

Introduction

The seven skills of adaptability, critical thinking, empathy, integrity, optimism, being proactive and resilience tap directly into people's sense of control and autonomy about their own lives. These skills are in you and within every one of us.

Developing these skills puts you back into the driving seat of your own life, enabling you to be happier, find and do work you love and have a true sense of purpose.

You will:

- Radically increase your self-awareness
- Know what to do and say in any situation you find yourself in
- Be able to get ready to do the work you truly love
- Understand how to live your life with purpose and passion
- Have happier and more fulfilling personal relationships
- Be equipped for the workplace of the future

I wrote *The Advantage*, now retitled as *7 Skills for the Future*, because I know with utmost certainty that each of the seven skills I describe have contributed to the success of my own life. I only really became aware of this through writing this text. Being **adaptable** makes the difference between being ordinary and extraordinary. Being adaptable helps you deal with change with grace and ease. The right **critical thinking** skills mean you'll be creative, resourceful and smart in an age of information overload and ambiguity. Living with **empathy** is crucial for having and nurturing a healthy, clear and meaningful relationship, not only with yourself but with others too. You need **integrity** to live a life aligned to values, accountability

and making the right choices. **Optimism** and using positive psychology principles helps you create and live the life you want to lead. If you're **proactive**, grab opportunities and understand how to respond to what's around you, rather than react, you will succeed. All of this requires **resilience** and strength, not least because we need to get better at failing and at persevering through setbacks and rejection.

Since this text was first published in 2013, there have been many studies and links around the importance of resilience, empathy, mindfulness, critical thinking, creativity, being adaptable and flexible, having integrity and values and being proactive and optimistic. These aren't just skills for now – they are skills that are needed more than ever because the world is changing even faster than it ever has been.

Many of the tools and approaches in the first edition have become very topical – for example, practising mindfulness, the importance of brain neuroplasticity, resilience and building strong networks, practicing self-care and nurturing oneself, going out of our comfort zones, life-long learning, reinventing ourselves several times in our lives and using new skills consistently.

My life experiences have not been easy, but I know my life is and has been rich, exciting, wonderful and challenging, and will continue to be. From a young age I had to learn to be self-reliant, adopting a survivor attitude for coping with mental health issues in my family, major childhood moves to Germany and the USA with a lot of disruption to my schooling. During this time, I also experienced sexual abuse and I left home at 16 with no qualifications and no family support. This led to several (perhaps inevitable) difficult years in my late teens and early twenties, which included single parenting, divorce, severe financial hardship and the loss of my mother in a violent road accident. By the age of 25 I had been through what some people might experience in twice that time and what many people perhaps never experience. It took me a long time

to confront and handle the subsequent emotions, blame and bad relationship decisions I made. It took me even longer to embrace my experiences and make them part of who I am today.

Whether I am adaptable and resilient naturally, or as a result of my early life experiences, I have certainly never shied away from taking on challenges and taking risks. I was always determined to make the very best of things. I made lots of mistakes and I still do. I didn't want to struggle financially. This was a priority for me and so I made sure I got the education I needed and it turned out I was good at making money. I've had to be proactive in creating a life that made sense for me and didn't mean being stuck in a rut or following a predictable life trajectory as a result of my early experiences. Getting the education I missed was so important to me that my early career included working in a cheese shop, coffee house, several restaurants and bars and often working two or sometimes three jobs to make ends meet. All of this gave me some very useful skills and a strong work ethic.

Throughout my life, I've always been optimistic. I now know that there is a strong link between being proactive, optimistic and resilient. Critical thinking helped me to be creative and resourceful when it came to working out what I needed in order to be where I wanted to be as well as to question my own assumptions and limiting beliefs about what I could and could not achieve.

I've been through the whole self-help movement, reading dozens of books and doing hundreds of different exercises. Some helped, some didn't. What really helped me through the most difficult times was a hard-nosed therapist who urged me to get up and make the most of my life, skills and potential. To even begin to do that I had to build empathy skills and develop integrity and these both could only come from and start with ME. Hard work? Yes, but worth it.

Such therapists and counsellors are very rare. However, I know that *7 Skills for the Future* gives you a shortcut to some of the lessons I learned.

Where have these skills brought me? Career-wise my work has evolved over the years and has included teaching, lecturing, training, research, qualification design, building my own consultancy business, designing training programmes, supporting disadvantaged young people, volunteering, serving on charity boards and being a trustee. All of this has meant creativity, taking risks and recognising and grabbing opportunities. My work has allowed me to travel widely to countries where there is extraordinary poverty and social issues, for which insight I am extremely grateful. I'm passionate about training, improving skills and developing people. The bulk of my work now is in helping people to develop self-awareness around these seven skills. Together with my team of licensed trainers, we run experiential learning workshops with diverse groups – from junior doctors to corporate lawyers, from young offenders and young people in pupil referral units to graduates, from employees in software development to middle management and senior leaders in major companies.

All, without exception, express the need for and a desire to work with these seven skills.

I am now happily married to the love of my life and I have a wonderful family. I live within a community where I can be active and contribute. I have fantastic work–life balance. Life is good. Actually it's brilliant. But it always has been, really.

We each have our own stories and our own experiences. We each can develop and become the very best of ourselves and live a life with meaning, purpose and real happiness. I'm still working on it and I use these skills every single day of my life. I also fall short of them each day too. I'm always learning.

I know these seven skills make a difference and I want you to experience this difference too.

So why not you, why not now?