

Develop Your Lookout

The first step in getting out of your own way is to develop what I call your inner Lookout.

In the world, lookouts watch for things going wrong, so they can raise a flag. Salespeople are “lookouts” in department stores, trying to spot shoplifters. Fire watchers are “lookouts” in national forests. You have a built-in Lookout in your mind, designed to keep watch over you. Specifically, your Lookout pays attention to what’s happening inside you: the tightness in your stomach; the surprise when your proposal isn’t chosen; the joy of making your mentor proud. You have thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations all the time. In the course of a busy day, you likely don’t notice them. Tapping into your Lookout can change that.



If you’re like most people, you already use your Lookout in certain situations. So you know how it works. If a car cuts you off, your Lookout notices your urge to “strike back,” so you don’t. When you get annoying emails, your Lookout spots your irritation, so you don’t reply. In cases like these, you avoid destructive behavior because your Lookout recognizes your reactive impulses before you act on them.

When the stakes get higher, so does the strength of inner reactivity. Under strain, your blood pressure and heart rate rise. Stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol flood your body. Survival instincts kick in, sending oxygen away from your brain and toward your limbs, so you can make a break for it. All of this makes it harder to think clearly. Your perspective narrows. The number of possible solutions you can generate drops. At the same time, emotions like anxiety spike. You might feel afraid and want to hide. You might feel angry and want to fight. All of this happens beneath the surface, whether you notice it or not.

Without using your Lookout, you’ll follow these instincts wherever they take you. That’s how you end up in bed at night, wondering how things went off the rails. When you feel calm again, it can be hard to imagine why you acted the way you did. If you rarely slow down and catch your breath, you might be living in this state quite often. If your Lookout doesn’t make some noise, you’re at risk of turning into Jack: a leader with a great track record who doesn’t notice that he’s boiling inside and burning things down.