Opposing Ideas

The knowledge that transformed how I think

The Premise

Significant research has been done on highly successful people, top sports stars included. One example comes from soccer (aka football, if you're a Brit like me). The very best penalty takers share one particular mindset, and it's worth a guess before you read on.

What goes through their head in the seconds before they shoot?

"I'm definitely going to score." *Nope.*

If that's their only thought and they miss, or the goalie saves it, there's an imbalance between what their unconscious expected and what actually happened. You'll usually see their physiology change: their shoulders drop, their head faces down. Poor performance for the rest of the game, and often for a dozen more games afterwards.

"I'm probably going to score." *Also nope.*

That's how moderate or good players think. "Probably" is the language of the average.

So which is it?

Neither

This is what the best in the world actually think...

“I am one hundred percent certain I'm going to score.”

AND

“I know exactly what I'll do if I don't.”

Both. At full strength. At the same time.

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Principle

The most successful entrepreneurs, sports stars, leaders, military operators and the people who hold families together tend to share this one ability. They hold two opposites at full strength, at the same time, and act accordingly. If you're questioning how, stop questioning. I'm asking you to suspend disbelief. I know from personal experience that it's perfectly possible to hold and believe in completely opposing ideas. The instruction is ultimately simple... just do it.

Push or rest. Accept or change. Be ambitious or be peaceful. You don't have to pick a side. You can choose both. Often compromise, the place between two opposing thoughts or two different ways of thinking, is where average and moderate live. Both of them, all the way, at the same time, is where the greatest successes tend to come from.

A Few Examples

Everything matters *AND* nothing does.
Every piece of your health counts, one weak link gets you. And ten years after you're gone almost nobody will think about it. Both, at once.

Big visions *AND* surrender.
Big visions, goal setting and being outcome oriented can be vital for growth and success. At the same time, surrendering to the universe, to whatever comes, letting life unfold and making decisions as and when necessary, helps you live in the right now and feel more peaceful, and it's a trait of the happiest people. So which one is it? Let it be both.

Look after the pennies *AND* don't sweat the small stuff.
Look after the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves: focus on the details. Don't sweat the small stuff: focus on the big picture. Which one is true? Why not both?

Put others first *AND* put yourself first.
I believe we're here to serve others, to do all we can to help the people around us have an even better, more peaceful life. At the same time, if you don't take care of yourself, it can be impossible to take care of others. So which one is it? Somewhere in between, kind of look after yourself and kind of give to others? Not for me. Push both to the extreme and test yourself. Think about what it would take to put yourself first while also putting others first.

First impressions matter *AND* don't judge a book by its cover.
A simple life lesson. You may be absolutely right to take an initial view of somebody when you first meet them. At the same time, you don't know somebody until you know somebody. Which one is it? Let it be both.

Accept it *AND* change it.
Full acceptance of where you are today, and full effort on where you're going.

Seek discomfort *AND* enjoy life.
Lift weights, delay gratification, have the hard conversation. And seize opportunities, live in the present, smell the roses.

How To Use It

Whenever you find yourself choosing between A and B, choosing between two ways of thinking about something, ask whether you should be thinking both. Ask what it would mean for both to be true. The results may transform your thinking, and your life.

Two opposing ideas. At the same time. Still functioning.