



Shift Happens

Dr. Maurice Duffy

Small Shifts.
Big Results.
Lasting Change.

JULY 2025

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Years — It Nearly Broke Me**

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THINGS TO BRING INTO AUGUST AND
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**“YOU ARE NOT
YOUR
THOUGHTS.
YOU ARE THE
STILLNESS
BENEATH THEM.
AND LIFE BEGINS
NOT WHEN YOU
THINK MORE, BUT
WHEN YOU
FINALLY LEARN
HOW TO STOP.”**

I Lived in My Head for 20 Years — It Nearly Broke Me

These days, I teach mindset for a living. I coach Olympic athletes on how to stop thinking when performance matters most. I help business leaders create space for others to think clearly. But for most of my life, I was trapped in my own head—falsely believing that was where strength lived. The head can become a fortress. A safe zone. A command centre. But beneath that surface? It's anything but peaceful.

It's where the inner critic runs riot. Where ghosts from the past whisper shame into silence. Where fear grows loud, the inner child goes unheard, and dark angels strategise revenge. It's where imposter syndrome takes root and chokes potential.

I didn't just overthink. I lived in that noise. I memorised it. I justified it. I called it being prepared, being logical, being smart. As an Irish Catholic, I was raised to believe that guilt was holy and emotions were weakness. The old saying "*The devil makes work for idle hands*" was drummed into me from the start. So I kept myself busy. Busy working. Busy socialising. Busy doing anything that kept me from sitting still long enough for the demons to catch up. I made decisions that looked good on paper. Chose what made sense, not what made meaning. I wore productivity like armour and avoided stillness like a trap.

Research confirms what I lived:
Overthinking fuels anxiety, drains energy, and erodes presence. The brain mistakes thought for action, and life passes by while you plan it to death.



I knew a lot. But I didn't feel any of it. I could teach mindset and still avoid my own. I could preach presence and still miss the moment in front of me.

So what changed?

Breath.

Not as a concept—but as a practice. I started small. One minute a day. Then two. Then five. Eventually, I learned to sit with myself for twenty-five minutes without reaching for distraction. My mind still resists. It still tells me I should be doing more. Achieving more. Thinking more. But my heart now speaks louder.

Thoughts born only in the mind are clever but cold. The ones that pass through the heart carry truth, weight, and life.

I now teach what I had to learn the hard way:

You are not your thoughts.
You are the stillness beneath them.
And life begins not when you think more, but when you finally learn how to stop.

“

**“YOU DO NOT
NEED A PERFECT
PLAN. YOU NEED
A FIRST STEP.”**

Dancing with Ghosts in a Cathedral: What If 5 Percent of Your Dreams Came True?

This weekend I danced in the aisles of Newcastle Cathedral. Yes, a cathedral. Not to hymns but to Beatles classics at a tribute concert. The stained glass light, the ancient stone, the music of legends—it all collided. And beside me, singing every word with a fierce smile, was my wife Karen. She has always loved her music. That moment was joy, defiant and raw.

Then came Imagine. John Lennon. 1971. It is a song we all know. But this time it hit different. The lyrics did not just float—they landed. In that setting it was not just a melody. It was a mirror.

Because Imagine is what we all do.

We imagine a better job. A healthier body. A bolder life. A braver self. We run reels of what could be. But here is the brutal truth: most people's imaginations stay locked in their heads. Just ideas. Just dreams. Nothing happens because nothing is done. But what if just 5 percent of what you imagine actually happened? That one email you send. That risk you finally take. That habit you start today. That five percent could flip your whole life.

I work with top performers—Olympians, CEOs, elite teams. They have dreams just like you and me. The difference is they act. They fail. They turn up when no one else will. They do the graft. They understand one simple truth: motion beats imagination.

"All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them." – Walt Disney



As James Clear put it: *If you can get 1 percent better each day for one year you will end up thirty seven times better by the time you are done. Success is the product of daily habits not once in a lifetime transformations.* Not flash. Not luck. Just doing the work daily. That is how change happens.

Three thoughts to reflect on:

- Dreams are the blueprints. Action lays the bricks.
- You do not need a perfect plan. You need a first step.
- Imagination is hope. Execution is power.

So here is my challenge. Next time inspiration strikes do not just feel it. Do something. Even 1 percent. Because nothing happens until something happens.

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." – Eleanor Roosevelt

“

**“THE FUTURE
BELONGS TO
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NOT EXCUSES.”**

I Am My Obsessions

Let's not dress it up. I am not some grand story of fate. I am not the result of vision boards, spiritual alignment, or inspirational podcasts. **I am the sum of obsessions, stubborn patterns, feelings, and habits that refuse to die.**

And here is the thing — I have read *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Loved it. Because it does not pander. It tells the truth: **We are creatures wired to repeat yesterday.** Comfort is our drug. Familiarity is our cage.

You eat the same. Think the same. Scroll the same. Live the same pattern year in, year out. Every January you tell yourself this year will be different. Then one day you wake up and wonder why life feels like a sequel with worse lighting and a tired plot line.

As someone who coaches Olympians, elite soldiers, and high performing chief executives, let me tell you something most motivational waffle skips over: **It is not magic. It is not luck. It is not even talent. It is habits. Ruthless, boring, brilliant habits.**

The best in the world do not chase motivation — they chase mastery. They do not wait to feel ready — they train until it does not matter. They know that success is never owned. It is rented. And the rent is due every single day. And here is what separates them from the rest: **They do not fear failure.**

Because they know **failure is not the opposite of success — it is part of it.** Every high performer pushes themselves through failure after failure. That is where growth lives. In the pain. In the stretch. In the messy middle.



That is how they know they are improving — not when it feels easy, but when it burns and they keep going anyway. I once watched an Olympian fall twenty times trying to land a new vault. His coach looked him dead in the eye and said: **"Again. No pity. Just precision."** And he did it again. And again. That is not luck. That is obsession channelled into excellence.

I talk often about **ROV** — Risk, Originality, Virtuosity — a mantra borrowed from an Olympian I had the honour to coach. It is not a slogan. It is survival.

- **Risk** — You must leap. You must fail. Then you must go again.
- **Originality** — Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.
- **Virtuosity** — Master the ordinary until it becomes extraordinary.

Me? I still overthink. I still wake up and try to talk myself out of discomfort. But I also know that showing up, even in chaos, beats waiting for clarity.

Three Things to Reflect On

- If you do not change your habits, your habits will change you.
- You are not tired. You are untrained in doing the hard things.
- The future belongs to those who repeat excellence, not excuses.

If you are not doing the work, the work is doing you. And if you are not failing, you are not stretching.

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**“WE HAND OUR
SELF-WORTH TO
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AND THEN ACT
SURPRISED
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The Brain Is a Drama Queen— and You're Its Punchbag

The season may be over but try telling that to the obsessed mind of a Liverpool fan. While Slot's lads are off sunning themselves somewhere in Marbella, I'm four hours deep in a Reddit thread because someone's cousin's hairdresser allegedly spotted Mbappé in a Nando's near Bootle.

Welcome to the modern mind: overstimulated, undertrained, and constantly spinning like an emotional tumble dryer. We refresh, we scroll, we spiral. Not because we're mad, but because we're addicted.

This is the obsessed mind. A full-time job with no pay, no benefits, and endless overtime. It doesn't wait for permission. It barges in at 2am screaming, "What if we're getting married? What if we're not? What if it's already over?" And the worst part? We listen.

Obsession isn't passion. It's passion weaponised by insecurity. It's that voice in your head that insists on decoding every full stop, replaying every message, and checking—again—if they've seen your Instagram Story. It's the twisted belief that if we just think more, analyse harder, and predict better, we'll finally feel in control. We won't. Because the obsessed mind doesn't want truth—it wants certainty. And that's the one thing life never guarantees.

Technology hasn't helped. We now consume anxiety the way we once consumed tea and Hobnobs—frequently, mindlessly, and without any nutritional value.



Clickbait headlines, 'leaked' transfer lists, and 2am TikTok therapy sessions keep us locked in a loop of low-grade panic.

And then there's social media. Let's not kid ourselves: it's no longer a connection tool. It's a comparison trap connected to a dopamine drip. We scroll like zombies. We stare at strangers' filtered lives and then quietly hate ourselves for not measuring up to their carefully constructed lies.

We take perfectly fine days and ruin them by comparing them to someone else's highlight reel. We post a moment, then check it fourteen times to see who "liked" it, as if those digital crumbs carry any real weight. We hand our self-worth to algorithms and then act surprised when we feel empty.

Social media doesn't just feed obsession—it manufactures it. It's a lab-designed cocktail of insecurity, distraction, and fear of missing out. You're not being informed. You're being manipulated—nudged to scroll, to doubt, to crave.

Even when the outside world is calm, our minds stay in constant refresh mode. The real kicker? Most of what we obsess over never actually happens. But we live the stress anyway.

We train our bodies. We train our pets. But when it comes to the mind, we leave it to behave like a toddler after a Haribo binge. We laugh at it. We name it. And eventually, we have to take back control.

Because the mind, for all its brilliance, is also a diva. It loves drama. It loves spirals. It will throw thoughts at you just to see what sticks. And if you let it run the show, it will happily burn the set down with you still on stage.

Train your mind the way you train anything that matters: with boundaries, with discipline, and with the occasional firm "No."

Next time it tells you to check again, to keep spiralling, to ruin your peace over something that probably means nothing, say:

"Nice try, brain. But I've got a life to live."

Because if you don't train your mind, life will. And life doesn't coach kindly. It teaches through failure, silence, and pain.

So put the phone down. Put the kettle on. And remind yourself: your thoughts aren't facts.

And that Mbappé rumour? Probably nonsense.



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**“CONFIDENCE
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Why Should Anyone Follow You?

It's arrogant to assume people will follow you just because you hold a title. Leadership is not granted by status or enforced through authority. It is earned—in moments of pressure—when trust becomes the only currency that matters.

Years ago, I sat with an SAS captain. A man who had seen more in a week of war than most of us do in a lifetime. He described leading a charge under enemy fire. No speeches. No second chances. Just action. But as he gave the order to move, he felt the fear that defines true leadership: what if they don't come? Not because they were cowards. Not because they didn't care. But because in that split second, if they didn't believe in him—if they sensed doubt, hesitation, or ego—they might not follow. And hesitation, he said, costs lives.

He looked me in the eye and said something I've never forgotten: "Leadership isn't guaranteed. In the end, people don't follow your orders—they follow their belief in you." That changes everything. It means leadership isn't about shouting the loudest, having the right badge, or looking the part. It's about showing such clarity, conviction, and credibility that others are willing to risk everything—because they believe you'll walk through the fire with them, not from above them.

That lesson came flooding back when I worked alongside the Army. I remember a single word etched on the wall of their leadership training room: **DEFENCE**. Not just a word of protection, but a code for how real leaders operate under pressure. Each letter stood for something earned, not assumed.



Decisive Action: When Jacinda Ardern faced the outbreak of COVID-19, she didn't wait for perfect data. She made clear, fast decisions—locking down the country early and communicating with calm conviction. In a world paralysed by uncertainty, she moved forward decisively, and her people followed.

Engage from the Trenches: When Marriott faced unprecedented losses, CEO Arne Sorenson didn't hide behind a PR team. He took a full pay cut, stood in front of staff, and addressed them directly. His voice cracked with emotion. It wasn't polished. It was human. And that honesty bought trust.

Fast and Flexible: When schools across the world shut down overnight, Sal Khan of Khan Academy moved fast. He expanded access, supported overwhelmed parents, and scaled his platform to keep children learning. No meetings. No delays. Just fast, focused flexibility in service of others.

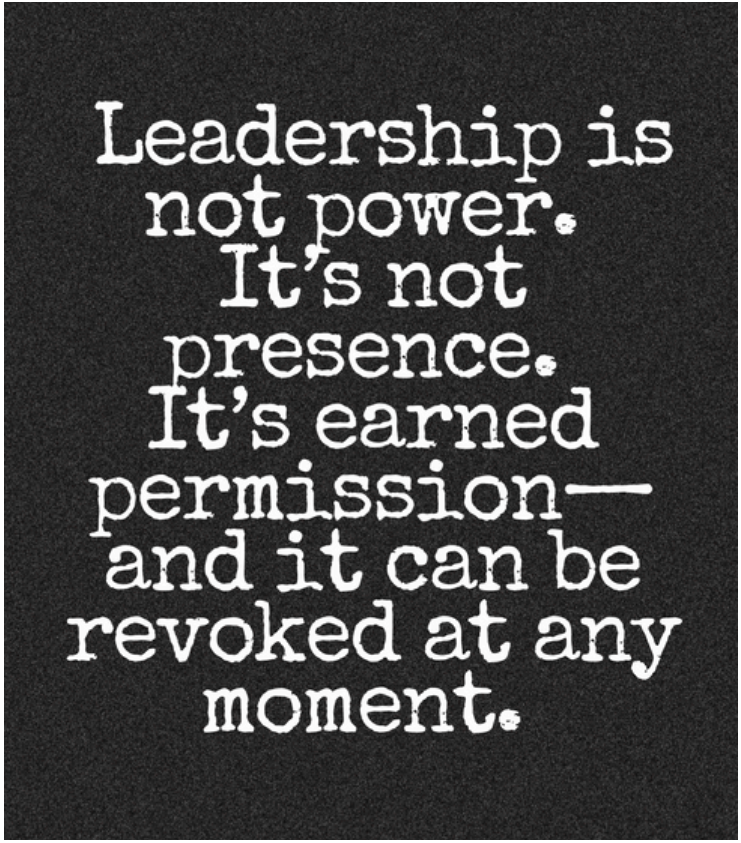
Exude Confidence: During the early rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in the UK, Professor Dame Sarah Gilbert, co-developer of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, became a symbol of unwavering scientific leadership. She didn't seek the spotlight, but when it came, she stood with quiet certainty, calmly explaining complex science to a frightened public. She faced scepticism, pressure, and global scrutiny—not with showmanship, but with precision and poise. Her confidence came not from volume, but from deep competence and an unshakable sense of purpose. She spoke clearly, acted quickly, and held the line—not just for her team, but for millions relying on their work.

Confidence doesn't always roar. Sometimes, it simply refuses to blink.

Narrative That Inspires: Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the comedian-turned-president, inspired a nation under siege. In T-shirts and bunkers, he looked into the camera and told his people, "I'm here." Not a speech. A statement. And it sparked belief across the globe.

Command Talent: Satya Nadella transformed Microsoft by moving the right people into the right roles fast. He got rid of fear-based hierarchy and rewarded those who showed initiative and humility. The culture changed—and so did the results.

Ensure Rest: Lewis Hamilton, a world champion, openly discusses mental burnout. He speaks about rest, therapy, reflection. Not as luxury—but as necessity. High performance doesn't come from grinding. It comes from knowing when to stop, breathe, and come back sharper.



Leadership is
not power.
It's not
presence.
It's earned
permission—
and it can be
revoked at any
moment.

So ask yourself: would you follow you?

Because that's the question that separates real leaders from pretenders. Not what title you have. Not how slick your vision sounds. But how deeply people trust that when you say "follow me", it means something real.

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**“LIFE DOESN'T
CARE IF YOU'RE
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START ACTING
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ALREADY ARE”**

The World's on Fire and I Forgot My Coffee

This morning, life punched me in the face. And then kicked me while I was down.

I forgot my coffee. That was the first sign. No caffeine. No pause. No breath. Just straight into the fire.

I left the house without my wallet. The tyre was flat. The traffic was biblical. My youngest is in the middle of exams, and all I hear is "Dad, it's fine." But it's not fine. It's a soft whisper covering a silent scream. The pressure is real. The weight is building. And I can't fix it. I just stand there, useless, while my child pretends not to crack.

My sister texted—"You never call." She's right and the guilt still landed like a dagger to the ribs.

My older kids don't speak to me anymore. Not properly. Just the cold, clinical silence of disappointment. Getting on with their lives but parenthood never leaves you.

My wife is ill—soul-achingly ill—and I'm not enough for her. Not today. Not any day.

The plumber didn't show. Again. The heating's dead. The house is colder than I am inside. I haven't slept properly in weeks. And when I looked in the mirror this morning, I didn't recognise the person staring back.

And then it happened. The moment every overloaded human dreads.



The tension boiled over. I snapped. I barked at someone who didn't deserve it. Not because they did anything wrong—but because they were kind, and I had nothing left.

That's what pressure does. It turns you into a version of yourself you hate. And the guilt? It doesn't fade. It multiplies.

And still—I got in the car. Still—I turned up. Because no one else is going to do this for me.

And maybe that's the hardest part: knowing you have no choice but to keep going when everything in you is begging to stop. You know what makes it worse? The world tells you this is all "part of the journey." That this chaos is a gift. A lesson.

Bollocks.

Sometimes life isn't building you. It's breaking you.
It's tearing through your resilience like wet paper and daring you to pretend you're fine.

So what do you do when the world's on fire and no one's coming to put it out?

You do the only thing that matters:
You walk through it anyway.

And as a mindset coach, I know this truth better than anyone:

**Thinking too much kills momentum.
Feeling sorry for yourself is wasted energy.**

And when life tries to break you, **it's down to you to bend—not snap.**

So you drag yourself through the flames—burnt, bitter, broken—and you show up.

You wave your kid off with shaky hands and fake confidence.
You hold your sick partner's hand and hide your fear.

You cancel the plumber again. You patch the tyre. You fake another meeting smile.

And maybe—just maybe—you whisper to yourself, *I'm still here. You didn't kill me. Not today. Tomorrow is another day. You don't have to be unbreakable. You just have to rise one more time than you fall.*

Three Things to do When It's All Falling Apart

1) Stop romanticising pain. Name it. Feel it. Then move.

"This isn't a growth moment—it's survival. Treat it like war. Win the next hour. Not the whole week."

2) Drop the guilt. Drop the performance. Just show up.

"No one gives out medals for pretending. You're not weak—you're exhausted. Say it."

3) Burn the checklist. Save the spark.

"If all you did today was keep breathing—you fought. And you're still in the fight."

This isn't the life you imagined. But it's the life you've got. And you're still here.
That's not failure. That's savage, brutal, defiant success.

Life doesn't care if you're ready—so stop waiting to feel strong and start acting like you already are

“

**"SOMETIMES WE
ARE NOT LOSING
SOMEONE.
WE ARE SLOWLY
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TO LIVE
WITHOUT THEM."**

Solitary- Where Presence Used to Be

Dr Maurice Duffy

"Solitude can sharpen you or shatter you. Some days it does both. But it also offers something strange and sacred: presence"

There is a strange kind of silence that settles in the house when someone you love is fading. It is not the absence of sound. It is the absence of presence. That knowing glance, that shared laugh, that ordinary chaos. And when that slips away, you feel it in your bones.

Solitary. Not lonely exactly, but solitary. A word that echoes.

In recent weeks, I have found myself more alone than I have ever been. Not physically. People come. People go. They mean well. They offer help. They ask for updates. But inside, there is only one voice I truly want to hear. One hand I still reach for in the dark. One presence that makes the world feel less hollow.

My wife is still here. And yet, not. She drifts further each day, caught in the fog of a cruel illness that takes piece after piece. And I sit by, watching. Useless. Powerless. Trying to stay strong while something inside me quietly fractures.

I never understood what solitary really meant until now. Solitary is lying in bed beside someone who no longer knows where she is. Solitary is making tea for two and drinking alone. Solitary is laughing at a memory and realising no one else was there to remember it with you. It is the quiet grief of ongoing loss. The kind you do not bury in one day, but instead bury over and over, moment by moment.

And yet, in this solitary space, I have also begun to notice. The sound of the clock ticking. The way the light falls on the wall in the afternoon. The soft rise and fall of her chest when she sleeps. Things I missed when life was busy. Things I now cling to.

Solitude can sharpen you or shatter you. Some days it does both. But it also offers something strange and sacred: presence. The raw kind. The kind that comes when there is nothing else to distract you.

I do not have answers. I do not know what comes next. But I know this. The world is full of noise, and most of it does not matter. When everything is stripped away, all that remains is love, breath, memory, and the quiet courage to keep showing up.

Solitary, yes. But not entirely broken. Not yet.

Three quotes to reflect on:

"Sometimes we are not losing someone. We are slowly learning how to live without them."

"Grief is not a storm to wait out. It is a season to live through."

"You do not heal by forgetting. You heal by remembering with gentleness instead of pain."

“

**“REPUTATION
IS BUILT IN
WHISPERS
AND DESTROYED
IN SCREAMS.
REBUILD IT IN
SILENCE.”**

The Art of the Comeback

"Rock bottom is not the end. It is the foundation upon which comebacks are built."

Life can be cruel. We make mistakes—some small, some devastating. Some we can bury. Others bury us. The truth is, most of us are lucky. Our worst moments are private. Our errors are dull. We offend no headlines. But for those in the public eye—sports stars, chief executives, politicians—a single lapse in judgement can be amplified a thousand times and broadcast across the globe.

I have worked with individuals at the heart of such storms. I have sat in silence as an international athlete broke down after a career-threatening scandal. I have advised organisations that believed they were too big, too powerful, too important to follow the rules—until the rules came knocking. And I have dealt with politicians who lied not just to the public, but to themselves.

In every one of those moments, the consequences were terrifying. Careers collapsed. Families suffered. Reputations shattered in a single 24-hour news cycle. And in every case, there was only one way back.

Because here is the hard truth: you cannot talk your way out of a problem you behaved your way into. No press release, no carefully worded apology, no PR strategy will fix it. The only way back is through the fire. It starts with accountability. Not the vague, calculated kind where people say *"I am sorry if you were offended."* But the raw kind. The kind where you say, *"I did it. It was wrong. I own it."*



Then comes the consequence. You take the punishment—whatever it is. You do not argue, you do not shift blame, and you do not hide behind lawyers. You stand in it. Because how you respond in that moment defines whether a comeback is even possible. But the real work? That comes after. Quietly. Persistently. In the dark, not in the spotlight. It is about rebuilding trust not with slogans but with actions. Not just saying the right things, but doing the hard things. Being present. Being better. Again and again.

One of the greatest myths in modern life is that redemption can be manufactured. That if we are clever enough or likeable enough, we can skip the humility. But the public is sharper than that. People know when they are being manipulated. They do not want perfection. They want sincerity. They want evidence. They want to see that you have changed.

I have seen remarkable comebacks. I have worked with athletes who went from disgrace to national heroes again—not because they dodged their failures, but because they owned them. I have seen leaders rebuild after collapse because they took the long road of integrity and hard work. Comebacks are possible. But they are not granted. They are earned.

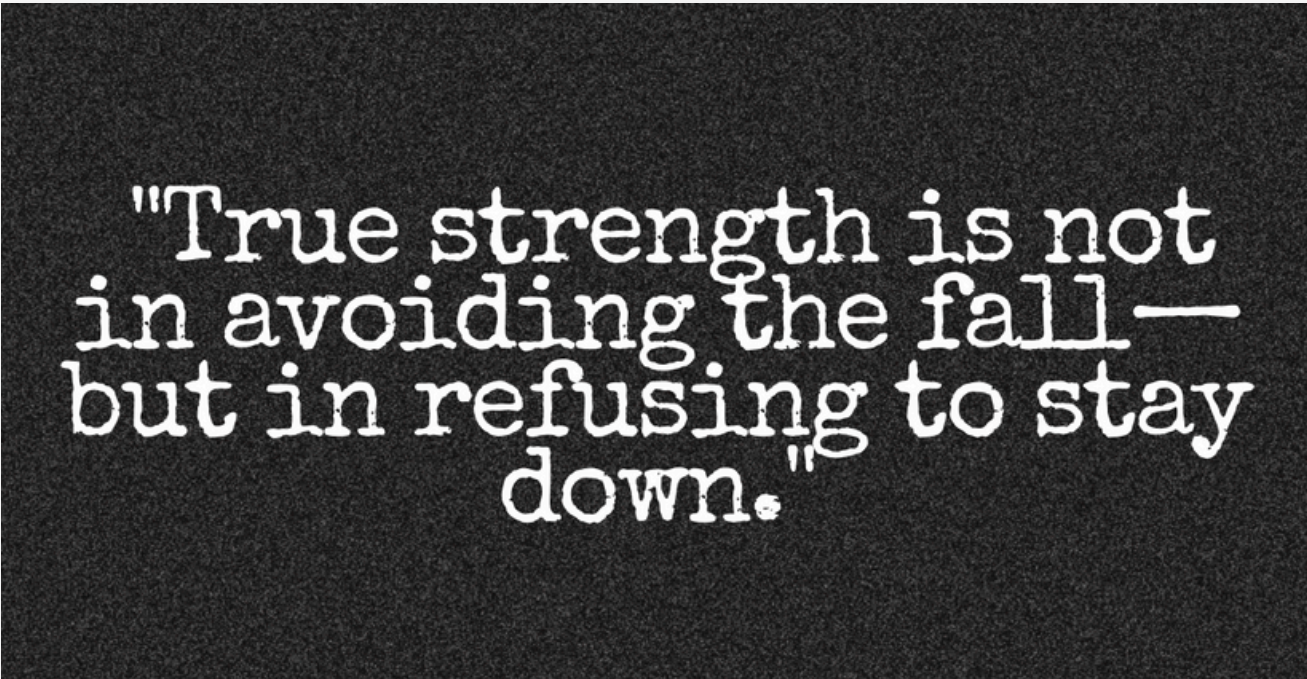
Three Truths to Reflect on:

*"A mistake does not define you.
What you do next does."*

*"You cannot rewrite the past,
but you can own the pen now."*

*"Reputation is built in whispers
and destroyed in screams.
Rebuild it in silence."*

So if you are in the middle of your worst chapter, remember this: it may not be the end. But there is no shortcut to redemption. No fast lane to forgiveness. You get back up. You show up. You do better. Again and again and again. That is the only way back. And the only one that lasts.



"True strength is not
in avoiding the fall—
but in refusing to stay
down."

Keep Connected with Maurice

Dr. Maurice Duffy is a globally recognised mindset coach, leadership expert, and motivational speaker with over 30 years of experience in transformative change. He serves as a Visiting Professor of Innovation and Transformation and Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Sunderland's He has worked with a diverse range of clients, including global corporations such as Google, Sony, Coca-Cola, Siemens, HSBC UK, P&G, Barclays, JP Morgan, BP, and AXA. His expertise extends to elite sports, having coached international teams and athletes like the Australian Cricket Captain Steve Smith, Durham Cricket Club, Ryder Cup players, and Premiership football players. Additionally, he has advised political figures in Westminster, Washington, and Durban, and has served as Advisor to the Mongolian Government. Beyond coaching, Dr. Duffy is a bestselling author, columnist, and BBC presenter. He regularly shares insights on mindset and personal development through his blog and social media platforms.



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