

DAVE MITCHELL



THE  
POWER  
OF  
*understanding*  
YOURSELF

THE KEY TO SELF-DISCOVERY,  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT,  
AND BEING THE BEST YOU



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# Contents

**Preface xi**

**Acknowledgments xv**

## ***Part One: The Grape***

<b>Chapter 1: Metacognition: The Process of Evaluating “The Juice”</b>	<b>3</b>
Metacognition Versus Self-Awareness	4
Thinking About Our Thoughts	5
Choosing to Extract Me	8
Your Cognitive Schemas Make You Unique	9

- Chapter 2: Locus of Control: You Are the Winemaker** 13  
Delusions, Control, and Disappointment 14  
Finding Your Locus of Control 16
- Chapter 3: Alignment: From Vine to Bottle** 23  
Inputs and Outputs 24  
Horizontal Alignment 26
- Chapter 4: Core Ideology: The Crush of Juice, Stems, Skins, and Seeds** 31  
Examining Inputs 34  
Assessing Your Desired Outputs 36  
Identifying Your Core Ideology 42  
Vertical Alignment 47

***Part Two: The Style***

- Chapter 5: What's My Style? Shades of Me** 51  
Understanding Interactive Style 55
- Chapter 6: Experts: It's About the Process for Me** 63  
Meeting the Expert 64  
The Behavioral Cues (or lack thereof) of Experts 65  
An Expert Is a Wine's Acidity 67
- Chapter 7: Romantics: It's About the People for Me** 71  
Meeting the Romantic 72  
Putting Others' Happiness Before Your Own 73  
Reframing Childhood Trials 74  
A Romantic Is a Wine's Sweetness 76

**Chapter 8: Masterminds: It's About the Possibilities for Me 79**

Meeting the Mastermind 80

Breaking the Rule in Order to Follow the Rule 82

A Mastermind Is a Wine's Fruit 86

**Chapter 9: Warriors: It's About the Pace and the Point for Me 89**

Meeting the Warrior 90

No Room for Interesting Details 92

A Warrior Is a Wine's Tannin 94

***Part Three: The Balance***

**Chapter 10: Punching Down the Cap: The Pursuit of Balance 99**

Finding the Right Balance 100

The Good and Bad of Stress 103

**Chapter 11: Punching Down the Expert Style Influence on Me 107**

Complementary Versus Contrasting Balance 110

An Expert with a Secondary Romantic (lowest score A column, next-lowest score B column) 111

An Expert with a Secondary Mastermind (lowest score A column, next-lowest score C column) 115

An Expert with a Secondary Warrior (lowest score A column, next-lowest score D column) 119

Extracting Me Worksheet 121

- Chapter 12: Punching Down the Romantic Style Influence on Me 123**
- A Romantic with a Secondary Expert (lowest score B column, second-lowest score A column) 126
  - A Romantic with a Secondary Mastermind (lowest score B column, second-lowest score C column) 128
  - A Romantic with a Secondary Warrior (lowest score B column, second-lowest score D column) 131
  - Extracting Me Worksheet 134
- Chapter 13: Punching Down the Mastermind Style Influence on Me 135**
- A Mastermind with a Secondary Expert (lowest score C column, next-lowest score A column) 138
  - A Mastermind with a Secondary Romantic (lowest score C column, next-lowest score B column) 142
  - A Mastermind with a Secondary Warrior (lowest score C column, next-lowest score D column) 143
  - Extracting Me Worksheet 147
- Chapter 14: Punching Down the Warrior Style Influence on Me 149**
- A Warrior with a Secondary Expert (lowest score D column, next-lowest score A column) 152
  - A Warrior with a Secondary Romantic (lowest score D column, next-lowest score B column) 154
  - A Warrior with a Secondary Mastermind (lowest score D column, next-lowest score C column) 157
  - Extracting Me Worksheet 159

**Chapter 15: An Example of Punching Down Your Own Style 161**

Analyzing My Assessment 163

***Part Four: The Vintage***

**Chapter 16: Veraison: The Evolution of Me 171**

A Shift in Perspective 174

Holy &#!\* 176

Identifying Your Veraison 180

**Chapter 17: Age-Worthy: Maintaining the Best Me 183**

Becoming Better with Age 184

An Endless Appetite for Learning 185

Civil Conversations for Understanding Different Perspectives 189

Aging Well Physically 193

A Plan for Greater Achievement 195

**Epilogue: Uncorking Me 197**

**Extracting Me Worksheet 199**

**About the Author 209**

**Index 211**



## Preface

*Extraction: As it relates to making red wine, this is the process of pulling out the true essence of the grape to produce the finest possible wine. While the juice is generally colorless, the skin, seeds, and stems add character, vibrancy, and flavor nuance. With too little extraction, the wine lacks color and complexity – too much extraction and the wine can be self-indulgent, overbearing, and brusque.*

My earliest clear memories from my childhood are of me walking in the woods with my dogs. I spent many of my days, when I was as young as six years old, wandering and pondering. Much of this fondness to disappear into the woods had to do with the challenges facing my mother. She was dealing with the mental anguish brought on by a life cocktail of an unplanned second era of parenthood, undiagnosed depression, and menopause. As a result, she developed unhealthy relationships with

vodka, barbiturates, diet pills, and my father. And she was not a happy drunk. My coping mechanism was to vacate the premises in hopes that she would pass out by the time I returned.

I have long since forgiven my mom, realizing that I arrived at a bad time for her. This book is not about her – but as it is a book predicated on the notion of fully knowing oneself, her influence on me must be included. I think it is also important to point out that despite her struggles, she exists in me through many of the traits of which I am most proud. Within every cloud there is a silver lining and such, as they say. For one thing, she indirectly and unintentionally but effectively inspired my ability to engage in metacognition, a concept that is discussed at length in this book.

My initial companion on these childhood journeys among the trees was my dog, Long John; or, as my dad called him, Bird Brain, due to his odd habit of chasing birds out of our yard. Soon, we were blessed with the arrival of Red, the most loyal and well-trained canine member of our family. Unlike Long John, whose attention span was commensurate with his nickname, Red never left my side from the time I walked out of the house and into the woods until I would return home many hours later. Perhaps it had to do with Red's puppyhood.

Red was already an adult when we first met. Judging by his demeanor, training, and appearance, he had been well loved and cared for. He was a passenger in a car accident near my hometown of Greenup, Illinois. My mother was a news stringer for the local television and radio stations and would contact local authorities to get details of any story that the area media might be interested in. A car accident, particularly one in which there was a fatality, was a big story in a small community. When she contacted the Cumberland County sheriff's department, they informed her that the driver of the car had been killed. The other occupant was unharmed but emotionally shaken. The lucky survivor was Red.

Touched by his plight, my mom sent my dad to collect Red and bring him to our house, where we would keep him pending notification of the family. Red's next of kin was the brother of

his travel companion. Because that brother lived in Hawaii, it would be nearly a week before the family could arrange to pick up Red. Within that week, he had endeared himself to our family in a way that no other dog had previously done.

I remember the incredible sadness I felt the evening that we waited for Red's "uncle" to pick him up. We lived at the end of Wylde Drive, a dead-end road that stopped at our house. Eventually, a pair of headlights approached our home. The car pulled into the driveway and my mother, father, and I looked at each other and at Red and began to cry. We waited for the knock on the door. And we waited.

After a few minutes, the car backed out of our driveway and drove away. No one ever showed up to claim Red. It was one of the happiest days of my childhood. For the next several years, I had a hiking buddy nonpareil. It is not hyperbole to say there was no other creature, human or otherwise, that I was closer to than Red during this time.

In many ways, this book and my life in general are the products of my mom, my dad, and Red. Without my mom, I would not have taken to the woods, spending countless hours contemplating the world and my place within it. She also contributed to my aptitude for public speaking, a reporter and entertainer in her own right. Without my dad, I would not have my sense of duty; he stayed with my mom for 53 years, allowing only her death to separate them. And without Red, I would not have felt the security to take those walks alone, to turn my attention deep inside myself and start the trek inward to discover my truth.

Many others would aid my odyssey: my lovely bride, my children, my sister, friends, co-workers, clients, and more than a few strangers. We are all shaped by those who cross our path. I am thankful for them all, regardless of the context of our intersection, because each has allowed me to learn more about me, to grow, to become the best me possible.

Still today, 50 years after those childhood experiences with Red, I am drawn to long hikes of solitude when I feel unsettled, out of alignment. Having moved from Illinois to Florida to

Colorado and, finally, to Walla Walla, Washington, this habit – my “wander ponders” – have remained a part of my life. After arriving in Washington State’s wine country immersing myself in the wine industry, I have come to realize that I’ve been undertaking the human equivalent of what the wine world calls “extraction.” I am learning how to express my essence as a human being to be the best person possible. It is an expedition that never ends, but never fails to fulfill. Just like a winemaker working with the grape to create the perfect expression in a bottle, we are rewarded when we endeavor to find and display our gift.

And, just like a winemaker, my muse was Red.

# Acknowledgments

Despite my lifelong fascination (obsession?) with metacognition, reflection, and contemplation, writing this book reminded me of the many people who have shaped my life. Many of them are mentioned within this work, but far more are not. As the cliché goes, “there are too many to list here.” But there are a few too important to not list.

My lovely bride, Lori, is my reason for being. You never stop astounding me as a person, a spouse, a mother, and a friend. I love you more than I thought it possible to love.

My daughter Brooke and son Slade have made me a better human being. You make me proud. I love you both and will forever do everything in my power to ensure that your life is good.

My sister provided a pivot point in my life when I needed it most. I love you, Sis!

In addition to those mentioned in the book, my enduring gratitude is extended to Nancy and Russ, Tom and Peggy, Bonnie, Debby, all my teachers – by profession and by chance and my many clients and seminar attendees from whom I have learned more than I have taught.

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Mom, thank you for what you gave me. It was more than you knew.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my two original mentors: my dad and Red. I cannot think of either of you without the seemingly impossible experience of smiling and crying, simultaneously. I can't think of a better lingering effect on someone.

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**PART ONE**  
**THE GRAPE**



# Chapter 1 Metacognition

## *The Process of Evaluating “The Juice”*

In vino veritas – In wine, there is truth.

– *Pliny the Elder*

I miss libraries. Oh, I know that they're still around, but I don't visit them. I am hopeful that some people still do, because I love the concept of a library. It is a magical place, a place to go where you have access to information old and new to broaden your knowledge. You can do research in a quiet comfortable location. There is always that worn, leather chair in the corner that only you know about. It is there that you settle in to embark on a journey. The library offers an environment that is precious in today's world. It allows for the solitary pursuit of information. You sit among the product of the efforts of the greatest minds of our time with tangible evidence of their efforts in every direction. With more motivation than plan, you start looking for wisdom. Your research may take hours,

even days. You will have to return repeatedly to this wonderful, quiet place full of resources to expand your understanding of something. To gain more knowledge, you will be required to have some – to think about what you already know, get up out of your comfy chair and go find information that will broaden that existing knowledge. You will gather a stack of books and return to your chair to pour over them for useful nuggets, sifting through the chaff of unimportant or unnecessary material in your quest for the meaningful. And with each new piece of data, a new pathway for further enlightenment will open.

Such is metacognition. The library is your own brain. And like the libraries of today, while we know it's around, we rarely step inside.

## **METACOGNITION VERSUS SELF-AWARENESS**

Metacognition is the process of thinking about thinking. More importantly for our purposes, metacognition is thinking about how *you* think. And although that sounds like a pretty easy undertaking, consider the daunting task of walking into the Carnegie Library to do some research on a topic of which you have only a superficial understanding with the expectation that you will leave it with absolute expertise. Take quantum physics, for example. I have heard it described this way, “Quantum physics is not just harder than you think, it is harder than you can think.” You might know a little about physics, but it's going to take a whole lotta trips to the library to learn quantum physics. In that way, metacognition is an entirely other level of self-awareness.

And here is where metacognition differs from mere self-awareness. Most people have some degree of self-awareness. Using the library metaphor, we can define self-awareness as the shallow knowledge that you possess about a subject upon visiting the first time. You may go to the library to research the wine varietal Cabernet Sauvignon, for example, with the knowledge that it is a grape used to make wine. Upon researching it, you would learn that Cabernet Sauvignon is