The following pages contain the handouts for the ‘Resilience’ course. Originally the idea was to have two sets of handouts, one for managers and one for staff, but several staff members pointed out that they are often in the position of having to support co-workers, junior members of staff and students, and so the ‘supporting resilience’ information would be helpful to them too. With this in mind, this is the complete handout, and some sections have a ‘supporting others’ coda, that shows how to use these techniques to help the people around you to be resilient and confident too.

The handouts are in four main parts, and follow the Clough, 4 ‘C’s model of resilience:

**Control:** This is the degree to which someone feels in control of their life. It includes skills like emotional self-management, ability not to get overwhelmed with stress, and maintaining a positive outlook. Someone with good control skills is able to lift the spirits of the people around them, no matter how they themselves feel, in the way that skilled parents have done for centuries!

**Commitment:** A friend of mine calls this ‘stick-to-it-tiveness’: the ability to make realistic promises/goals, and overcome obstacles in order to achieve them. It’s the opposite of the kind of person that gives up at the first hurdle. Someone with commitment inspires the people around them, and makes a task feel do-able.

**Confidence:** This is how you feel about yourself and your own abilities: it’s realistic self-belief. A person with confidence is neither arrogant nor cringingly self-deprecating: they know what they can do, and what they do well, and they also know their limitations: in fact their confidence makes it possible to admit their limitations in a way a less confident person might find difficult. A confident person is generally good at inspiring goodwill in the people around them, by their own ‘can do’ attitude, and by appreciating the qualities those people have.

**Challenge:** A resilient person also needs good skills for dealing with challenges. Confidence is all very well, but knowing your own limits can become an excuse for never extending them. People with good challenge-management skills enjoy trying new things and developing new skills. They are also able to fail at a challenge without losing all their confidence!
Control Through Cognitive Restructuring

We cannot always control what happens in our lives, but we have some measure of control over how we let it affect us. If we believe that everyone is on our case and out to get us, we are likely to have a much more stressful life than if we believe that we are having a bad day and no-one meant anything by it. We can create a stressful life for ourselves by interpreting actions and events in a certain way. Consider the story given below: read through it, and think about whether Kim had a bad day or a good day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim woke up and looked at the clock: he had slept in slightly, so he hurriedly got out of bed and went downstairs for breakfast. Looking in the fridge all he could see was 2 prepared halves of grapefruit, so he had one of them, then went upstairs to get dressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He couldn't find any ironed shirts, so he put on a casual shirt and jeans and went back downstairs to get his stuff ready for the voluntary work he was due to do later that morning. Looking out of the window as he did so, he noticed that it was a gloomy day, so he decided not to take his bike in case it rained, and use public transport instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the way to the station he got a copy of a newspaper to read on the train. There was an article on music, and he read this while waiting for the train, which had been delayed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That day, not much happened at the drop-in advice centre where he volunteered: there were only 3 clients all day, and all three had problems that were easily dealt with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards the end of the day, he got a call from someone he hadn't seen for a long time, asking if he was free that evening. He was, so he arranged to meet them in town. There was nothing good on at the cinema, so the two of them sat and talked in a café until closing time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before turning overleaf, go through the paragraphs one at a time and decide: is Kim having a good or bad day? On the whole, how are things going?

Now turn over the page.
As you’ve probably guessed, Kim’s story has been carefully worded to appear as neutral as possible: either interpretation is valid. Here are some examples of interpretations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY</th>
<th>INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim woke up and looked at the clock: he had slept in slightly, so he</td>
<td>Needed the sleep/having to rush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hurriedly got out of bed and went downstairs for breakfast. Looking</td>
<td>On a diet so grapefruit is good/limited choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the fridge all he could see was 2 prepared halves of grapefruit, so</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he had one of them, then went upstairs to get dressed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He couldn’t find any ironed shirts, so he put on a casual shirt and</td>
<td>Not looking smart/dressing comfortably.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jeans and went back downstairs to get his stuff ready for the</td>
<td>Nice to have a break from cycling/not able to exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voluntary work he was due to do later that morning. Looking out of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the window as he did so, he noticed that it was a gloomy day, so he</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decided not to take his bike in case it rained, and use public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transport instead.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the way to the station he got a copy of a newspaper to read on</td>
<td>Good to read article/bad that train is late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the train. There was an article on music, and he read this while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waiting for the train, which had been delayed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That day, not much happened at the drop-in advice centre where he</td>
<td>Boring empty day/nice skivy day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteered: there were only 3 clients all day, and all three had</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems that were easily dealt with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards the end of the day, he got a call from someone he hadn’t</td>
<td>Can’t stand them/glad to see them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seen for a long time, asking if he was free that evening. He was,</td>
<td>Nothing on so stuck with bore/nice to spend time together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so he arranged to meet them in town. There was nothing good on at</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the cinema, so the two of them sat and talked in a café until</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The point is, Kim has either a good or bad day, depending on how you see it.

Cognitive restructuring is a good long-term tool for dealing with stress. If you are dealing with a difficult situation every day, it can be useful to think of a new way of seeing it, that reduces the stress for you. The following questions may help.
Cognitive Restructuring -
Guide to Techniques:

There are of course a huge range of cognitive restructuring techniques, too many to include here, but they fall into three main categories:

**Different Perspective:**

Sometimes it can help to shift your perspective, and change the viewpoint from which you’re seeing something which stresses or pains you. Examples include:

- **Seeing it from another’s point of view:** e.g. other road users are not usually out to get you or make your life difficult: they’re just not being as considerate as they could be, or doing their best.

- **Not seeing yourself as a victim:** It’s possible to make yourself unhappy by casting yourself as the victim in the middle of your own private drama: ‘They’ve all let me down rather than ‘No-one’s available’.

- **Focus on a positive aspect:** If a group of people are argumentative and vocal, well, at least they’re engaged with the topic and not indifferent to it.

- **Time Perspective:** This is the ‘we’ll all laugh about it later’ perspective.

- **Rename it:** ‘Challenging’ customers are often just assertive ones, ‘difficult’ staff are often staff who have a lot of ownership of what they’re doing. Much easier to think about them this way!

All of these involve moving your mental ‘viewpoint’, usually away from yourself.

**Openness:**

These techniques are good for dealing with the unexpected, or with changes in plans. Often their can be unexpected benefits to such changes provided we’re ready to accept them, using techniques like:

- **Releasing Expectations:** just because it isn’t what you planned or expected, doesn’t mean it’s a bad thing, but it’s easy to feel like that. The fact your friend didn’t get you wanted for Xmas doesn’t mean what she got you was no good, or wasn’t thoughtful. In fact it may be more thoughtful than the usual tie she gets you!

- **Releasing Control:** If you were expecting to be in control of a situation and it turns out that you’re not (for example, staying with friends it turns out they’ve organised trips for you which you hadn’t expected), it’s easy to feel scared or helpless, just because you’re not the one in control. On the other hand, you could accept that other people being in control might do just as good a job as you, if not better for this particular thing: after all, they know the area better, know what’s good to see and so on.
All of these involve letting go of something (expectations, control) and accepting the situation for what it is, not for what you would have it be.

**Comparison:**

You can make yourself unhappy by comparing a situation with some (frequently unattainable) idea, and moaning about how it doesn’t come up to scratch, like complaining about bad weather. Or you could use comparison in a different way.

- **Counting Blessings:** a bit of an old chestnut this, but it often works: how badly off are you, really? Do you still have your health, friends, loved ones, a roof over your head, and can you allow yourself to feel happy about that? Or are you going to be miserable even though you have all these things, because you didn’t win the lottery?

- **At least it’s not worse:** Or you could compare downwards instead of upwards. If you’re having a busy day, at least it’s not one of those seemingly endless ones where you do nothing and feel knackered at the end of it.

- **Comparing With Others:** But choose your others with care! Someone once said, ‘Never ready beauty magazines: they will only make you feel ugly’, so make sure you make a fair comparison with how the majority of people are managing.

- **Comparing Earlier:** I wish I was the weight when I first started saying ‘you know, I really need to lose weight!’ Often it can help to compare you current situation with earlier ones, where you may have longed to be in the situation you are now in.
Helping Others: Cognitive Restructuring

Introduction: Cognitive restructuring is a particularly powerful technique with which to support another person. Often someone else can supply a perspective which we cannot see because we are too buried in the problem, or the emotion that goes with it.

The emotion that goes with it is also the reason why this technique can fail very badly when applied to another person. It is very easy to be glib, and say ‘well, you can just see it as…’ when the other person simply is not yet in an emotionally receptive state. Before you can deliver your marvellous insight, you need to make sure some preconditions have been achieved. Remember, before people are willing to take your advice, they need to be sure that you have their best interest at heart: that you CARE.

1. **Confidence:** They need to have confidence in you, that you are a person whose ideas are worth listening to. If you feel this is not the case, you’ll need to play it down a bit: ‘Well, I haven’t always dealt well with situations like this myself, but someone I really admire always says…’: that sort of thing.

2. **Active Listening:** They need to feel that you’ve really understood and appreciated their situation: you’ve looked interested, and you’ve commented/fed back in such a way they can see that you’re fully aware of their situation.

3. **Recognition:** Emotional recognition in this case: have you made it clear to them that you have some idea of how they’re feeling about this? It’s probably their feelings on the matter which are stopping them from doing this without you, so you’ll have to make it clear, for example by asking if you’ve got it right, that you have some measure of insight into their emotions on this issue.

4. **Eagerness:** Okay, eagerness may be overdoing it a bit, but I needed it for the acronym! You should have some signal or indication that they are ready to hear from you now. That may take the form of them simply asking what you think, or an obvious change of mood, or you can ask if they’re open to a suggestion.

If you fulfil these necessary four conditions, then your restructuring idea is highly likely to be accepted, or considered, by the other person.
Taking it further:
Life Confidence:

The restructuring techniques don’t end there: they can also be used as a way of viewing your life. This is another application of the ‘changing perspective’ technique, although the techniques are slightly different when you’re looking at your whole life.

I first realised the power of changing viewpoint when I was working with people with mental health problems. The difficulties they had to overcome to rejoin society, made me aware of the incredible number of things most of us achieve every day and take for granted. Most of us manage to provide for ourselves, keep ourselves clean, seek out things that make us happy, enjoy the company of friends or lovers, manage our finances and so on. Any one of these would be an astonishing achievement for a long-term institutionalised person, and we haven’t even got onto the difficult stuff yet!

You have probably already developed a ‘baseline’ of confidence that lets you manage these everyday tasks without feeling that you have to climb Everest on a daily basis. It’s very likely that you have achieved more than these everyday activities that I listed above, and yet people often fail to take confidence from these achievements because they don’t regard them as achievements.

I recently took an example from my own life and used it on a training course. My book had been rejected by an agent, and I wanted to see if my unsuccessful attempts at getting published could be turned into positives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences:</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m a failure: I haven’t been published</td>
<td>Untried, fresh, something new. Writing for different audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had an agent but don’t have one now</td>
<td>Used to working with an agent, that one not the best fit, but parted amicably with experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been on the Arvon and Clairon prestigious writing courses but still no success</td>
<td>Have attended high-profile courses and learned a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This book was edited by a professional editor, but still no-one’s interested.</td>
<td>So, it’s ready to go! And you understand the editing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s only my fiction everyone hates: I write other stuff successfully.</td>
<td>So you’ve been published. And have transferable skills: you know how to write and edit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we looked at what methods were being used to change negative to positive, we came up with the following:

a. **Being Selective**: There simply isn’t time to tell everything, so we’re choosing the things that sound best. The sum of all these positives makes a good, confidence-building story.

b. **Transferable Skills**: I haven’t done it, but I’ve done something like it. My persistence/resilience is another skill I bring of course, one that can be extrapolated from the process.

c. **Trending**: Reading the trend as ‘nearing success’ rather than ‘continuing failure’.

d. **Changing basis for comparison**: You can always make yourself miserable by comparing yourself with heroic achievers: there again, you can make yourself happy by comparing yourself with people more like yourself.

Are you comparing yourself fairly with people in similar situations to you? For
example, most people with caring responsibilities don’t have time to go down the gym so you could say it’s a miracle you haven’t put on more weight than you have, rather than feeling bad because you don’t look like a supermodel.

Or you could compare with your earlier achievements: okay, you aren’t a millionaire but at least you’re holding down a job and making more money than you used to.

If you use ideas like this as your viewpoint for comparison, you’re likely to gain more confidence from your achievements.

e. **Changing what you call it:** Sometimes simply renaming something can make you feel different about it and more open to gaining confidence. Look at the difference between ‘suffering from AIDS’ and ‘Living with HIV’.

f. **Changing system of values:** It may be that you’re comparing yourself with the wrong people or wrong standards. I don’t own my own home, or have substantial savings, or earn a huge amount of money, but I do the work I love and enjoy my life enormously. Changing my values in this case from material achievements to experiential ones changes me from a failure to a success, or at least to someone who has been successful at living his life differently.

   These values may, of course, not be apparent to others...

g. **Change from process to results:** Similar to the above, and useful for dealing with bad experiences. I have made stupid mistakes in my life: from this I can either judge myself as being a stupid person, or as someone who has survived and learned from the experience, such that I’m unlikely to do it again. At the very least, I may have gained insight and skills from the experience which can add to my confidence: if only to reassure myself that I can survive disasters.

These are only examples, but I’m sure you get the general idea by now: viewpoints can lead to you discounting your achievements, or esteeming them and thereby gaining confidence.
DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE
-COMMITMENT-

Using Visualisation to Build Commitment

There are a huge number of techniques for increasing commitment: writing down goals, sharing them with other people, putting together ‘mood boards’ and so on, but all of these are indirect ways of visualising the goal as if it were real. Visualisation is the core skill, but we will look at related skills later for people who simply will not, or cannot get on with, visualisation itself.

It’s worth bearing in mind, however, that visualisation has a very strong pedigree, and is used by successful sports coaches all over the world. I can pretty much guarantee that all of the amazing athletes who took part in the recent Olympics have done visualisation exercises in order to stick to their incredibly punishing practice routines. So it’s not just a hippy-dippy new-agey thing to do (not that there would be anything wrong if it were, but the idea puts some people off): it’s a very practical technique for getting an ‘advance payment’ on your eventual success, and using it to stick to your goal. It’s essential for getting you through those times when the activities you’re undertaking to get to your goal are in themselves unrewarding, or even painful.

1. Visualisation Preconditions:

To get the best out of your visualisation, try and get the following 3 ‘p’s:

a. **Proxemics:** Which is the posh word for surroundings: try and find a place in which you can sit comfortably and not be interrupted. Noise distraction can be a problem, and if you can’t find a quiet place, I’d recommend you have headphones playing natural sounds or New-Agey music while you visualise. One ‘plus’ of using the headphones is that you come to associate the sound with visualisation, and start automatically relaxing as soon as you hear it.

b. **Posture:** Nothing fancy! If you can easily sit in the Lotus position, then good for you! Even a half-lotus is pretty much beyond me, and sitting cross-legged makes my knees ache, which isn’t good for relaxing. The point of all these ‘special positions’ is similar to the headphones: if you’ve got a position you only use for visualisation, you’ll go into ‘visualisation mode’ more quickly when you assume the position. But if you’re fat and clumsy like me, just find a position in which you reckon you’ll be comfortable for the next 10 minutes or so, and you’ll find that works just fine.

c. **Peacefulness:** Now you’ve found your nice situation, and you’re sitting comfortably, enjoy it a little before you start visualising. Let yourself enjoy the fact that you’ve got a little time off, that you’re comfortable and so on. Take some nice deep breaths, easily, in your own time, and let your body soften a little into your chosen position.
2. How To Do It:

The trick is to make the experience as vivid as possible, so take a little time over it, and try not to ‘shorthand’ the experience and just turn it into an idea. You had the idea before you started – you’re going for the experience now! So, how can you make the experience ‘stick’? By using the Ash Charlton Patents Pending Visualisation Cribsheet, which I use all the time when I’m doing this stuff!

VISUALISATION CRIB SHEET:

1. **What goal do you want to achieve?**
   *(make sure you put the actual goal, NOT the process by which you achieve it)*

2. **What will the scene be when your goal has been achieved?**
   *(sometimes at the place you’ve achieved it, e.g. at the end of a race, sometimes you’ll be notified in some way, so we want to get the scene right)*

3. **Note down some ideas of what the scene will look like.**
   *Try to use all your senses, especially the first two:*
   
   a. What will you see?
   
   b. What will you hear?
   
   c. What will you smell?
   
   d. What will you be touching?

4. **Any thoughts on how the scene will play out?**
   *If the scene above feels a little thin, there may be things you will do as a result of your success.*

5. **What difference will it make in your life afterwards to have this thing done?**

The crib sheet pretty much dredges everything that can be dredged out of this experience, but if you have additional questions/ideas, please feel free to use them.

Obviously it’s going to be a bit hard to relax if you’re studying a cribsheet all the time, and I’d rather you focussed on feeling happy and relaxed and clear visualisations, so the following methods might help:

a. **Read it First:** Then just do the best you can. Don’t put pressure on yourself to remember all the questions: you’ll tend to remember the ones that work best
for you, anyway.

b. **Practice:** Visualisation shouldn’t be a one-off: you can do it whenever you feel your commitment slipping. If you visualise several times, or visualise different things for different projects, you’ll find you remember more the crib sheet quite naturally.

c. **Get Someone To Help:** This is the best method, and if you have a friend who can slowly talk you through the visualisation, actually using your situation and ideas, it’s a really nice thing to do. But sadly people aren’t always available for this kind of thing, and good staff can be SO hard to find, so a good alternative is to record a ‘talk through’ for yourself, or get one: I’m currently doing one for University of Reading which will be available on the Intranet, and I’m updating my website to include it as well.
Helping Others: Visualisation

**Introduction:** The best way to help another person use visualisation is using option ‘c’ above. However not everyone gets on with this technique (I suppose we can’t all be Olympic athletes…) so I’ve given some alternatives to visualisation below. It’s essential if you use these techniques that you don’t let slip that you think the other person is a Giant Wuss because they can’t do ‘real’ visualisation (although this is what I personally believe…)

1. **Talk it Through:** ‘What if’ questions can be handy for this: spend 5 minutes talking about what it would be like if the person actually achieved their goal, using stuff from the crib sheet to pad it out a bit and make sure the person really connects with the image. It’s a kind of ‘stealth visualisation’.

2. **Write it Down:** Do this as a piece of work: that you want a full description of what they want to happen, with lists of good outcomes/consequences/feelings. You can use the crib sheet as a pro-forma, but, again, pad it out with stuff you actually know about what they want: stuff that’s relevant to the situation.

3. **Draw it/Other Expressive Methods:** Not everyone is a writer: perhaps they could draw the outcome, or express it in some other way. Though by the time you get to interpretive dance, visualisation seems like the easier option… (!). One that can work very well and doesn’t seem too weird however, is a ‘mood board/collage’ where someone uses ‘found’ objects from magazine or online to make a poster or artwork (often with added headlines) of what it would be like to have achieved the goal.

4. **Experience Others Doing It:** Many people have films, books or music that they find inspirational, and which relate to their situation: experiencing one of these often helps them reconnect with the feeling of success and achievement.

5. **Play Acting:** Okay, I’m too much of a Giant Wuss to do this, but some people can find that role-playing their success, being interviewed on national TV (or at least local radio…) etc., can give the ‘visualisation’ effect.

I realise that options 1 and 2 are probably the ‘safest’, and easiest to do, but it’s worth being open to the others, as not everyone has the articulacy that the first 2 methods require.
Helping Others: Team Commitment

Introduction: There are times when you’re not just looking for your own commitment, but trying to get a whole team committed to a project: either because you’re the team’s manager, or just because you’re the project leader. If you’re working with a team, you have some additional ‘sneaky’ ways of getting them to visualise:

1. Talk/Presentation: Of course you can do this one-to-one as well, try to ‘sell’ the idea to a person, but it’s generally best done in dialogue, with as much coming from the other person as possible. However, when you address a team you’re supposed to be presenting more of a fully-fledged idea, so ‘talking up’ a visualisation, and painting a picture of what the end result would be like feels much more natural.

2. Restructuring Suffering: Okay, this can get a bit ‘tomorrow we will build Communism’, but if there is suffering on the way to achievement (as in the case of an office move, for example) then this is ‘sacrifice’, not just awfulness. Other inconveniences can be similarly restructured as necessary evils, using the visualised goal to keep them in perspective. Hey, it’s how Cameron ‘sold’ austerity to an electorate who was going to suffer it!

3. Milestones/Celebrations: These have the dual function of helping everyone to believe we’re getting there, but also of reconnecting with the visualised goal.

4. Ownership/Hiving Off: Making sure you’ve maximised ownership of the end vision, and along the way have made people personally responsible for part of it, so that they feel more committed to the process. These peers are much better placed to convince other staff members, especially cynical ones, than you may be.

5. Arranging for Quick Wins: The old managerial cheat, but obviously it makes the visualised goal look more ‘real’ if it starts delivering actual results early.

6. Choosing Your Battles: There will always be people who are cynical, or don’t ‘buy into’ the vision, and obviously you should pay attention to them, but don’t let them consume all your time. You would use your time better supporting the people who are on board, or wavering: let them bring the lost sheep in!

7. Dissatisfaction: For a team, dissatisfaction with the way things are is often a stronger motivator than some ‘pie in the sky’ idea that only the project leader believes in. Use this. Get them to connect with everything they hate about the way things are: a bad visualisation of the present can be just as effective as a good visualisation of the future.
DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE
-CONFIDENCE-

Gaining and Losing Confidence:

Everyone knows what a big difference to resilience a little confidence can make. It makes you more willing to try things, deal with setbacks and helps you hold onto happiness during hard times. It’s such magical stuff that it’s surprising that we leave its increase and decrease entirely to chance.

If we had in our houses an object that could generate this kind of well-being and capability, wouldn’t we work hard to protect it, and try to extend its effectiveness? Yet most of us leave our confidence out in the rain, at the mercy of what life throws at us. We let it increase and decrease as if it had nothing to do with us, or our happiness.

How can confidence be fostered and developed? Well, there’s no magic to it: coaches and teachers have been helping their pupils develop confidence for years - it’s a vital part of what they teach.

If we’re going to talk about increasing confidence, we’re going to need a definition of what it actually is:

Confidence is a realistic belief in your own abilities, so well established that it’s a constant good feeling about yourself.

Confidence isn’t just an idea that you might be good at something. Confidence is stronger than that: it’s a deep feeling of capability, a strongly-rooted knowledge of your own strength. Confidence is a form of ‘deep happiness’: a good feeling about yourself that tends to endure.

How can we get this good feeling of confidence? Well, like with first aid, our first job is to make sure you don’t lose any more of it than you’re doing already, which would be tackling any confidence-destroying negative beliefs you have.

Negative Beliefs:

There a number of ways of looking at negative beliefs, however I find the most useful way of tackling them is to divide them into:

1. **Negative beliefs about self:** That you are in some way less good, less worthy, less loveable, or less lucky than everyone else, therefore you will never succeed.

2. **Negative beliefs about others:** Almost the same as the above, only stated from the ‘other’ point of view, that other people would do this so much better, or will judge you or hate you for your attempts and actions.

3. **Negative beliefs about tasks:** That the task itself impossible, or will never be completed.

4. **Negative beliefs about the world:** This is an extension of the above, that the world is a difficult and hostile place, and all effort is wasted – a kind of fatalism.
These beliefs, negative and unpleasant as they are, can be kind of comfort, because the message they all bear is ‘There is no use in trying: you can just give up’, which can be very welcome news when you’re feeling low and discouraged. Unfortunately, giving up and not achieving things is going to keep you feeling low and discouraged in the long term, or even worse, develop into a full depression, so, assuming that these are negative beliefs and not statements about reality, how can they be challenged and overcome.

Different things work with different people in different circumstances, but I’ve found all the ones below to be useful at one time or another. I’ve categorised five kinds of negative beliefs, or ‘crap’ as I like to call them.

1. **I’m Crap!**  
   **Negative beliefs about oneself**

   a. **Separation**: Separate yourself (good, full of potential) from your actions (unsuccessful). You are not an unsuccessful person, you have been unsuccessful: there’s an important difference.

   b. **Grandiosity**: You’re not that unique! You are no better or worse than anyone else, not specially blessed or cursed, and as able to succeed as anyone else.

   c. **Reality Checking**: Is what you’re saying even true? Are you having more setbacks and less luck than most people? What is the average experience in your area of achievement?

   d. **Going for Feelings**: Negative thoughts are often no more than an expression of negative feelings, which we all get from time to time. It can be a lot more helpful to say, ‘I’m feeling down and miserable’ than ‘I’m no good’.

   e. **Key Learning**: What’s more, you have something you didn’t have before: experience. You can learn from this, make a fresh start, do it better next time, now you know where at least some of the pitfalls are.

   f. **Do What You Can**: If you acknowledge that you are discouraged, and have lost confidence, then you need to lower your expectations. Be content with doing the minimum, and be glad a discouraged person can manage that much.

   g. **Everyone Started Somewhere**: Every great musician has some story of feeling s/he’d never be one of the ‘greats’, would never improve. Every person who’s fluent in a 2nd language was once learning their basic verbs, just like you are.

   h. **Uniqueness**: Doesn’t work for all of them, but with some fields of endeavour, especially those with some creativity or interaction with others, only you can do it your way: it’s not a competition! Your style of writing, point of view, or way of interacting, will be just right for some audience or other. It doesn’t matter that someone else may be a ‘better’ writer than you: they cannot write your book or viewpoint.
2. They’re Crap!
Negative beliefs about others

a. **Commonality:** Everyone feels like this sometimes, everyone feels like giving up, you’re just having one of those times. Look at the lives of any great achiever, they’ve all had their ‘missing years’, their doldrums: you’re in good company!

b. **Reality Checking:** Are other people really thinking that about you, or is that just your fear of what they’re thinking? Why not check it out: if you’re right, you’re no worse off, and if you’re wrong (which you probably are) you’ll find they’re probably not judging, or not judging as harshly as you fear.

c. **Choose ‘Others’ with care:** Who are you comparing yourself with? The best in the field? That’s not very fair if you’re just beginning – shouldn’t you be comparing yourself with the people who’ve been studying or working as long as you?

d. **Feedback is Information:** If you’re worried about the judgement of others, think of what it tells you – it’s all information. If they don’t like your work, it’s useful to know, to find out how to improve and get it right next time. At least you know now where you’re going wrong.

e. **It’s not always a competition:** The fact your colleagues may do a task better than you does not mean you shouldn’t do it: all that matters is that you do it well enough! There will always be someone better at something than you, it doesn’t mean your contribution isn’t valued. I can’t cook like Anton Mossiman, but I can make a dinner you’d enjoy eating.

f. **Judgemental Attitudes:** If you’re worried about being judged as a person, remember that such judgements reflect more on the judger than the judge. Someone who judges you for your life choices probably isn’t very happy with their own: think about where they are in their lives, such that they need to feel better by judging people. Then tell them to go get a life!

3. It’s Crap:
Negative beliefs about tasks

a. **Try to make it a choice:** Yes, this task is tough: do you still want to do it? If you’re brave enough to take it on, even though it’s tough, you can feel good about being an adult about it, and having courage.

b. **You did it before:** This is unlikely to be the most difficult thing you’ve ever done: how did you manage to do the other things, especially things where you felt like giving up hope, but didn’t?

c. **Failure is a classy thing:** Tough tasks risk failure, or include it in getting to your eventual goal. Failure shows you tried, and that says a lot about you. It’s a classy thing: all the best people have done it!
d. **Repeated Failure Doesn’t Mean the End:** The fact that you’ve failed a lot doesn’t mean you’re going to fail the next time, any more than throwing ‘heads’ six times in a row means the next one is bound to be ‘tails’. In fact the chance is 50/50 every time: past events do not necessarily point the way to future ones. If you’ve learned from your experience, you’re less likely to fail the next time if you’ve failed once, not more.

e. **Bad Luck:** Two ways to think about luck. One is the retort by a famous golfer, who, when an interviewer suggested that there was always an element of luck, replied, ‘Yeah, and the more I practice, the luckier I get!’ Also, if there is an element of luck in what you’re doing, then you need to give yourself the maximum number of throws of the dice to get the result you’re after: keep trying, and stay in the game long enough to keep throwing the dice!

f. **Talent:** Many people feel that they fail because of lack of talent, that they do not have some inborn aptitude that some other people have. There is very good evidence that there is no such thing. People usually thought of as talented have put in a lot of practice time: child prodigies are invariably hothoused, which is why they tend to show up in areas where general life experience is less important: music performance, mathematics, athletic ability etc. I’m not denigrating these fields of endeavour, but you can be good at them without necessarily knowing a lot about other subjects, whereas there are some areas of endeavour (teaching, writing, social work) where you need a more rounded life experience to start achieving in them, so child prodigies are rarer. There is no such thing as talent, only disciplined practice from a person who is willing to learn where they are going wrong. So get started! Start failing and learning!

4. **It’s all Crap!**

**Negative beliefs about the world**

a. **Some people succeed:** If you’re saying that it’s the world, not you, then how come some people succeed? They’re in the same world that you are.

b. **Semantics:** Fatalism is a **feeling** that we all get some time, and it’s usually a response to a number of setbacks at the same time. It can be useful to separate the feelings of despair and demotivation, from the reality of what the world is actually like.

c. **Devaluation:** If the whole world is a tough place, then ‘tough’ has no meaning. ‘Tough’ only means something if some things aren’t tough: otherwise, it’s just yet another word for ‘everything’. Yes, the world may have turned out to be a **tougher** place than we naively thought, but it still doesn’t mean it’s all unremittingly grim, or there’d be no need for the words ‘unremittingly grim’.

d. **You’re right – give up!** A bit of reverse psychology here, but may be worth a go: perhaps you’re right, there’s no point in trying and effort **never** pays off. Beginners do just as well at a skill as experienced pros: we all know that – right? I’m reminded here of the golfer Arnold Palmer, who, when asked if there was an element of luck in golf, said, ‘Oh yes: and the more I practice, the luckier I get!’
5. You're crap for making me do it!

Negative beliefs about manager or project leader

- **What would it take?** Put your money where your mouth is: what would it take to make this task more bearable for you, given that you have to do it. Stop moaning, start improving things.

- **What is the reason for it?** The task may seem pointless because you're not aware of its purpose or have forgotten: let’s review the reason for it.

- **If not me, then another:** There’s always going to be someone in charge, so how can I do this in a way that works for you?

- **What will have to go?** If you’ve got too much on, and have no more capacity, what can be de-prioritised.

- **You’re being paid to do it!** Bottom line; we all have to do things we don’t enjoy (like supervising you, presumably...!).
Appreciation: The Power of Praise and Thanks

There have been countless experiments about what motivates and encourages people, and time and again it’s been shown that appreciation - praise and thanks - are among the strongest motivators and best ways of building confidence.

Now you may be thinking, ‘but surely that would build other’s confidence, not my own, but not so. Again there is good evidence to demonstrate that where one person in a team is appreciative, it starts everyone doing it, so it’s bound to come back to you sooner or later. In any case, wouldn’t you rather be in a team where people appreciated each other?

So, why don’t people do this more often? After all, we’re quick enough to point out when someone gets something wrong, or offends against us in some way. Unless you make a particular effort to praise or appreciate, all that another person gets from you is that they get stuff wrong all the time: not the most motivating of messages.

I think the main reason appreciation is tricky is because we’re worried about not getting it right, sending a mixed message, or sounding patronizing. I’ve listed the fears and their solutions below.

### Appreciation: Giving Praise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worried about sounding patronising</td>
<td>Make it an ‘I’ statement, and make it an opinion: ‘I really liked…’: after all, you’re entitled to your opinion!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about embarrassing them</td>
<td>Keep it short. If they’re comfortable with it, they’ll ask for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about mixed messages, accidentally giving backhanded compliments etc.</td>
<td>Keep it simple, 12 words or less, just one message. If you want to add some shade, do it later, or when you’re discussing at greater length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about them thinking they’re above criticism</td>
<td>Keep it specific: you’re not praising everything they do, just one thing they did well. Try and avoid ‘You always…’-type statements. Instead, try to make it ‘I liked the way you did x the other day.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, ideally, a compliment would be given in the form: ‘I really appreciate the work you did on that paper last week – thank you.’

### Appreciation: Receiving Praise

There is also the fear of being praised: even though, as human beings, we all need to be appreciated, there is still the dreaded embarrassment of being praised! Fortunately, there are similar solutions at hand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worried about being embarrassed</td>
<td>Don’t argue! Arguments make the praise go on for ages! Just say ‘thank you’: that tends to keep it short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about seeming big headed</td>
<td>Talk about the matter as if it were neutral to you: ‘I’m glad you liked it’, ‘I’m glad it was useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried you might not get another.</td>
<td>Then milk this one for all it’s worth!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appreciation: Self-Appreciation

Now, before you start saying it would be a bit sappy or even crazy to thank yourself for coming up with good ideas, consider:

a. Many bosses feel the same way about speaking to their staff that way, until they give it a go and find out the amazing effect it has on office atmosphere and staff motivation.

b. You probably already use negative motivational techniques like getting angry with yourself when you fail, or berating yourself for making a mistake: you don’t feel sappy or crazy for talking to yourself then, do you? So why not do the good stuff as well, especially when it’s not only well-proven to be effective, it’s common sense that it will create a happier internal environment for you to be nice and encouraging to yourself rather than blaming and criticising.

This is why you should make a point of thanking yourself for achieving the task (in this case bringing yourself happy thoughts). Your mind is a part of you, it’s just like you; it likes to be thanked and appreciated.

So, have a try at creating a happy ‘internal office’, by thanking your mind when it brings you enjoyable memories or ideas, or comes up with good solutions, or helps you calm yourself down when you’re feeling stressed. Encourage these useful mind activities, and you’ll find your mind doing more and more of them: people will often work much harder for praise than they will for other rewards. And praise is free!
DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE

-CHALLENGES-

‘Stuck’ Syndrome:

Okay, we’re not talking about problems or setbacks here, we’re talking about real challenges, the sort of thing that makes you wonder if you’re able to continue with this project or idea. How can you tell if you’ve got a challenge or just a problem? Simple: if you have a real challenge you’ll be showing ‘stuck’ syndrome, which is characterised by:

**Feeling Defeated:** Strong feelings of defeat, associated with a lack of motivation.

**It’s on your mind the whole time:** Even though it would help to let go and think of something else, you find yourself dwelling on it.

**Unable to think of anything new:** You return to the same, failed, solutions again and again.

**Getting annoyed and frustrated with the problem:** As if it were a person that was thwarting you, rather than a situation.

**Being more dedicated to the problem than to the solution:** This one is the real giveaway! If you find yourself justifying (to yourself or others) over and over again that you’ve done all you can and there IS no solution, then you’re stuck.

Of course, ‘stuck’ syndrome may just be the realisation that there is genuinely no solution and you’d best give up, but you get left with the nagging feeling that there should be something you can do, that you should be able to solve it in some way. If that’s where you find yourself, what you need is...

Serendipitous Methods:

“Serendipitous” is a word that means “fortunate chance”, and in this section we will look at methods of using random chance to break set or introduce creativity. Historically there are a huge number of these: people have used Tarot cards, ordinary cards, the i ching, random patterns of birds or tea leaves etc., in order to fortell the future and understand the past.

I do not want to get into a debate about whether any of these methods work for the reason that they say they do: that is a matter for personal faith. Most people who use them, however, say that they find that they help to change perspective, to create optimism, and to solve problems. This is often more to do with the attitude towards the particular method than any intrinsic power they may have. Basically, any method of generating random words or ideas will work, provided that it is used in the right way.

So what is the right way?
1. Developing a Rich Question:

Half the battle with the answer is framing the question. What do you want to know? What outcome do you want? Frame your question as if you were asking it of the wisest person in the world, someone who could give you an answer to anything. Alternatively, state your intention: where do you intend to be at the end of your problem-solving exercise. Sample questions/statements include:
- what stops me from finishing my project?
- I intend to deal better with the stresses of my job
- why can’t I get on well with my co-worker
- I intend to get more out of team meetings

Make sure it’s short, and that you’ll know if you’ve got it or not. For example, if you want to deal better with stress, how much better is better? Is any improvement acceptable, or do you have some ideal image of how you would cope with stress, and nothing short of this will do? It doesn’t matter which it is as long as you’re clear.

2. Considering Resources:

It is a common error at this stage to plough straight into problem-solving and get stuck, so don’t do that! Instead, take some time to consider something on your side: a possible resource. This may be a nice thing about yourself (that you’re very patient, or resourceful) or a reminder of a resource in your environment. If you can’t use anything, use your serendipitous method to suggest something.

3. Find Out What Is Stopping You:

Still not solving yet! Next, you need to understand the nature of your obstacle. Again, if nothing comes to mind, you can use your serendipitous method to suggest something. When you have it, consider the way in which it stops you, how it takes power away from you. What is its method?

4. Find a Resource to Help:

Consider another resource: different to the one you thought of in 2, above. This is a resource for change: something you can use to overcome the obstacle. Consider how you could use it to do this.

5. Accept Outside Help:

You don’t have to do this on your own. Think of an outside resource: a helpful friend, or a work resource you are aware of, and let yourself be open to its assistance.

6. First Steps:

This is the final part, to help you “ground” the exercise. What could be a first step for you: something you could do as soon as you get back to the office or your life, to start it happening. It must be something you can do, no matter how small. So, if you wanted to use team meetings better, it can’t be “Next time Brian says that, I’ll say this...” as you can’t control when that will happen. A better first step would be “I’ll tell Gill that that’s what I’m going to say when Brian speaks next.”
Possible Serendipitous Methods:

Oracles include:

1. **Random Words**: The oldest and cheapest method. For each of the stages above, think of a page number, and a line number, and choose the first noun, adjective, adverb or verb in that line (i.e. not parts of speech like “and” or “but” which don’t mean much on their own).

2. **Brian Eno Oblique Strategies**: Invented by the famous studio producer Brian Eno who has worked with U2, David Bowie etc, and is regarded as one of the greatest producers in the world. These are a set of cards that deal more with difficulty with artistic expression, and they can be viewed one at a time here [http://www.oblicard.com/](http://www.oblicard.com/), or downloaded from here [http://www.rtqe.net/ObliqueStrategies/](http://www.rtqe.net/ObliqueStrategies/)

3. **I Ching**: Some people swear by this! It’s a very old Chinese method, which relies on throwing coins. You need an I ching book for it: these cost £5 or more.

4. **Cards**: Ordinary cards or special Tarot decks. You’ll need a book on how to interpret them though.

5. **Intuitive Solutions**: This is my personal favourite, for people who find i ching or Tarot too weird and random words too dull. It’s a set of 3 decks of very clear cards with good general statements on them, and includes a booklet telling you how to use them. It costs around £15, and can be ordered from The Phoenix Bookshop: 01309 690 110.