Okay, let's start with a quiz.

When a guy is asked what he's thinking and he answers 'nothing', what's the truth...

A. He's definitely thinking something, but he doesn't want to say for fear of where it might lead?
B. He really is thinking nothing.

B is usually the right answer. Deep, reflective thinking is hard. It takes energy, effort, and concentration. So when we do it, we like to hurry it along, resolve a solution or course of action, and move on. What do we move on to?

Autopilot. A state of numbness where we're doing something, but not really thinking about it. Like you're driving a car and you wonder where the last twenty minutes went. Autopilot.

The simple fact is that we live around 90% of our lives on autopilot. Just rolling along. And there's a problem with that. When we're on autopilot we...

- Lack intentionality and don't engage with our surroundings
- We miss opportunities to learn and grow
- We lack reflection on our actions and consequences

But it's spookier than that. Another number is our propensity to change. At around the 97th percentile, we prefer to continue along a linear path. And for good reason. These habitual actions save our brain from becoming overloaded by short-cutting unnecessary decisions we've already taken. Like, which brand of tomato sauce to buy, or which loaf of bread. Just change the aisles in a grocery store and see what happens.

To give a tangible example of how little we like to change our minds, consider this... Gatorade and Powerade. Tell story of market leadership.

So, here's the challenge. We wander through life on autopilot, and we bloody hate change.

But that's what conferences are about, right? Getting some inspiration to help drive change and improve our businesses. Yet it happens so infrequently. A speaker gets up, says something interesting, we go cool, and then make Monday's coffee.

Change is a habit. So, how do you create it?

Let me tell you a story about a boss I once had. He got feedback from his team he was a little dull and lacked spontaneity. So, I was in his office looking over his shoulder at his diary to schedule a meeting the following week. I couldn't do it at 10am on Monday, because he had diary note to be spontaneous.

It's hilariously ironic... but he set aside 30 minutes to work on change. And it worked.

I'll tell you about another habit. Mine – I have many bad ones, and one good one.

When I hit 40, I was running 4 days a week. This was less than I had been five years ago, which was less than I had been 10 years ago. The trend was obvious. Because I was too busy. Travelling a lot. Social events. Blah blah. Will I go for a run today was the internal argument. Like I know I should, but what's the big deal with skipping a day, right?

I actually wasted more energy on the internal debate than getting on with running.

So, I stumbled upon Streak Runners International. You had to run a minimum of one mile everyday for a year to join – no sick days, no excuses. So, I set a personal minimum of 3km – just a quick jaunt if necessary – and decided to have a go for thirty days. After thirty days, it seemed crazy to waste the effort... so I kept going.

I've run every day for nearly eighteen years. Have there been tough days? You bet. I can't fly direct to Europe – I have to stop over for a day to have a run each way. I've run in minus 30 celcius. Before surgery. The day after surgery, immediately after being released from hospital, still high as balls, and against doctors orders.

To say running is a habit is an understatement. I don't have to think about it. No argument. It's just something that needs to happen.

So, if you want to learn new skills, like change, schedule it... and then keep doing it until it becomes habit. Like running, it may seem hard at first, but it will get easier, and it will become natural.

Getting into content...

Now the only thing I know about installing a kitchen, plumbing, or electrical... is that they're not DIY jobs. But despite that major limitation let's see if we can find you a couple of things that might be worthy of a new habit...

And just to cover something upfront. I'm going to propose six principles:

- Be Interesting
- Be Persistent
- Be Present
- Be Remembered
- Be Positive
- Be Grateful

Be interesting

Let's talk about brands and how you build them for a bit. I'm going to decode the dribble…

Firstly, what's a brand? Here's an example. No would you pay more for the apple on the left or the right? The right obviously. It's got something extra – it's organic. Not it looks the same, probably tastes the same, has the same nutritional value, keeps doctors away, but we put more value on it. Largely for emotional reasons.

That's branding. The premium we get above the utility value of a commodity – either in price, market share, or both.

It's not fancy, and while you can make an academic meal out of it, it still distils back to something pretty simple. Creating a premium above utility.

But what's that premium created by. Brand differentiation, clever strategies, digital genius. Sort of… a little bit. But, is the spirit of getting to the unfiltered truth, you could simply say, being interesting.

Here's an example of that. A really weird photo of a pub in Australia around the early 70's. And this is the oldest from of advertising there is. It's called social media. It's people telling other people, what they bloody love, and what's pissing them off. They're not talking about the middle ground, stuff that's just okay.

So, here's the truth off social media, advertising, and promotion. If you're not doing work worth talking about, people aren't going to talk about you. Simple as that.

I don't care how many followers you have. Or how smart your CRM system is. Some dude was boasting there personalisation was so good they did over 1,500 different version of an ad to micro-target an audience. All they did was 1,500 shit ads. An extraordinary effort that was no more useful than one shit ad. And a heck of a lot less useful than one good one.

So, you might think I'm talking about marketers at this point. I'm not. I'm talking about you. Every one of you, each owner and entrepreneur in this room is a marketer. It might not be what you trained in, or what you do each day, or even what you're passionate about, but you're a marketer.

Here's where I learned that. At Air New Zealand I got a challenge from the Chairman of the board in 2004 – culture sucks, we don't think it's an HR problem, it's a communication problem, and it's now yours. Good luck.

So, I spend more time talking to Rob Fyfe about how we'd engage staff and make them advocates for the brand – mini marketers – that I did about any external campaign. I knew we were winning when I got a call one afternoon from the manager of the Tauranga airport. Bing Bong story.

So, what you do, every day, adds value, or otherwise, to the Mastercraft Brand. It also directly relates to your future income.

So, I'm going to tell you how to be a marketer.

Let's talk hobbies… this one's Toy Voyaging and it's a real thing…

Anyway, Jobs suck. Jobs are work. Tasks and to do lists are boring. Repetitive. Graft.

Hobby's, on the other hand, are fun. They're enjoyable. Failure is okay. Experimentation is cool. Discovery even better.

Here's something to do with the job of marketing… make it a hobby. Think of the promotion and building your Mastercraft brand as one of your hobby's. Even better, make it a team hobby and do it together.

And then make it as much bloody fun as possible. Stop being boring. Start be memorable. Remarkable. Here's some ideas…

- Kellogs/Kitchen box, Plug, Wooden Spoon, Emergency Numbers Decal (Plumbing & Electrical) – one for switch box, one for laundry sink
- 'Let us fix it, and save yourself the trouble' packet of bandaids
- Tell Dad jokes
- Repost fun social stuff
- Quirky flyers

The reward for making me smile or laugh, is my attention. Stop being forgettable. The whole bloody world is forgettable. Your competitors are being forgettable. Determine to be remarkable. Grab a new hobby, have a blast.

One final hint, Tick Tock and You Tube Shorts changed everything. We're in a video world, get used to it. But be comfortable being uncomfortable. Being interesting in print is gold, being interesting in video is gold.

Okay, we started with Be Interesting, now, let's Be Persistent

Or, I should say, universally persistent. Here's a simple truth, the person who asks for the most orders, and is willing to hear the most no's, will also hear the most yes's.

But that's not your job as the owner. Or your business development person if you have one. It's everyone's job. Everybody sells.

There's a wonderful story about a gas station in Australia that has a long-running promotion, a bit like the McDonald's, would you like fries with that? They ask, would you like a Kit Kat for an extra $2?

How many people do you think would say yes out of ten? Call it out.

Roughly 6/10.

This station serves around 1,500 customers a day. So that's a shit tonne of Kit Kats... and nearly $700,000 pa in additional revenue.

What's your Kit Kat?

Maybe in Plumbing, it's a question about premium upgrades, or checking systems.

In electrical, about adding master surge protection for safety.

Kitchens it might be about appliance upgrades.

Or it could be around helping with lead generation. Everyone can do that. Three doors up and down. Do you have a friend who also might be interested.

I'm not the expert. You'll decide your Kit Kat.

Then how do you get everyone doing it? Let me tell you a story about that. When I was living in Atlanta, I worked for a company that had a big bottled water business. Like the big olde 5 gallon bottles, cooler rental. We had 106 branches across the US and thousands of drivers going out on routes each day. And we completed around 80% of our schedule on an given day. Late payment holds, people not home, lazy buggers, I don't know. But 80% sounded rubbish. I remember wondering what would have happened in Fedex. Roger, how'd you go on the overnight courier run today. Pretty good boss, I delivered 80%. You mean 20% of our overnight deliveries didn't reach their intended recipients today? I suppose. Boom.

So, here's the first thing I did to start to work on the problem. I bought 106 great big whiteboards and put one in each office. We put everyone's names down one side of the board, and days of the month along the top. Each day, there percentage delivery rate was recorded. Everyone could see it. And everyone could see who was lagging behind. Within 60 days, our daily completion rate was above 85%. We'd lifted it 6 p.pts by measuring something, making it personal, and making the results visible. We hadn't even talked goals or consequences. It just magically improved.

So, work out what your Kit Kat is, something ideally everyone can contribute to, measure it, make it visible, and you'll surprise yourself how much progress you can make.

We're Interesting, We're Persistent, now let's be Present Now

Being present is about how we interact with people. But today I want to talk about the most important time of all. In fact, there is no more important customer moment than this.

The first interaction. It's sets every expectation from that moment forward. It frames every future interaction. And it to a large degree predicts the future. That sounds weird, but it's driven by our minds.

See, we're wired to want to be right. It's not something we choose actively, it's just how we're built. So, our brains do a bit of filtering on our behalf. They sub-consciously ignore information that would cause us to question our rightness, and they actively seek and admit information that confirms we are indeed wise and correct.

That's how silly arguments work. We're talking at each other, but not really listening. Our brains are filtering and organising, and justifying. It's how extremist groups work. They reinforce, while trusting our filtering mechanisms filter counter views.

So, first impressions set the tone for everything that happens afterwards. At Air New Zealand, if the ground crew messed up at check in, the inflight staff were screwed. The customer has an expectation this is going to be a terrible flight, and they're damn well going to be right. They'll find every little problem to support their belief and ignore all the efforts of the crew.

First impressions last. They frame everything. If I expect you to be great, that's what I'll see. If I expect you to be a poor listener, that's what I'll see.

Be fast. Be first. Be attentive. Be empathetic. Be reassuring.

Be Remembered

Okay, we're in the door, we've done the work… will we allow it to become invisible because it works, which is the unremarkable expectation. Or will we be remembered.

Let's make an active choice towards the latter. And there's two things to do here, and a bonus. The first is to say thank you. But don't just say thank you. Show it. It's could be a chocolate bar with thanks on it. A sprig of lavender on the cistern with a thank you card. A Mastercraft branded chopping board. Wooden spoon.

The second is the call to make sure it's all good after a few days. Get in front of any concerns.

When someone asks them, who did your kitchen, do you know a good electrician around here, we want them to recall us!

Be positive

Okay, this is a Kiwi problem. We're not good at positive, and we tend to celebrate the wrong stuff.

I lived up in the States for a while, and those buggers know how to celebrate. They are the pinnacle of - in their words - THE ATTABOY. When stuff goes wrong, they sort it quietly and quickly, because that's important. But mostly so they can get back to hooping and hollering and high-fiving and pumping.

Now, even though I grew up in New Zealand, I got a bit of a culture shock when I moved back here. When stuff goes well, we get a bit humble. The stoic Meads era All Black who scores a try and unemotionally jogs back to halfway with a scowl on their face. It's like we're embarrassed of success. Don't want to look like a boastful tosser. Tall poppy. We shrug, it was nothing, and move on.

Meantime, we bloody love a good cock up. Let's get that on the table. Roll it around. Poke it. Work out who to blame. When to blame them. And how long they'll have to wear a badge of shame.

It felt weird. So I took a stopwatch to meetings to work out how much time was spend analysing problems and failures, versus how much time was spent talking about things that had gone well and what we could learn from them. Maybe even how we could replicate and amplify that success.

I think you know where this is going. There was no point in the stopwatch. 100% cock-ups. Zero successes.

We love cock-ups.

But there's a problem of this. If you've got one thing out of my talk today, I hope its that I like work that stands out, gets noticed, and earns memorability.

So, here's the problem. If you take something that's messed up, and fix it, you go from bad back to ordinary. Not being bad is better than being bad… so you've still gotta fix stuff. But ordinary is unremarkable, forgettable, thankless, and boring. The only way to be remarkable is to find things that are working, and then find ways to improve them, replicate them, and amplify them. That's the only path to remarkable.

So, celebrating success is the only path to greatness.

Now, I'm not suggesting burying cock-ups. Nor am I suggesting we don't fix failures. I am suggesting that you need balance – spending at least as much time talking about successes – bag and small – and working out how you can create more of them.

Add a ritual – even better. At 42 Below, in the early days, that had what was known as a Monty. If someone won a new listing for 42 Below, they rang the bell and called a Monty. Everyone, not matter what time of day, immediately gathered in the staff bar and took a shot of Vodka. Nothing like it as a 10am coffee chaser on a Monday morning.

Celebrate the right side of the ledger

Be grateful

This is the last of my list. Make two calls every Friday to bloody love your weekend. This is my second most persistent habit.

One call you make to someone who works for you or with you – like a subbie or supplier. And it's a call to say thanks. It could be extra effort, a kindness shown to a colleague, or randomly to simply say you appreciate them.

The second call you make is to a customer. To ask check in on the work? Is the job to their satisfaction? No problems? Great, and while I have you on the line, I just wanted to say thank you again. We love what we do, we really appreciate the business, and we're grateful you're happy. Oh, a google review shout out would be cool too.

Here's a cool story Dion Nash told me… time allowing

I want to wrap by acknowledging that I know it's tough out there. The climate in the last couple of years has sucked. But as Ayrtom Senna said, you can't pass ten cars on a dry day. But you sure can when it's raining.

In challenging markets, great teams can still win.

- To do that, we need to stand out from a sea of sameness.
- We need to have the courage to try some new things – not just recycling comfortable.
- We need to be interesting, persistent, present (especially when creating first impressions), be remembered, be positive, and be grateful.

And, if you gain anything from this conference, choose a few things. Not many. Maybe only 2 or 3 to start with, and schedule time to practice them. Accept some discomfort. Actively reflect on results. Tweak, refine, and let them become part of what you do.

Now I thought I'd finish with a story about taking risks and having fun creatively – time allowing.