

[BEN CROWE, DIRECTOR OF MOJO CROWE] My name is Ben Crowe, and I'm a professional mentor and leadership coach, mainly with CEOs and coaches and athletes and teams. More recently, governments and teenagers, working mainly in mindset, in a professional sense, and their perspective, in a personal sense.

Both my brothers are doctors, and I think I must have been a wannabe who just wanted to help people. My life purpose is to help people do things better and be better for it. How that manifests is different, depending on the client and depending on the situation.

My dad died when I was pretty young. And I think I've always been in that search of meaning and purpose ever since that, in terms of perspective.

PERSPECTIVE

In coming to terms with our new environment, perspective will get us through this chapter. And in terms of perspective, the two most powerful pillars are acceptance and gratitude. But there are other principles as well to acknowledge here.

First and foremost, this too shall pass - the world will get through this. This virus doesn't discriminate, as Tom Hanks and Prince Charles have realised, so it also dials up this sense of equality and horizontal relationships – where everyone in the world is equal. We may be different (from different financial structures or different backgrounds) but everyone on the planet today is equal.

Secondly, our greatest growth comes from our darkest times. Our greatest learnings come from our most difficult times and this chapter will define many leaders out there.

The reason why our greatest failures can lead to our greatest successes, because it unlocks humility, and humanity, and learning. Three of the greatest attributes of leaders, and we're already seeing the most beautiful sense of humanity around the world at the moment.

ACCEPTANCE

In terms of how powerful acceptance is in these times, acceptance is the gateway of perspective and it's one of the greatest pillars that human beings have access to today. We actually don't understand as humans, how powerful acceptance is.

There's a book called *The Road Less Travelled*, by M. Scott Peck, which is considered in the top three most important books ever written. Don't worry, you don't need to read the book - I'll give you the punch line. It's in the first page, it's actually in the first two lines of the first page. The first line of *The Road Less Travelled*: "life is difficult". But the second sentence is the clincher: "Once you accept that life is difficult. Life is no longer difficult." The power is in the acceptance.

We're just not accepting today and therefore we're distracted. Everyone is putting judgments on whether something is good, or something is bad, and we've got our opinions and judgments. Nothing is ever that good, or that bad. It just is what it is. And as soon as we go from that frame of reference, life is a lot easier to deal with.

GRATITUDE

Expectations cause anxiety. Any expectations or entitlement we thought we had for 2020 have literally been thrown out the window. So as soon as we let go of those expectations – the persona versus the person – we can get back to what is real. The things we can control and the best version of ourselves. Now, it's really important to understand the difference between a goal and an expectation. So the goal might be just to keep your company afloat – and we've all got goals – it's

really important to reframe our goals right now. But it's also important to know that there's no expectations, there's no guarantees that you'll be able to achieve those goals because there are so many things about life right now that we can't control.

And this is where trading expectation for appreciation is so powerful – for just feeling lucky. You can wake up in the morning and appreciate that you got to have a hot shower, or you got to have a breakfast, or you got to sleep in your bed.

We decide whether to focus on expectation and entitlement or have a sense of appreciation and gratitude. And just saying right now things that you're grateful for, shifts your perspective in such a beautiful way.

CONNECTION

Connection is why we're here as humans, it's why we're on the planet. We're neurobiologically hard-wired for connection. Shame, on the other hand, is the fear of disconnection. That I'm not worthy of being connected to you. Now, at the moment, while we're being asked – by law – to physically disconnect from each other, it's really important to understand that we're still worthy of connection. And finding ways to stay connected is really important. Because being asked to stay away can unlock these shame stories that can be triggered, in particular, from our childhood – that we're not worthy of connection because we're staying away from each other. So, it's really important to identify that while we're not physically connected, we are worthy of connection and we can find that social connection, and mental connection, and spiritual connection that, as humans, we're hardwired for as well. And it's what's really important for all of us is to find any way shape or form to stay connected with one another.

VULNERABILITY

Certainty and routine right now have been replaced with uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure – and that's effectively the definition of vulnerability. So those who embrace vulnerability, as a strength right now have got a greater chance of getting through this chapter. There're effectively two types of people on the planet today: those who view vulnerability as a strength, and those who view it as a weakness. If you view vulnerability as a weakness: typically, we're quite closed, close-minded, defensive, on the back foot, in denial of what's going on around us. We're not very compassionate – first for ourselves, because we think we have to be this perfect leader with all the answers, and then it's very hard to be compassionate for someone else, if you're not compassionate for yourself first, and compassion is so important right now. And then you won't create that connection first for yourself and then for others.

But if you view vulnerability as a strength, and you lean into that risk and uncertainty and emotional exposure, the opposite three things happen. You're more open, more open-minded, curious, you're more adaptive, you're incredibly compassionate – because you don't have to be this perfect leader anymore. You can lean into the humanity of what's going on around you and then you can be compassionate to others. And then you will create that connection that, as leaders, we're looking for – even though you're physically disconnected in terms of your environment, working from home, you still can create the most beautiful connection. If, as a leader, you embrace vulnerability as a strength, and then you'll be able to adapt to the conditions around you, which are changing by the hour at the moment.

In terms of understanding that vulnerability is courage, Brene Brown did this beautiful exercise and went around the world and interviewed some of the bravest teams on the planet – from the

military, to SOGs, to navy seals. And she asked them this one question: she said the definition of vulnerability is risk, uncertainty and emotional exposure. Is there ever a time in your life when you're not having to lean into risk, uncertainty and emotional exposure?

And they all laughed, and they said: "No! 24/7, seven days a week, 12 months a year. We are constantly having to lean into risk, uncertainty and emotional exposure. We could be killed at any moment." And that's vulnerability, and that's courage. Lean in, be open to the influence, be adaptive to change, embrace the uncertainty. That is courage. The world needs braver leaders right now. The world needs more vulnerable leaders right now.

PERFORMANCE MINDSET

A lot of the work I do with my clients centres around performance mindset, which is (in the moment of performance): how I can focus my attention on the things I can control, and the best version of me, and not get distracted by the things which typically sabotage our performances, which is the fear of failure or focusing on the result.

Right now, it's fair to say that life itself is a performance. There are so many distractions that are sabotaging our performances right now and what's impudent on us is to identify when we're getting distracted and let them go.

90% of performances are sabotaged by the fear of failure or focusing on the result, causing unnecessary expectations that we can't control. Accepting the things we can't control and focusing back on the things we can control and the best version of us, enables us to think with clarity and with a calmness and a composure. To enable us to strategize, to communicate and stay connected.

If we're feeling overwhelmed at the moment, more likely than not, our focus of attention is on something we can't control but wanting to control it, which causes instant anxiety. Especially if we're worried about the results, the future: "when is this going to end? How many people are going to suffer? When can I get some certainty back in my life?" all these things we can't control. Accepting that and focusing our attention back on the things we can control can help us feel less overwhelmed. But there are other techniques we can utilise as well. Creating "courage mantras", or affirmations, if you like, to enable us to stand tall rather than go small when we experience fear is an example. Michael Phelps, the world's most famous Olympian, made affirmations and courage matras quite famous – and you can Google "Michael Phelps affirmations". But in order to create them for ourselves, you've really just got to answer three questions. The first one is: "how do I experience fear? Or how do I show up when I'm afraid? Do I go to silence, do I go to violence? Do I go to fight or flight? Do I shut up shop and be in denial?"

Once you can identify how you show up in the world when you experience fear, when you're afraid, the second one is: "where do I shrink or go small rather than tall? What situations are causing me to feel anxiety at the moment or feel fear?" And for all of us they're very, very different, in terms of how we experience these emotions. Once you can identify those two questions then you can go: "OK, the next time that happens, the next time I experience anxiety or that feeling of being overwhelmed, what can I say to myself, in real time, that will reframe the story I'm telling myself?" Now a courage mantra can be as simple as: "I'm a warrior, not a worrier". Or it can be as simple as: "I've got this". But in your own words, in your own vernacular, what can you say to yourself that enables you to stand your ground and to stay tall, rather than go small in these moments of anxiety where we're feeling quite overwhelmed.

We are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. And it's really important to understand that our life story is not our life, it's just our story. And we're the author of it, so we'll get to write the ending. But we also get to go back to these moments that we're living right now and reframe these stories where we're telling ourselves: "I'm not enough, I'm not good enough, I'm not successful enough, I'm not smart enough". And give yourself permission to be imperfect but unconditionally worthy: worthy of love, worthy of belonging, worthy of connection, worthy of going on a journey of right now – do whatever is required.

Unfortunately, we've got this negative bias, this unconscious negative reptilian brain that's like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones. We can make it Velcro for positive experiences by giving ourselves permission to be imperfect, but unconditionally worthy, to get through this chapter.

Now, this is the most important principle that every human on the planet needs to understand, acknowledge and implement, and that is: it's our decisions, not the conditions, that determine our mindset, our self-worth and our attitude. At the moment the opposite is happening, we're letting the conditions of our reality, determine our mindset. But we are in total control of our emotions because we're in total control of the words that we send from our conscious mind to our unconscious mind that determines our emotions.

So if you're feeling calm, it's medically physically impossible to feel anxious. But the opposite is also true – if you feel anxious, it's impossible to feel calm and *you* decide. Recapture that performance memory when you were at your best and reclaim the words that best describe how you were feeling in that performance. I guarantee you'll find derivatives of "calm", or "composed", or "relaxed", or "confident", or "happy", or "free". In your own words, in your own way – when you recreate and reclaim those emotions, that becomes the story you tell yourself.

Viktor Frankl, who's one of my heroes and arguably the world's greatest psychiatrist, who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp. He got out of there and he wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, and he wrote it in seven days. The most famous line in that book is that "everything can be taken from a person, except for one thing – the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way". Our greatest growth comes from our darkest times and this chapter will define so many leaders. Once we realize that, we decide it's our decisions – not the conditions – that determine our mindset, that determine our attitude and determine our self-worth. It's not up for grabs, we're already unconditionally worthy.