

COACHING PHILOSOPHIA

~~THE PROBLEM IS YOU.~~

The Shadow Rebellion

A manifesto for the ones who can't leave

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ISLE OF MAN · 2026

You did everything they told you. You worked harder than your parents did, and they worked hard. The qualifications came, then the promotion that quietly ate your evenings. There is a meditation app on your phone gathering guilt. And still, on certain mornings, before the first meeting takes you, a thought gets through that you have trained yourself to push away before it finishes: *something here is wrong, and it might not be me.*

I am writing to tell you the thought is correct.

Modernity makes a promise. Work hard, keep improving yourself, and your life will eventually resolve into contentment. The promise fails, and it fails on schedule, and when it does the machine performs its one great trick. It sells you back yourself as the problem. Your discipline was the issue, or your mindset, anything but the pace, anything but the strange arithmetic of measuring a human life in quarterly increments. An entire industry waits at that exact moment of collapse, self-help on one shelf and productivity systems on the next, offering to repair the person the machine just broke, using the machine's own logic, so that you can be fed back in smoothly. The treadmill does not care whether you are running toward ambition or running toward healing. It only cares that you keep running.

I will not sell you the exit. That is the other lie, told loudest by the people who claim to stand against all this. Quit the job and move somewhere warm, run a small business from a laptop while the sunsets do the healing. I live on an island in the Irish Sea and walk its coastline most mornings, and I can report that geography does not keep the promises made on its behalf. The plainer, harder truth is that you cannot opt out, and neither can I. There are mortgages and there are school runs, and the machine has no door marked exit. It is the condition we live inside, the water and the weather. Anyone selling you an escape from it is selling a holiday brochure printed on the machine's own presses.

So the question changes shape. If you cannot get out, the question becomes who you are going to be in here.

People have been asking that question for over two thousand years, and I did not invent the answer. Epictetus worked it out as a slave. Marcus Aurelius worked at it while running the empire, writing notes to himself at night that nobody was ever meant to read, trying to keep one small territory, his own mind, beyond the reach of the very machine he operated. For these people philosophy was survival technology, a set of daily practices for staying human inside conditions you cannot control, and nothing like the seminar-room subject it later became. The universities buried that tradition under argument for argument's sake, and I have spent years digging it back out, in libraries and on my feet, because the ancients were writing field manuals for precisely the situation you now find yourself in.

I came to this work the hard way round. I grew up in Johannesburg under conditions that had no interest in my potential, and at seventeen I was homeless. Fighting saved my life, and thirty years of teaching others to fight showed me what the fight actually teaches, which has surprisingly little to do with aggression. I trained fighters first. Later came soldiers and police officers, and these days it is mostly executives and founders, and every one of them needed

the same two capacities: to stay present inside pressure they could not run from, and to protect themselves without shutting down. I have watched those capacities save a person in a cage, and I have watched them save a person in a boardroom. The opponent changed. The work never did.

So here is what I do, in the one word I refuse to soften. I teach rebellion. Camus drew the line I stand on: the rebel is the one who says no, and inside that no defends something worth a yes. Understand what this rebellion is, and what it will never be. You are not going to overthrow the machine, and cynicism is just obedience wearing black. The rebellion I teach is small and mostly invisible, practised daily, and it begins with refusing the machine's central claim, which is its claim on your inner life. Your attention comes back under your own command, because attention is the ground on which every other battle is fought. You walk without a podcast and let your own thoughts return from exile. The true thing gets said in the meeting, once, and you discover you survive it. And somewhere private you keep a self that is never submitted for review.

Then a strange thing happens, and I have watched it happen client after client. A person who stands this way inside an organisation changes the weather around them. Meetings become more honest simply because they are in the room. Colleagues remember, watching them, that another way of standing exists. I call this being a light in the machine. The whole system will still be there on Tuesday, but the square metre you occupy will be different, and square metres add up. The alternative, waiting for the system to grant you permission to be human, is a wait without an end.

This is the work, and I offer it to a handful of people at a time, because it cannot be scaled and I would never want it to be. It is philosophy practised as a discipline, trained the way I trained fighters, through repetition and correction, over time. We will not be trying to fix you, because you were never broken. The work is to get you standing inside the machine in such a way that the machine can no longer get inside you.

You were never the problem.

It is time to stop living as if you were.

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