

INNERCISE

*The New Science to **Unlock** Your
Brain's Hidden Power*

John Assaraf



Waterside Press

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Introduction

In the 1950s and '60s, Jack Lalanne revolutionized the physical fitness and health industry by promoting and teaching exercise and nutrition.

Today, we complete the fitness revolution with *Innercise*—a comprehensive guide to science-based mental and emotional techniques to strengthen your mind-set and unleash the hidden power of your brain.

Lack of knowledge or skill is not what really holds you back. It's your mind-set, emotional blocks, and deeply ingrained habits that you must release to clear the path to your greatest victories and successes. With *Innercise*, you'll learn to change your habitual patterns, and eliminate disempowering emotions like

- Fear of failure or success
- Shame and embarrassment
- Fear of being judged
- Low self-worth
- Negativity and pessimism
- Lack of confidence

Your limiting beliefs, stories, and excuses are nothing more than reinforced subconscious patterns that cause you to think, feel, and consistently behave in ways that produce the same results over and over again.

Now, cutting-edge technology and the science of neuroplasticity have finally unlocked the door to breaking free from these patterns. My hope in writing this book is that it will empower you to recognize and release whatever is holding you back from your fullest potential and the grandest vision for your life.

You will discover powerful, brain-based techniques that elite athletes, Navy SEALs, CEOs, and astronauts use to upgrade their awareness and skills, so they perform at the highest level possible. *Innercise* is your key to greater mental toughness, more confidence, and increased emotional fortitude. With it, you'll achieve your health, wealth, career, relationship, and business goals faster and easier than ever before.

To your amazing success,

John Assaraf
CEO, NeuroGym

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“Whatever the mind can conceive and believe,
it can achieve.”

—Napoleon Hill

The Innercise Revolution

Over three decades ago, a very wise and successful man asked me a simple yet profound question that transformed my life. At the time, I was just nineteen years old, with no college behind me and none in front as far as I could see. I still had dreams of being successful, at least as I thought it to be: mansions, yachts, fancy cars, hot bodies, glamorous lives. Those things captivated me, and I was determined that one day I would become as financially successful as the people I saw on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*.

There were, however, a few hiccups along the way to realizing my dreams.

The first was I had left high school about two years earlier, right after eleventh grade. The second, I was still living in my parents' apartment. I'd been told that, without a college degree, I was going to have to settle for working for minimum wage. I have to admit, that warning hit home. My father was living proof—as a cab driver he was always chasing down the next fare and barely made ends meet.

Worse, although I'd been working at one part-time job or another since I was eight, my work experience was patchy—I held different jobs, perhaps the longest-lasting one was a stint as a scrappy street kid shoplifting, committing petty

crimes, and, due to my larger size compared to the other kids, a reliable brawler in street fights.

I had reached a turning point though that summer of my nineteenth year on earth. I looked back just long enough to say good-bye to the shore and cast my sights to the open waters in search of a better future.

As fate or God's will or whatever you want to call it showed up, I was fortunate to cross paths with a wise and successful man. My concept of success at that time was pretty shallow. However, today with hindsight, I see that he was indeed very successful, in ways I only came to appreciate as I dug deeper for meaning and purpose in my life.

Alan Brown was an astute and wealthy entrepreneur who was also a wise and generous philanthropist. He loved to help people achieve their dreams, especially those with a sparkle of passion and success in their eyes. Alan saw that sparkle in mine.

One April afternoon at lunch, Alan was eating a healthy salad as I was chowing down a burger and fries, when our casual talk moved onto new ground. As I shared more of my life story with Alan, he listened patiently for a while, but as soon as I began to complain about all the ways I had been wronged: no education, no money, no connections, no skills—

“John,” he interrupted, “whatever happened in the past is totally irrelevant. The past is your history. The only thing that matters is what you choose and decide to do for yourself starting right now. Today! The past you can't change, but you can *choose* to change your future.”

I was taken aback, filled with skepticism. A moment later though hope shined its light. “How can I do that? How do I choose my future?”

“By answering three simple yet very profound questions.”

Those questions would change the direction of my life forever.

“What, specifically, do you want to achieve?” He was careful to point out that he was asking not what I thought I *could* achieve, but what I really *wanted to achieve*.

I shared with him some of my biggest goals and dreams, like retiring when I was forty-five with a net worth of three million dollars. How I would have a big home, a fancy sports car, and enough money to travel the world and take care of my parents.

He nodded understandingly. “*Why* must you achieve these goals?” He asked me to dig deeper and come up with as many reasons as I could because, as he explained, “You’ll need that leverage over yourself for the times when you don’t feel like doing what it is you need to do.”

And then he threw the mother of all questions at me. Looking deep into my eyes again, almost as if peering into my soul, he asked: “Are you interested in, or are you *committed to*, achieving these goals and living the life of your dreams?”

“Uh...man. I don’t...well, what’s the difference?” I asked.

“If you’re interested,” he said, “you’ll do what’s convenient and what is easy. You’ll come up with stories and excuses of why you can’t. You’ll allow your past or present

circumstances to control what you think and do. If you're interested, you won't be willing to go through the discomfort of change yourself—because change is absolutely required if you are serious about breaking free from your current beliefs, habits, and results.

“If, however, you're committed, then you'll do whatever it takes. You'll take action in spite of your doubts and fears. If you're committed, you will upgrade your knowledge, your skills, and your belief system of what *is* possible for you to achieve. If you are serious and committed, you will choose to let go of anything that is holding you back. I can teach you how to strengthen your mindset. That's where you start and from there you move to making the internal shifts needed to overcome your mental and emotional obstacles. I can teach you this. I can teach you how to override your subconscious, unpleasant emotions, and the automatic limiting behaviors that keep you stuck.

A few heartbeats passed in silence.

“So,” Alan said softly, “are you interested or are you committed?”

I was excited and scared.

“So?” he asked again softly.

Finally, I held out my hand to shake his. “I'm committed. Let's do this!”

It was that commitment, that single decision at age nineteen, that kick-started everything for me. It was at that moment that naïve intentions and grandiose dreams shifted to me, truly forging the life I wanted.

Using what Alan and a few other amazing mentors taught me, I went on to build five multimillion-dollar companies. I've authored two New York Times bestselling books. I've been in eight movies and documentaries. I've been on national TV—*Larry King Live*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *CNN with Anderson Cooper*, and more.

I've created a life that not only resembles the people I watched on the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, but more important than all of that glamour, I have been enriched far beyond with excellent health, an incredible wife, and two amazing sons.

Don't let me mislead you though. This didn't all happen in a straight line. In fact, I've had as many steps backward and sideways as I've had going forward. It was not suddenly "happily ever after." Along with my material success, came an overindulgence in what were supposed to be heavenly rewards but, in reality, were hellish trappings. The result: two divorces. Alcohol and sugar addiction. Ulcerative colitis. Prediabetes. Stock market busts. A business bankruptcy and more than 50 extra pounds of fat that my body didn't need. My life in the fast lane cost me my health, dear loves and friendships, millions of dollars, and very nearly my sanity.

In the end, the Innercises and guidance in this book are what helped me turn my setbacks into my biggest comebacks *by being committed to achieving the life of my dreams... no matter what.*

You Can Make the Same Commitment

By now, some thirty-seven years since that conversation with Alan, I've asked those same three questions to tens of

thousands of my students. *There's magic in those questions.* They can be the gateway to an entirely new life for you.

Innercise is a book about using your brain to achieve your goals and dreams. It's a practical, science-based guide to understanding what holds you back, and what can lead you forward. In the pages that follow:

- You'll be introduced to empowering ways that can transform your life.
- You'll learn how to recognize and release feelings of uncertainty and doubt that cause you to procrastinate and deny taking the right steps toward achieving spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical success.
- You'll learn to identify what's really holding you back and then reframing and releasing it, followed by retraining your brain to have the confidence, certainty, and focus to achieve your goals and dreams.
- You'll learn to feel, think, and act at your highest level so you can start to *achieve* your goals instead of just *setting* them.
- You'll learn how to live your life with more purpose and meaning: to feel in more control, freed from stress, circumstances, and people draining your vitality and energy.

We stand at the forefront of a revolution in brain science that can provide you with better tools to work more productively with far greater emotional and spiritual balance—a

revolution that can help you create a life filled with deeper meaning, passion, purpose, and joy.

So, ask yourself this question: Are you merely *interested* in having the life you desire, or are you *committed* to having it?

PART I:
Know Thy Brain

What I am looking for is not out there, it is in me.

—Helen Keller

1: It's Not Your Fault

Why Reaching Your Goals Has Been So Hard

*“Those who cannot change their minds cannot
change anything.”*

—George Bernard Shaw

Picture a grain of sand.

Can you see it? Let me help. It's about the size of this period
below:

—> . <—

Now, imagine that instead of being a grain of sand, this dot is actually a *tiny piece of your brain*. Just a little speck of what we call “gray matter.” If you could look closely enough, first, you'd discover this dot is actually made up of special nerve cells called *neurons*—and this tiny speck of brain, the one that's the size of a grain of sand, *can contain as many as 100,000 of these neurons*.

Look even closer.

These neurons are “talking” to each other, sending signals across connections called *synapses*. There can be up to a *billion* connections in that tiny speck alone. A billion!

Now, step back.

Zoom out and see that instead of one dot, you have thousands upon thousands of these dots accumulating into *billions* of neurons and *trillions* of connections.

These numbers—billions, trillions—are mind-bending in scope. Taken in totality, they make your brain one of the most complex life forms in the known universe. Many think of this like it's no big deal, if they think of it at all.

But this three-pound miracle *is* a big deal. Your brain does a staggering amount of work: It runs all your organs and regulates your temperature; it operates your immune system; it repairs the constant damage done to your body. It also controls your muscles and runs your digestive system. It keeps your heart beating, your eyes moving, your hair growing. It warns you of danger and fights cancer and welcomes in love and pleasure.

And that's still just scratching the surface. There is faith, consciousness, instinct, and so much more. It does all of this while you drive a car, think about that Great American Novel you want to write, and talk through a challenging problem with someone you trust.

Everything. From tiny to huge, from the mundane to the epic, your brain does it all; and it does so with a complexity and mysterious elegance that the most dedicated scientists in the world have yet to even begin to understand.

Every moment of brilliant genius, breathtaking creativity, and astonishing accomplishment in human history was accomplished with an evolving brain made up of stuff

like yours. The Fortune 500 CEO's brain? Same stuff. The coworker who lost all that weight? The friend who quit her job and started a successful business? Lincoln's brain? Einstein's brain? *Same stuff.* Of course, there are differences; some people have regions with greater amounts of creativity, or intellect, or empathy. And brain chemistry varies. DNA varies. But still, our brains are made of the same stuff; or as neuroscientists would say, of a "consistent molecular architecture."

I imagine many of you are shaking your heads right now questioning: *Really? Well, if my brain is so powerful, why do I have so much trouble achieving what I want?*

The answer will amaze you.

Setting Goals versus Achieving Goals

Think for a moment about the last time you set a goal. I'm not referring to cutting the grass or doing your taxes, but something much larger and more important. Something that would add the greater purpose and meaning you yearn for.

Perhaps you want to start a business. Or earn more income. Fall in love. Feel better about yourself. Whatever your goal, if it is *important* to you, then there's a good chance something will eventually happen: *you will fall short.* Don't get me wrong. I'm an eternal optimist. You give me lemons and I'll find a way to make lemonade. It's not just a positive attitude—I know plenty of "can do" people who find out they can't do. It's not just about talent—mediocrity is often rewarded in business and government, particularly when flash is more appealing than substance. And it's not

just about hard work—new business owners reportedly work an average of 60 to 80 hours a week, often with only a minimal paycheck coming in, yet 80 percent of startups don't survive past 36 months.

Clearly attitude, talent, and a strong work ethic are critical. But most of our big goals are not achieved because we set ourselves up to fail. Just look at the statistics for those who try to lose weight. Or at the high percentage of troubled marriages. Better yet, don't rely on statistics from some big university study; ask your friends how they fared with their New Year resolutions.

All this underscores the thinking that *achieving goals is hard*.

But wait. Is this true?

Think about it. How often have you imagined yourself richer, thinner, or happier? More connected, better liked? Kinder? More generous? Think of the times you've wanted a shiny new car, a promotion, or a date with the amazing person you just met. Defining your goals can come to you as naturally as eating and sleeping. In fact, one of the great marvels of the modern human brain is we have the capacity to look toward the future with an effortless grace. So, when it comes to setting goals, that's anything *but* hard. We are, in many ways, goal-desiring and goal-setting machines!

That's not the trouble. But *reaching* them can be. It's in taking action and moving toward our goals consistently even when things go awry, as they almost certainly will.

In one moment, we might be filled with the rush of neurotransmitters like dopamine, serotonin, or endorphins—

all which make us feel motivated, energetic, confident... and the next thing we know we haven't even gotten off the couch and dove in to what needs to be done. Or maybe we do get going, filled with energy and good intentions like when we kick off the New Year with a new exercise and diet plan. But somewhere along the way we lose our mojo, we drift, almost imperceptibly at times right back to where we started.

Why is it so hard to accomplish what we set out to do?

Your Brain's Two Priorities

Take heart. It's more complicated than you think as to why your workouts trailed off, or why you couldn't come up with a clear picture of who your target market would be for your dream business.

Yes, your brain is amazing. But it's also a work-in-progress. From the earliest known human ancestors living some seven million years ago to today, our brains have slowly, steadily, transformed. And continue to.

For that transformation to be possible—to get from hominid brain to *your* brain—the organ evolved under two important principles.

The first is safety. More than anything, brains need to survive. In order to live long enough to reproduce and pass brain improvements on to the next generation, brains cannot not die too soon. That means your brain has naturally evolved to keep you safe—emotionally, physically, and mentally.

The second is efficiency. Remember that long list of jobs your brain is taking control of, from blinking your eyes to

thinking analytically? The only way to get all that done is to be efficient with energy. Your brain has to focus on energy conservation so that it can do more with less.

These two factors had a distinct effect on how the brain you have today works. Running from the jaws of a saber-toothed tiger to swerving around a distracted driver, your brain evolved instinctual, automatic responses to make sure you move out of harm's way. To be efficient, rather than learn from scratch new habits for every single thought, emotion, and action, your brain instead relies on familiar behaviors that can be implemented with very little energy.

Safety and efficiency help you survive, but they don't ensure you will *thrive*.

Your Autopilot Life

Those ultrafast responses—the instincts and automated ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that serve so well to keep you alive and running efficiently—come with a cost though. They run most of your life and thus in many ways you are more or less a collection of habits, many of which you're barely aware of. Your life, in other words, is largely on autopilot. This is called automaticity and **it's why you keep getting results you don't like; not once, not twice, but over and over again. When you think, feel, and act the same way, when you are habituated to stay the same way, your life turns out more or less the same way too.**

Change Threatens the Brain

Survival is an issue for all life forms. Every living organism adapts, or evolves, to meet changing threats, environments,

needs. There are very rare exceptions; for instance, sulfur bacteria found off the coast of Western Australia show no evidence of having evolved in nearly 2 billion years. But we humans are definitely not among these rarities. In fact, we have evolved substantially. Our brains are now three times larger than our earliest ancestors, and the shapes of our brains have changed to in accommodating learning language, analytical thinking, consciousness, cultural and technological advances and more.

Yet, *your brain* hasn't adapted well in some fundamental ways too. My friend Dr. Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscience professor at the University of California, San Francisco, says we are all burdened with ancient brains trying to focus and survive in a high-tech world.

Here's an example of what Adam means: Your goal to lose weight might seem exciting and inspiring to you, but your ancient brain wants you to keep that weight on in case there's a famine around the corner. Or, the idea of leaving your job to start a business might send a tingle of excitement down your spine, but your ancient brain "worries" that the loss of your current job and income could lead to starvation. To your brain, almost any change you want to make is interpreted as a potential *risk*—emotionally, financially, physically, mentally, socially. And the mother of them all, a risk perceived as potentially one that could kill you.

All of this leads us to the same quandary every time. Setting goals isn't hard. *Achieving* them is hard because, as far as your brain is concerned, radical change is a potential threat.

When we look at change this way, we begin to see the light at the end of a very dark tunnel. In your own life, this may show up as glimpses of answers to some nagging questions like these:

- Why do I keep starting to change, and end up right back where I started?
- Why is it so hard to break the thought patterns I have? The emotional patterns? The behavior patterns?
- Why do I get stuck earning the same income?
- Why is it so hard to leave a job or relationship that is no longer satisfying and rewarding?
- Why do I continually sabotage myself with every diet I try?

And perhaps the most nagging one of all:

Why can't I seem to complete the goals that would bring me what I want?

The answer to each is the same. *Significant change, for the brain, feels like a significant threat, and it will do everything possible to resist leaving its "comfort zone."*

Consider the thermostat in your home. It keeps the temperature the same, no matter if it's hot or cold outside. If you open a window in the winter to let in some fresh air, the thermostat registers the change, and turns the heat on, bringing your home back to "normal" so that you'll feel safe and snug.

Your mental and emotional habits of a lifetime have set the "temperature" at a certain point, too. So, you're comfortable

within a certain range of feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. But when you try to change the way you feel or think or act—to open a window to let in some fresh air—the “thermostat” in your brain kicks in to bring you right back to what it has come to be known as your “normal” comfort zone. The result is you stay stuck, or maybe embattled with yourself to eke out slow incremental gains instead of the giant steps you envisioned.

Yet some people do manage to override this resistance and achieve change. They lose weight and keep it off, they start businesses that fuel them, they get promoted, they earn more, they have loving and fulfilling relationships, they find true *happiness*, they write a book and take dancing lessons. They thrive, not just survive.

And, so can you. But to do this, you have to understand that you have not one brain, but two.