

# INTRODUCTION

*Why this little book is a game-changer!*

## **“HUSBAND ABANDONS WIFE MID-ATLANTIC”**

I was fortunate (or unfortunate, depending on how you look at it!) to be thrown unexpectedly into a life-threatening situation in my mid twenties. I was taking part in a rowing race across the Atlantic Ocean when my rowing partner and ex-husband—a 6'5" international oarsman—developed a phobia of open ocean and had to be rescued from our tiny plywood boat. We were only a few hundred miles into our 3375-mile journey and already our plan had gone completely wrong. I suppose the sensible option would have been to get on to the rescue boat with him, seeing as I was a novice rower, but I choose to go on solo.

I spent the next 3½ months completely alone—there was no support boat following me—just me, the sharks, some massive waves and the occasional container ship. The hardship and depths of despair that that journey pushed me to were life transforming. If you think about it, there are probably only a handful of people in the entire world who have spent more than 100 days alone in such a hostile environment. I was lucky. I survived.

But not only did I survive. Against all the odds, I thrived. What I lacked in rowing prowess, physical size and strength (I'm really rather small), I made up for in mindset. It struck me very early on that whether I made it to the other side or not was all in my mind.

Partly out of desperation, but mostly out of a desire to survive, I forced myself to find a load of attitude enhancing tools that helped me to control my mindset and I journaled every day in my 'Ship's Log'. This kept panic at bay and helped me

to cope with the stress of the situation. The attitude tools stopped me thinking ‘I can’t’ and forced me to think ‘I can’. They helped me to find joy in the most unexpected place—way outside of my comfort zone and skill level.

It took me 111 days to successfully row across the Atlantic Ocean from Tenerife to Barbados. On returning to dry land I started to apply the same mindset strategies to my professional life and forced myself outside of my comfort zone. The Atlantic had taught me that the comfort zone would always shift towards me, making my new reality comfortable eventually. The results were transformational and the upward trajectory rather dramatic. Within a year I had gone from being a PE teacher to working with members of the Royal Family and attending meetings at Buckingham Palace. I began making programmes with the BBC, had my first book published, spoke at conferences all around the world and have gone on to launch five companies.

Hear the full story of my solo Atlantic row and watch footage of the huge waves I encountered and the emotional reunion with my family at the finish line here: [www.debrasearle.com/watch](http://www.debrasearle.com/watch).

It’s incredible what can happen when we learn to take control of our mindset and stop allowing ourselves to be affected by negative situations. It’s incredible what happens when we let go of the lies we have been telling ourselves about our capabilities. It’s incredible what can happen when we stop relying on willpower and put in place habits that support our mind.

I subsequently discovered that almost all of the attitude tools I adopted during those desperate days at sea have their roots in the field of Positive Psychology. The Choose Your Attitude Journal is structured in such a way that it leverages my rowing boat strategies with some of the best productivity, positive psychology and neuroscience research out there. This is digestible science with a practical application.

## IT'S A FACT!

The writing you will do in this journal will prime your brain with positive thoughts. Not only has this been found to be an antidote to stress and anxiety, but it will improve your focus, creativity and productivity. Your neural pathways will begin to change, making it easier and easier to maintain optimism in the midst of challenges.

In the *Journal of Research in Personality*,<sup>1</sup> one study into the health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences had fascinating results. The researchers examined 90 undergraduate students who were split into two groups. The first group wrote about an intensely positive experience each day for three consecutive days. The second group wrote about a control topic for three days.

Three months later, the students who wrote about positive experiences had better mood levels, fewer visits to the health centre, and experienced fewer illnesses. WHAT?! Feeling these benefits for three months after just three days of writing is simply incredible. This is one of the many reasons why I am so passionate about the Choose Your Attitude Journal practice that I do each day. I have taken the findings of this, other research studies, and my own experiences on the Atlantic, and spent years trialing what a daily writing practice should include to get optimal results for my health and the goals I am working towards.

## IT'S NOT MAGIC, IT'S MINDSET

As you'll see in the following pages, this practice is a powerful combination of brain rewiring, goal visualising, gratitude awareness and action planning. This is where the magic happens—although it's not magic, it's mindset. So why that combination? Well, partly because they echo my daily practices from the rowing boat, but mostly because they are a fantastic way to train a very important filter in our brains. It's called the Reticular Activating System. We'll call it RAS for short. The RAS is the part of your brain that serves as a filter between your subconscious mind and your conscious mind.

At any one moment in time we are being stimulated by up to 11 million bits of information, but our conscious mind is only capable of processing around 40-70 bits of information. Therefore 99.9% of our awareness, thinking, processing and

problem solving is being run by our brain's subconscious hard drive. For example, if I ask you to become aware of how the waistband on your clothes feels against your skin, your brain will retrieve that sensory information for you. The waistband and its stimulus were always there, but as your conscious brain only has 40 bits of information to work with in any given moment, your subconscious brain chose not to pass on those sensory signals. It deemed it unnecessary to bring to your attention.

The RAS controls which sensory signals move from our subconscious mind to our conscious mind, which is why a person who lives in a city can sleep through loud traffic noise in the background but wakes immediately if they hear the sound of an alarm or their baby crying. In a way, our RAS is a bit like a Google search bar. There are millions of websites out there, but you are able to filter out the ones you are not interested in by typing a keyword into the Google search bar.

So, how do we ensure that the right keywords are in our RAS's search bar in order to force our brain to focus on things that are important for us to see, hear, and experience in order to achieve the life we desire? We do it by developing a Choose Your Attitude Journal writing **habit** that will intentionally help you to set your attitude for the day, journal about the good stuff in your life and visualise the goals you aspire to. The various components of this journal train that subconscious 99.9%, effectively teaching the brain what information and opportunities to bring to your attention in order to achieve your goals and aspirations. Let me explain how and give you a few striking examples of the results it has helped me to achieve.

While I was rowing the Atlantic, daily, sometimes hourly, I visualised the moment when I would achieve my goal and row in to the harbour in Barbados to be reunited with my family after 111 days alone at sea. Often, this was the only thing that kept my oars in motion. In the many years since making landfall I have always practiced running 'Future Truth Movies'—seeing and feeling myself successfully achieving whatever goal I have set for myself. But achieving my goals hit a whole new level one year when I started to journal in the past tense about the Future Truths I wanted for my life as if I had already achieved them.

## HOLLYWOOD MOVIE LEVEL RESULTS

As always, I had defined my annual goals in January, writing such audacious ones that I hadn't the faintest idea how I would bring them to fruition. But that's the wonderful thing about being able to programme our Reticular Activating System. I'd conditioned my brain to look for ways to make those goals a reality but journaling them as Future Truths took it to another level. They were absolutely not truths about my life at that moment, but I was literally writing my Future Truths into existence.

I wrote Future Truths about a movie version of my solo Atlantic row and miraculously it is happening. By July I had sold my story and signed a contract with a movie producer and director and now the movie is in development in Hollywood. I've literally sat in meetings discussing which actress will play me in the movie!

I wrote Future Truths in great detail about being interviewed by one of my idols for his uber successful podcast. He'd never heard of me. How would I even get an email or message through to him? But I kept on journaling my Future Truths and by September I was sat in his office in LA recording a session for his show. I also wrote Future Truths about taking my speaking work to a whole new level, and by November found myself speaking at a John Maxwell conference in Atlanta, broadcasting to 40,000 people—unbelievable! He later quoted me in a tweet. I could hardly believe that my words were being tweeted by one of the world's most successful leadership experts and authors.

Having never been great at taking time off, I even Future Truth journaled about work-life balance and going on holidays with my family and friends. I ended up being able to afford and enjoy six holidays that year, and rather than the time away from my businesses having a negative effect, we achieved our most financially successful year in 16 years of trading.

## THE POWER OF THIS PRACTICE

I don't tell you this in any way to brag, but as an illustration of how powerful journaling about the goals we want to become our Future Truths can be, especially when we zone in on the next key action we can take or the small win we

can achieve to keep forward momentum. By combining this with a daily practice of gratitude and consciously choosing an attitude for the day, I found that the little things in life I was grateful for kept me positive and happier, while I worked hard to make my goals a reality. By choosing an attitude to approach each day with and listing the benefits of sticking to that attitude, I more often than not found that I could approach the inevitable challenges with the right mindset.

So that's why I have created this journal. My heartfelt desire is to know that I have helped a few others to achieve their Future Truths along the way. Please read the **'How to use this journal'** section for an explanation of how to get the most from this practice. There is also a **Quick Start Guide** you can refer to or you might like to watch a video tutorial and download some completed example pages by visiting [www.debrasearle.com/resources](http://www.debrasearle.com/resources).

After all, what's the alternative? If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always got. I don't know about you, but I don't want to get what I've always got. I want more joy, more success and more work-life balance.

Do let me know how you get on by tagging me in posts and using the hashtag #CYAjournal.

I look forward to helping you kick the can't out of life and hearing news of the realisation of your Future Truths.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath the name, ending in a small flourish.



**3 ATTITUDE BENEFITS:** The next step is to describe the benefits that would come from committing to that attitude for the day. As you write each one, take a minute just to mentally feel how good it would be to have those benefits realised.

**4 GRATITUDE:** Report three small things that have happened in the last 24 hours that you are grateful for. Then choose who you will send a short message/email/letter/call/meme to, telling them how much you appreciate something they have done or congratulating them on what they have achieved.

**5 JOURNALING:** This is where we train our subconscious brain to support us in finding the opportunities and resources needed to achieve our goals. In this section there are 4 types of journaling. I choose one depending on my mood:



#### FUTURE TRUTH JOURNALING

Write in detail (sounds, smell, location, what's happening, who is there, etc) in the past tense, as if you have already achieved the goal or situation you are writing about. Repeatedly imagining the feelings rewires your brain quicker.



#### CATHARTIC JOURNALING

Stressed about a particular event, situation or relationship? Then work through it by letting your thoughts spill onto the page. Writing about the stuff we are finding difficult allows us to move through those challenges with more clarity and to organise our thoughts.



#### FUTURE TRUTH STATEMENTS

Write a list (6-10) of statements that summarise your most desired goals. Again, you must write them as if you have already achieved them. E.g 'I am a NY Times Best Selling Author.' Go BIG! Write in fast bullet points and only stop listing one once it has been achieved.



#### RE-LIVE A POSITIVE MOMENT JOURNALING

Stuck for words? On the days you don't feel very positive or are uninspired to write about your Future Truths, try re-living a moment of success or happiness. When we re-live a moment of pure joy it puts our mind into a more positive state.

**6**

**KEY ACTION:** Vanish procrastination by picking one priority for the day and complete this before starting on anything else. How do you know what that one thing should be? Just ask yourself this question, "If I achieved nothing else today but this one thing would I be satisfied?" If the answer is no, think again.

**7**

**SMALL WIN:** Harvard Researchers found that one small win can boost productivity and happiness. This 'Progress Principle' is vital for building momentum and achieving goals. What would be a small win to help you on your way with your 'Key Action'?



*Journal*

Date:

## CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE

Attitude benefits:

### GRATITUDE

1

2

3

Message of gratitude or encouragement to:



### JOURNAL

SELECT:    

### KEY ACTION



### SMALL WIN



# FURTHER READING

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