

The Chimp Paradox. The Mind Management Programme for Confidence, Success and Happiness.

Dr Steve Peters (2012). Published by Vermilion.

This book is written by a Consultant Psychiatrist who, as well as his role at the University of Sheffield, has also coached athletes at the highest level in cycling, snooker and football.

Peters offers a model for people to understand how the mind works in order to develop an individual's potential confidence, success and happiness. This has been used very successfully by high profile athletes, such as Sir Chris Hoy and Bradley Wiggins, but is aimed at anyone seeking to achieve potential in these areas for wellbeing.

The model he offers is clearly laid out and full of useful practical exercises for the reader to make understandable that which has often left them upset, confused and frustrated.

The book is in 3 parts with chapters punctuated with key points and concluded with a useful summary.

- Part 1 has 6 chapters and explains what he calls the inner mind
- Part 2 has 6 chapters that focus on day to day functioning
- Part 3 of the book also has 6 chapters and focusses on how to improve your health, success and happiness.

In part 1 Peters uses the latest neuroscience to understand how our brain have evolved with a resultant rational part of our human brain as well as there being an emotional element.

- He calls the emotional component of the brain and how it effects us as the 'Chimp'. He does not suggest that cognitive reasoning is better or worse than emotional reasoning, simply that we are best being aware of both and attending to both in order to function at our best. From this perspective we are most likely to develop confidence, success and happiness. The 'Chimp' can potentially be our best friend as well as our worst enemy – hence the paradox.
- Chimps like to survive. They search for others and those that are protectors. The chimp tends to consider how it will feel before undertaking any action. It can be unpredictably anxious or calm. Rather than try to understand why it feels as it does, it is best to tame it.

His book has useful visual images as well as an understandable text to explain how we also store information in the brain that acts as a memory bank so that many of our responses are automatic. This he calls our 'Computer'.

When we process information we get a response from our 'computer' 20 times more quickly and from our 'chimp' 5 times more quickly than using the human brain. Therefore he suggests that if we are looking to make changes we can modify information stored in our computer and also tame the chimp as well as looking to alter information in our human brain.

- If the chimp and human are relaxed the computer will run on auto.

- How the chimp interprets a situation starts info processing. If it senses danger it will take over (and that's where the blood supply to the brain is sent). It will look in the computer to see what is stored there. If the computer does not reassure the chimp the chimp will take over.
- If the chimp is reassured it will ask the human or computer to act. If the chimp does not see danger it will hand over to the human or computer depending on whether the human has stored something in the computer due to being familiar with the event.

What we hold as our life force, values and truths of life he calls our 'Stone of life'.

- Truths of life are based on hard evidence e.g.
 - Life is not fair
 - The goal posts move
 - There are no guarantees.
 - Everything that happens comes and goes
 - Disappointments are tough but they need to be kept in perspective
 - Happiness can be found in many ways
 - Every day is precious
 - Its the way you deal with things that gives you peace of mind
- Our values are personal judgment calls e.g.
 - Being unfaithful is wrong
 - Family is more important than work
 - Being selfless is a virtue
- The life force is what you believe life is all about

As the Chimp & human brain gauge everything by what this 'Stone' holds he gives exercises to the reader in order to identify what is held there and whether any of this may be unrealistic or unreasonable and impacting on us negatively.

He calls how we see ourselves, others and the world our 'Mindset'.

- This influences how we approach life and he therefore suggests how we can explore our mindset so that our reference points are reasonable and realistic .

The computer receives messages from the chimp and human brain and therefore has to make sense of 2 different perspectives on life and the world.

Our 'computer' has 2 main functions: acting as a reference source for the chimp or human or to run automatic programmes.

- Helpful and constructive automatic beliefs and behaviours he calls 'autopilots'.
- Unhelpful and destructive automatic beliefs and behaviours that are removable he calls 'Gremlins'.

- Unhelpful and destructive automatic beliefs and behaviours that are not removable he calls 'Goblins'. He explains the difference between Gremlins and Goblins and suggests how to identify what can be changed and how that might take place.

Any one of these 3 brains could dominate us although it is best for us if they work collaboratively.

- The human brain works with facts and is logical, the chimp with feelings and impressions and therefore has the potential to hijack you if left untamed as all information goes to the chimp before your human brain. Even if your human brain disagrees with the chimp he suggests you will still need to manage the chimp as it is too powerful to just ignore.

He suggests 3 ways to manage your chimp in favour of trying to ignore it.

- He explains how to express the chimp in an appropriate way; to calm the chimp with logic or how to reward or distract the chimp.

He looks at function and behaviour of male and female chimps to better understand how men and women often behave differently or hold different beliefs but does not suggest we as humans should adopt these differences within human behaviour or culture.

Chimp roles and hormones

- Male chimps must be strong and offer security. He will patrol his boundary. He is driven sexually. He sees the female as his property.
- The female chimp is good at weighing up the male's mood and anticipating his actions. She reads his body language. She has a strong maternal drive and stays close to the male to fulfill her maternal drive. She has a strong maternal and nesting instinct. If she lacks confidence she is more likely to survive as she will be on the alert. She will avoid decision making as she quickly becomes anxious. She tends to put herself down.
- The chimp's drives won't change but its behaviour can be changed. We are responsible for the actions of our chimp.

In part 2 Peters covers understanding and relating to others, explains how we relate to other people and how best to choose a support network and an environment in which to thrive. He offers a simple clear stepped approach to managing stress in the short as well as the longer term. To reflect the 3 different working parts of our brain he explores what each part of our brain requires for us to function at our best.

He explores our relationships with other people.

- He gives examples of commonly held Gremlins and Mindsets that can affect us negatively. He offers approaches that can help us better understand others when we meet them for the first time and how our human brain and chimp affect our judgments and expectations of others.
- He suggests we invest in relationships with those who we care about and accept that we are not likely to get along with about 20% of those we meet.
- He offers techniques to develop effective communication and rationales for these.

He explains what is important to the chimp and our human brain when choosing our social group.

The chimp wants to be seen as strong to stay in the troop by

- impressing others at all times
- keeping everyone happy
- caring about what others think
- chooses others on their looks and familiarity

The chimp agenda in connecting is to:

- Win
- express emotion
- attack the other person
- defend itself
- get its point across
- hold its stance
- continue to look good
- project responsibility to others if it feels guilty.

Chimps have a sense of territory and belonging to the troop. They like routine and familiarity.

The human tends to consider how it will feel after it has undertaken an action.

Humans like to have a purpose.

Being human involves

- Honesty
- Compassion
- Conscience
- Law abiding
- Self control
- Sense of purpose
- Achievement and satisfaction

The human brain when choosing our social group:

- enjoys sharing and working with others
- wants to build a society
- has respect and compassion for others
- would like the approval of others but recognises that you shouldn't be worried about what others think
- sees each individual as having responsible for their own happiness but not that of others
- chooses others on their qualities

The human agenda in connecting is to:

- understand the other person first
- allow the other person to express themselves
- gather info by listening
- look for solutions
- use facts

Humans like a world that is fair and looks after the vulnerable and one that gives equal opportunities to all. They believe that everyone will behave fairly and feel guilt, remorse and atonement.

Peters suggests ways of investing in the group.

- This requires us to cater for the needs of the human and the chimp so that the computer can make sense of our fluctuating 'real' world.
- Learning how to survive in the real world enables us to be happy

He explains how stress affects us and offers strategies for managing sudden stress in order to stabilise our 'real' world.

- He suggests having an autopilot reaction to stress will serve us best. This includes: recognising the stress and choosing to use the computer; pausing for thought to stop our chimp reacting by slowing down our thinking; taking a step back physically and or mentally to gain perspective using logic; forming a plan to reduce the stress and then reflect on the situation; allowing oneself to express emotion in a positive way.
- In order to diffuse stress he recommends expressing emotion and reminding ourselves that life is unfair, rather than holding the unrealistic expectation that life is fair. We then need to decide when our chimp has been sufficiently exercised and that we are ready to move on. Planning how to move forward is key to doing so.
- He gives some examples commonly experienced as stressors including decision making processes and unrealistic expectations.

He gives advice on how to deal with long term stress.

- Peters describes chronic stress and how to check for signs of it and how to prevent it.
- He highlights how stress can be caused by ourselves, others or circumstances and how to diffuse this rather than accept it as normal.

In part 3 we focus on our health, success and happiness.

In terms of our health Peters suggests how we can look after our physical and mental health and then work on maintaining it.

- For physical health it is important to attend to our dietary intake, nutrition, weight, exercise and fitness. The chimp and human have different perspectives on any of these components.
- The human brain will know what it wants in each of these areas and be pleased with being fit, in shape and eating sensibly. The chimp wants an easy life and would rather go for immediate gratification and pleasure, dismiss consequences of this and not take any responsibility.
- People who are successful are proactive and have a plan that they can modify if needs be.
- For mental fitness he suggests we use intellectual challenges and stimulation, have fun, purpose and achievements. We also need to allow ourselves a period of recovery from emotional traumas just as we would from physical injuries.
- He suggests relaxing, resting and sleeping as 3 ways of recuperation needed to be well.
- If we are ill he highlights the importance of taking responsibility, which can include seeking help.

In terms of achieving success

- Peters identifies how success may be defined by our human mind and or our chimp and encourages us to define this for ourselves.
- Recognising when you are in your own realm and acting on this can prevent chimp activity. We can set the rules in our own realm and also choose who we ask for advice .
- Respecting others when we are not in our own realm is important.
- Agreement is best negotiated when in personal relationships.
- Our chances of success are enhanced if we consider the issues of commitment, ownership, responsibility and excellence.
- If we aim to do 'our best' we are aiming at personal excellence.
- Humans work best when they use a kindly approach to themselves, use encouragement, rewards and consequences.

Peters gives us a plan for success.

- He suggests differentiating between dreams and goals and making goals achievable.
- Pacing ourselves to achieve one new goal at a time is best. Maintaining a goal previously achieved is possible alongside trying to achieve one new goal.
- The more preparation we put into planning for success the more likely we are to be successful.
- It is best to reflect on progress regularly and reward ourselves as small steps are achieved towards our goal.
- He reminds us that anything in life is only as important as we want it to be but not to completely ignore how something makes us feel.

In terms of happiness

- Peters suggests that we can choose to be happy
- He highlights the need for a plan to achieve happiness
- He identifies how happiness may be defined by our human mind and or our chimp and encourages us to define this for ourselves.
- Adding extras to our usual lives that fulfill the needs of the chimp and the human will lift happiness levels
- We need to work out what we need to make us happy and then fulfill this. Things on this list may be material as well as being about things such as wellbeing. Ingredients for happiness include material things as well as elements of how we live our life/who we are.
- We are more likely to be happy if we approach life in the right way. This includes choosing the right partner in life.
- Making a list of the things that have an immediate & delayed impact can be used to lift levels of happiness.
- Nurturing autopilots rather than gremlins will promote happiness.

In terms of confidence

- Peters suggests we have 2 ways of thinking and that using the human thought processes will best develop self confidence.
- Choosing to base our confidence on 'doing our best' will maximise it to 100%.
- Having realistic expectations of oneself maximises our confidence.
- It is normal for us to lack confidence as a result of a relationship ending.

Developing security.

- Happiness is underpinned by security
- The chimp regularly seeks security although this is not always realistic
- Even a healthy chimp will be sensitive to being vulnerable and insecure so we need to expect this, accept it and plan to look after it.
- The human can store an autopilot into the computer that will reassure the chimp.
- We can control some risk but not all risk.

(The book is available as a 335 page paperback or kindle version. It costs less than £10).