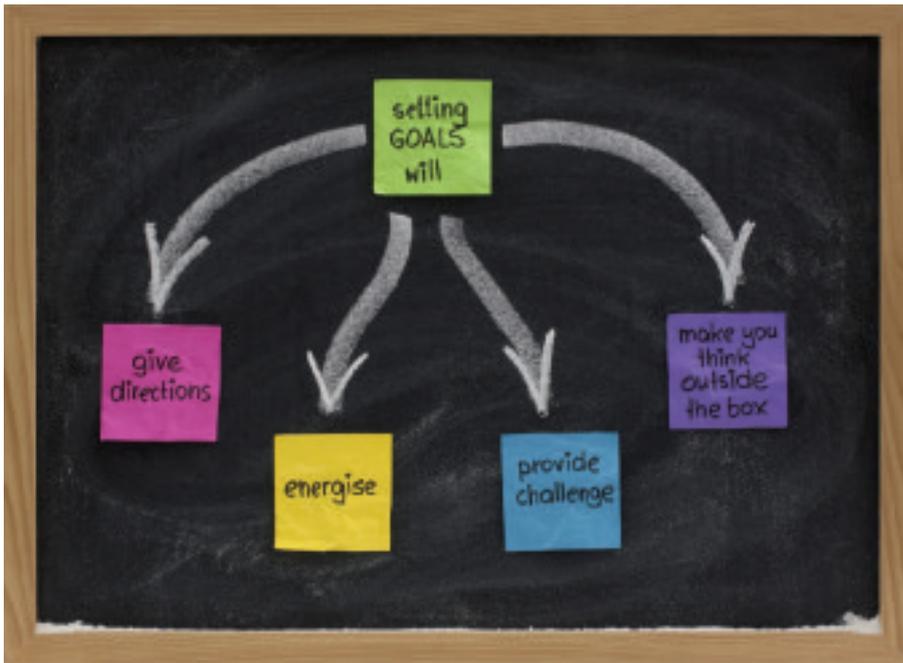
By taking part in this exercise we hope we have highlighted the importance of mastering the mind and we trust you will find value in pursuing the exercises. Your achievements in life are determined by your personal beliefs in self, the dreams you have and the action you take to make these dreams reality. Understand now that only a small percentage of people really plan their lives.

Finally, it is worth noting that if we enabled our people to develop themselves, we would probably be running even more effective, profitable, customer-focused organisations with a high-achieving and contented staff. That would be the ultimate in integrating individual and organisational goals harmoniously.

Life areas	List your top five goals for the short term and the long term
Career goals	
Wealth and material possessions	
Develop mature loving relationships with our friends and family	
Peace of mind – absence of worry, fear, anger, guilt, envy	
Worthy goals – goals that relate to the larger community	
High levels of health and energy	
Self-actualisation – to be responsible and creative	
Spiritual – your higher values and how you relate to others	

Lifeline planning

Table 1



About the authors

Philip Atkinson is a consultant specialising in strategic, behavioural and cultural change. He is a member of various training consortia and has recently focused on creating innovative business simulations through Learning Strategies Ltd. He consults in the UK, Europe and the USA, and has written seven business books and published over 300 articles. He is a speaker at conferences and runs workshop sessions for leading companies.

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Alan Steel founded Alan Steel Asset Management in 1975. The company has consistently been recognised in national awards, particularly in investment areas. He is an outspoken critic of financial product mis-selling, and was the first to name and shame Equitable Life, three years before regulators acted. He has written hundreds of articles for national newspapers, including *The Daily Telegraph*, on building personal wealth and contrarian investing, and speaks at investment seminars.

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2. www.alansteel.com

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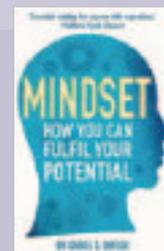
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This book explains why it's not just our abilities and talent that bring us success-but whether we approach them with a fixed or growth mindset. This title makes clear why praising intelligence and ability doesn't foster self-esteem and lead to accomplishment, but may actually jeopardise success.

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