ISSUE 10
JULY / AUGUST 2019

HIGHER STATE

THE MAGAZINE FOR HIGH PERFORMERS

A CURIOUS MIND

Banking executive Paul Gordon talks about his love of learning, taking on challenges and constantly pushing himself to evolve

REFRAME AND RELAX

When life gives you lemons, you choose your response

ALL SET FOR SUMMER

The best time of year to get and stay fit

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

Boost your focus and results each day by following this easy advice

NO TIME TO EAT WELL

It's time to take control and ditch the excuses

Think differently

Wow, we are over the halfway mark for 2019! It's been an eventful year for me so far - working with fantastic teams and individuals in all corners of the world.

One of the things I enjoy most about my work is the ability to connect with so many incredible people. I love to hear how people are striving to be at their best, pushing themselves out of their comfort zones and achieving amazing results. All of this whilst looking after their physical and mental wellbeing.

This month, my high performer interview is with Paul Gordon - someone who has gone from strength to strength in the banking world and who always has a positive, "can do" attitude. Paul maintains this optimism and energy even in the most difficult times, and I think this is something we can all learn from. It's not the circumstances that matter, it's the way we handle them.

Enjoy your summer (or winter if you're in the Southern Hemisphere!) and make the next six months count!

Abi

Transforming People. Transforming Performance

Issue 10, July / August 2019

Mind + Body + Business

STRATEGIES & STRUCTURES FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Is your team focused, productive and getting results?

Are your people energised, forward-thinking and bringing their "A" Game to work?

We help executives and teams to **build high performance habits** and achieve results with more energy, more focus and less stress - on a sustainable and healthy basis.

Our unique **High Performance Formula** is a 360-degree system that enables teams to achieve top performance - addressing Business, Psychological and Physiological factors that impact long-term success.

Combining extensive business and coaching experience with skills as a certified fitness, mindset and nutrition professional, Abi can help you to take your team to the next level.

Speak to Abi about team **training**, executive performance **coaching**, **consultancy** and in-house **programme development**.

Abigail Ireland - Peak Performance Strategist

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WHAT'S IN STORE

04 Work with Abigail Ireland
06 Productivity: Get Your Ducks in Order
07 Mindset: Handling Difficult Circumstances
08 Fitness: The Best Time to Build Good Habits
09 Nutrition: Too Busy to Eat Well
10 Spotlight on Paul Gordon

CLICK HERE for upcoming PERFORMANCE PROGRAMMES

WORK WITH ABIGAIL

Ready to lift your team's performance, productivity, engagement and results?

Abi works with organisations to amplify team performance and productivity through workshops, coaching and strategic in-house programme development. She focuses on business productivity strategies whilst also incorporating psychological and physiological drivers of top performance (for example, mindset, attitude, exercise, nutrition and sleep).

Abi's corporate career led her to work internationally in private equity deal origination, acquisitions, banking, strategy and business management for over 13 years. She went on to launch her own businesses in the wellbeing and education fields, using her additional skills as an NLP Practitioner, Master Personal Trainer and Nutrition Coach to bring a unique offering to clients that covers all aspects of peak performance.

Abi's integrated **High Performance Formula** can be applied to any team to boost productivity, energy, focus, engagement and quality results.

1 WORKSHOPS

- Practical, value-packed workshops that have an immediate impact on productivity and create a high-performance mindset.
- Workshops on topics including Business Productivity, Thriving at Work, Mastering Team Dynamics, The High Performance Mindset, Eating for Performance and more. Also tailored workshops catering for specific business requirements.

>> CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE <<

2 COACHING

- Tailored coaching sessions for individuals and small groups, often in the weeks and months following workshop sessions - designed to promote accountability and embed long-term performance habits.
- Opportunity to tackle issues & roadblocks that sabotage performance.

>> CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE <<

3 STRATEGY

- In-house programmes and initiatives tailored to organisational and team requirements - research, analysis and strategy development.
- Design and development of solutions to increase productivity, boost engagement, lift performance and achieve objectives.

>> CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE <<

MID-YEAR PROGRAMME LAUNCH!

We're excited to announce that **two powerful programmes** are launching over the next two months. Each programme approaches PEAK PERFORMANCE habit-building from different angles. We combine virtual learning with interactive coaching, to give you a convenient way to enhance your performance at work and beyond. Contact **abi@abigailireland.com** for info and to reserve your spot.

Next Programme Launch: 3 SEPTEMBER 2019

Exclusive 6-week group coaching programme comprising six 90 minute interactive webinars (7pm, UK Time Zone), tailored to meet the needs of high achieving professionals.

Interact with a cohort of 9 other like-minded peers to build self-awareness, develop skills and master strategies to put you in control of your work and life.

Modular programme combining science, psychology, theory, practice and coaching support to give you everything you need to master "the art of saying no".

Discover what you can do differently to shift the way you operate, both in and out of work - giving you more control, confidence, clarity and time back for yourself.

Group Size: Capped at 10 individuals per cohort

Next Client Intake Starts: 5 AUGUST 2019

Tailored individual nutrition coaching programme

Daily lessons, habits and workouts to keep you on track, motivate and inspire you.

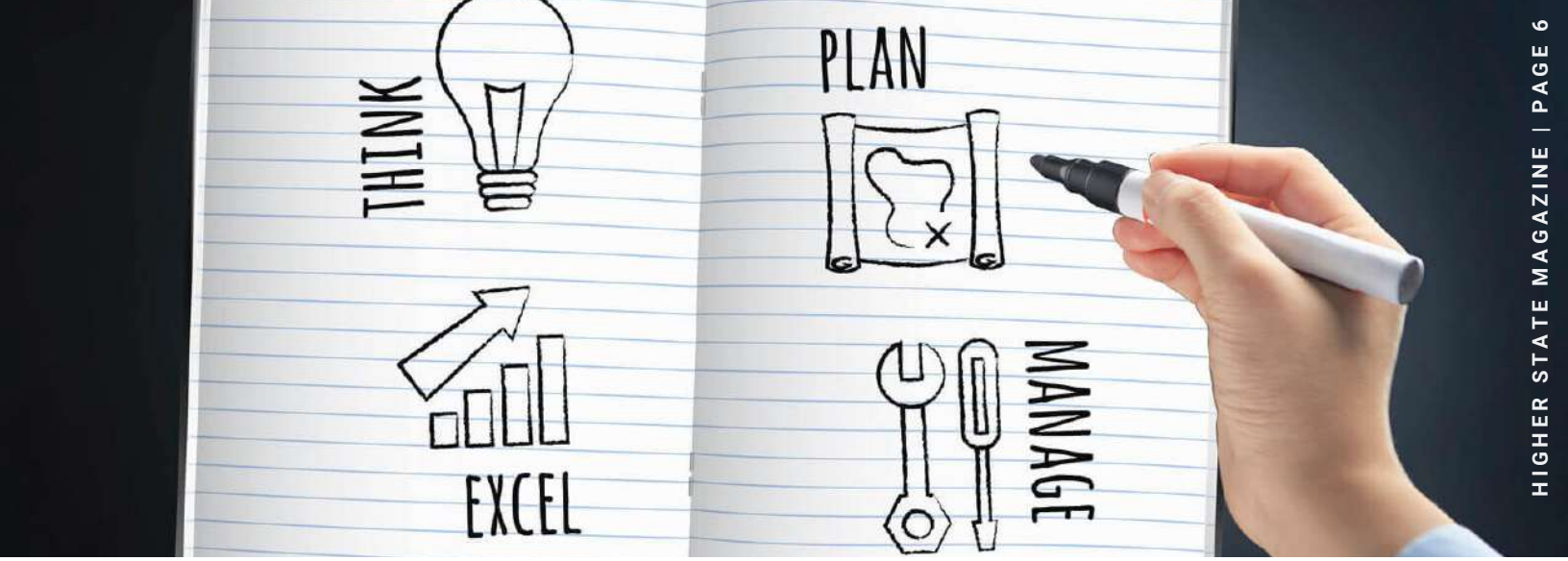
Coach interaction to check in and support you throughout.

Develop healthy long-term habits, to set you up for success, both physically and mentally.

Opportunity to really understand your deepest drivers, motivations and obstacles so that you can optimise your physical performance and capability.

Science and research backed programme that works.

Coaching Spots: Capped at 10 individuals per intake



PRODUCTIVITY: Get Your Ducks in Order

Start every day with a high performance mindset

Most people don't invest the time to *plan*. Instead, the majority of us wake up each morning and get stuck into the day, allowing external influences and obstacles to shape how we spend our time. Wouldn't it be great to have crystal-clear clarity about your purpose and objectives every single day?

There is no magic bullet, but frontloading your day with intentional planning time will do wonders for your performance and productivity, even if it seems counterintuitive to start your day thinking rather than doing. You've no doubt heard about morning routines and - despite all the debate about these - the truth is that creating consistent practices *does* lead to exceptional results. Incorporating a 10 minute reflection period into your morning routine sets you up for success and keeps you focused as you navigate through your day.

The first thing to ask yourself is this: "*At the end of this day, how will I know that I have had an incredibly successful day - what will I have achieved, felt or enabled?*"

This is a powerful question that will give you concrete focus and purpose. As the day evolves, you will have a strong sense of whether certain tasks are moving you towards or away from this accomplishment. As new demands flow in, you'll have more clarity about what is truly important to you versus what is on someone else's agenda.

Spending the next few minutes mapping out tangible actions on your calendar will do wonders to keep you on track and give you the confidence to say no to anything (or anyone) that attempts to steal your attention away.

Undertaking high performance planning first thing in the morning means you make the important decisions whilst your mind is fresh. As you go through your day, you'll be able to fully focus on execution rather than waste valuable energy deciding what to do next.

If you want to be more productive and achieve more in less time, register for the FREE 10 Day Productivity Challenge that kicks off every Monday. One quick & easy challenge each day for 10 days to help you get on track. Register here and set yourself up for success.

MINDSET: Handling Difficult Circumstances

We are in control of more than we think

You may not be able to control every situation and its outcome, but you can control how you deal with it.

When scrolling through Instagram, you will see an abundance of quotes like the above. The question is, do you properly pay attention and internalise the message? We all have a tendency to blame external circumstances for the way we feel and act. And yet, we are fully in control of the way we handle what life throws at us.

Shakespeare said, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". We each have our own filters and models of the world - essentially, our individual interpretation of reality. If we can adjust our perspective, we can change the way we think, feel and act. As a result, what looks like a difficult situation will not have as huge an impact on our state or behaviours. We simply need to remember that there is always another way to look at things.

In future, try asking yourself these questions when handling a difficult situation or person...

What else could this mean?
What would I like this to mean?
What's the positive in this?
What's my intention behind this?

By getting out of your own head and looking at things differently, you get to choose how you feel, think and ultimately respond. It's entirely up to you.

If you want to develop a high performance mindset and shake off any blocks / limiting beliefs that prevent you from bringing your best self to work, get in touch about our workshops and coaching programmes for both individuals and teams.

Mindset is a key aspect of high performance. As a qualified NLP Practitioner, Abigail explores ingrained belief systems and mental obstacles that hold teams and executives back from operating at their best. To find out more, write to ask@abigailireland.com.

FITNESS: The Best Time to Build Good Habits

Start now and put less effort into feeling good

If there is a 'best' time of year to get fit and healthy, nothing beats the summer months. In the Northern Hemisphere, summer is well underway. The extra daylight, sunshine and heat make us feel energised and more awake. Moving into the summer holiday period means things generally slow down a little at work, as people take time off to spend with family or travel to a foreign destination. All of these factors combined make it a whole lot easier to fit fitness into our lives. By the time it's winter, these habits will be ingrained and you won't look back!

For those who find it hard to wake up in the morning, the early sunrise and warmer weather make this much less daunting. You read enough about the benefits of exercise on the mind, body and brain so let's get straight into some ways to incorporate the fitness habit into your life. Here are 3 Top Tips to get you started this summer:

Tip #1: Inject fitness into your summer holiday - wherever you go, add in some walks, jogs or hikes to explore the area. Even better, book into some tennis or golf classes, pack your swimwear and enrol in local yoga or Pilates classes.

Tip #2: Wake up 30 minutes earlier - since it's easier to wake up in the morning during summer, start your day a little earlier and opt for a quick workout to get the blood pumping. A great way to begin the day.

Tip #3: Go outside - what better way to be at one with nature and receive a healthy dose of Vitamin D, than to take your workout to the park or beach. Whether before work, during lunch or in the evening, nothing beats working out in the fresh air. Find a buddy to help you stay on track.

Abigail is a qualified Master Personal Trainer, certified Precision Nutrition coach and Pilates Instructor. She integrates Physiology into client performance strategies and workshops. To find out just how much physical wellbeing impacts workplace performance, email ask@abigailireland.com.

Get 5 Quick, Easy & Delicious Recipes
>> CLICK HERE <<

NUTRITION: Too Busy to Eat Well

Why this logic doesn't work

We know that making better food choices will result in more energy, better sleep, more focus, weight loss and a general sense of feeling good. And yet, so many of us fail to make healthy food choices - particularly when busy.

Common excuses are:

I don't have time for breakfast.
I'm too busy to eat lunch.
I'm too tired to make dinner.

These statements tend to lead to either not eating at all (and then binging later in the day or week) or grabbing junk food to help us through the day. Things like crisps / potato chips, chocolate bars, cups of coffee and sweets. All of these 'food' choices are easy to find (accessible), affordable and great in providing an energy boost when we need it most (hello, 3pm). The downsides are that they are low in nutrients and eventually lead to an energy slump.

The truth is that we opt for these convenient options because they are our default choices. We create connections in our brains between convenience and certain foods. To preserve precious brainpower, we immediately opt for what our brain is familiar with when we are tired or low on energy (no decision-making required).

So, it makes sense to create new pathways that connect more nutritious food choices with convenience. Brainstorm some healthier options and keep a sticky note close by to remind you of other ways to eat well when under pressure or low in energy. For example, all of the following are easy to find and super convenient to prepare and eat:

>> Banana / apple / blueberries
>> Smoothie (homemade will take you around 5 mins tops)
>> Pre-packed rocket / mixed leaves and cooked prawns
>> Hummus, pre-cooked chicken and cherry tomatoes
>> Granola or overnight oats (get meal prepping at the weekend!)

For daily support with your fitness and nutrition goals, and to boost your mental and physical performance this year, check out the One Year Online Nutrition & Fitness Coaching Programme with Abigail Ireland here.

For a FREE Recipes for Busy People Mini E-Book, click here.

YOU CAN BANK ON PAUL

Leading and creating high performing teams doesn't happen by chance. It involves being intentional and clear on direction, whilst also giving people the opportunity and space to grow.

With a lifetime of experience under his belt, banking executive Paul Gordon has drawn from many people, events and circumstances in his life to help shape the way he leads. He has an unrelenting passion for learning, personal development and improvement. He takes ownership for the way his life and work evolves, and he injects positivity and energy into his everyday interactions.

Read on to find out how Paul stays on top of his game, maintains a fresh perspective and keeps focused every single day.

"I FOCUS ON BEING POSITIVE, BUOYANT AND PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT I DO."

PAUL GORDON

Paul Gordon has a refreshing leadership style that generates energy, engagement and motivation in those around him. Having been in banking since he was 16 years old, it's impressive that Paul still radiates so much passion and enthusiasm for what he does.

In this issue of Higher State, we explore what has shaped Paul's attitude, mindset and choices over the years. We learn about the challenges and obstacles that impacted his journey and, most importantly, how he handled these.

Abi's Observation: Having worked with Paul, I have witnessed his ability to lead and motivate teams through extremely challenging times. He has a real skill for being cool, calm and collected under pressure. His down to earth style, transparency, sense of fun and approachable manner enables him to build rapport quickly and easily.

Being a leader involves building a connection with those you lead - far beyond meetings, paperwork and agenda items. Relating to your people on a personal level is crucial when building high performing teams, as Paul discovered at key points in his career.

Key Takeaway: True high performers don't sit on the sidelines watching the action. They seek opportunities, stretch right out of their comfort zones, and embrace setbacks with a positive "can do" attitude.

INTRODUCING PAUL

Tell us a bit about your career path and how you got to where you are today?

I am the Managing Director, SME & Mid Corporates at Lloyds Banking Group - it's a dream role. I lead a team of about 1000 colleagues who support about 70,000 businesses with turnovers up to £100m, across the UK. Between them, these businesses support around 4 million jobs and generate something like £250bn of GDP for the UK economy.

I began work at 16 in a TSB branch - on the counter, serving customers. Since then, I've had a breadth of positions in retail and commercial banking, from customer facing, to product development, marketing, operations, M&A and transformation.

Over the last 10 years, I've had some meaty roles. I was Change and Integration Director when HBOS and Lloyds merged. I later became CEO of Lloyds International in Australia, which was a great opportunity. I came back to the UK and was MD for the Consumer and Commercial Cards business. At this time, I led the acquisition of MBNA from Bank of America – the largest financial services acquisition, at least in Europe, since 2009. Following that, I stepped into the role I am in now.

I went to a decent grammar school but I left with poor exam results. I thought I wanted to be a teacher but didn't have the grades. When I was about 19, I had a massive wake up call. I could see people around me doing well in their careers, including my friends who had gone to university. I realised I was going to be left behind and I needed to take control of my own career journey. At the time, I regretted the path I had taken. I knew it was down to me to change things – no one else was going to do it for me and so began my quest for life-long learning.

I stepped back into studying whilst working full-time and did five years of professional banking and finance exams, starting with my Chartered Banker qualification. I then joined the Chartered Institute of Marketing and did my marketing diploma. I went on to do an MBA which involved four years

of distance learning with Warwick University. I passed with Distinction. By the time I was 30, I had spent the best part of 11 years on education, academic and professional qualifications, and personal development - in my own time - whilst gaining invaluable work experience and climbing the corporate ladder. For me, this was a transformational period.

What do you love about being in banking?

It's the connection with customers – whether personal customers during my time in the retail bank, or corporate and commercial customers now. I enjoy getting closer to customers and understanding their aspirations for their businesses and their personal ambitions. The customer contact is what I enjoy the most. I'm also naturally intrigued by how things work. I get a kick out of understanding how businesses operate, succeed and create value. My 11-year journey of personal development and learning set me up to be really curious.

What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?

In my early twenties, I know I was overlooked for some opportunities because I didn't go to university. I applied for roles with some consultancy firms and other banks. They wouldn't even look at me and I didn't make it past the first hurdle. I found the rejection difficult to deal with. It spurred me on, beyond my banking exams, to do my marketing diploma and MBA.

I wanted to improve myself and prove to others that I was capable and to be more in control of the options and choices in my career. Just because I didn't go to university, I knew I wasn't stupid. That kind of rejection really spurred me on during my twenties.

There were also times when I had so much on with work, study, relocating, getting married and having children. There's a lot of pressure attached to all of these situations and many of them overlap. It can be overwhelming. It was pretty hard, but it helps to keep focused on the longer term and keep reminding yourself that these are positive choices that you are making – and they are **your** choices.

Did you have any mentors or coaches along the way?

Definitely. Early in my career, I realised the value you get out of a network and, within that network, the importance of having mentors, coaches and sponsors. All three are hugely important and play different roles in your personal development and career progression. I've never been too proud to use the support of others along the way.

"...you definitely have to bring yourself to work – you can't have two different personas, people see through it."

- PAUL GORDON

In my late twenties, there was one particular senior director who was massively impressive as an operator. I kept up a mentoring relationship with him over a number of years. He helped me face into my early career challenges in my thirties as I worked my way up the ladder. He gave me brilliant leadership advice but he also gave me some poor advice too! I remember once he said, "I do not have friends at work, I have acquaintances."

For a while, I believed that was true and how business leaders should operate, but I soon started to appreciate the emotional and practical benefits of our work and personal lives being intertwined.

The idea of bringing your whole self to work and allowing others to get to know who you really are is hugely important. Having a work persona which isn't really *you* can make it hard for people to connect with you and you with them.

I operate in a people business where you need collaboration to get things done, so you definitely have to bring your whole self to work – you can't have different personas, people see through it.

What are your top three personal values when it comes to work and life?

Curiosity & Learning – I have a real thirst for learning how things work and how people think, feel and act the way they do. I want to know how I can be a better person and help others to be better people and achieve their potential.

Integrity – I place a lot of emphasis on being fair, trustworthy, honest, open and transparent, and also engaging other people in this way. This really helps when going through difficult times.

Energy – I bring energy to my work and associations with friends and family. I focus on being positive, buoyant and passionate about what I do.

The banking world is always changing and evolving – what's your approach to dealing with constant change?

It's important to have a heightened level of awareness about what is going on around you. I read, spend time with customers, look at what the competition is doing, and speak with consultants who have insight into the broader industry and can take learning from other industries. You get a sense of what's going on – customer, competitor, technology advancement, regulatory change. I get a lot of value out of the relationships and networks I've built over the years. Keeping them warm is important.

My job is to make sure we balance the need to deliver for our customers today with the need to think three steps ahead of everyone else. I love to engage with the here and now but I have to think about what the world will look like in 3, 4, 5 years' time for our customers and what that means for the role we are playing in supporting them. We then need to ensure that the decisions we are making about the business today about people, processes and proposition are taking us on that journey for the future. It's not just about what we can see immediately in front of us.

That need to grow, learn and do things better is a big part of my appetite for searching for answers for what the future might hold and then making sure we are ready for it.

Dealing with change is about being patient and impatient - knowing that change is constant, the world around you is constantly evolving and that ambiguity is the norm sometimes requires a calm, patient head to work out what that change might mean.

But you also have to be impatient in your pursuit of change and the need to adapt in order to succeed. This applies in business and in your personal life.

You've been in many high profile roles - how do you stay calm under pressure?

There are definitely times when I feel pressure, but I feel it's my responsibility to act as a valve, sometimes there to cushion some of that pressure from the people I work with but also to release pressure into the system by helping others to understand the context for and feel the urgency of a situation.

I've always had a rational brain, and I'm a problem solver and fixer by nature. I'm an organiser, a planner and my years of experience have taught me to plan for risks and challenges in advance. I am very consistent in my behaviour and calm under pressure. I have no qualms about working to really tight deadlines or in situations where there is lots of ambiguity. I'm a clear communicator and so, as part of that, I try hard to create cohesion across other people and teams – giving them clarity, direction and purpose.

"As a leader, your job is to remain focused and clear about purpose."

As a leader, your job is to remain focused and clear about purpose. Purpose is everything. If you allow your brain to lose control, you can't think or communicate clearly. If others are looking to you for purpose and clarity and you've allowed your brain to haze, then that becomes really hard for you and obvious to them. It filters out to others and accentuates through the team.

I think my make-up is such that I constantly think about being part of the solution, not the problem. I'm a very positive thinker. I think long term and not just about what may be happening in the moment. I also like to get things into perspective because things do go wrong – it's rarely personal and provides an opportunity to learn.

There's also definitely something to be said about looking after your mind and body from a health and wellbeing perspective, and making sure you're as resilient as possible when facing into times of pressure – so, thinking carefully about how you balance your life, taking time out to pause and reflect, relaxing and sleeping properly, eating properly...

All of that adds to an ability to be calm and think clearly under pressure.

"There's also definitely something to be said about looking after your mind and body...and making sure you're as resilient as possible when facing into times of pressure."

PAUL GORDON

What does a high performing team look like to you?

A high performing team needs to have purpose, be clear about what they're trying to achieve and understand how the various members of the team fit together - what they individually and collectively contribute. Having diversity of thought, background and experience is really important.

Trust is key too. Individuals need to be able to trust others and respect their ability, contribution, judgement and decision-making – and give others the time and space to do what they need to do.

I also think there needs to be a high degree of accountability for each person's contribution to the team and accountability to each other.

Do you have a typical daily / morning routine?

I generally switch off my work phone after 7pm and I'll deliberately disable notifications to avoid the constant urge to stay in touch with whatever is happening, and I won't look at my phone unless something important or urgent is going on.

On my commute in the morning, I check my emails and see what I can respond to there

and then, versus what I can't. I try hard to not let my inbox dictate my day. I'm very organised with my diary and usually have all paperwork, material and collateral attached electronically to meetings in my calendar. I try to avoid carrying paper around.

I mentally prep during the commute, by making sure I'm clear about the day's purpose and what I need to get out of my meetings that day.

I always have a think, first thing in morning, about two or three things I need to ensure I get done each day and which are really important for my team and then I'll keep them in focus – because I know that I will get pulled into other people's agendas throughout the day and I work on the basis there will be other unplanned events that happen outside my control.

My commute usually includes a green tea from the train station cafe – because I don't drink coffee and the green tea provides valuable antioxidants, is good for the brain and is a healthy kickstart to the metabolism.

What else had made you the person you are today?

One of the biggest events that shaped my life was back in 2006, when my brother was diagnosed with chronic kidney failure and I was the best kidney organ match from my siblings. In November 2006, I donated a kidney. It was a really traumatic period.

On the one hand, I was really worried about the implications for my brother and his family. On the other hand, I was worried about going through major surgery and the impact on me, my family and my work. I had lots of hospital appointments in the build-up and I had to take three months off work post-surgery. At the time, my career was really taking off and so I was also worried about what it would do to my career prospects. It's crazy to think now but that's how I felt.

I had always been the calm problem solver who created clarity for others. This time, I felt out of control and couldn't think straight. I had an executive coach and she helped me by talking about the gift of giving - giving my brother a gift but also creating an environment for others to give to and help me. It was not the time for me to be the strong one, but to let others take the lead, whether at work or in my personal life.

The whole concept of my relationship with people around me changed. I showed my vulnerabilities and allowed people to do things for me. So many people stepped up, gave me space, and supported me emotionally and practically. They too got a massive amount out of it at the same time, and you could see the warmth and satisfaction they got personally from being able to help me and indirectly help my brother.

"My job is to give others the space to grow, develop and support each other."

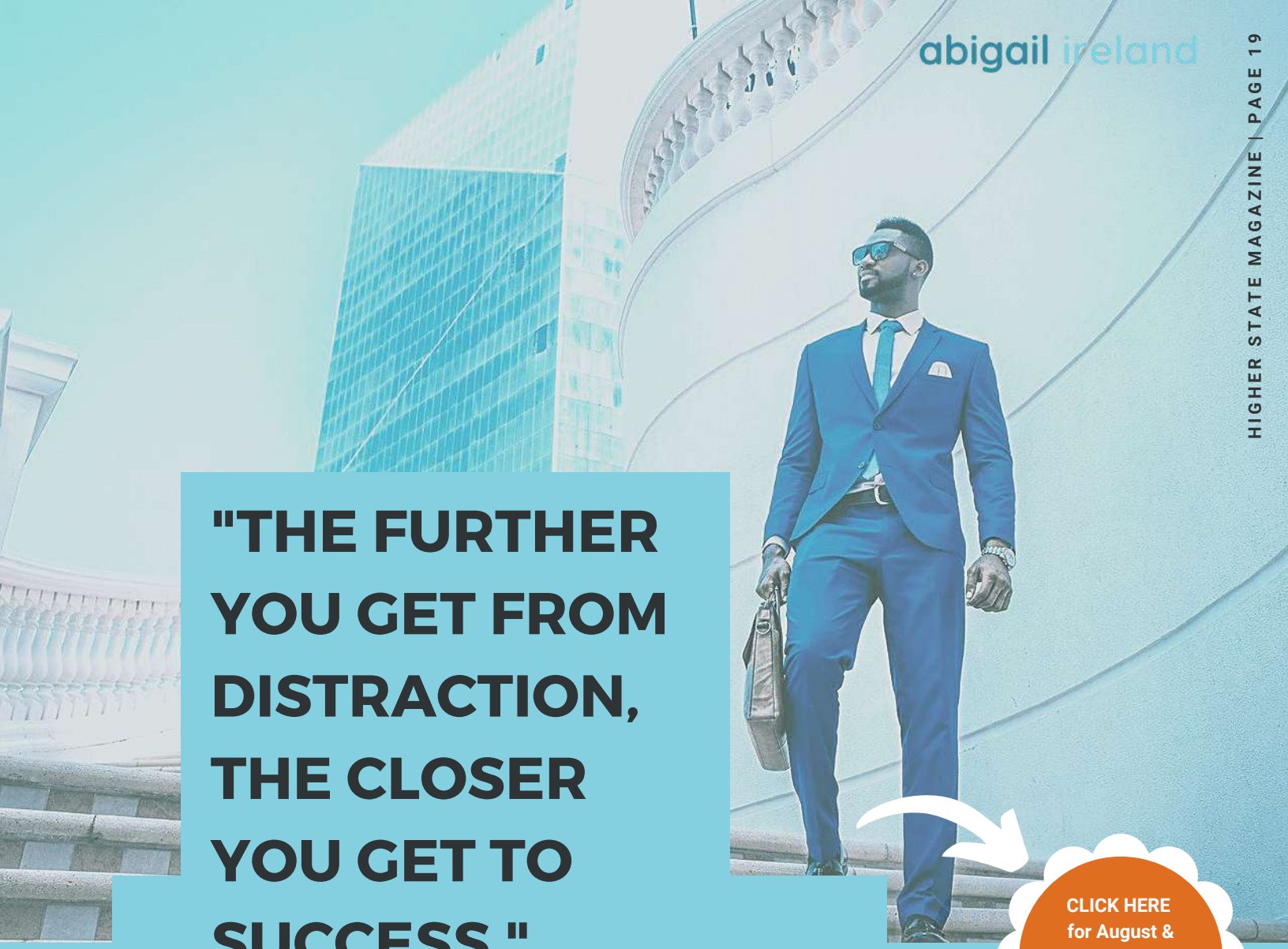
I realised my job was not to always be the fixer and problem solver. My job is to give others the space to grow, develop and support each other. Over the last 13 years, this has really shaped the way I've thought about relationships at work and about unlocking opportunities for other people to give.

It also made me think differently about my personal health and wellbeing. It was life changing. I think I am probably fitter and healthier now than I was 20 years ago.

Get in touch to learn more about the superstars we speak with in Higher State.

To boost your performance, enrol on one of our upcoming Performance Programmes kicking off soon.

>> CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS <<



"THE FURTHER YOU GET FROM DISTRACTION, THE CLOSER YOU GET TO SUCCESS."

- BRENDON BURCHARD

CLICK HERE for August & September PERFORMANCE PROGRAMMES

Thank you for reading Higher State! Stay tuned for Issue 11, out in September 2019.

Remember to **check out the two upcoming Performance Programmes** and set yourself up for success during the second half of 2019.

I respond to all emails personally so drop me a note and let me know what you want to read about.

In the meantime, stay productive and bring your A-Game EVERY day.

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