

**Book Review: ‘How Not to Worry – the remarkable truth of how a small change can help you stress less and enjoy life more’, by Paul McGee** Capstone ISBN: 978-0-857-08286-2

A long title but a good one. A lot of people in my circle seem to be worried – about both major issues such as the economy, their weight/health, job security, spread of war zones, and more minor, everyday worries, but there does seem to be quite a bit of worry about.

So a book that can help you to reduce your worry levels seems a good idea in these troubled times. The benefit of this book is in its easy-to-read, conversational and humorous style of writing that provides insights into why we worry so much, some of the causes of that, and how we can start to take more control over our worrying brain.

I think that this book is intended for “normal worriers” in Paul McGee’s words, and not for people with major worries or serious stress levels. Trainers in related topics such as stress will also gain some benefit from this book to get their message across, although not much is really new here.

The author is a speaker on topics of change, motivation, workplace relationships and self confidence, and has authored seven books to date. Paul McGee is also the creator of SUMO (Shut Up, Move On) and has a website - [www.TheSumoGuy.com](http://www.TheSumoGuy.com) - that I certainly hadn’t come across before.

The book is structured into two sections covering ‘Stop, Understand’ and ‘Move On’, with chapter headings including ‘the big deal about worry’ and ‘why do we worry’, ‘let’s get rational’ and ‘manage your imagination’ amongst others.

His conversational and amusing style is based around stories from his own experience and those of others, and these are generally helpful as a device. Paul cites a range of current thinking and models to underpin his points, without resorting to dry academia or to regurgitating scary statistics about stress. I liked the short quotes that are dotted around each chapter to help his message come across, such as ‘when you’re worrying about the future, you’re missing out on the joys of the present’.

The author also employs a ‘hammock time’ panel per chapter to help us reflect and to take on a short exercise or to try out a tip as we go along.

**Section 1: ‘Stop, Understand’** – this section provides the context for starting to consider and challenge your worries and thereby reduce your anxiety. Paul says that there is a ‘big deal about worry’ and is concerned that our mental wellbeing has never been as fragile as it is now. He paraphrases Macmillan’s ‘you’ve never had it so good’ quote by adding – ‘and yet, we’ve never felt so bad’, despite being the healthiest and wealthiest generation yet!

Paul’s key point here is that worry can become a way of thinking that can become our default setting, and can be either constructive or destructive. He distinguishes between ‘worth it worry’ (leads to action) and ‘worthless worry’ (doesn’t deal with our concerns), that can create a Worry→Anxiety→Stress cycle.

Paul highlights the impact of worry: it can weaken us, can drain us of energy, cause physical reactions and tiredness, and cites the ‘stress makes you stupid’ saying, adding, ‘and sick’. Getting the balance

right between Challenge, Pressure and Stretch he says can create positive stress, whilst a sense of purpose provides us with meaning and the energy to meet these challenges with less stress in our lives.

His key point in this section is to raise our awareness and understanding of worry and stress so that they don't rob us of a meaningful and worthwhile life.

**Section 2: Why do we worry?** – focuses more on a range of factors that many of us would recognise, such as a lack of influence and control over pressures and change, our tendency to wallow in worry, overexposure to “bad news”, etc.

In the following chapters Paul draws from a number of existing models and research to amplify his key points. Experienced readers will recognise many of them, such as our primitive, emotive and rational brain that leads us to interpret situations and often to act irrationally; Covey's Circle of Influence is in there, as is 'scripts' from Transactional Analysis.

These offerings are mostly well selected but don't add much new to the field of stress. He does make some helpful suggestions though, such as making your environment friendly by being aware of changes creeping up on you, to manage your mental diet, to exercise often, to avoid people who 'escalate' bad news, and to 'cut the clutter' as a means towards wellbeing.

The author keeps the reader focused on everyday, simple changes we can make. An example of this was to 'set aside 7 minutes to start de-cluttering in the next 24 hours' – that's do-able by all of us and the results are quite satisfying (I tried it).

### **In summary**

How Not to Worry makes a helpful rather than revolutionary addition to the bookshelf for those concerned with their anxieties. By his own admission, Paul says that this is not a “how to” book or a set of quick-fix solutions; it is, however, more of a strategy to think about your more minor worries and then to manage them, and so prevent anxiety levels increasing.

Paul McGee urges us to adopt small-scale changes, arising from our increased awareness, and to take heart from Maria Robinson's quote “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending”.

This book may also appeal to line managers concerned about the increase in work-related stress and absenteeism, and HR and training specialists keen to support their people and to contribute to a wellbeing culture in their organisations.

Value for money? Yes, a good resource for around £11. I'd rate it 3 out of 5.

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