



PRACTICAL GUIDE

REGAIN THE POWER OF CHOICE

Why willpower was never enough —
and what works instead, when a habit has taken
up more room in your life than you want.

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A few words, first

If you are opening this book, it is probably because something in your life is taking up more room than you want it to. A drink. A screen. A relationship. An urge that comes back at the same hour every day, and that you answer the same way every time.

You have almost certainly tried to change it. And it held. For a while.

This book is not here to tell you to try harder. It is here to explain **why trying harder was never going to work** — and what works instead.

In these pages you will not read the words “disease”, “powerless”, “higher power” or “incurable”. You will not read that something in you is broken, either. We are going to talk about conditioned habits, about mechanisms, about function, perspective and choice. Because that is what this actually is — and because that is what can be changed.

I have been working with people for more than thirty-five years. Professionals, business owners, athletes, parents. Functioning people, often brilliant ones, who succeed at almost everything — except this.

They sit down across from me, they look at the floor, ashamed and out of answers, and they all say more or less the same sentence: “Patrice, I don’t understand. I’m capable in every other part of my life. Why am I not capable here?”

Well, I have good news for them, and for you: **this is not a question of capability.** It is a question of mechanism. And a mechanism can be understood, taken apart, and put back together differently.

HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

Read it slowly. A chapter or two at a time. Get yourself a notebook — a real one, made of paper — and write in it. The questions at the end of several chapters are not decoration: they are the part that does the work.

And above all: **nothing will be asked of you.** No decision is required of you in this book. First you are going to understand. Deciding comes afterward, and it will be your choice.

Understanding opens the door. It does not transform anything. But without it, there isn't even a door.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

The first six chapters take the mechanism apart: why willpower loses, how the cycle closes, what the behaviour is really for, and why your previous attempts did not hold.

The next six deal with what comes after: what it actually costs you, the three options in front of you, how to observe without judging yourself, the three-part procedure, and what happens once the decision is made.

It is short, it is direct, and it is written to be used — not only read.

THE CONTRACT OF THIS BOOK

I give you the map. You walk the road. This guide explains honestly how the mechanism works and where we intervene on it. It will not do the work for you — no book does — but it will make it **impossible to stop seeing** what you are about to see. And that alone changes a great deal.

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Six categories, one mechanism. So this book does not have one chapter per behaviour: that would be twelve versions of the same chapter.

CHAPTER 1

You are not broken

What to set down before we start

It is nine in the evening. The day is done. You worked well, you were decent to everyone, you held your place. Nothing dramatic happened. Nobody hurt you, nobody insulted you.

And yet there is that small hollow. That tightness in your chest. That emptiness you can't quite name.

You don't say to yourself "I'm going to have a drink", or "I'm going to open the app", or "I'm going to text her". You don't say anything at all. **You are already on your feet.** The act left before the thought.

And twenty minutes later, it's better. Genuinely better. Not for long — but better.

Then, later that evening or the next morning, the sentence arrives. Always the same one: *"Why do I keep doing this?"*

If you recognized yourself in that scene, you are not running out of willpower. You are watching a well-installed habit work exactly as designed.

FOUR THINGS TO SET DOWN BEFORE GOING FURTHER

Before understanding the mechanism, four ideas have to go. They are so widespread that we take them for truths. They are not — and more importantly, they stop you from seeing clearly.

1. "Something in me is broken"

This is the most expensive belief of them all. It turns a behaviour into an identity. And an identity can't be changed — it can only be endured.

A brain that installs an automatic response to repeated pain is not a defective brain. It is **a brain doing exactly what it was built to do**. It found a fast solution to a real discomfort, repeated it, and automated it. That is a performance, not a failure.

The problem is not that your system is broken. The problem is that it is very *good*, and it learned the wrong answer.

2. “I am my behaviour”

You drink, but you are not “a drinker”. You gamble, but you are not “a gambler”. You keep going back to that person, but you are not “a weak person”.

There is an enormous distance between *doing* something and *being* something. That distance is the space where change becomes possible. Remove it and there is nothing left to change: there is only someone left to condemn.

3. The word “addiction”

I don't use it with the people I work with. Not out of delicacy, and not to soften reality. For a far more practical reason: **the word drags a whole procession of ideas behind it that block the work.** Disease. Incurable. Tragedy. A label for life.

When someone believes they are ill, they wait for treatment. When someone understands they have a conditioned habit, they can act. That is not the same posture — and it does not produce the same results.

4. Shame and guilt

These are two different things, and the distinction matters enormously.

Guilt says: “I did something I don't like.” It is about the act. It is uncomfortable, but it is useful: it points in a direction.

Shame says: “I am a bad person.” It is about the person. And it points nowhere at all — it only pushes you down.

Here is what thirty-five years of practice have shown me, without a single exception:

Shame makes people use. It has never made anyone stop.

In Chapter 4 you will see why that is mechanically true: shame is a pain, and pain is precisely what triggers the cycle. Judging yourself for a behaviour feeds the behaviour you are judging.

Take this with you: for the rest of this book, hold one posture only — **observer, not judge**. You are watching a mechanism run, the way you would watch an engine. A mechanic does not insult himself in front of a knocking engine. He opens the hood.

CHAPTER 2

One mechanism, six faces

Why the category changes nothing

When people find themselves together in one of my groups, the first reaction is almost always the same: each one thinks their case is different from the others.

The man who drinks thinks the man who gambles has a “real” problem. The woman who can't leave a relationship thinks hers doesn't compare. The man who spends five hours a night on his phone thinks he isn't serious enough to be in the room.

And then, an hour in, someone describes a typical evening. And the whole room recognizes itself.

SIX CATEGORIES

Almost every compulsive behaviour fits into one of six families:

- **Alcohol** — the most normalized of them all, because it is served everywhere and socially celebrated.
- **Drugs and medication** — from daily cannabis to the sleeping pills nobody wants to give up.
- **Gambling and money** — lotteries, casinos, sports betting, high-frequency trading apps.
- **Relationships and sexuality** — compulsive attachment, the constant search for validation, pornography, dating apps.
- **Screens** — social media, streaming, games, the device you pick up “for two minutes” at ten at night and put down at midnight.
- **Work, performance, food, shopping** — the socially rewarded compulsions, the hardest ones to see, because the world around you applauds while you burn out.

Six families. Completely different faces. Very unequal consequences — I will never claim that one drink too many and a forty-thousand-dollar gambling debt are the same thing in terms of consequences.

But in terms of *mechanism*: they are identical. Down to the comma.

THE SAME ENGINE

A pain arrives. An automatic response fires. The act is carried out. Relief comes — and it is real. The brain records: “**that worked, do it again.**”

Change the name of the act and you get any one of the six families. The engine never changes.

WHY THIS IS EXCELLENT NEWS

Because if the mechanism is one, so is the solution.

You don't need a specialized treatment for your particular behaviour. You need to understand **how the mechanism works, and where we intervene on it**. That is exactly why I work with mixed groups: the person who gambles and the person who drinks help each other far more than you would expect. Each one sees in the other what they can't yet see in themselves.

It is also why there is no chapter per category in this book. That would be twelve versions of the same chapter.

THE QUESTION OF SEVERITY

“Is my case serious enough?”

It is one of the questions I get most often, and I always give the same answer: that is not the right question. Severity is not a threshold you have to cross to earn the right to take care of yourself.

The only useful questions are these:

- 1 Does it come back?** Not once, not during one hard stretch. Recurrently, predictably, almost on schedule.
- 2 Does it fire without you deciding?** Does the act leave before the thought?
- 3 Have you already tried to stop or cut back — and it didn't hold?**

4

Is it costing you something you would rather not pay? Time, money, self-respect, presence with the people you love.

If you answer yes to those four, the rest of this book is for you. Whatever the substance, whatever the act, whatever worse thing the person beside you is living through.

An important note. Some physical withdrawals — large quantities of alcohol, certain medications — carry real medical risks and should never be attempted alone. If that is your situation, talk to a doctor first. The work described in this book is done *alongside* medical care, never in its place.

CHAPTER 3

Why willpower loses

5 % against 95 %

You have already made the decision. Probably several times. On a first of January, on a Monday morning, on a difficult morning after. You made it sincerely, with conviction, telling yourself that this time would be the one.

And it held. Three days. Three weeks. Maybe three months.

Then one evening, without warning, you found yourself exactly where you no longer wanted to be. And the conclusion arrived on its own: *"I don't have enough willpower."*

Well, I'm telling you that isn't it.

TWO SYSTEMS, TWO WEIGHTS

There are two systems working at the same time in your head.

The first one is **conscious**. It is the one reading this sentence. The one that analyzes, compares, decides, sets goals. It is brilliant, it is lucid — and it is tiny. In my practice I picture it as roughly **5 %** of what actually runs your day.

The second one is **automatic**. It is the autopilot. It handles your breathing, your driving, the way you hold a fork, your mood in the morning, your reaction when somebody raises their voice. It does not reason: it runs programs that are already installed. And it occupies the other **95 %**.

THE ROPE

Picture a tug of war. On one side, your willpower: one person. On the other, your autopilot: nineteen people.

You can pull harder. You can train to pull harder. You can motivate yourself, set goals, promise yourself rewards. **You are going to lose.** Not because you are weak — because the balance of force is what it is.

You don't win that match by pulling harder. **You win it by changing the programming.**

And that is precisely what the work I do is for. We don't strengthen willpower. We go and work on the side of the nineteen.

THE SAME DRAWER AS DRIVING A CAR

Here is the idea that most often makes something click for people when I present it.

Think back to your first hours of driving. You had to think about everything: the mirrors, the clutch, your speed, the signal, the blind spot. It was exhausting. You were driving with your conscious system.

Today you do forty minutes of highway while thinking about your meeting, and you arrive with no memory of the drive. The program went down into the automatic system. It runs without you.

Your compulsive behaviour is filed **in the same drawer**. Exactly the same one. The brain draws no moral distinction between “tying your shoes”, “driving” and “opening the bottle at nine”. It knows one rule only: what is repeated becomes automatic.

It is unsettling, I know. It also sounds like bad news. It isn't — and here is why.

WHAT GETS INSTALLED CAN BE UNINSTALLED

The word to remember is **neuroplasticity**: the brain's capacity to reorganize itself, to create new connections, and to let the ones that no longer serve grow weak.

That capacity does not stop at twenty. It does not stop at fifty either. It works your whole life, and it obeys one very simple rule:

What you repeat gets stronger. What you stop feeding gets weaker.

The same mechanism that installed the behaviour can install another one. It is neutral. It knows nothing of good or bad, of the past or of regret. It obeys repetition.

Which means the question is not “am I capable of changing”. The question is: “**what am I repeating?**”

THREE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES

- 1 Stop fighting the urge.** Fighting an urge head-on is the one-against-nineteen match. We don't work on the urge: we work on what manufactures it.
- 2 Stop counting on motivation.** Motivation is an emotion, and emotions pass. What holds is a procedure — not a burst of inspiration.
- 3 Aim at the programming, not the symptom.** The act is the effect. You have to go and look at the cause. That is what the next three chapters are for.

One sentence to carry: you did not fail. You used the wrong tool, with a great deal of courage, for a very long time.

CHAPTER 4

The cycle, in five stages

The mechanism in slow motion

People say “vicious cycle” all the time without ever looking at what it is made of. So let's look at it in slow motion. It has five stages, always the same, always in the same order.

STAGE 1 — THE PAIN

It always starts with a discomfort. Always.

And pay attention: rarely a tragedy. That is what fools everyone. It is not the bereavement, the divorce or the bankruptcy. It is much smaller and much more ordinary: a tiredness, an emptiness, a tension, boredom, an irritation at work, a sentence from somebody that stung, a silence in the house.

Sometimes you couldn't even name it. It is just there.

And one particular pain shows up at stage 1 more often than any other: **the shame of the previous act**. That is what makes the cycle so impossible to break with guilt. Judging yourself harshly after the act creates the trigger for the next one.

STAGE 2 — THE AUTOMATIC SEARCH

There is no deliberation here. There is no “should I”. The autopilot recognizes the sensation, opens its catalogue of fast solutions, and pulls out the one with the best track record.

It is extremely fast. Often less than a second. That is why people tell me: “I don't even know how I ended up there.”

You didn't end up there. You were driven there, by a program, exactly the way you drove home last night without thinking about it.

STAGE 3 — THE ACT

The drink, the screen, the phone call, the bet, the purchase, the plate. It is done. This is the visible part — and it is the only part most people try to control.

It is also the part traditional approaches try to work on, with very little success when the goal is becoming free of a repeating act.

STAGE 4 — THE RELIEF

And it is real. This is the point I care most about getting across.

The relief works. It delivers. The tension drops, the emptiness fills, the noise stops. For twenty minutes, an hour, an evening — you feel better.

Nobody repeats a behaviour for ten years if it gives them nothing. If you are repeating this one, it is because it delivers something. Denying that would be dishonest, and above all useless: you don't free yourself from a solution while refusing to admit it worked.

Alcohol was never the problem. It was the solution.

— and the same is true of the screen, the bet, the relationship, all of it.

STAGE 5 — THE CONDITIONING

This is the invisible stage, and it is the one that counts.

The brain has just recorded an equation: **this pain → this act → relief**. It files the information. It reinforces the path. Next time the response will come faster. And a little faster the time after that.

Repeat that a few hundred times over a few years and you get a program as solid as the one that ties your shoes or lets you walk without thinking.

THE CYCLE, IN ONE LINE

Pain → automatic search → act → relief → conditioning → (new pain, usually the shame of the act)

And it starts again. Not because you are weak. Because the circuit is well built and it is doing exactly what it was built for.

WHERE WE INTERVENE — AND WHERE WE DON'T

Almost everybody tries to intervene at **stage 3**: don't carry out the act. Grit your teeth. Resist.

It is the worst possible place. At stage 3 you are already in motion, the autopilot has the controls, and you are fighting one against nineteen. You can win a few times. You cannot win every time.

The real work happens elsewhere:

- **At stage 1** — learning to recognize the pain while it is still small, and to name it. Naming an emotion already strips part of its trigger power away.
- **At stage 4** — understanding precisely *what the act is solving*. That is the subject of the next chapter, and it is the heart of the whole work.
- **At stage 5** — installing another response, by repetition, until it becomes automatic in its turn.

In other words: we never attack the cycle at its visible part. We attack it upstream and downstream.

Exercise. Take your notebook. Think back to the last time. Write three lines: *What was there just before? What did I feel in the twenty minutes that followed? What did I say to myself afterward?* No judgment. Observer, not judge.

CHAPTER 5

What it is really for

Function, emotion, belief

Here is the question nobody asks, and it changes everything:

That behaviour — what is it solving for you?

Not “why do I do this” — that question leads straight to judgment, and judgment leads nowhere. But: *what is it solving?* What job does that act get done, every single time you carry it out?

Because it gets one done. Always.

THE THREE COLUMNS

In my work I use three columns. Three, that's all. It is the simplest grid I know, and it is also the most effective.

COLUMN 1 · THE FUNCTION

What the act **solves**. Its job. Putting you to sleep. Anaesthetizing. Rewarding. Silencing a thought. Marking the end of the day. Creating a border between work and home. Filling an emptiness. Feeling alive.

COLUMN 2 · THE EMOTION

What was there **just before**. Not the hour, not the place, not the person: the inner state. Tiredness. Loneliness. Swallowed anger. Boredom. Anxiety. Shame. The feeling of not being seen.

COLUMN 3 · THE BELIEF

What **gives permission**. The sentence, often a tiny one, that authorizes the act. “I worked hard, I’ve earned this.” “Today’s a write-off anyway.” “Just tonight.” “I can stop whenever I want.” “It isn’t hurting anybody.”

When someone fills in those three columns honestly for seven days, almost the same thing always happens: they discover that column 1 does not contain ten different answers. It contains one or two, and they keep coming back.

And right there, abruptly, the behaviour stops being a riddle. It becomes **a strategy**. A bad strategy, but a coherent one, with a logic and an objective.

WHAT THAT CHANGES

Everything, in fact.

As long as the act stays inexplicable, there is nothing to do but resist. As soon as you know its function, two doors open:

- **You can deal with the cause.** If the function is “silencing the evening anxiety”, the work is not on the drink. It is on the evening anxiety.
- **You can replace intelligently.** A new response only holds if it gets the *same job* done. That is where most attempts fail: people swap one act for another that solves nothing. A cup of tea does not replace a border between work and home.

THE THREE NEEDS THE COMPULSION STEALS

After thirty-five years, I almost always see the same three needs sitting behind the columns. The compulsion promises to meet them, fills them for an instant, then steals them.

- 1 Connection.** Feeling linked to someone, to something, to yourself. The act creates an instant connection — and then it isolates you, systematically.
- 2 Being heard.** Having someone understand what is happening inside. The act silences the need instead of naming it, and nobody hears a thing.

3

Control over your own life. Having a grip on your existence. This is the cruellest irony of the mechanism: the act gives the illusion of control and takes the real control away.

Look at your column 1 once you have filled it in. You will very likely find one of those three needs underneath.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BOTTLE

A man tells me: “I have three drinks every evening.” We fill in the columns together.

Function: marking the end of the day. He has no other border between his work and his life. The drink is the only signal that says “it’s over”.

Emotion: a tension that never comes back down, every evening, around half past eight.

Belief: “I gave all day, I’m owed something.”

That man does not have a drinking problem. He has a border problem and a tension that never comes back down, and alcohol is the only solution he has found. Taking the drink away without giving him anything else takes away his only border. Of course it isn’t going to hold.

Giving him another way to close his day — and a way to let the tension come down — that holds.

What to take away: you are not fighting an enemy. You are dealing with a solution that worked, and that now costs more than it pays. Your job is not to destroy it. Your job is to **replace it with something better.**

CHAPTER 6

The transfer

When the act changes and the function stays

I need to tell you what happens when you go after the act alone. Because it may already have happened to you, and because you may have blamed yourself for something that was not your fault.

It is called the transfer.

YOU HAVE ALREADY SUCCEEDED — AND IT SLIPPED OUT SOMEWHERE ELSE

Here are scenes I see every week:

- Someone stops drinking. Six weeks later she is eating in the evening until it hurts, every evening.
- Someone deletes social media. Two weeks later he is watching series until two in the morning.
- A woman leaves a relationship that was destroying her. Four months later she is with someone who has a different first name and exactly the same behaviour.
- A man stops gambling. He starts working seventy hours a week, and everyone congratulates him.

In every one of those cases, the person reaches the same conclusion: “I relapsed, I'm incapable.”

That is not what happened.

The behaviour changed. The function stayed. And a function that isn't being met will go and find another act — that's all.

WHY IT IS LOGICAL

Go back to the cycle in Chapter 4. If you remove stage 3 — the act — without changing anything at stages 1, 4 and 5, what is left?

The pain still arrives. The automatic search still fires. The need for relief is intact. The autopilot will simply go and find **the best available substitute** in its catalogue. That is mechanics, not moral weakness.

A brain does not leave an essential function unanswered. Ever.

THE LESSON: ACT ON THE CAUSE, NOT THE EFFECT

This is probably the sentence I repeat most often in my work.

The act is the effect. The function, the emotion and the belief are the cause. As long as the cause is intact, the effect moves. You can move it your whole life — and plenty of people do, changing behaviour every three years and believing themselves cured in between.

That said, there is very good news buried in this, and it matters.

WHAT THE TRANSFER PROVES

If you have already stopped something for weeks or months, you have just demonstrated something you probably don't give yourself credit for: **you are capable of stopping.**

You were not short on willpower. You were short of half the work — the half nobody ever explained to you.

HOW TO SPOT A TRANSFER IN YOURSELF

A few signs that don't lie:

- A new behaviour settled in *quickly* after the old one stopped — a few weeks, rarely more.
- It fires *at the same time of day* as the old one.
- It gives you *exactly the same type of relief*.
- You defend it. "It's not remotely comparable." That sentence is an excellent clue.

If you tick those four, you did not relapse. You changed vehicles without changing roads.

Exercise. List your past attempts. For each one: what did I stop, how long did it hold, and **what took its place?** That last column is usually empty in people's heads — and full in their lives.

CHAPTER 7

The real cost

What can be counted, what cannot

This chapter is short, and it is the most uncomfortable one in the book. Take it calmly, and above all, read it to the end: it finishes well.

WHAT CAN BE COUNTED

Take your notebook and a pen. We are going to do an honest calculation, without rounding down.

The money

How much does this behaviour cost you per week? Add all of it: the act itself, what comes with it, the indirect consequences.

Multiply by 52. Then multiply by the number of years. Write the figure out in words.

The hours

Count three blocks:

- The time of the act itself.
- The time of the preparation — thinking about it, arranging it, anticipating it.
- The time of the recovery — the difficult morning after, the day at half power, the lost hours of sleep.

Total it for one week. Multiply by 52. Convert into full twenty-four-hour days.

Most people land between three and eight weeks a year. Entire weeks of life, every year, that don't count.

WHAT CANNOT BE COUNTED

And then there is the other column. The one with no figure, and it weighs infinitely more.

- The conversations you didn't have because you weren't really there.
- The projects you put off telling yourself “once I've dealt with this”.
- The look on the face of someone who loves you and has stopped asking questions.
- The energy it takes, every day, to manage appearances.
- The distance you have put between yourself and the person you meant to be.

That is the column nobody talks about. It is also the one that finally makes people move — never the figure.

NOW, THE GOOD NEWS

I did not make you do that calculation to hurt you. I made you do it for one reason: **what it costs you to continue is also the measure of what you get back by changing.**

Those weeks exist. That money exists. That energy exists. That presence exists — the people around you are still waiting for it. All of it is in your life right now; it is simply allocated somewhere else.

You don't have to become somebody else to get all of that back. You have to reclaim what is already yours.

And one last point: this cost is *not* proof that you wasted something. It is the bill for a service you were genuinely receiving — the relief at stage 4 was real. You paid dearly, but not for nothing: you paid to stay standing with the tools you had. Now you are in the process of discovering others.

Keep that figure. Write it on a page of your notebook, with today's date. You will read it again in a few months, and it will not taste the same at all.

CHAPTER 8

The three options

Status quo, moderation, freedom

Now I have to tell you something that nobody has probably ever told you in this field.

Nobody is going to decide for you. Not me, not your family, not a group, not a book.

I know why it matters to say that early. A good half of the people who come to see me arrive with one very specific fear: the fear of being told to stop everything, permanently, today. And that fear paralyzes them so completely that they would rather look at nothing at all.

So let's set it aside right now. In front of any behaviour there are exactly three options. Three. All of them are legitimate, and the choice is entirely yours.

OPTION 1 — THE STATUS QUO

Change nothing. Continue.

It is a real option, and I name it without irony. Plenty of people choose it, and sometimes for good reasons: this isn't the right moment, something else is more urgent, life is already heavy enough.

The only thing I ask, if you choose it, is that you choose it *consciously*. There is an enormous difference between being subjected to a behaviour and deciding, eyes open, to keep it for now. In the first case you are a passenger. In the second you are at the controls — even if the course doesn't change.

And just remember this: **if nothing changes, nothing changes**. The cost from Chapter 7 keeps running.

OPTION 2 — MODERATION

Keep the behaviour, but change its terms completely. Clear, precise, written limits. Not “I'll be careful” — that is not a limit, that is an intention.

Real moderation is: what quantity, which days, in what context, with whom, and what do I do if the limit breaks.

I'll be honest with you: for some people and some behaviours, moderation works very well. For others it becomes a full-time job — monitoring, negotiating, justifying — more exhausting than stopping. Nobody can predict which group you are in. What we can do is try it seriously and look at the result without lying to ourselves.

OPTION 3 — FREEDOM

Stop using it altogether. Grieve the solution, and install something else in its place.

I don't say “abstinence”, and that is not a quibble about vocabulary. Abstinence means depriving yourself of something you still want. **Freedom** means no longer needing it. That is not the same experience, and it is not the same life.

Freedom is not a deprivation to be endured indefinitely. It is a state in which the act has lost its function — because something else took the job over, and does it better.

NONE OF THEM IS IMPOSED

This is the signature of how I work. All three options stay on the table from beginning to end. Nobody will tell you which one to take — and the day you choose, it will be **your** decision, made with complete information.

A decision imposed by somebody else never holds. A decision made with your eyes open holds very well.

WHY YOU SHOULD NOT DECIDE TODAY

Here is a point I don't move on: **make no decision now**.

In the program I run, the decision is made in week five. Never before. And that is not caution — it is effectiveness.

A decision made in the momentum of a difficult morning after is an emotional decision. It lasts exactly as long as the emotion that produced it. A decision made after several weeks of honest observation rests

on facts: you know what the act solves, you know what it costs, you know what you have already tried and why it didn't hold.

That one holds.

So for now, the only thing I am asking of you is to **look**. That is what the next chapter is for.

To write in your notebook: which of the three options would you *want* to choose, if you knew for certain you would succeed at it? Don't think too hard. Write the first answer that comes. It is usually the right one, and you will come back to it later.

CHAPTER 9

Observe before deciding

Seven days, three columns

Everything you have read so far is theory. Useful theory, but theory. This chapter is the first piece of real work, and it is also the most important one in the book.

It fits in one sentence: **for seven days, you observe and you change nothing.**

CHANGE NOTHING — REALLY

I repeat it because nobody believes me the first time. You don't cut back. You don't try to do better. You set no goal at all.

Two reasons for that.

The first is technical: if you modify the behaviour while you are observing it, you are observing something else. You won't see the real mechanism, you will see this week's performance.

The second is human: trying to do well immediately reintroduces judgment. And judgment produces shame, and shame is a trigger. You know the rest.

Observer, not judge.

THE THREE COLUMNS, IN PRACTICE

Every time the behaviour happens, you note three things. It takes two minutes. On paper, in a notebook — not on a phone, for obvious reasons.

- 1 The function.** What did it solve? Write the most honest answer, not the most elegant one.
- 2 The emotion.** What was there just before? One word is enough: tiredness, boredom, anger, loneliness, tension, emptiness, shame.

3

The belief. What sentence gave me permission? Write it down word for word, exactly as it went through your head.

Add the time as well. It is a small detail, and it is often the fastest revelation: most people discover within three days that their behaviour keeps a far more regular schedule than they believed.

WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN

I can describe it fairly precisely, because it is almost always the same.

- **Days 1 and 2:** you write after the fact, sometimes the next day. That is normal. Write anyway.
- **Days 3 and 4:** you start seeing repetitions. The same hours, the same words.
- **Days 5 to 7:** something curious happens — you catch yourself observing *while* it is happening. And sometimes, without having decided to, you don't carry out the act.

That last point deserves a pause, because it is the first concrete sign that something is moving.

It is not willpower. It is that observation inserts a space between stage 1 and stage 3 of the cycle. A tiny space — one second, two seconds. But inside that second, you become someone who chooses again.

THAT IS WHAT REGAINING THE POWER OF CHOICE MEANS

It does not start with a great heroic decision. It starts with **one second of awareness inserted into an automatism**. And that second gets longer, the more you repeat it.

THE FIVE-MINUTE JOURNAL

Beyond the seven days of observation, I recommend one very simple daily practice, and I recommend it to everybody: **five minutes of writing a day**. Not ten, not thirty. Five.

Always the same time of day, preferably the evening. Three questions are enough:

- What did I feel today, and when?
- What was difficult, and how did I answer it?

- What do I take away, however small?

It is not a literary exercise, nobody will read it. It is a measuring instrument. Writing what you feel forces you to name it, and naming an emotion reduces its charge — one of the most reliable effects I know of.

AND IF THE WEEK GOES BADLY?

Then you will have an excellent week of data.

I am serious. A week in which the behaviour happens eight times teaches you infinitely more than a heroic week in which you held back. You are not sitting an exam. You are taking a reading.

One rule only. Nothing you write in that notebook may be followed by a judgment about yourself. If you catch yourself writing “I’m useless”, cross it out and replace it with the bare fact: “it happened Tuesday at 9:15 PM, after a difficult phone call”. The fact is useful. The judgment is not.

CHAPTER 10

The three C's

Clarity · Confrontation · Coding

All the work I do with people fits into three movements. Three, in this order, never another. These are the three C's.

C1 — CLARITY: SEEING PLAINLY

This is where you are, if you have read this far and done the exercises.

Clarity is not “knowing you have a problem”. Everybody has known that for a long time, and it has never changed anything for anybody.

Clarity is **seeing the mechanism run in real time**: recognizing the stage 1 pain while it is arriving, identifying the function, hearing the belief that grants permission at the moment it goes past.

It is the foundation. Without it, the other two movements have nothing to grip. With it, the behaviour stops being a mystery and becomes an object you can handle.

But — and this is essential — clarity alone is not enough.

Understanding opens the door. It does not transform anything.

Plenty of people spend years understanding their behaviour perfectly while nothing moves. They did C1 and stopped there, believing the rest would come on its own. It does not come on its own.

C2 — CONFRONTATION: CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

Confronting, here, does not mean taking yourself on, or giving yourself a shake. It means **putting a belief up against reality and seeing whether it holds**.

Remember column 3 from Chapter 5. Those tiny sentences that grant permission. “I’ve earned it.” “Just tonight.” “Today’s a write-off anyway.” “I can stop whenever I want.”

Those sentences are not facts. They are interpretations — learned, repeated, never verified. And they are extraordinarily effective: they open the door to stage 3 in a fraction of a second.

Confrontation means writing them out, one by one, and putting three questions to each:

- 1 Is it true?** Actually true, verifiable — or only familiar?
- 2 What does believing it cost me?** The real price of that sentence, in my life.
- 3 What would be more accurate and more useful to me?** Not more positive — more *accurate*.

It is writing work, and it is demanding work. Most people need support with it, not because it is complicated, but because we are the worst possible judge of our own obvious truths. A belief you have carried for twenty years does not look like a belief: it looks like reality.

That is exactly what an outside pair of eyes lets you see.

C3 — CODING: INSTALLING A NEW RESPONSE

Seeing plainly is not enough. Understanding differently is not enough either. It has to be **installed**.

Remember the rule from Chapter 3: what is repeated becomes automatic. Coding is the deliberate application of that rule. You choose the new response — the one that meets the *same function* as the old one — and you repeat it until it goes down into the 95 %.

This is where the most powerful part of my work comes in: **SVT**, a subconscious visualization technique I use with participants in the second half of the program. It cannot be learned from a book, and I am not going to pretend otherwise here: it is practised with support, with someone guiding and adjusting.

What I can tell you is the principle. The autopilot does not learn by argument — if it did, understanding would be enough and we wouldn’t need this book. It learns by the **repetition of an experience**. SVT creates that experience deliberately, until the new response becomes the first reflex rather than the second.

WHY THE ORDER MATTERS

Coding without clarity installs a response to the wrong function. That is what produces the transfers in Chapter 6.

Confronting without clarity means wrestling with ideas without knowing which ones actually count.

Stopping at clarity means understanding perfectly why you do something... and continuing to do it.

Clarity, Confrontation, Coding. In that order. That is the procedure.

Where you are. This book takes you to the end of C1 and gives you the tools of C2. C3 requires support — I would rather tell you that plainly than let you believe a book is enough.

CHAPTER 11

Holding

What happens after the decision

Let's say the decision is made. Whichever of the three it is. What happens next, concretely?

I might as well tell you now: it is not linear, and it is not what you have been told.

THE TWENTY-ONE-DAY MYTH

You have heard it a hundred times: twenty-one days and a new habit is installed. It is false, and it is a lie that does a great deal of damage.

From what I have observed over thirty-five years, you should count on **about two months on average** for a behaviour to become genuinely automatic — and considerably longer for some people, depending on how old the replaced behaviour is and how much emotional weight it carries.

Why does that matter? Because the person who believes the twenty-one-day figure finds themselves on day twenty-five, still forcing it, and concludes that they have failed. When in fact they are *exactly on schedule*.

We celebrate at thirty days. We aim for ninety.

THE THIRD WEEK AFTER THE DECISION

If there is one thing I want you to take from this chapter, it is this.

The hardest stretch is not the first week. In the first week you are carried by the momentum of the decision, by adrenaline, by novelty, sometimes by pride.

The hardest stretch is **the third week after the decision**. The momentum has dropped. The novelty has worn off. Ordinary life is back, with the same stage 1 pains. And the new response is not automatic yet — it still takes conscious effort every single time.

It is mathematically the worst moment: the most effort required, the least emotional support available.

That is precisely why I build my programs over eight weeks and why the decision is made in week five. That way, that third week falls *inside* the program. The person goes through it with support, in a group, with someone to talk to — rather than alone at home, a month after everybody has gone.

THREE SIMPLE TOOLS, EVERY DAY

Here are three practices I give every participant. They are simple, free, and formidably effective when they are done daily.

4-2-8 breathing

Breathe in through the nose for 4 counts. Hold for 2. Breathe out slowly through the mouth for 8. Eight repetitions. **Three times a day** — not only when things are bad.

The long exhale acts directly on the nervous system and brings the alert state down. Practised three times a day, outside of any crisis, it lowers your baseline tension — and therefore the intensity of the stage 1 pains. It is prevention, not first aid.

The five minutes of writing

The journal from Chapter 9, every day, even when there is nothing to say. Especially when there is nothing to say.

The pause

Two or three times a day, you stop for thirty seconds and ask yourself one question: *what am I feeling right now?* That is direct training for the stage 1 muscle. The earlier you spot it, the more choice you have.

THE NO PRINCIPLE

A rule worth its weight in gold in tight moments: **never negotiate with the urge in the moment.**

The autopilot is a formidable negotiator. It never asks you to abandon the project; it asks for one exception, just one, today, with excellent reasons. And it almost always wins, because it negotiates at the precise moment when it has the controls.

The counter is simple: the decision is made cold, not hot. It is written down. It is not reopened in the moment. When the urge arrives there is nothing to decide — it is already decided, and you apply it.

It is less heroic than a battle. It is also far more effective.

AND IF IT GOES OFF THE RAILS?

It happens. Not always, but often. And here is how we treat it.

A slip is **information**, not a verdict. It tells you that a function was not covered, or that a belief had not been confronted, or that a particular situation had not been anticipated. That is useful. It is even valuable.

What turns a slip into a catastrophe is never the act itself: it is the shame that follows. Shame is a pain, pain is a stage 1, and the cycle starts up again — faster than before.

So the rule is this: **you note it, you understand it, you adjust, you continue**. No drama, no resetting the counter to zero, no erasing the three weeks that came before. They exist. They count. They do not cancel out.

ALONE, VERY FEW PEOPLE MANAGE IT

I'll close this chapter with the hardest thing for the people I work with to hear — often very self-sufficient people, used to handling their own affairs.

Alone, very few people manage it. Not for lack of worth or strength. For a structural reason: **you cannot see your own blind spots**. That is the definition of a blind spot.

You need at least one person who knows where you are, to whom you tell the truth, and in front of whom you cannot pretend. A group, a coach, a trusted person. Together, it becomes an entirely different proposition.

What to take away: it is not willpower that makes it hold, it is structure. A clear procedure, daily tools, a decision made cold, and someone who sees you. Nothing heroic in any of it — and that is exactly why it works.

CHAPTER 12

Regain the power of choice

And what comes next

We are at the end. I want to tell you what this actually produces when the work is done. Not promises — what I see in people.

WHAT IT PRODUCES

The first change is not the one you expect. It is not “I don't want it anymore”. It is subtler, and it is far better:

The urge still arrives — and now there is a space between it and you.

Inside that space, you see what is happening. You recognize the pain. You know what it is asking for. And you choose what to do with it. Sometimes you choose something else, sometimes you choose the same thing — but you choose.

That is what regaining the power of choice is. It is not never feeling anything again. It is no longer being driven.

Then the other changes come, and almost all of them arrive by themselves:

- Time comes back. Those weeks from Chapter 7 start counting again.
- Energy comes back — far more than you imagine, because managing appearances was consuming an enormous amount of it.
- Relationships change. You are present in conversations. People notice before you do.
- Your relationship with yourself changes. The daily shame leaves, and its departure frees up an immense amount of room.

- And one question remains, very ordinary and very vertiginous: “*all right... now what do I do with all this?*”

THE QUESTION THAT ALWAYS ARRIVES

That last question deserves some attention, because I see it arrive in almost everyone, usually around week eight.

The behaviour no longer runs the life. Time and energy are back. And suddenly there is room — a lot of room. For the first time in a long while, the question is no longer “how do I get out of this?” but “**what do I want to do with my life now?**”

That is a very good problem to have. It is in fact the most reliable sign that the work has taken hold.

And it is another job of work, with its own tools: giving your life meaning and direction. That is what my other program, *Is There a Pilot in the Plane?*, is for — a course built on twelve pillars. I won't say more about it here; one thing at a time, and this book had one job to do.

WHAT YOU CAN DO STARTING NOW

If you were to keep only four practices from this book, it would be these:

- 1 Seven days of observation.** Three columns, changing nothing. Start tonight.
- 2 Five minutes of writing a day.** Always at the same time.
- 3 4-2-8 breathing, three times a day.** Outside of any crisis. It is maintenance.
- 4 One person you tell the truth to.** One is enough to begin with.

Those four practices cost nothing and require no decision. And they will show you more in a week than ten years of good intentions.

ONE LAST WORD

You have reached the end of this book. That is already something: most people never open the hood.

You now know that you are not short on willpower, that the mechanism is the same for everybody, that it has a function, that it has a cost, and that it can be worked on — not by pulling harder, but by changing the programming.

And you know that nothing is being imposed on you. The three options are still on the table, and they will stay there.

Only one thing cannot be settled in a book: nobody sees their own blind spots. So if you would like the two of us to look at your situation together, with no commitment and no sales pitch, the door is open — the next page tells you how.

You already have everything you need to be happy. What you were missing was the map, not the courage.

WHO I AM

Patrice Beaudoin

Human potential coach

I have been working with people for more than thirty-five years, including more than twenty in direct practice with clients. I directed residential and outpatient recovery centres before developing my own way of working.

My clients are professionals, business owners, athletes, parents. People who function, who succeed, and who carry something in silence that takes up too much room. I don't work with the vocabulary of disease, but with mechanisms, procedures and tested tools — and with what these people already have: their intelligence, their clear-sightedness, and their wish to take back the controls.

My approach rests on three things: applied neuroscience, a reading of perspective drawn from stoicism, and my own experience — because I am not describing this road from the outside.

What I don't do. I am not a substitute for a health professional. Some situations require medical care, and I say so plainly when that is the case.

HOW I WORK

My program *Regain the Power of Choice* combines two things that, on their own, are not enough:

- **One-on-one sessions**, where we work on your specific situation: your columns, your beliefs, your decision.
- **Group workshops**, where people discover that the mechanism is the same for everyone — and where they finally stop being alone with it. The group is deliberately mixed: each person sees in the others what they cannot yet see in themselves. Complete confidentiality, camera on, nothing imposed.

THE NEXT DOOR

Thirty minutes, free, no commitment

If something in this book resonated, the logical next step is not to buy anything. It is to **talk to somebody**.

I set aside time every week for assessment calls. Thirty minutes, by phone or video. We look at your situation, we fill in your three columns together, and I tell you honestly what I see — including if I believe my support is not what you need right now.

No commitment. No pressure. And you leave with something useful, whatever happens.

BOOK THE ASSESSMENT CALL

calendly.com/coachpatricebeaudoin

Pick the time that works for you. You will get the confirmation by email right away.

For everything else — the program, the next cohorts, the free masterclasses:

regainthepowerofchoice.com

And if this is not the moment, keep this book. Do the seven days of observation. Come back whenever you want — the three options will always be on the table.

See you soon!

Patrice