

EXECUTIVE ATHLETE

JONATHAN
CAWTE

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FOREWORD

If you want to get anywhere fast, the first thing you need to do is hire a coach. You need to have somebody who will challenge you and keep you aligned as you move toward your destination. Early in my career, success and exciting opportunities arrived quickly, but years later I became frustrated as my upward trajectory began to level out. Disillusioned with my lack of progress, I hired a coach who welcomed me with a simple question: “Who benefits the most from your skills and expertise?”

Looking back over the years I had spent coaching, a pattern began to emerge. My most successful clients were overweight male executives. Most of them were married with children. Most of them were in their forties, that age when it becomes increasingly difficult to keep up. When I met these overweight executives for the first time, many of them would speak about “getting by”. But really, they had reached something of a breaking point. Their children had reached the age when they could outrun Dad, their mates’ ribbing was cutting a little deeper than it once did, and the nagging from their wife or family was no longer just frequent—it was never-ending.

Most of them would speak of a moment of resolution brought on by a photo or a video. They saw an image of themselves, and they didn’t like what they saw. They had been hiding from the camera for some time, and it had caught them when they weren’t expecting it. They would still be reeling from the shock when they came to me.

It had become clear to many of them in that moment of resolution that everything was related. Their suits didn’t fit any more; they felt sick and tired day and night; they lacked the verve that had once driven them to succeed. They had resolved to lose weight before, but these attempts had come to nothing. They may have succeeded in business, but they had failed at looking after themselves.

These men who came to me were lost. They were so far down the road of ill health that it was no longer a simple matter of retracing their steps back to the life of health and happiness they had once enjoyed. They needed a guide. They needed a compass. They came to me looking to lose, on average, 20% of their bodyweight, and by coaching and inspiring them I helped them find their way to their destination.

These were the people who benefitted most from my skills and expertise. When I dug a little deeper I learned that they also shared similar problems with equally similar solutions. With this discovery my mission became clear. I wanted to design bespoke health and fitness solutions for the overweight executive whose weight was keeping them from living an unrestricted and fulfilling life. It was for these executives

that I sat down to write this book.

I wrote this book because I could see exactly why other programs that promised similar results failed so regularly. Though there are countless authors and health gurus who have series of fitness, weight-loss or stress-management tips to share, they often don't have a reproducible system.

GPs offer the same advice they've always offered: reduce alcohol, cut down on carbs and fatty foods, and try going out for a walk—as though two-thirds of the adult population has never heard this advice before. The exercise routine that the overweight executive followed 10 years and 20kg ago no longer works. The middle-aged or nearly middle-aged executive needs a new system.

Executives are used to looking for reproducible systems in their professional lives. When it comes to their health, though, many of them are too embarrassed or unwilling to swallow their pride and ask for help. They need a system—one that provides a clear methodology to achieve premium health. This methodology is the Compass.

None of the four points of the Compass is revolutionary on its own. Each compass point reflects established knowledge in the health sciences. The issue is not what is needed, but how much and in what proportion. If you only adopt a little of each, the benefits are only marginal; take any of the Compass points too far and you get further problems:

- » Work and Rest Management: Take this too far and it becomes a series of airy-fairy practices that involve intricate rituals, a new shoeless wardrobe and relaxed personal hygiene standards.
- » Stress Management: Too much yelling out “I can do it” and not enough doing what needs to be done.
- » Exercise: Take exercise too far and you'll spend more time than you need to in an ultra-competitive, egotistical, and domineering environment, which is probably not what you signed up for.
- » Nutrition: It's easy to get caught up in the dogmatic rules of nutrition and the never-ending fight over which nutritional camp holds the high ground. Who needs or wants this?

There is no doubt that you need all four points of the Compass, but you need to find the balance within and between each. Strike the right balance and you find yourself at the point where the four elements intersect. At that intersection is the Executive Athlete. Where the four points of the compass meet, you have an individual who radiates health and feels invincible.

This book is for people who want to feel this way. It's for people who are time-poor and responsibility-rich. It's for people who have dedicated their lives to their careers, and who in the process have sacrificed their physical fitness, mental health and personal relationships. The Compass will guide you back to the centre, and make you happier, healthier and abundantly more successful.

INTRODUCTION

David's Story

“Frustration and embarrassment brought me to believe that exercise just wasn’t for me anymore. I was too old and too busy. I had accepted that I was just a big person. I stopped making excuses. I just said no.”

David Heine, Chief Operating Officer, eftpos

David is an Executive Athlete today, but on the day I met him he had given up. As he says, he was “hiding from real life and hiding from the truth”. He used humour as a way of keeping criticism of his expanding waistline at bay. He was frustrated and embarrassed, and convinced that exercise just wasn’t for him anymore.

Deep down, David had known he had a problem for some time. He knew his weight was an issue, but he couldn’t bring himself to admit it or ask for help. “As a moderately successful person”, he says, “it’s hard to expose yourself in such a way, to others and yourself, to be honest with yourself about how overweight you are, and how you have let yourself go. It’s embarrassing, it’s scary, and it certainly doesn’t fit with the sense of ego you have as a successful person.”

David worried about his weight every day, but what he didn’t know was that he wasn’t the only one worrying. Two people had front row seats to David’s struggle with obesity, and both were anxious spectators. David’s wife, Sam, and his executive assistant, Jess, had been watching as David, once a

vibrant and beaming professional, came to prefer above all things the safety of the couch.

One day, when he was returning to his desk, David overheard a phone call between Jess and Sam. Rather than interrupting, he stopped and listened. They were talking about David’s weight and the effect it was having on his life. The words cut deeper than before because David wasn’t able to defend himself with a joke. What concerned him most of all, though, was the tone of the conversation. Years of using humour to deflect criticism of his weight had convinced him that he was the butt of everybody’s fat jokes, but Jess and Sam weren’t laughing. As he listened more, it became clear that they were scared about what the future held for David if he continued on the path he was on.

Not much later, David was on a family holiday at his parents’ home in Wagga Wagga. David’s mother filmed him playing with the kids in the backyard pool. When he watched the video that night, he didn’t like what he saw. He turned off the video and walked over to the scale in the bathroom. He weighed 110kg.

David had fallen prey to what those in the world of professional sport call ‘the creep’, the almost invisible lowering of standards that leads athletes to stop doing the extra work that led them to success. The true champions fight against the creep by setting new goals for themselves at every turn. The middle and back of the pack are full of people who once vied for the lead but have since allowed themselves to slide

steadily backward. This is the creep, and for the executive, it can be all too easy to let the creep set in. The demands of the job make it all too easy to forget to take care of themselves. Since their health declines slowly, it is often hard for them to notice as they slide into obesity and sickness. Worst of all, their personal relationships suffer. Like so many other overweight executives, David was missing all those special moments with his beautiful wife and his growing kids.

David had allowed the creep to set in, but he had recognised the cost before it was too late. He saw the look of disappointment in his wife's and his children's eyes. This realisation became David's moment of resolution. He knew that the time had come for him to do something, but he also knew he couldn't do it on his own. He had tried once before to take up running, but on his first run he didn't even make it two kilometres before he had to stop. He says he felt like he was having a heart attack: "I remember finishing it and thinking, 'I can't do this', and at that moment I gave up." He was determined not to let himself be defeated so easily again.

It was only a few days later that I met David for the first time. He turned up to his first session with Jess and Leanne, two of the fittest girls in his office. David let the girls set the pace, and before long he was sprawled on his back in the Domain. Jess and Leanne joked that neither of them would be giving David mouth to mouth if he stopped breathing.

A week later I was sitting in David's plush corner office,

where he told me that he would let me train him. "But", he said, looking me straight in the eye, "if you push me, I will quit". That was then.

This is now. I am writing this on a Saturday in August. It has been six years since our first session and at 7am this morning David deadlifted 140kg. He is still four weeks away from reaching his goal of 150kg, but he and I both know he'll get there. These early-morning sessions have become an important ritual for David. They help prepare him for his always-full weekend schedule. This weekend, his son Will has a rugby game and his daughter has a hockey game. He's going to be at both games. He will spend the rest of the day playing with his niece, his nephew and the kids while his wife does a trial session at the gym David attends during the week.

After completing his fifth City2Surf with Will two weeks ago, David wants to improve his 1.6km time so I have written him a program to help him set a new personal best. After his Sunday morning sprint session, he'll be heading to Centennial Park to start training for the 90km Sydney to Wollongong bike ride, which he'll also be doing with Will. Next weekend, he'll be one of my competitors in the Nike Fastest Mile event on Saturday, and we will be teeing off in the Sunday comp at Ryde-Parramatta Golf Course.

This is the same man who, not six years ago, preferred the safety of the couch to something as physically undemanding as a family walk in the park. He's physically transformed. He's lost 32kg of fat and added 7kg of muscle, and

he's done it all by following the Compass. His willingness to say yes to anything physical, which stopped surprising me long ago, has taken him a long way. But as much as he loves to face east, he's also made sure to orient himself to the other directions as well. He executes his nutrition program, rests when he needs rest, and he calms his mind when he feels stressed.

David enjoys all of the obvious benefits of exercise: he has as much energy as he did when he was a teenager, he's happier and he's healthier. His body is stronger and so are his relationships. He's also become a powerful and inspiring leader. When I met him he was in a technically specialised executive role. Today he is COO at eftpos. His newfound fearlessness in the face of challenges and his ability to engage deeply with stakeholders at every level made him a natural fit for the C suite.

David, like any executive, was time-poor but he didn't allow that to stop him. He saw this for the hollow excuse it was. He says, "People will tell you it's the real reason, but it's not. The real reason is you are afraid—afraid that you can't do it. You're afraid of everything you should be doing and doing well." But behind the door you are most afraid to open is your greatest opportunity for achievement. David describes the beginning of his journey as "f***ing scary". What he got out of overcoming that fear and winning is an immense sense of pride and accomplishment: "It wasn't part of who I was, but it is a fundamental part of who I have become."

Becoming an Executive Athlete involves staring down your biggest fear and winning. It will be one of the greatest moments of personal growth in your adult life. To be able to transform your health from your biggest liability into your greatest asset will change how you define yourself as a leader, partner and parent.

As an Executive Athlete the best years of your life are ahead of you.

Our Featured Leaders

MINA AMES, Managing Director, Russell Reynolds Associates

As a female in the male-dominated world of executive head-hunters, Mina Ames is in a class of her own. She's cheeky, a little mischievous and bubbles over with infectious energy. It's no surprise to learn that she was a representative rugby union halfback for her county in England. Often presented with a brief that says little more than "I need a CEO", Mina has learned to be something of a mind reader when it comes to executive placement. She's able to help find ideally suited candidates thanks to her ability to develop intimacy almost immediately with candidates. In our conversation, Mina comes back to purpose frequently and insistently, using it to describe her personal values and the organisational values of energised and successful companies. She cares for the executives that she places, so she speaks to them about maintaining purpose alignment and finding the anchor points that give them the energy to succeed. Who would have thought that her experience as a halfback telling the forwards what to do in no uncertain terms would predict what she does and how she does it.

MARK ADAMS, Executive General Manager, Specialised Sales, National Australia Bank

Mark Adams leads a team of six hundred across five states and four countries. This role often means that he is away from home two to three days every week. This is not only

challenging, it is tiring as well. To find the energy to perform, Mark uses photography as his anchor point. This is where Mark achieves flow outside of work, creating so much creative energy that a good photography session can totally consume him. Mark's favourite subjects are urban exploration, industrial art, beautiful surfaces, landscapes and abandoned places. But, what struck me most about Mark is that, as an ex-engineer, there is an extremely considered and measured side to his personality. This is combined with a very different side—that of a closet stand-up comic. Mark has an ability to flip from profound insight to humour in the space of a sentence. It puts people at ease and lets some of the air out of over-inflated rooms.

DAVID HEINE, Chief Operating Officer, eftpos

David Heine is a born competitor. When I ask him what he enjoys being described as, he says, "I want to beat you, but I want you to also be ok". He is a social creature. He wants to win, but he's keen to share victories. This is most evident in the physical endeavours he enrolls in with his children, Will and Ava. Tell David that something can't be done and you'll see his motivation rise in an instant. He's always thrived on achievement, so with a long string of accomplishments behind him, he now has to search for new challenges. This includes his role at eftpos. Having known David for some time now, I am sure that he took the role because it meant he would get to stare down the industry heavyweights: Visa and Mastercard, and their contactless payment systems. Somewhere along the line, somebody must have told him that it couldn't be done.

ROSI FERNANDEZ, Managing Director, La Prairie

Rosi Fernandez loves food and has a particularly soft spot for Japanese fine dining. She admires the precision, the exotic flavours, and the wine that goes with it. Put one of Sydney's best pizzas in front of Rosi and she will find it hard to say no. Coming from a large Spanish family, food played a big part in Rosi's upbringing, and it is still tightly woven into her family, social and professional lives. So how did she manage to lose over 20% of her body weight? Rosi used the same method she developed to make Australia the number one growing market for La Prairie worldwide: worry about the now, now. Her strategy of compartmentalising and focusing only on what is in front of her is how Rosi manages the demands of international travel and ridiculous amounts of meetings. Rosi adopts the same strategy to exercise, deliberately not committing the workout to memory and frequently asking "What's next?" This strategy helped her to become an Executive Athlete after more than 20 years without any kind of formal exercise program.

PART ONE: THE EXECUTIVE ATHLETE

CHAPTER 01

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

“Today’s executives are working far too hard, and they’ve stopped enjoying their jobs. When the fun dries up, that’s when you need to ask yourself why you do what you do. Assessing identity is really important. Part of that identity is - do you understand the cost of this role? There is a huge level of expectation on our executives that isn’t necessarily sustainable. Not everybody can cope, because not everybody has that level of resilience.”

Mina Ames, Managing Director, Russell Reynolds Associates



Success requires sacrifice. You must be able to sacrifice what you are today for what you will become tomorrow. The decisions that you make on the path to success all come with a trade-off. It's a game of give and take.

- » A university degree comes with the sacrifice of an immediate full time salary.
- » Marriage comes with the sacrifice of all the good things you can enjoy when you are single.
- » Investments come with the sacrifice of the peace of mind created by money in the bank.

What are the trade-offs you've made? What have you sacrificed to be successful? What has your executive career cost you?

The answers to this question are always deeply personal and occasionally depressing. Memorable trade-offs almost always leave a scar. All too often, we sacrifice something we love for something we want. It's almost never something that happens in an instant. We aren't asked to choose one thing or the other. It's subtler than that. An extra hour at

the office might mean a missed dinner with friends. The next time, they might not invite you. A string of Saturdays working from home might mean your family stops expecting you to join them at the park or even the dinner table. The routine drags on, and in time you find yourself eating alone and saying, "No, I can't" to your children or your spouse.

What drives people to make these sacrifices? Competitive advantage—that extra mile an organisation and its leadership are willing to go that keeps them one step ahead of the present or potential competition. It demands the almost constant input of new energy. There are always competitors to spur on, strengths and weaknesses to be evaluated. For those with the guts and know-how, there are always opportunities there to be seized, and these opportunities wait for nobody.

Sacrifice is what it takes to win. It is the essence of winning, and winning is not optional. Like the athlete, the executive must win, and this means maintaining a competitive advantage. Speaking broadly, the decision to pursue and maintain competitive advantage comes with three options:

1. Get more value from each hour of the day.
2. Increase the number of hours that you work.
3. Both.

They are the same three options that your competitors have always had. Once the benchmark is raised, it becomes the new norm. The convenience store chain 7-Eleven experi-

enced this accidentally in 1963 when they established their first 24-hour store in Austin, Texas. Located very close to the university campus, one Saturday night after a football game the store was so busy that it never closed. Encouraged by the increase in revenue, the store changed its standard opening hours from 7am to 11pm to a new schedule: 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Soon this became company policy, and before long it became the benchmark for all convenience stores. If you wanted to succeed in the industry, it was impossible to do so without being open 24 hours a day. This trend later extended to supermarkets, pharmacies and gyms. 7-Eleven established a new benchmark, and before long their innovation was the norm.

For the executive, the benchmark was raised during the economic uncertainty of the 1980s. White-collar workers began logging more hours, trying to make themselves stand out from the nine-to-five set. Workplace cultures rewarded those who worked all hours, devoting themselves entirely to the job and blurring or erasing the lines between work and personal time. The effects of this were long lasting. In a 2011 Regus white paper, 'A Study into the Length of the Workday and its Impact on Employee Health', 45% of Australian workers reported taking home their work at least three times a week. This is simply what it takes to maintain competitive advantage. It is the new normal.

The Age of the Unhealthy Executive

If the symptoms of executives' work habits were the product of an infectious disease, that disease would be quickly eradicated. The government would spend millions of dollars and deploy all the resources at its disposal to contain and eliminate the disease.

The problem is that the health consequences of the executive's lifestyle are not as obvious as those of, say, Ebola. Deterioration is so slow that the consequences are nearly invisible, and the damage is self-inflicted. Plummeting energy levels, constant pain and restricted movement are ignored until they reach a crisis point. Until the health issues become impossible to ignore, they are swept under the carpet with the words, "I am getting old".

Age is, indeed, an uncontrollable variable, but it doesn't account for the overwhelmingly poor state of today's executives. According to a recent Apollo Life study:

- » 71% of executives are obese.
- » 48% are in hopelessly poor physical condition.
- » 35% have stomachs that are larger than their chests.
- » 30% take daily medication.

The statistics become even worse if you are a CEO:

- » 82% are obese.
- » 77% have stomachs that are larger than their chests.
- » 69% are in hopelessly poor physical fitness condition.
- » 62% are unable to do one push up or sit up.
- » 59% are unable to touch their toes.
- » 56% take daily medication.
- » 28% have not exercised at all since they were children.
- » 10% have had a heart attack in the last 12 months.

It is hard to get your head around these statistics. Executives possess all the elements that, when combined, create success. They have all of the resources and knowledge, and they've got the track records to prove it.

These track records show that they know how to identify and solve problems before they become catastrophic. They understand cause and effect, but for whatever reason they have been slow to apply this knowledge to their physical health. It appears that it is a sacrifice they are prepared to make.

It's not just a matter of executives not eating right or exercising. They are also not managing their stress in remotely effective ways. The Apollo Life study describes how 84% of executives and a staggering 100% of CEOs suffer from stress-related ailments such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high chole-

sterol, abnormal heart rhythm, stomach ulcers, frequent headaches or insomnia. Throughout their careers, executives have put their mental and physical health on the line.

Although they might be rewarded with the lifestyle that is a testament to their professional success, they are sacrificing their ability to enjoy this lifestyle. They pay this cost because they have ignored the warning signs, prioritising their competitive advantage over their health. They don't act until it's too late.

The Age of the Unhealthy Executive is well and truly upon us. Stress, unhealthy diets and a lack of exercise have resulted in a staggeringly high number of overweight executives. Since it is unlikely that the pressures of the job will ease any time soon, executives need to take responsibility for their health. They need to realise that their very lives are at stake.

Luckily, I know you are different. The fact that you are reading this book tells me that you are ready to move through the four stages of the Conscious Competence Learning Matrix.



Fig. 1: Conscious Competence Learning Matrix

The solution is the same method that executives use to design training programs for their work teams. When it comes to their health, the overweight executive is in the Unconscious Incompetence stage. They are initially unaware of how little they know. They are unconscious of their incompetence. To move through the matrix, the executive must first recognise their incompetence. Only then can they begin to consciously acquire new skills. To recognise their incompetence, the overweight executive must first identify their own symptoms of executive decline.

CHAPTER 02

The Four Symptoms of Executive Decline

The connection is clear. The demands of operating in a highly competitive workplace result in widespread executive health issues. This is hard to ignore when seven out of ten executives are obese and the vast majority are suffering silently with serious medical conditions. These problems often start when the executive begins to climb the corporate ladder or first starts his or her business.

While there is often an assumption that success will mean more time to focus on one's health, the opposite is more often true. The competing demands of a growing number of stakeholders mount with each passing quarter, and all the while the executive's health declines. Four symptoms stand between them and their dream lifestyle:

Symptom 1: Fatigue

The fatigued executive lacks physical, mental and emotional energy. Even a small drop in energy levels makes leadership harder for the executive. When the executive is tired, inspiring the team by making each of its members feel special—like they belong—can feel like a herculean task. This energy

deficit can affect not only the individual's performance but also that of the team and even the entire organisation.

The leader sets the cadence. Whether it's a frenetic pace, an assertive cool or a sluggish crawl, the leader's energy levels influence how those around them behave. Think of executive decline as a chemical reaction. Sagging energy is the catalyst that increases the speed and intensity of the reaction. When energy levels bottom out, the other symptoms of executive decline begin to appear alarmingly quickly.

No matter how skilled or experienced you are, you can't endure long and intense periods of decision-making without it negatively affecting your energy. The result is decision fatigue. Lurking beneath the surface it is easier to ignore than physical fatigue. Those who have this kind of fatigue are often not consciously aware they are making poor decisions.

Mental fatigue and decision fatigue lead the mind to look for shortcuts, and it has two favourites:

Reckless decision-making: Decision fatigue often leads to impulsive action. This helps explain why ordinarily sensible people can sometimes lash out at colleagues or family members. Decision fatigue erodes will power, explaining why sugar becomes irresistible at the end of the day. It makes the executive unwilling to compromise; this can lead to excessive spending, drinking or anger if someone gets in the way.

“When an executive is unwell, there is generally less permission—permission to make mistakes, etc. You’re too singularly focused on a narrow definition of success, and so inventiveness and creativity tend to suffer. The opportunities that come from trial and error are still there, but it becomes more mechanical. You rely on the technical more than the creative. You lose that flare.”

David Heine, Chief Operating Officer, eftpos

Doing nothing: This is the ultimate energy saver. Inaction and procrastination allow the fatigued mind to avoid or put off choices. Ducking decisions creates bigger problems in the long run, but the exhausted brain is not exactly known for its ability to forecast future results. It merely seeks rest. Inaction can always be justified: they have worked hard all week; they deserve some down time; they’ve earned the freedom to hit that snooze button again. This attitude is the biggest stumbling block when it comes to starting an exercise program. But it’s not the result of any laziness on the part of the executive. No, the mental and emotional energy required to perform their role leaves them little energy to do anything else. At the end of the day they’re not recharging their batteries. They’re collapsing into bed with one hand still on their phones.

Symptom 2: Disengagement

The stress that so often dogs the successful can quickly sour relationships with family and friends. Relationships of any depth demand constant input of new energy, and often executives just don’t have the energy to spare. Your loved ones, friends and family members require more than just your presence. They need sincere communication. They need you to engage with them, to remember those important shared moments and to be there to create new ones.

Engaging takes energy. Like the members of your team, your family, friends and loved ones want to feel special. They want to feel like they belong in your inner circle. This

is not something that can be bought or outsourced. Give them anything less than they deserve and you run the risk of isolating yourself. The longer this isolation continues, the more difficult it will be to get the attention you need when you need it.

Unlike professional relationships, with their clear-cut hierarchies, personal relationships are non-hierarchical. Even the most powerful executive meets family, friends and loved ones as equals. Unhappy team members can either get over their issues or find a new position elsewhere. The executive can stand firm and exert the power of their position. At home, relationships need to be nurtured; they can't be ruled by force. This nurturing and engagement require energy. Conflict is the inevitable result of long periods of disengagement brought on by a lack of energy. Conflict at home cuts a little deeper. The disapproval of a partner or child is the source of yet more stress and yet more fatigue. It's a never-ending downward spiral.

Symptom 3: Pain

The unhealthy executive lives with constant or nearly constant pain. This is the inevitable result of a weak frame that is supporting far too much weight. Imagine a rope bridge that stretches across a river. Its wooden planks and beams seem to be in good enough shape. The ropes are a little frayed but look strong enough. You step onto the bridge. As you near its centre, you can feel the rope tighten in your hands. You can hear it begin to groan with the strain. By the time you reach

the middle, the bridge itself is twisting and has distorted out of shape. Finally, as you watch, the rope snaps.

Think of the rope as your muscles, the wood planks and beams as your bones. When you become weak and heavy, the same thing that happens to the bridge happens to your body. Muscles tighten, bones creak and ache, posture gets bent out of shape. It's only a matter of time before something snaps and you find yourself facing a painful injury, one that might forever affect your quality of life.

For the physically inactive executive this process also follows a predictable pattern:

- » Tight calves, hamstrings, groin, hip flexors, lower back and thoracic spine
- » Poor posture (shoulders come forward, excessive pelvic tilt)
- » Pain in the knees, hips, lower back, shoulders and neck.

The longer the executive is physically inactive, the weaker and heavier they become. Tightness, poor posture and often excruciating pain get worse. Natural movements like walking and running that combine velocity with full body weight damage joints that suffer from bad biomechanics. Moving hurts.

Constant pain is a mental distraction. Physical discomfort significantly reduces one's ability to pay close attention or to retain information. Long days behind the desk or at the boardroom table are sources of tremendous discomfort. At

the end of a long day of sitting, the unhealthy executive needs to lie down to get relief.

Constant pain saps mental, physical and emotional energy. It derails nutrition and exercise plans and makes it harder to engage with others, affecting personal and professional relationships. Worst of all, it drains resilience, making it harder with each passing day to push through setbacks. The executive who is in pain is hanging on by a thread. It's only a matter of time before the rope snaps.

Symptom 4: Obesity

Although there are exceptions, the vast majority of unhealthy executives are overweight. Many of these are more than overweight: they are obese. Years of poor nutritional decisions and a lack of exercise have left the executive unable to control his or her weight. According to the International Journal of Epidemiology, if left unaddressed this can dramatically shorten their lives:

- » <5 years of obesity increases the risk of mortality by 50%
- » 5-15 years of obesity doubles the risk of mortality
- » 25+ years of obesity increases the risk of mortality by 250%.

As if this weren't enough, there is the embarrassment that goes along with weight gain as well. For too many unhealthy

executives, the shame that comes with the struggle to control their weight keeps them on the sidelines of life. Though the obese are frequently the butt of cruel jokes, the social distress caused by obesity is no laughing matter. They often find refuge in work, which only sends them further down the weight gain spiral.

The warning signs are unmistakable. Photos are avoided, and the executive learns how to hide under layers of baggy clothing. The increase in weight comes to the attention of the GP who advises the executive to lose weight. However, without a plan or a person to turn to for help, excuses pile on top of excuses. The GP is told, "I don't have time to exercise or go on a diet", and it's left at that.

Family members and loved ones become worried. They encourage the executive to do something about their weight. The executive gathers the courage to sign up to the gym, tries Lite n' Easy, cuts alcohol, or perhaps all three. The Monday results are promising, but stress, pain and fatigue catch up with them and they give in to the pressure—they give up. The weight they lost during the week comes back on, and by Sunday night they are heavier than before.

For those who have struggled with their weight, this often becomes a cycle without end. Short bursts of motivation, initially promising results, a stumbling block, and old habits take over again. Soon it's too late to reverse the tide without help. The executive goes from being overweight to obese or from borderline obese to morbidly obese. The extra weight

“I was sick of the yo-yoing. I was sick of being fat, thin, fat, thin ... When I started Weight Watchers, I had already tried to lose weight, and I’d gone down to my goal weight and then gradually back up again. It took two years to get rid of the weight the last time, even with exercising. Trying to do the same thing and expecting different results—it didn’t make any sense! That was the moment for me. I had to stop what I was doing and start considering my health more importantly than a work project.”

Rosi Fernandez, Managing Director, La Prairie

causes a secondary illness, like type II diabetes, high cholesterol or unbearable chronic pain. Worst of all, with each failed attempt to do something about their weight, the prospect of a pain-free and healthy life seems to retreat over the horizon. Not only are stress, pain and a lack of energy constant burdens, the executive also feels that things will never get better.

Executives in decline

This isn’t just about executives’ expanding waistlines. No, this is about the decline of the executive. Perhaps most concerning is that the rate of this decline is accelerating. Even though we are seeing a greater emphasis than ever before on health and wellness, it is not stopping the declining levels of health among executives. As responsibilities and demands associated with executive roles increase, executives are finding their pool of personal energy resources drained dry.

Executives are used to problem solving, and their approach to problems large or small is straightforward. Identify the problem, implement the solution and manage the result. To put it simply, they know how to win. But the decline of the executive is making it clear that this approach is not being applied to their health in the same way. By allowing their careers to eclipse their fitness and health, today’s executives are losing, and losing big. They are losing more than they are prepared to admit.

The satisfaction associated with a job well done or a business

problem solved is undeniably addictive, and like any other addiction, can make all other goals fade into the background. The executive is so hungry for a narrowly defined image of success that they forget to step back and look at the broader picture. They don't see how much they are sacrificing:

- » They are unable to access all the talent and skill at their disposal due to a lack of energy.
- » Work-related stress is straining their important relationships with family and friends.
- » Rather than enjoying the pleasure of health, they suffer with daily discomfort or pain.
- » Years or even decades of weight gain have made them ashamed of their own bodies.

This is not the dream lifestyle to which so many young executives aspire. When the executive was 25 years old, full of hope and ambition, they dreamt of a life of unlimited options. They believed that success would bring with it joy, respect, and even love. The naivety of youth leads the young executive to assume that all will remain much the same as it has been. The young believe that their health will always be there for them. They feel invincible. They feel bulletproof.

This optimism is slowly eroded by the weight of their executive responsibilities. These responsibilities demand sacrifices, and this leads the young executive to start cutting corners with their health. The executive's list of professional achievements grows longer, but so does their list of aches, pains

and ailments. Their relationships suffer. The dream lifestyle dissolves before their eyes. As the gap between expectations and reality grows, so too does their unhappiness.

The Gap

An executive in decline is miserable. They may be surrounded by the trappings of success, but they are fighting against the three drivers that create happiness. It would be safe to assume that happiness is based on your reality, but that is only partly true. Happiness is relative. What makes us happy is our reality minus our expectations.

The first driver of happiness is the Imagination Gap. To be happy, the executive must live up to the benchmarks set by their imagination.

- » If an executive receives a \$20k pay rise but imagines they will receive \$30k, they are unhappy.
- » If an executive receives a \$10k pay rise but imagines they will receive \$5k, they are happy.

The second driver of happiness is the Intertemporal Gap. To be happy, the executive must constantly progress, surpassing their achievements of the previous year.

- » If an executive receives a \$20k pay rise each year but this year receives \$10k, they are unhappy.
- » If an executive receives a \$5k pay rise each year but this

year receives \$10k, they are happy.

The third driver of happiness is the Interpersonal Gap. To be happy, the executive must get more than their peers or surpass the competition.

- » If an executive receives a \$20k pay rise but their peers get a \$25k pay rise, they are unhappy.
- » If an executive receives a \$10k pay rise but their peers get nothing, they are happy.

Because executives set the bar so high for themselves the gap between their expectation and reality is often substantial to begin with. When executive decline sets in, the three gaps described above widen considerably. The fall back to earth can be nothing short of traumatic. There are things that the executive imagines they can do, but obesity and poor health have made many of these things physically impossible. What's worse, they watch from the sidelines as their peers or family members enjoy physical activities the declining executive no longer has the energy or ability to do. And it's not just the young who are able to do these things. It's often people in their own age group or even people older than themselves. The moment of realisation that comes with these experiences can be profoundly distressing.

Perhaps they have been able to push this realisation aside for a while. Indeed, many declining executives are able to remain in denial about their health issues for a decade or

more. Eventually though, their moment of realisation comes. The executive has two choices at this point: either they resign themselves to a shortened life marred by discomfort and illness, or they try to close the gap between expectations and reality. Doing the latter begins with an honest re-evaluation of the past, present and future, for which we'll turn to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 03

How Did I Get Here and Where Do I Go from Here?

Tiger Woods was asking himself the same question at the end of the second round at the 2013 Masters. Whilst playing the par 5 15th hole, the moment his perfectly struck chip shot left his club Tiger was thinking he was one step closer to winning his 15th major title. The ball lands inches away from the hole, but instead of leaving him an easy putt to take the lead, the ball hits the flag and inexplicably rolls into the water.

Tiger must play the shot again, but replaces his ball one metre from the correct location and incurs an additional penalty. Tiger executed what he thought were two perfect shots but the sum of the two mistakes resulted in a four-stroke penalty. At the end of the weekend, Tiger finishes four shots away from winning the championship.

Every decision that Tiger made about hitting a golf ball that week was good enough to win his 15th major title. But while his execution of his professional skills was very high, it was the mistakes that he didn't know he was making that robbed him of the opportunity to leave his legacy how he envisaged.

The same can be said for executives. The execution of their

professional skills is very high. However, their dedication to the job leads them to make mistakes with their health that rob them of leaving a legacy that they once envisaged.

The four symptoms we discussed in the last chapter are all directly or indirectly related to the seven mistakes we'll talk about in this one. You might see some of these and think, "Yes, I do that, but that's not affecting my health", or you might feel that the trade-off (professional success for physical wellbeing) is somehow worth it.

If the bad habit is an isolated one you may be correct, but when these mistakes become part of a weekly routine they'll make you pay eventually. When that moment arrives, the consequences can fall on you like a load of bricks. If you change your habits now, you will avoid falling into the same trap that has caught so many of today's unhealthy executives.

The Seven Mistakes Executives Make

Thinking sleep is negotiable

An athlete and an executive have polar opposite views on sleep. The athlete feels that the more sleep they get the better they will perform. The executive believes that sleep is something that they can and even should sacrifice to gain or maintain competitive edge. Of all the unhealthy executives I have met, whether out of shape or obese, stressed out or exhausted, all of them see a good night's rest as something that is entirely negotiable.

The reasons for this are many. There is the executive who feels that 11pm is a good time to email clients. There is the executive who stares at the ceiling, unable to switch off. There is another who goes to sleep early each night but wakes up like clockwork at 2am with her to-do list running through her head. The end result is the same: the executive is sleep deprived. Run on a sleep deficit for long enough and the four symptoms I discussed in the last chapter will become part of who you are. A lack of sleep is strongly linked to obesity. Half of those who sleep less than five hours each night are obese. This isn't a coincidence.

Using caffeine to wake up and alcohol to go to sleep

When an executive is tired, they use garden-variety stimulants to give their brains the boost of energy they need to get back to the task at hand. Caffeine, sugar, and even nicotine are spaced through the day in such a way that fatigue, often the product of sleep deprivation, can never really set in. Caffeine is the stimulant of choice for many. Executives consume, on average, four to fifteen shots of coffee each day. Some of them go so far as to substitute coffee for food, which allows them to skip breakfast or work steadily through their lunch hour.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine notes that caffeine acts as an 'adenosine receptor antagonist' (adenosine being the chemical produced by the body that tells you when your body needs sleep). Caffeine blocks the adenosine receptor, which makes it difficult or (for some people)

impossible to sleep when it is coursing through your veins. Caffeine's effects can last anywhere from eight to fourteen hours. If you're drinking coffee all day and then having trouble sleeping at night, the culprit should be obvious. Even if you are able to fall asleep quickly, caffeine disrupts the sleep cycle so you'll get less deep sleep and will wake up feeling less rested.

Rather than cut back on their caffeine intake, unhealthy executives turn to depressants to help them wind down. Their depressant of choice is usually alcohol. Though it might feel like having a few drinks before bed makes it possible to come down from the day-long caffeine high, alcohol is not a sleep aid. It is a sedative, which only mimics sleep. Like caffeine, alcohol interferes with the sleep cycle. Caffeine to wake up and alcohol to go to sleep is a recipe for chronic exhaustion.

Keeping temptation within arm's length

The Law of Food Proximity is simple: if you can see it, reach it or smell it, you will eat it. When I am coaching executives about food choices, many of them talk about certain high-energy foods they find irresistible. These foods usually just happen to be the ones that are stored in the kitchen at work, in the drawer beside them or in the fridge at home.

We can use the Law of Food Proximity to our advantage by shaping our environment so the right food is immediately available. To turn bad habits into good ones, we must make

sure that the correct option is also the easiest one. Making these decisions at the start of the week will help ensure that decision fatigue doesn't get the best of us at the two most dangerous times of the day: the lull of mid-afternoon and the time between dinner and bed.

Solving the same problem every week

A production line uses repetitive processes to achieve a predictable result and optimal efficiency. The executive who struggles the most is the one who creates the opposite of a production line: every day their food record is entirely different. The executive is not following a plan or measuring their weight. They fail to keep a food record. Rather than using or developing a reliable system, they follow their unreliable gut. They start each week wanting to solve the same problem that they failed to solve last week. Rather than learning from their mistakes, they repeat them.

A nutrition plan that reliably creates weight loss must have more than one element. Far too many overweight executives are convinced that they can lose weight if they eliminate a single item from their diet and replace it with something beneficial. They cut out ice cream and start drinking green juices. They approach exercise in a similar fashion. They commit to running 5km each morning.

With this approach, the executive can only hope to find success if they trip over it. They choose not to deploy the same systematic approach that has helped them solve count-

less business problems. Repeated failure does nothing to change the approach. Instead, the approach is intensified. If running 5km each day isn't producing the desired results, they try running 6km each day. At no point do they consider how the many variables of weight loss work together. At no point do they measure their progress or systemise their execution. Predictably, results are less than what is hoped for.

Exercising with a bad attitude

Executives who have sacrificed their health for successful careers are often disconnected from their bodies. They have forgotten what it feels like to win physically. A decade or more of consistent exhaustion and self-doubt blunts their confidence in their physical capabilities. The overweight executive exercises out of guilt brought on by the forceful words of a doctor or to punish a body they are not proud of. They aren't aware of the immediate return on investment that comes with an exercise program.

They say winning is a habit. Exercise is an opportunity to establish a habit of winning that an executive can carry into their professional and non-professional lives. It's about sneaking outside your comfort zone and establishing control. This can be achieved by something as small as finishing a session ten seconds faster than before or something as large as completing your first half marathon.

Wins pile upon wins until the domain of the possible stretches beyond the horizon. The executive who feels in control

“Exercise is not just about going through the point of no return and going harder and harder still. It’s a practice skill and it’s not just about physical commitment. It’s about work commitment. It’s one of the elements of leadership. If employees see any wavering in their leader’s commitment, they’ll begin to doubt both the leader and themselves. If you want them to stare at you with the same commitment, if you want them to get it done, you’ve got to show them that commitment. You have to be it.”

David Heine, Chief Operating Officer, eftpos

of their body feels indestructible. Executives are used to pursuing this feeling in the boardroom, but they approach exercise as though it is all investment and no payoff. This is the wrong attitude. The tremendous feelings of pride and accomplishment that come with a solved business problem are identical to those that come with a new physical accomplishment. Exercising out of guilt or shame does not produce these feelings.

Refusing to ask for or accept help

What does the executive do when they encounter a technical problem that exceeds the bounds of their skills and experience? They find an expert. They ask for or accept help as soon as it becomes clear that they are out of their depth. What happens when the not-so-gentle nagging of a spouse finally convinces the executive that they must do something about their weight? They go it alone.

The problem is that asking for help is seen as an open show of weakness. There is an inflating of the ego that comes with professional overachievement. As justified as this ego might be, it is surprisingly fragile. The executive wants and expects to be as good at weight loss as they have been at managing their career. The executive understands when their professional expertise has reached its limit. They need to be willing to admit the same when it comes to their health and fitness.

Losing faith

A great many unhealthy executives have attempted to solve their weight issue, but for many reasons have not succeeded. The loss of self-confidence that often follows these defeats leads the executive further down the path of lethargy and weight gain. They convince themselves that the pleasures that come with a healthy body are out of their reach.

The irony is that the executives who believe they have no power to take control of their body are the same executives who believe they do have the power to change any circumstance within their work environment. They are the first to push themselves beyond what others say is possible. They coach their employees to push through seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but they lose faith in themselves the first time they stumble. If they allowed this habit to creep into their professional lives, they'd soon be out of work.

The executive is a dreamer, but knows how to turn dreams into reality. They see it and believe it, then they lead their teams to the desired result. Adherence to this same principle will drive behavioural change and weight loss. The first person who has to believe it will happen before it happens is you.

These are the seven mistakes that create the creep, that slow change in behaviour that drives executive decline. Each habit in isolation is a minor and easily correctible issue. There may not, for instance, be any net effect on the life of the executive who leans on caffeine or alcohol more than they should. The problem is that the extreme pressures that executives are under lead them to pile bad habit on top of bad habit. With each passing year, the executive's responsibilities increase. Fatigue and weight gain set in, and the creep becomes more evident.

Unknowingly, the executive has created the conditions that produce the four dominant symptoms of executive decline: fatigue, poor relationships, physical pain and obesity. The worst part is that the rate of decline is accelerating, and they can't find the way to slow it down.

Where to go from here

You've diagnosed the symptoms and understood their underlying causes. Now it's time to act. The process to losing weight is quite simple. I am not saying it is easy, but what is required in the realms of nutrition and exercise is straightforward. What makes it complicated is you. Losing 20% of your bodyweight and becoming an Executive Athlete is a head game. What you say to yourself when you're facing a challenge will make the difference between failure and triumph.

To win the head game, you first must accept that being overweight is a problem—a problem you must solve. You

are used to facing these kinds of problems at work, and not accepting anything less than exceptional results from yourself and those around you. Bring that same mindset to your weight problem and you'll be well on your way to solving it.

The second step is to believe that weight loss is a skill, a skill that can be learned. This means stopping the limiting belief that says, "I am just a big person and always will be". This parallels the work of Carol Dweck. In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck outlines two different mindsets: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. The mindset that you adopt determines how you view yourself, how you approach problems, and whether you believe transformative change is possible.

A fixed mindset is reinforced by the belief that basic qualities are carved in stone. It views failure as a permanent condition. Intelligence, personality, creativity and ability, including the ability to lose weight, are fixed traits, not traits that can be developed.

A growth mindset takes the opposite view, that the ability to learn is not fixed but can change with your effort. Yes, intelligence, personality, creativity and the ability to lose weight can differ wildly from person to person, but that says nothing about a person's ability to learn. The growth mindset believes that everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

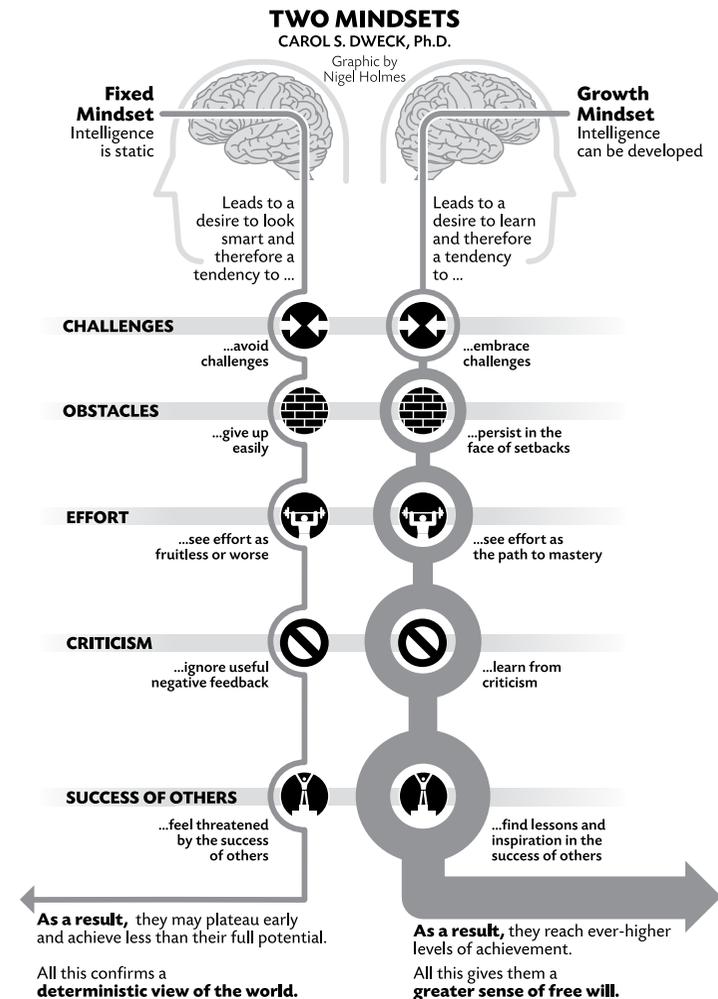


Fig. 2: Mindset comparison. Diagram by Nigel Holmes, from *Mindset* by Carol Dweck

Our experience in a specific area guides us towards one end of the spectrum or the other. If you have tried to lose weight before only to stumble in the first week, you are probably prone to fixed mindset patterns. This provides myriad ready-at-hand excuses: “I’ve tried, and I can’t do it”, “I’m just not good at this stuff” or “I’ve just learned to accept that I’ll never be in shape”. This is closed thinking, and it virtually assures that success will remain forever out of reach.

Chances are that, as an executive, you have experienced highs and lows but you understand that setbacks are only temporary. Your career is proof that you have the skills that come from the application of the growth mindset. To become an Executive Athlete, you’ll need to utilise this same skill-set and be prepared to let expert advice change your mind. You’ll need to execute unemotionally.

Both a growth mindset and a fixed mindset are self-fulfilling prophecies. The belief that any skill can be learned produces results that reinforce the power of belief. Equally self-reinforcing is the fixed mindset, which quits the moment it encounters difficulty.

This is often an exciting discovery, and it’s a great place to start our journey towards self-improvement and a healthier and happier future. There will be challenges ahead, but how you choose to approach them will make all the difference. Do you choose a fixed or a growth mindset? Do you choose to conquer or to be conquered?

If you’ve let yourself down before, it’s time to unburden yourself of those past failures. This attempt will be unlike all the others. You are an executive, so you understand that success is earned. Whatever your journey has been, looking back on your professional life should make one thing clear: you are not made of such malleable stuff that you let your past shape your future. You are the master of your own destiny.

It’s time for executives to look themselves in the mirror and ask: when did I start accepting average-at-best results for my health and fitness? In no other realm of my life do I ever accept average, so why is it ok when it comes to my health? If you value who you are, what you create and how you affect the lives of those dearest to you, nothing less than a complete commitment to improving your health will do. You owe it to yourself and to those who depend upon you.

Let’s begin.

To find out more about *The Executive Athlete* and purchase a copy of the book please visit:

<http://www.jonathancawte.com/Books/The-Executive-Athlete>