

# Mental Spinach

The Work Life Handbook

Jess and Ian Pollard and Jackie Werdeling



## What is it?

### Welcome to the *Mental Spinach* Work Life Handbook

This Handbook is an additional resource to be used alongside our pocketbook *Mental Spinach* as you navigate your work and life. Both are structured to encourage:

- **Self-starting** – building your capabilities, relationships, businesses or anything important to you, without depending on spoon-feeding or direction from others;
- **Having a Growth Mindset** – deeply believing that you can strongly grow your capabilities and relationships; and
- **Having a Player Mindset** – when faced by challenges or disappointments, asking yourself “What is my role in this and what can I do about it?”

...and through these to give you the confidence and courage to think and dream bigger and act and commit decisively.

The Handbook highlights thought-provoking questions on common and important challenges - like managing your wellbeing, building your community or developing your leadership. It is based on the *Mental Spinach* Four Lenses framework. This is a simple way of thinking through different aspects of a decision or topic, so that you're covering off on the following logical themes or (as we call them) Lenses:

- **Identity** – Who am I and how can I strengthen my compass of self-awareness?
- **Opportunity** – How can I best source and capture the right opportunities to generate my own luck?
- **Impact** – How can I optimise the opportunities I choose to pursue?
- **Sustainability** – How can I realistically sustain all this?

It offers a disciplined way to reflect on what matters to you and what impacts your connection with others. You can use its framework as flexibly as you wish.

## How do I use this handbook?

Lightbulb moments often come from asking the right questions about things you've observed, experienced or felt. This Handbook prioritises such questions and is an easy way to get started with healthy reflection and action rather than procrastination.

Like *Mental Spinach* this Handbook is designed as a companion for you, whether you're trying to build something (yourself, your relationships, your career), transition into something new (from sport, between careers) or are just curious and looking to get more out of life. It can be read in one sitting and kept as a core reference for inspiration when one of the chosen topics becomes a priority for you.

As an individual, you can use it flexibly – Print it. Save it on your desktop. Keep it at your desk. This toolkit is designed as an ongoing reflection tool to pick up and put down as is helpful.

Whether you're part of a group or you are a team leader, you can use it as a **conversation guide** - Great conversations stem from great questions and active listening. That's another reason why this resource is designed around questions. You can use this handbook and the *Mental Spinach* Four Lenses framework as a guide to shape mentoring, coaching or team conversations.



## What topics are covered?

This Handbook is structured around helping you to reflect, action-plan and connect around specific topics. In the following order it will help you to:

- find more joy and meaning (p. 5)
- change unsustainable patterns (p. 6)
- build on your wellbeing (p. 8)
- manage your time and energy (p. 9)
- develop good financial habits (p. 10)
- master important conversations (p. 12)
- grow your community (p. 13)
- build your capabilities at work (p. 14)
- contribute more at work (p. 16)
- become a better leader (p. 17)

We've included up front in this Handbook a worksheet which you can use for any of the above topics to identify your key takeaways, priorities and proposed actions.

## A final note from the authors

Hi. We're Jess and Ian Pollard, the father and daughter team that co-authored *Mental Spinach*. Over the years we've had great joy hearing from readers of *Mental Spinach* sharing stories of how our little green pocketbook has impacted their lives. For some it's helped to shape important decisions at big crossroads. For others it's nudged them to reflect more regularly on the huge ongoing impact of seemingly little realisations or events.

One such reader is Jackie Werdeling, a seasoned international HR executive. Jackie shared with us her own story of how *Mental Spinach* had impacted her life and was keen to help us spread the *Mental Spinach* framework into more organisations. This workbook is the result of our collaboration with Jackie to that end.

Our aim in sharing this is to be a companion to your story and to inspire you to observe, question, reflect and act upon things that will positively shape your life. Life is full of gold mines of potential, rich for the taking by those with the courage to question and go for it!

We are confident that this free handbook can be improved and extended. We always love feedback and suggestions.

You can find us at [www.mentalspinach.com](http://www.mentalspinach.com).



# Topic Worksheet

## Using this worksheet

1. Pick a topic from this handbook
2. As you read the questions from each Lens write down the questions or reflections that jump out at you
3. Once you've spent time on all of the Lenses, note down your key takeaways, who can help and what actions you are going to take

### 1. The Identity Lens - Building your compass of self-awareness

Type your takeaways, questions or things of note in the box below:

### 2. The Opportunity Lens - Creating more opportunities for yourself

Type your takeaways, questions or things of note in the box below:

### 3. The Impact Lens - Working smarter, not harder

Type your takeaways, questions or things of note in the box below:

### 4. The Sustainability lens - Building your compass of self-awareness

Type your takeaways, questions or things of note in the box below:

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#### What are your key takeaways?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Who can help?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### What actions am I going to take?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## I want to find more joy and meaning

It's easy to lose sight of the goal of living a joyful life given our daily distractions. Imagine instead a life where you're purposefully aware of this objective. You can intentionally shift your mindsets and habits to generate more joy and meaning in your life.

### Ask yourself:

#### Identity - What brings me joy and meaning?

- Where and when do I feel like I belong and feel at my best?
- Do I spend time working on things I enjoy with people I enjoy?
- Am I living my life intentionally or copying someone else's life?
- What mindsets and habits support bringing more joy and meaning to my life?
- What are my values? Do they align with my life priorities?
- What story of my life best recognises my real potential?

#### Opportunity - How can I source opportunities for joy and meaning?

- Where and how can I find opportunities to design my own life to find more joy and meaning?
- What small daily changes could I make to create more fun and appreciation in my life?
- What contexts or engagements spark my imagination?
- Am I open to new opportunities, or do I hang on to goals, even when they are no longer serving me well?
- Can I find opportunities for joy and meaning in helping others?
- How can I find more ways to spend time with people who energise me and bring me joy?

#### Impact - How can I work smarter not harder on these opportunities?

- In a year from now, what are the sustained changes I would like to see in my life that would give me more joy and meaning?
- What does a joyful and meaningful week look like to me?
- Who do I need on board to help me realise my dream week?
- How can I find the courage to make big changes that I need?
- How can I use my strengths and passions to accelerate my pursuit of more joy and meaning - and give me some early wins?

#### Sustainability - How can I maintain a sustainable balance?

- What are the signs I am not getting enough enjoyment in my life?
- Am I willing to live a simpler but happier life with more space and less clutter?
- Do I need to shift my expectations to find more joy and meaning?
- Do I celebrate others' successes and get pleasure from them?
- Can I regularly practice gratitude and celebrate my wins in life?
- Do I take time to have a healthy break?

# I need to change unsustainable patterns in my life

If you're spotting a cluster of signs that you're moving into unsustainable territory, it's important to design some meaningful change to the patterns in your life.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity - How can I understand my needs at this time?

- What's in short supply in my life right now? (time, energy, attention, sleep, sense of belonging?)
- What are my mind and my body telling me needs to change?
- What things are draining me or making me anxious?
- Do I typically put myself second? Or third, fourth...? Or mostly number one?
- Who's in my support crew — my rock in uncertain times or for tough decisions?
- What is my light at the end of the tunnel?

### Opportunity - What opportunities are open to me?

- How can I safely explore the change I need to make and talk about it with someone I trust?
- Where are there immediate opportunities to make some small changes and to create some initial momentum?
- Which are the vicious cycles or traps in my work/life? Can I transform them?
- What other opportunities will stem from making this change? How big is the opportunity really?
- Do I worry about things I can neither control nor influence? How might I reframe my mindsets so the problems diminish?

### Impact - How can I work smarter not harder to effect change?

- What key ingredients will set this change up for success?
- Who do I need on board to help me?
- Are there tough conversations I need to take on? With whom? When? How?
- Which of my core foundations or strengths will help me succeed in this opportunity?
- If I slow down, will it help me create more mental space?

### Sustainability - How can I make the changes sustainable?

- Do I need to let go of some things in order to make this change?
- Do I understand and accept what I can control and what I can't?
- Where should I be setting clearer priorities, personal boundaries and more realistic expectations?
- Am I taking ownership over whatever is important to me?
- What milestones will help me to recognise and celebrate my progress?

### From *Mental Spinach* p. 83 – Spot signals of unsustainable territory

When you approach unsustainable territory you'll experience red flags in your energy, feelings, responses, thought patterns and performance. Here are some examples of those signs.

#### Signals of unsustainable territory

##### Personal Signals

###### Mind

Feeling out of touch with your values and your sense of self  
 Trouble concentrating or remembering  
 Responding in a way that's unlike you  
 Not feeling as invigorated as usual

###### Body

Regular or ongoing sickness or fatigue  
 Sudden changes in sleeping or eating patterns  
 Putting on or losing weight quickly

###### Spirit

Feeling a lowered sense of hope  
 Feeling disconnected from the world around you  
 Putting what you believe in second  
 Never finding time for your favourite hobby

##### Social Signals

Regularly feeling lonely  
 The feeling of a shrinking world and limited friends  
 Feeling you don't have anybody you can ask for help  
 Losing faith in others  
 Fractured relationships  
 Not taking ownership over your life roles

##### Financial Signals

Major changes in your spending habits  
 Worrying a lot about your finances  
 Starting to build large amounts of debt  
 Not understanding your own financial behaviours

# I want to keep building on my wellbeing

Your wellbeing is built on a range of foundations (personal, social and financial) which work together to provide stability and strength. Those foundations need your ongoing nurturing to maintain and build your wellbeing.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity - What are the keys to my wellbeing?

- What wellbeing practices are impactful for me?
- What relationships or community activities are really important to me and bring joy to my life?
- Which of my mindsets set my wellbeing up for success?
- What are my priorities and how do these impact on my wellbeing?
- Do I have a healthy benchmark for what me being well looks like?

### Opportunity - What can I do to build on my wellbeing?

- How can I get more of what I need to recharge my batteries?
- Is there a mindset or habit which continually costs me? Can I modify it?
- What habits or activities would I like to build into my daily life to enhance my ability to look after myself?
- Am I ready to dedicate the necessary time, energy and attention to make changes for my wellbeing?
- Where are there opportunities to make looking after my wellbeing enjoyable and connected to people I care about?

### Impact - How can I make these initiatives real game changers?

- What are the key ingredients for creating a lifestyle that continually builds my wellbeing?
- How do I create the space to do so?
- How can I use my strengths and passions to accelerate my growth?
- How can I achieve some early wins and momentum?
- How can I seize the courage to make big changes if I need them? To assert myself? To express my needs?

### Sustainability - What can help sustain my wellbeing?

- How much am I trying to sustain right now? Do I need to let go of some things or say 'no' to others?
- How do my and others' expectations impact on my wellbeing? Are some of those expectations unrealistic?
- In what contexts does perfectionism drive me? Is it warranted?
- Do I take time to celebrate and show gratitude for improvements in my health and wellbeing?
- Is it time for a holiday?



# I want to manage my time and energy better

Your time and energy are limited resources which you can purposefully manage in order to live the life you seek. Pausing to reflect on where you direct your time and your energy helps you to re-prioritize those things you want most.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity - What is my relationship with my time and energy?

- Do I consider my time and energy as limited resources?  
Do I value them highly?
- Do I typically bite off more than I can chew?
- Do I have the time to pursue the things that are meaningful to me? ("time affluence")
- What important things do I put off because of time?
- Do I think ahead to prioritize my time and energy?
- Who are the people who help me save time and energy?

### Opportunity - How can I better manage my time and energy?

- What resources and support would help me?
- How can I better manage technology distractions?
- Of my current tasks, which are the big time and energy sappers?
- What time do I waste on unwarranted perfection, procrastination or things I can neither control nor influence?
- How can I spend more time on things that energise me and with people that do?
- Am I getting enough exercise, leisure and fun? Enough Sleep? Eating reasonably well?

### Impact - How can I increase the impact of the initiatives I choose?

- Have I analysed how I use my time?
- If I find more time and energy, how can I best use it?
- What 'smarter not harder' habits would help free up my time? (Better control of my diary? Saying "No"? Blocking out time? Keeping meetings focused? Dealing with things once?)
- What mindset changes could transform my use of time?
- What are some easy things I can do to positively impact others' energy and time?
- How might I get outside my comfort zone to better manage my time and energy? (Taking time to reflect? Saying no? Delegating more? Asking for help? Avoiding micromanaging?)

### Sustainability - How do I avoid the unsustainably fast lane?

- What time- or energy-related signs warn me of unsustainable territory? (Taking too much work home? Rushing? Mistakes? Procrastination? Forgoing exercise or hobbies? Missing important family things? Not enough sleep? A short fuse? A growing "to do" list?)
- Do I feel guilty about protecting my personal time? Why should I?
- Are my time and energy overly focused in one direction?
- Do I know when I'm heading for a particularly demanding period (whether days or weeks)? How can I best prepare?
- Am I conscious of my limits when building expectations?
- What recharges my batteries? Can I get more of it?

# I want to develop good financial habits

Building a healthy level of financial understanding and good financial habits isn't an overnight exercise but it offers lifelong rewards. It helps fund your aspirations and gives you more flexibility in designing your life.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity – What are my financial habits and priorities?

- Why is financial understanding important or relevant for me?
- How does it link into my life situation, needs and aspirations?
- Am I reasonably disciplined in my financial affairs? Would I like to be?
- Do I understand my pay and its various components, including super?
- Am I inherently a saver or a spender?  
Do I budget for my income, expenses and savings?
- Do I understand my insurances (perhaps property, vehicles, health, life and income protection) and what I'm not insuring?
- Do I understand my tax position and tax-deductible expenses?

### Opportunity – How can I best capture opportunities to improve them?

- Do I track my expenses? What big items should I focus on?
- Do I have the right balance between spending now versus saving for later expenses?
- How can I best put money aside for big purchases?
- Are my financial records and files as good as they need to be?
- From whom can I get independent professional advice?
- From what free sources can I get independent comparative data on major financial items?
- Who else can I talk to about my financials and financial matters in general - partner? friend? colleague?

### Impact – How can I optimise the opportunities I choose to pursue?

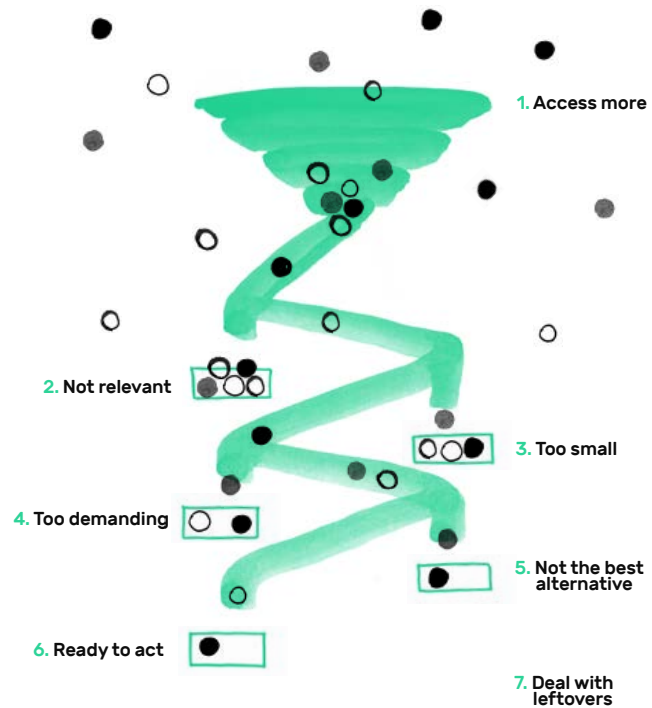
- How can I make my financial position simpler and also more favourable?
- From what sources can I keep building on my financial understanding?
- Who else in my family should I encourage to achieve greater financial understanding?
- Do I understand what it means if I don't have a will in place? Have I updated my will for my latest personal circumstances?
- Do I understand the dangers of giving personal guarantees?

### Sustainability – Are my financial position and habits sustainable?

- Before I invest, borrow or take on legal obligations, do I make sure I understand the deal and check the backgrounds of those I'm dealing with?
- When considering a potential investment, do I look at both the best and worst case outcomes and what risk I can afford to take?
- How regularly should I review my total financial position?
- Do I see signs that I'm approaching unsustainable financial territory? (Major changes in spending habits? Worrying a lot about finances? Building large amounts of debt, especially increasing credit card debt?)

**From *Mental Spinach* p. 27 – Enhance your Opportunity Pipeline**

There is an ecosystem of opportunities around you. To find more and cherry-pick the best, you can use the Opportunity Pipeline model in *Mental Spinach*.



# I want to master important conversations

Conversations are core to so many dimensions of your life – like relationships and collaboration, giving and receiving feedback and expressing your feelings. For some of these the stakes will be high and you'll be wanting to master them.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity - Who am I and how do I approach important conversations?

- What values and principles shape my approach to important conversations?
- What mindsets and habits do I regularly take into important conversations? (e.g. a win-win mindset or a win-lose mindset)
- Do I shy away from confrontation or important conversations? If so, why? Is that serving me well?
- Do I prepare well for important conversations? How deeply do I listen? Do I think well "on my feet"?
- What have my most recent big conversations taught me about how I navigate them?

### Opportunity - How can I find opportunities to improve my approach?

- From little things, big things grow. Can addressing a difficult topic now avoid a harder conversation down the road?
- Do I look for the right opportunity (time and place) to have important conversations or deliver feedback?
- Who can give me objective feedback on my strengths and areas for improvement in navigating important conversations?
- What learning opportunities could help me improve my conversation skills?
- How deeply and effectively do I put myself in the other person's shoes and understand their logic, agenda and feelings?
- How can I better prepare for the conversations that count?

### Impact - How can I work smarter not harder in important conversations?

- What do I see as the agenda for the conversation?
- What are my priority outcomes from it?
- What are the key ingredients for achieving success in it?
- What element of courage do I need to maximise my impact? (To assume responsibility? To share vulnerability? To speak up?)
- Is it time to experiment with a new approach and see how it affects the flow and the outcome?
- Who can help to give me game-changing insights into my communication style?

### Sustainability - How can I reduce the strain on me of a big conversation?

- Would I feel in a safer place if I had someone with me?
- As I navigate expectations and compromises, am I clear on what commitments and compromises I can make?
- Is this important conversation worth having, or is it something I need to move past and let go of?
- Who can support me before and after important conversations?

# I want to grow my community

Humans are social animals, with the need to build community deeply hard-wired into their DNA. Growing your community is about finding authentic ways to build relationships that matter and last.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity – Who are my community and why are they important to me?

- Do I think growing my community is important in my life? If so, do I prioritise it accordingly?
- Who is my tribe? Where do I feel most like I belong?
- Who are the key people in my life? Who would I like to spend more time with?
- Which people make me feel at my best?
- What are my strengths when it comes to meeting new people and building friendships and relationships?

### Opportunity – How can I find opportunities to grow my community?

- What can I do to deepen my most important relationships?
- Do I create enough time for the conversations that count to build deep relationships?
- What habits and mindsets regularly lead to me meeting new people?
- When I meet a great new person, what do I do to follow up?
- What's a fun thing I can regularly do to meet new people?
- Am I so invested in my longstanding relationships that I'm less open to meeting new people?
- How can I use my strengths to build my community?

### Impact – How can I optimise my opportunities to build my community?

- How can I create more continuity or consistency in most significant relationships?
- What events or clubs will regularly introduce me to new people?
- How can I free up more time to engage with others?
- Can I be more courageous in meeting new people? (Say "hello" to strangers? Go to new events? Try something outside my comfort zone? Say "yes" to events where I won't know anyone?)
- What system or approach will help me to check in with people more regularly and support big events in their lives?

### Sustainability – Can I realistically sustain all these relationships?

- What social signals might tell me I'm taking on too much? (Regularly late to special family events? Not delivering on promises to friends? Fractured relationships?)
- Is it time to sit back and look at who I'm prioritising?
- Should I be asserting my own needs more strongly?
- Do I often express my gratitude to the people and community who matter most to me?
- Do I need to let go of some relationships to welcome others into my life or to create more space for those closest to me?

# I want to build my capabilities at work

Growing a healthy and fulfilling career is in your hands. More than ever you now have the opportunity to design and develop your professional capabilities.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity – What do I want out of my work life?

- What does success mean for me?
- What mindsets and habits will help me to keep growing my professional life?
- What do I value and how does that shape my working life?
- What are my top skills and strengths?
- What do I love doing that brings me joy?

### Opportunity – How can I best source opportunities to grow?

- What work opportunity would change the game for me now?
- What habit, skill or mindset would continue to reward me if I focused on it?
- What extra dimensions to my current role would make it great?
- Can I clearly articulate what type of opportunity I'm looking for and what I could bring to it?
- Who are the key people in my working life and how can I better support them?

### Impact – How can I optimise the opportunities I choose to pursue?

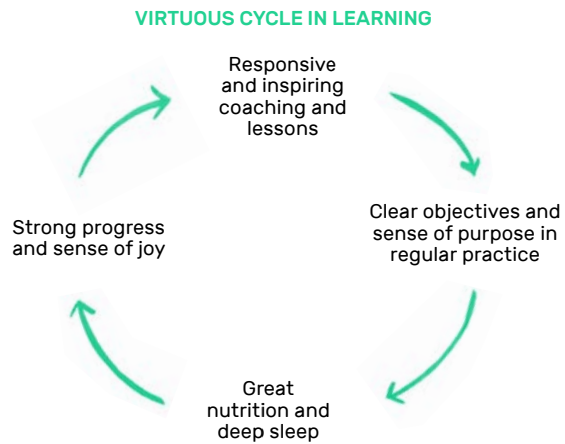
- Am I constantly learning new things and upskilling?
- Can I use my time and energy more effectively through better routines and systems?
- How can I tap into the power of courage to accelerate my career? (Have a challenging conversation? Back myself? Assume responsibility? Admit I got something wrong? Experiment? Be vulnerable? Ask for help?)
- Can a win-win mindset enhance my contribution?
- Can I be more effective in giving and in receiving feedback?

### Sustainability – Can I sustain these initiatives as well as everything else?

- What am I currently juggling? Which things aren't aligned with my priorities? What should I say 'no' to?
- For me, what does a sustainable lifestyle look like?
- Is my inner perfectionist costing me extra work and stress?
- What signs warn me that I'm approaching unsustainable territory? How can I spot them earlier to avoid burnout?
- What's in short supply in my life right now?
- How can I better protect my times of rest and relaxation?

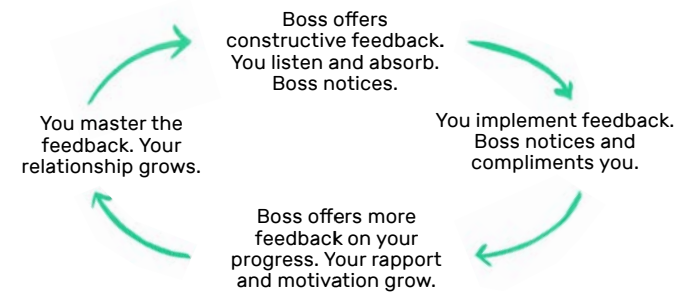
**From *Mental Spinach* p. 53 & p. 67 – Virtuous Cycles in learning and feedback**

When you have a range of ingredients positively impacting on one another you create a virtuous cycle that grows as the cycle repeats. Here are two virtuous cycles from *Mental Spinach*, one in learning and one in the impact of positive feedback with your boss.



**DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK**

Your ability to receive and use feedback is key to your growth. But it can drive much more. Consider the following virtuous cycle in a work relationship with a boss (or teacher or coach).



## I want to contribute more at work

Business growth may ultimately be measured by revenue and profit numbers, but the real building lies in the growing of its people, products, systems and key relationships. You don't have to be in a sales or customer-facing role to help build the business.

### Ask yourself:

#### Identity – Who am I and what do I uniquely offer?

- Am I motivated to add value to our business?
- What is my role in the business's operations?
- What authority and accountabilities do I have?
- What resources and support are available to me?
- What can I influence?
- Who is depending on me and what are my critical success factors?

#### Opportunity – How can I best find opportunities to add value?

- How can I bring my best authentic self to work more often?
- Am I curious about the business beyond my immediate responsibilities?
- Do I look out for the potential in others and ways it can be applied and developed?
- How can my strengths and behaviours best contribute to the culture?
- Do I welcome new colleagues and foster their sense of belonging?
- What projects or experiments can I champion to build capacity in the business?

#### Impact – How can I optimise the opportunities I choose to pursue?

- Does my collaboration help others to be more effective in their roles?
- How do I communicate my thoughts and feedback most effectively?
- With complaints or problems, do I look for underlying causes and proper fixes?
- Do I record and communicate learnings and document systems or processes?
- How can my efforts best support those closest to the customers?

#### Sustainability – Can I realistically sustain all this?

- Do I put things at risk by over-promising? Do I typically deliver on expectations?
- Do I hold up my hand when additional resources are needed?
- Do I acknowledge others' contributions wherever possible?
- Do I celebrate my own successes and others' at most opportunities?
- Do I keep an eye out for warning signs of unsustainability (personal or business)?
- Do I know what I need in order to maintain my own wellbeing?



# I want to become a better leader

Inspiring others to achieve a goal, make a change or take a risk requires self-belief, creativity and conviction. Regardless of your formal position you're a leader if you believe in a purpose and can motivate others to get on board.

## Ask yourself:

### Identity - What is my brand of leadership?

- In my various life roles, where and how do I lead?
- In what contexts do I feel like a natural leader?
- Do I put too much pressure on myself when I'm in a leadership role? Do I feel I need to have all the answers?
- Am I conscious of my behaviours, language and words, and their impact on others? And the mindsets behind these?
- Am I typically open to feedback?

### Opportunity - How can I lead more effectively and more often?

- What issues are important to me and worth influencing? Where can I step up and make a difference?
- What mindsets will best help me build on my leadership?
- Without just attention-seeking or micro-managing, how can I be more involved and engaged with my team?
- Can I be more effective in seeking feedback from my team?
- Can I grow my team's capabilities by more effective delegation?
- What experiments might I try?

### Impact - What will make my opportunities more impactful?

- How can I listen more deeply to colleagues and other stakeholders and use that intel to drive better outcomes?
- How can I communicate most effectively the significance of the immediate opportunity?
- Who are my role models and what can I learn from them in strengthening my own brand of leadership?
- Which of my skills and strengths can I apply to have a greater impact? If I need some new skills, how can I acquire them?
- What do I need from my leaders so I can be more effective as a leader? What should I fight for on behalf of my team? (Clarity? Resources? Context? Recognition?)

### Sustainability - How do I sustain the momentum of my leadership?

- What most saps my energy as a leader? What boosts it most?
- What personal danger signs do I need to be mindful of to ensure I remain purposeful and effective?
- When leading others, how can I balance having an open mind with asserting my own views and needs and saying "no"?
- How do we celebrate team successes?
- Which systems, processes or cultural norms need overhauling for the good of the team?