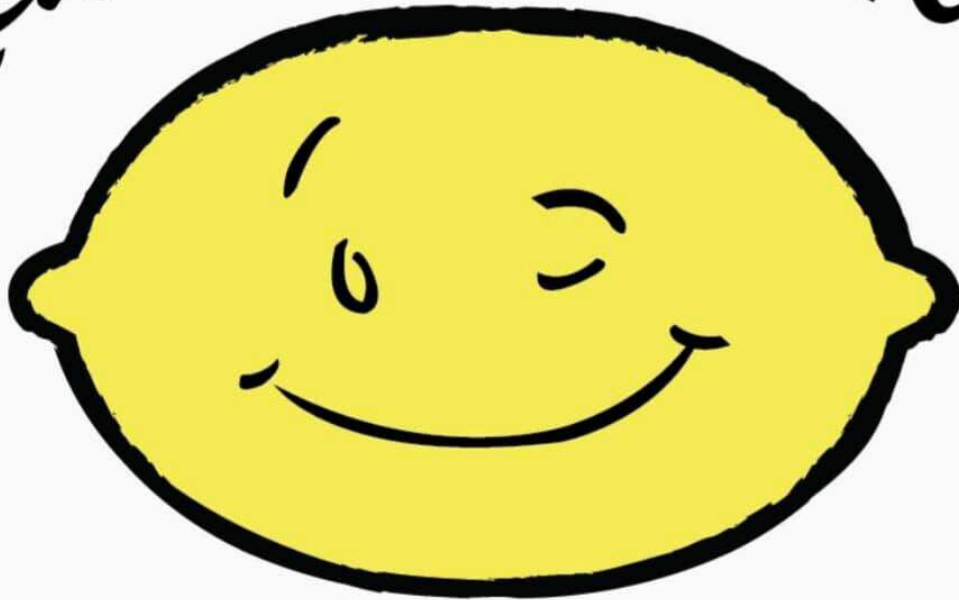


Lemon Shaker



"Shake your Thinking to Shake your Life"

A book designed to support your understanding of the
Three Principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness.

Mitchell Kuhnert

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Preface: The Lemon Shaker Legacy

Every journey begins with a spark of inspiration, and for me, that spark came in the form of a band called Lemon Shaker. It was more than just a musical endeavor; it became a metaphor for the principles and insights I would later explore in this book.



Years ago, I found myself performing with a talented group of musicians, led by a gifted guitarist who doubled as a graphic designer. One day, as we brainstormed a name for our band, Lemon Shaker emerged—a playful and memorable title that perfectly encapsulated our laid-back, energetic vibe. To further the brand, my friend created an adorable lemon character that adorned our t-shirts, proudly proclaiming, "We play it, and you shake it!" Our little band had a joyful run that lasted just six months, but the legacy of Lemon Shaker lingered far beyond our final performance.

As I transitioned from playing music to diving into the world of personal development and the Three Principles, Lemon Shaker became a guiding light for my consulting business. The name itself holds profound meaning: just as a lemon can be sour when eaten alone, our thoughts can turn bitter and unproductive when filled with negativity. However, with the right balance—the right "lemon recipe"—these same lemons can create delightful, refreshing experiences that brighten our lives. Similarly, our thoughts can lead to positive outcomes when nurtured with care and intention.

Despite some advising against the use of the name Lemon Shaker for my business, I felt a deep connection to it. The name represents not only my musical past but also the optimism of transforming sour moments into sweet experiences. It serves as a reminder that our approach to life—our thoughts and how we perceive challenges—can lead us toward joy, growth, and deeper connections with ourselves and others.

As you read this book, I hope you find inspiration in the stories and principles shared within these pages. Like the flavor of a well-made lemon meringue pie, the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought can bring richness, clarity, and positivity into your life.

And who knows? Perhaps one day, you'll proudly sport your own Lemon Shaker t-shirt, embodying the spirit of joyful living and the transformative power of thought. Thank you for joining me on this journey; let's shake things up together!

**“Be the reason
someone feels
welcomed, seen,
heard, valued, loved
and supported.”**

Introduction:

The journey of understanding the Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—began for me during an exciting but challenging period in my life. I stumbled upon the teachings of Sydney Banks, which resonated deeply with me and provided a framework that transformed how I viewed my experiences and reshaped every interaction in my life from that moment onward.

In June 2006, I was a 31-year-old man who had recently gotten married (for the first time—more on this topic later), taken a new job in school administration, bought a house, and moved to the great state of Iowa. I knew very little about Iowa, except that it was in the Midwest, where I had spent my entire life, and that my wife at the time was about to start medical school there. To say I was undergoing significant changes at that point in my life would be an understatement. I remember starting my job at Stilwell Junior High as the associate principal and athletic director. On my first day, as I sat at my desk, the thought that ran through my mind was, “I have no idea what my job is, but here we go!”

One of the first people to reach out to me was an amazing woman named Claudia Henning. She was the director of the West Des Moines Youth Justice Initiative and scheduled a meeting to welcome me to the city and discuss how the YJI program would impact the students at my school and how I could support them. She explained that her group had been learning about a new concept called the Three Principles, aiming to place it at the center of their work with youth in the restorative process. In our first meeting, she informed me that I could take a class through United Way the following week to learn about it, and that it would benefit a young administrator. Since I thought, “She seems pretty important, so I better take this class!” I signed up.

The Introduction to the Three Principles class was hosted at a local church in Des Moines. It was a Monday-through-Friday class that ran from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. My goal in this section is to share my thoughts on the first day of the class. This was my first professional learning in my brand-new administrative role, so I was eager. I dressed in my new slacks and a shirt and tie. I packed my notebook, pens, and a new professional computer bag, ready to learn. Since I didn't know the town very well, I left with enough time to navigate the new landscape and arrive ten minutes early, hoping to impress the instructor and be as prepared as possible. However, when I arrived, the parking lot was almost empty. I thought, “This doesn't look like the right place.”

As I walked into the church, the old wood and books filled the air with a familiar scent; the class was held in the church library. It was set up like most church libraries, with books on one end and a serving area on the other, reminiscent of my church in Fall Creek, WI, Saint James Trinity Lutheran. A few others were already there when I entered the space. I asked whether this was the location for the Three Principles class and was greeted with a warm, "Yes, it is! Welcome!"

I looked around and noticed some furniture arranged in a circle. It wasn't traditional desks or tables; just two soft chairs and two loveseat-style couches. Quickly, I chose the single soft chair, thinking I preferred not to sit with anyone on the loveseat. I settled in, took out a legal pad and pen, and noticed that others were in the kitchen area enjoying the coffee. Although I am not a coffee drinker, I appreciated the aroma. I was ready for class to start at 8:00 a.m. and observed the interactions among the people in the room. A few more people entered and found seats in the circle. However, time kept ticking, and it was 8:30 a.m. before we had everyone seated and began introductions. My mind was racing, somewhat frustrated with the late start, as I thought, "This isn't a great first impression; we aren't respecting everyone's time."

Corinne Lambert was the United Way instructor for this class, and little did I know that she had a solid plan for delivering her message, but my mind was not prepared to learn. Instead, I was preoccupied with all the wrong thoughts. I was surprised that only four people were in the class. I felt uncomfortable in the vulnerability of the circle arrangement and found myself judging the others in the class (who I am still friends with today). We were told we didn't need to take notes. At one point, the woman sitting across from me fell asleep, and I thought, "How rude!" I wondered, "Why doesn't the teacher wake her up? Should I say something?" When the class ended, I walked out feeling frustrated and a little angry, thinking I had wasted my time.

Day two had a very different feel for me. I set the alarm to wake up and get ready to be in class right at 8 a.m. I wasn't worried about impressing anyone, so I wore my jeans and a hoodie. I didn't bring my backpack and stopped at the gas station to get a hot chocolate before arriving, knowing that everyone else would be drinking coffee, which I don't like. On this day, I chatted with a few classmates about their thoughts on day one and felt good that everyone seemed a little surprised by the content of the class, which focused on Sydney Banks and his ideas about mind, thought, and consciousness.

The class started with some reflection on the content, and we all had to share. I explained my frustration, and some heads nodded in agreement while others listened. We began to talk about our own life experiences, and the instructor shared insights, pointing out how our thinking helped shape our experiences. I was particularly interested in hearing my classmates' experiences and started connecting the emotions everyone was expressing to my own thoughts. At some point, I lost track of time, and before I knew it, day two was over. I walked to my car really enjoying the time I spent with my new friends, and thankfully, nobody fell asleep that day!

Day three was the meat of the learning. We discussed the three components and watched some videos of Sydney Banks. He was a gray-haired Scottish welder who faced issues just like all of us do. While working with a counselor, he received the famous line: "Syd, you don't have problems; you just think you do." In that moment, Mr. Banks experienced the epiphany that changed his life forever, realizing how all of his life was created in his mind.

This idea was best explained through a simple analogy of a cup of tea. The MIND is like the hot water you put in the cup (Mind = Energy, not Brain), the THOUGHTS are the favored tea bags you add to the water, and the CONSCIOUSNESS is how the tea tastes. If you put in good thoughts, the tea tastes better; if you put in negative thoughts, it tastes bad. As I walked out that day, I thought, "Could it really be that simple?"

I didn't know it at the time, but the drive home that day marked my turning point as I reflected on my journey. I clearly remember walking out of class that day and noticing how perfect the weather was. It was sunny and warm, perfect for rolling the windows down and playing music on the car stereo really loud. I felt completely present during the drive home, with no worries in my mind, just fully absorbed in the amazing day. Now, I was excited about having two more days of class left.

This was a clear turning point for me, and I started feeling excited about how I could share this knowledge with others. My teacher's brain began crafting lesson plans for the future. I felt compelled to write this book to address each phase of life and how the Three Principles can support individuals, helping them experience that moment when they realize that life follows this pattern: Thought -> Feeling -> Action -> Result. Every human experience begins with thought, and the exciting part is that you can learn to control that thought better. I want this to serve as a reference guide that you can either read in its entirety or consult the section you need at the moment you require it.

Chapter 1: The Essence of the Three Principles

We will start our journey by defining the principles, or at least how I have brought them to life for myself. None of these principles can simply be explained; they must be taught through analogies. Just like when someone asks you to define the word "LOVE," you would need to talk about experiences, feelings, and provide examples. It's not easy if you have ever tried!

Let's begin with **MIND**. As a huge Star Wars fan, I find it safest to define the mind by comparing it to the FORCE. In "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope," Obi-Wan Kenobi describes the Force as "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together." This description emphasizes the Force as an interconnected source of energy that influences the universe and all beings within it, highlighting its mystical and overarching power in the Star Wars saga. The mind is not the physical matter of the brain; rather, it represents the energy in the system. It consists of electrical impulses and neurotransmitters that function like a highly sophisticated computer. In my experience, every person possesses an energy or aura that can be felt at some level. It's said that animals can pick up on this energy more than humans can, which I have witnessed with dogs throughout my life.

The mind can also be described in religious terms, which isn't traditionally allowed in a school environment, so I tended to avoid that topic. However, for me personally, the mind can be described as God's gift of life. We humans cannot explain the difference between being alive and being dead, but we can recognize it when we see it. Death is the absence of energy in the system. I believe the physics principle that energy cannot be created or destroyed means that when we die, our energy must go somewhere. Is the **MIND** our soul? Sydney Banks defined MIND as a combination of the universal mind and the personal mind. The universal mind, like the Force in Star Wars, is constant and unchangeable. The personal mind is how we use the Force, and it is in a perpetual state of change. We can only practice our understanding, much like Luke did in the movie. Science has taught me that we only use 10% of our brain, so I believe that some humans have tapped into more of their mind, just as Luke learned to use the Force. It's an exciting idea, although it can sound a little crazy to some people.

CONSCIOUSNESS represents our perceived reality at any moment. I like to use a DVD player to help describe consciousness, much like the tea cup analogy. The DVD player must be plugged into the power source (**MIND**), and then you insert a DVD into the player (**THOUGHT**). If you put in a comedy movie, you will laugh; if you put in a horror movie, you will be scared; or if you put in a Hallmark movie, you will feel love. In my class, I often describe the movie "The Blair Witch Project" and how it kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time. I was fully immersed, imagining myself in the woods with the characters. My stomach tightened, and I would jump out of my seat when something scary appeared suddenly. **CONSCIOUSNESS** is the experience we have while watching these movies, and we can all relate, having seen films ourselves. However, I remind everyone that when we watch a movie, we are only looking at flickering light bouncing off a screen in front of us. All the feelings we experience are created by our thoughts, yet nothing is actually happening to us. That realization was an "aha" moment for me, highlighting the power of my own thinking! Another close friend and Three Principles teacher, Tony Wilson—author of "You Are Enough"—coached me that humans all graduate from the University of MSU... and MSU stands for "Make Stuff Up!" We will definitely see this concept play out in every chapter of this book.

That brings us to the final principle: **THOUGHT**. Some might argue that it's the most important one and that it should come first. Most practitioners emphasize the order of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness, which I believe is valid; however, I have placed it last here because it is the aspect we can control the most. I read somewhere that humans have between 60,000 to 100,000 thoughts each day. While I don't have research to back this up, let's assume it's true for our discussion. Many of our thoughts go completely unnoticed. Thoughts like breathing, blinking, or digesting food aren't at the forefront of our awareness; they simply happen. Our brains are working to keep us alive, so we know these processes exist because they occur every day.

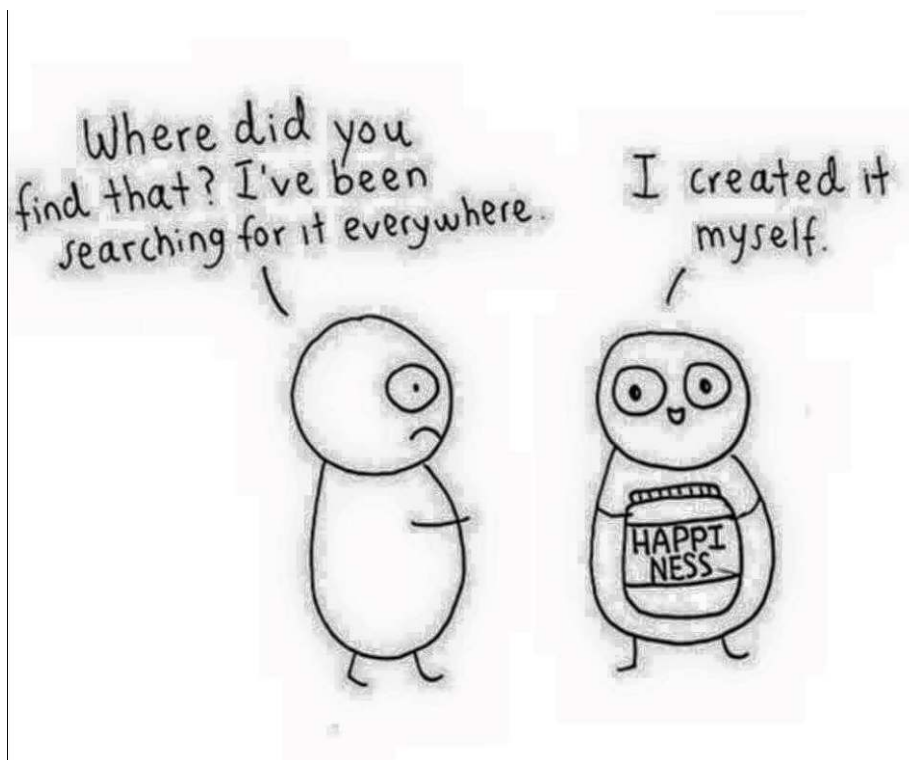
Then there are thoughts that create more intense feelings—thoughts like, "Will people even read this book?" or "Why did my high school girlfriend break up with me?" These are the thoughts where life gets particularly interesting.

In class, we use the River Analogy to discuss thought. Imagine a river flowing right past the front of your body; this river flows to the left, bends around, goes into your left ear, flows through your head, out your right ear, and bends around past you again. If we imagine this river as all our 100,000 thoughts, then when some of those thoughts flow past us, we can reach into the river and grab onto them.

Some examples that have impacted me the hardest in my life revolve around my divorces. Yes, I have had a few, and at night, when it got quiet, I would start grabbing onto certain thoughts like, "What is wrong with me?" and "Why did the love fade?" When I held onto those thoughts, I began to feel sad or angry. The tighter I squeezed those thoughts, the worse I felt.

The trick I want to share is to avoid grabbing onto thoughts that make you feel bad and instead focus on those that uplift you. We humans tend to latch onto the negative more easily. The next practice is to avoid holding onto any thought for too long. Learn to throw it back into the river more quickly. This practice is something we all must engage with, regardless of how much we understand thought.

The downside of the river analogy is that it forms a cycle; it keeps flowing past you. The next time those negative thoughts come back around, will you grab them, how quickly will you throw it back in? Or can you learn to focus on only those positive thoughts that create a positive feeling for yourself?



Chapter 2 : Babies

On the first day of class, we ask our students to use words that describe a newborn baby. We are talking about the moment when the baby is wrapped in a blanket and handed to the mother or father, and they see the baby for the first time. The words that come up most frequently are: cute, peaceful, loved, amazing, gift, or blessing. I realize that there are other experiences in this space, but for the most part, the birth of a new baby is awe-inspiring. I like to think of all babies as blank slates, being the closest to the universal mind at this stage. They are alive, and we can see the energy in them, but their primary goal at this time is to survive. Most of us do not have any memories from this phase of life. A baby must rely on others to survive, and that is the job of the parent.

We all start from the same place, and what happens next begins to shape our belief systems. No pressure, parents, but you are starting the programming very early. The good news is that you don't have to be perfect until they are about four years old. Start working on your own belief systems and bring the positive ones forward as you program your child. I remember walking out of the hospital with my daughter and thinking, "Holy sh*t, I am in charge of keeping you alive!" Yet, I was very motivated by the love I felt for her.

Babies are a big deal. The first three years of a baby's life are considered the most significant growth years. During this period, substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development occurs. Supporting good mental health development in babies is crucial for their overall well-being and growth. Here are some important practices parents can adopt:

1. **Responsive Caregiving:** Respond promptly to your baby's needs—feeding, comforting, and changing. This builds a strong attachment and helps the baby feel secure and valued.
2. **Emotional Availability:** Be emotionally present and attuned to your baby's signals. Engage in eye contact, smile, and use a soothing tone. This fosters a sense of safety and trust.
3. **Routine and Structure:** Establish regular routines for feeding, sleeping, and play. This helps babies feel secure and understand what to expect, contributing to their emotional stability.
4. **Positive Interaction:** Spend quality time interacting with your baby through talking, reading, singing, and playing. These activities enhance language skills and cognitive development while strengthening your bond.
5. **Model Healthy Emotions:** Display healthy emotional expression and regulation. Show your baby how to express feelings positively, as babies learn about emotions by observing their caregivers.
6. **Social Interactions:** Facilitate interactions with other babies and caregivers. Social play helps develop trust and communication skills, teaching babies the basics of relationships.
7. **Parental Self-Care:** Take care of your own mental health and well-being. Parents who practice self-care are better equipped to care for their babies, providing a more supportive and stable environment.

By adopting these practices, parents can lay a strong foundation for their baby's mental health, promoting resilience, emotional intelligence, and healthy relationships as they grow.



Chapter 3 : Childhood

I didn't personally learn about the Three Principles until I was 31, so I can't speak directly to how my childhood might have differed had I understood them earlier. However, I can share how these principles can be applied to my daughters, who are currently 7 and 10 years old. Alongside their experiences, I will recount a few of my own childhood memories and their lasting impacts.

One notable experience my daughter and I share is the flu while traveling in a car. For me, it happened on a school bus, while she experienced it in the car. This event left a lasting memory that affected me for several years afterward. I was on a bus during a summer trip to swimming lessons when, just as I was coming down with the flu, I got sick and vomited all over the front seat. I felt so embarrassed in front of the other kids. As a result, I stayed home sick for the remainder of that week and missed all the swimming lessons that summer.

Here, we see the power of thought. The following summer, I signed up for the same swim lessons, but my excitement about riding the bus had vanished. Instead, I felt overwhelming anxiety about getting on that bus again. Although I was perfectly healthy, the memories of the previous year haunted me. I started to think, "What if I get sick again? Will the other kids remember and make fun of me?" Those thoughts worked me up so much that I felt physically ill. Thankfully, my parents encouraged me to face my fears, and I successfully rode the bus to swimming lessons without any issues afterward. I needed that successful trip to reinforce that I would be okay, although I still felt some stomach nerves on subsequent trips.

My daughter mirrors this experience. At age 4, she became car sick on a trip from Iowa to Wisconsin to visit Grandma. Since then, she experiences car sickness on any journey longer than an hour. As we discuss upcoming trips, she starts to feel unwell, and she has often been sick on those journeys. I can see her anxiety building; despite her best efforts, she eventually tells me she feels sick in the back seat.

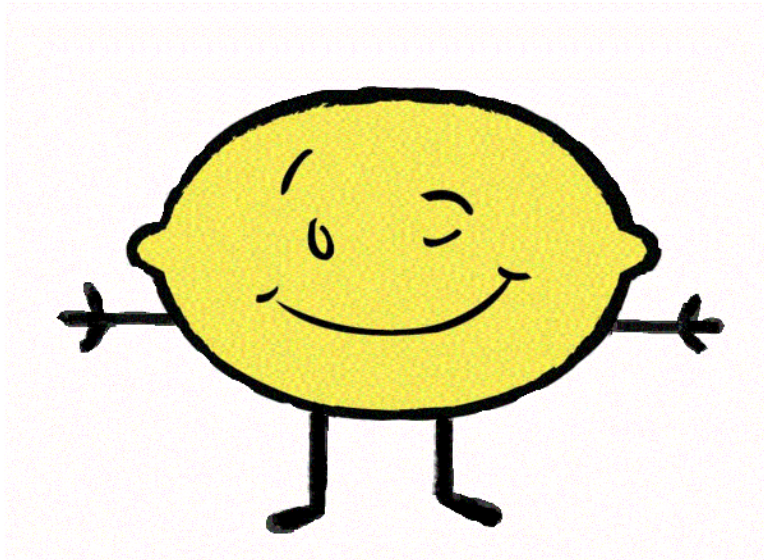
I understand that car sickness is common and that many people feel better sitting in the front seat, but if I can keep Adleigh distracted, we can usually manage. When she wears wristbands that apply pressure to specific points, she feels more confident. She dislikes taking medication for support, and believe me, I've tried that too. These examples illustrate how thoughts create feelings that lead to actions, sometimes resulting in undesirable outcomes.

The fascinating thing about children and the power of the Three Principles is that they have fewer life experiences and, therefore, less trauma than adults, making it easier for them to learn. Babies and kids are closer to the Universal Mind simply because they have less conditioning in their lives. If we can explain their thinking to them and demonstrate the control they already possess, they can start taking a proactive approach to their own thoughts. I frequently discuss my feelings with my girls, helping them understand where those feelings come from. I coach them through conflicts they have with friends, encouraging them to consider the other person's perspective. This approach seems to foster their empathy when they witness dynamics in their friend group.

As a parent, I continually remind myself that regulated adults raise regulated children. I often communicate my feelings to my girls, especially when they aren't brushing their teeth after the fourth reminder. I calmly express that I'm losing my patience. While I start off composed, I sometimes lose my temper by the fifth reminder, which makes me feel guilty. However, it shows them that if they don't want an upset dad, they can follow through with requests.

There are some wonderful children's books already available. One is "The Shimmering Secret," written by Karla Hansen, which is based on the Three Principles for kids. Another is "The Falling Raindrop," by Neil Johnson and Joe Chin. Both are excellent books to kickstart your journey into these concepts. I, too, will be writing a series of children's books featuring the main character, "Lemon Shaker." He is a lemon whose thinking can sometimes be sour, but at other times, it can make life really sweet!

Children are incredibly resilient, and as adults, we must adhere to the principles discussed in Chapter 2 to support their growth. I observe this in my role as an educator as well. When I see what some of my students manage in their lives while still showing up to school, I am amazed. Children nurtured in a supportive mental environment tend to be more resilient as adults. My youngest daughter exemplifies this with her propensity to make messes from time to time, something her parents often point out. Even as I write this sentence, she is using a towel on her chair to prevent spills from damaging it at the age of 7. She simply has more accidents than her older sister, which isn't a big deal. However, it's heartbreaking when I see her reaction after spilling water on the floor; she immediately begins to cry, fearing she has disappointed me. I hugged her and reassured her it was an accident. Her tears make me realize that my past responses might not have been calm, reinforcing her belief that she is clumsy and accident-prone. I need to correct my behavior and show an appropriate emotional response to accidents. As parents, we can always learn and strive to do better.



Chapter 4 : Teenagers!

This chapter could easily be a book of its own based on my experiences, but I will share the highlights of my time working with teenagers. I served as a math teacher and girls' basketball coach at Platteville High School in Platteville, WI, from 1999 to 2006 before moving to Iowa with my first wife to become a school administrator for grades 7-9 from 2006 to 2025. Along the way, I learned from several practitioners in this field. "The Spark Inside" by Ami Chen Mills-Naim was used by our Youth Justice Initiative with offending youth, and I also gained insights from Jack Pransky and Lori Carpenos through their book "Healthy Thinking/Feeling/Doing From the Inside Out."

Teenagers are at a stage where they are just beginning to take care of themselves, but their brains are not yet fully developed, requiring some support. Unfortunately, the last part of the brain to develop is the frontal lobe, which serves as the brain's "brake pedal." A clear example of this is "teen groupthink." Teenagers are more likely to make poor decisions when they are with their peers. Many of us can recall personal experiences that illustrate this phenomenon. If no one in a group possesses a fully developed frontal lobe, there is no one to slow the group down or think about the consequences of their actions. I advise parents that now is the time to engage more actively in their teenagers' lives and to be aware of their friend groups. This doesn't mean controlling their friendships, but rather ensuring you know who your teen is spending time with. I recommend that parents meet their friends' parents before allowing significant time together.

A common topic among parents at school concerns sleepovers. My response is straightforward: teenagers don't need sleepovers, as they often lead to poor decisions. While they may argue that "everyone else is doing it," I encourage parents to hold firm; nothing good generally comes from teenage sleepovers. Though your children may resist your decisions, they will appreciate your guidance later when they navigate these challenging years. I understand that some parents may disagree, and that's perfectly fine; I base my perspective on over 20 years of experience with this age group. Some teenagers may handle sleepovers successfully, but the odds are against it unless there are strong relationships with all involved families. Even then, my daughters may not always appreciate my parenting choices in this area.

The challenges of the teenage years are further amplified by social media. Teenagers often tie their self-worth to others' opinions. The new currency of "likes" on social media, along with the information fed to our kids by algorithms, is alarming. I often tell my students that smoking was a significant issue my generation had to navigate, and social media will be this generation's challenge. Just as many profited from smoking, there are people getting rich at the expense of our students' mental health today. I have students who are afraid to come to school because of a group chat where someone said something unkind to them. Consider this, parents: we provide our children with cell phones—essentially small computers—that grant them access to the darker aspects of life, including pornography and bullying, which we would never simply give them. While there are positive aspects online, I can guarantee that teenagers will encounter harmful content, especially without a developed frontal lobe to guide their choices.

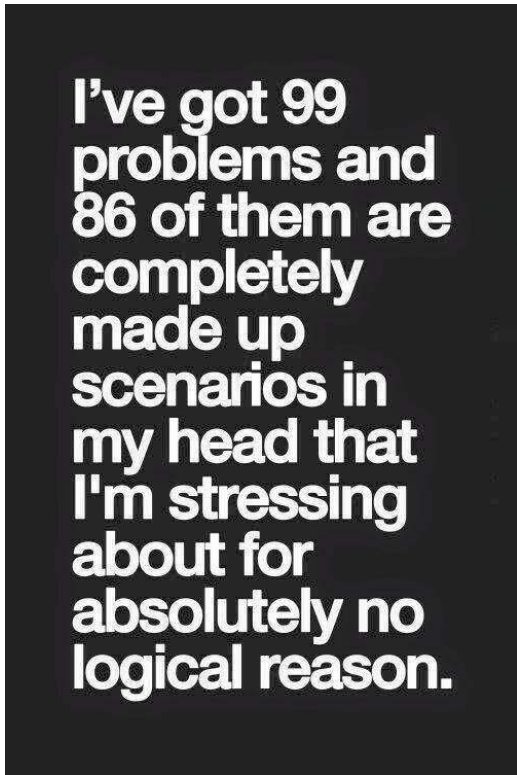
So, what should we communicate to our teenagers? We must reinforce the principles outlined in Chapter 2. The teenage years are critical developmental stages, second only to the ages of 1 to 3. However, unlike toddlers, teenagers can talk back, making it more challenging to stay regulated. Yet, it is essential that we do remain regulated. Remember, a regulated adult is the only way to help regulate a teenager. If you find it challenging to remain regulated, seek support from other adults. The answer to who can support you varies for everyone, but common sources include family members, schools, counselors, and places of worship.

The main messages that are important for teenagers to internalize include: Happiness comes from within; you cannot depend on others to control your happiness. I emphasize this because teenagers are often inclined to look externally for validation. You will hear things like, "I am not smart enough," "I am not athletic enough," or "I am not...," which are negative self-perceptions. Group chats on social media can exacerbate these feelings. Another crucial takeaway is that what others think of you is their business, not yours. It doesn't matter what someone else thinks; their opinions cannot impact you unless you allow them to.

The final point for teenagers in this chapter is to stop creating stories in your head and to focus solely on what is real. When students come into my office claiming that the whole school is talking about them, I acknowledge their feelings but remind them that not everyone is focused on them. As humans, we tend to place ourselves at the center of everything because we are the protagonists in our own stories, which is understandable. However, the reality is that not everyone is paying attention to us.

I also hear students discussing rumors that their friends heard from others or read online, leading them to believe these rumors must be true. I appreciate their innocence, but they are wasting a lot of energy on these unfounded concerns. I often use the battery analogy here: we have a limited amount of energy to expend each day, so I encourage focusing on the real and confirmed aspects of life. We can easily waste energy on the fabricated stories we create, both in our minds and from external influences. I urge them to invest their energy in things they can actually control—specifically, their thoughts. Don't relinquish your power to others.

Teach that understanding the Three Principles can enhance resilience. When facing difficulties, recognizing that their thoughts and feelings are not permanent can help them navigate challenges more effectively. Encourage them to view setbacks as opportunities for learning rather than failures, fostering a growth mindset. Reinforce the idea that their worth is not determined by others' opinions or social media validation. This can help reduce anxiety related to peer pressure and the need for acceptance. Highlight the importance of being connected with supportive peers and adults who understand the principles, as this can provide a safe space for discussion and growth.



**I've got 99
problems and
86 of them are
completely
made up
scenarios in
my head that
I'm stressing
about for
absolutely no
logical reason.**

Chapter 5 : College Years

In this chapter, I can't claim to speak from personal experience or even from the experiences of my kids, but I will reflect on how I believe the Three Principles could have significantly impacted me as a college student. This reflection begins on the very first day.

My roommate, Alex, and I were moving into our dorm for our freshman year and attempting to remove the bolster from the wall. Little did we know that the bolt extended through the wall into our neighbor's room. Moments after we thought we had failed the task, a tall guy entered our room and asked, "Do you guys need help?" At that moment, my mind played tricks on me; I worried that we had annoyed the neighbor—who I assumed was a senior—and now we looked like fools. I don't know why the University of MSU (Make Stuff Up) seemed so significant at that moment, considering it was a freshman dorm. The guy, Josh, ended up becoming one of my closest friends throughout college and the rest of our lives. We often joke about that moment now as adults.

How often does this happen to everyone? What are the common instances where we create narratives in our minds? In college, students frequently experience moments where their thoughts generate assumptions that may not align with reality. In this chapter, we will explore some of these scenarios.

College is a highly social environment, and for the first time, students are away from adult supervision, free to explore on their own. This newfound freedom can be both exhilarating and overwhelming. Students may find themselves grappling with the responsibility of making their own choices, which often brings about feelings of anxiety. They may assume that others are judging them negatively during interactions, leading to discomfort in social settings and a fear of not fitting in. Misinterpretations in friendships or romantic relationships can also lead to unnecessary conflict, as students overthink others' words or actions, creating stress that affects their overall college experience.

Moreover, college is about learning, and much of that process occurs within our minds. Many students convince themselves they are inadequately prepared for exams, which leads to stress and panic, even when they have studied enough. When receiving grades or feedback, students may perceive comments as personal attacks or reflections of their abilities rather than as constructive criticism. Imagined expectations from family, friends, or society can lead students to pursue paths that do not align with their true interests, causing further stress and confusion.

In addition to managing academia, students often engage in various social scenes, including fraternity life. I joined the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity my first year of college. Most of my dorm friends chose not to join, but for me it was another way to socialize and launched my future DJ career. For some, joining a fraternity represents a chance to develop deeper social connections and build a community. However, it can also bring pressure to conform to certain behaviors or expectations. Through the lens of the Three Principles, students can recognize that their thoughts about the social dynamics of fraternity life don't need to dictate their actions. By being aware of their consciousness and understanding that their experience is shaped by their thoughts, they can navigate fraternity life with authenticity, avoiding the trap of comparing themselves to others or succumbing to peer pressure.

Another important aspect of college life is time management. For many students, this is their first experience with a flexible schedule that demands self-discipline. Without the structure of high school, the freedom to choose when to study, attend classes, or socialize can be overwhelming. Students might grapple with procrastination or let distractions hinder their progress. However, recognizing that they have the power to direct their thoughts can help them create a more productive routine. By prioritizing tasks and being mindful of how their choices affect their goals, students can harness the energy of this freedom to manage their time effectively and experience a sense of control over their academic journey.

Additionally, mental health awareness has become increasingly vital in the college environment. Many students encounter pressures that can lead to anxiety, depression, or feelings of isolation. Understanding the Three Principles allows students to recognize that they are not alone in their struggles. By cultivating awareness of their thoughts and emotions, they can engage more openly with resources on campus, seek support from friends, or explore mindfulness practices. This shift in perspective encourages a culture of vulnerability and connection, enabling students to support one another and prioritize their mental well-being.

Recognizing these moments is essential as it allows students to challenge their assumptions and focus on constructive responses that align with their goals and well-being. By understanding and applying the Three Principles, college students can cultivate greater freedom in making choices that resonate with their true selves, embrace their unique social experiences, and foster a greater sense of well-being, resilience, and clarity throughout their academic journeys and beyond. In navigating the complexities of college life, students can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and create lasting memories and connections that enrich their lives.



Chapter 6: Career Beginnings

One of the biggest transitions in life is moving from college into a career. For me, that shift happened in 1999 when I became a high school math teacher and basketball coach in Platteville, Wisconsin. At the time, the world was consumed by worry about Y2K. People feared that when the clocks hit the year 2000, global systems would crash. The buildup was intense.

And then—nothing happened.

Midnight came and went like any other New Year's Eve. The world had spent years worrying about something that evaporated in an instant. It's a perfect example of how powerful and misleading our thinking can be. We build entire stories in our heads, and when reality arrives, it's often completely ordinary.

This is the essence of the Three Principles in the workplace: our experience comes from our thinking, not our circumstances. Stress, pressure, and insecurity don't come from our job, coworkers, or boss—they come from the thoughts we attach to those things.

Whenever I teach the Principles to educators, I share this simple scenario: Imagine receiving an email from your principal that says, *"Please see me in my office."*

Immediately, most people assume the worst. They think, *What did I do wrong?* or *What parent complained?* Some even feel physical reactions—tight shoulders, sweaty palms, hair standing up on their neck.

Almost no one thinks, *Maybe I'm getting complimented,* or *Maybe I'm being considered for something positive.* The mind tends to default to fear, especially if past experiences have conditioned us to expect it. But this reaction is simply thought—not truth.

My advice is simple: roll with it. Your inner wisdom will always help you handle whatever is actually happening. Don't waste energy preparing for imaginary disasters, like the Y2K panic. Let the situation unfold before you create a story about it.

In my early career, I was drawn to coworkers who shared my emotional patterns. I did not hang around people who were constantly “spinning”—overthinking every interaction, planning for every possible outcome, and narrating every detail out loud. They had plans A, B, C, and D for everything. Preparation is good, but preparing for four or more possible futures drains your energy when only one of them will actually occur.

Today, after learning the Three Principles, I find that kind of spinning exhausting. My advice is to stay present. Respond when you actually have the information you need. Even if you don’t have all the information, respond when you have enough clarity to move forward. Notice when your mind is noisy, stop engaging with the noise, and your natural clarity will return. Your mind has a built-in reset button—like a snow globe settling when you stop shaking it.

Education is a tough field. Teachers give endlessly, face constant criticism, and often receive very little in return. Yet teachers are some of the most remarkable people I’ve ever known. Even the smallest encouraging thought can keep them going for years.

That’s why it’s vital to understand that your happiness at work is your responsibility. Not your peers’, not your administrators’, not your students’. It comes from how you think about your day, not what happens during it. You have to wake up and be excited for what might happen and be intentional about seeing all the positives that there are in the workplace.

We all have difficult days—that’s part of being human. But don’t assume every tough moment defines your path. Feeling insecure, overwhelmed, or discouraged is temporary. Don’t make big decisions when you’re in a low mood. Like a river, those moments pass.

As you deepen your understanding of thought, your mind settles more easily. You begin trusting your wisdom. Communication becomes smoother, decisions become clearer, and confidence arises naturally—not from effort, but from a quieter mind.

Chapter 7: Coaching

Coaching girls was my first real experience in understanding how much influence I could have on the teenage mind. Basketball had always been part of my identity growing up, and I learned in college that the sport wasn't just something I enjoyed—it kept me grounded. Moving my body, working hard, being part of a team... all of it brought me a sense of regulation and well-being. No surprise there—physical activity has a way of clearing the mind just as much as it strengthens the body.

When I stepped into my first coaching role as the JV girls' coach, I quickly realized that coaching boys and coaching girls were two very different experiences. Not better or worse—just different. And those differences taught me more about the Three Principles than I ever expected.

What stood out first was the emotional landscape. Most boys I'd coached or played with tended to guard their feelings. They often expressed emotion through competitiveness, focus, or sometimes frustration. Girls, on the other hand, were often more open with their emotions—both the highs and the lows. They were more willing to share when they were nervous, overwhelmed, excited, or unsure. It wasn't dramatic—just honest. And that honesty gave me a window into how powerful thought is in shaping experience.

When a girl came to practice upset, it was rarely about basketball. It was usually about the story her mind was creating around something someone said, a grade she received, or a moment that felt bigger in her imagination than it was in reality. I began to see so clearly that their feelings weren't coming from the event itself—they were coming from the meaning they attached to it. The University of MSU—*Make Stuff Up*—was alive and well in the gym.

Communication worked differently, too. Boys often wanted direct instructions, a clear goal, and a challenge to attack. Girls valued connection first. They wanted to understand the *why*, to feel supported, and to know they were part of something bigger than themselves. Team culture was everything.

Problem-solving highlighted the same contrast. Boys tended to jump straight into solutions—sometimes before understanding the problem. Girls often thought through the emotional side of things, considering how a decision might affect others before moving forward. Both approaches had strengths, and both benefited when we slowed down and looked at the thinking beneath the reaction.

Confidence and risk-taking showed up differently as well. Boys often attacked challenges with confidence—even if that confidence wasn't always grounded. Girls were sometimes more cautious, stopping themselves before they had even tried. I realized quickly that if I could help them see the difference between their insecure *thoughts* and their actual abilities, everything changed. When girls began to understand that their self-doubt was just a moment of cloudy thinking—not a reflection of who they were—their confidence grew naturally. They took more risks, pushed themselves, and discovered abilities they didn't know they had.

And of course, there were the peer dynamics. With boys, competition often took center stage—who could outrun, outshoot, outplay the others. With girls, relationships were the heartbeat of the team. A conflict between two players could affect the energy of an entire practice. Once I began to understand that their interactions were shaped by the thoughts they believed in the moment, I could guide them to see beyond misunderstandings and settle into clarity.

These experiences taught me that the Three Principles aren't just ideas—they're living truths that show up every day in the gym, on the court, in the locker room, and in life. Thought creates experience. When players understood that, even a little, the game became lighter. Mistakes didn't define them. A bad day stayed a bad day instead of turning into a bad week. Their resilience grew.

By being aware of these differences and grounding my coaching in the Principles of Sydney Banks, I learned to create an environment where both boys and girls could thrive. An environment where it was safe to feel, to fail, to grow, and to try again. When young athletes begin to see how their thinking shapes their world, they discover clarity, confidence, and a deeper sense of well-being—both on and off the court.

Chapter 8: Navigating the Storm in my Career

Throughout my career as a school administrator, my professional identity was deeply intertwined with my sense of purpose and belonging. My role was not just a job; it was the very core of who I was. However, there were pivotal moments when that identity was challenged, particularly during times when I was placed on administrative leave. These experiences, while immensely difficult, served as profound lessons in understanding my principles and the workings of Universal Wisdom.

Being put on administrative leave felt like an earthquake shaking the foundation of my identity. Each time it happened, it came as an unexpected shock, leaving me grappling with feelings of confusion, self-doubt, and fear. Questions flooded my mind: What did this mean for my career? How would it reshape my identity? In those moments, the weight of my role as a school administrator was heavy, intensifying my sense of vulnerability.

Yet, as I reflected on these challenging experiences through the lens of Sydney Banks' teachings, I began to realize that these tribulations might be more than mere obstacles; they could, in fact, be Universal Wisdom guiding me toward a more authentic path. Banks emphasized the role of thoughts in shaping our reality and underscored that our experiences are influenced by our perceptions. During my administrative leave, I discovered that my distress was not solely tied to external circumstances but also rooted in the internal narratives I created about what it meant to be a leader.


As I navigated these periods of uncertainty, I learned to step back and observe my thoughts rather than be consumed by them. Instead of succumbing to negative self-talk and fear of judgment, I sought to reconnect with the innate wisdom that resides within us all. I began to see my administrative leave as not just a setback but an opportunity to pause, reflect, and realign with my true self—an invitation from Universal Wisdom to consider what truly mattered beyond my title and position.

Resilience became a crucial theme during these times, echoing Sydney Banks' assertion that within each of us lies the capability to weather life's storms. By recognizing that adversity often leads to profound insights, I shifted my perspective. These pauses allowed me to reflect deeply on my values, reassess my goals, and seek a clearer understanding of my purpose in education and beyond.

Support from colleagues and mentors also played an essential role in helping me navigate these challenges. Conversations with those who had faced similar trials reminded me that I was not alone. Their stories of resilience and growth echoed the belief that even in moments of crisis, there are hidden opportunities for learning and transformation.

Ultimately, each experience of administrative leave became a stepping stone toward a more authentic alignment with my principles and purpose. I came to understand that these challenges—though initially disheartening—were perhaps Universal Wisdom steering me toward a more meaningful path. Each trial reinforced my belief that our experiences are meant to guide us, helping us to rediscover the essence of who we are outside of titles and roles.

While my career as a school administrator was a central facet of my identity, the times spent on administrative leave revealed a deeper understanding of resilience and self. These experiences taught me to trust in the process of life and the guiding force of Universal Wisdom. As I moved forward, I carried with me the insights shared by Sydney Banks: that every challenge, no matter how daunting, holds the potential for transformation, and it is through our thoughts and reflections that we can align ourselves with our truest path. I hope sharing my journey will inspire others facing similar trials to embrace the journey ahead, trust in their innate wisdom, and recognize the hidden opportunities within every challenge.



Sometimes the best
thing you can do is
not think, not wonder,
not imagine,
not obsess. Just
breathe, and have
faith that everything
will work out for
the best.

Chapter 9: Relationships, Marriage, and Beginning Again

If coaching taught me how thought shapes a teenage mind, marriage taught me how thought shapes an adult heart. Relationships strip away pretenses and point you straight at your thinking—sometimes gentle, often messy, always revealing. This chapter is the story of that revealing: the dark places my thinking went after two failed marriages, the bright, steady lights my children brought into my life, and the way faith and the Three Principles helped me build a blended family with Kim.

I've been married three times. I say that plainly because it's true, and because truth is where healing begins. After my first marriage ended, my mind went to work inventing worst-case scenarios. The University of MSU—Make Stuff Up—enrolled me as a full-time student. My thoughts told stories: *You failed. You're not enough. You'll always mess this up.* Those thoughts felt absolute. They were loud and convincing.

When the second marriage ended, the thinking got darker. This time the stakes had changed: I was not only thinking about myself, I was thinking about two little lives—my daughters, Adleigh (now 10) and Quinn (now 7). I remember late nights when my head raced with questions I could not silence: *Did I break their future? What kind of father am I? Will they be okay?* Those thoughts wrapped tight around my heart and made the world look small and hopeless.

But here's what the Three Principles taught me in that season: the pain wasn't coming from the circumstances of divorce itself; it was coming from the meaning I attached to those circumstances. Thought was doing what thought does—trying to make sense of loss by telling stories. The stories felt true, but they weren't the truth. They were temporary weather, not permanent climate.

Adleigh and Quinn changed everything. Holding them for the first time dropped me into the present in a way nothing else had. Their tiny hands and honest questions pulled me out of spirals more effectively than any pep talk. Still, parenting through separation brought a new layer of fear—fear for their safety, fear about their stability, fear that I had somehow failed them by not keeping the family intact.

Yet parenting also taught me something crucial: kids don't need a perfect parent. They need a present one. They need someone who can come back to clarity after the storms of thought pass. When I began to recognize my darker thinking for what it was—temporary noise—I could show up calmer, steadier, more available. That mattered more to them than any attempt at perfection. I now try and share the gift of the three principles with them. I truly believe that learning this sooner for them will have a lifetime of impact.

When Kim and I met, I brought the history of two marriages and two daughters. Kim brought four children from her previous marriage—Noah, Sam, Lily, and Bella—and a life she'd already poured herself into. What struck me early on was a choice Kim made that surprised me: after years of being deeply involved in parenting older kids, she chose to lean back into mothering again. She opened her heart to Adleigh and Quinn without ledgering the cost. That willingness to love—intentional and sacrificial—felt like grace in human form. It also looks like pancakes with chocolate chips almost every other breakfast for the girls which is a far cry from their fathers breakfast of a granola bar on the run to before school care.

Blending our families was not a neat transplant. It was a messy, beautiful integration of calendars, traditions, loyalties, and love. We were stepping into the center of each other's stories rather than starting a new one. That reality forced the Three Principles into everyday practice: thought, consciousness, and mind were not abstract ideas anymore—they were the tools by which we negotiated dinners, bedtime routines, teenage moods, and sibling rivalries.

Faith became the second lens through which I learned to see. The Three Principles helped me understand how my experience was shaped by thinking, while faith gave a deeper context: God is present, patient, and at work in ways I often cannot measure. Kim's influence here was enormous—she centered herself in God and simply invited me to join her. That steady foundation made everything else possible.

Love began to look less like grand gestures and more like showing up consistently, present over perfect. I couldn't control how quickly everyone adjusted to living together, but I could stay steady, patient, and open. Some of the strongest bonds grew in the simplest ways. Noah wanted a camping bed for his car and Lily came to me wanting a climbing wall for the new apartment she and her boyfriend would be living in, and building those items together became more than just a project—it was a chance to earn her trust and share in her excitement. Sam needed an iPad holder for his favorite game, and helping him figure it out became a quiet way to show that I cared about his world. Even small moments like these—constructing, tinkering, problem-solving side by side—built a foundation of connection that words alone never could.

Over time, these hands-on experiences extended to the whole family. We created small rituals—weekend pancakes, shared chores, family game nights—that built connection naturally, without forcing it. I made mistakes along the way; and Kim was quick to remind me that everything has a place, that routines matter, and that relationships take time. But each project, each shared moment, was a chance to show up and be present.

Humility softened the edges of the learning curve. Instead of trying to prove myself or fix everything, I learned to trust that clarity returns when the noise settles. Faith reminded me that grace is bigger than my past, and the Three Principles showed that perspective always shifts when thought quiets.

We didn't get it right every day. But we showed up. We tried. And that trying mattered.

Three marriages. Two daughters. Four stepchildren. Not the tidy story I imagined when I was young, but it is honest, and it is filled with hard-earned wisdom. I don't define my worth by the failures behind me anymore. I define it by the steadiness I can offer now—the patience to wait for clarity, the humility to repair when I've caused hurt, and the courage to begin again.

The Three Principles taught me that dark thinking is temporary. Faith taught me that God's presence is not. And Kim taught me that love, when chosen again and again, can build something strong out of the fragments.

Relationships aren't built out of flawless histories. They're built out of steady presence, brave vulnerability, and the willingness to return when life knocks you down. The dark thoughts pass. The light comes back. And love—if you let it—keeps finding its way.

Chapter 10: The Power of Present Living in Overcoming Anxiety and Depression

In our fast-paced world, where uncertainties abound, many grapple with the heavy shadows of depression and anxiety. These emotional states can feel overwhelming, clouding our perception and stealing our sense of peace. However, there is profound wisdom to be found in ancient philosophies that emphasizes the importance of living in the present moment. In conjunction with the understanding of the Three Principles, we can cultivate a mindset that alleviates worry and loss, leading us towards a more fulfilling existence.

Ancient philosophers, from Stoics like Epictetus and Seneca to Eastern sages like Buddha, have long recognized the transformative power of being present. Epictetus famously stated, "It is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." This quote serves as a powerful reminder that much of our emotional suffering originates not solely from external circumstances, but from our interpretations and thoughts about those circumstances. Anxiety often stems from future worries, while depression may arise from dwelling on past regrets. By anchoring ourselves in the present, we can break free from the chains of these emotional states.

The Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—offer a framework that beautifully complements the wisdom of these ancient teachings. Understanding that our experience of life is shaped by our thoughts can empower us to navigate feelings of anxiety and depression with greater clarity. The principle of Mind signifies the universal intelligence that flows through us, guiding our thoughts and experiences. When we tap into this wisdom, we realize that our emotional states are transient; they are influenced by the thoughts we entertain, which are not fixed truths, but momentary reflections.

By practicing mindfulness and focusing on the present, we create a space for awareness that allows us to observe our thoughts without becoming entangled in them. By acknowledging that worry about the future is merely a collection of thoughts, we can recognize it for what it is—a mental construct rather than an absolute reality.

Moreover, the principle of Consciousness enriches our understanding of how we perceive our experiences. It reminds us that our awareness can shift, providing a pathway to new perspectives. In moments of anxiety or sadness, we can choose to redirect our focus to the present, fostering feelings of gratitude and contentment. The simple act of noticing the beauty around us—the warmth of the sun on our skin, the sound of laughter, or the taste of our favorite food—brings us back to the now and fosters a sense of appreciation that can counteract negative spirals.

The teachings of Buddhism, particularly the concept of "mindfulness," emphasize being fully aware and engaged in the present moment. Through practices such as meditation, we cultivate an ability to observe our thoughts and feelings without judgment. This aligns seamlessly with the Three Principles, as it empowers us to recognize that our emotions are a product of our thinking, not a reflection of our reality. As we embrace mindfulness, we discover that our anxiety and depression do not have to define us; instead, we can reclaim our sense of agency by choosing where to place our attention.

In conclusion, the interplay between ancient philosophy and the Three Principles offers us a powerful toolkit for navigating the tumultuous waters of anxiety and depression. By anchoring ourselves in the present, we can break free from the tyranny of past regrets and future worries. As we cultivate mindfulness and recognize the transient nature of our thoughts, we empower ourselves to experience life more fully, embracing its joys and challenges alike.

Every moment presents an opportunity for growth and understanding, reminding us that even amidst struggles, we can find solace and strength in the here and now. It is in this embrace of the present that we unlock the potential to live a life enriched by awareness, resilience, and a deeper connection to our true selves.

Chapter 11: Humor

In the grand tapestry of life, one thread shines brightly: humor. The ability to laugh, to find joy in everyday situations, and to view life through a lens of lightness and playfulness can be transformative. When we explore the interplay between humor and the Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—we discover that laughter is not just a source of joy; it's also a powerful tool for navigating the ups and downs of life.

Humor has an uncanny way of shifting our perspective, allowing us to reframe situations that might otherwise feel overwhelming. It dissolves tension and serves as a reminder that life, with all its complexities, can also be delightful and absurd. When we engage in humor—whether through a witty joke, a playful observation, or a funny story—we tap into the principle of Mind, the universal intelligence that fosters creativity and connection. This inherent wisdom encourages us to find joy in the mundane and to embrace the lighter side of our experiences.

Imagine facing a challenging day at work or grappling with an unexpected setback. It's easy to become bogged down by negative thoughts, feeling as if the weight of the world is on our shoulders. However, when we allow ourselves to laugh at the unpredictability of life, we create space for a fresh perspective. This ties beautifully to the principle of Thought, which informs us that our emotional experiences are shaped by how we interpret and respond to situations. By choosing to infuse our experiences with humor, we can lighten our emotional load and navigate challenges with grace.

Consider the power of a well-timed joke or an amusing story. When we share laughter with others, we foster connection and camaraderie, creating an environment where people feel seen and understood. This relational aspect of humor links to the principle of Consciousness, which reminds us of the fluid nature of our awareness. When we share joy through laughter, we expand our consciousness, bonding with others in a shared moment of delight. These connections create a ripple effect, uplifting not just our spirits, but also the spirits of those around us.

Laughter also has a remarkable way of grounding us in the present moment. When we're caught in our webs of worry and stress, a good laugh serves as a gentle nudge to return to the now. This principle aligns with the understanding of Mind, which connects us to our innate wisdom and reminds us that joy exists in the present. Engaging with humor invites us to let go of our preoccupations, if only for a moment, and appreciate the richness of life unfolding in front of us.

Throughout history, great thinkers and philosophers have recognized the value of humor. Mark Twain famously said, "The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter." This sentiment resonates deeply with the essence of the Three Principles, illustrating that humor can serve as a catalyst for transformation. In moments of struggle, it encourages us to transcend our limitations and tap into the creativity and resilience that lie within us.

Moreover, humor can serve as a bridge in difficult conversations. When we tackle challenging subjects with a light-hearted approach, we foster openness and understanding. By incorporating humor, we create an atmosphere of safety, where individuals feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and vulnerabilities. This aligns with the principle of Consciousness, which nurtures connection and empathy, allowing us to navigate even the toughest discussions with grace and understanding.

Humor is more than a source of amusement; it is a powerful ally in our journey of self-discovery and personal growth. By embracing the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, we unlock the potential of laughter to uplift our spirits, deepen our connections, and ground us in the present moment. As we navigate life's joys and challenges, let us remember to find the humor in our experiences and to celebrate the lightness that laughter brings.

After all, a good laugh can be the spark that ignites a new perspective and transforms our experience, proving that sometimes, the best antidote to life's complexities lies in embracing a little humor along the way. So go ahead, share a laugh, and let the power of humor be your guide!

Chapter 12: The Illusion of Mistakes

In the human experience, the concept of "mistakes" looms large. From childhood missteps to professional blunders, we often face moments that we label as failures. However, when we delve into the understanding of the Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—we discover a liberating perspective: there are no mistakes, only opportunities for growth and learning.

At the heart of the Three Principles is the acknowledgment that our experience is fundamentally shaped by our thoughts. Our interpretation of events, including those we deem mistakes, comes from our personal beliefs and mental frameworks. Often, what we categorize as a mistake is simply a result of our thinking in that moment—a reflection of the information we had, our state of mind, and the context in which we found ourselves. It's crucial to recognize that our thoughts can create an illusion of failure, leading us to dwell on experiences that could otherwise be viewed as valuable lessons.

Mistakes are a universal part of the human journey, seen across cultures and throughout history. The famous inventor Thomas Edison famously stated, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." This perspective aligns beautifully with the essence of the Three Principles. Each so-called mistake provides essential feedback and insight—an invitation to learn and grow. When we shift our focus from viewing mistakes as setbacks to seeing them as stepping stones, we create a path of continual learning.

Understanding the principle of Mind allows us to tap into our inherent wisdom. We are all born with an inner guidance system that nudges us toward growth and understanding. When we encounter challenges or make choices that don't yield our desired outcomes, rather than labeling them as mistakes, we can ask ourselves what we can learn from the experience. This taps into our ability to connect with our innate intelligence, which continuously guides us along our path.

Consciousness, as a principle, expands our perception of reality. It helps us understand that we have the power to change our awareness and how we respond to the events in our lives. When we view situations through the lens of higher consciousness, we recognize that our experiences, including those we call mistakes, are part of a larger tapestry of life. This perspective invites us to embrace humility, allowing us to acknowledge that life is a series of experiments, and each experiment contributes to our growth.

In contrast to the fear and anxiety that often accompany mistakes, the Three Principles encourage us to cultivate a mindset of curiosity and openness. Instead of fearing judgment or concluding that we are unworthy because of our missteps, we can approach challenges with the question: "What can this teach me?" This shift in thinking fosters resilience and empowers us to take risks, knowing that we are all on a journey of learning.

Moreover, the realization that mistakes don't truly exist liberates us from the shackles of perfectionism. Many individuals strive for an unattainable standard of flawlessness, fearing that any misstep will define their worth. However, through the lens of the Three Principles, we come to understand that life is inherently imperfect, and it is precisely these imperfections that make our journeys rich and meaningful. Each moment of uncertainty and every unexpected turn teaches us more about ourselves and the world around us.

Lastly, the acknowledgment that there are no mistakes promotes connection and empathy among individuals. When we recognize that everyone makes decisions based on their current understanding, we cultivate an environment of compassion. Sharing our experiences, including our missteps, fosters deeper relationships and communal learning. As we support one another in our journeys, we create a culture where mistakes are reframed as opportunities for growth, leading to collective wisdom.

The Three Principles provide a transformative lens through which we can view mistakes not as failures but as integral parts of our learning journey. Each experience—regardless of how we label it—shapes our understanding and influences our growth. By embracing this perspective, we can cultivate curiosity, resilience, and empathy as we navigate the complexities of life.

Rather than fearing mistakes, let us celebrate them as stepping stones that guide us toward our highest potential. As we honor our paths, we illuminate the reality that mistakes are not a reflection of our worth but rather, invitations to explore, learn, and grow in the extraordinary adventure of being human.

Chapter 13: Change Is One Thought Away

Life is a series of intersections, moments where different paths cross—sometimes with unexpected turns. One vivid illustration of this is akin to navigating a four-way stop. Picture this: you approach the intersection, your heart steady and your mind focused. You know the rules. It's your turn to go. But suddenly, another driver barreling through the stop sign nearly collides with you. In that split second, a wave of anger surges within you. How could they be so reckless? The initial thought ignites a firestorm of emotions—frustration, indignation, and anxiety about what could have happened.

As you continue down the road, your feelings swirl in a tumultuous storm. You can feel the anger building; it feels justified. In that moment, your thoughts are fixated on the driver's disregard for safety, on the recklessness of their actions. You replay the episode in your mind, allowing the anger to cloud your judgment and affect your day.

But then, as you stop at the next light, a new piece of information enters your consciousness. You notice that the driver who nearly caused the accident has pulled into the hospital parking lot. Your heart races with concern as they rush out of their car, frantically carrying a child into the emergency room. Suddenly, the context of the situation shifts dramatically.

With this new perspective, your mood transforms almost instantaneously. The feelings of anger dissipate, replaced by empathy and compassion. You begin to imagine what it must be like for them, navigating a crisis with their child. Your mind conjures images of worry, fear, and urgency—emotions you can resonate with as a parent or caregiver. The one thought that mere moments ago fueled frustration now evolves into understanding.

This experience at the four-way stop illustrates a profound truth about the human condition: our feelings can change with a single thought. The lens through which we interpret events profoundly impacts our emotional responses. The Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—offer a framework for understanding this dynamic.

The principle of Thought reminds us that our emotions are not inherently linked to external circumstances, but rather to our interpretation of those circumstances. In the initial moment, you allowed your thoughts about the driver's actions to dictate your emotional state, fueling feelings of anger. However, as your thoughts shifted to a scenario filled with compassion, your feelings transformed accordingly.

Consciousness plays a crucial role as well. It enables us to expand our awareness and consider multiple perspectives. When we are bounded by a fixed thought, we may lose sight of the bigger picture. But as we reflect on the situation from different angles—considering the potential fears and stresses faced by another—it opens up a window to understanding that enhances our sense of connection.

Furthermore, the principle of Mind speaks to the innate wisdom we all possess. In moments of heightened emotion, we may overlook this wisdom, allowing thoughts to cloud our judgment. However, when we pause and invite ourselves to reflect, we can access deeper insights that foster empathy.

Embracing this understanding empowers us as humans. We can learn to shift our thoughts consciously, choosing to appreciate the complexities of each individual's experiences. It's a reminder that behind every action is a story—a narrative filled with challenges, joys, and fears that may not be immediately visible.

In recognizing that we all face our own battles, we cultivate compassion for ourselves and others. This enhances our relationships and creates a more empathetic world, where understanding reigns over judgment. It's not just about avoiding anger; it's about fostering connection and recognizing our collective humanity.

The four-way stop experience serves as a poignant lesson in the power of thought and empathy. It illustrates that feelings can pivot dramatically with one new piece of information and a shift in perspective. By embracing the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, we can navigate life's intersections with greater awareness and understanding.

Every day, we are presented with opportunities to choose our responses—to foster empathy instead of anger, understanding instead of frustration. By cultivating this awareness, we not only enrich our lives but also contribute to a kinder, more compassionate world. So, the next time you find yourself at a four-way stop, remember the potential for perspective to change everything, and leverage that power for good in your life—and the lives of those around you.

Chapter 14: What Anyone Thinks About Me Is None of my Business

In our complex web of social interactions, it's easy to become ensnared by the opinions others hold about us. We often find ourselves questioning: What will they think? How will they perceive my actions? Yet, there lies a profound truth that can liberate us from this anxious cycle: what others think about us is none of our business. This principle, deeply rooted in the understanding of consciousness, offers a pathway to personal freedom and self-acceptance.

When we operate from the belief that the thoughts and opinions of others define us, we surrender our power. We allow external perceptions to shape our reality, compromising our own sense of self-worth and confidence. This tendency can lead to a constant state of anxiety and self-doubt, disconnecting us from our authentic selves and hindering our growth.

The Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—offer an empowering framework for redefining our relationship with others' perceptions. The principle of Mind reminds us that each individual possesses innate wisdom. Our true self comes from this inner guidance, not from the opinions of others. When we recognize that our worth is not contingent upon external validation, we can begin to reclaim our agency and authenticity.

Consciousness is the essence that allows us to experience the world through our uniquely colored perspectives. It enables us to create our thoughts and feelings about any given situation. Understanding this principle empowers us to realize that while others may have their opinions, they are, at the end of the day, a reflection of their own experiences and thoughts—totally separate from our reality. Others may see us through their unique lens, influenced by their past, fears, or desires, but that does not define who we are.

For instance, consider a time when you felt judged or misunderstood by someone in your life. Perhaps you shared an opinion or made a decision that was met with disapproval. In that moment, it's easy to internalize their judgment and let it dictate your feelings. However, by understanding Consciousness, you can step back and recognize that their reaction is more about them than it is about you. Their thoughts stem from their worldview, shaped by their own experiences; it does not diminish your value or truth.

The principle of Thought plays a crucial role in this dynamic, as it reminds us that our emotional experiences are fundamentally tied to our thinking. We create our feelings based on our interpretations of others' reactions. When we recognize that the negative feelings we may experience are rooted in our thoughts—often unfounded and derived from comparisons or assumptions—we can consciously choose to disengage from those mental traps. This gives us the freedom to define ourselves, independent of external perceptions.

When we remind ourselves that we are the authors of our own narrative, we can approach life with greater courage and authenticity. We're free to express our true selves, pursue our passions, and embrace our individuality without the paralyzing weight of seeking approval. This liberation fosters emotional resilience, allowing us to navigate challenges with greater ease and equanimity.

Moreover, by adopting the mindset that what others think is none of our business, we cultivate an environment of acceptance and understanding within ourselves. This understanding creates a ripple effect, enabling us to extend the same grace and non-judgment toward others. Rather than viewing people through the lens of criticism, we can appreciate their individuality and understand their reactions as reflections of their own unique journeys.

A profound analogy can be made with a mirror. When we look into a mirror, we see our reflection. If someone else were to stand beside us and comment on our appearance, that perception belongs to them, not to us. Similarly, others' opinions about us are, at their core, reflections of their own mindsets, ideas, and experiences. Just as we don't allow a mere mirror to dictate how we feel about ourselves, we should not let the opinions of others govern our self-worth.

Embracing the truth that what others think is none of our business opens the door to a life of freedom, authenticity, and self-acceptance. By understanding the Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—we empower ourselves to break free from the chains of external judgment and thrive in our individuality.

Every day presents us with opportunities to step into our power and reframe our relationship with social perceptions. As we remember the essence of our true selves, we can navigate life with confidence and grace—firmer in the belief that we are enough, irrespective of others' thoughts. Let us foster a culture of self-acceptance and compassion, prioritizing our inner wisdom over external validation, and, in doing so, embrace the beautiful journey of being uniquely ourselves.

Chapter 15: The Dog Rules

There's a profound wisdom to be found in the simple, joyful existence of dogs. When we observe the remarkable bond between dogs and humans, we catch glimpses of essential truths about presence, connection, and love that can transform our interactions—including those with our partners. In a world often marked by distractions and worries, dogs exemplify a way of being that teaches us valuable lessons about cultivating our relationships, particularly with my wife, Kim.

Consider the image of a dog and a man sitting side by side on a bench. The man is lost in thought, his mind racing through an endless list of tasks, worries, and obligations, while the dog sits contentedly beside him, focused solely on the beautiful view before them. The man's thought bubble is filled with swirling ideas, yet the dog's bubble contains just the serene moment they are sharing. This stark contrast offers a powerful reminder of the importance of being present.



The principle of Consciousness reminds us that awareness is a choice. In a sense, dogs embody this principle with their ability to live fully in the moment. They don't ruminate on the past or fret about the future; instead, they engage with the world around them with unfiltered joy and curiosity. This is a lesson worth emulating in our relationships. Just as a dog focuses on the here and now, we can choose to leave behind our distractions and fully engage with the ones we love.

When I reflect on how dogs interact with their humans, I notice the consistent display of unconditional love and loyalty. A dog greets you at the door with palpable excitement, their tail wagging wildly, as if to say, "I've been waiting for you! You are everything to me!" This genuine enthusiasm reminds us of the power of appreciation and presence in maintaining strong connections. Similarly, when interacting with Kim, I strive to mirror that same eagerness and appreciation. A simple smile or warm greeting can set the tone for our entire day and foster a sense of belonging and love.

Dogs are also masters of empathy. When a loved one is feeling down, a dog instinctively senses the emotions in the room. They may nestle closer, offering comfort and companionship without the need for words. This mirrors the understanding of Mind within the Three Principles, where empathetic connections stem from a shared consciousness and an innate ability to sense what others need. In our relationships, we can all benefit from becoming more attuned to the emotions and needs of our partners. Taking the time to genuinely listen and offer support can strengthen our bonds and cultivate a deeper level of intimacy.

Moreover, dogs demonstrate resilience in their unwavering spirit. They bounce back quickly from setbacks and adapt to change with remarkable grace. This resilience serves as a powerful reminder—not just for dogs, but for us as human beings—to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Just as a dog might shake off raindrops after a storm, we too can let go of stressors and return to the steadfast, loving presence our partners deserve.

The joy and playfulness that dogs exude are infectious. They invite us to embrace spontaneity, to savor each moment, and to not take life too seriously. Dogs remind us of the power of play, a key component in fostering strong relationships. Taking the time to engage in fun activities with Kim can rekindle our connection and remind us of the joyousness that comes from simply being together. Whether it's sharing a walk, playing a game, or laughing over shared memories, embracing playfulness reinforces the bond we share.

In conclusion, the perspective of a dog provides us with a treasure trove of insights into connection, presence, and love—lessons that can enrich our relationships with the people we cherish most. By embodying the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, we can cultivate an awareness of the importance of being present, nurturing empathy, and fostering resilience.

As I strive to incorporate these lessons from our canine companions into my relationship with Kim, I find it a powerful guide. By embracing presence, unconditional love, empathy, and playfulness, we can deepen our connection and create a space where both of us can thrive.

So, let us take a cue from our four-legged friends and approach our relationships with enthusiasm, openness, and a heart full of love, creating meaningful connections that enrich our lives and those of our partners. After all, the joy and wisdom of a dog's perspective can guide us toward a deeper understanding of our own relationships and a more fulfilled life.

Conclusion: It's A Journey

As we wrap up this exploration of the Three Principles—Mind, Consciousness, and Thought—it's essential to take a moment to reflect on the journey we've undertaken together. This book has been a culmination of experiences, insights, and lessons gleaned from both the challenges and joys of life.

From the very beginning, my journey with the Three Principles transformed how I viewed my experiences, reshaping my interactions and providing me with a framework to navigate the complexities of life. Each chapter represents a unique perspective, inviting you to explore fundamental truths that can enhance your understanding of yourself and your relationships.

One of the core principles expressed throughout these pages is that our experience is shaped by our thoughts. This idea serves as a foundation for understanding the importance of being present, embracing empathy, and reframing our perceptions. Whether discussing the innocence of babies, the struggles of teenagers, or the enriching connections between dogs and humans, we have seen how these principles apply to every phase of life.

This book can function as a valuable resource for you, regardless of whether you choose to read it in its entirety or consult specific chapters as needed. Each section can stand alone, offering a wealth of insights that may resonate with different aspects of your life at various times. The goal is to create a guide that is accessible and applicable, providing you with tools to navigate your own journey.

Through the stories shared within this book, I hope you feel encouraged to reflect on your own experiences, recognizing the power of your thoughts and the role they play in shaping your reality. It is my sincere hope that you take these teachings to heart, applying them to cultivate a deeper connection with yourself and others.

As you continue to engage with life, remember the essence of the Three Principles and how they relate to every facet of existence. Embrace the present moment, find the humor in life, and approach challenges as opportunities for learning and growth.

In our pursuit of understanding and connection, let us carry forward the wisdom shared in these chapters, knowing that we are all part of a larger journey. The beauty of life lies not in perfection but in our ability to learn, adapt, and grow together. Let us remain open to the insights that each moment holds and foster the bonds that enrich our lives.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me and remember it's never over. May this book serve as a guiding light, a companion, and a source of inspiration as you navigate the beautiful complexity of being human.

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About the Author

In "Lemon Shaker," Mitchell Kuhnert brings a wealth of experience as a dedicated teacher, coach, and principal who has passionately supported countless students and educators in understanding the transformative power of the 3 Principles. With a career rooted in education and personal development, Mitchell seamlessly blends insightful anecdotes from his life with practical wisdom cultivated over years of guiding others towards emotional well-being and growth.

The 3 Principles—mind, consciousness, and thought—form the backbone of this enlightening narrative, offering readers a fresh perspective on life's challenges and opportunities. Through relatable stories, Mitchell illuminates how these principles can foster resilience, clarity, and purpose, empowering readers to embrace change and turn life's lemons into refreshing opportunities.

Join Mitchell Kuhnert on this inspiring journey to unlock the full potential of the 3 Principles. Whether you are an educator seeking to enhance your teaching practice, a student navigating personal challenges, or anyone in search of deeper self-understanding, "Lemon Shaker" will inspire you to see possibilities where you once saw limitations.

Please join the Lemon Shaker club by purchasing your favorite item from our shop! Follow the QR code to shop now. If you have made it to this point and found anything worth your while please purchase some apparel to show you Lemon Shaker love!

