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Gift

MINDSET®

*Unwrap the 12 Gifts to lead
and live a life of purpose,
connection and contribution*

Renée Giarrusso





One

WHY THE GIFT MINDSET® MATTERS

I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it. —Maya Angelou

For many years I have embraced the Gift Mindset. As I shared the concept with others, they found that adopting this powerful mindset helped them to embrace challenges and successes, both in and out of the workplace. Sharing the lessons we learn through these gifts not only empowers us, but can be someone else's survival guide and can create a culture of sharing and openness.

In the first part of this book, you'll get a grasp of the concept of the Gift Mindset. Then, in part II, we explore the 12 Gifts. You can read these in any order, depending on your needs and what is important to you right now. A book has lived its purpose when it's dogeared, marked up and worn; my intention is that this book will become a go-to resource and a gift that keeps on giving.

But first, let me share with you my first gift.

My first gift

It was 1997 – the year *The Castle* movie was released and ‘this is going straight to the pool room’ become a much-loved Australian catchphrase. It was also the year Princess Diana tragically passed away and the *Titanic* became a worldwide hit on the big screen, with its theme song, ‘My heart will go on’, flooding our airwaves.

This was the year that I believe I first experienced what I call ‘the Gift Mindset’ – a year that changed me and my outlook on life forever.

I was in my early 20s; I had just completed tertiary study, come out of a relationship and was sick of studying. A switch flicked in me and I knew I wanted to travel and get outside my comfort zone. So, I decided to spend six months in Connecticut, USA, teaching dance at YMCA summer camps. Now that I reflect on it, this was quite an erratic thing to do, having never been overseas before. My poor mum nearly had a nervous breakdown and only now can I understand why.

This amazing experience included teaching 25 kids at any one time on two different camps; luckily for me, the popular Spanish dance song ‘Macarena’ had just come out – it was a great default dance to keep my under-six-year-old group occupied. I lived with host families, was bitten by a dog and hospitalised, and spent three months backpacking across the US on just US\$2000.

I came back independent, worldly (so I thought) and energised as a person. The experience was challenging, but taught me so much about the world and myself. I guess the Gift of Growth was unwrapped in front of me during this time – I grew in every way possible.

On returning to Australia, I worked a few casual café jobs and utilised my marketing qualification within a small start-up coffee business, but I knew there was more for me. Serving croissants to corporate workers on their lunchbreaks and being locked in a small

office next to the coffee roaster was not where I thought I would end up.

An opportunity

Before long a black-and-white newspaper advertisement for a job within a global company caught my eye. I ripped it out of the paper and pinned it on the cluttered corkboard in my bedroom. Maybe it was the visual – the advertisement didn't even have a job title. Instead, a slogan caught my eye. It said, 'Do you want Success?', and featured an M&M's character holding an upwards arrow. I jumped at the opportunity and got through five of six gruelling interview stages to apply for the role. It was down to me and one other candidate to present at a final assessment centre on a rainy Tuesday morning in July 1997. I slaved for hours creating a marketing presentation and rehearsing it. I had organised a lift into the city from a good friend, practised my presentation and even lashed out on yet another new outfit, all in the hope of securing the job.

I really wanted this job; it would be my first real professional job, where I would be paid what I believed I deserved. I could be the one ordering croissants in my lunchbreak at the café I had worked at. I would also get a car and be on my way to climbing the corporate ladder – both really important things to a 22 year old.

On the night before the presentation I received an unexpected phone call. I was out watching a movie when Mum called saying I needed to come home – something had happened. I will never forget that drive home with my now-husband, whom I had only just met. I was on autopilot. When we arrived at my mum and stepdad's house, where I was living at the time, Mum opened the door puffy-eyed and in tears. I was shocked to hear that my dad was in hospital. We got back in the car and sped to the hospital; in a blur of uncertainty and tears, we ran into emergency. My dad – whom I was very close to – had just passed away. I was overwhelmed.

Although he had just passed on, I got to hold his hand and say goodbye; he was only 51 years old.

It was the most surreal experience of my life. The nurse held me up as I was holding Dad's still-warm hand that had comforted me a million times, saying an emotional goodbye with little feeling of closure or comprehension of what had just happened.

Afterwards, we drove home to my family's house in numbed silence. We were all speechless from shock. We had so many questions, but nobody knew how to ask them.

Reality hits

Reality hit me when I remembered I had my job assessment the next morning. What was I going to do? Should I go? Should I cancel?

Dad and I were similar in many ways. He had been an avid entrepreneur in the rag trade and printing game with amazing ideas, dreams and a knack for technology and music; he would have loved to be alive in this day and age. Unusually, I hadn't seen him for over two weeks – the last thing he had said to me was, 'Get that job at Mars; it will set you up. I know you can get it.' With Dad's words in my mind, I called my friend Anna to let her know what had happened and to confirm that she could still drive me to the city.

With a foggy head and a heavy heart, I got ready the following morning, armed with my presentation and a stomach full of butterflies.

The assessment went well. I somehow put emotion aside and focused on getting the role. By the end of the process, I was emotionally and mentally drained, physically dizzy and only just hanging on. I'm not going to say it was easy; it was probably the most challenging thing I have ever done, but I had so much determination to win the role that nothing could stop me.

I ended up getting the job and spent over a decade with an amazing company. Some people may call me ruthless, insensitive and crazy – I even questioned myself at the time – but my optimism

and positive outlook went into overdrive to get me through. This is an example of the motivation of optimism working for me. I knew that to move forward I needed to live life to the fullest, and I had to use this experience of losing my dad to drive me to live the life my father didn't get to live. This taught me the Gift of Resilience.

Challenges as well as successes

This experience taught me how much embracing our challenges, not just our successes, can teach us. Adopting a Gift Mindset is all about dialling up self-awareness and leaning into how you are feeling, then acknowledging and accepting the lesson the experience offers – as opposed to resisting it, struggling against it and letting it hinder you. Did I want my dad to open the door and look at me lovingly with his beautiful blue eyes and hug me and say it was all a bad dream? Yes of course I would have done anything for that to happen. I didn't choose or want this situation. I learnt to accept the reality and use resilience to drive me to make a difference in life, and embrace every day as if it were my last.

Energy and passion kicked in, like an electrical surge that took over my thoughts, my body and me as a person. This feeling has never left me – this is the foundation of the Gift Mindset.



Our biggest lessons come through embracing, not resisting, our challenges and successes. When we adopt a Gift Mindset we can approach situations in our lives with deeper self-awareness, viewing whatever we are faced with, good or bad, as an opportunity to progress. Seeing the gift in any situation changes our thoughts, feelings and therefore the way we approach our tests and triumphs.

Gifts can come in many forms. Sometimes they are hidden or buried in the past; sometimes they are sitting right under our noses;

other times an event we're in the midst of will become, at some point, a learning experience and a Gift.

Do you remember your first gift? It may not have been based on a challenge or tragedy, but a success. Maybe you won a sporting game or a scholarship, or maybe someone showed you empathy that got you through a hard time and now you use that gift with others. It's worth reflecting on what you have learnt and how you have applied this in your life and, in the process, shared it with others.

Losing my dad at such a pivotal time impacted how I approached my life, professionally and personally. On some days I broke down but, overall, I embraced what I could instead of resisting what I couldn't change. And now I want to share the Gift Mindset with you.

Are you ready to unwrap your gifts?

A Gift Mindset

Now that you have grasped the concept of having a Gift Mindset, you may be pondering two things:

1. Why does having a Gift Mindset matter?
2. What will it cost you, your team and your loved ones if you *don't* adopt this level of awareness and acceptance, applying what you have learnt from your gifts?

By adopting the Gift Mindset, we get to live our legacy now by living a life of purpose, connection and contribution.

Positive psychology research shows that 40% of our happiness is determined by how we think and act. It is possible to achieve an increase in our happiness – a key reason we need to adopt a Gift Mindset to move forward progressively and be happier and even more successful.

It is important to note that this mindset applies both in and out of a work context – as you read this, please ensure you wear both hats.

The 2020 global pandemic is an example of a situation presenting gifts that both challenge us and provide opportunities to look at success differently.

Why having a Gift Mindset matters

If we choose not to learn from and share our lessons, or close ourselves off from receiving lessons from others, we risk robbing the world of our insights or, worse, contributing mindlessly to a world already heavy with distraction and clutter.

Never before have we lived in a such connected world, but at the same time been so disconnected. Social media has been linked to elevated levels of loneliness, anxiety and depression, as well as decreased social skills.

In my experience, many people focus on broadcasting only the positive aspects of their lives. On most platforms, people are depicted as living their dream life – perfect relationships, endless holidays, picture-perfect plates of food and successful businesses. Social media has become a highlight reel of only the good; it rarely portrays what is truly going on. This can lead to ‘comparison syndrome’, where people compare their own ‘real’ lives with others’ highlight reels – a natural human reaction. If you are comparing yourself to the digital presence of someone else, you run a high possibility of discounting yourself for reasons that aren’t usually valid.

Comparison can be a killer; it can diminish and dim you as a person.

Psychologist Leon Festinger developed social comparison theory in 1954, stating that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others around them. Subsequent research shows that people who compare themselves to others on a regular basis often experience feelings of guilt, dissatisfaction and sometimes even remorse.

Social media is a huge contributor to social comparison.

Don't compare your chapter 1 to someone else's chapter 20.

It is important to remember that no-one is you, and that is why sharing your gifts is vital. The sharing process can get you out of your own head, and reinforces your uniqueness. It gives you the ability to help others grow through your lessons, both positive and negative. Contribution is a core human need, as is connection: we are all wired to connect. By adopting a Gift Mindset, you satisfy these needs, not only for you but also for those around you.

Many of the successes and challenges shared via social media are topical, and often there is no evidence, no essence and no real connection to learn from. Don't get me wrong; I love technology and there is a use for it, but when it comes to sharing lessons, in many cases, these platforms are light on as far as what is real.

Social media is creating a paradox effect where we get the illusion of many choices when, in actual fact, we find it harder to find viable options. We may feel that by digitally connecting and sharing we are having social engagement, when essentially none of the connections are physical or real. I know I find this when shopping online; I often feel overwhelmed with choice, and end up buying nothing.

We all know that mobile phones, once a luxury and now an extension of most people's arms, have taken over. Recently at my local park I noticed seven dog walkers, each of them on their phones and not present in walking their furry friends. Research out of the UK indicates that one in eight of us is addicted to our phone, with an average of five to six hours spent on-screen daily.

Someone once said that the only two types of people who call their customers 'users' are drug dealers and app developers; I can see why!

People aren't having as many real, human-centred connections and interactions these days; the age of technology and distraction is upon us, and I can't see the landscape becoming any less cluttered.

In her book *Alone Together*, social psychologist Sherry Turkle argues that our relentless connection to the digital world is actually driving isolation. On the whole, she says, we are now ‘lonelier and more distant from one another ... the effect of this is that the way we interact online has changed and above all it has put a strain on our personal relationships, as well.’

Did you know that more than 65,000 Australians attempt suicide per year, with more than 3000 suicide deaths in 2018? Suicide has become the leading cause of death in Australia for people between 15 and 44 years of age, with reasons including stressful life events (imagine if we could share these openly), trauma, mental illness and substance abuse. In this age of distraction, we need to go back to human connection. I believe in my heart of hearts that the Gift Mindset could help us share more of ourselves, as a way of helping others.

Vulnerability and courage

The more open we are, the more vulnerable we become, and the more likely others will listen and use our lessons as a survival guide. Brené Brown’s extensive research on vulnerability has brought to light its importance. We need to peel back the layers and understand our fears and feelings – these are connected to every success or challenge we experience.

Future leadership belongs to the brave and if this means sharing our lessons, we have a compelling reason to do so. Courage is a skill set we need to foster and master – as Brown says, ‘The greatest barrier to courageous leadership is armour.’

The way we see and understand others in a real sense is dependent on trust, respect and what we are willing to share. Disclosing our challenges and our successes to others can help create rapport and support deeper and more meaningful relationships.

One day many years ago, back in my corporate life, my manager told me that he struggled with numbers. I was taken aback: how

could he possibly struggle with what was such a large part of the role that he was so good at? As a sales director, his role was largely driven by budgets, scorekeeping and forecasting. He openly disclosed what he had done to upskill in this area, and how he had learnt to love numbers. This resonated with me – firstly because numbers have never been my strong point, either; but, more importantly, I was impressed that he had openly shared his weakness with me. I'll never forget that conversation and the Gift of Growth that he gave me. The lesson I took on board is to be open and honest and share what you need in order to be of service to others. I still can't say I love numbers, but I have learnt to like them. This lesson was a priceless reminder of how important it is to share ourselves with others.

When I reflect on people and situations, whether challenging or positive, it reinforces the importance of being aware of these experiences and knowing their drivers, which we will explore in the next chapter. The reasons to foster a Gift Mindset are strong and compelling, and the cost of not doing so means we leave the gifts under the Christmas tree, tightly wrapped, containing wasted gold. I ask you, 'Why waste what could be so priceless to ourselves and others?'