

# A CLOUDLESS MIND



PAUL SMIT & SCOTT BYRD

# A CLOUDLESS MIND

A exploration into the  
true nature of YOU and  
those you lead

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**BY**

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## Preface

Typically, this is where we would recruit a famous CEO to reassure you that we – Paul and Scott – are exceptional performers in our respective fields. This is where you are comforted about our expertise and fed vague platitudes designed to make you excited about what's to come. This is also the section you always skip because you have better things to do. So does the CEO author, who gets his communications assistant to write these sorts of things anyway. So let's just move on to the introduction, shall we?

## Introduction

Here is where we would normally explain to you what an amazing book this is and how everything you will learn will blow your mind and transform you from a struggling manager into Alexander the Great. But you didn't pick this up for hype, you picked it up for insights. We won't waste your time with promotion. We trust that you have a discerning eye and are capable of testing the information we present against your own experience. We aren't here to sell you a quick-fix system or convince you of a progressive management style, office plan, or approach to team-building. We are here to share foundational insights that cut through the noise and change your experience of life and leadership. Let's just get to the first chapter and get moving.

# CHAPTER

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**01**

Storytellers

Now that you made it all the way through the preface and introduction, it's clear how committed you are. It's our hope that with all of the energy saved during the introduction and preface phases, you are awake, fully engaged, and prepared to see an entirely new perspective on the world than the one you've been living with for your entire life. Yes, that's a big statement. And we mean it.

It's been said that 70 percent of all leaders are stressed out and weary from anxiety. Obviously, these aren't the leaders that have read and embraced the insights in this book. The last thing a stressed-out leader is capable of is experiencing effortless. Deadline pressures, people issues, and shareholder demands are experienced in a way that gives rise to tension and constant frustration. The enlightened, effortless leader sees the world differently. Through understanding the true nature of their own mind, a relaxed, powerful state of being becomes natural and durable.

To be clear, you won't have to listen to vegetarian music, and we won't be pointing you to a new mindfulness meditation practice, some cool new breathing technique, or even the latest leadership models. We'll be working with hard science to deliver radical insights. Grasping some of the concepts in this book may be a struggle at first. But don't worry. This is not an arcane science book. This book is about discovering the peace and power that lies within all of us. We'll just have a lot more fun getting to that place than your peers will have grinding through another day. Before we move any further, you should know that there are no instructions to follow, nor are there any lesson plans or management models in this book. This book is for effortless leadership. Why would we give you a list of onerous tasks?

Let's dive in.

## Understand Your Processing Power

You may already know that there are two distinct levels to our brain, which we'll call the conscious and unconscious minds. Did you know that your unconscious mind processes information at 11,200,000 bits per second? If you're not a computer scientist, this may not mean much to you. But you should know that, from this fact alone, you are nothing short of a miracle in shoes. There are only a few computers ever invented that even come close to this processing power. IBM's Watson might best you, but the smartphone in your pocket has nothing on your unconscious. The conscious mind, which comprises your awareness, is vastly different. It moves at a comparative snail's pace of about 60 bits per second.

Before you get down on your conscious mind, we should give credit where credit is due. Even though it only works at 60 bits per second, it may actually be the coolest piece of tech in the modern world. Without the conscious mind, we would not be able to experience any of the beauty in life. It's our conscious mind that allows us to enjoy the smooth groove of a great jazz piece, or the complex flavors of an amazing meal, or the wonder of a spectacular sunset. If we didn't have a conscious mind, it would be like being at the best party of your life while laying passed out on the couch.

Sometimes, you might feel like you actually are just passed out on the couch in your own life. Have you ever felt like you're being guided by impulses, patterns, and emotions you don't understand? You're probably not crazy. It makes perfect sense once you know that your conscious awareness is 200,000 times slower than your unconscious mind. Don't let this scare you too much. Your brain is just trying to run an efficient organization, and it doesn't need

to let your conscious mind know every detail.

To truly comprehend the rest of this book you will need to fully understand the enormous disparity between the processing speed of the two levels of mind. Use your 60 bits to ponder the tremendous implications. Consider the possibility that knowing this one data point could alter the entire way you see the world and operate in it. Does a sense of wonder arise when you consider this possibility, or do you notice fear popping up? Keep your conscious mind tuned in: Examining this insight may change the way you look at yourself, your business, and your life.

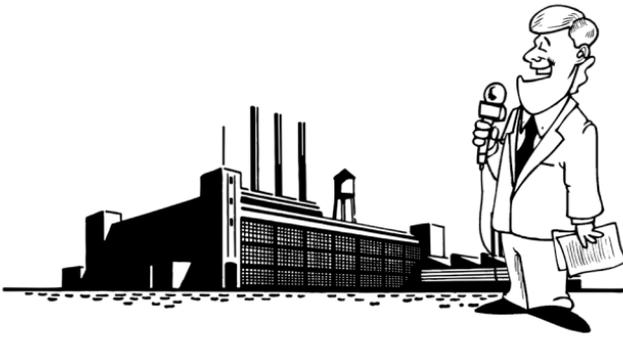
## Storytellers

Dutch professor Ap Dijksterhuis, a thought leader on thought itself and the bestselling author of *The Smart Unconscious*, provides what is perhaps our favorite metaphor for visualizing how the two parts of our brain work together. Dijksterhuis brilliantly explains that our unconscious brain is like a gigantic factory with 200,000 workers. Standing in front of the factory is a reporter. We know that our conscious brain, the reporter, is not very well informed, given its processing limitations. To compensate for these limitations, it makes up all kinds of stories about what is happening in the factory. Just like a television reporter, he feels the need to explain what is going on like he knows all the facts. And, what's even worse, the reporter thinks that he is the CEO and that he controls everything that is happening in the factory. The reporter actually believes his own story and that he can control all 200,000 workers! He has no idea that he is simply a storyteller.

Thankfully, the latest research from the field of neuroscience gives us a much clearer understanding of the relationship between the unconscious brain and the conscious brain – our storyteller. This groundbreaking research states that the unconscious brain does everything, and only afterward do we become aware of it. So, in a way, we are always living a fraction of a second in the past.

How are you sitting right now? Interestingly, as soon as your attention is brought to your posture, the reporter probably starts to explain why you are sitting the way you are. But notice that this only happens after your awareness is brought to your posture. Are the reasons the reporter gave for your posture accurate? No! In reality, it is impossible for the conscious mind to understand the complexity of decision-making occurring deeper within your

brain. But that does not stop it from making up a story to explain it. Everything you do, everything you think, and every choice you make has all been determined by the factory, and afterward the reporter works to fit it into a narrative. We are like football announcers constantly commenting on the game, while at the same time believing that the game is happening thanks to our commentary.



## The Muppets

Do you remember the two characters in The Muppet Show that sat up in the balcony? They constantly commented on everything that was happening on the stage. That's right, Statler and Waldorf! Just like the reporter in your head they have all types of commentary and stories about what is happening on the stage.

Now, imagine you are sitting in a movie theater. You're peacefully relaxed as you watch the movie unfold, scene by scene. As the story plays out you experience a whole collection of emotions. At times you are excited or scared, sometimes you laugh, and other times you feel deep sadness. Because you experience all of these emotions without resistance, self-judgment, or analysis, it feels wonderful. That's why you came to the movie in the first place! Isn't it interesting that people actually pay for horror movies to get frightened out of their minds? Or, they'll happily say, "I cried like a baby during that movie." Why do we do this? Because when we experience the emotions with no resistance we actually enjoy the experience.

Let's go back to our Muppets in the balcony for a quick look at how they experience the movie:

*"Watch out, Brad!"*

*"I knew that was going to happen, man!"*

*"Great, now you're in jail, you idiot!"*

*"What if this ends badly?"*

*"What if he doesn't manage to escape?"*

*“By the way, check out his shirt, it’s way too tight.”*

*“Right? He probably shrunk it in the dryer.”*

*“You think he has a dryer at home?”*

*“You should hang a shirt like that to dry on a line, it works better.”*

*“Or he could have bought a larger size.”*

*“But anyway, he should have stayed in Tibet!”*

*“Yes, but that girl did run away with his friend. Why does this always happen to him?”*

*“He should have been friendlier in the beginning.”*

Due to the Muppets’ senseless drivel, you can no longer enjoy the movie. You may even end up shouting, “Could you please quiet down?! You’re ruining the entire movie!”

Sounds familiar? We have this Muppets-style dialogue running in our minds almost constantly. Our brains are chattering endlessly, creating stories and coming up with opinions on events both real and imagined. These voices provide humans with the evolutionary benefits of analysis, projecting the future, and applying old information to novel situations. But they are just broadcasts from the reporter, and when we believe every story the reporter drops into our consciousness, unwelcome things begin to happen in our mind and lives. Understanding what our mind is doing frees us from listening to the Muppets and the commentary that takes us away from being present in the moment.

## Cognitive Dissonance

We all have convictions, ideas, and opinions about ourselves. When the factory does something that contradicts the views we have about ourselves, the reporter comes up with a story to make us feel better. It means that we try to justify our actions by creating a story expressly designed to make us feel better about our choice.

Let's use the example of getting into top physical condition. Most people can relate to trying to improve their health at one point or another because we believe it will make us happier or able to operate more effectively. Still, our actions often don't line up with this "believed" thought. At night when you automatically find yourself walking to the refrigerator and taking out the cookies and chocolate, the reporter might show up with his commentary:

*"You can't eat vegetables all of the time, you have to have some balance!"*

*"You have to enjoy life and live a little!"*

*"I'll just have half a bowl tonight and eat only healthy foods for the rest of the week."*

*"I exercised yesterday, so it's fine."*

The next day, the good intentions to skip dessert the rest of the week seem distant. Your brain might highlight that you ate mostly healthy food the day before despite your evening slip up, providing wiggle room to give yourself a pass on those big diet and exercise plans. This is partially because the reporter in our head has a tendency to adjust memories, which make our thoughts about the past subjective and unreliable. A few days later

when you go to remember that night, you'll be remembering the memory, not the night itself. This is how events and situational truths can be so easily distorted, and why two people can have remarkably different accounts of the same event.

Once you fully understand both cognitive dissonance and the distorted quality of memory, you will experience every conversation in a totally different way. It will help you see through people's stories, and you might even start to laugh at your own.

## Opposite Statements

Another form of easily recognizable cognitive dissonance is a concept we call “opposite statements.” Say you heard someone say, unprompted, “I was really sad about the breakup with my girlfriend, but I’m over it now.” No, he’s not! It would never occur to him to say anything like this if the pain of the breakup wasn’t still at the forefront of his mind. I witnessed this firsthand not long ago when my dad looked out of the window and said, “It’s another rainy day, but I’m not letting my mood depend on the weather.” Clearly, his mood had been affected by the weather, and his words were a response to that. If someone isn’t bothered by something, they wouldn’t mention it. Imagine you are visiting a friend that has music on. You would never say: “I don’t mind that the music is on.” It would simply not appear in your awareness. You would only say something if the music was bothering you. This is the reporter doing sloppy justification work and trying to convince itself that whatever is happening is, in fact, in alignment with the story it’s telling.

In my private coaching practice, I encountered opposite statements constantly. Whenever a high-powered CEO would tell me he wasn’t going to drink that night, I knew the chances were extremely high that he would. Someone that isn’t grappling with self-control around alcohol wouldn’t feel compelled to say something like that. They just wouldn’t drink, sans commentary. The chances that the factory produces a martini in his hand is incredibly high, despite what the reporter has to say. The same goes for watching porn, overeating, shopping, or any other behavior that feels uncontrollable and impulsive. Recognizing opposite statements provides insights for tuned-in leaders. If the leader is awake to how the reporter works, he or she can be more aware of the unconscious mind’s habits and desires and can better predict future actions.

## Colored Glasses

The reporter obviously doesn't have the full picture about what's happening inside the factory. And, as it turns out, the factory workers are only able to see the rest of the world through the distorted windows of the building. So by the time information about the broader world goes through your unconscious and gets to your conscious mind, you're seeing a heavily edited reality.

It's like going through life wearing colored glasses. You see the world through your own filters, and what you see is never objective. These colored glasses are permanently attached to your face, but there may be a time when you become aware that you are wearing them. When this realization hits you, you inevitably discover that none of your thoughts and opinions are true. Not one of them! They are only true for you. There is nothing right or wrong about these colored glasses, but effortless, enlightened leadership requires that you know you are wearing them and that everyone else is too. These glasses will never come off and we will never be able to look at the world with complete objectivity. By knowing this, the enlightened leader is less identified with their own thoughts, ideas, and opinions, and is more open-minded and capable of truly innovative thinking. This leader encourages humility, respect, and openness among their team, as this insight leads people to value their peers' unique, subjective contributions (as well as their own) and to listen before asserting their own rigid truth.

Some of your team's "unique" contributions might seem utterly foreign to you, but you can learn to glean the value from other perspectives without your loud judgments getting in the way. For instance, let's say that someone opens a meeting by proposing that bananas are the best fruit. Perhaps you love bananas. But I don't.

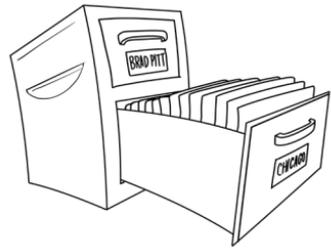
What does that say about bananas? Nothing. A banana is simply a banana. Every opinion we have about bananas comes from subjective thoughts, and the same is true about the oddball idea you overheard in your last meeting. Your personal reaction might be instructive, but you shouldn't forget that you are bringing your subjective vision to the table, not the ultimate truth about the idea's viability. By holding your opinions lightly, you can more effectively consider ideas outside of your norm.

## Shortcuts

As we have just learned, we are storytellers who are full of cognitive dissonance and opposite statements and see the world through reality-distorting glasses. But, wait...there's more. Our brains are also shortcut-creating machines. Please take two seconds to think of a famous movie star.

### Done?

Let's assume you chose Brad Pitt. Why did you choose him? Your brain certainly didn't go through every movie star you have ever known. It simply created a shortcut and Brad's name shows up. Now, think of a city in the United States. Instantly one



comes to your mind. Let's say it was Chicago. Your brain didn't go through every city you know in the U.S. It went to Chicago effortlessly.

The brain creates shortcuts to save energy. It's like we all have a filing cabinet in our head with a label on the front of each door. In one file cabinet you have all of the movie stars you know, but "Brad Pitt" is written on the label. Marketers take advantage of this tendency to make shortcuts by exposing people to repetitive messages that connect a category to a specific brand, such as McDonald's for fast food. Some brands and products have even become synonymous in common speech; you might say you're buying "a coke" even if you're not buying Coca-Cola specifically. Marketers are, in essence, naming your filing cabinets for you.

This is a tendency to be aware of, as these shortcuts inform our

opinions and allow us to come to conclusions based on limited information and analysis. What is your opinion of Steve Jobs? Your brain can come up with an opinion about Steve Jobs in a millisecond, even though you could never go through all of the information you have ever heard about Steve Jobs, much less all of the information there is to know about Steve Jobs. Your brain creates a shortcut and says he's either crazy, brilliant, or whatever trait you read about him once in a magazine. You probably don't even remember where you came across the information or why you feel the way you do. Knowing that our opinions are created by our tendency for shortcutting, we can get less attached to our opinions and be more open-minded as we become aware of our subjective nature.

Subjectivity, as you might have guessed, is dependent on there being a "subject". But with everything we know about the workers in our mind, can we say who that subject is, really? Your intuitions and assumptions might be monumentally wrong.

Let's explore how our brains create and relate to this subject.

*For the whole book, please visit*  
[www.cloudlessmind.com](http://www.cloudlessmind.com)