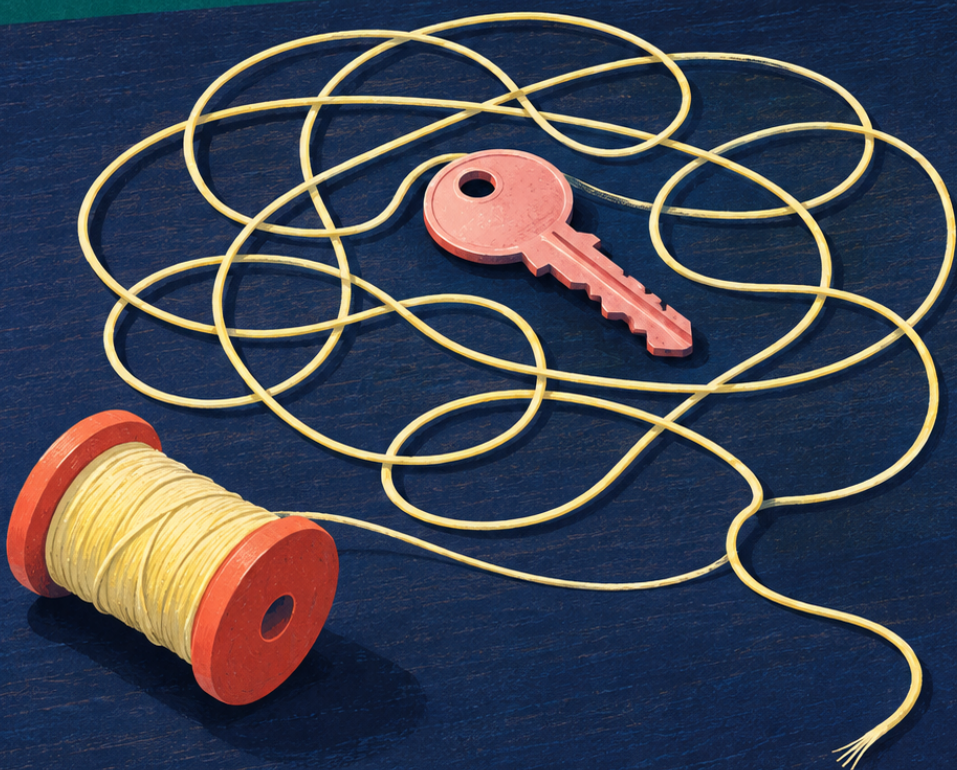


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When Your Mind Won't Let It Rest

Preparing for what matters without spending your life rehearsing it



WILLIAM DE FRANCE

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Humalight

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Read at your own pace. Use the contents to return to a section or an exercise. Keep your notes wherever you find it convenient.

This free opening includes “Before you begin” and the complete first part. The full book continues with explanations, practical exercises, sources and further reading.

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Before you begin

You have made the arrangement, checked the information and thought about what you would do if something went wrong. A few minutes later, you are back at the same question. You know what the answer was. You want to know whether you can trust it enough to stop.

This book is about that return: the point where useful preparation becomes an attempt to settle a future that has not happened yet. We will look at why continued thinking can feel responsible, how that connection may have developed, and what you can do when another round no longer changes your plan.

Iona, who is preparing to visit her sister, carries the main story. Colin, whose landlord has left a practical question unanswered, shows why some worries need further action. Their lives illustrate possibilities rather than explain yours for you.

The six exercises concern one ordinary situation. Each takes a few minutes to begin; the journey, conversation or other activity comes later. You can work with the exercise that fits your situation without completing them all at once.

This is an educational guide, not a treatment programme. It does not ask you to ignore actual danger, abandon necessary checks or handle serious distress alone. The aim is to make preparation useful and leave some room for the life you are preparing to live.

Part I — You have made the plan, but you are still there

Thursday evening

Iona is forty and works as a payroll assistant. Most weeks she goes to work, catches up with a friend or two and spends her evenings at home. This Saturday she is taking a train to another city to visit her sister, Louise. They see each other only a few times a year, and both have kept the afternoon free.

The journey involves one change of train. Iona has bought her ticket, checked the departure and connection, and saved the itinerary on her phone. Louise knows when she is due to arrive. There is no important occasion with a fixed starting time, but Iona would like to have as much of the afternoon with her as possible.

It is Thursday, eight in the evening. Iona is sitting at her kitchen table with her phone beside a novel she meant to start after dinner. She opens the journey planner for the fourth time.

The trains are the same. The connection is the same. She follows the route with her finger and feels briefly more settled. She has read it correctly. She can put the phone down.

Then she imagines the first train arriving late.

She picks the phone up and looks at the connection again. There is nothing on this screen that tells her whether Saturday's first train will be delayed. Still, the information is there to inspect. Looking feels more responsible than leaving the question alone.

The question underneath the question

At first, Iona was asking which train to take. The timetable answered that. Then she was asking whether she had allowed for the change. The itinerary answered that too. Now she is asking something larger: can she be certain she will manage the journey without a problem?

The screen cannot answer this question, but she is using it as though it might.

She imagines reaching the connecting platform just as the doors close. She thinks about Louise waiting. Then she wonders whether she ought to travel earlier. If she takes an earlier train, she could have a problem on that one instead. Perhaps she should examine another route.

By now she is no longer making a choice between two arrangements with clear advantages and costs. She is trying to find one that removes the possibility of regret. Every route has a possible difficulty. Each difficulty appears to require another thought before she can stop.

The novel stays closed. There is no sudden crisis and no visible disaster. The evening is simply passing while she does something that feels necessary but is no longer producing much.

A small relief that does not last

Louise sends a message asking whether Iona would prefer lunch near the station or at her flat. Iona replies that either would be lovely. Then she asks whether changing trains at the intermediate station is straightforward.

Louise has made the journey before. She says that she managed it without difficulty and suggests asking station staff if anything is unclear.

Iona feels better. A few minutes later, she begins wondering how recently Louise travelled that way. Perhaps something has changed. She starts another message, then deletes it. She does not want their conversation to become entirely about the journey.

She is looking forward to seeing her sister. She also wants to be capable of getting there. Those wishes have become entangled with a requirement to feel fully prepared before she can enjoy anything else.

It is possible to see that this requirement is exhausting and still feel reluctant to release it. What if the next check is the one that matters? What if she stops now and later discovers something she could have known?

What this might look like in your life

Your repeated question may concern an appointment, an application, a conversation or an arrangement for someone you care about. You may replay the steps silently rather than reopen a screen. You may ask your partner whether you have forgotten something, receive an answer, then ask again in a slightly different form.

The important feature is the return to a question after the available answer has stopped changing what you will do. That differs from discovering a missing document, receiving new instructions or realising that an arrangement has not been confirmed. Those discoveries can call for action.

You do not have to dismiss the whole concern to notice the difference. Iona's connection could be disrupted. Caring about it is understandable. The narrower question is whether Thursday's fourth inspection gives her anything the earlier ones did not.

That question gives us somewhere to begin. It does not require Iona to become carefree or prove that her journey will go well. It asks her to examine what the continued preparation is doing, what she hopes it will provide and what else is waiting for her attention.

Continue with the book

The arrangement is made. The information is checked. A few minutes later, you are back at the same question. This book explores when responsible preparation becomes a search for certainty that another check cannot provide. Distinguish a real information gap from a request for reassurance, prepare for relevant changes and return to an activity you wanted to enjoy.

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