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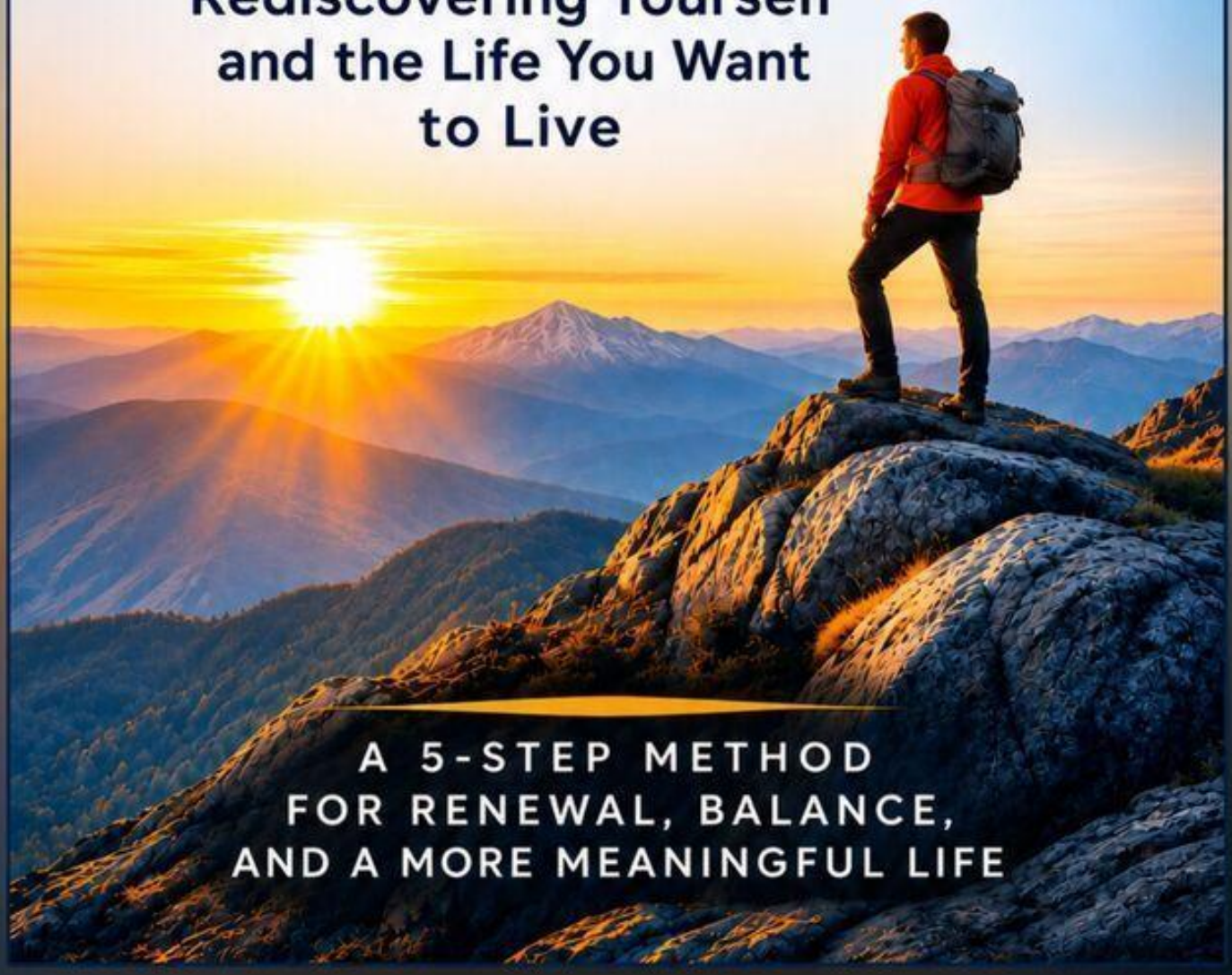
PAVEL VERBNYAK

THE SECOND SUMMIT

A Practical Guide for Your Next Chapter

Rediscovering Yourself and the Life You Want to Live



A 5-STEP METHOD
FOR RENEWAL, BALANCE,
AND A MORE MEANINGFUL LIFE

Pavel Verbnyak

The Second Summit. Rediscovering Yourself and the Life You Want to Live

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What happens when you achieve your dreams but still wonder, «What's next?» In The Second Summit, international speaker and coach Pavel Verbnyak explores how to redefine success, rediscover your purpose, and create a more fulfilling life. Through inspiring real-life stories, practical exercises, and a powerful five-step method, this book will help you find your own path to a meaningful future.

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The Second Summit Rediscovering Yourself and the Life You Want to Live

Pavel Verbnyak

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Preface. You Don't Have to Start Over

There is a moment that rarely makes it into the photographs taken at award ceremonies. The goal has been reached. The project is complete. Your career is going well. From the outside, everything looks as it should. And yet a quiet question arises within: "What now?"

I have encountered this question among executives, entrepreneurs, professionals, and people navigating a transition between stages of life. It does not always signal a crisis. Sometimes a person has simply grown accustomed to what they have achieved. Sometimes they are tired. Sometimes their former priorities have changed, while their new ones have yet to be named. These situations may feel similar, but they call for different solutions.

In my work as an international speaker and trainer, I meet people who know how to set goals, make difficult decisions, and take responsibility for others. I have led programs for executives and entrepreneurs, spoken to young audiences, and worked with teams in different regions and countries. The more personal stories I hear, the less I believe in one-size-fits-all answers. One person needs to expand a business, another to learn to delegate, and a third to reclaim time for family. These choices may look very different from the outside, but in every case it is important to understand whether the goal a person has chosen is truly their own.

This book is primarily for those who have already achieved a great deal in their professional or personal lives but want to choose their next stage consciously. It does not suggest dismantling what you have built, changing professions in haste, or searching for a single calling. Instead, we will explore what is worth preserving, what possibilities have already opened up, and what calls for a new decision.

The book includes interviews with real people, composite literary characters, my own observations, and practical exercises. Documentary episodes should not be confused with fictional illustrations. Not every exercise will suit every reader, and questions concerning health and psychological well-being are no substitute for consulting an appropriate professional.

I propose a simple test: look beyond a grand goal somewhere in the future and consider an ordinary Tuesday. Does it make room for health, relationships, curiosity, work you consider meaningful, and at least one decision that is truly your own?

The second summit does not have to be higher than the first. It has to be yours. And the journey toward it can begin not by dismantling your former life, but with an honest question.

A question worth carrying into these pages is not simply "What do I want next?" but "What kind of days am I willing to build on the way there?" The answer may be quieter than a promotion or a new milestone. It may also demand more courage.

How to Read This Book

The chapters are arranged as a step-by-step journey: from acknowledging what you have achieved and reconsidering familiar assumptions to making decisions, conducting experiments, finding support, and creating a personal plan. Choose one main exercise in each chapter. Additional exercises are collected in the workbook, and you can return to them without having to complete everything at once.

The Second Summit Method: Five Movements

This book is not a ladder with another trophy at the top. Think of it as five movements you can revisit whenever your definition of success changes. Think of these five movements as a map for the journey, not a test you must pass.

1. RECOGNIZE (Chapters 1—3): notice what you have achieved, what has become familiar, and which roles no longer tell your whole story.

2. RECONNECT (Chapters 4—6): question old assumptions, attend to your energy, and listen to what your values are asking of you.

3. REIMAGINE (Chapters 7—8): explore choices beyond either-or thinking and make room for interests you thought you had lost.

4. REDESIGN (Chapters 9—11): make small experiments repeatable, invite support, and give what matters a place in your calendar.

5. RISE (Chapter 12): choose a direction of your own and turn it into a flexible 30-to-90-day plan.

You do not have to move through these stages perfectly. Start where your life is asking the most honest question. Return to the other stages as often as you need. The five movements describe the journey. The Four Horizons, introduced later, are a compass for checking what matters; the Four Levers are resources you may draw on as you redesign your days. Neither replaces the journey itself.

Chapter 1. When the Dream Has Already Come True

When a Long-Held Dream Became an Ordinary Evening

That evening, Andrei came home earlier than usual. He parked the car, went up to the apartment he had once dreamed of, and paused in the entryway. He could hear the voices of his loved ones from the kitchen, while the city lights were coming on beyond the window. Nothing bad had happened. And yet he had an unexpected realization: he could no longer name anything he looked forward to with the same eagerness as before.

Andrei was forty-three. He had built his own business, weathered mistakes and difficult decisions, and created a life that had once seemed a distant goal. He cherished his family and his work. But that evening, for the first time, he heard his own question clearly: “What comes next?”

The question unsettled him precisely because he had no obvious reason to complain. He had no intention of selling the company, moving away, or rejecting the past. He wanted to understand why the path that had once given him direction no longer pointed to the next step.

This is a fictional composite scene, created to illustrate a common experience. But I have heard similar questions from executives, entrepreneurs, and people in a wide range of professions. They do not always signal a crisis. Sometimes a person has simply changed while their idea of success has remained the same.

What makes Andrei’s pause unsettling is not failure but the absence of it. There is no emergency to solve, no obvious enemy to overcome. His old measure of progress has stopped giving him an answer. That uncertainty deserves attention before it is buried beneath another ambitious target.

Why Achievement Stops Feeling Extraordinary

A major goal has a way of focusing our attention. While we are moving toward it, every decision seems part of a clear route. But once we have reached it, much of what we dreamed about becomes a familiar backdrop. An apartment becomes a home, a coveted position becomes the daily work routine, and a successful project becomes a new responsibility. This does not diminish the achievement. That is part of how everyday life works: with time, even important changes stop feeling new.

The difficulty begins when a person takes this familiarity as proof that they must immediately achieve something greater. The next goal is then chosen not out of interest, but out of a fear of stopping. Instead of asking, “What do I want?” they ask, “What else do I have to prove?”

I suggest that you resist rushing to an answer. Your first summit may have been truly your own. It gave you experience, connections, confidence, and freedom. A new interest does not negate the value of the path you have traveled. Before charting the next route, it is worth noticing what already works and what is missing from your life now.

The Old Guitar

A few days later, Andrei was sorting through a cupboard when he found a guitar in a worn case. Once, he could spend hours working out melodies without thinking about usefulness or results. Then came urgent tasks, projects, and the habit of devoting his free time only to things that produced a measurable return.

He ran his fingers over the strings. The guitar was out of tune, and the chords came back only with difficulty. Andrei lost his place several times, but he kept playing. After about twenty minutes, he noticed that he was smiling. He did not need to become a musician. It was enough to hear again a sound that had once delighted him for its own sake.

Over the following weeks, Andrei made no dramatic change of course. He continued to work, meet with his business partners, and spend time with his family. Sometimes he picked up the guitar for fifteen minutes; sometimes he found no time at all. But he stopped demanding that the activity justify its productivity. A small space appeared in his life that did not need to be justified.

This detail matters to me. Renewal does not always begin with a new business, a move, or a grand strategy. Sometimes the first sign of change is a return to something we stopped allowing ourselves long ago.

An Ordinary Tuesday as a Test of a Goal

When choosing a new summit, it is easy to imagine the triumphant moment of arrival. It is far more useful to ask yourself about an ordinary Tuesday. What will the day look like if the goal is achieved? Will there still be time for your health, your loved ones, your interests, rest, and work you consider meaningful?

For example, a new position may bring freedom to make decisions but require constant travel. A new project may be inspiring while also depriving you of sleep. And a small change to your schedule can sometimes create a greater sense of being alive than one more high-profile achievement. There is no universally right choice. There are choices whose consequences are worth seeing in advance.

Practice: Where I Stand Today

Set aside five minutes and write down your answers to three questions:

1. What did I once dream of that has now become part of my life?
2. Which of my achievements still brings me joy, benefit, or a sense of gratitude?
3. What do I feel is missing from my life now, according to my own sense of things rather than the expectations of others?

Do not draw up a new five-year plan just yet. Choose the one answer that surprised you most. If you wish, return to it in a week. Additional exercises are collected in the workbook at the end of the book.

Instead of a Final Answer

Andrei did not find a major new goal in a single evening. But he stopped treating questions about the future as a sign of ingratitude for the present. He began to notice what he wanted to preserve from his former life and what could be changed without destroying what he had achieved.

Perhaps you do not yet need to know the name of your next summit either. It is enough to recognize that the desire to grow and gratitude for the life you have already lived are not at odds with each other.

But another question remains. Why does something that once seemed like unimaginable happiness gradually become an ordinary day? That is where we will begin the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Why Achieving a Dream Can Feel Ordinary

The House He Had Dreamed Of

On his first morning after the move, he woke before the alarm. For several seconds, he listened to the silence and then remembered: this was his home now. The very house that for years had existed only in photographs, plans, and conversations with his family.

He stepped barefoot onto the terrace. Dew glistened on the grass. A bird was singing in a neighboring garden. He smiled: once, this ordinary view had seemed almost unattainable.

Several years passed. The house remained the same, but in the mornings its owner now thought about emails, deadlines, shopping, and errands. He had not fallen out of love with his home. It had simply stopped being an event and become part of life.

This is a fictional composite scene, created to illustrate a common experience. It does not portray any particular interview participant. Its point is not that the dream was a mistake, but that even something longed for becomes familiar with time.

There are two very different questions hidden inside the same feeling. “Why am I no longer excited?” asks about the fading of novelty. “Does this still matter to me?” asks about values. The first may call for attention and gratitude; the second may call for a change of direction. Neither should be answered automatically.

From Anticipation to Familiarity

As we move toward a goal, our imagination sets it apart from everything else. We picture the moment of achievement in advance, return to it in our minds, and sometimes attach a promise to it: “Then I’ll finally be able to breathe.” But after we reach it, new concerns emerge and our attention shifts to the next set of tasks.

In psychology, this is sometimes described as adaptation to positive change. Yet people and circumstances differ: we cannot claim that everyone grows accustomed to every success at the same rate. It is especially important not to confuse familiarity with a loss of meaning.

You can stop admiring your own home every day and continue to love it. You can grow accustomed to a professional role and still find meaning in your work. Or you may discover that a former goal truly no longer aligns with your present values. These are different situations, and they call for different responses.

From Results to Possibilities

One of the most useful shifts in how we view success is to stop seeing an achievement solely as a reward and ask what it has made possible. Why did you want to earn more? For security, freedom of choice, time with loved ones, the opportunity to travel, or the ability to support a cause that matters to you?

Imagine an entrepreneur who dreamed of financial freedom so he could spend more time with his children. The business grew, but his schedule remained unchanged. The question is not whether he is successful enough. The question is whether he has begun to use the freedom he worked for.

Not every possibility is immediately available. There are debts, obligations, circumstances, and people who need our care. But even within these constraints, it is helpful to see the difference between having no choice and being in the habit of overlooking a choice that already exists.

Practice: Ten Dreams That Became Real

Write down ten things that are part of your life today but were once dreams or important goals. They might include an education, a profession, a home, relationships, independence, public-speaking skills, or the opportunity to help others.

Choose your three most significant achievements. For each one, answer: 1) what did I really want at the time? 2) what possibilities did the result open up? 3) am I making use of them today? 4) what single action would help me use them more consciously?

Do not demand excitement of yourself. It is enough to acknowledge the path you have traveled and see what it has made possible. If you discover that a former goal no longer feels meaningful to you, that is important information too.

What Remains When the Goal Is Achieved

Achievements help us build a life, but they cannot fully answer the question of who we are. Once a result becomes familiar, a different conversation opens up before us: what remains an important part of who I am, regardless of my status, position, or number of completed tasks?

The next chapter begins with that very question.

Chapter 3. The Question That Is Hard to Answer

Sergei was accustomed to difficult questions. Over twenty-five years of professional life, he had learned to make decisions, negotiate, remain calm, and find a way forward where others saw a dead end. But one day, over a family dinner, someone asked him, “What do you enjoy doing when you’re not working?”

He wanted to answer, “Traveling.” But then he remembered that his most recent trips had been for work. He wanted to say, “Reading.” But lately he had read almost nothing but business materials. “Music,” flashed through his mind. He really had loved music once. Yet now he could not remember the last time he had put on a favorite album simply for pleasure.

People usually asked Sergei about his position, his projects, and the number of people on his staff. He had clear answers to those questions. But now the subject was Sergei himself — and his customary confidence vanished.

Sergei is a composite literary character, not the subject of a documentary interview. But the question his story poses is entirely real: who are we when no one is asking about our work?

The Role That Quietly Became an Entire Life

Work can bring meaning, joy, a decent income, and a sense of belonging. For many of us, it becomes a space for growth. The problem arises not when someone loves their profession, but when they gradually lose every other way of describing themselves.

We begin to introduce ourselves by our job title, assess our day by the number of tasks we have completed, and measure our own worth by how much we are in demand. And when circumstances change, we may find it difficult to answer a simple question: “What remains in me if this role changes?”

Psychology offers a useful distinction here: a social role is what we do in a particular context, while the self is larger than any single role. It encompasses values, relationships, curiosity, habits, abilities, experience, and many possibilities yet to be realized. This does not mean we should abandon our careers. Rather, it means reclaiming the right to be multifaceted.

Your profession is an important part of your story, but it is not the whole story.

When You Stop Living by Someone Else's Definition of Success

In my work with executives, entrepreneurs, and teams in different countries, I have encountered a recurring question: "I have achieved what I was working toward. So why do I want something more?" Sometimes the answer has nothing to do with a lack of gratitude or discipline. The old definition of success simply no longer describes the person they are today.

Our idea of success often takes shape early: a good education, a well-known company, promotion, stability, recognition. These aspirations may be sensible and worthwhile. But it is important to check from time to time: are they still mine — or am I merely continuing along a route chosen many years ago?

This kind of reassessment does not call for drastic action. You do not have to resign, move away, or erase your achievements. Sometimes an honest conversation, a free evening, a return to a forgotten interest, or a new project that reminds you why you once set out on your path is enough.

Filipe Carrera: From a Predictable Career to Defining His Own Measure of Success

Filipe Carrera lives in Lisbon. Today he works as a trainer, university lecturer, and consultant. But after earning his degree in economics, he imagined success differently: running a large company or a major corporate division.

While working at a bank, Filipe could see a clear career ladder ahead of him. At the same time, he felt with increasing clarity that conventional office life did not suit him. He was drawn to varied challenges, travel, and interaction with people from different cultures.

Making the decision was not easy. He had grown up in a family of modest means, so the fear of financial vulnerability and even bankruptcy felt very acute. This was not the story of someone with nothing to lose. On the contrary, every step required him to weigh real risks.

As his training practice in Portugal began to grow, he started to wonder what would come next. He foresaw increasing competition and changing conditions in the education-services market. Rather than wait, Filipe began looking for opportunities beyond his familiar environment. His academic paper was accepted for presentation at a conference in the United States — an event that became an important turning point in his international career.

Later, he described himself as a “cultural chameleon”: someone who enjoys adapting to different countries, systems, and people. This does not mean his path was free of loss. Filipe also spoke about major changes in his personal life, including divorce. But his curiosity about the world and his desire to teach remained.

When I asked what he would like to be able to say to himself at the age of seventy-five, his answer was brief: “You really did change something for the better.”

Filipe’s story matters not because everyone should build an international career. It shows something else: you can continue to grow professionally while changing the very measure of success. Instead of pursuing someone else’s job title, you can choose work that leaves room for freedom, meaning, and your own strengths.

Exercise: Five Answers Instead of One

Take a sheet of paper and complete the sentence “I am someone who…” five times. Your first two answers may relate to your profession and family. But in the next three, try not to use job titles, social status, or familiar responsibilities.

Think back to what fascinated you before your calendar filled with commitments. What conversations give you energy? What do people ask for your help with, not because you are in charge, but because of the kind of person you are? What part of your personality receives almost no attention?

Then choose one small step to take over the next seven days. Not “find myself once and for all,” but, for example, meet someone from a field that interests you, return to music, sign up for a class, or spend an hour outside your work role.

But sometimes the question “Who am I apart from work?” becomes especially difficult precisely after major professional success. Jan Hossfeld’s story shows why letting go of a former role can bring relief and disorientation at the same time.

The Monday When No One Called

For many years, Jan Hossfeld worked toward an outcome many leaders dream of: creating a company capable of operating without its owner's constant involvement. After his father died in December 2010, he found himself drawn into managing the family software business. The company was experiencing financial difficulties, and no one had had time to prepare a succession plan. Jan stayed, at first out of a sense of responsibility toward the employees, and later because the work had become an important part of his life.

About fourteen years later, after the company was sold in early 2025, the first ordinary Monday morning arrived. Jan woke up, made coffee, walked around the house, and opened his to-do list. Almost everything had been completed, handed over, or no longer required his involvement. He expected calls, requests for clarification, urgent questions. His phone was almost silent.

From a management perspective, it was a triumph. The organization was making decisions and solving problems independently. But the silence proved unexpectedly uncomfortable. Jan caught himself wishing that someone would call after all — just to reassure him that he was still useful.

Later, there was a small incident: a former colleague was slow to reply to a message because he had moved their conversation into his archive. Jan smiled and felt a twinge at the same time. Not long before, his messages had been important to the company's work; now they could be archived without concern. This was exactly what he had worked toward as a leader — and exactly what he found difficult to adjust to as a person.

At moments like these, it helps to remember that a professional role is only one of many. We remain friends, loved ones, mentors, students, and people with our own interests and values. Each of us can have several roles, and each comes with certain expectations. But sometimes one role takes up so much space that all the others become almost invisible.

Jan acknowledges that he liked being the person others relied on. During the years of crisis, this trait helped. Later, however, it may have prevented the team from becoming self-reliant. Gradually, he learned to distinguish between being responsible and being indispensable.

After the sale, Jan began searching for a new professional role, wrote a book about his management experience, and went through rejection and self-doubt. He chose a position in finance and operations at the non-profit organization OpenEnergyTransition, working thirty-two hours a week. This decision was not about turning away from difficult challenges, but about wanting to leave more room for his wife, his children, and his own life. At the time of the interview, this new stage was only just beginning, and Jan did not claim to have already found the ideal balance.

This story prompts reflection: sometimes we perform a role so well that we begin to confuse it with who we are. But if an organization has learned to manage without you, that does not mean you have become less valuable as a person. Perhaps you have created a space in which others have grown — and given yourself a chance to choose your path anew.

Exercise: “My Roles”

Take a sheet of paper. Write your name in the center. Arrange the roles you play around it. Do not limit yourself to your profession. Think about relationships. Responsibilities. Your involvement in other people’s lives. And activities that matter to you. Now look at the map you have created. Which role takes up the most time? Which demands the most emotional energy? Which brings you satisfaction? Which have you neglected for a long time?

A Question for the Reader

Where in your life have you become accustomed to measuring your own worth by how much others need you? What will still matter about who you are, even if that role comes to an end one day?

Preserving What You Have Achieved While Expanding Your Life

We often imagine change as a choice between two extremes: leave everything as it is or start again from nothing. But there are many intermediate options. You can remain in your profession and take on a new role. Stay with your company and establish different boundaries. Continue running your business while making room again for relationships, health, travel, or creativity.

Here it can help to ask yourself four questions: what is worth doing more of in my life? What should I do less of? What is it time to start? What should I stop? You do not need perfect answers. It is enough to notice the direction in which your life will begin to feel a little more like your own.

Sometimes the second summit begins not with a new job title, but with a simple discovery: I can be a successful professional and still remain a person who is curious about life.

You do not have to begin your life again. Sometimes it is enough to begin choosing again.

Questions for the Reader

- Who am I apart from my profession and social roles?
- What part of me has long remained in the shadows because of work?

Chapter 4. When a Strength Feels Like a Weakness

The Email Anna Did Not Send

Anna was thirty-six. She worked for a technology company, knew her field well, and could solve complex problems. Her colleagues valued her meticulousness; her manager valued her ability to see projects through. She was used to getting to the bottom of things, checking the details, and preparing before she spoke. This caution had helped her more than once. But one day, it became an invisible barrier.

For several weeks, Anna considered a proposal that could improve the workflow. She could see where employees were losing time, why mistakes kept recurring, and what could be changed. All that remained was to write to her manager. The email was almost ready, but every time she found a reason not to send it: one more calculation, one more example, one more check.

The issue was not only the quality of the idea. Something else lay behind it: “Who am I to suggest this?”

Anna is a composite character. But her doubt is familiar to many: we are capable of acting, yet we hesitate, as though we must first receive permission to be bolder.

Not Every Thought Is a Fact

A belief is a settled idea about ourselves, other people, or the way the world works. It helps us find our bearings quickly, but sometimes it turns past experience into a rigid rule for the future. “I’m simply not made for public speaking.” “At my age, it’s too late to change professions.” “Only managers put forward good ideas.” Each statement sounds like a final verdict, although what we actually have before us is an assumption.

It is important not to confuse a limiting belief with a genuine obstacle. Lack of money, family responsibilities, health, professional regulations, and the economic situation can truly restrict our choices. The words “just believe in yourself” do not make these circumstances disappear. But sometimes an external limitation is compounded by another one: an internal prohibition against even exploring the available possibilities.

The useful question here is not “How can I make myself think positively?” but “What is my conclusion based on, and what might help me refine it?” We do not have to replace an anxious thought with an ecstatic one. It is enough to move from a categorical “never” to an enquiring “I don’t know yet.”

How an Inner Script Becomes Automatic

Imagine someone who was often told as a child, “Don’t draw attention to yourself.” Perhaps this was the adults’ way of protecting them from trouble. But years later, caution may be triggered automatically even in situations where taking initiative is safe and appropriate. The script continues to operate although the circumstances have changed.

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