



What do you mean it's not all about me?

Andrew Griffiths



SIMON & SCHUSTER

A U S T R A L I A A CBS COMPANY

'The Me Myth' – living with the
limiting belief that the world
revolves around 'me'

Contents

Welcome to the world of 'The Me Myth'	vii
How to get the most out of <i>The Me Myth</i>	x
1 Where we come from doesn't matter – where we are going does	1
2 Put a pea under your cushion, Princess	9
3 Start every day with a little magic	17
4 The art of empathy	21
5 If you want to make big changes in your life you might just need big motivation	29
6 What is your moral code?	37
7 How judgmental have we all become?	43
8 Lie down with dogs and you get up with fleas	49
9 We all need someone to look up to	55
10 'Respect' is a powerful word	59
11 Where do you put your best energy?	63
12 Dreamtime	69
13 Listen to your gut instinct – about everything	75
14 Stop analysing the world within and explore the world around	81
15 My 'Pretty Woman' experience	87
16 If you truly want to grow – give your greatest asset	97
17 Inspired communication	103
18 Chain yourself to a tree once in awhile	109
19 The greatest teacher is Mother Nature	117

20	Figure out what you don't want in life	125
21	Why worry?	131
22	It's time to be honest	139
23	Make a decision and move on	145
24	Which emotion is driving you?	151
25	When did you stop having fun?	159
26	Don't put the important things off	165
27	Put away the self-development books for a while	171
28	Step up and take responsibility for your life	177
29	Get back to doing the things you love	183
30	Celebrate loud and celebrate long	189
31	Have a love affair with life	195
32	The battle with perfection	199
33	The pain of comparison	203
34	The Great Wall of You	207
35	It's time to define the new you	211
36	Right here, right now	215
	Where to from here?	221
	Recommended reading	223
	Acknowledgments	224
	About Andrew Griffiths	226

Welcome to the world of 'The Me Myth'

Me, me, me – welcome to the battle cry of the modern world. When did we become such a self-obsessed race? Tom Wolfe called the seventies the decade of 'me'. Have we become any less self-absorbed in the last 30 years? Not really. If anything we have become more self-centred with most of us living, to some degree, with the very limiting belief that the world revolves around 'me'.

Most of us are desperately seeking a sense of peace, spirituality, contentment and satisfaction in the midst of a crazy and chaotic world. We are looking inwards for the answers. But are we finding them?

Not really. And every day we are bombarded with messages reinforcing this idea that the world revolves around 'me'.

Messages telling us what to eat, what to wear, what type of car to drive, the friends we should have, where we should live, the people we should marry (and divorce), and what imperfections we have and what we should be doing to fix them.

This massive amount of information has a significant impact on us. We feel constantly overwhelmed from the minute we drag ourselves out of bed till the moment we collapse back into the same spot at the end of the day. And rightly so. For many of us, this bombardment has become a way of life and it's all we can do to tread water. The notion of getting a life, in any shape or form, seems to be a dream that is slowly fading away.

I'm not just talking about getting ahead with money or material possessions. I mean in all aspects of our lives, including our sense of wellbeing, our health, our spirituality, our relationships and our passion for life. Who the hell has time to appreciate everything we

have when we are so busy processing this mass of information telling us what to do?

It all leads to a sense of 'over-analysis paralysis', a condition where we get overwhelmed with information, options and demands that are all about 'me'. We become confused, we lose direction and we struggle to achieve clarity in our lives, which ironically are the things we spend so much of our time and energy looking for.

But the single most powerful impact that this over-analysis paralysis can have is a sense that we are no longer in control of our lives, and that, to me, is the greatest tragedy for any person.

Most of us desperately crave to become better people, it's part of being human. We want to feel contentment, love, passion, energy and excitement every day. But when we live in a constant state of over-analysis paralysis, becoming a better person is lost in the struggle to survive.

My advice in this book is really very simple. There comes a time for each and every one of us, when we need to step up and take responsibility for our lives. A powerful place to start is by accepting that the world doesn't revolve around 'me'. It may seem like a contradiction in the world of self-development and growth, but the less time you spend thinking about 'me' and the more time you spend getting on with living, the greater your life will become.

We need to overcome our own over-analysis paralysis, ignore the communication bombardment, let go of the self-scrutiny, and stop beating ourselves up over our shortcomings and the shortcomings of those around us. It's time to get on with life!

In other words, stop thinking and start doing. Getting on with living is the greatest self-development tool we can ever have. Like most profound realisations, the concept is simple. If you live in the world of 'The Me Myth' it is impossible to have a rich, rewarding and joyous life. Simply shift your focus outwards instead of inwards and you open yourself to a world of miraculous opportunity.

It sounds like a piece of cake, doesn't it? And I am sure you're

thinking that I couldn't possibly understand how complicated your life is. The demands that you have, the issues that you are dealing with, the responsibilities that you are trying to cope with and the fear of loss that you battle every single day of your life.

Well, you're right, I don't know the challenges you face, but I have had plenty of my own over the years. In fact, I started life with nothing but challenge. I was abandoned as a baby when I was only a few months old and that set the stage for the next 40 action-packed years.

I have spent a lifetime trying to prove to the world that I am worthy of existing. I have had to deal with tragedy at the most intimate level. I have tried to kill myself slowly through self-abuse and workaholism. But, at the same time, I have spent every year trying to become the best man I can possibly be. I have achieved things that no one believed I could and I have not only come to peace with my past, but I have learnt to use it to thrive, prosper and, most importantly, to help others to set themselves free from the chains that tie them to their old stories and beliefs.

Throughout *The Me Myth* I will share my journey with you. We all have a journey with many twists and curves, perhaps even the odd pothole and breakdown, but the quality of our lives today is really about the decisions we make along the way. In my journey I made the decision not to be a victim and to get on with living rather than over-analysing every little part of my life. By doing this I have had some big insights into myself and people in general. The realisations for me have been quite amazing and I am sure they will be for you too.

There is no doubt that parts of this book will cause you to reflect on your own life and the way you have reacted to past experiences. Hopefully you will be better able to understand why you react to certain situations in a particular way today. I never claim to have all of the answers, but I very honestly open up about my life and my own realisations for all to see. Some of it isn't pretty, but all of it is real.

I hope that, as you share my journey, you will have your own realisations and moments of clarity. But mostly, I hope that when you put this book down you will feel a growing sense of excitement about the life you can have – the life you deserve.

We all have endless possibilities, but they can only be realised if you understand that you are the one in the driver's seat. It's time to take control, get on with living and love the journey.

How to get the most out of *The Me Myth*

I am not that much of a traditionalist when it comes to writing a book. I tend to write so that you can open one of my books at any page and get some insight or information that is relevant to you right then and there. I believe that just as certain books end up in our hands when we need them, so the right information jumps out of a book when we need it. So what I am saying is that you don't need to read *The Me Myth* cover to cover to get it. It's not a process, it's a way of living.

You will notice several themes running through *The Me Myth*. These are what I consider the fundamentals of behavioural evolution. We all have certain repetitive behaviours, both good and bad. The objective is to change the bad and do more of the good. This will require some internal soul-searching and, even though that is what we need to move away from, to get there we have to go backwards to go forwards. Bear with me, and I promise the journey will be worth it.

I ask you to take a moment to read the quotes at the end of each chapter. Please don't just glance at them; close your eyes and think about what is being said. The simplest of ideas are often the most stunningly profound.

I have included 'Key points' in each section just to make sure that I get my message across in a clear and simple way. I have also asked

a few questions and made suggestions in each section that can be used to help you overcome your own battle with living in 'The Me Myth'.

Reading a book like this is a journey, just like our lives are a journey. We can read a chapter today that doesn't really impact on us a great deal, then we might read it again a month later and feel deeply inspired or moved. What we need at any one time in our lives changes. I hope that you will keep *The Me Myth* close by for many years to come and that in times of need you will open it at the perfect page for what you need right then.

Where we come from doesn't matter – where we are going does

I don't have a birth certificate and I'm not completely certain when or where I was born. I do know that I started life in Melbourne in early 1966, but I wasn't registered as being alive until December 1975. How does someone in Australia not have a birth certificate? Well, let me share some of my early days with you.

For some reason my parents left my older sister, Wendy, and me with an old lady, Winifred, who used to live up the street from us. I was about six months old and Wendy was about 18 months old. Our parents never came back and we started living with Winifred.

I have an enormous amount of respect for this selfless woman in her seventies who took us in. She had no reason to look after two small children, other than some sense of duty and compassion.

Winifred was born in 1896 in London. She had moved to Australia as a teenage girl, chasing the man she loved. She had never quite

forgiven Australia or Australians for the life that followed. She'd lost all of her brothers in various wars, she'd lost two husbands (again to war), she'd had a breast removed due to cancer as a young woman and her family had disowned her the minute she'd left England.

We lived a surreal kind of life with Winifred. Although she looked like a petite, well-groomed granny, she was a compulsive kleptomaniac, constantly filling her pockets at the shops and making us kids wander the streets at night stealing things from people's front gardens.

We lived an isolated, gypsy-like existence constantly moving around the working-class areas of North Perth, with a prim and proper public face that hid the darker side of our world. Winifred talked to herself incessantly, and I always remember those conversations were angry, bitter and hateful. She was filled with resentment towards the world for all she had suffered – and it had to erupt.

She would scream at Wendy or me, inches from our faces, spittle flying, as she told us how much she hated us, how filthy and disgusting we were, and how she wanted us dead. She would drag us around the house by our hair, she would beat us with lumps of wood. I lost track of the number of times I was woken in the middle of the night as she attacked me with a shovel or a walking stick, screaming at the top of her lungs. She threw boiling water on us, stabbed us with scissors, smashed our heads into walls and doors, and bashed us with anything she could get her hands on.

We were always covered with bruises, cuts and burns, with clumps of hair missing. As a grown man I struggle to understand the fear this little old lady brought out in me, but as a child she terrified me.

To escape I started to wander the streets of Perth. I remember knowing exactly when the deliveries were made at the shops close by and I would treat the milk and bakery deliveries as my own personal smorgasbord. I was out and about at all times of the night.

There were a number of brothels close by as well. I didn't really know what they were, but the ladies were very friendly towards me.

They all had large busts and smelled really nice. They would take me to a room out the back and give me big cups of hot chocolate and generally make a fuss of me. It was a kindness that I wasn't used to and I was scared by it, but at the same time I craved it. In all the time I lived with Winifred she only ever kissed me once – the day Gough Whitlam, the then Prime Minister of Australia, was sacked.

From my various safe hide-outs I would watch drunken men swagger across the road to the brothels and re-emerge in about half an hour. I assumed they were all going in to get hot chocolate, and I guess in many ways they were.

Eventually the welfare became involved. One day during swimming lessons at our primary school I took off my shirt, revealing a big cut on my stomach and arm from where Winifred had attacked me with a pair of gardening shears. I had bruises from head to toe and countless half-healed injuries. The headmaster asked me what had happened. Winifred had always told us to say, 'I fell down in the garden,' but the headmaster didn't believe me for a second. The welfare was called in to investigate the suspected abuse.

They inspected the house where we were living, they brought in psychologists to interview us, doctors gave us medicals and our teachers gave statements. Winifred reacted to all of this 'fuss' with anger and bitterness. She blamed it on Wendy and me for being 'evil' children.

The welfare laid down rules and conditions for her to follow. Tough things, like I had to be able to sleep on a bed inside the house. We had to wash daily and if there was any further evidence of violence we would be sent to live in an orphanage.

Of course nothing really changed. Many years later, when I read the welfare reports, it was clear they didn't know what to do with us if they took us away from Winifred. They tried to find our parents, but that proved fruitless. Foster parents were thin on the ground and far less likely to take in two battered and emotionally scarred kids. So they left us with Winifred for a while longer.

A short time later, things flared up badly. Winifred went on a rampage, attacking me with a metal rake, and she knocked me unconscious. At the same time distant relatives of Winifred's who couldn't have children expressed interest in adopting us. Finally Wendy and I were taken away and put in emergency care.

After a few stints in various forms of shelter, we finally ended up in Sydney with new parents. But it wasn't to last. Our foster mother died from a terrible and aggressive form of cancer not long after we arrived in Sydney. And our new daddy lost the plot. This was understandable, but his actions were not forgivable. He started to abuse Wendy. I knew something was going on, but I was too young to really understand it fully. So as a budding teenager I took my anger and headed elsewhere.

I went to a very big and very rough school, Asquith Boys High, north of Sydney. I wanted so badly to fit in that I would do just about anything to belong. I started smoking, drinking and taking drugs. Smoking was the easy part. On my first day at school I looked for the toughest kid I could find and asked him if he wanted a cigarette. This opened a number of doors to the rough part of town for me.

One day Wendy told me about what was happening at home. I was furious. I confronted our foster father about it and we had a huge fight. I left that night and never went back.

Drinking became a huge part of my life. With the various groups that I hung out with, we always drank. I snorted lighter fluid with some, I smoked dope with others, I took LSD with some of the older fellas, then hashish, speed and ultimately I even smoked heroin, just once, but enough to know that it existed and what it felt like, and to know that I liked it.

I stole a car to learn how to drive. Not a great idea, particularly as it was a manual. My fleeing from the scene involved bunny hopping up the hill. Very impressive, I must say. I hung out with friends and we broke into houses and stole things. I started growing marijuana and selling it at school (my entrepreneurial streak started early).

Today I look back at those times and I cringe. I can't believe that I did those things and I am ashamed that I did.

I knew that my life was heading down a predictable path. Soon I would either end up in jail, dead in a car wreck or lying on a trolley in a hospital emergency room with doctors thumping my chest.

One Friday afternoon I was standing at the end of the driveway of the house where I was living, waiting to get picked up for a night of partying. I had long since moved away from my foster father and, fortunately, a wonderful woman called Val had taken me in and provided a safe haven for a number of years. Throughout my life there have always been a few angels close by and I think of them often.

It was quite a spiritual moment for me as the late afternoon clouds split and the sun started to slide behind the hills. Pondering what was happening around me, it was easy to see the road that so many people follow. I saw Winifred kill herself with bitterness and anger. I saw friends kill themselves with self-loathing in the forms of drug and alcohol abuse, and I saw far too much violence from people who were tragic and lost and looking desperately for someone to be angry with. I was on the verge of heading down one of these dark paths myself.

I realised right then and there that I had the power to choose my way in the world. I didn't have to follow the predictable path that I saw so many others on. I was in control and I could change if I wanted to. I knew I expected more out of life and I believed in myself enough to have the confidence to do it. This was incredibly profound for me and I knew that now was the time to break away from the world unfolding around me and to be my own man.

So that is exactly what I did. From that day on I have tried my best to live my own life, changing what needs to be changed and becoming a better person in any way I can. Sometimes it's been hard, other times very easy.

Now, I have given you a very compressed version of the first 17

years of my life. There is a lot more stuff to share, some of it will come out in other chapters, some will stay locked in my head for the time being. But I have been very open and very honest with you.

Today I am an international bestselling author. I have a pile of books sold in over 50 countries around the world. I live in Cairns, north Queensland, right on the Great Barrier Reef with a lovely American lady called Debra Ruth Lawson. I travel the world presenting to organisations, sharing my experiences and giving advice on how to build powerful, ethical and successful businesses. I have been lucky enough to do some amazing things in the first 43 years of my life and I can't wait for the next 43 years. I have a huge list of incredible things that I intend to get done before I die.

I have shared my story with thousands of people at conferences. When they see me bounce up on stage, they see a somewhat portly, successful-looking, educated man in his early forties. They assume a lot. When they hear about my background they are often shocked. 'How did you overcome this hard start to life and become the man you are today?' they ask. But mostly they are inspired because I share a very powerful message. Where we come from doesn't matter, where we are heading does.

How many people live their lives bound by the chains of their past? Yes, it is absolutely horrible to be on the receiving end of violence, or rape, or neglect, but we all have the ability to choose whether we will learn from these experiences and move on, or be chained to them, destined to live a life of fear, anger, inadequacy and despair.

The years are whistling by and as you get older they will go even faster. Are you still being held prisoner by events from your past? If you are, perhaps today is the day to stand up, take a deep breath and let them go. You are in control of your life, you are the one who decides where you're going, not some deep, dark past that is no longer relevant. We all have a truly incredible opportunity to live the life we want and, when we do, nothing makes you feel more alive.

‘The more time we spend living yesterday the less time we have for living today.’

Key points

1. We all have a history, some of it we are proud of, some we are not, but what you were is not who you can and will be.
2. You have to let go of the past to embrace the future. Too many people live in yesterday and they are destined to stay there until they make the decision to change.
3. Life does not have to follow predictable paths. You are not destined to failure because of what happened in the past, unless you believe that.
4. Living as a victim is a sad, hollow, lonely life. We all have the choice to live the life we want.

It’s time to change your Me Myth

What part of your past are you hanging onto?

What price have you paid so far for holding onto this belief?

Are you really ready to let it go?

So what is stopping you?

Write one sentence and read it out loud as often as you can, saying what you are letting go of and what will change in your life when you let go of it. This will give you the motivation to let go of something from the past that is still holding you prisoner today.

Put a pea under your cushion, Princess

The greatest threat to living a rich life is complacency. The more comfortable we are, the more likely we are to accept things that are just not right. As we get older we seek comfort, or status quo, and we are willing to compromise ourselves to keep it.

We start to make mental calculations about situations, like being in a job we hate or in a relationship that has run its course. When we start to think ‘It’s easier to stay in this job, even though I hate it’ or ‘I’m retiring in ten years so why leave now?’ or ‘I’m not happy in this relationship but it’s easier to stay in it than find someone else’, our alarm bells need to start ringing.

I am not suggesting that you should throw in your job at the drop of a hat, but you should be honest with yourself. Ask yourself why you are staying if you really don’t enjoy what you do or the company you are working for?

The same applies to relationships. We all know they take work, there are ups and downs and challenges, but sometimes a relationship

simply runs its course and needs to end. I met a married couple recently who live in the same house but have completely separate lives, right down to different bedrooms. They both date other people and, in reality, they don't even like each other any more. They say the charade is for the sake of their children who they don't want to put through the distress of a divorce. Really?

A divorce can be devastating with long-term effects. But is it really better to stay together, living a lie? What kind of message does this send the children about loving relationships and honesty? Wouldn't they prefer to see their mother and father happy?

The truth is that this couple is too comfortable in the scenario they have created, despite its difficulties. It is easier to stay with what they know than to leave and face the unknown and start a new life. As human beings we learn to get comfortable in even the most unusual and unfulfilling situations, mainly because we have certainty in staying where we are. It can be incredibly scary to break away, to make the changes and to get uncomfortable, but once you do, you can start to feel the blood pumping through your veins again and your passion for life coming back.

Do you remember the fairytale about the princess and the pea? The queen hides a pea under a pile of mattresses to see if it causes the princess discomfort. I believe we all need to put a pea under our cushion to stop us from becoming too comfortable with our lives. It's nice to be comfortable, but our greatest growth as human beings comes when we are challenged.

The achievements that I am most proud of are the end result of me getting uncomfortable. I was terrified of public speaking, as most people are (statistically most people would prefer to burn to death), but I pushed through my fears and made myself get up and talk. Today I present to large groups of people all over the world. I still get nervous, I still feel uncomfortable and there are times I look at the door and think about making a run for it. But I have learnt to turn the fear into excitement and I absolutely love public speaking now,

even if I have butterflies. It has become a real passion of mine and this passion has enabled me to make it a rewarding career travelling the world.

Making yourself uncomfortable often precedes great accomplishments. People rise up and do great things when they are challenged because necessity makes them. So why not get uncomfortable more often?

When I came up with the idea for my first book, *101 Ways to Market Your Business*, I spoke to a number of people in marketing about it.

Many of them told me, 'It's really hard to get published, so why set yourself up for disappointment? Best to just let the idea go.' It's true that writing a book takes a lot of discipline, creativity and hard work, and many books are rejected. The easiest thing for me to do, the most comfortable thing to do, would have been to put the manuscript in the bin and just get back to life as normal. Fortunately, while their comments did make me question my dream, they also motivated me to succeed. But it told me a great deal about people's attitudes and their fears. Several books later, I am very glad that I didn't listen to those people and stay comfortable.

I know how hard it is to move out of your comfort zone, even when the situation you're in is hurting you. Growing up with Winifred was not a great experience. But when you live in a strange situation you don't really understand why it's strange, you just accept it. My friends at school went home to a mother and father, but for some reason I didn't. There were other differences too.

I didn't brush my teeth until I was about eight or nine years old. Winifred had false teeth, so she wasn't concerned about things like oral hygiene and even though we learnt about it at school it didn't seem to apply to us. Likewise we only had a bath once a week and we took it in turns using the same water. I was always last, so you can imagine how clean I was.

I wasn't allowed to sleep inside the house. I had to sleep on a

mattress on the veranda, no matter how cold it was. I remember being so scared on wild winter nights, shivering and hearing footsteps with every gust of wind. I was locked outside on a soggy old mattress like a dog, often without even so much as a blanket. Ironically we had a number of dogs over the years and they all slept inside.

After a while I wasn't scared any more, I just accepted that was where I slept and that was that. When I grew older I realised that Winifred had a hatred and distrust of men and, even as a young boy, I was put into the same category.

We moved house often. Wendy and I used to hate it. We had to load up shopping trolleys and push them up the road to wherever the next house was. I suspect we moved because the houses became filthy, covered in dirt and grime, and packed to the rafters with huge amounts of stolen stuff.

Winifred's son, Uncle Ted, lived with us from time to time. He was a giant of a man and he scared me a lot. He'd been a prisoner of war in Burma in World War II and I don't think he ever got over the experience. Mind you, he got a job at the Swan Brewery as a beer taster, which seemed to suit him just fine. Unfortunately he took his work way too seriously, working pretty much all day every day tasting beer.

When he stayed with us he lived inside the house and Wendy and I would sleep with Winifred in her room. I was so glad to be inside that I didn't ask any questions. My biggest memory of Uncle Ted was of his stubbly face and the stale smell of beer on his breath. I never trusted him.

But despite all of the problems, when the welfare finally became involved, Wendy and I were absolutely terrified at the thought that we would be taken away from Winifred. All of the abuse and all of the violence amounted to nothing when faced with the possibility of being taken away from her. And I found this confusing.

Although she certainly had her down side, Winifred had provided a roof over our heads, we were always well fed and clothed, and there

was a strange kind of certainty in living with her. Wendy and I lived in fear of Winifred dying. We both wanted her dead in many ways, but our fear of what would become of us outweighed our hatred of her.

We wanted to stay in a situation that really was not good for us because we were scared of what change would mean. Change brings uncertainty in many different shapes and this creates fear if we are in a vulnerable place emotionally. We generally just think of how it will affect us (remember, it is all about me!), without giving a second thought to those around us.

It wasn't just us who were scared at the thought of change. When the welfare finally did take us away Winifred went wild with rage. I would have thought Winifred would be glad to see us go, but she was clearly distraught and dealing with her own uncertainty about the future. As I get older I realise that she was scared of being old and alone.

When we left Perth and moved to Sydney with our new foster family I was worried – who would look after Winifred? But we went to Sydney anyway, and a few years later, she was found dead. She had been dead for several weeks before her body was discovered.

Things didn't change for Wendy and me overnight by any means, but once we were out of the situation with Winifred we could see that life didn't have to be lived the way we were living it. We didn't have to live in fear, we didn't have to be scared all the time and we had the right to be treated in a certain way. As strange as this may sound, I certainly didn't feel like this growing up. So leaving was a confronting option, but it was the best choice. I learnt then that change is not a bad thing. This became a very significant factor in the coming years, to the point where I craved change and the challenge to grow.

When I talk about challenging ourselves, it doesn't mean we all have to climb Mount Everest. For some people challenging themselves is simply taking a different route to work or trying a

different type of food. That's good. What is most important is that we challenge ourselves in any way that we can, both big and small.

I have encountered so many extraordinary people in my life, many of whom you will get to meet in this book. They all share one magnificent trait – they have big peas under their cushions. They don't let themselves get too comfortable and they never accept second best, in themselves or those around them.

Getting uncomfortable means that we stop focusing inwards on our fears, our perceived failings and our shortcomings and get on with the task at hand, which is living a full life.

'You know you are alive when you surprise yourself by doing the things you (and others) never thought you could.'

Key points

1. The greatest way to grow is to be challenged. If you don't have any challenges – find some.
2. Being comfortable is nice, but there is a price to pay. We only get to live this life once, so why not make it count?
3. Look around you for examples of people who constantly challenge themselves. They are the best examples of the benefits that come from challenging yourself.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Ask yourself if you have become too comfortable with life?

What have you been putting off because you are just too comfortable?

Find someone who seems to always challenge themselves and ask them about their life and their levels of joy, satisfaction and contentment. Then ask yourself what is stopping you from doing the same?

When did you stop having fun?

Sometimes it seems that when you mention the word ‘fun’ and put it in the same sentence as ‘life’, the room lets out a collective sigh, indicating the feeling that another cliché has just left somebody’s mouth.

Well, I for one think that we need to spend a lot more time revisiting this particular cliché because it has never been more relevant than it is today. Somewhere along the line we have all become far too serious, particularly at work. It seems that the line between being professional and having a good time has become like the Great Wall of China – big, bold and completely useless.

I could have become the most miserable bastard on the face of the planet and blamed everyone for everything that has happened in my life. However, somewhere along the way, I learnt to laugh out loud, and often, and I have absolutely no doubt that this has saved my life.

There was an incident that I think triggered my fun gene. I was about six years old, sitting on the bus and going into the city with the old lady to do some shopping. We arrived at our stop and, having

been taught good manners, I waited for the other people to get off and then headed out the door. Just as I was getting off the last step (which was a big step for a little fat kid with short legs), I thought I heard the bus driver say something to me so I turned as I was making the leap to the ground.

Then things turned ugly. The driver had released the mechanism, which closed the front door at exactly the same time as I turned to see what he said. The door clamped shut on my right ear and I was suddenly stuck on the outside of the bus, which started to pull away from the curb. The doors were solid metal and the driver couldn't see me on the outside of the bus, but my little legs were going 100 miles an hour as we started to drive down St Georges Terrace in the heart of Perth. People started screaming and waving at the bus. I imagine I must have looked like one of the Three Stooges.

After what seemed like hours but in reality was just a few seconds, the driver slammed on the brakes (which didn't really help my ear one little bit), opened the doors and I fell to the ground, sobbing and clutching my ear.

I vividly remember looking up at a sea of adults standing around me with looks of fear and concern on their faces. Then one of them burst out laughing. This spread like wildfire and in no time at all, the entire crowd, including the bus driver and the old lady, were all belly-laughing as I sat on the ground nursing my injured pride. It didn't take long for me to start giggling as well and, even though it felt wrong, after all everyone should have been deeply concerned and lavishing me with sympathy, it felt so much better than sitting there feeling sorry for myself.

There is something very Australian about laughing in times of adversity. Many nationalities don't get it. Some feel that we are almost irreverent, but I think it is a form of stress relief. We laugh, we have fun, we make fun of each other, no matter how terrible the situation may be, but all the while we grow closer as a result. As any Australian knows, we only make fun of people we like. So if you

are getting to know some Australians and they start teasing you or making fun of you, that is a good sign.

I went to India to see my Indian publishers a couple of years back. I met so many people who were not just poor, they were wretched. They literally had nothing and they looked like skeletons. But the thing I saw the most in India was smiles. Everyone smiled, all the time. Small children smiled, mothers with arms full of babies smiled, old men smiled, Indians living in the gutter smiled. I even think the cows were smiling.

Whilst I like to think that was the result of my magnetic personality, I actually think that there is an air of positivity and optimism in India. It seems out of place in such a poor country, especially when you come home to a modern, western country where we all have so much and yet so many people seem so unhappy.

People choose whether they will be happy, miserable, outrageous, conservative, angry or any other emotion. Often they don't realise that they make this choice but they do. I think that being miserable is hard work. Being a bit outrageous and fun is very easy.

I realise that people also choose whether or not they are going to have fun in what they do. And without a doubt, there is a very clear correlation between people who choose to be happy and those who have a lot of fun doing what they do.

There are so many rewards for choosing to have fun in life. For starters every interaction is so much more rewarding, even something that seems as mundane as ordering a coffee.

I learnt this first-hand at my local coffee shop. As was my ritual I strolled in around 7 am, said a cheery hello and had a chat with my local coffee dealer, a man by the name of Michael. We did this early morning ritual every day for several years and one morning he came up to me for a chat and told me he was leaving. Michael went on to say that hearing me whistle as I walked up the corridor to his coffee shop was one of the highlights of his day. He mentioned that I always came in with a big smile on my face, I had a cheeky comment or two

to make and I sincerely asked how he was doing on this fine day.

Michael told me that my early morning visit was the best part of his working day and I put him in a good mood, which he passed onto everyone who came into the café.

How did I feel after he told me this? I felt both humble and proud. I was lost for words, but it reminded me that being nice to people, having fun with them and just saying a big hello with a nice smile on your face, always comes back at you. But, and of course there is a but, most people wander around looking like undertakers when they should be bounding around like puppies.

We get miserable going to work because we are supposed to be miserable. We don't leap into our favourite coffee shop and scream hello every morning because everyone else will be standing there looking like they are at a funeral and we don't want to appear weird.

My advice is to forget what everyone else has to say or has to think. Step out of your comfort zone and be playful, have fun and make the extra effort to connect with people. Like attracts like – the more fun you have the more fun you will attract. We choose our state of mind and we can always choose to have a positive state of mind. We just have to want it bad enough.

There are many sections in *The Me Myth* that reinforce this concept of choosing our state of mind to get the most out of life. The problem is that if you are totally focused inward, you don't really care about making other people's day, or playing with people, or just having fun. When you start to focus outward you see a hundred opportunities every single day to give and get love, to give and get passion, to give and get fun.

The more you do it, the easier it gets. If it feels a bit weird at first, don't worry, I guarantee you will grow into it. Give it time and people will respond in ways that will blow your mind. I have started humming a song in an elevator only to have the lady next to me start singing and people join in as they got into the lift. It was an

incredible moment and we all burst out laughing when we got to the ground floor.

Most importantly of all, don't worry about what other people think. I used to be terrified about that and, as a result, I would turn my focus inwards and go through life having dull, bland interactions. Now I just don't care what people think. I have fun with pretty much everyone I meet. I love to make people laugh. I love to laugh and absolutely love making someone's day. It is amazing just how easy this is to do. A few sincere words, a compliment or two, laugh at yourself or share an experience. It really isn't that hard.

Imagine how this wonderful world of ours would be if we all spent more time laughing, having fun and playing with the people we encounter every day, particularly those people who are close to us who perhaps haven't seen us have fun for far too long.

Remember, it's only life, it ain't that important, with a bit of luck we will get another go. Put your hands on your belly, shake it around, feel the laugh start deep inside and let it come out. We all get to choose our state, no matter how tough our lives have been or the challenges we face. Being miserable certainly won't help, but having a pile of fun really will.

'Thank goodness being miserable is such hard work. It sure makes having fun so much easier.'

Key points

1. In the craziness of life, many of us have forgotten how to laugh.
2. Having fun should be mandatory, not optional.
3. You can have a profound effect on other people by having fun and simply being cheerful.

4. If it has been a while since you had a belly laugh, get back into training. Having fun is a lot easier than most people make out.

5. Don't worry about what other people think. Most of the time they will join in with your fun.

It's time to change your Me Myth

Have you forgotten how to have fun?

When was the last time you had a great big belly laugh?

Do you take life too seriously? When did you stop having fun?

What can you do to bring more fun into your life every day?

Tomorrow make a point of having lots of fun experiences with people you meet.

About Andrew Griffiths

Andrew Griffiths is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for helping people to achieve both their business and personal dreams and goals. He is an internationally renowned author, dynamic keynote presenter and specialist consultant.

He started his first business at the age of seven when he sold newspapers in the red-light district of Perth. Since then he has gone on to sell encyclopaedias door to door, travelled the world as an international sales manager for a large Japanese shipping company, worked in the Great Sandy Desert for a gold exploration company, been a publisher, had his own scuba school and retail store, and worked as a commercial diver throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Andrew has founded and run two boutique marketing and corporate communication firms in Australia.

Inspired by a desire to see others reach their full potential, Andrew has written eight hugely successful books. His '101 Business Building Books' offer business owners smart, practical and realistic advice. This series is sold in 50 countries, and has been translated into many languages including Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Nigerian, Estonian and Indonesian.

Known for his ability to entertain, inspire and to energise, Andrew is considered one of the leading small business experts in the world. He is highly sought after as a keynote presenter and trainer.

There is no doubt that anyone who meets Andrew Griffiths, reads one of his books or experiences him presenting, will come away from the experience inspired, entertained and ready to make changes in their life and their business.

www.andrewgriffiths.com.au

To find out more about *The Me Myth*
please visit www.thememyth.com

THE ME MYTH

First published in Australia in 2009 by
Simon & Schuster (Australia) Pty Limited
Suite 2, Lower Ground Floor
14-16 Suakin Street
Pymble NSW 2073

A CBS Company
Sydney New York London Toronto

Visit our website at www.simonandschuster.com.au

© Andrew Griffiths 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

CIP available from National Library of Australia
ISBN: 9780731814251

Author photo by Brad Newton

Cover and internal design: Xou Creative

Printed in Australia by Griffin Press

The paper used to produce this book is a natural, recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable plantation forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations in the country of origin.

This advance uncorrected reader's sampler is the property of Simon & Schuster Australia. It is being loaned for promotional purposes and review by the recipient and may not be used for any other purpose or transferred to any third party. Do not quote for publication until verified with finished book. Publicity and marketing enquiries to pr@simonandschuster.com.au