

1 Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life

If you've picked up this book, then two things are likely to be true:

There is something in your life that you would like to change.

You are not sure what to do to change it.

Perhaps you find yourself spending more time than you'd like in your head – worrying about the future, dwelling on the past – so that it seems as if life is passing you by. Maybe you notice yourself feeling hopeless and unhappy and yet you feel unsure of how to move forward. Perhaps you notice yourself feeling angry and irritable, as if you are being controlled by your fluctuating moods. Possibly you just feel stuck – as if everyone else is living their lives and you are on the sidelines looking in. This is an uncomfortable, unpleasant, and often painful place to be, and the temptation in this kind of situation can be to look outside of ourselves in the hope that someone somewhere has the elusive magic formula, the set of rules that will make life feel effortless. Maybe you have even found a set of rules that has worked for you in the past, which has allowed you to make changes and get more of what you want out of life for a while. But now here you are again, reading these words and still wishing for something to change.

2 ACTivate Your Life

Life Is Messy

The truth is that life is messy. It's chaotic, unpredictable and change is just about the only thing that remains constant. Just when you think you've got it all figured out, life changes and you need a new set of rules! Even the most robust and well-intentioned set of 'rules for life' will come up short at some point.

So, what if there was no magic answer, no set of rules? What if the messiness and chaos of life wasn't actually the problem? What if it were possible to live a rich, meaningful and rewarding life despite all the storms and uncertainty, the fears and the setbacks?

You Have the Skills!

As humans, we are pre-programmed with the skills necessary to negotiate even the most challenging of life situations, and we use these skills every day without even noticing. Have you ever been in a situation where you took action even when every thought in your head and every atom in your being seemed to be telling you to hide? Think hard – try to think of an example, just one. Maybe you had an important job interview and your mind started showing you lots of scary images of yourself getting tongue-tied and not knowing what to say, but you went ahead and did the interview anyway? Maybe you arranged a dinner date with someone you really liked and felt your stomach tying itself up in knots as you approached the restaurant, but you were able to go inside, sit down and enjoy the evening anyway? Maybe you just woke up one morning and felt like staying in bed, but you got up, had a shower and went to work all the same?

Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life 3

We're willing to bet that, as soon as you thought of one example of a time when you did what was necessary (regardless of how you felt), your mind would have offered up three examples of times when you **weren't** able to do that! When uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, memories, urges or sensations actually **did** get in the way of your doing what you wanted to, and living the kind of life that you wanted to live. But that's OK: we're not going to try to convince you that it's always easy. We just want to invite you to notice that it **is** possible to take action that enriches your life, even when all your internal stuff is urging you not to – in fact, you do it all the time! And sometimes you don't do it. The aim of this book is not to set out a lot of complex rules about how to manage your internal world and live your life. The aim is simply to encourage you to learn from your past experience – to do more of the stuff that works for you and less of the stuff that doesn't work, and to practise these useful habits until they become second nature.

Life Is for Living

This book is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (which is usually shortened to ACT and pronounced 'act') and is **not** a set of rules – **it is a way of life**. ACT has been proven to be one of the most effective ways of helping people to 'un-stick' themselves: to escape from the quicksand of uncomfortable internal experiences, not by fighting, suppressing or trying to change them, but by developing a sense of willingness to do the things that bring them fulfilment, even when that means coming into contact with painful thoughts and feelings. When we talk about 'acceptance' we do not mean simply resigning oneself to a life of pain and unhappiness. We mean acknowledging that certain things in life are outside of our control. We are going to

4 ACTivate Your Life

propose that we have a lot less control over our thoughts and feelings than we have been taught to believe, but that we can still take full responsibility for what is within our control – what we do and say, how we live our lives every day.

But ACT is also about more than that. Life is for living and many of us are so busy attending to the **business** of living our lives – jobs, bills, responsibilities, routine – that we don't stop to think about what is really important to us. ACT involves pressing the pause button and asking the questions that most of us rarely spend much time considering. What kind of a person do I want to be? What do I want to stand for in life? How do I really want to use the limited amount of time and energy available to me every day? We use these questions to help us to set goals that will take us closer to the lives that we want, and to motivate us to take actions – even tiny ones – that are true to our values.

Open, Aware, Active

ACT is simple. It doesn't require that you delve deep into your past to find hidden answers or to spend your days identifying and challenging 'wrong' thoughts. Using ACT, anyone can transform their lives for the better by being three things – *Open, Aware* and *Active*.

Open

Being *Open* means learning to respond more effectively to the painful and unpleasant thoughts and feelings that are an inevitable part of the human experience, so that they no longer act as a barrier between you and the things that you value.

Aware

Being *Aware* means easing out of automatic pilot mode and beginning to connect with what is going on around us and inside us **right here and now**. It means using the skill of *mindfulness* to notice the small details and beauty around us that we can miss when we're wrapped up in our busy minds, problem-solving, comparing, judging, criticising and doing all the things that minds are great at! That awareness can also help us to notice the opportunities that may have slipped under our radar – opportunities to know ourselves better, opportunities to do more of the things that make life worth living.

Active

Being *Active* means becoming clear on what matters to us most in life, and then pursuing those things vigorously – living life on purpose, rather than drifting through unconsciously. It's about knowing the kind of person that you want to be, the kind of life you want to live, and then intentionally taking steps in that direction. More than that, it's about doing so even when you know that it might be uncomfortable or challenging, and being fully open to and aware of the experience as you go.

Helen Keller, the American author, political activist and lecturer who experienced and overcame considerable adversity in her life, said that 'Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.'¹ ACT gives you the tools to set sail on that adventure, and to keep your ship moving forward, whether the seas are calm or stormy – to get out of your head and start living your life again. Each of us has years of experience in applying these principles at work and

1 Keller, Helen, *The Open Door* (Doubleday, 1957)

6 ACTivate Your Life

in our own lives. We are really excited to introduce you to the world of ACT – to help you get unstuck and ACTivate your life.

Meet Tim, Marcia, Samantha and Dave

In this book, we are going to introduce you to four characters: Tim, Marcia, Samantha and Dave. They represent real people with real problems with whom we have each worked over the years, and their stories will give you a full sense of how the skills of being *Open*, *Aware* and *Active* can be successfully applied.

Tim's Story – 'Why can't I stop worrying?'

Tim, a thirty-year-old man working in human resources, came to therapy after struggling for two years with increasing worry and anxiety. In the first session Tim described his worrying as 'out of control' and said that he did not know how to switch off his mind. He found that he was spending all of his energy and time trying to avoid making mistakes or letting 'bad' things happen. Tim said that because of this constant worry, life was passing him by.

Tim had moved from his home city for his current job several years ago, and lived with flatmates near his workplace. Tim's parents still lived in his home city, and were retired. He described having a good relationship with them: he phoned them regularly and visited them for holidays. Tim said that he got along with his flatmates (friends from university), although he spent only a small amount of time with them, due to the long hours that he worked. Tim was single, having come out of a long-term relationship a couple of years ago. He

Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life 7

described that while he had friends, he didn't socialise often due to work demands. Tim said that, while he would like a relationship, he had felt 'too busy' for this lately. He admitted that he frequently felt lonely.

Tim said that he felt that his main issue was that he frequently worried about potential problems and catastrophes, both at work and at home. His most common worries were about making big mistakes at work, which would cost the company a substantial amount of money and lead to him losing his job. To make sure this didn't happen, Tim was extra cautious – always double-checking (sometimes triple-checking) his work and constantly thinking about potential future problems. He found that he took much longer to complete tasks than others in his team, which meant that he often worked late.

He also found worries intruding in other areas of his life: he worried about being single, and ending up alone for the rest of his life; that an accident would happen to his parents; or that he would make a poor financial decision and end up living with crippling debt. He also worried about his health: he felt tired a lot and so he was concerned he may have a serious health problem, such as cancer. He'd had several check-ups with his doctor and he'd been told his physical health was fine. The doctor suggested that the worrying may be a sign of a mental-health issue. This led Tim to worry more!

Tim described how difficult it was to live with such a high level of worry. He was frequently anxious and unhappy, and the worries affected his enjoyment of many things. He also shared that he experienced trouble sleeping, with a key time for worrying thoughts being when he was trying to get off to sleep at night. During

8 ACTivate Your Life

the day, Tim was frequently tired and fatigued, and reported being quite fidgety and agitated and having trouble concentrating. He described other symptoms of anxiety, such as a nauseous feeling in his stomach and breathlessness. On one occasion when he was so worried about making a mistake at work he had had a full-blown panic attack.

As part of his motivation to try therapy, Tim described the various ways he had attempted to stop worrying so much, without ever really getting on top of the problem. He said that he'd tried telling himself not to worry, that he was being silly, and blocking out the worrying thoughts, but these strategies didn't seem to stop them. Tim said that he occasionally wrote down his worries and tried to problem-solve, but found that this actually increased the amount that he worried, rather than reducing it. He said that he sometimes called his parents to discuss his worries. They would usually try to reassure him that things would work out OK, but that only helped him feel less anxious for a short period of time. He had found that his father had been less patient with him more recently.

Tim said that he occasionally coped with his worrying by drinking alcohol, although this led him to be concerned about becoming an alcoholic. He did not drink regularly, but described that when his worrying became overwhelming and he didn't have to go to work the next day, then he would drink up to half a bottle of wine 'to bring down the tension'. This did seem to work, at least in the short term, although it would tend to make him feel hungover and lethargic the next day.

Tim said that he felt pretty stuck – like the worrying had taken over his life.

How *Open, Aware and Active* Is Tim?

The therapist agreed with Tim that the worrying certainly did seem to be having a big influence on his life now. Tim accepted that living as though the worst was going to happen was costing him a lot. It was as though the task of living was to avoid all possible errors, mistakes and calamities, rather than about, well, *living*.

Let's now think about to what extent Tim was being *Open, Aware* and *Active*: at what stage do you think Tim is?

Open

A key observation that Tim made is that he found it hard to tolerate uncertainty or risk and the feelings that accompanied such situations. While in certain situations it can be useful to be cautious, it looked as if he was being overly cautious in many areas of his life.

Tim was also responding to his thoughts about the future almost as if the catastrophic events he worried about had actually already happened. It was as if he was taking these thoughts literally, and they deserved his full attention and needed an immediate response. It was hard for him to see that **these thoughts are part of the process of living**; it was as though to him they represented what life was all about.

Aware

Rather than being aware of the present moment, Tim was in fact spending most of his time living in the future: a worrying fantasy of the future from which he found it hard to escape. It is no wonder that he was experiencing physical symptoms of stress.

10 ACTivate Your Life

Tim had noticed that he was frequently caught up in these worries and the thought that life may be passing him by – currently, he finds his worries so consuming that he spends much of the time totally disconnected from the present moment.

Tim's sense of his identity – who he is – appeared to be threatened by his worrying thoughts. It was as if he was being held hostage by the worries and that whatever he tried it would be a big risk.

Active

Tim had a clear idea about how he would like to live: to have an intimate relationship, to connect with someone, to act like a caring and reliable friend, and to be a dedicated and thoughtful worker. However, his actions were more influenced by trying to handle his worries at the expense of other important aspects of his life. This was most apparent when he reflected on the amount of time he spent working in order to avoid some catastrophic event from happening. Instead of pursuing and developing other areas of his life, Tim was driven by his worries, staying in the office until 9 p.m. in the hope that this would help him to feel better. In fact, Tim's suffering was two-fold: the pain of the anxiety that came with the worrying thoughts and images that filled his head, and the pain of living a life that was shrinking around him. His experience told him that this was no way to live.

Marcia's Story – 'I just want to be happy, like everyone else'

Marcia was thirty-eight years old and, for the past six months, she had often found herself inexplicably tearful and feeling a deep sense of loneliness. This was not

Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life 11

normally like her, but she'd started to notice that other people around her seemed to be much happier, more confident and more able to enjoy their lives. In comparison, she thought that she didn't feel as good as other people, which she found hard to understand as she felt as if she did everything right in her life. She was always helpful, she never got angry with others and she worked hard. She couldn't make sense of where these feelings were coming from.

She worked in the fundraising department of a local charity and had been in the same position for the past ten years. She enjoyed her job and felt she was good at it, although she occasionally wondered what it would be like to be in a more challenging senior role. However, when she thought this, she would typically tell herself, 'you'd never be good enough, just stick to what you know.'

Marcia also worried what would happen to her mother if she changed jobs and had less time to devote to her. Her mother, with whom she lived and was very close, needed a lot of support as she had a number of complex mental and physical health issues. Her father had died in a car accident when she was in her late teens. Since then, her mother had experienced bouts of severe depression, and Marcia had often needed to look after her. Although she had a good relationship with her, Marcia occasionally felt her mother could be demanding and needy.

Marcia tended to keep herself very busy and spent most evenings and weekends out with friends or helping her mother. While she enjoyed this, she did her best to avoid time on her own because that was when she felt most lonely, a feeling she really struggled with. On

12 ACTivate Your Life

the rare occasion she spent an evening alone, she found herself comfort eating and drinking wine to dull these feelings. She tended to be very critical of herself when she did this – ‘you’re fat and lazy – such a loser’.

She had an active social life and enjoyed spending time with her friends and being involved in her local church. All her friends saw her as a bright, bubbly, cheerful person who was always busy and willing to help out. In her friendships, she often found herself giving a lot but receiving little in return. She felt a certain sense of pride that she was always there for other people, however she intermittently found herself wishing she had someone to look after her.

One thing Marcia did for herself was running. She would run most days in the morning and loved the sense of energy and freedom. She occasionally felt guilty about doing this as she felt she was being selfish, but she allowed herself this one ‘guilty pleasure’.

Recently, a close friend, Theresa, had noticed that she seemed down and asked whether there was something wrong. Initially, Marcia was reluctant to say anything: ‘You don’t want to hear me moaning on about my problems!’ But Theresa insisted, and Marcia opened up about all the things that seemed to be wrong with her and her life. Theresa asked her what she wanted out of life. Marcia was surprised to find herself becoming tearful: ‘I just want to be happy, like everyone else!’

How Open, Aware and Active Is Marcia?

With Theresa’s support, Marcia decided that she wanted to do something to change things. She bought a self-help book and

Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life 13

started to reflect a little on her thoughts and feelings, and how they seemed to keep getting in the way of the life she really wanted for herself. Slowly she came to see that the life she was living was not *Open, Aware, or Active*.

Open

Marcia noticed that there were certain thoughts, feelings, memories and sensations that she would just rather not have, so she ended up avoiding situations that might trigger them. In particular, feelings of anxiety and loneliness felt almost unbearable for her. There also seemed to be lots of rules – shoulds, oughts and musts – that Marcia was following in order to decide what she should think, feel and say. On reflection she could see how much these were restricting her choices in life.

Aware

Marcia noticed that she often tended to be ‘wrapped up’ in her thoughts – dwelling on the past or worrying about the future – and therefore not so aware of what was going on around her. She told Theresa that she struggled to really enjoy anything in life as she always had a sense that she was missing out and that other people were doing better than her. In particular, she could see that she was not so good at recognising her own feelings, desires and wishes.

Active

Listening to her talk, her friend Theresa heard several things that sounded as if they were important to Marcia. It was clear that her relationships with other people were important, in particular,

14 ACTivate Your Life

being there for others. At the same time, Theresa wondered about Marcia's values related to **herself** – when she wasn't looking after others what were the things that were important to her? It seemed that sometimes these weren't very clear for Marcia.

Samantha's Story – 'I'm just so angry all the time!'

Samantha is a forty-six-year-old woman who referred herself for therapy after being reprimanded at work by her manager, following a heated argument with a co-worker in a meeting. Samantha described struggling with her temper over the past year.

Samantha said that she wanted therapy 'in order to handle stress better' and 'act like the person I was before'. Samantha said that her problems with anger had not just been in the workplace, but also in her personal life. Her husband had confronted her about her anger, stating that her behaviour was making him unhappy. Samantha also had a falling out with a close friend, and described saying things in anger that she wished she could take back.

Samantha lived with her husband, Colin, and had two young children, Charlie (seven years old) and Emma (five years old). Samantha described that she and Colin had argued more since there had been changes in his work, and his employer had asked him to work longer hours. This had resulted in Colin helping less with child-care, and coming home late in the evening. Samantha felt guilty about arguing with him in front of the children. She also struggled with her sense of shame about 'losing it' when the children misbehaved, being quicker to raise her voice and harsher in how she reprimanded

them. Both Emma and Charlie told Samantha that they had 'felt scared of Mum' when she became angry like this.

Samantha worked part-time as a receptionist in a busy medical practice. Her job had become more stressful lately and involved interacting with patients in a GP surgery, which at times meant dealing with people who were demanding or were unhappy when appointments ran late. She said that she had found herself becoming more easily irritated by patients in these situations. While Samantha reported that she had never lost her temper at work, she had recently experienced occasions when she had felt strong urges to shout at people. She said that she worried about losing control in this way. In addition, she had been impatient with and critical of her colleagues, becoming annoyed by situations that she found unfair or by management decisions that she saw as errors. Samantha frequently found herself thinking that she shouldn't have to put up with other people doing a poor job. On one occasion she expressed this view to a co-worker in a meeting, leading to an argument where they both started shouting at each other. On several occasions she expressed her critical views to her manager, who responded defensively. Samantha reported feeling exasperated and trapped by her work situation: at times she felt like 'making a statement' by quitting her job, but she also knew that she would not do this because of family financial commitments.

Samantha reported that many times she felt her anger was justified ('I had to say something, I shouldn't have to put up with it'), that there were unfair and silly situations that she had to deal with, and that others did not

16 ACTivate Your Life

take the care and attention required to do things properly. On other occasions, however, she described feeling regretful for becoming annoyed, reflecting that she ‘made a mountain out of a molehill’ and that expressing her anger inflamed the situation rather than changing it for the better.

Samantha said that she had tried to cope with her temper by telling herself to calm down, and to lower her standards. She found that this didn’t really work: instead, she ended up getting frustrated and focused on how outrageous it was that she had to put up with a bad situation. Samantha described feeling her anger like a ‘red ball’ inside her chest, and while there were a number of occasions when she noticed this feeling and didn’t act on it, it felt as though things ‘build up like a pressure cooker that is just going to explode’. At times Samantha tried to avoid confrontations by telling people she didn’t want to discuss things while she was angry; she found that this just seemed to make people avoid discussing things with her.

How *Open, Aware and Active* Is Samantha?

In the session the therapist explored with Samantha about how her problems could be thought of in terms of the skills of *Open, Aware* and *Active*:

Open

Samantha said that she often felt controlled by her anger, which meant that she ended up acting in a way that didn’t reflect who she was and what was important to her. She also described

Introduction: Getting Unstuck and Enjoying Your Life 17

sometimes making conscious efforts to avoid or reduce the thoughts and feelings she had when something triggered her anger. Other times she would just allow herself to 'go with' her thoughts and feelings, usually finding herself getting further caught up with a sense of injustice and a need to be right. Neither approach seemed to be working for her.

Aware

Samantha was often strongly influenced by the thoughts, feelings and memories that showed up when she experienced provocations. She described having thoughts that had a very 'right and wrong' feel, and getting caught up with her judgements about the unfairness and pointlessness of situations. She also had quite critical thoughts about others and herself that she responded to as though they were the truth. At those times there was little room for Samantha to take a flexible view of her experiences, to take the perspective of others, or to treat herself with a sense of compassion.

Active

Samantha was not acting like the person she would like to be at home, in her friendships, or at work. She described doing things that sabotaged her efforts to repair or improve situations. From the position of needing to be right and defending what she felt was unfair, there was little room for her to do things that gave her a sense of vitality and meaning. Tearfully, Samantha said that she didn't want to act like someone that other people would rather avoid. Instead, she would like to be nurturing and warm to others, and to think creatively about how to improve the situation at work and home.

18 ACTivate Your Life

Dave's Story – 'Why am I always sad and low? I want to be free of this black hole.'

Dave sat in his chair and glared at the counsellor. He clearly didn't want to be in the meeting and said as much. 'Talking is a waste of time and will only make things worse for me.' He admitted that the only reason he was in the meeting was because his sister had pushed him into coming along. 'She thinks if I don't change soon, I might end up doing something silly. I suppose she might be right . . .' Dave reluctantly admitted that he was feeling depressed and very stuck, and that he didn't know how to get himself out of his situation. In spite of himself, Dave started to tell his story.

Dave was a forty-two-year-old marketing executive. Things had started to go downhill for Dave after he had recently been made redundant from his job. Up until six months ago, he had worked in a large sporting goods company. He had started in the company in his early twenties and had steadily worked his way up within the organisation through regular promotions. With each successive promotion, he found the responsibility and time commitment increased, which he enjoyed. The money gave him a greater sense of financial security and he liked the sense of respect from his colleagues. However, as Dave continued to progress in his career, he'd noticed the rest of life starting to fade into the background as work took up more and more time. He'd had a series of short, unfulfilling relationships that had often ended as he'd been unwilling to make a more serious commitment. He'd given up on the prospect of ever having children. Dave had a reasonably large circle of friends, who he knew mostly from work. Social

activities were largely based around drinking after work. At times he'd noticed a sense of loneliness and isolation, however, he didn't have too much time to think about this.

It was a major restructuring that had led to Dave being made redundant. Dave couldn't believe it had happened and had not seen the redundancy coming. Although the company had clearly struggled recently, he'd assumed his position would be safe. He felt like his whole life had been completely turned upside down and his identity had been stripped from him. He was devastated and described feeling 'completely at sea'.

In the weeks afterwards he experienced strong feelings of resentment about the fact he'd been made redundant. He often found himself spending long periods of time angrily ruminating about how his employer had let him go. The redundancy package he'd been given meant he didn't have to look for work immediately, for which he was grateful. He felt he needed time to collect himself before thinking about going back to work. Eventually, he started to send out his CV but received several early rejections that shook his confidence. He started to notice himself becoming increasingly pessimistic about the future, saying to himself, 'What's the point, no one is going to want to employ a washed-up has-been' or 'My skills aren't relevant in the job market these days'. Often at these times he would end up drinking to relieve some of these feelings, but found that this would spiral him into deep feelings of self-loathing because he would beat himself up for being 'soft'. He remembered his father telling him that men who couldn't handle tough times were weak.

20 ACTivate Your Life

Dave found himself withdrawing from his friends and family and spending increasing amounts of time watching television. Eventually, he'd noticed the feelings eased up and he felt more numb. Initially he'd enjoyed this respite, but he sometimes worried that he didn't have any drive or motivation.

He didn't feel he could open up to anyone about what he was going through as he worried what they would think of him. The longer he left contacting friends the harder it was to think about reaching out. After some time, his sister contacted him to see how he was doing. He'd never been particularly close to her, but he ended up telling her everything that had been going on. She had pushed him to seek out some help and had set up the initial assessment appointment with the counsellor for him.

How *Open, Aware and Active* Is Dave?

Open

Although Dave was experiencing, to some degree, a normal and natural response to a big life change, he had some fairly inflexible rules about how he should feel that made it hard for him to make space for his emotions. This meant he tended to do things that would temporarily distract him from feelings of sadness and hopelessness (like watching TV or drinking) and avoid situations that he anticipated might be difficult or uncomfortable (like seeing friends, talking about his problems or looking for work).

Alongside this, his therapist noticed that Dave had a tendency to respond to his negative, self-critical thoughts in one of two

unhelpful ways. He either gave in to them and went along with them or he ended up fighting and struggling with them. His therapist wondered about the impact these response styles had on Dave's ability to stick with doing the things that were important to him.

Aware

Dave was often very wrapped up in his thoughts, dwelling on the past and worrying about the future. This meant he was often not very mindful of how he was actually feeling. While this could provide short-term respite, it meant that he limited his ability to find out what worked best for him. Also, this reduced his ability to step outside of his experiences, and take a different perspective on what he was going through.

Active

Dave had clear values related to work and invested a lot in his job over the years. In some ways, this heavy investment had prevented him from thinking more broadly about how he wanted his life to be. As such, when faced with a significant change in his working life, he didn't have other resources to draw on to sustain him.

Dave's behaviour also appeared to be largely driven by a desire to think and feel better before he took action. He believed that only once he was thinking more positively and feeling more optimistic would he be able to do what he needed to do. This approach meant he severely limited his opportunities to take effective action in the present moment. Waiting until he was thinking and feeling better could mean he would be waiting for a long time!

22 ACTivate Your Life

How *Open, Aware and Active* Are You?

In this next section, we'd like to invite you to think about how *Open, Aware and Active* you are. We'd like you to fill in the worksheet below, answering the prompt questions, to help you get a sense of both where your skills lie and also the areas in which you need to improve.

OPEN, AWARE and ACTIVE WORKSHEET

Briefly describe here the main problem(s) that you had in mind when you picked up this book. Keep this problem in mind as you answer the following questions:

Open

Generally, how open are you to internal experiences such as thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories and physical sensations?

- *Which of these internal experiences do you struggle with particularly?*
- *Are there times when you're able to be open to uncomfortable internal experiences?*

24 ACTivate Your Life**Aware**

How aware are you of your thoughts and feelings as they occur? How good are you at recognising and labelling them? How mindful are you of what is going on around you?

- *Do you find yourself often running on autopilot, wrapped up in your own thoughts?*
- *How easy do you find it to step out of yourself to take someone else's perspective?*
- *Do you find it difficult to go easy on yourself and be self-compassionate?*

Active

Do you have a clear direction forward in life? Do you know what is important to you? Or do you feel lost and confused about how you want your life to be going?

- *What are the moments when you feel most alive, vital and engaged?*
- *How good are you at setting a course in life, making goals and sticking with them – even when things get rough?*

26 ACTivate Your Life

OPEN, AWARE and ACTIVE CHART

Once you've completed the *Open, Aware* and *Active* worksheet, use [Figure 1](#) to map out where your strengths lie and where you need to develop your skills. Give yourself a score on each of the three skills from 0 to 10. Then place an 'X' on the corresponding line. You can then use this chart to monitor your progress. Come back to it after you've read the book to see how you've developed.

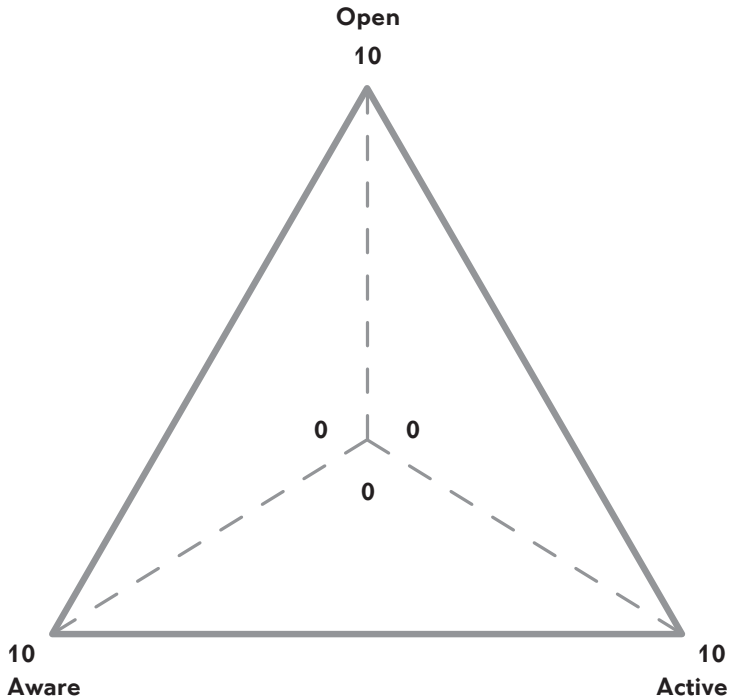


FIGURE 1