



**DISCOVERING
OPPORTUNITY
Within Uncertainty**

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What You Can Do

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Dedicated to our unsung heroes - the healthcare professionals who continue to put their physical and mental health at risk to save the rest of us mortals. Thank you.



Contents

**Why Do Some People Achieve More Than
Others? 01**

**The 1st Mindset Shift:
Hope to Faith. 04**

**The 2nd Mindset Shift:
Control to Leverage 06**

**The 3rd Mindset Shift:
Fear to Focus 09**

One Last Thing... 11

About The Author 12



00

Why Do Some People Achieve More Than Others?

Since I was a child, I have been preoccupied with answering one question - “How?” Whenever I saw someone doing something that I wanted to do, I would become obsessed with trying to figure out how they did it. It turns out, as humans we all have that same obsessive tendency from birth.

We see others walking upright and we aspire to do the same. However, as we get older and the constraints of the real world are imposed upon us, that childlike curiosity disappears. We become creatures of comfort and habit once we have our basic needs met. And when those needs are in danger of being compromised, we revert to our primal instincts and protect our world at all costs.

This basic human behaviour is the backdrop against which the Covid-19 pandemic played out. No matter who you are or where you live, the pandemic affected us all in some way, shape or form. But, we all handled it in different ways.

When the first wave of “The Covidness” hit Australia and lockdowns were announced, I reached out to my clients and those in my circles who had been kind to me over the years to see how they were doing. Sadly, I heard such painful stories. On top of the daily challenges of dealing with their now stuck at home partners and kids, it seems their jobs and businesses were severely impacted.

One client shared the story of how one of their long term best clients had turned nasty, demanding money owed to them for breach of contract. Another shared how worried they were about paying the bills when they couldn’t open the doors to their business. I also heard the sadness in the voices of people who felt helpless that they could not visit ailing parents living in separate homes.

It seems the uncertainty of the situation at hand was crippling everyone in my circles and I felt like I had to do something to help them cope with the uncertainty ahead.

I thought back to the days when I was running my consulting firm, “BLKMGK”, and

managing a team of 13 staff on multiple project sites. I battled several bouts of uncertainty when contracts were blocked, the local economy crashed and projects ended without being extended. My fellow business folk would always be talking about times being tough and how much of a struggle it was, but I always had a different perspective.

I believed that no matter what is going on in the world, somewhere, somehow, someone is always making money. *Why couldn't that be me?* I just needed to find out who is doing what I wanted to do and *how* are they doing it. The relentless pursuit of those questions allowed me to get through those dark times.

So I took what I discovered during my early years in business and used it as a foundation to start doing daily videos to lift people's spirits. I posted the videos on LinkedIn which allowed me to share my Entrepreneurial mindset and principles with those who needed some practical positivity. Many said they found great comfort from my energy and stories to help them get through some of the darkest times in their lives. The videos gave them something more useful to focus on than the story around them.

After finishing the series, I took the audio from the videos and created a podcast called "Business as Usual: Clarity and Confidence During Uncertain Times". This enabled me to reach and help more people over a longer timeframe as countries continued to go in and out of lockdown.

The Brutal Truth About Dark Times

While my work helped others get through some of the darkest times of their life, here's the brutal truth. Dark times will continue to come and go in various ways throughout your life. How you handle them is what makes you survive and thrive, or wither and die.

The biggest tool to help you survive the dark times is your mind. Strengthening your mind will decrease the negative impact of dark moments in the same way that exercising makes you stronger. Imagine if you had the clarity and confidence to handle *anything* thrown at you - how would that impact your business, your career and even your life?

Sure, economies are starting up again as vaccination programs are rolling out, so there is some hope, but over the next decade you will experience change like you have never experienced before.

According to EY's "Global Capital Confidence Barometer" which surveyed 2,400 C-Suite executives in 54 countries, 68% are expecting to return to pre-pandemic profitability between 2022 and 2024. This means there is a tonne of work being done right now to transform companies to thrive in this new era of business.

Business is never a solo game. Companies always operate within an ecosystem of customers, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders. This means that any companies that do business with those companies, will also have to change to keep up. And since work is a big part of our lives, if you are working for one of those companies, you will be exposed to an incredible amount of change at a rapid rate and expected to cope without issues. As I said in a recent Keynote Presentation for a client, “The evolution of the past will be nothing compared to the revolution of the future”.

For the skeptics who doubt the level of change coming, consider the world we live in today. You can hit a button on your phone and summon food, transport and even a potential life partner. Just a few years ago, a phone was only used to do one thing - make phone calls. Today, your phone is just a single app on your phone. Mind blown.

All this convenience stems from one single technology invention - Apple’s iPhone. It was a catalyst to impact nine different industries by creating new jobs and transforming consumerism like never before. All that from a single piece of technology. Can you imagine what is coming when multiple emerging technologies like autonomous driving, augmented/virtual reality, blockchain, quantum computing, robotics and artificial intelligence enter our everyday lives? This is why I believe the evolution of the past will be microscopic compared to the revolution of the future.

But if you view this change from a place of fear, doubt and uncertainty, you’ll never be able to discover the opportunity ahead.

Inside this guide you’ll learn the three most important mindset shifts you need to make to give yourself the best possible chance of success when navigating the uncertainty ahead. Call it resilience, grit, strategic agility, whatever. To me it’s just good old fashioned principles of motivational psychology that have kept me in business for over 15 years.

At the end of each chapter is a focus question for you to use with your leadership team. During my strategy sessions with clients I use a bunch of calibrating questions, but these are the main ones designed specifically to spark ideas and strategies to help your people discover opportunity within uncertainty.

I hope it serves you well by giving you and your people clarity and confidence to handle any challenge that arises. I wish you nothing but success as you navigate the road ahead.

Dream, Build, Inspire, Lead!

AJ~

01

The 1st Mindset Shift: Hope to Faith

While these two terms might sound interchangeable, their definitions give a stark difference in outcomes:

HOPE: A feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen

FAITH: Complete trust or confidence in someone or something

The nuances between the two can best be described in “The Stockdale Paradox”, a story told by business author Jim Collins.

Admiral James Stockdale was the highest-ranking military officer at the “Hoa Lo Prison”, also known as the “Hanoi Hilton”, the infamous prison camp used for American POWs during the Vietnam War. Admiral Stockdale spent eight years there until his release in February 1973.

In an interview with Admiral Stockdale, Jim asks him how he managed to survive while facing so much uncertainty about his future. Admiral Stockdale replies, “I never wavered in my faith. Not only would I get out, but I would also turn it into the defining moment of my life that in retrospect I would not trade.”

Jim then asks Admiral Stockdale who amongst the prisoners didn’t make it out of the camp as strong as he did. He replies, “Oh that’s easy. It’s the optimists. The optimists were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come and go and then the following year it would be another Christmas, and it too would come and go. So they suffered from a broken heart.”

From my vantage point here in Melbourne Australia, Admiral Stockdale’s experiences certainly played out remarkably similar during the second wave of the pandemic. Going through what many around the world labelled a brutal lockdown, the six months that we endured saw many messages of hope float around the local community:

“It’s just two more weeks to go - come on Melbourne, we can do this!”

And just like Admiral Stockdale’s colleagues, when those two weeks came and went, we were still in lockdown. People’s spirits began to dampen. Depression crept in for some, while others embraced anger as their emotion of choice. As the months dragged on, many began to despise the government for not managing the situation more effectively in the first place. Finally, after six months of high tensions, case numbers began to fall and restrictions eased, allowing many to make up for lost time. Sadly though, some never made it through.

The key lesson here is that we need to develop faith in ourselves and our abilities. I always say in my presentations and programs that as Entrepreneurial Leaders, we need to believe unequivocally that we too will triumph over any challenges that come our way. Our dreams and our passion for those dreams will help us get through the dark times.

FOCUS QUESTION

**How can we help our people
build faith in themselves and
their abilities?**



Admiral Stockdale reunited with his family, February 1973. Source: San Diego Magazine

02

The 2nd Mindset Shift: Control to Leverage

During the pandemic, I noticed the emergence of three very distinct types of business behaviours that I labelled “The Drifters”, “The Shifters” and “The Innovators”.

“The Drifters” buried their heads in the sand hoping for the crisis to blow over. “The Shifters” acknowledged the crisis and flicked a switch to go online to continue to do business. But “The Innovators” went beyond and did something incredibly special. They dug deep inside to find the courage to reimagine the way their business could be done. In doing so, they unlocked incredible opportunity that never existed before.

In my keynote presentation “A Crisis is a Terrible Thing to Waste”, I explore several examples of innovative thinking during the pandemic but one of the best is automotive manufacturer Nissan.

Being active in several regions around the world, Nissan marketing teams began to notice a problem in January, when the pandemic emerged in China. By Chinese New Year, a deeper story began to unravel as visits to dealerships ceased overnight with no signs of recovery happening anytime soon.

As the pandemic progressed throughout the world, Nissan teams were glued to their dashboards watching their key metric of “Dealership Visits” plummet around the world. This sudden decline in numbers sparked much fear and confusion throughout the entire organisation globally.

At first glance, the situation seemed grim, but then something interesting happened. At the same time dealership visits were rapidly declining, another metric was doing just the opposite. The number of visitors to Nissan’s digital assets were growing exponentially. It seemed that customers were still engaging with the brand even though they were not visiting dealerships.

The Digital, Sales and Marketing Teams at Nissan scrambled quickly to take advantage of this incredible unprecedented opportunity and went all-in on developing a new

digital-first strategy for the launch of their newest electric vehicle, “Ariya”. The launch of the new vehicle was to coincide with the relaunch for the brand which involved coordination across 125+ global markets. This task would have been crazy enough as a traditional face to face launch, but since many markets would be in lockdown, the entire event needed to be delivered online.

Once the decision had been made to go online, Madhu Nutakki, Nissan’s Chief Customer Experience Digital Officer was faced with a key question:

“How do you keep employees motivated during a downturn while launching a global icon during a pandemic?”

Embracing what they could control, Nissan Leaders steered their teams through the crisis to create the perfect storm for “Ariya” - no longer just a car, but a symbol for a new way of doing business for an 87-year-old company.



The Nissan “Ariya” - The car that became a symbol for the new Nissan. Source: Electrek

Leveraging their digital strategy, 1.2 million people visited Nissan’s new Ariya website within the first four days. During these visits, they submitted their vehicle configuration preferences such as favourite features, colours and drivetrain platforms. Now the company had vital data to make more precise decisions regarding ordering parts and systems for different regions, to more accurately match demand. This new data-driven precision presents an incredibly valuable competitive advantage, given that global supply chains were affected by the pandemic.

What makes Nissan’s decision to adapt truly remarkable is that you have to remember

that all large organisations have been built upon principles of command and control. Everything is executed according to a predetermined strategy formulated years in advance. This approach is usually adequate until a black swan event like a pandemic occurs and then those plans go out the window. As former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson puts it, “Everybody’s got a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

What Nissan did spectacularly well was to abandon their control mindset in favour of “Leverage” - one of the 40 principles of my Entrepreneurial Thinking philosophy. They saw a trend and moved quickly to turn it into an opportunity that positioned themselves to thrive in this new era of business.

The key lesson here is to stop trying to control everything according to pre-existing conditions and plans. Look for what *is* happening instead of what you want to happen. Then leverage the opportunity to reimagine the way business could be done. When resources are limited, you have to become more resourceful.

FOCUS QUESTION

What facts about the current situation can we embrace to leverage into a valuable opportunity?

03

The 3rd Mindset Shift: Fear to Focus

After shifting from hope to faith and then re-examining your operational strategy to shift from control to leverage, you will be on a path to recover quicker from the economic catastrophes of the pandemic. But this last mindset shift is the most important one as things could go horribly wrong if you don't protect the first two shifts you have made.

During the pandemic, Todd Herman, the author of "The Alter Ego Effect" and a global expert in peak performance psychology, interviewed 73 CEOs of companies ranging from \$2.2 million to \$511 million. He discovered something fascinating.

Todd's interviews revealed the existence of three types of companies out there: "The Fear Focused", "The Unfocused" and "The Strategy Focused" - very similar to my "Drifters", "Shifters" and "Innovators".

Todd discovered that the "Fear Focused" group:

>> Consumed five times more news media than those in the "Strategy Focused" group

>> Mentioned the term "Coronavirus" or "Covid-19" more frequently than the "Strategy Focused" group

>> Spoke more about the situation at hand, unlike the "Strategy Focus" group who were talking about plans to move forward

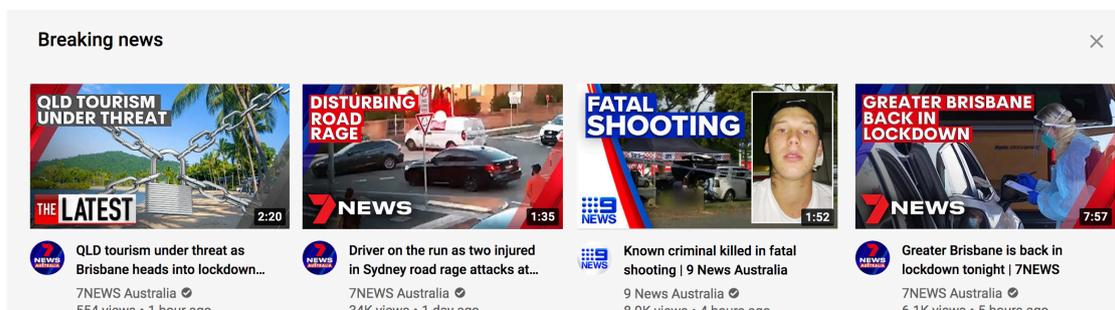
>> Used negative future pacing words 13 times more such as "struggle", "fear", "hard" and "difficult". E.g. "It's a *struggle* right now. With so much *fear* around, it's *hard* to see a path forward and *difficult* to know how things will turn out."

Now what is really interesting is that the "Strategy Focused" group used the same words but in an entirely different context:

“I know we’re going to *struggle* to adapt and we might have a lot of *fear* around change. But if we have the courage to do the *hard* work, we can make it through these *difficult* times.”

It is amazing how the exact same words can have an entirely different meaning depending on where your focus lies. This is why it’s so important to develop and protect your mindset.

The key lesson here is to stop consuming so much news media. Once upon a time, the news used to be the only way to receive facts about a certain situation, however as communication mediums have evolved, the level of drama and sensationalism required to cut through the noise has increased exponentially.



Sensationalism from Australian News Media Channels on YouTube

Unlike other forms of entertainment, news drama goes nowhere. The characters don’t evolve and the story never really gets resolved. So the more news stories that you consume, the tension inside you just builds and builds and starts to impact your mind negatively. As Entrepreneurial Leaders we cannot afford to be distracted by drama. We need to shift our mindset from Fear to Focus and protect it by being somewhat ruthless on what we consume.

FOCUS QUESTION

What positive stories can we create, collect and share to inspire our people to stay mission focused?

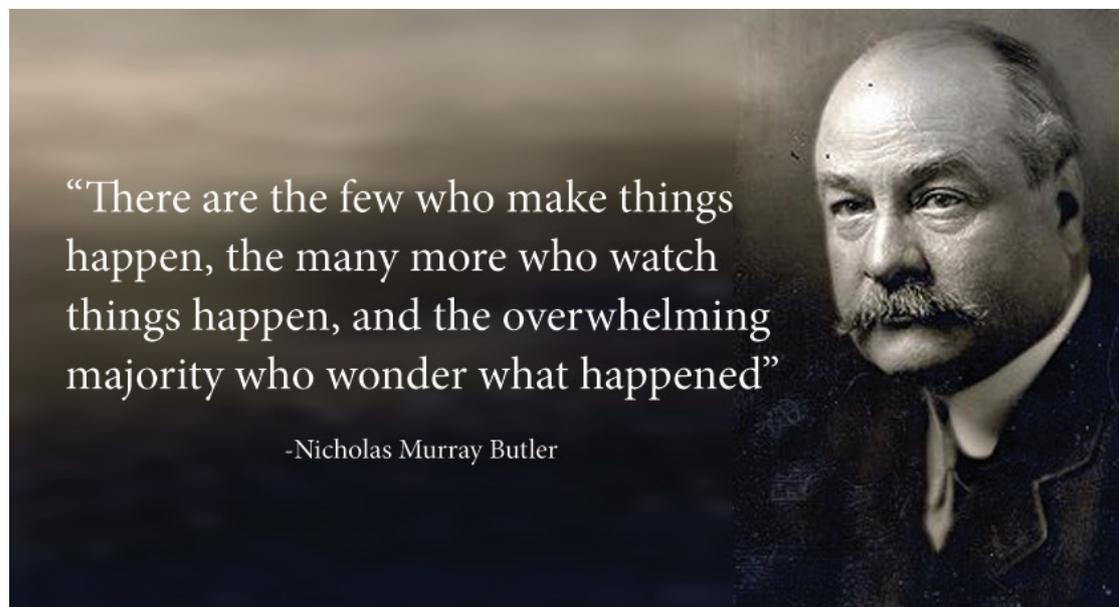
04

One Last Thing...

The three focus questions inside this guide will get you started on the path to restoring clarity and confidence in this post-pandemic operating environment. When you move out of the fear zone you'll start to see opportunities that you never saw before simply because you shifted your focus.

If you would like to go deeper and create tangible and sustainable change within your company, please get in touch to explore your unique challenges and see which one of my presentations or facilitation sessions might be right for you. You can email me at speaker@ajkulatunga.com or connect with me via the socials on the next page.

As I do on stage during my presentations, I'd like to close this conversation with you by sharing one of my favourite quotes from American Educator - Nicholas Murray Butler who in 1931 famously remarked about the three types of people in the world today:



So my final question to you is, *which group do you want to belong to?*



AJ Kulatunga is a Keynote Speaker and Business Strategist who helps organisations adapt, innovate and lead to thrive.

Leveraging his experiences from a 15-year career in business and technology, AJ works with leaders, teams and channel partners to address high priority challenges and build business growth.

Connect with AJ and start a conversation around what you would like to achieve this year:



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