

upskill

21 KEYS TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



CHRIS WATSON

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Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Key 1: Ability to Influence	11
Key 2: Commercial Thinking	21
Key 3: Commitment to Change and Adaptation	31
Key 4: Constructive Communication	41
Key 5: Creativity and Innovation	51
Key 6: Direction and Purpose	61
Key 7: Effective Planning and Organisation	71
Key 8: Enthusiasm for Customer Service	81
Key 9: Focus on Developing Others	91
Key 10: Interpersonal Awareness and Diplomacy	103
Key 11: Intuitive Thought	113
Key 12: Motivation to Succeed	123
Key 13: Ownership of Self-Development	135
Key 14: People Management and Leadership Potential	145
Key 15: Positive Decisions	155
Key 16: Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility	167
Key 17: Resilience and Emotional Control	177
Key 18: Results through Action	187
Key 19: Specialist Knowledge and Ability	197
Key 20: Teamwork and Collaboration	207
Key 21: Use of Information and Data	217
Summary	229
Notes	231
About the Author	247

... the strongest principle of growth lies in human choice.

George Eliot

KEY 17

Resilience and Emotional Control



Resilience and Emotional Control

People who demonstrate resilience and emotional control express a firmness of purpose and can work with commitment and enthusiasm to achieve important goals. They are inclined to believe in their own capabilities. These flexible individuals are able to handle big workloads, competing demands, interruptions and distractions with poise and ease. They can think clearly under pressure and have the capacity to remain calm and composed. Mentally robust, they tend to view most obstacles as challenges to be met and are not demotivated by setbacks or changing circumstances. They know when to seek the support of others to help overcome adverse situations. Capable of managing their own emotions and impulses, they are likely to regard any personal criticism as an opportunity to learn and improve.



Ideas for personal development

Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.

Stephen Hawking

Tool

- Acknowledge all of your signature strengths. Too often we are encouraged to focus on our limitations and so may forget to acknowledge everything at which we excel. Try out the free Character Strengths survey at viacharacter.org. To understand

your personal strengths and preferences and how best to apply them, investigate Gretchen Rubin's Four Tendencies framework and take her tendencies quiz at gretchenrubin.com.²⁴⁵

Techniques

- ▲ Pump up your personal positivity. Resilient people are far more likely to identify little pockets of silver linings even in the worst of circumstances. Being more optimistic is not only closely linked to higher levels of personal resilience, but it is also a mental state which can be learned and mastered – regardless of your genetic make-up.²⁴⁶ Watch Tali Sharot's TED Talk 'The Optimism Bias' to discover the benefits of training your brain to zoom in on positive events.²⁴⁷
- ▲ Get enough sleep and plenty of exercise to ensure you are able to cope effectively with all the challenges in your life. Mental breaks and deliberate calm can keep stress chemicals at bay, reducing the potential for feeling overwhelmed.
- ▲ Reward small wins. Resilient people have self-belief, they work hard, persevere and take pleasure in small wins which bring personal satisfaction.
- ▲ Be more grey. Avoid black-and-white thinking and apply a more graduated approach. Avoiding all-or-nothing thinking supports the exploration of creative options.
- ▲ Avoid the drama. Office gossip fires up your emotional centre and can knock you off balance. Be empathetic and compassionate, but don't worry about what others think of you or defer to peer pressure against your better judgement.
- ▲ Learn to trust. Being sceptical about other people's intentions may limit your ability to draw on social support when you need it. Defer dialogue – hold back from expressing your views and opinions until you have heard everyone else and you fully understand the situation. Remain open, rather than react from a position of opinion and judgement.

Inspiration

- + Hunt for a copy of *The Impossible Just Takes a Little Longer* by Art Berg – essential reading for anyone interested in how to overcome adversity.²⁴⁸ If you are short of time, search for the poem 'Don't Quit' by John Greenleaf Whittier.
- + Face life's problems head-on. In his book *The Obstacle is the Way*, Ryan Holiday provides techniques to turn adversity into advantage, suggesting that overcoming challenges is one of the most effective ways to grow.²⁴⁹
- + Learn to juggle – literally. Activities which require focus and practice strengthen the frontal lobe and support higher level thinking.²⁵⁰ Alternatively, get a hobby which will enable you to recharge your batteries. Warren Buffet loves playing the ukulele. Bill Gates plays lots of bridge. Try to schedule purposeful downtime into each day.



Ideas for delivering results

The best survivors spend almost no time, especially in emergencies, getting upset about what has been lost, or feeling distressed about things going badly. ... For this reason they don't usually take themselves too seriously and are therefore hard to threaten.

Al Siebert

Tools

- Lighten up. When you do feel under pressure, find a moment to visit Spotify and listen to 'Weightless' by Marconi Union. This music has been specially designed with sound therapists to promote a feeling of relaxation, and evidence suggests it may significantly reduce both anxiety levels and blood pressure.²⁵¹

- Search for meaning. Develop a 'personal why' statement. Having your own compass will provide a clear sense of purpose and will help you to view any setbacks from a broader perspective.

Techniques

- ▲ Define your goals, make sure they match your personal values and then pursue them relentlessly. Resilient people view stretching goals as a challenge, not an obstacle. Identify compelling reasons to get involved and be proactive.
- ▲ Study at the school of stoicism. Try not to dwell on events and situations which are outside your control. Identify the things you can influence and invest your time and energy here. Fail fast and move on quickly. Learn from the event and let go. Adapt quickly to new developments by being curious and asking lots of questions.
- ▲ Manage any stress using distraction and resolution methods. Distraction includes exercise, breathing techniques, walking and extracting yourself from the situation. Resolution is focused on solving the problem.
- ▲ Take a cold bath. If you can't remove the stressors, build up your ability to deal with them. Studies reveal that taking a cold bath in the morning (or cold water swimming) increases mental toughness and your ability to face stressful situations.²⁵²
- ▲ Exercise self-control. Look up Walter Mischel's iconic 'marshmallow test' and discover the relationship between deferred gratification and success in everyday life.²⁵³ Personal willpower is in limited supply. There is a greater chance of giving in to instant gratification and impulsive behaviour when you are mentally exhausted.
- ▲ Helping others is recognised as a powerful way of enhancing mental toughness. Multiple acts of kindness have been found to have a cumulative positive effect on our mental toughness.²⁵⁴ Extend your personal resilience by bolstering the confidence levels of colleagues who are less resilient than you.

- ▲ Connect with others across your organisation. Research reveals that strong social connections bolster resilience, increase well-being and make you feel more productive.²⁵⁵ Begin noticing who you spend time with on a daily basis. If you are connecting with people who are optimistic and more satisfied with life, you will start to be affected by their positive outlook.²⁵⁶
- ▲ Practise seeing things from another person's point of view. When we empathise with others, we feel less isolated, less entrenched in our own problems and are able to recover more quickly.

Inspiration

- ✦ Become an osteologist. According to All Blacks coach Gilbert Enoka, 'you need only three bones to be successful: a wish bone, a back bone, and a funny bone'. The wishbone emphasises the importance of having a goal. The back bone means having the courage to see things through. The funny bone reminds us of the importance of not taking ourselves too seriously.
- ✦ Be more courageous, more vulnerable, more connected and more resilient. Identify practical ways to show up, speak up, act and fail more often by reading *Daring Greatly* by Brene Brown.²⁵⁷
- ✦ Embrace your stress. Hear how the latest research on the biology of courage is suggesting that stress may only be bad for you if you believe it to be the case. Watch Kelly McGonigal's compelling TED Talk on 'How to Make Stress Your Friend'.²⁵⁸
- ✦ Mind yourself. Read *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World* by Mark Williams and Danny Penman.²⁵⁹ Apply their down-to-earth methods to reduce personal anxiety and stress and build a happier, more confident approach to your working life.
- ✦ Identify a personal resilience role model. Select someone who oozes bouncebackability. Monitor their reactions in social situations and try to mirror their approach. Next, read *Grit* by Angela Duckworth and discover the significance of the combined power of passion and perseverance, plus an effective way to focus your energy on your five highest priority goals.²⁶⁰

- ✚ Download a podcast by Srikumar Rao on how to be more resilient at work – he offers heaps of practical ideas for entrepreneurs and employees.
- ✚ Resist perfectionism. It may be a form of procrastination and prevent you from moving forward with things. Eighty per cent is good enough in most cases. Avoid the roadblocks by reading *The War of Art* by Steve Pressfield.²⁶¹
- ✚ Watch Isaac Lidsky's TED Talk 'What Reality Are You Creating for Yourself?' and discover some great ideas on how to let go of excuses, assumptions and fears.²⁶²
- ✚ Endure more. Get more out of yourself and others by reading Alex Hutchinson's scientific dive into the limits of human performance. Grab a copy of *Endure* and discover precisely what it is that successful athletes do to keep pushing forwards against a mounting desire to stop.²⁶³
- ✚ Train your chimp to manage your emotions. Understand your mind and where many of your impulsive responses come from. Read *The Chimp Paradox* by Steve Peters and apply proven scientific principles to gain greater control of your thinking and make better decisions on a daily basis.²⁶⁴



Ideas for long-term gain

... a certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Kites rise against, and not with, the wind.

John Neal

Tools

- Complete a MTQ48 mental toughness inventory and review your results for levels of challenge, control, commitment and confidence.²⁶⁵

- Investigate the Stockdale paradox and then apply this principle to your most challenging work issue.²⁶⁶

Techniques

- ▲ Improve your decision making. Resilience requires you to make more decisions rather than avoid them. This means you should trust your judgement – but don't be averse to changing your mind.
- ▲ Exercise impulse control – practise techniques to resist or delay an impulse, drive or temptation to act.
- ▲ Make things tougher for yourself. Baseball players practise swinging with a weighted bat so that batting feels easier during real games.²⁶⁷ In the same way, you can increase your personal stamina by stretching yourself more. Try deliberately increasing one of your personal targets on a specific day each week and monitor the results.
- ▲ Make more promises – and keep them. Hardy people have greater capacity, make more realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.

Inspiration

- ✚ Watch the inspirational TEDx Talk by Sam Berns entitled 'My Philosophy for a Happy Life'.²⁶⁸
- ✚ Introduce an idea generation exercise at your next team meeting based on a famous quote by performance psychologist Jim Loehr. Ask people for three suggestions on how best to 'consistently perform towards the upper range of [their] talent and skill regardless of competitive circumstances'.²⁶⁹ Take note of their responses and act on them.

- ✚ Develop your emotional literacy. Practise reducing any unwanted emotional arousal by consciously recognising your own emotional states. Discover reliable ways to do this using David Rock's book *Your Brain at Work*: 'To reduce arousal, you need to use just a few words to describe an emotion, and ideally use symbolic language, which means using indirect metaphors, metrics, and simplifications of your experience.'²⁷⁰
- ✚ Practise 'prospective hindsight' by using the pre-mortem technique to look ahead and anticipate any potential future issues. Find out more by watching Daniel Levitin's TED Talk 'How to Stay Calm When You Know You'll Be Stressed.'²⁷¹



Related work skills

Commitment to Change and Adaptation (3), Enthusiasm for Customer Service (8), Interpersonal Awareness and Diplomacy (10), Intuitive Thought (11), Ownership of Self-Development (13), People Management and Leadership Potential (14), Positive Decisions (15).

About the Author

Chris Watson is an award-winning specialist in the promotion of adaptive management skills who founded Endor Learn & Develop in 2002 following a successful career in publishing and higher education. He provides fresh, practical ideas to extend performance at work, delivering results through people for every type of organisation – from emerging small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through to multinational corporations. Drawing on his background in leadership, psychology, education and the human sciences, he has a proven track record in harnessing potential to help organisations flourish. Incurably curious about all aspects of organisational behaviour, his aim is to strengthen relationships in the workplace by sharing straightforward solutions which people can relate to on a personal level.

As an active member of the national learning and development community, Chris writes for the *Business Matters* publication and is a regular blogger at the Knowledge Bank. A chartered member of the Institute of Personnel and Development, he has an honours degree in psychology and a master's in human resource management. As a keynote speaker, facilitator and coach, Chris regularly presents at regional Chartered Management Institute events, business conferences and HR forums. More recently, he has collaborated with a number of institutions to support employability initiatives and has launched an innovative toolkit for young people on the language of work.

Chris lives in sleepy Lincolnshire in the UK with his wife and four children. In his spare time he enjoys watching stand-up comedy, eating spicy tacos and listening to Nick Cave albums (although rarely at the same time). He is always interested in exploring new ideas to extend the performance of people. If you have any great suggestions for developing any of the adaptive skills listed in this book, drop him a line at: hello@endorlearning.com.

What people are saying about *Upskill*

If you want to develop yourself, your people and your teams, read Chris Watson's *Upskill*. Reflecting the growing trend towards self-directed learning, this do-it-yourself guide is filled with practical and innovative ideas that will help both you and your teams flourish!

Marshall Goldsmith, *New York Times* number one bestselling author of *Triggers* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* and two-time winner of the Thinkers50 Leadership Award

We live in an age of positive disruption which is only set to increase in the years ahead. The winners will be those individuals who are open to new ideas and actively focus on developing their learning agility. *Upskill* offers a huge range of tactical tools and intelligent ideas and approaches for long-term gain, which makes it so useful for anyone committed to developing themselves or others.

Dominic Monkman, Global Strategy and Business Operations Director, GlaxoSmithKline plc

Upskill recognises that people sit at the centre of their own learning. It's refreshing to read a book that provides individuals with such a range of tools and techniques in one place, which can be accessed whenever they are needed. Chris Watson has clearly drawn on his extensive practical experience in the field. Great job.

Kate O'Sullivan, Deputy Chair, British Rowing, Chair, British Rowing National Coaching Committee

Compelling in its clarity, *Upskill* reflects the latest thinking on how to improve performance by building on strengths – helping individuals to learn at their own pace, in their own time. Anyone working in not-for-profit organisations, in the education sector or in other institutions outside of the corporate world will also find great value in this material.

Eleanor Cannon, Chair, Scottish Golf

With *Upskill* Chris Watson has curated an accessible, practical and memorable toolkit which any established or aspiring leader should delve into as part of their ongoing development journey. Taking an evidence-based approach, each of the twenty-one keys unlocks a door leading to a rich menu of resources, tactics and strategies. A book destined to spend very little time on the shelf.

**Mark Gilroy, Managing Director,
TMS Development International Ltd**

Upskill offers a highly relevant and very accessible toolkit that enables the reader to engage with a variety of tools and techniques to enhance their personal and professional development at the point of need. The 'Inspiration' sections provide insights and additional resources that directly navigate the reader to a plethora of supporting narratives, and the book's smorgasbord approach is both flexible and focused – ensuring that individuals can easily identify the areas which will have the most positive impact for themselves and their organisations.

**Susan Kane, Head of Leadership and Learning and
Development, University of York**

Well-structured and easy to navigate, *Upskill* is a veritable toolkit of tried and tested solutions for anyone wanting to develop themselves, their teams and their organisations – whether they need help attacking a specific challenge or just want to browse for practical inspiration.

Richard Mellor, Global Chief Human Resources Officer, R/GA

Business is facing a new wave of complexity. Wrong response: create more processes and systems and add structures, control and committees – this complicatedness chokes productivity and satisfaction at work. Right response: better utilise people's intelligence, leverage their adaptiveness, strengthen their problem solving skills and grow the individual rather than the bureaucracy. *Upskill* provides tools and guidance to help achieve this, and enables readers to better face complexity without getting complicated – the essence of vitality.

Yves Morieux, Managing Director, Boston Consulting Group

The definitive guide to developing the adaptive skills essential for success at work

Brimming with punchy, practical ideas to improve your day-to-day effectiveness, *Upskill* is ideal for anyone who is committed to developing themselves and their colleagues, but may not have the time, the resources, the budget or the inspiration to know where to start.

Just-in-time learning solutions – wherever and whenever you need them

In *Upskill* Chris Watson delivers a dynamic snapshot of easy-to-access development possibilities, providing you with:

- 840 user-friendly tools and techniques reflecting the latest thinking on how to extend capability and boost professional growth.
- A rich resource of reliable solutions, grouped around the twenty-one adaptive skills most valued by today's employers – including creativity, collaboration and communication.
- An abundance of proven approaches, topical insights, time-saving apps and inspirational videos, as well as helpful signposts to relevant quotes, books and other resources.

Upskill will help you adjust to the ever-changing world of work and take charge of your career

If you want to develop yourself, your people and your teams, read Chris Watson's *Upskill*.

Marshall Goldsmith, *New York Times* number one bestselling author of *Triggers* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* and two-time winner of the Thinkers50 Leadership Award

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