MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Feel Stuck

How to Move Forward When Everyone Else Is Apparently Succeeding



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

You open your phone for one innocent reason. Maybe you want to check the weather. Maybe you need to see what time the grocery store closes. Maybe you have forgotten whether Tuesday is still happening.

Three minutes later, you discover that someone you went to college with has been promoted to Vice President of Something Important. A former coworker has launched a company, raised money, bought a suspiciously photogenic house, and apparently developed visible abdominal muscles during the same quarter. Someone younger than you is giving an interview about "the lessons I learned building my first million-dollar business," which is particularly rude because you have just spent twelve minutes trying to cancel a free trial before it charges you $79.99.

You put the phone down.

Excellent.

You now feel behind in life.

Nothing in your actual situation changed during those three minutes. You still have the same job, the same abilities, the same relationships, the same plans, and approximately the same quantity of laundry waiting somewhere nearby. Yet your brain has received new evidence that everybody else is moving forward while you are apparently parked on the shoulder of existence with the hazard lights blinking.

This feeling is powerful because it does not usually announce itself as comparison. It arrives disguised as a reasonable conclusion.

"I should be further along by now."

That sentence sounds responsible. Mature, even. It has the tone of an accountant who has discovered a discrepancy. Unfortunately, nobody can tell you what “further along” means, where “now” was agreed upon, or who approved the schedule.

Still, your brain has paperwork.

Maybe you thought you would have a better career by this age. More money. A business. A partner. A house. A clearer purpose. Better habits. Better knees. At the very least, you expected to understand taxes without staring at a government website as if it had been translated from ancient submarine.

Instead, some parts of your life look strangely similar to how they looked a year ago. Or three years ago. You keep thinking about changes you want to make, but thinking has become its own full-time department. You research. You plan. You reconsider. You wait for the right moment. You watch videos made by people who confidently explain how to transform your life before breakfast.

By breakfast, you are exhausted.

Feeling stuck is not always the same as actually being stuck. This distinction matters because the solutions are completely different. Sometimes you genuinely need to make a change. You are in the wrong job, the wrong routine, the wrong relationship with your time, or the wrong strategy. Something has stopped working, and continuing exactly as before would be like pressing an elevator button seventeen times because perhaps the building respects passion.

But sometimes your life is moving and you cannot see it because you are measuring your progress against somebody else’s highlight reel, somebody else’s timing, or a fictional

version of yourself who was supposed to have completed several major life milestones by now.

That fictional person is extremely productive.

They wake up early, exercise regularly, answer emails immediately, invest sensibly, cook vegetables on purpose, maintain meaningful friendships, and somehow have a drawer where all the cables are organized.

You, meanwhile, have a bag of cables.

Nobody knows what they belong to. One may be from a printer purchased in 2009. You are afraid to throw it away because history has taught you that the exact cable you discard will become critically important within forty-eight hours.

This book is not going to tell you that everybody moves at their own pace and therefore you should simply relax while destiny arranges the furniture. That idea can be comforting, but comfort alone will not move your life forward. If you have been standing in the same place for too long, eventually somebody has to suggest using your legs.

We are going to figure out what kind of stuck you are.

Because there are several versions. There is “I know what I want, but I am afraid to start.” There is “I have too many options, so I choose none.” There is “I keep waiting until I feel motivated.” There is “I am making progress, but everybody else appears to be progressing faster.” There is “I have spent so much time choosing the perfect direction that moss is now growing on the decision.”

And then there is the especially irritating version: “I have no idea what I want, but I am absolutely certain I should already have it.”

That one is popular.

The first thing we will do is separate the emotional feeling of being behind from the practical problem of not moving. They overlap, but they are not identical. If you confuse them, you can spend years trying to fix the wrong thing. You may push yourself harder when what you really need is a clearer direction. Or you may keep analyzing your feelings when what you really need is to send the application, make the call, enroll in the course, cancel the thing, start the project, or finally admit that your current plan has the structural integrity of wet toast.

Then we will deal with comparison, because comparison does something extremely sneaky: it turns somebody else's result into evidence about your worth. You see a friend buying a house and somehow your rented apartment begins to look guilty. Someone announces an engagement, and your perfectly ordinary Tuesday suddenly has questions to answer. A coworker gets promoted, and instead of thinking, "Good for them," your brain opens an internal investigation titled WHAT EXACTLY HAVE WE BEEN DOING WITH OUR LIFE?

The investigation rarely ends well.

Part of the problem is that modern life gives you access to thousands of people whose achievements you were never designed to monitor. A hundred years ago, you might have compared yourself with a neighbor, a sibling, and one annoyingly successful cousin. Now you can compare your finances with a software engineer in Seattle, your body with a fitness creator in Miami, your career with a twenty-six-year-old founder in Austin, your kitchen with a woman whose refrigerator contains matching glass containers, and your

morning routine with a man who apparently journals at 4:45 a.m. voluntarily.

This is not comparison.

This is an international tournament you entered without reading the rules.

The goal of this book is not to make you stop caring about progress. Quite the opposite. I want you to care about progress enough to stop confusing it with performance. Real progress is often embarrassingly unphotogenic. It looks like sending one email you have avoided for two weeks. Updating a résumé. Saving the first $100. Saying no to something that keeps draining you. Spending thirty minutes learning instead of three hours researching how to learn.

You probably will not post, "Big news: today I finally created the spreadsheet."

And yet the spreadsheet may change more than the inspirational quote you saved six months ago and have not looked at since.

We will also make your next steps smaller. Not because you lack ambition, but because ambition has a bad habit of designing projects too large for Tuesday evening. Your brain says, "I need a completely new career." Useful. Very manageable. Shall we complete that before dinner?

A better question is: what action would make your situation five percent less stuck?

Not fixed.

Not transformed.

Not worthy of a documentary soundtrack.

Just less stuck.

That may sound unexciting, but movement has an advantage over inspiration: movement exists. Once you begin creating evidence that you can act, decide, adjust, and continue, the emotional fog starts losing authority. You no longer need to solve your whole life before taking the next step.

You need the next step before you can solve your life.

Throughout this book, we will look at the habits that keep you stationary: waiting for certainty, treating motivation like an appointment, confusing planning with progress, comparing timelines, fearing wrong decisions, trying to change too much at once, and abandoning useful actions because they do not produce dramatic results by Thursday.

You will learn how to choose a direction when you are uncertain, how to build momentum without requiring a personality transplant, how to measure progress in ways that do not make you miserable, and how to recover when your plan goes badly.

Because some plans will go badly.

This is not evidence that the universe has rejected your application.

It is normal.

Most people who appear to be “moving forward” are not marching confidently along a beautifully lit path. They are making guesses, changing direction, recovering from mistakes, trying things that fail, and occasionally pretending they knew what they were doing because LinkedIn does not have a button labeled “I Have No Idea, But This Seems Reasonable.”

You do not need to become fearless. You do not need perfect clarity. You do not need to catch up with everybody.

You need to stop standing still while arguing with the clock.
We will begin there.
Wklejony tekst

Chapter 1 - Are You Stuck or Just Looking Sideways?

Daniel was doing reasonably well until 8:17 on a Wednesday morning.

He had a job that paid the bills, a decent apartment, a few people he genuinely liked, and a vague plan to move into a better role sometime within the next year. His coffee was hot. His inbox had not yet become openly hostile. There was no emergency.

Then he opened LinkedIn.

A former coworker had become a director. Someone from college had launched a startup. A man Daniel vaguely remembered from a conference had posted a photograph from an airport lounge beside the phrase “Building something exciting.”

Daniel was suddenly behind.

Nothing had changed in his life between 8:16 and 8:17. He had not lost money, ability, time, or opportunity. Nobody had arrived at his apartment and removed three years from his résumé. He had simply looked sideways.

This is one of the most important distinctions in the entire problem: sometimes you are genuinely stuck, and sometimes you are experiencing the feeling of being stuck because someone else appears to be moving faster.

Those are not the same thing.

If your car is parked because the engine is broken, you need a repair.