

# ‘Get a Life’– Not an Excuse

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We can all sit on our backsides feeling sorry for ourselves blaming everyone including ourselves for the way we are, or the way that we feel or behave. We can say we are depressed, accepting medical diagnosis and resort to medication or booze to hide away. But how does any of that thinking or lack of action create that buzz that makes us live life to the full. Ok you can't smile every day, but maybe you can for, at least, a few moments a day just as you can moan, get frustrated, be bored. That's just about living. When things 'get to you', those times when annoyances, awful happenings, or

someone close dies, it can give you a reason for opting out or be labelled bereaved or depressed. But, you **can** also get back there smiling amongst the tears and coping with the guilt you may feel, perhaps for even feeling that way.

AERO might help you with all of this and even more. Think about finding your purpose in life, the job you want, the people you want to be with, the duties that you have and how to make them bearable or even enjoyable. If you can understand yourself a bit better then you can start to understand others too and why they might respond to you in the way that they do or even the way that you would like.

## **The Origins of AERO**

As a ‘long in the tooth’ social worker whose mind state was really that of a community worker [and there is a difference] I began to think that there must be a better way to help people cope with difficulties in their lives. The waiting lists to see therapists combined with the criteria for seeing them, meant that the issues people had affecting them and their severity were being categorised by outsiders, not by the people themselves.

I have had times in my life when it would have been good to have someone to help me explore and find solutions to issues that worried or distressed me, but

knew that because I still functioned on a day to day basis, I wouldn't fit into any of their categories.

Wouldn't it be good to have a booklet and a way of working that you could do by yourself, with a family member, or a friend?

So this is the aim. For many people this will be enough, you will be able to use AERO and figure things out for yourself. When you know more, I pretty well guarantee that you will begin to feel better. You might still be frustrated or bored or angry at times, aren't we all, but at least you will have worked out why.

When I was fourteen years old I missed six months of school and was labelled as a school phobic. No one helped me find out why, and for decades I pondered on this until AERO gave me the answers. I was a mix of an introvert and extrovert, not as extreme as some people that get labelled as bi polar, but the introvert part was controlling the other part of me and the extrovert felt trapped and bored.

In December 2010 I looked at my medical records for that time and was shocked [as was my Mum when I showed her] at the lack of understanding about me and the **labelling**. I could have been placed in a psychiatric hospital adolescent unit after one appointment with a psychologist, but I got back to school and muddled through with the support of one fantastic teacher. I had a

good family around me, so even with later tragedies in my life I have come out laughing and want the same to happen to as many people as possible. I can be a terrible giggler.

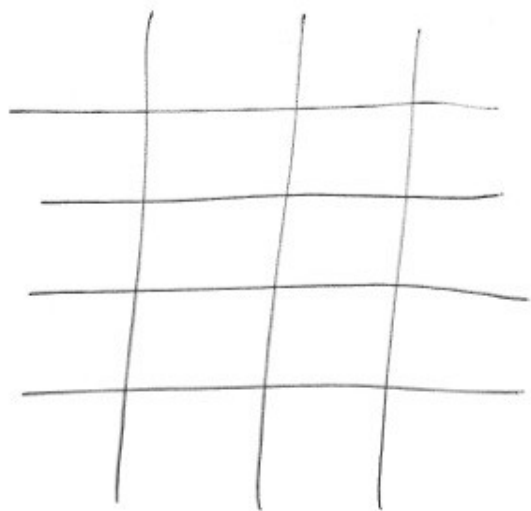
The aim of the booklet is to be a ‘dip in and out’ tool, not specifically a whole read. Most adults are too busy for that, rushing around doing what needs doing and wishing that what they didn’t do got done or what they dreamed of, happened.

It is also for those of us who get restless, feeling bored one minute and exhilarated the next. People are so simple and yet so complex and knowing yourself better can be great and awful too.

### **So how might AERO work?**

There are two parts to AERO. Firstly there are trigger words that help you think or talk about life and your view of life. Secondly there is an introvert/ extrovert chart which helps you consider your personality and other people’s too.

Before you read any further look at these two diagrams:



Nothing in AERO is about a test. There is no right or wrong way to do any of it. AERO is a tool to help you think and by that thinking make choices and act, or not upon those choices taking the consequences along the way. It is also a philosophy of living life.

You might like to jot ideas down for you to look at in the future so keep a little notebook, diary or your mobile handy.

So which of the diagrams did you prefer and why?

Did you think either of them was the way that you live your life?

Was that OK or would you rather live your life the other way?

If you had this kind of life would you be happy or perhaps you already are?

So are you happy?

Don't dwell on the diagrams too much unless you are in conflict with others about why you have that life and feel that you need to explore why.

Try the diagrams on your family and friends. They might be quite revealing.

Do you see their lives and the way that they think in one or other of the diagrams?

How does that way of living affect you and how you want to live?

*If you looked at them and thought what the heck is she on about and need to know now turn to the end of this booklet to find out my and other people I've tried them on interpretation, but take care to retain your own ideas.*

### **Aspirations-About what?**

Aspirations can be a great or frustrating word. Think of the Olympic runner who wants to achieve gold. He might be able to get noticed or even get the sponsorship so that he can concentrate on getting gold, but then what happens to everything else in his life. He can, of course, be a 'her' and bring in issues and choices such as when to have children. That may also be a goal. Do you go on and on trying to get that Olympic gold and put off having the children?

There are so many of us that have aspirations to do something in life which we only ever partially achieve or never at all. For some of us that is fine, for others there are life-long regrets that can impact on others.

But there are also others who don't seem to have any aspirations, not knowing what they want to do with their lives. In the negative this can mean that they drift by mixing with the 'wrong' people or get nagged to do something when they are quite happy living each day as it comes and, as long as they aren't a burden on society, what's wrong with that!

Let's not confuse aspiration with ambition. They can be the same, but they don't have to be.

I wanted to be an actress and a writer and have to some extent achieved both, but not in the ambitious way that I wanted to. Being the fairy in a local am dram panto compared to some character in an RSC production is much lower than what I had always hoped, but then maybe now at the age of 56 it's just as much fun.

### **Encouragement-by Whom?**

This really is interesting, as I don't think that we are as good as we could be at encouraging adults. Why? I don't know, whether it's to do with some kind of jealousy perhaps, but this will be very interesting for future debates.

### **Realism-what's that?**

Look, when the country is broke and people still expect to have more, what's that about? I can't understand how



people expect to get pay rises and more services when there is only a finite amount of money. And those people who earn enormous amounts of money, you know the million plus a year sorts who, even after paying half or more in tax have more than most can ever dream of. What's that about? If they worked one day a week as a carer looking after a severely disabled or confused person maybe we'd have more respect, but then, maybe they do! We don't know. The same as the journalist that criticises so many, maybe they work as carers one day a week for all we know, but then if they do, they should tell us because surely caring is one of the most important jobs that anyone can do and can also be one of the most frustrating.

Realism is also about the art of the possible, it doesn't have to all be negative.

When I worked as a community worker in Colnbrook, I found that giving local people a buzz and something fun to do brought people out of their houses to help. I'd like to see more of this. I don't see why more people can't do something for free.

Realism is also looking at crazy rules, regulations and fears. Take the CRB checks that rule the 'world'. What are they really about? Are there really abusers around every corner waiting to leap onto every vulnerable

person? Have all these checks made any difference to the number of serious cases?

Come on, let's get real, let's start teaching our children to kick them in the balls, scream and run.

And why on earth are people going off with complete strangers they have met on the internet! Surely anyone under the age of 40, unless they have 3 kids, should be going out and meeting people normally.

AERO can teach people about reality and so eventually lead to the reduction in the need for CRBs.

Why are people vulnerable anyhow? Ok, we know that some are young or disabled, but a lot of old people are stuck on their own because they have just become miserable old gits who weren't very nice to their family and friends when they were younger. Perhaps they were the bullies and time has got its revenge on them. I know that these views may sound harsh, but I really think that they are worth airing.

I don't believe that anyone is too old to change and apologise for their previous behaviour. Think of how in Charles Dickens 'Christmas Carol', the ghosts affected Scrooge's behaviour. Wasn't he lucky to get this second chance!

## **Openness-Oh yeah!**

Is there really such a thing as openness? Try asking some Government Ministers, surely they have to watch nearly every word they say in case it gets misinterpreted and taken on by the pathetic hyenas [gutter press] I always find it amazing that the BBC and other TV and radio talk about the ‘media’ as if it isn’t them, but wake up guys it is you too!

As with all professions, mine own included [social work], there are good people and irritating people who appear to get a ‘kick’ or something out of being negative about people and things. I use the word ‘irritating’ rather than ‘bad’ because I don’t really think that people are ‘bad’ they just, for some reason, find positive speech and actions difficult, but I think that they need to be careful and think a little more because otherwise one day they might find themselves alone like Scrooge.

The thing with AERO is that you can think what you like and hopefully over time you will find a network of people around you to air some of the issues that you feel. But then, through ‘reality’ you might be put ‘In your place’

Say you are innately racist or ‘anti’ something or other, AERO can help you to explore why, and with that information you can decide whether you want to still be ‘anti’ and take charge of the consequences and the

decisions you have made. This can be in the context of the law and general moral views.

### **History repeats itself, but does it have to?**

Just before the second world war broke out my Grandfather wrote to his German friend saying that he could no longer be friends with him because he should have helped to prevent Hitler getting into power and what was happening in Germany was just unacceptable. But then was that realistic of my Grandfather? It could have been that his friend was an influential academic and scientist, but there again if it was only him trying to do something, could he have achieved anything? Maybe, maybe not.

Over the years that I have worked as both a social worker and community worker with adults and children, I have come across many people who do things in a certain way just because their family has always done it that way.

So does history have to repeat itself? I don't think so, but often it takes courage to do things differently, so maybe it's not a coincidence that the word 'encourage' comes from the word 'courage'. AERO is the thinking tool to consider different ways and if you want to consider a 'different' way and have no one to encourage you then get in touch and I'll try to help you.

## **So you believe what's written in the newspapers, do you?**

It's amazing how powerful the press still are! Whether you are a Daily Mail reader or a Guardian reader there seems to be a tendency to believe in the accuracy of what is written. The other thing that is interesting is the columnists who give their views on all sorts of topics. Where do they get their wisdom from when many have spent their whole lives being journalists? I'm not knocking them, although it might seem that I am, I am just querying it, that's all. Like everyone we meet in life, we have to make a judgement about how honest and genuine they are and journalists are no different. Some people are very suspicious of all journalists and others are too trusting so where do we get the happy medium. I've found the same in my profession as a social worker and there is a comparison although it seems that there could be more retribution on a social worker that doesn't keep a confidence than a Journalist but maybe that's not true.

I think when you look at the section on personality that you might understand more about who to trust most. The likelihood is that you are more likely to come across a social worker than a journalist, not because you particularly want to, but because if you want to access a service, say for your elderly relative, they are the ones

that have to assess the need and link it to what criteria they have been given at the time.

### **The trigger words- What are they about?**

I don't think that the power of words is a coincidence, for centuries they have made or broken relationships between groups of people, countries and states.

We may have a number of words that are known across countries, but those words can be interpreted differently and words meanings can change over time and within colloquial groups. Think of the word 'Gay.' When I was a child it meant someone being jolly, now it is mostly used for someone who is homosexual. Also the word 'ignorant' to me it was someone who wasn't very intelligent, but to my Brummy friends it meant someone who was rude.

I hope by now, that reading my words have stirred you up in some way. You may agree with what I have said or feel angry, and this has been a deliberate ploy because I want to try to show you how powerful words are, and it is that power that has led to people being controlled in how they should think.

Below are some starter trigger words to get you thinking about your life and the people around you. Why did I pick these words and not others? Well the answer is that some have been used in the children's version of AERO

and have had a powerful effect over a short period of time. Others I feel are more appropriate for adults.

The way to use the words most of the time is the way that you chose the boxes and squiggles diagram. So if you are mainly a squiggles person feel free to pick whichever words appeal to you. If you are a boxes person go through them logically and move from one to the next one, but don't dwell too long on any word that doesn't seem to relate to you otherwise, you might get to miss the one that really does.

AERO is also a tool for life, just like brushing your teeth, so feel free to come back to any or all of the words, time after time and as many times as you want. They are there for you forever.

### **Twenty two random words**

**Contentment**

**Control**

**Frustration**

**Future**

**Loneliness**

**Mobility**

**Individuality**

**Dependency**

**Stubbornness**

**Assumptions**

**Adaptability**

**Decisions**

**Age**

**Humour**

**Expectations**

**Hurt**

**Attitudes**

**Trust**

**Depression**

**Time**

**Money**

**Health**

There are many words that could be chosen as trigger words and you may want to gather more as you go along. Why twenty two? For no reason at all except that it's a number I like.

When you think about these words and how they affect you or anyone in your life you might like to jot down ideas or draw pictures related, both to the ones that first come to you, and the after thoughts. Don't dwell on the rights and wrongs of your thoughts. If they bring up good or bad memories then perhaps it is good to jot some of this down and either destroy it or keep it for the future to have a look at.

The words are deliberately listed in a random way. If you prefer to list them alphabetically or in any other order feel free to do so.

**Contentment**

I find this an interesting word because I think that it is very much about a feeling and for many of us hard to achieve for any extended period of time.



Do you feel like this?

If so, where and with whom

If not, why don't you?

Is there anything that you can do about it?

Think about why you do or don't with different people and in different situations. Are there some common themes that make you feel good or bad?

Perhaps you are looking at this word with an 'other' or a group of people! Can you agree, disagree or compromise on things that are positive or negative? If you can't agree, is the word one that you should not discuss as a group?

### **Frustration**

At the time of writing this I am frustrated about not being able to achieve some of my goals and so sometimes I just feel that I want to explode. By the time you read this all of this may have changed in my life for the better hopefully, but who knows and that to me is the frustrating thing. But as a squiggles person why does it bother me? Well that's the interesting thing, so in many ways I must have a stronger boxes element to my life than I thought that I did.

***For additional info on the diagrams go to the end of the booklet***

So what frustrates you and how do you deal with it? Try using some drawings if you like rather than just talking or list the things that frustrate you.

### **Loneliness**

This I find is a mind blowing word. Although I like time on my own I have had large periods of life where this has had a huge impact on me.

I have had people tell me to go out and make some new friends, but it nearly always makes me feel like I am the one that is making all of the effort. My life seems to be either too much company or too little. I've never seemed to have got the balance right and continue to wonder why it's me that has to make so much of the effort.

So you've picked this word! If you are a boxes person you will have got here logically. If you are a squiggles person it will have beamed at you.

If you are currently lonely get in touch and I'll try to help you because often this is hard to deal with on your own.

### **Individuality**

Do you know who you truly are? I think that for most of the world, for much of the time it is hard either to be an individual or know what you are. From young children we are surrounded with rules and regulations that we soon learn not to question instead just grumble about blaming someone else for making that rule. For us adults with children who have children who have questioned these rules, regulation or morals it can become tiring and wearisome. If you have read this logically you will have read that my Grandfather wouldn't remain friends with his German friend because he didn't stop Hitler and the Nazi atrocities. As an individual could he have done anything? Perhaps he tried and had to consider his family over the world. What would you have done in his situation?

How easy or hard do you think it is to be an individual?

What are the good or bad things?

If you are dependent on others can you really be as individual as you would like?

Think of the elderly person receiving home care who would like to get up at 5am or go to bed at 3am they don't get this choice as far as I know.

If you know of someone who does let me know?

**Stubbornness**

An interesting word! Who decides that we are being stubborn? Do we know that we are? Is this just an individual state or can you imagine situations where there are more than one person being stubborn?

What affect does this stubbornness have on relationships?

I can think of several situations, but as with all the other words I don't want to put ideas into your head.

### **Adaptability**

Are you able to adapt to different situations and different people?

If not, why not?

When you visit, or stay with a friend do you do things their way or try to do things your way? And if you try to impose your way what happens?

This is also important in a working situation and is very linked to being part of a group or team.

In certain situations it is crucial to be adaptable, think of a life and death situation where normally your role would be different but in this particular situation for some reason you are the best to do the job. Many years ago when I was seven months pregnant, I was called out to visit a woman in a high rise flat who was dangling her young child out of a window. I went with another worker who should have taken the lead, but couldn't handle it. It was towards the end of the day and I was knackered. It was before individual mobile phones and the old one that we had didn't work in the block of flats. I had to be adaptable enough for both of us and saved the child from being dropped out of the window. There was no time to be precious about our original roles.

What situations have you been in where you have had to be adaptable?

### **Age**

I know someone at the time of writing who is 92 and acts a couple of decades younger most of the time.

Sometimes she complains about her knees hurting, but then who wouldn't at her age. She doesn't walk as much as she used to, but that's partly because she doesn't want to. She however still has a very alert mind and her grandchildren will talk freely with her about all sorts of things including the kind of discussions that many kids would have with their mates.

When she is with other people just a bit younger than her she acts much older, but this is because she is ‘adaptable’.

Whilst working in a school I came across several children who felt restricted by their age and after exploring why were able to cope with life better.

Adults find it is generally more difficult to get a service than children unless you have some kind of illness or disability.

Some people use their age as an excuse not to do something which can be ok, but it may lead to them becoming isolated and lonely.

What do you think about age?

Is it important?

Are the expectations of different people at different ages ok?

If not, why not?

## **Expectations**

So we lead naturally to this very powerful word

Whose expectations are they, yours or theirs?

And who are ‘they’? Friends, family, the ‘state’?

Many children that I have used AERO with have picked this word and talked at length, realising that often their own expectations are quite different to their parents and other family members.

Think about your week ahead. What is expected of you and by whom?

Make a list and consider how you feel about each of these expectations?

How do you cope with the things that you don't like or find difficult for some reason?

If you took a balance of the good and bad or negative expectations what percentage would you class as good or bad/negative?

Can or would you like to change this balance?

Think about taking small steps towards these changes which could be tasks you have to do, people who have an impact on your life.

Jot down who they were and why they made you feel this way.

## **Attitudes**

This is another very powerful word. As with all of the words it can beam out at you reminding you of a situation, or life in general.

Attitudes to things are often seen as negative. “He has an attitude problem,” but you can also have a positive attitude.

Think about your own attitude to certain people and situations. Make a list of positive and negative attitudes. Which do you have most of?

Explore why you have more of one or the other.

Do you think you are right, or are others? Does it really matter anyway?

Does anything need changing? If so, what and how can things change?

Do you have to change?

Are you the one that always has to change and do you need to tell people that they need to change?

Can they change?

## **Depression**

This is a word that is used commonly, but whereas years ago people were told to ‘pull themselves together’ I wonder whether it has now gone too far the other way!



The account below comes directly from a young person who I knew at Wolgarston. She reflected back four years later.

### **Julia**

Julia was 17 years old when I first knew her and was in the sixth form. She was one of the first people to use AERO in its raw state. I caught up with her again at the age of 21 to find out how she was now and what if any impact AERO had on her life.

Even though it was four years since she had seen the AERO words she instantly recognised them and said that two words had become significant. These words were **Expectations** and **Image**. She said that she never knew what was expected of her and didn't like herself.

We decided to explore together why at the age of 17 she felt that she needed someone to talk to. She said that ever since she was at primary school she felt like the odd one out and that everyone was in their own little groups and she didn't fit in. She said "other people saw me as different". She felt that her parents had been overprotective not letting her play out when others had been able to.

She attended three schools after primary. She was bullied at the first staying there for about a year. She described it as both physical and verbal bullying with children shoving her around. She said that she was small

with specs and felt different. She got on ok at her next school but was only able to stay there until she was thirteen and then went to Wolgarston High School. She made some friends there but generally found it difficult. She wanted to join a particular group but sat on the outside of this group never being able to become a member.

Julia never saw herself as a loner she was just introverted but didn't want to be. She wanted to be accepted and part of the group. She 'badly' wanted to be a member of a group and didn't care what type of group it was. We talked about how easily she could have become a member of an undesirable group just to be accepted.

Julia liked herself now but when she was 17 she didn't. She didn't feel like she belonged anywhere. The friends that she had were themselves all outsiders and in retrospect she realised that they could have become a group with their own group identity.

Asking Julia about what she generally felt about life then she said that she felt 'numb'

"I had to get up and drag myself out of bed. I found it a chore just being out and about. I felt trapped at home with the same four walls. Everything was just dull"

We talked about colours and she said that for about 4 years most of her life was black with occasional times

when it was grey. Julia said that after every holiday she dreaded going back to school and only stayed to sixth form because she felt that her own parents hadn't done enough with their lives and had low expectations of themselves.

During this period her parents were splitting up which made it an even darker time. She said that this dull black feeling came well before they started to split up. This darkness reached its peak during the first year of doing her A levels and she decided to leave school and do something else. Julia said that she always felt that her immediate family was detached from the world. She comes from a large extended family but didn't feel that they helped.

During this period Julia was put on some anti depressants by her GP but she decided that being labelled as depressed and the medication just made things worse and so she took herself off it. She said that her father had been on medication for years since a close relative had committed suicide.

Julia said that she didn't like this time in her life and wasn't keen generally talking about it but it felt ok as it was for a book and for others to learn from.

The dominant colour in her life was now a bright blue and Julia liked herself as the person that she was now.

She realised that she was a person of routine although showing her the boxes and squiggles diagrams for the first time she preferred the squiggles but needed the boxes to live her life.

She said that she had learned to “create her own power” and gave examples of taking the lead in when and where to meet friends.

She had found making decisions difficult but didn’t now.

She said that people could tell what mood she was in by the clothes that she wore when she was 17 describing them as being like a “wall flower” and “not wanting to be noticed”

Returning to the discussion of depression and medication Julia said that she refused to touch it.

She said that at 11 she saw herself as a “funny little girl with specs on” and that the bullies had exaggerated that image.

Returning to the AERO words Julia said that she picked ‘expectations’ because she didn’t know what others wanted of her and she was always trying to please everyone. She recognised that she was dominantly a ‘giver’ rather than a ‘taker’

She also picked the word ‘Image’ and remembered being in a cramped room whilst doing AERO. She said that the

room represented where she was at that time. She hadn't seen AERO for 4 years but she hadn't forgotten it.

Julia showed that by exploring who she was and issues in her life that she could live without medication whereas her Father continues to be dependent on it to be a happier calmer person.

What do you think of Julia's story?

Do you need help or is it someone you know?

## **Money**

I have put this word because it has so much impact on many of us.

The old saying that money can't buy you love was certainly true of some children at Wolgarston. I knew of a child whose Mum had bought the family three substantial houses, one to live in and two as family holiday homes, but what the boy wanted was time with his Mum which she found hard to understand.

How important is money to you?

Have you been involved in arguments about money?

Think about what you actually feel about money?

Were you born into a family with no money, some money or lots of money?

What impact did this have on you, both as a child and an adult?

Did it make you want to have more money or see money as evil and destructive?

Does money make you happy or lead to arguments and distress?

## **Control**

Control is quite a good word to follow money although I didn't list it here deliberately. As I said earlier the words were all listed randomly.

What do you feel about the word 'Control'? Do you see it as a positive or negative word?

If the answer is that it can be both, then in what situations is it positive for you and what situations is it negative? Why not make two columns and jot your ideas down.

Were you controlled more or less as a child and are you still controlled as an adult?

Was this good or bad?

Do you control other people? If so, why?

Do you like or dislike controlling them?

Do you see control as power, safety, necessary or what?

## **Future**

In the 1970's my then boyfriend, later husband talked about a world when everyone would have their own personal phone. He didn't call it a mobile, but he did talk about some of the negative consequences, such as secrecy. At the time people laughed at him.

For a few years now I have been talking about robot carers that really know you and people laugh at me, but I would prefer that when I am a really old to a few minutes a day from a carer.

How do you see the future?

What will you contribute to the future?

Do you fear it, just take each day at a time, or relish it?

## **Mobility**

Mobility can be about getting around physically.

It can also be about changing jobs or life styles.

Some people are able to handle these changes while others struggle.

Where do you fit?

Would you like to be more mobile?

Can you do this on your own, but feel a little scared or do you need some help?

What stops you from being mobile? Is it yourself, family friends or systems?

I think coping with mobility in the sense of change and physical mobility depends quite a lot on a mixture of your personality and your upbringing. What do you think?

## **Dependency**

Is it good to be dependent?

I personally see it as more negative than positive, but would be interested to hear other people's views.

It's another word that I see linked to upbringing mainly and personality secondly. What do you think?



Take the person, usually a woman, who has driven for years and doesn't know how to open the bonnet of the car and check the oil or the tyres. Does that matter?

Consider the young people who get in a state because their mobile phone has gone wrong and see it as life and death.....what's that about?

Why is it that some old people have to be taken everywhere whilst others can, and do, just get on the bus?

Why did you pick this word? Are you too dependent or do you have too many people dependent on you?

How would you like things to change?

Jot down some ideas and how you could make them work.

As you may know by now I am very much a stepping stones person. I don't believe that change can happen quickly, but maybe it can. What do you think?

### **Assumptions**

Wow this is such a strong word that we all use regularly. The first time we meet someone we make assumptions about them. Sometimes these turn out to be accurate and at other times we are well off the mark.

We notice how they look, the clothes they wear, their body language and all sorts of things. Our upbringing, education or training influences what we first think and feel which can be good or bad, but if we step back for a bit and let those assumptions swirl around in our head rather than become fixed then, perhaps, we can see a different picture of them.

When I was in the first year of secondary school we had a geography teacher who on first meeting my class was very controlling. He assumed that we were all going to be badly behaved and shouted at us regularly when it was unnecessary. One day I'd enough and burst into tears. He took me aside and asked me what was wrong and I told him about his assumptions and that we were not as he saw. From that day onwards he was a changed person.

The trouble with assumptions is that they are usually based on a simplistic look at people and situations, but if you go below the surface you might see something totally different.

I once worked with a family where even the police were scared of talking to the stepfather because he shouted most of the time. I got to know the family and asked the step father why he seemed to shout so much. He said that he didn't realise he did and that no one had told him before. He thought about it and said that he had worked

for brickies and whilst up the scaffolding they would shout to each other because otherwise they couldn't hear what they wanted. He asked me to help by prompting him if he was shouting and within a short while he broke the habit.

What assumptions do you make?

What assumptions have been made about you?

Why did you pick this word?

## **Decisions**

In the William Styron's book *Sophie's Choice*, Sophie had to decide which of her children would live or die. As an individual this must have been one of the most appalling things to ever do. What do you do? Let them both die because you can't make that decision?

I worked several years ago with a social work student and we had a discussion about decisions. I asked him to list decisions that he had to make as easy, medium and hard. He came back the next week with his list and found that the easiest decisions were those at work and the hardest were those at home such as what to have for tea.

I've had my children ask what we're having for tea and when they've chosen something complained that they really would have preferred something else.

This may seem simplistic, but it's small things like this that can lead to bigger arguments.

What decisions do you find easy or hard?

How do you make decisions?

Do you leave them to someone else to make and, if so, what do you then feel about the decisions that have been made?

## **Humour**

Why pick this word?

Well I think I picked it because it is culturally led. My other half doesn't think that I have a sense of humour, but I do.

What makes you laugh? Do you laugh at different things to other people?

## **Hurt**

We can hurt ourselves by falling over and physically injuring ourselves, but what about emotional forms of

hurt? These can be very powerful and affect how we live our lives.

Are you aware of times that you have felt emotional hurt? How did you respond to this?

What about times that you might have hurt someone else?

Think of how you might have dealt with things better.

## **Trust**

A common phrase used these days is ‘Trust me’ but can you trust people generally or not?

Think of who you trust and why?

Think of people you don’t trust and why?

What makes you trust one particular individual or group of people and not the other?

Is there something in your past that has affected your ability to trust?

Do you think that you can learn to trust people and if not why not?

How important is trust?

What happens when you lose someone's trust? Can you regain it?

## **Time**

How often have you heard someone say that they haven't got the time for whatever?

Time is an interesting word because it rules many of our lives. Many things are linked to a clock.

People rush around having to be somewhere to do something

What does time mean to you?

Time can also mean giving someone your time or receiving it from them.

I have worked with children who only spend very small amounts of time with their parents and yet given longer time don't know how to cope with it.

Do you have too little or too much time doing the things that you need to compared with what you would like to?

Do you have spare time and, if so, what do you do in that time?

Think about the school day or office working hours. Are they the best way of running time or what about having seasonal time, say working more hours in the summer than the winter? Should working hours be tailoured to individual preferences?

## **Health**

Good health is what most of us would like to have, but what is good health?

Is it about our physical and mental health or just one or the other?

I personally query the idea of depression. I feel that there is very little static in our lives and that being labelled as depressed is a form of creating a static illness that is equivalent to being without a leg.

When someone dies it can feel like you have lost a physical part of you and some people do go through recognised stages of bereavement, but many of us don't and we just have to accept the death as a permanent change to our lives.

If we have ill health and cannot function on a day to day basis who should support us and how can this be done?

Do you think that the current systems can be sustained as we get older and older as a population? If not, how can things be organised better?

Do you think that your attitude to health relates mostly to your individual personality or to your upbringing?

### **Keep Exploring**

So you've tinkered with my 22 words and may have started to choose some extra ones or discarded some of the 22. Now it's time to take a look at how personality affects who we are and how we see the world.

### **Personality**

Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

Maybe you don't know or have never thought about it.

Well my view and you may or may not agree with me [and that's what AERO is about] is that you are likely to be both.

What I mean by this is that in certain circumstances and with certain people you can be very outgoing [an extrovert] but in others you can be fairly introverted [sensitive or inward looking]

What about the people that you live with, your friends or the people that you work with?



Are they leaning towards extroversion or introversion or do you work with and live with people who seem to be balanced? I wonder how they see themselves?

There are good parts to being either mainly an introvert or extrovert they just need emphasising.

Have a go at the chart below try to pitch yourself in different situations and when you have done that try to think and jot down whether you are happy being that way or whether you are not and if not why not?

After that have a go at plotting your view [and it can only be your view as an outsider] of the people that are either significant to you or those that you come across regularly.

If you read past the chart you will see my interpretation of each number but feel free to interpret them how you want

## Introvert/ Extrovert chart

		Description	Location or Situation	Action to take or Acceptance
Self Absorbed	1	Hermit. Happy with own company		
	2	Self-harm. Possibly suicidal tendencies		
	3	Shy introverted		
	4	Slightly introverted. Typical view of UK		
	5	Balanced. Could be indecisive.		

	6	Outgoing. Typical view of USA		
	7	Bubbly outgoing		
	8	Loud noisy.  Insensitive to others		
	9	Centre of attention.  Can be on own.  Might swing to 2		
	10	Centre of attention.  Can never be on own.  Easily swing to 2.		

1] Hermits are often happy with their own company and may not be interested in people very much. They may have to tolerate mixing with others e.g. in education or working situations. I reckon that lots of people become hermits not out of choice but through other circumstances or because they are parts of the other numbers on the charts. Take the celebrities who we may record as number 10 on the chart. Because they appear to do anything to get publicity what many would call attention seekers. Are they really like that or do they learn to behave in that way just to make people realise that they exist. When it all gets too much they then become hermits going off to 'rehab' because they have used drugs or alcohol to cope with being a number 10

2] Someone who could possibly have suicidal thoughts, be into self harming or have dependences on drugs or alcohol. People at the top of the scale can also swing towards 2.

These to me are the saddest people and I wonder why they have suicidal thoughts Why do they self harm and how do they self harm?

If you wanted to be controversial you could say that people who smoke are self harming because they actively know the links between smoking and cancer. But then we could also say that those significantly overweight are self harming too.

I suppose that my major concern is for the people who are quietly self- harming because of loss or grief.

What is also disturbing are people who self harm just because other people do, seeing it as fashion.

3] People here can be shy and unable to speak in front of others or in certain situations.

This can be very frustrating because in your head you may be saying what you want but something stops you from saying it aloud. People who define themselves here may have always been this way or have learnt to be this way. Maybe they got in trouble at school or lived within a family that behaves like a war zone.

If you find yourself like this you may need to go for a walk alone and scream to get things out of your system so that you get a new pitch to talk.

4] The general UK Population is regarded as reserved by other nations. I also believe that many people who are in the caring professions are here thus their inability to challenge policies that they don't agree with.

5] Someone here is mid range, which is generally good, but may mean that they are pulled between friends or family who are either extroverts or introverts. They may however find it difficult making decisions and so may have had bad decisions made for them by others.

6] Many would see the USA population as here as they are regarded as more outgoing.

7] The 'Popular' people who are still good at supporting friends. Many of us would probably like to be here but being a number 7 for long I reckon must be hard going. Just like always having a smile on your face.

8] Pop & movie stars can be loud and noisy and less sensitive to others, but they may swing also to no 2.

However there are others who are extroverts on stage, but off stage lean towards introversion.

Have a read of Robbie William's autobiography where he talks about Rob the introvert and Robbie the performer.

Somebody Someday

9] Someone here may, on a regular basis, want to be the centre of attention and do things to gain this position. They can be a teacher's nightmare but in later life be rewarded by press coverage. They can spend time on their own but don't generally choose it.

10] I have come across very few 10s as they are the people who can't live on their own and will do anything, positive or negative to have people with them constantly. They are the ones who are most likely to swing to 2.

### **The Power and Effect of Personalities**

Do you lump people together or see people as individuals?

Think of strangers and how you see their personalities for example do you think that people with certain personalities are attracted to certain jobs and if so what happens to the people who might be attracted but don't fit into the perceived group personality?

For example do you have to be an extrovert to read the news?

Are extroverts more powerful than introverts and, if so, should they have this power?

Do men and women have different understanding of personalities or is this outdated? For example, is it better to be an extrovert male than an extrovert female?

Think about how personality links to the individual trigger words e.g. do and should extroverts have more money than introverts?

Are extrovert jobs such as those in the media reasons for having greater pay than more introverted jobs such as caring jobs?

What about education? Could introverts be taught together and extroverts be taught together rather than be muddled in together as they are currently taught?

Should hermits have to socialise at work or school or should they be allowed to just be on their own?

Think of nations. Are there extrovert nations? e.g. is the USA more extrovert than the UK? If so, how does this affect their different economies and the attitudes between the introvert and extrovert members?



What about the inbetweeners who are more balanced, not being either dominantly extrovert or introvert? How often are they forced to join one or other group? Think of the child or adult who has one black and one white parent. How often are they forced to define themselves as black or white?

Personality can be similar with someone being both introvert and extrovert being forced to define themselves for careers, membership of groups and all sorts of other reasons and situations.

Which is better being a hermit or being someone who socialises all of the time?

Why do you think this?

## **AERO needs you?**

If you feel that you have benefitted from reading this booklet then get in touch because the aim is to help people everywhere and anywhere.

[Rachelbramble@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Rachelbramble@yahoo.co.uk)

## **Explanation of the squiggles and boxes**

If you looked at the boxes and squiggles and thought what's this about then that's fine. If you saw yourself preferring one but perhaps living the other then that's fine too.

Some people see the boxes literally as boxes and the squiggle as a doodle whereas other people can see all sorts of symbolism in the two shapes.

Some see the boxes as order and the squiggle as disorder. It's for you to decide what they are.

You may find them useful when looking at people who affect your life. For example if you are a boxes person and you are living with squiggle people this may be exhilarating or frustrating.

You may naturally be one or the other or be forced to be one that you don't feel comfortable with. As with the personality chart you may have to be one or the other in different situations and with different people.

Try them out on friends and family.

## **References**

Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens, 1843, Chapman and Hall

Sophie's Choice, William Styron, 1979, Random House

Robbie Williams: Somebody, Someday, Robbie Williams and Mark McCrum, 2002, Ebury Press

The Nameless Social Worker, Rachel Bramble, 2004, Janus Publishing

Back cover

We can all make excuses rather than just get on with life.

But why do we make these excuses? And what are the consequences for making these excuses?

Every life is individual, but very few of us can live alone.

AERO is a way of thinking about what you really want out of life.

It's for happy people as well as the bored, confused, sad or frustrated.

It's for the givers as well as the takers.

It's there for everyone.



