



Andy Barker
and Beth Wood

Un lock you

Be calm,
confident and
happy in just
10 minutes a day

Praise for *Unlock You*

'A truly insightful book. If this doesn't help you achieve your potential, nothing will.'

David Gold, Chair, West Ham United and Gold Group International

'Every individual and business who wants to thrive in the 21st century needs to take care of their and their team's mental health to build resilience and team confidence. This is an important book that guides you to help you, as teams and as people, to deal with uncertain times in an accessible and effective way.'

Dr Jo Twist OBE; CEO, UKIE

'I found *Unlock You* helpful in setting attainable goals for increasing positivity in my life while releasing negativity. It has developed my understanding in areas regarding stress, and enhanced my ability to create a better life for myself using the tools we are naturally designed with'

Sarah Ali Choudhury, award-winning Indian food expert, Influential Woman of the Year 2018

'Beth Wood and Andy Barker have compiled a fantastic resource with plenty of theory and some inventive ways to practise as you challenge yourself to improve your wellbeing. They don't just help to *Unlock You*, they give you a full set of keys too.'

Ian Martin, cognitive behavioural psychotherapist, The Priory Hospital

'*Unlock You* - the title says everything! So many more of us could live a healthier, more fulfilling and happier life, and this book will unlock your potential. The step-by-step exercises provide the support you'll need to bring positivity and mindfulness into situations we face every day. The research information included explains WHY we need to make adjustments to help change our conditioned thinking and behavioural patterns. It's a book to keep for a lifetime, guiding us through each day as we go forward.'

Mark Curry, actor, presenter, qualified life coach

take some responsibility for our predicament. But to never ever be late? Is that feasible? Achievable? What is bound to happen at some point? We're going to be late through no fault of our own and this rigid belief will result in our experiencing the inevitable emotional disturbance. We're lining ourselves up for a fall. It's not a matter of if, but when.

- 2 It is *awful* and totally unacceptable to be late. Of course, being late for anything is not ideal. It can be annoying for others who are kept waiting and can be seen as rudeness. Is it really, truly *awful* though? We'll look in more detail at our tendency to 'awfulise' or 'catastrophise' in Chapter 6.
- 3 I *cannot bear* to be seen negatively by my colleagues. 'I cannot bear it' or 'I cannot stand it' are examples of low frustration tolerance which we will look at in Chapter 6. Although the experience is highly unpleasant you can bear it. (We all can bear far more than we instinctively think.)
- 4 I am totally stupid. It proves what an idiot I am. One minor transgression and you're liable to damn yourself as being totally stupid? All of us can do less than perfect things from time to time. That's all part of being human. But totally stupid? That's another huge leap of logic. Does it prove you're an idiot? Are you actually an idiot? No!

We can now begin to understand how easy it has been to turn an unfortunate, though relatively trivial, situation into an awful one. It hasn't been the situation itself that has caused us the upset. It's the beliefs we hold about the situation.

This knowledge is power! We can change the way we think and powerfully and positively alter the consequences of difficult situations. We can use the ABC Model as a mechanism to evaluate a situation, identify our irrational beliefs and adopt the process to change to a more flexible, realistic alternative. In terms of our journey towards confidence and happiness and achieving the potential that is buried inside us, this is gold!

Irrational Beliefs

Before we look closely at the process of change, we should spend a moment understanding more about irrational beliefs.

Irrational Beliefs are:

- ▶ Rigid or extreme
- ▶ Inconsistent with reality
- ▶ Illogical
- ▶ Unhelpful to us in pursuing our goals

Exercise 4.2: Identify Those Irrational Beliefs

Using the story example, we are now more easily able to identify the types of irrational beliefs from these lists. So, from the four beliefs that we identified in our being late story, allocate the types of irrational belief to each statement that you think is applicable.

Types of Irrational Beliefs:

- ▶ Demands
- ▶ Awfulising
- ▶ Low frustration tolerance
- ▶ Self/other/life depreciating

Jot down a note by each to say why:

- 1 I must never be late
- 2 It is awful and totally unacceptable to be late
- 3 I cannot bear being thought of negatively by my colleagues
- 4 I am totally stupid; it proves what an idiot I am

Disputing

With your new-found knowledge, you'll get increasingly used to identifying your own and other people's irrational, unhelpful beliefs. This self/other awareness is a major step in changing the unhelpful ways you think, feel and behave. To do this and effect lasting change, we'll add another letter to the ABC Model. **D** – Disputing.

The purpose of the Disputing process is to recognise and then test for the validity of your beliefs that may be influencing situations. At the outset, you'll probably find it easiest to use the ABCD process in a fairly formal way, writing each step down, but in no time you'll be able to run through the process in your head to determine a more helpful viewpoint.

There are four disputing questions to ask yourself regarding a belief you hold. Let's use as an example the belief that 'I must always be perfect 100 per cent of the time in everything I do'.

▶ Is it true?

Is your belief true? No. The use of the word *must* tells us that this statement is a rigid demand. Is perfection possible? And having to *always*

be perfect? This is an irrational perfectionist-based belief that could cause upset to yourself and possibly others. We'll have a look at perfectionism in more detail in Chapter 6.

► **Is it logical?**

Is it logical to expect that because you demand perfection 100 per cent of the time, this will happen? Does it make sense? No. What happens when inevitably it doesn't? How does that make you feel and behave?

► **Is it helpful? It is sometimes easier to think 'How does it help me?'**

It's likely that holding this belief is not helpful. It can create the tendency to procrastinate, to put off the task for fear of not living up to your irrational demand. That can lead to real and damaging feelings of failure. You're setting yourself up to fail. It's a self-defeating strategy. It may also have wider implications if you demand perfection of others.

► **Would you teach the belief to others?**

Based on the answers to the previous two questions, it's highly unlikely that you would recommend such a belief to others, such as friends or perhaps your children. This we find is the killer question. When coaching using the ABCD Model, this is the point where even the longest held and most guarded belief is finally questioned. The process of change can now begin.

The process of change – changing Demands to Preferences

We saw in Chapter 3 that, thanks to Neuroplasticity, we're able to change the way we feel, think and behave if we really want to. We can change even the things we have held most dear, beliefs and attitudes that we have long assumed to be part of our character. Many times on our courses we've been told, 'Well of course I've always been a worrier and my mother was a worrier. I didn't stand a chance!' Worry is not an inherited trait! If you'd prefer not to consider yourself a congenital 'worrier', then you have the ability to be something else. You have the power to change.

We know that rigid demands are unhelpful, so if we are seriously intending to make changes these need to be reframed. Is there an alternative to a demand? There is. A preference! Why is a preference better? Because a demand gives us just one option. A demand is dogmatic, rigid. I must.

They should. We have to. You either do or don't meet the terms of a demand. A preference, however, gives two or more options.

What do we mean by a preference in this context? We can express a preference as: 'I would *prefer* to always produce perfect work, *but* I accept that perfection is impossible and so striving for excellence, which is achievable, makes far more sense. In future that's what I'll aim for.'

When I (BW) first began working with the ABC Model it was this that I found most liberating. I worked hard to coach myself into thinking of preferences rather than demands and it really does make the world seem a different place. For a few months I had to do it consciously. When a difficult situation arose, I talked myself through the process:

- ▶ *I would prefer* that the arts centre where my group of disabled actors rehearse had not used the set of their play to make into Santa's Grotto *but* I accept that this has happened and we can probably come to a compromise.
- ▶ *I would prefer* that I could still drive (I have glaucoma) *but* I accept that this is not possible and there's a bus stop outside my house.

I've done it for so long that it's now my go-to response, my most used pathway. I literally think in terms of preferences, and the reduction in stress is huge. I think it's also made me appreciate other people more, and probably myself too. If I catch myself thinking a rigid demand, I know I must be tired and make sure I find the time to rest.

Exercise 4.3: Preferences

Write out three demands that you hold or have held in the past. Now change them into preferences. 'I would prefer that ... but ...'

- 1
- 2
- 3

ABC Thinking

This is the exciting bit. We're ready now to start using the ABC Model. Try to be as honest as you can when you are identifying your beliefs and the issues that are worrying you.

Exercise 4.4: Using the ABC Model

We're going to map out the first stage of the ABC process, identifying a Belief about an Activating Event and the resulting Consequence, including the emotion, behaviour and physiological symptom.

Take a few minutes to think of an issue or problem that you're currently having. It may be an ongoing adversity or a current worry or challenge.

A – Adversity. What is the problem or issue? Capture it as succinctly as possible.

B – Belief. What is or are the beliefs that you hold about the A? Is the belief rigid? A demand? Can you identify a personal rule? Remember must, have to, need to.

C – Consequence.

Emotional – notice how it makes you feel. We'll look in detail at emotions and the ways to address Unhealthy Negative Emotions in Chapter 11.

Action Tendency – what does it make you want to do?

Behavioural – note your behaviour regarding the adversity.

Physiological (symptoms) – headache? Raised heartrate?

Let's dispute the Belief that you have selected:

- ▶ Is it true?
- ▶ Is it logical?
- ▶ Is it helpful?
- ▶ Would you teach this belief to others?

How could you reframe the belief so that it is more helpful? For example, changing it to a preference if it is based around a rigid demand.

If you did this, what might your new, more helpful belief look like?

Write it down. (We always find it helpful to say it out loud.)

Now close your eyes and imagine how this new more helpful belief might change the consequences.

Remember the Activating event or Adversity is still the same – it is the way that you respond to this that changes.

At the end of this chapter is a simple Disputing Form to use when in the future you challenge unhelpful beliefs. If you don't use it before, you will use this as part of the six-week follow-up programme at the back of the book.

Questions and Answers

- ▶ **If I move from my rigid beliefs to preferences won't I become less effective?**

You can uphold extremely high standards and rigorous aspirations with flexible, realistic beliefs and achievable goals. We can have a preference for the highest standards in others, but we cannot demand them as we do not have full control over other people. We can disturb ourselves significantly by making demands of ourselves and others that simply will never be met.

- ▶ **What happens if a truly awful event occurs? How does the ABC Model help with that?**

Sadly, dreadful things do happen. REBT from which the ABC Model derives is very effective for helping people who have experienced trauma. As we've said, PTSD is treated widely through the use of cognitive therapies. It's not about trying to change the event, it's about how we view it. People who experience trauma may go on to suffer consequences such as feelings of guilt or anger. REBT and the ABC Model are very effective in helping people to reframe their view of the trauma in order to enhance the healing process.

Conclusion

Learning the ABC Model and integrating it into your daily life and habitual mental process is a key part of Mind Fitness. When you are consciously determining how you respond to a situation and choosing a response that benefits rather than disturbs or damages you, you regain an enormous amount of control over your life.

We're not saying that life will instantly become easy and filled with joy; this isn't fantasy land. But you'll be able to reduce the unnecessary worry about what will or might happen, and to manage your emotions in a way that minimises upset and conflict. Stopping our unhelpful beliefs tripping us up is a big step in the journey towards a you that is calmer, happier and significantly more able to cope with the challenges of life.