

Beyond Coping

Finding Your Way Forward

**Bring about changes you want
during and after
the COVID-19 pandemic**

Ben Scott, A. Biba Rebolj and Greg Oberbeck

BT Press

CONTENTS

Forewords	ix
Introduction	xi
1 It's Too Much	1
2 Everything Starts with Hope	9
3 The Image of a Future Worth Living	26
4 Overcoming Challenge	45
5 Use What You Have	61
6 From Coping to Creating	86
7 What Has Been Better Already?	99
8 A Miracle Minute	108
9 Beyond Coping	118
Epilogue	124
About the Solution-Focused Approach	127
Acknowledgements	133
About the Authors	135

The pandemic has challenged us all in so many ways. As well as exacerbating our worries for our mental health, the restrictions of lockdown increase the risk that our hopes and dreams will fade as we struggle to find ways of dealing with the impact of COVID-19. This book offers an alternative, inviting us to look to the future and to celebrate what we are doing that is working, to focus on our capabilities rather than our failings. *Beyond Coping* is born out of a particular time, but its valuable guidance will be just as applicable when the pandemic is history.

Evan George,
co-founder of BRIEF

EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

'Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.'

Desmond Tutu

The Jogger sighed as she bent down to tie the laces of her scuffed running shoes. As she reached for her keys, she fumbled and dropped them. The front door was so heavy and the handle so stiff that she welcomed the opportunity to give the door a bit of a kick. Stepping onto the porch, she realised her keys were still on the doormat. With reluctance, she turned back to pick them up.

In the midst of all the stress and worry, the arguments and panic attacks, there was one thing the Jogger found to be a little helpful, and that was going for a run. These runs were in part a desperate attempt to clear her head – and if ever there was a day when she needed to clear her head it was today. She hadn't meant to snap and lose her temper earlier, but the mounting difficulties and ear-splitting noise of the household had become too much.

Standing on the pathway outside her house as she

BEYOND COPING

put on her face mask, the Jogger felt a cold breeze drift over her skin. Hazy sunlight beckoned through the overcast sky. 'Yes,' she thought to herself, 'this is what I need.' She turned to find her elderly neighbour Bill examining his car. Prior to COVID-19, he would often have greeted her with a hug, but these days he took social distancing seriously. Regardless of the few metres between them, Bill's smile was as warm and welcoming as ever.

Bill was known to everyone as a lovable but quirky man. His wife had sadly passed away a few years ago, and since then his passion had been a vintage classic car, which was parked on the road, wheels almost kissing the kerb. The pristine grey 1964 Austin Cambridge was a four-door saloon with a deep red interior.



Bill was devoted to that car, washing and polishing it every weekend until it was so sparkling the Jogger felt as if she needed sunglasses to look at it.

Although she knew a great deal about Bill's car,

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

she had to admit she didn't know that much about the man himself. He would talk for hours if you let him, so much so that the Jogger would often find herself daydreaming as he rambled on. Today that daydreaming was dedicated to the turbulence of her home life and the argument with her partner.

BILL: Morning! How are you today?

THE JOGGER: Morning, Bill. I'm all right, thanks. And yourself?

In truth, the Jogger didn't feel all right, nor did she have the energy to listen to Bill's rambling, but she hoped a few pleasantries would end the conversation quickly. But Bill, it seemed, neither knew nor cared to follow the rules of small talk.

BILL: Fantastic! Where are you off to today?

THE JOGGER: Just out for a run ... I, umm ...

The Jogger struggled for a way out of the conversation, while Bill maintained a patient and steady gaze. There was no getting out of this without seeming rude, so she smiled and continued with another question.

THE JOGGER: What are you up to, Bill?

Anticipating the question, he sidestepped gracefully to allow the Jogger full view of the Austin Cambridge.

BEYOND COPING

BILL: I've been taking care of this beauty! What do you think?

The old man spread his arms like a proud ring-master, inviting his audience of one to survey the pristine motor.

THE JOGGER: Wow! You've done a great job.

BILL: Thank you. She's my treasure, this car is.

A few rays of sunlight slipped through the clouds and danced on the car's spotless surface. The more the Jogger looked at it, the more impressed she was.

THE JOGGER: So, what's she like to drive?

BILL: I wouldn't know nowadays.

A grin crept across Bill's face as he continued to carefully polish the already immaculate bodywork, determined not to leave a single scuff.

THE JOGGER: What do you mean you wouldn't know?

BILL: Well, I can't drive anymore – they said my eyesight's not up to it.

THE JOGGER: Then why ... I don't get ...

BILL: [laughing] What don't you get?

THE JOGGER: I mean, why would you spend so much time and effort washing and polishing a car that you can't drive anymore?

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

The thought of painstakingly caring for a car you couldn't even drive seemed absurd to the Jogger. Surely the old man wouldn't be able to talk himself out of this one. Sensing a hint of confusion creeping over Bill's face, the Jogger was surprised when his expression turned into a mischievous smile.

BILL: Aha! That's easy to answer.

THE JOGGER: Really?

BILL: Of course! My hope from washing and polishing the car has nothing to do with driving it.

A glint flashed across his eyes as if he'd just played his best poker hand.

THE JOGGER: I don't quite understand.

BILL: You see, I believe that many good things start with one's hopes. So my hope from keeping the car sparkling isn't about driving it – it's that every now and then someone will see it and appreciate it. My hope is to bring a smile to people's faces, so I polish the car ... and sometimes it works ... you're smiling now!

THE JOGGER: That's true, you have made me smile. But I still don't get it. Surely you're not out here every weekend, working this hard, just to make the occasional person smile?

BILL: Well, I have to admit that it makes a difference to me too. Making other people

BEYOND COPING

smile was something my wife did her best to do wherever she went. After she died, working on the car and seeing other people appreciate and enjoy it has given me a renewed sense of purpose. So I suppose you could say that my hopes are to make other people happy, to give me purpose and to honour my wife. So you see, it's my hopes that inspire my actions.

The Jogger was taken aback. She'd seen Bill polishing his car weekend after weekend, but was only now discovering why.

THE JOGGER: I knew the car meant a lot to you, but I had no idea you were doing it for your wife.

BILL: She was always trying to brighten someone's day, so this is one way I can continue to do that now that she's gone.

THE JOGGER: I can see now how your hopes inspire you to do what you do.

BILL: Of course, it's the same for all of us – our hopes inspire our actions.

There was something about Bill's words that resonated with her.

Taking out her phone, the Jogger opened up her notes, scrolling past countless old shopping lists before typing what Bill had said:

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

our hopes inspire our actions

THE JOGGER: So, you're saying the reason you're out here every weekend is all down to your various hopes?

BILL: Absolutely. If my hope had been to maintain the car so that I could drive it, I might well have become frustrated and given up. Keeping it pristine in the hope of making other people smile, finding a greater sense of purpose and honouring my wife ... now that's a different matter entirely.

THE JOGGER: I see ...

The Jogger was surprised to find that the silence that had settled over the conversation was more contemplative than awkward.

BILL: So, what about you? What is it that you're hoping for from your run today?

THE JOGGER: What? My run? I don't know ... I'm just running ... well, trying to anyway. I'm not really hoping for anything from it.

To her surprise, Bill rattled out a disbelieving laugh. Not that it was a mean laugh; there was a glimmer of kindness in his eyes that never seemed to leave him.

BILL: Of course you're hoping for something from your run, otherwise you wouldn't go! So what is it?

BEYOND COPING

How had the Jogger managed to get into this situation? She'd only meant to have a brief chat, and yet here she was, answering question after question. Checking her watch and seeing only ten minutes had passed since the conversation began, she decided she might as well entertain Bill's quizzing a little longer.

THE JOGGER: I suppose I'm hoping I might get rid of some of the stress and panic churning in my brain at the moment.

BILL: I see. And if the stress and panic dissipate as you run, what would you be hoping to find instead?

THE JOGGER: I really don't know ... I just can't see how anything will help at the moment. There's so much uncertainty around COVID and so many things to worry about.

BILL: It is a difficult time, that's for sure, and a lot of things are out of our control. Suppose this run does help ease some of that stress and panic, what are you hoping will replace them?

THE JOGGER: Just being able to clear my mind would be a help, and to start thinking straight again.

BILL: And if you had a clearer mind and were thinking straight, what difference do you think that would make?

THE JOGGER: Erm ... I guess I might be more relaxed, and perhaps move forward with my life a little.

BILL: Aha! There it is!

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

THE JOGGER: There is what?

BILL: Your hope!

THE JOGGER: My hope?

BILL: Yes, your hope that has inspired or maybe even pushed you to go out running today, hoping to relax and move forward with your life. But that's just my guess and I might be rambling again. Don't take an old man like me too seriously.

The Jogger was once again taken by surprise. If she was being honest, that was indeed what she'd been hoping for, though she'd never thought about it like that – she'd never thought about her actions being driven by her hope.

THE JOGGER: Well ... yes ... I guess so. And you're not rambling at all, Bill.

Just as Bill was folding in the outside wing mirror of the Austin, a speeding, battered Peugeot came roaring around the corner. If the Jogger had been standing in the road right now, she might have been inclined to jump back. But Bill didn't seem too flustered. With a wry smile, he took a small step backwards, allowing the Peugeot to pass – missing his toes by only a few millimetres. Sliding into the free spot between Bill's car and another neighbour's, the Peugeot came to a smooth stop. The Jogger had never seen parallel parking executed so perfectly.

BEYOND COPING

BILL: That's Katya, our dear girl. Have you met her before? She lives further down in flat 18 and is quite a powerhouse!

The Jogger knew a little about Katya. She was a local girl renowned for her artistic abilities. Not too long ago, she had created a beautiful painting of wildflowers. Just looking at it, the Jogger could see the hundreds of hours Katya had devoted to her craft – the delicate brushstrokes, the lifelike imagery. It had been displayed in the community hall, a tribute to her talent and the pride of the neighbourhood. But Katya had since taken the painting down, apparently ashamed of its flaws – flaws only she could see.

As Katya wrestled with the shopping bags in the boot of her car, Bill took the opportunity to tell the Jogger a little more about her.

BILL: When Katya stopped by the other week, I could tell that, like you, she was in need of some hope.

Katya planted her shopping bags on the path and pushed her glasses higher up the bridge of her nose, taking care not to dislodge her colourful mask. Her baggy sleeves partly hid splotches of paint on her agile hands.

KATYA: Hi, Bill!

Katya's muscles seemed to twitch, ready to reach for a hug, then she stepped back, remembering the COVID-19 distancing.

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

BILL: Hi, Katya, great to see you. This is my neighbour.

A beaming smile greeted the Jogger, who returned the acknowledgement. This courteous person with a delicate frame was not the driver she had imagined after witnessing the Peugeot career around the corner only moments earlier.

THE JOGGER: Nice to meet you.

KATYA: Likewise.

BILL: I was just about to tell her about our interesting conversation on finding hope. And voila – you blew in like a tornado!

Katya clicked her key fob to make sure the car was locked. Pocketing the keys, she leaned against a nearby lamp post.

KATYA: I remember every word of that conversation. I was having such a rough day and our chat and those questions you asked were really helpful.

BILL: Do you remember how I asked you about what your hopes were?

KATYA: I do. Let's see ... I think I said I wanted to get back to a positive mindset, because I'd been struggling to see the good in anything that week.

BILL: That's right ...

BEYOND COPING

He looked over at the Jogger, checking that she was following the details.

BILL: ... and I asked what difference getting back to a positive mindset would make to you.

Katya lifted her head towards the sky.

KATYA: I remember that question really making me think about how I'd enjoy life more and do better with my painting and my career.

A pigeon fluttered past, causing the Jogger to jump and lose concentration for a moment.

THE JOGGER: Sorry, what was that question again? The one that really made you think?

BILL: It was a rather simple one. Katya said she'd like to get back to her positive mindset, so I asked her what difference it would make to have that. In fact, I think I used a similar question after that, asking what difference it would make if she was enjoying life more and doing better with her painting.

Recalling the conversation further, Katya began waving her hand as if painting a canvas.

KATYA: That question made me think I'd probably be making more of an effort with my

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

friends, even though it's hard to see them in person at the moment.

THE JOGGER: So after just a few short questions you'd already listed all those things?

A grin crept across Katya's face, her eyes bright with possibility.

KATYA: Yes, all those things, and that wasn't even all of it. Bill asked me what else I'd like to add to that list.

THE JOGGER: [laughing] What did you tell him?

The Jogger cut her laughter short as she noticed Katya's brow furrow slightly and her gaze drift down to her feet.

KATYA: Actually, I told him about some difficult stuff at that point. About how I sometimes get overwhelmed with self-doubt. How I have loads of things I want to achieve, but the self-doubt sometimes stops me from pursuing them.

The Jogger looked towards Bill. This appeared to be the first part of the recounted conversation that hadn't gone smoothly. Running his fingers through his thinning silver hair, Bill watched and listened patiently as Katya continued.

BEYOND COPING

KATYA: Like the time there was this gallery exhibition competition. I thought I would give it a try. I even started coming up with ideas. But then I thought, 'No, I'm not good enough.' Which was stupid.

Bill remained silent, so the Jogger tentatively asked another question.

THE JOGGER: So how did Bill respond when you told him about your struggles with self-doubt?

Laughing spontaneously, Katya shook her head in amusement.

KATYA: It was ridiculously simple, really. He just asked me what I wanted to be happening instead.

THE JOGGER: I see. And what did you want instead?

KATYA: I told him I wanted to be giving things a go.

Finally, Bill interjected.

BILL: And when you said you wanted to be giving things a go, I also asked what you thought that might lead to. Especially if you were doing so with a positive mindset.

KATYA: You did, yes, and that's when I said I'd

2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

feel better about myself and would start to have more of a life plan.

THE JOGGER: So by the end of this chat you'd named a whole bunch of hopes?

KATYA: Yup. To reinforce a positive mindset, enjoy life more, do better with my painting, be excited about the future, make an effort with friends, give things a go, and have more of a life plan.

Bill and Katya exchanged a grin. No longer looking at her feet, she was again bright and animated.

KATYA: So that's how the conversation about my hopes went. And by the end, I knew that if I could see progress in those things, then I'd be heading in a good direction. It was a really helpful discussion, though Bill refuses to take any credit!

BILL: Of course not. The ideas were all yours – I just asked about them.

Katya's mobile phone rang.

KATYA: Sorry, I'll have to take this, it's a friend.
Good to see you both!

THE JOGGER: And you. I should probably get going anyway. Thanks so much to both of you for your time, it's been ... interesting.

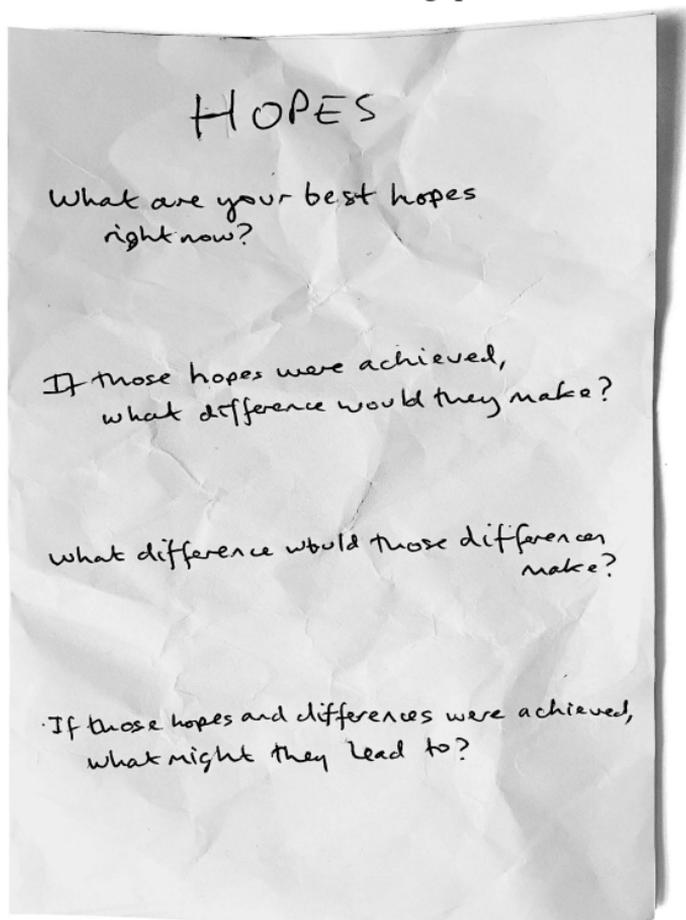
Bill started to rummage around in his overall pockets.

BEYOND COPING

Pulling out a scrap of coffee-stained paper, he presented it to the Jogger.

BILL: Here, before you go, take this. It's a little task I gave Katya. Think of it as 'an invitation for discovering hopes'.

Taking the crumpled piece of paper, the Jogger unfolded it to reveal the following questions:



2: EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HOPE

The Jogger took a snapshot of the crumpled piece of paper, careful to include the whole page, and saved it on her phone, alongside the note she'd made earlier. Thanking Bill again and turning to continue on her way, the Jogger couldn't help but dwell on that phrase: our hopes inspire our actions.

Activity/Exercise

Thinking of Bill's questions, try answering them yourself:

What are your best hopes at this point in time?

If these hopes were achieved, what difference would they make?

What difference would those differences make?

If these hopes and differences were achieved, what might they lead to?

THE IMAGE OF A FUTURE WORTH LIVING

'The future belongs to those
who believe in the beauty of
their dreams.'

Eleanor Roosevelt

The Jogger's mind was racing with new thoughts after her conversation with Bill. What he'd said resonated with her in a promising way, but his approach to life still wasn't entirely adding up. It was all very well to say that 'our hopes inspire our actions,' but what then?

Panting heavily, the Jogger wound her way through the neighbourhood's streets of semi-detached houses. Turning the corner towards a nearby park, she almost knocked into a woman walking her dog. The feisty Yorkshire terrier fixed its eyes on the Jogger and gave a not so intimidating growl. The dog walker gasped behind her face mask, visibly shaken.

3: THE IMAGE OF A FUTURE WORTH LIVING



THE JOGGER: I'm really sorry! Are you OK?

THE DOG WALKER: I'm fine, I'm fine, but you need to look where you're going and stop staring at your feet!

THE JOGGER: I know, I'm so sorry, it's just that I was ...

As the dog walker regained her poise and adjusted her spectacles, she noticed the Jogger's furrowed brow.

THE DOG WALKER: Something the matter, dear?

THE JOGGER: No ... nothing much.

BEYOND COPING

THE DOG WALKER: Come on, I've seen expressions like that before. What's bothering you?

The woman was persistent, and it seemed unlikely the Jogger could get away with shrugging off the well-intended question. Besides, she owed an action of apology, so the least she could do was answer her, even if the Yorkshire terrier was now growling like a lawn mower.

THE JOGGER: It's just something my neighbour said to me.

THE DOG WALKER: And what was that?

As a cyclist whizzed past and another dog walker crossed the road to avoid the growling terrier, the Jogger took a moment to glance purposefully at her watch. She hadn't anticipated one conversation interrupting her run, let alone two.

THE DOG WALKER: Don't worry, dear, I've lots of time on my hands. Please go on.

THE JOGGER: I don't really ... I'm not ... My neighbour asked a lot of questions about hope, and I ended up saying that my hope was to move forward with my life.

THE DOG WALKER: And is that true?

THE JOGGER: Yeah, I guess so.

THE DOG WALKER: Then what's troubling you?

THE JOGGER: I just don't know how I'm

3: THE IMAGE OF A FUTURE WORTH LIVING

supposed to do that. I mean, I don't know *how* I'm going to move forward with my life. Right now, all I have is hope.

A perceptive look passed over the dog walker's face. Even the little dog yapped and looked up at his owner as if he was in on the secret.

THE DOG WALKER: Ah – you're stuck on the 'how do I get there?' question. That one's stumped me many times over the years.

THE JOGGER: Huh? How do you mean?

THE DOG WALKER: It seems the obvious thing to ask, doesn't it? How do I do this? How do I get there? But obvious questions aren't always the most helpful or useful ones.

This was turning into a strange day. The Jogger was reluctant to get dragged into another conversation, however warm and motherly this woman seemed. On the other hand, the conversation with Bill had been surprisingly helpful. Maybe this one would be too.

THE JOGGER: I agree that asking myself how I'm going to get there hasn't been particularly helpful so far, but what do you think would be a better question?

THE DOG WALKER: This might sound funny but my dog, Einstein, taught me the answer to that one.