

CHAPTER 1

BEGIN

It's not hard to picture someone who isn't enjoying their job . . .

Imagine Katie. Katie left university, where she'd studied history, and entered a graduate training programme at a big advertising company. She showed a particular adeptness at marketing, and at the end of her placement she was offered a full-time position. Katie seemed to thrive in this role. At the time, social media marketing was in the ascendency, and Katie quickly grasped how she could make it work for her clients – mainly large food companies. A few big coups followed: a prizewinning campaign here, a new client there, and she was promoted. Then she was promoted again. Her twenties were flying by, and Katie seemed to be flying, too. Now, at thirty-five, Katie is in charge of a global team that delivers online marketing solutions to some of the world's biggest food production companies. She is well-liked by her colleagues, has an amazing salary, and is the envy of her social circle.

But Katie hates her job. Like many others, she fell into her profession. Katie feels she should be having the time of

her life, but she's totally miserable. Something has to change. But what?

Katie represents those who on the surface seem to have it all figured out, but really yearn for something different. Katie could do with disrupting her work life and thinking bigger.

And Katie isn't the only type of person that needs to think bigger . . .

Imagine Reyansh, who dropped out of university. He always intended to go back but never did, and instead bounced around a few different jobs in the service industry. He's been a barman and a waiter, but has found a niche as a barista. For the last couple of years he's been working in a coffee shop, and since joining, the coffee shop's fiercely loyal clientele has steadily grown. Reyansh makes a decent cup of coffee, but that's not why the coffee shop is doing so well. The reason people come back is because of Reyansh. He's funny, he's charming, and sometimes – because it's sunny, or he likes your coat – he gives you free coffee. (Though the owner cheerfully berates him for this.) Reyansh isn't the quickest barista on the books – he's usually too busy chatting – and there is supposed to be a loyalty card scheme to administer freebies. But everybody can see that Reyansh adds inordinate value to the business. He's a great shift supervisor, he's brilliant at teaching trainees, and even the crankiest, most difficult customers leave the shop smiling.

But Reyansh isn't satisfied. Being a barista is fine, but it was always intended as a stop gap. For one thing, the pay isn't great. For another, while making coffee and hanging out with people is fun, he craves something deeper and more meaningful from his work.

Reyansh personifies people that fail to launch within the

specific time period society expects of them. It can be daunting to launch later than your peers, particularly when you don't have a clear idea of what your passion is. Reyansh could do with thinking bigger, bringing his future self forward and identifying a more satisfying career pathway.

And Reyansh isn't the only type of person who needs to reimagine where their career is going . . .

Imagine Juan, who is working happily in an investment bank. He likes his work and his colleagues, and is perfectly fine with the 50+ hour working week. Juan now manages a team of ten people, and takes great effort to bring them along. He is a mid-level manager. Over the last five years he has seen members of his team advance within the organization relatively quickly, two of whom have been promoted over him. Juan genuinely wishes them well, but he cannot understand why his own progress has stalled. He is growing disillusioned but keeps smiling on the outside.

Juan is a good example of people who plateau despite craving advancement. He could do with rethinking how he approaches the next few years of his career, so he can move beyond his plateau.

So Katie is miserable, Reyansh has failed to launch and Juan has plateaued. Perhaps you picked up this book because you're facing a similar problem.

Maybe you know where you want to be in your career, but you don't know how to get there. Maybe you don't even know that – you simply know that you aren't where you're supposed to be right now. Or maybe you feel as though you know where you want to go, and know, on paper, how to get there, but somebody else is preventing you from doing it – a bad boss, say, or an unhelpful colleague.

Fear not.

This book is going to help you take small steps to build the career you want, and it's going to show you how to do that using insights from behavioural science.

Drawing from multiple disciplines, behavioural science seeks to understand why people make the choices they do, and also identifies easy tweaks that we can make to our environment to get different outcomes. Behavioural science can help explain why people stumble in their career journeys. It can also help explain why some aren't entering the race in the first place, and why others drop out at the first sight of failure. Behavioural science teaches us that we should think big and set a goal for our future. It also teaches us that by taking regular small steps today that support this big thinking, we can get to where we want to go.

As a professor of behavioural science at the London School of Economics, whether I am teaching masters' and executive-level students or giving talks to industry, I always want one fact to land: the research I do into human behaviour helps explain why an outcome they want is not materializing.

I'm going to do the same in this book. I will explain why the outcome you've been working towards might not have materialized yet, and I'll also show you how to *overcome* these obstacles. I will blend my own original insights with research from the frontiers of behavioural science, and draw on lessons from the fields of economics, psychology and management to empower you to build the career you want. While I have changed the names and other identifying information of the people whose stories I tell in this book, the substance of their experiences is real. You may even see yourself in some of them.

Perhaps you are starting a business, or closing a business. Perhaps you are starting university, or thinking of dropping

out. Maybe you are vying for a promotion, or wishing for a lateral move across divisions in your company. You could be one of the many people who are uninspired by their working lives and in need of change.

Regardless what role, industry or stage of career you are in, I guarantee you'll find valuable lessons in these pages that will help you think big about your future and visualize a big-thinking goal. To help you achieve this goal, the book will also focus on identifying the regular small steps you will take to achieve your ambitions. And just as important are the behavioural science insights that will help you stick to taking these small steps, and to circumvent or navigate around biases and other obstacles that get in your way on your big-thinking journey.

HOW I ENDED UP WHERE I AM TODAY

In December 2011, I moved to the LSE as a lecturer. I was full of enthusiasm, excitement and expectation. About six months into my new role, I had a conversation with a professor in my external network who I really admired and respected. As we discussed the next steps in my career, he told me that it would take at least five years to become a senior lecturer, and that even that trajectory was highly unlikely.

I was devastated to hear it would take me that long. I felt like a deflated balloon. If I were a cartoon drawing, there would have been a black cloud hanging over my head. After the shock of the news, I internalized the feedback from Professor Negativity and hit a plateau. I even started going backwards. My enthusiasm for my research waned; I couldn't work productively. I dwelled on how mediocre I was compared to others.

The professor's comments became a self-fulfilling prophecy. A prediction like this, from a respected source, causes itself to become true – because whoever is impacted by the prediction believes it, and changes their behaviour accordingly. In this case, a supposed mentor's beliefs about my abilities negatively affected my performance as I lived *down* to their expectations.

But this professor did not know me well. Actually, he did not know me at all.

That realization came to me in the middle of one sleepless night, like a slap in the face. Professor Negativity had created a narrative about me which was false. Like a fairy tale, it was based on archetypes. These archetypes were constructed from inaccurate social norms about people like 'Grace'. People can confuse my relaxed demeanour for the attitude of somebody who doesn't take their career seriously. Or perhaps my admission that I found it difficult to finish projects had caused him to label me as someone who would never finish a project. Equally, women in economics are still a rare breed in academia, and even rarer still as you advance through the ranks. Maybe my unusual path to academia – with no stop at an Ivy League institution on the way – meant he assigned a lower probability to me ever being successful. Who knows?

One thing I realized that night was that he was wrong. I was also certain that his narrative about me had been constructed because of the professor's own cognitive biases and blind spots.

But what could I do?

One simple change I could make right then and there was to get a different mentor. So I did just that. In fact, I found three. I listened carefully to what they all had to say. This process was really important, as I truly believe in listening

to feedback. I also believe that if everyone says you are dead, you should lie down. If, for instance, they had all told me the same thing as Professor Negativity – that I would be very unlikely to make senior lecturer within five years – it would have been wise to listen, and up my game. But they didn't. In fact, none of Professor Negativity's sentiments were repeated. Ever.

So what happened five years later? Well, I had already been promoted to associate professor (which is a higher grade than senior lecturer), and was writing a CV that would see me promoted to professor. I had far surpassed my expectations: I had my dream job, with a clear progression path. I also avoided Professor Negativity at conferences.

Perhaps more importantly, though, I was happier. I didn't have that black cloud over my head. But things would have been very different if I had continued to internalize the first feedback I heard as a hard reality. Things would have been different if I hadn't navigated around that obstacle.

I was lucky. At the time, I was conducting research about precisely these kinds of obstacles. I used myself as a laboratory as I furthered my understanding of the study of human behaviour. I was becoming a behavioural scientist.

These days, you can find me in Connaught House at the London School of Economics, where I am an associate professor of behavioural science, well on my way to becoming a professor. I am a director of the new MSc in Behavioural Science, and also the director and founder of The Inclusion Initiative at the LSE. My research seeks to understand why people choose the jobs they do, and why some people have more success than others in getting to where they want to go. My findings demonstrate clearly that while some factors on our career journey are not within our control, a lot of others are. This has led me to advise many business leaders,

helping them find ways to level the playing field for their employees, to ensure they are rewarded based on ability, skills and talent alone.

This book, though, looks at the problem from the other way around. It is about empowering individuals to think bigger, and enabling them to build the career they want through taking regular small steps.

WHAT HOLDS US BACK?

While having big dreams is easy, making them happen is hard. Navigating working life today is tricky, and the skills we need are always changing. Advances in technology and increasing globalization are shaping the type of work that is available at a pace. More of us find ourselves working in winner-takes-all arenas. From the traditional workplace to the modern-day start-up, the people who are perceived to be the best at what they do get extraordinary rewards, while those who rank just a quarter percentile point below them get rewards that are much more ordinary.

It can feel exhausting if you are striving to get to a specific finishing line. It can be even worse if you are working really hard but have no direction or end goal in mind. Many of us sacrifice self-care in the quest for success. We miss family events, health check-ups, forget special occasions and more. If we are putting our well-being and happiness at risk, surely we should be rewarded according to our impact, skills, abilities and talent? Otherwise the risks we are taking don't have fair pay-offs.

So we put in the effort and enhance our skills. These newly acquired skills produce something amazing: breakthrough research, an innovative strategy, or a product that everyone

will be better off from having. We are then rewarded in kind. Right?

Unfortunately, the process which determines who gets what reward and why is not exact, and is often unfair. Great new products fail daily, real talent goes unnoticed, and valuable innovations are cast aside. Cognitive biases are often the reason why our ideas falter and careers stall. These biases have likely impacted you and your career over and over and over again. They may even be so blatant they bring you to tears when you notice them. It is frustrating when people who can influence your career progression reveal blind spots that make the journey longer and – even worse – less enjoyable. You may grow disheartened when narratives of ‘this is how we do things around here’ stand in the way of your innovative ideas, or you have to waste time in endless discussions driven by bureaucracy, red tape and lobbying. You may find yourself getting grumpy when you witness biases hindering the career progression of extraordinary and intelligent people in your own workplace just because they didn’t go to one of the top schools, aren’t part of the right networks or don’t have the right look.

But it’s not just about other people – the influence of cognitive bias is not isolated to the actions (or inactions) of others. *Our own* cognitive biases hold us back, too.

You may consider yourself a good decision-maker. You always put thought into the choices that you make. You don’t allow emotions to rule your head. You’re pretty logical, right?

Wrong.

Behavioural science has proven beyond doubt that, most of the time, our decision-making is badly hampered by cognitive biases and blind spots, regardless of how good we think we have been in our deliberations. We often hold a belief that we are acting purposefully when we aren’t. We aren’t as rational as we think.

How can our own cognitive biases hold us back at work? Well, for those of you who are working for a large company, ask yourself why you aren't going for a promotion next year. Is it because you haven't fulfilled the requirements, or (as is the case most of the time) are the promotion criteria unclear and you want to make sure that you more than exceed them?

Take a step back. What is the rational decision?

If I am rational, I want to get the benefits of a promotion as soon as I can. I want the extra income, the status, and the proverbial monkey off my back. In the case of criteria being unclear, then shouldn't I go for promotion even earlier? I should take a chance, right?

But maybe I'm placing too much weight on the cost of being rejected instead.

If this applies to you, a cognitive bias is holding you back. You are overestimating the costs of getting turned down (the rejection, the pain, the embarrassment and so on) and underestimating the benefits of potentially being successful.

For most of us, the anticipation of rejection is so bad that we don't put our hat in the ring as often as we should. We anticipate the rejection as being too awful to even consider facing it. However, the actual experience of the rejection is not as bad as we anticipate. And there are silver linings, too. For me, rejection tends to involve a good glass of red wine and some chocolate to accompany the pep talk I give myself before trying again. Most importantly, we learn a lot from trying and failing. It is a life experience, in and of itself.

Let me use another example. Do you hate your current job and dream about setting up a business? Maybe you have a cool product idea, but you break out in a cold sweat when thinking about not having a regular pay cheque for the foreseeable

future. So you carry on with your long commute, and worry vaguely that your true calling is passing you by.

Is this rational? Are you looking at the decision as all or nothing? Are you underestimating the cost of regret? Are you taking into account the costs of ‘what if?’ when you are eighty years old and haven’t followed your dreams?

Our own cognitive biases hold us back. In fact, for most of us, *this is the main problem*. If I am truly self-reflective, I would put the ratio at 80 (me): 20 (others). I have stuck with projects far too long after I should have binned them. This makes me a victim of the ***sunk cost fallacy***, which is the tendency to continue only because of previously invested resources. I have also grossly underestimated how long it will take me to do some of the most basic tasks, falling victim to the ***planning fallacy***, which rears its head when we believe our pursuits will always follow the best-case scenario. At various phases in my career I have felt like an imposter when putting myself forward, despite having the credentials and the experience to make me a pretty solid bet. It is telling that even those that are aware of ***imposter syndrome*** fall into its trap. I have also procrastinated for endless periods (including when writing this book), to avoid feeling the pinch of failure or rejection.

To recognize that we are part of the cause of a prolonged career journey that stumbles, stalls, reverses and even edges near a cliff for periods of time is actually quite freeing. The acknowledgement of the possibility that *our own* biases hold us back allows us to be proactive. Looking at the above ratio, I can take control of 80 per cent of those cognitive biases. Doing so will have a huge impact on how my career progresses. And this is true for you, too – albeit your ratios may be different.

From today, I want you to take control of your career

journey, and use behavioural science insights to help you identify and pursue a new big-thinking goal, or to get across the finish line and realize a long-term dream.

WHEN WILL I GET THERE?

When we think big, it can be tempting to put an exact deadline for completion on our new journey. I want you to avoid doing that. Everyone's journey is going to be a function of a combination of talent, effort and luck. You can put in effort and hone talent, but you cannot control luck. What I am certain of is that you are going to go on a career-transformation journey, and it is going to take years.

Yes, that's right . . . years!

For some of you it will be two years, for others five years . . . and if you are aiming to be the leader of a country, the CEO of a big company or create the next path-breaking product, it may even be ten.

But don't panic! There is plenty to enjoy along the way. You will not be waiting years to realize gains. In fact, I am certain you will experience growth almost straight away. Like a road trip from New York to San Francisco, there are key milestones, moments when you just enjoy the view, and lots of fun, exciting experiences to be had en route.

The point of a road trip isn't simply to arrive somewhere else; the journey itself is rewarding, too.

Equally, there will be times in your career journey when you get a flat tyre or hit roads where there is nothing worth seeing. You may also choose to take a break to allow for other key life events. If you buy a book that promises you a new

destination – or a major life change – in one week or one month, I hope it’s refundable. We all have the potential to achieve great things, but if it were that easy, everyone would be doing it.

Unless you are in a situation where you can upend your entire life, you need to get real and realize that big thinking is a medium-term expedition. We should view this expedition as medium-term because it will take years rather than days, weeks or months, but at the same time it will not take most of your adult life to complete it. This approach also allows for a great work–life balance. It is not do-or-die; if you don’t get it right every single day, it’s not the end of the world. And having a good work–life balance should be central to the pursuit of any big-thinking goal.

As a thought experiment, cast your mind back to the person you were five years ago. Make a mental note of any major changes you have experienced in your life since then. The major changes do not have to be work-related; they can include relationship changes, a bereavement, moving country, having children, starting and finishing a degree, losing a significant amount of weight, running a marathon, etc. Do you think that your personality changed? Do you think that your ability to handle situations changed? Did you change how you physically dress or wear your hair? Make a list of all the notable changes you can recall. Now, make a list of the changes you think you will make in the *next* five years.

I do this exercise sometimes when I am teaching behavioural science executive students. But rather than asking the group to fill out both columns, I ask them to fill in one column or the other. Every single time, I have found that the lists written by the people who are reflecting on the last five years are much longer, and more ambitious overall, than the lists by those who are thinking forward to the next five years.

And these are people who have elected to attend a course for business leaders! By default, they are expecting major future changes, right?

So what gives?

The majority of us see ourselves as having experienced many major changes when we look backwards. However, we also imagine that the next five years will not bring any great or significant change. We assume we will stay more or less the same. But this is simply a behavioural science illusion. Regardless of age, we tend to underestimate the amount we can achieve in the medium term going forward, yet we view ourselves as having made major progress in the medium term in the past!¹

So our future selves are underachievers; and, in contrast, our past selves are overachievers. Imagine what could have been achieved if you had consciously set a big-thinking goal for the last two, five or even ten years and committed to small steps to achieve it? Rather than striving for the next pay cheque, the next pay rise or the next promotion, you could have aimed for something bigger. You could have aimed for something different. You could have been striving for something you really wanted. Believe me: thinking big and taking small steps that support your ideas can reinvent you!

But, as humans, we are impatient. We generally favour a lofty goal over short periods because we are excited to walk in the shoes of our improved selves sooner rather than later. And that's pretty understandable. But it also sets us up for failure. Very often we can't make the changes that we need to over the short term without completely restructuring our lives. Voices in your head start shouting that it's too hard, that you are unhappy and life is too short. So you quit. And when you do so, you learn a lesson: you are a quitter. Next

time you plan a life change, you are reminded that you are a quitter – so why even bother starting something?

When thinking big, it is never all or nothing. Regular small positive actions have a disproportionately large positive effect on major life outcomes.

Have you ever tried to lose weight over a short period by cutting carbs only to fall off the wagon . . . by eating a wagon loaded with pasta? It's the same phenomenon. Or maybe there is some long-standing New Year's resolution that you always make but never keep to? Quitting smoking, reading more, drinking less alcohol? Maybe every 31 December you pledge to overhaul your career, but come 31 January you are back on autopilot wishing for the weekend. All too often, by the end of January we lack the energy and motivation to follow through on our best-laid plans. That's because short-term goals set most of us up for long-term failure.

We are creatures of routine. The easiest way to ensure that you do not achieve a goal is to jump in too quickly. Of course, there are always exceptions to this rule – I'm sure you've read plenty of stories of people who turned their life around in two weeks. But we don't infer a trend from an anomaly. Besides, if you scratch the surface, you might find their story is much more complicated. Behind a spectacular two-week turnaround there's often years of structured and sustained effort. It is this effort that causes the success. It doesn't make for a neat newspaper headline or an exciting party anecdote – but it's the truth.

In most cases, the person who is deemed an overnight success has long been quietly honing their craft and creating opportunities so they can finally be recognized for their expertise.

There is real truth in the saying: ‘Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.’

Setting your sights on a medium-term horizon of two, five or even ten years allows for real change. It is also a sweet spot: you will not feel a significant drop in happiness if you begin with small steps that are peppered into your usual routine. Your efforts will not disrupt your schedule too aggressively, but these small steps still accumulate, and add up to something big. This is a key insight from behavioural science:

Small changes that are actioned regularly have disproportionate effects on our life outcomes.

This brings me back to Katie, Reyansh and Juan. Though the outcomes in their scenarios are totally different, the problem is the same. Reyansh hasn’t been back to university because he’s told himself he isn’t organized enough. But being organized is a basic administrative skill that can be learned. If you can make a cup of coffee and cash up a till, you can learn how to organize your time. Similarly, his failure to commit to anything is symptomatic of a fear of failure. Despite being clever and capable, Reyansh has held himself back by never pushing himself outside his comfort zone. He doesn’t believe change is possible.

Katie, on the other hand, has never asked what she wants for herself. It goes without saying that she is also very capable and clever, but she’s internalized a story of what success looks like, and – even though it isn’t right for her – she has doggedly stuck to it. ‘What will happen if I try to do something else?’ she thinks. ‘What will my friends say? My parents? What if I can’t pay my mortgage?’

Juan is stuck because of *status quo bias*. He has hit a plateau and has not yet taken the time to discover what he can

control in order to get himself out of it. His job is like a comfort blanket, and while he craves change, needing this comfort is holding him back.

What might happen if Katie, Reyansh and Juan worked to overcome their biases and took a medium-term approach towards changing their career?

A two-year journey is enough time for Katie to set up a boutique marketing consultancy of her own. Why? Well, that two-year window would give Katie enough time to disentangle the tasks in her job that she likes from those she does not, register a new company, hire her first members of staff and pivot to a happier working life.

A seven-year journey is enough time for Reyansh to become a practising psychotherapist. How? By tracking backwards and looking at the things he's liked doing in his different jobs, Reyansh can identify talents – like his people skills – and, with this discovery under his belt, choose a university course that leverages those talents. Seven years is sufficient for him to complete university while holding on to his barista job part-time, and then he can make the transition to full-time practice.

A four-year journey is enough time for Juan to work on the things that are holding him back so he can progress to managing director. What is holding him back? Well, for one, the tendency for others in the organization to misinterpret his easy-going manner as a lack of senior leadership potential. Once the biases of others are recognized, they can be tackled effectively. In a four-year window, Juan can invest in honing his confidence and authority so he can make his added value clearer to senior colleagues in a series of regular catch-ups he takes the liberty of scheduling. Juan is up to that challenge.

What will happen if *you* go on a medium-term journey and think big?

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

When we go on a journey, we need a map. For the journey you are about to embark on, this book is your map. It will help you plan out and navigate your medium-term expedition. Because we are all unique in our ambitions, you will each have a different journey length. However, the process that all of you go through will essentially be the same. You're going to set intentions to unlock new abilities and skills, and gain access to new opportunities.

You will take the time to identify the obstacles that are standing in your way. We often put obstacles in our own way. Obstacles are also, either consciously or unconsciously, caused by the actions of others. These others could be your colleagues, your friends or your family – or a combination of all three. New abilities may be needed to allow you to successfully navigate around such obstacles.

Most of us face both of these barriers. We hold ourselves back, and we are held back. This book uses cutting-edge behavioural science research to help circumvent these obstacles.

I have personally taken the time to think big. This has led me to realize that there are a number of distinct topics that need to be tackled, and there is a systematic way of doing so. The creation and maintenance of a big-thinking goal has six steps that you need to work through to give yourself the best chance of completing it.

First, there must be something well-defined to aim for. You need a big-thinking **goal**. This is what you visualize when you think big. What is your goal? What does your future self look like? When deciding what this goal is, you will also need to identify the activities that allow you to achieve it. These activities are like stepping stones across a

lake (or pond, depending on how ambitious you plan to be), and they are the small steps that you will take in order to realize your big-thinking goal.

Second, you need to find **time** to take those small steps. More than that, you need to recognize that humans have a tendency to be impatient – we favour spending time engaged in activities that bring us immediate gratification. In contrast, the activities that move you forward have pay-offs that are in the future. Tools from behavioural science can help you prioritize your journey and stick to your intended path, giving you the best chance of realizing your big-thinking goal sooner rather than later.

Third, your own cognitive biases have the potential to sabotage your big thinking. Looking **inside** yourself and learning what these biases are is essential. Avoiding being trapped by your own biases is paramount to staying on your chosen trajectory.

Fourth, the cognitive biases of others can hinder and derail your progression. Looking to the **outside** world and identifying what these biases are, and learning how to navigate around them, will ensure that your best-laid plans aren't scuppered by other people.

Fifth, understanding how the physical **environment** that you spend your time in affects the possibility of you realizing your big-thinking goal is an essential component to moving forward. No matter what your working environment is like at the moment, insights from behavioural science will allow you to make small tweaks to your surroundings that will support your new endeavour.

Last, but certainly not least, in order to follow through and realize your big thinking, it is necessary to harness and hone **resilience**. Resilience, put simply, is not giving up on your big-thinking goal. Sounds good in principle, but how

can you do it in practice? Understanding how your own reactions to interactions and circumstances affect how resilient you are will allow you to make minor changes in behaviour that can have large returns over the next few years.

These are the keys to changing gears in your life. To recap, they are:

- **Goal**
- **Time**
- **Inside**
- **Outside**
- **Environment**
- **Resilience**

These six topics define the content of the six chapters that make up the core of this book. Embedded within each of these chapters is a series of behavioural science insights. Each insight can improve the odds of you succeeding in realizing your big-thinking goal by taking regular small steps, starting today. However, what works for one person may not work for another. You will learn what works for you by trying the exercises, and using the tools that appeal most to your own experience. While you might choose to work through only some exercises, all the behavioural science insights listed in each chapter are worth considering. Understanding and remembering them will help you navigate your big-thinking journey that little bit more easily.

It might be that when you think big you discover two, three or four big ambitions that you want to shoot for. In order to work on these most effectively, I would recommend that you pick your top priority, and go through the book developing a plan for this one goal only. Then you might want to work through the book again, with your second and then

your third big goal in mind. And while this book is focused primarily on the world of work, you can use these techniques to make your big thinking come to fruition in any area of your life. Perhaps you want to learn a language, write a novel or run a marathon – or all three! The processes detailed in the chapters that follow can help you get on track in any field.

Get this right once, and you can lean on the approach time and time again. It will become like a ‘rinse, wash and repeat’ for avoiding the biases and blind spots that *used* to hold you back.

So are you ready to think big, take small steps and build the career you want? Then let’s get going . . .

Happy planning!

CHAPTER 2

GOAL

IS THE STORY YOU TELL ABOUT YOURSELF TRUE?

When I was growing up in Ireland, I was terrified of needles. Really terrified. From convincing a friend that looked nothing like me to stand in for me, to passing out and requiring multiple stitches in my head, having blood drawn was always a dramatic event. My father likes to tell the story of him sitting in a doctor's waiting room chatting amiably to a nun while I was getting my blood taken. A nurse popped her head around the door and asked him to come inside. 'Your daughter is very distressed,' she said. 'Perhaps you should be with her when the needle goes in. I can see from her records that she has previously fainted.'

The nun looked at my father in disbelief and exclaimed, 'Shame on you! You should have been in there all this time. Poor little mite. A child needs their dad at times like this!'

My dad stood up slowly and responded, 'My daughter is twenty-five.'

My needle phobia continued to haunt me throughout the

rest of my twenties. It sounds hilarious in hindsight, but the cold sweats, shaking, nausea and fainting weren't funny to me at the time. So when I was told that I had type 1 diabetes in 2011, when I had just entered my thirties, it had a particularly sharp edge. I feel I took the news that I needed to inject myself with insulin five times a day for the rest of my life pretty calmly, given my severe phobia. I simply asked the consultant how long I was going to live without insulin because I had no intention of injecting. In my eyes, my quality of life would be zero, so what was the point?

This statement was taken so seriously that I was given a firm lecture about the possibility of being committed into an institution involuntarily. I was also told I would not be allowed to leave the hospital that night until I had injected successfully.

Today I inject five times a day, often in public without being noticed, and it's no big deal. While before I held tightly to the belief that I had an unshakeable fear of needles, my personal narrative has well and truly changed.

The power of our own narratives to shape both our actions and inactions is tremendous.

Narratives cut across all aspects of our lives, including our ability to think big and make things happen in our careers.

IS SOMETHING ALREADY BLOCKING YOUR PATH?

When we start to formulate any medium-term plan, the first thing we need to do is set a big-thinking goal. Otherwise you won't know when you've reached your destination. However, there is a crucial step that comes ahead of establishing

your goal. Before you put pen to paper and conjure up images of what you will be doing in a few years, stop and think about the mental barriers that stand in the way of you visualizing the career of your dreams.

Have you ever thought about creating a podcast, only to push the thought out of your head because you have no experience of any of the stages of podcast creation? Have you ever considered learning how to fly a helicopter, only to file it away with all the other wishful-thinking projects? Have you ever wanted to go rambling around the world for months on end, only to smile and think it's just a pipe dream?

Do you have an idea of the person you want to be, but it seems so out of reach that you have already scaled back your ambition?

It is not too hard to formulate a plan that will enable you to achieve your big-thinking goal, once you have a final destination in your mind's eye. Later in this chapter, I will give you some behavioural science insights which, if followed, will help you on your big-thinking journey. These insights will ensure that you intentionally move towards ME+.

ME+ is the person you will be after you have realized your big-thinking. It is the person you will be when you finish your medium-term expedition. ME+ has the career that you visualize when you think big. Soon, you will do this visualization and create an image of ME+.

But before that, let's do the hard bit and uncover any personal narratives that may be holding you back . . .

What stories are you telling yourself that stand in the way of your success?