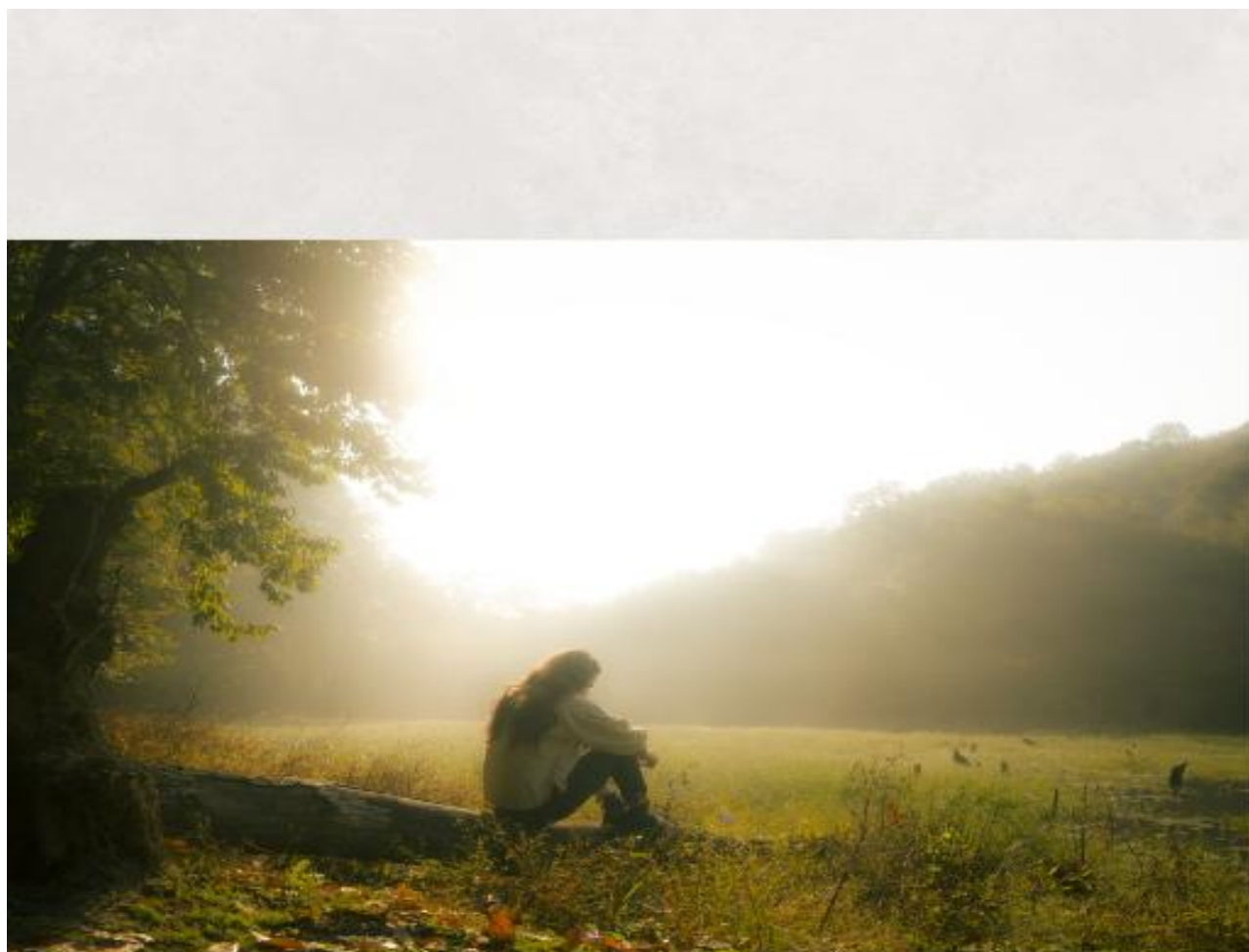




HOW LIFE REALLY WORKS

*Understanding Your Brain, Your Thoughts, Your
Feelings, and the Results You Create*

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Welcome

Have you ever found yourself doing something you know you don't really want to do?

Maybe you keep putting off something that's important to you. Maybe you stay in a situation that's no longer serving you because changing it feels too difficult. Maybe you find yourself thinking the same negative thoughts over and over again, even though you know they're not helping.

Or perhaps you've wondered, *“Why do I keep doing this? Why can't I just change?”*

If you've ever felt this way, I want you to know something important: **There is nothing wrong with you.** Your brain is doing exactly what it has been designed to do.

That doesn't mean you're powerless. In fact, understanding how your brain works can give you more power than you may realize.

In this short eBook, we're going to explore two simple things that I use in my coaching:

The first thing is a concept called **The Motivational Triad** and the second is a tool called **The Model**.

Learning how these two things work together can help you understand why you think and behave the way you do, why change can feel uncomfortable, and how you can begin making more intentional choices about the life you're creating.

My hope is that this eBook doesn't just give you information. I hope it gives you a new way of looking at yourself.

Let's get started!

How Your Brain Is Wired

Let's begin with something important to understand about your brain.

Your brain's primary purpose is to keep you alive.

Your brain is constantly taking in information from your environment and what's happening around you. It's paying attention to circumstances, other people, your surroundings, and even your own thoughts, looking for anything that could potentially be a threat.

When you really think about that, it's remarkable. Your brain is constantly working in the background to protect you. But here's where things can get a little tricky:

Your brain doesn't always recognize the difference between something that is truly dangerous and something that is simply **uncomfortable**.

An uncomfortable conversation isn't necessarily dangerous. The possibility of failing isn't necessarily dangerous. Someone's opinion of you isn't necessarily dangerous. Trying something you've never done before isn't necessarily dangerous.

But your brain may react to those experiences as though you need to protect yourself, and that's where some of our patterns begin. Your brain may essentially say, *"Wait - I don't like this! This feels really uncomfortable. Let's just forget it."*

Or:

"This is going to take a lot of work. Let's just stay where we are."

Understanding this is very important because it helps us stop looking at ourselves as broken or incapable when we're struggling to make a change. Instead, we can begin to recognize what our brains are naturally trying to do—protect us from what it considers to be a threat.

The way I like to explain this is through something called **The Motivational Triad**.

The Motivational Triad

The Motivational Triad describes three basic things our brains naturally tend to do without us even being aware of it:

1. Seek Pleasure and Reward

Your brain wants to move toward things that feel good or rewarding. It wants comfort, fun, satisfaction, and positive experiences.

That might mean enjoying your favorite food more often than you should, binge-watching your favorite television show, aimlessly scrolling through your phone, seeking out ways to earn praise, relaxing after a long day, or doing something else that gives you an immediate sense of pleasure or reward (*hello, Amazon!*).

There's nothing inherently wrong with pleasure. The important thing is simply to recognize that your brain naturally seeks it.

2. Avoid Pain and Negativity

Your brain also wants to get away from things that feel painful, difficult, uncomfortable, or negative.

This can include physical discomfort, but it can also include emotional discomfort, such as fear, embarrassment, rejection, uncertainty, failure, or disappointment.

Your brain naturally wants to protect you from those experiences because it is convinced that they will kill you.

3. Conserve Energy

Finally, your brain wants to conserve energy.

Your brain uses a tremendous amount of energy every day, so it naturally looks for ways to make life more efficient. One way it does that is through habits and familiar patterns. When you've done something repeatedly, your brain doesn't have to work as hard to figure out what to do next. That's why familiar patterns can be so powerful—even when they're patterns you don't particularly like.

Sometimes conserving energy looks like repeating a bad habit that you've been trying to break or staying in a bad relationship longer than you should simply because it's familiar.

And sometimes it looks like simply **not taking action at all**.

Think about that for a minute. Your brain can say, *"This is comfortable and I know what to expect, so let's do more of that."*

Or, *"This feels very uncomfortable. Let's get away from it."*

Or, *"This is going to take too much effort. Let's just stay where we are."*

And often, this happens automatically—as our brains run on autopilot unless we are really paying attention to what we're thinking.

You don't necessarily sit down and consciously decide to avoid something or repeat an old habit. Your brain simply looks for what's familiar and that's why we can find ourselves repeating behaviors, patterns, and habits that we truly want to change.

You Are Not Your Brain's Automatic Response

Now for the really good news—You have another incredibly important ability: **the ability to become aware of what is happening inside your mind and make intentional choices**.

Though we can't necessarily control every thought that pops into our minds, we can become aware of our thoughts. And once we're aware of them, we can begin to question them. We can ask ourselves:

Is this thought actually true?

Is it helping me or hurting me?

Is this how I want to think about this situation?

What else could be possible here?

This is where the prefrontal cortex becomes important. It plays a major role in things like planning, decision-making, attention, and regulating our responses. So while your primitive brain may say: *"Avoid this. This feels uncomfortable!"*, you have the cognitive ability to pause and ask: **"Is this actually dangerous, or is it simply uncomfortable?"**

That pause is incredibly powerful. The goal isn't to get rid of the part of your brain that wants to protect you. It's there for a reason. The goal is to understand it, recognize when it is influencing your decisions, and learn to make more intentional choices.

And that brings us to something I think is incredibly important when it comes to creating change.

Expanding Your Capacity

If we want to grow as human beings, we have to become willing to expand our capacity for things that may feel uncomfortable. We can't always give up simply because things don't go according to plan.

My mentor and teacher in coach training give a perfect example of this that I want to share with you here: Imagine a baby learning to walk. Think about what that baby does. They stand up, take a step, and fall down. And then they get back up and do it again.

They might fall down dozens—or even hundreds—of times before they're strong enough and coordinated enough to take those first few steps, but you never see a baby fall down and say, *“I guess walking just isn't for me because it's way too hard and I can't do it.”*

They simply keep learning. They're building strength, developing coordination, and expanding their capacity. And that's something we have to be willing to do as adults, too.

Growth Requires Risk

If we aren't willing to expand our capacity for risk, uncertainty, and discomfort, we're probably going to stay stuck in the same patterns and the same life we've always had. Sure, that life may be comfortable, but comfortable doesn't necessarily mean fulfilling.

Remember, your brain naturally wants to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and conserve energy, so when you decide you want to change something in your life, your brain may try to pull you right back toward what's familiar and comfortable. That's why change can feel so difficult.

It isn't necessarily because something is wrong with you. It's because your brain is doing what it is designed to do.

If we want something different, we must be willing to do something different.

That means being willing to step outside of our comfort zone, take some risks, and **feel those uncomfortable feelings without immediately trying to escape them.**

Imagine Something Different

I believe that growing and creating a life you love is important. We only get this one life here on Earth, and I believe God has a purpose for each one of us, so if there are things you want to do—maybe start a new hobby, create a new relationship, become stronger and healthier, change careers, start a business, or simply become a different version of yourself—I don't think we're meant to automatically talk ourselves out of those things because they feel uncomfortable.

Instead, we can start by **imagining what we want.**

Here's something interesting: What we imagine for our lives is often limited by what we've been exposed to in the past. If you've never seen something, experienced something, or even considered that something was possible for someone like you, it can be difficult to imagine yourself doing it.

If you want to believe that something bigger is possible for you, you must expose yourself to new possibilities. Seek out ideas for things you may be interested in and then read about them, learn about them, listen to people who have done whatever it is that you're interested in, and really consider what could be possible.

Allow yourself to think: **“What if I could do that, too?”**

Before we ever take action to create something new in our life, we must first be able to see the possibility in our minds.

Intentional Thoughts Create New Possibilities

This is where our thoughts become really important. We can begin creating intentional thoughts about what we want and what we believe is possible for us. Instead of automatically thinking: *“I can't do that,”* we can choose to block that thought and, instead, ask: **“What would I need to believe in order to take the next step toward believing that it is possible for me?”**

Instead of: *“This is too hard,”* we might think: **“This is uncomfortable because I'm doing something I've never done before.”**

Instead of: “*What if I fail?*”, we can ask: “**What could I learn if this doesn't go exactly the way I planned?**”

These are intentional thoughts, and over time, intentional thoughts can become beliefs, and those beliefs can influence the actions we're willing to take.

You Have to Be Willing to Feel Uncomfortable

Creating the life you want does not mean everything will suddenly become easy. On the contrary. You're going to feel fear. You may feel doubt, nervousness, or uncertainty. You may even wonder if you're making a mistake. And that's okay.

Uncomfortable feelings don't necessarily mean we should stop. Sometimes they simply mean you're doing something new.

Remember the baby learning to walk—Falling down wasn't proof that the baby should stop trying. It was part of learning how to walk.

Sometimes the uncomfortable feelings we experience while we're growing are simply part of **expanding our capacity**, so if there is something you want for your life, I want you to start thinking differently about the discomfort that comes with pursuing it.

You don't have to wait until you're completely confident. You don't have to wait until you're no longer afraid. And you don't have to know exactly how everything is going to turn out.

You simply must be willing to **set the goal, take the next step, and be willing to feel whatever comes up along the way**, because that's how we grow. That's how we expand our capacity. And that's how we begin creating a life that is different from the one we've always had.

The Model — CTFAR

Now that we understand a little more about how our brains are wired, I want to introduce you to the main tool that I use in my coaching practice all the time: It's called **The Model**.

The Model gives us a simple way to examine what's happening in our lives and, more importantly, what's happening **inside our minds**.

The Model consists of five components:

C — Circumstances

T — Thoughts

F — Feelings

A — Actions

R — Results

CTFAR.

Once you understand this model, you have a tremendous amount of power over your life because you can begin to see the connection between what happens in your life, what your thoughts are about what's happening, how you feel, what you do, and the results you're creating.

Let's break it down.

C — Circumstances

Circumstances are the things you have absolutely no **control over**. They're the facts of a situation. The weather is a circumstance. Other people's actions are circumstances. Things happening in the world are circumstances. Your past is a circumstance. Basically, anything that is outside of your control and cannot be disputed is a circumstance. It's simply the facts of what happened.

And here's something really important: **Circumstances are neutral.**

They don't come with a meaning attached to them. We give them meaning through our thoughts. That brings us to the next part.

T — Thoughts

Thoughts are simply **sentences in your head**. They're what your brain is telling you about your circumstances, and your thoughts are subjective. Two people can experience the exact same circumstance and have completely different thoughts about it. That's because the circumstance itself is neutral until we give it meaning through the thoughts we think about it.

The circumstance isn't creating the meaning—**Your thought about the circumstance is.**

And that thought leads us to the next part of the model.

F — Feelings

Feelings are the emotional experience we have that is caused by a thought we're having. Typically, we can describe a feeling with one word: Sad. Happy. Angry. Anxious. Frustrated. Peaceful. Excited.

It's also important to distinguish feelings from physical sensations.

For example, if you have an infection and develop a fever, that's a physical sensation caused by something happening physically in your body. That's different from an emotional feeling.

If you take a walk outside, feel the sunshine and breeze on your face, and think, “*This is wonderful*”, you might experience a feeling of calm or happiness. That is a feeling caused by a thought you’re thinking.

Can you see the difference?

The important thing to understand is that **our thoughts create our feelings**. And those feelings then influence what we do next.

A — Actions

Actions are the things we **do—or don't do**. Everything we choose to do, as well as the things we avoid doing, falls into this category. And our feelings influence our actions.

If you're feeling confident, you may be more willing to take action. If you're feeling afraid, you may avoid taking action. If you're feeling discouraged, you may decide not to try.

So, we have our circumstance → we have the thought we're thinking about that circumstance → that thought creates our feeling → and that feeling influences our actions.

Which brings us to the final part of the model.

R — Results

Results are the things we create or experience because of the actions we take—or don't take. Our actions create results and this is where The Model becomes really powerful.

When you look at the entire process, you can see the connection:

Circumstances → Thoughts → Feelings → Actions → Results

You may not be able to control what happens around you. You can't control other people. You can't control the weather. And you can't change the past. But you can become aware of what you're thinking about all those circumstances.

When you become aware of your thoughts, you can begin to intentionally choose what you want to think and believe. That can change how you feel.

And when you change how you feel, you're more able to choose actions that move you toward the results you want.

That's the power of The Model.

It doesn't mean you can control everything that happens in your life, but it does mean you can learn to understand what's happening inside of you and become much more intentional about how you respond to the life you're living.

See the Model in Your Own Life

Let's make this practical with an example:

Imagine your husband says he'll call you later, but several hours have passed and you haven't hear from him. The **circumstance** is simply: **"My husband hasn't called me."** That's the fact.

Now your brain may immediately add a thought: **"He doesn't care about me."** That thought creates a feeling. Perhaps you feel **hurt**. Because you feel hurt, you may withdraw, become quiet, or decide not to talk to him. Those are your actions.

And the result might be that you feel even more disconnected from your husband.

NOW imagine the circumstance stays exactly the same, but you think: **"I wonder what's going on? Maybe something came up."** You may feel curious or neutral instead of hurt.

Your action may be to simply check in with him.

And the result may be completely different.

Notice something important: **The circumstance didn't change.** Your thought about the circumstance changed. And that changed everything that came afterward.

This doesn't mean you should ignore genuine problems or pretend everything is okay when it isn't. It means you can learn to separate the facts of a situation from the story your brain is telling you about those facts. That's a powerful skill.

A Simple CTFAR Exercise

Think about something in your life that isn't going the way you want it to and walk through these five questions:

Circumstance

What are the actual facts about this situation?

What truly happened that a camera could have recorded?

Thought

What am I thinking about those facts?

What story am I telling myself?

Feeling

How does that thought make me feel? Describe that feeling in one word.

Action

What am I doing—or not doing—because I feel that way?

Result

What result is that action creating in my life?

Then ask yourself one more question:

If I want a different result, what would I need to think, believe, or do differently?

You don't have to immediately change anything, just start with awareness.

Your Brain Isn't the Enemy

As you begin learning these concepts, I want you to remember something: Your brain isn't your enemy. It isn't trying to ruin your life. It's trying to protect you. It wants to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and conserve energy. Those instincts have helped human beings survive, but sometimes what protects us from discomfort can also keep us from growth. That's why awareness is so important.

You can learn to notice when your brain is telling you things like, *“This is too hard. Don't do it. What if you fail? What will people think? Just stay where you are because it's so much easier!”*

And instead of automatically obeying that thought, you can pause. You can become curious. You can ask:

Is this actually dangerous, or is it simply uncomfortable?

Is this thought helping me?

What do I actually want?

What result do I want to create?

What is one small step I could take toward that result?

You don't have to silence your brain. You simply must stop allowing every thought it produces to make your decisions for you.

Reflection & Journaling Prompts

Now it's your turn. Find a quiet place and spend a little time with these questions. You don't need to answer them all at once. Let yourself think, write, and explore.

- 1. Where in my life do I feel stuck right now?**
- 2. What am I currently avoiding because it feels uncomfortable?**
- 3. What might my brain be trying to protect me from?**
- 4. Am I seeking immediate pleasure or comfort in a way that keeps me from something I really want in the future?**
- 5. Where am I conserving energy by staying in a familiar pattern?**
- 6. What is something I would love to do if I knew I couldn't fail?**
- 7. What possibilities might I be unable to see simply because I haven't been exposed to them yet?**
- 8. What is one new possibility I could explore?**
- 9. Think of one situation that is frustrating you. What are the actual circumstances (the facts) of the situation?**

10. What thoughts are you having about those circumstances?
11. How do those thoughts make you feel?
12. What actions are you taking—or avoiding—because of those feelings?
13. What result are those actions creating?
14. If you want a different result, what might you need to think, feel, or do differently?

And finally:

What if the discomfort I'm feeling isn't a sign that I should stop?

What if it's simply a sign that I'm growing?

Sit with that for a while.

A Final Thought

Understanding your brain doesn't mean you'll never feel afraid again.

Understanding The Model doesn't mean you'll suddenly control every circumstance in your life, because life is a 50/50 balance of positive and negative. It's just a part of life that comes along with being a human.

And creating the life you want doesn't mean everything will become easy.

What these tools can give you is something much more useful: **Awareness.**

You can begin by noticing your patterns instead of simply living inside them. You can begin separating circumstances from the stories you're telling yourself about those circumstances. You can become curious about your thoughts. You can learn to allow uncomfortable feelings without immediately trying to escape them. And you can begin making intentional choices about the actions you're willing to take.

Sometimes the biggest changes in our lives begin with something very small: A thought. A question. A moment of awareness. A willingness to pause before automatically doing what you've always done.

You don't have to change your entire life today. You don't have to have everything figured out. You simply must become willing to see what's happening inside your own mind, because **awareness is where change begins.**

And when you're ready to take the next step, you don't have to figure everything out by yourself. That's where coaching can help.

Coaching isn't about someone telling you what you should think, what decisions you should make, or what your life is supposed to look like. It's about having someone help you see what you may not be seeing for yourself. Someone who can help you slow things down, examine your thoughts, understand the patterns keeping you stuck, and decide intentionally what you want to do next.

You get to decide what you want your life to look like.

And you get to decide what you're willing to do to create it. I'm here if you'd like some help along the way.

Want to Go Deeper?

If this eBook gives you a new perspective on your thoughts, your patterns, or the results you're creating, I'd love to help you explore it more deeply.

Through **Stephanie Stewart Coaching, LLC**, I help women slow down, get clear about what they really want, understand the thoughts and patterns that may be keeping them stuck, and begin creating intentional change.

You don't have to know exactly what you need before you reach out. That's what the **Fresh Start Session** is for. It's simply an opportunity for us to talk about where you are, where you'd like to be, and whether coaching might be a good fit for you. Visit StephanieStewartCoaching.com/coaching to find out more and schedule your FREE coaching session.

You don't have to have your whole life figured out. You just have to be willing to take the first step. And I'm here if you need me.

Thanks for reading and I hope this little book is helpful!

Stephanie Stewart

Certified Life Coach

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