

SHALLOW THOUGHT

DEEP MIND

*What you need to succeed, thrive,
and make the world better*



Dr Wayne Somerville

CREEK'S BEND
Toonumbar, Australia

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Preface

We've been the problem. It's time to become the solution.

No God, no space alien, no other creature is going to take responsibility and make things right. It's up to us to realise the futures we desire.

This book is for everyone who takes on life's challenges and dreams of a brighter tomorrow. The ideas apply to all the opportunities and problems, from the everyday to the profound, that we meet in our personal, social, spiritual, professional, and political lives.

Now in my mid-60s, I have a grandfather's stake in the future. I'd like to give you a head start so you don't have to reinvent all the wheels I had to chisel out and roll around.

These stories from my life as a clinical psychologist, horseman, bush regenerator, and environmental activist are about experiences that changed the way I think and do things. They might also help you discover who you really are, what you could be, and how you can make the world better.

This book is based on reason, science, and philosophy. I believe that the wisdom of our deep mind can transform lives and the world.

But please be warned. There's no quick fix on offer here, no secret to make wishes manifest, no '6-steps' formula. Learning what we need to know takes time and effort. But once you've got it, you'll never lose it.

Dr Wayne Somerville

Creek's Bend

Toonumbar, NSW, Australia

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Introduction

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A challenge to live, work, and raise a family, and the task is getting harder. We can no longer take our well-being for granted or rely on others to give us the lives we want. Not for the first time in history, we have to look inward to secure sufficiency. And on top of the usual demands, we confront threats the likes of which we've never seen before.

The media soundtrack to modern life buzzes with talk of war and tales of catastrophe and suffering. Ever spreading human activity degrades our planet's air, water, and soil, and puts at risk civilisation that millennia of clement weather made possible. Climate destabilisation drives mass extinctions of plants and animals, as all-time records of heat and cold, and drought and flood, are reset with each passing year.

And as problems proliferate, reason retreats. Science is under attack. In this so-called 'post-truth' age, 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief', according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

But this is also a time of great promise and possibility. Science is breaking through longstanding barriers. Renewable energy technologies are transforming the way we power our lives and move about. In medicine, treating cancers with a pill is no science fiction, human genomes are sequenced routinely, and there's talk of genuine elixirs of life. The information revolution rolls on as social movements push back against divisive politics and harmful developments. And knowledge, once restricted to a few, is now available to everyone.

The One Thought Solution

The human mind is the source of both our prospects and our problems. Our mental abilities make it possible for us to meet challenges in new, creative ways. But the way we think is also crucially involved in generating the perils we face. If we are to make the world better, we have to change the way we use our minds. Our personal and collective futures depend on how we think and act.

Some claim that for the sake of our species and the planet, humans have to transcend an innate self-serving irrationality, and evolve more rational and compassionate ways of thinking.

But I believe there's nothing essentially wrong with our minds. Rather, a near universal, natural, but inherently limited 'One Thought Solution' has come to dominate the way we think. Honed by evolution, this 'train of thought with one carriage' works, or works well enough, to give us the impression that we can see off challenges and solve most personal, political, and scientific problems quickly, with minimal effort. But this strategy from ancient times causes grief when it's applied inappropriately in our complex modern world.

This book shows you how to go beyond shallow thought to unlock the power of your deep mind and tackle life's challenges.

Book Contents

- Part 1: Tackling Big Challenges

We begin by examining the One Thought Solution: what it is, how it can create trouble, and what it takes to find solutions to big problems.

Chapter 1, Nature's Basic Problem Solving Strategy, gives an evolutionary perspective on the role that the One Thought Solution plays in the survival of our kind and other creatures across eons of time.

Chapter 2, War Trauma and a New Psychology, tells a story, 45 years in the making, about the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the search for gentler psychological therapies for trauma survivors.

Chapter 3, Native Forest Dieback, describes the 20 year journey that led my wife Susan and me to a treatment for a dieback disease which is devastating eucalypt forests along Australia's eastern seaboard.

Chapter 4, Unconventional Gas, gives my perspective on the problem of gas field industrialisation and the history making Gas-field Free campaign in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.

These stories from my life are examples of the kinds of smaller problems that make up the big challenges that confront humanity. The search for humane treatments for trauma is but one aspect of the overarching task of dealing with interpersonal violence and war. Dieback in Australia's eucalypts is just one example of the troubles that afflict forests around the globe. And the campaign against invasive gas fields is one instance of the worldwide struggle to promote reason over propaganda, and to reconcile the interests of people and the environment with those of the fossil fuel and mining industries.

This book is not so much about the problems that came my way, but rather what these tell about how you can successfully take on challenges in your life.

- Part 2: Using the Deep Mind

The second part of the book explores the knowledge and skills you need to harness the deep mind.

Chapter 5 introduces the 'Key Mental Processes' that together make us who we are, and determine how we think and act.

Chapter 6, Perception, zeros in on where our bodies end and the external world begins, and examines how our minds generate the reality we inhabit.

Chapter 7, Memory and Imagination, investigates the way we create visions of past and future.

Chapter 8, Beliefs to Limit or Liberate, surveys ideas that assist or block our potential for positive change.

Chapter 9, Language, delves into the profound effects that words have.

Chapter 10, Emotions, discusses the positive and negative feelings that affect the way we respond to challenges.

Chapter 11, Intuition, Sleep, and Dreams, takes us into the mysterious realm of the unconscious and sleeping minds.

Chapter 12 takes stock, looks to the future, and asks ‘what’s it going to take?’

Thought Experiments

Albert Einstein imagined that the streetcar he was riding accelerated to the speed of light as he looked back at a clock tower. He realised that the hands of the clock would appear stationary and time would be frozen. Einstein then did the maths and gave the world his special theory of relativity.

In this book you’ll be invited to work with thought experiments, though none as mind bending as Einstein’s. I’ll invite you to think about, or to say, or to imagine, some thing, and to rate your feelings on a ‘-10’ to ‘+10’ scale that we’ll call the ‘Emot-o-Meter’. These exercises in active mindfulness make it possible for you to imagine situations, take perspectives, and see implications that you could not otherwise realise.

There are no right or wrong answers, no correct way to respond to the thought experiments. You are unique and can take from these experiences what’s relevant to you. Requested images might come clearly, vaguely, or not at all; and it really doesn’t matter. All you have to do is make believe that you can imagine, see, hear, or do the things that we talk about.

Checking With Your Intuition

Your ‘gut feeling’ whether something is right or not comes from a part of your mind that psychologists call the ‘intuition’, or the ‘deep’, ‘subconscious’, or ‘unconscious’ mind.

The thought experiments in this book invoke real feelings - there's not much difference between real and imagined sadness and happiness. So before each exercise, I want you to check with your intuition that deep down it feels all right for you to do this work at this time.

That's not as strange as it might sound. Have you ever felt that something was not quite right and it took a while for you to work out what the problem was? Your intuition let you know that something was amiss before you consciously knew what it was.

When you check with your intuition, encourage any negative feelings to come through. Heed and respect your deep mind: it is rational, cooperative, and protective, and knows more about you than you do.

Your deep mind does not communicate by talking, so we need to set up nonverbal signals. If this was a face-to-face consultation, I would ask your intuition to indicate 'yes' and 'no' with particular finger or head movements. Known as 'ideomotor signals', these slight, automatic movements tend to naturally accompany our thoughts of 'yes' and 'no'.

But because I'm working with you via the written word, we'll conduct the training differently. You will control the running of the thought experiments and interpret your own responses using a method known as 'ideosensory signalling'.

The first step is to identify the sensations that you can use as signals. We'll do that now. Make yourself comfortable and ask your intuition to give you a feeling that you can interpret as a 'yes' signal. Take all the time you need. When you discern a clear 'yes' feeling, ask your intuition for a 'no' signal. Repeat the process of asking for 'yes' and 'no' signals until you can readily distinguish the two.

If the signals are not clear, compare the feeling you get when you say things that are definitely true or untrue. You might contrast what it feels like when you say 'I am a man' and 'I am a woman', or 'I am a giraffe' and 'I am a human'.

If your signals are still unclear, take a break and think about whether your deep mind might not want to communicate in this way. Perhaps some part of you is reluctant, or you might need more information or more time. Perhaps your intuition is protecting you. Whatever the reason, respect and heed your deep mind.

If you would like personalised help to get started on your work with the deep mind, you might see a registered psychologist with expertise in Ericksonian Hypnotherapy or Neurolinguistic Programming. Organisations such as the Australian Psychological Society or the American Psychological Society can direct you to an appropriately qualified practitioner.

In any case, you can get what you need by just reading the book without doing any of the thought experiments.

Stories and Studies

This is a work of nonfiction. As far as I know, everything in this book is true and based on real events and research. Dialogue with clients was reconstructed from clinical notes or, where indicated, taken verbatim from recorded conversations or client's letters and responses to questionnaires. Quotations from politicians and executives are from emails and letters sent to the author, speeches in the NSW Government's Hansard, or media reports.

To protect identity and privacy, I have changed some names: these are indicated by double quotation marks around the initial presentation of the name. When known, animals are referred to by their real names.

References

At the end of the book, for each chapter you will find the references indicated by superscript numbers in the text.

Let's get started.