



The Support Person

An e-book by
Sam & Kate Cawthorn



Sam Cawthorn

Sam Cawthorn is an expert in personal turnarounds. He is obsessed with not only bouncing back, but bouncing forward.

In October 2006, Sam's life was literally cut short in a horrific car accident in Tasmania.

After being pronounced dead on the way to the hospital, Sam was resuscitated – and consequently given a second chance to live the life of his dreams.

He has grabbed the opportunity with both hands, one of them now prosthetic.

After being in a coma for six days, hospital for five months and a wheelchair for a year, Sam has embraced the past two years and become one of the world's most prominent young inspirational speakers, connecting with audiences across four continents and inspiring more than 100,000 people.

Sam was told he would never walk again.

He did.

He was told he would never play the guitar again.

He does.

Sam was told his life would never be the same.

It's better!

Kate Cawthorn

Kate Cawthorn is Sam's wife. They met when they were in high school and married in 1999. Kate's has a background in music and writing, and her love and connectedness toward everyone she meets is infectious. She's been a loving supporter of Sam throughout his accident and life.

Kate's vision is to see every woman realise their potential – she's currently writing a book about being a support person through crisis.

Sam and Kate have two girls, Emelia and Ebony, and a younger boy named Jacob. They live in Balmain (Sydney), Australia.

The Support Person

Trying to deal with tragedy and personal problems can feel overwhelming.

They have the potential to knock us down and bury the person we once were, leaving behind a whimpering, hollow shell.

Many people have experienced firsthand the shock, fear and trauma that tragedy can strike into your heart. It's a battle, but it can be empowering too.

I believe that God/life/the universe (whichever you believe in) only throws at you what you can truly handle.

It's how you decide to deal with it that shapes the person you become.

The 5 stages of grief

Anyone can be overcome by grief, even if you haven't experienced the death of a loved one. Grieving can also apply to loss of normality, or of the life you once knew.

Many people have studied and written about the 'grief cycle' and it's generally accepted that there are five stages of grief that every person goes through.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross carried out one of the first major grief studies in 1969, in her book *On Death and Dying*. 'The Kübler-Ross Model' also had a theory about the five stages of grief.

Following this research, I decided to document the five definitive stages I experienced along my traumatic journey, overcoming the stress and upheaval of Sam's accident.

Let me tell you about each of them in turn:



Step 1 » Stop 'Coping'

“ Cope: To struggle or deal, especially on fairly even terms or with some degree of success. ”

I don't like the word 'coping'; hence the inverted commas. To me, 'coping' implies that we're only **just** making it through – treading water and holding our mouth and nose above the surface. The reason I've used the word 'coping' is that *this is how most people see themselves dealing with a major problem*. They're 'coping' or 'just coping' with it.

What we need to do is rise **above** the problem, pull ourselves out of the water, and make our way back to dry land. Easier said than done? Believe me, it's not as hard as you think.

Knowledge is power

The best way I've found to attack these 'coping' feelings is to arm myself with knowledge about the problem. Knowledge really **is** power. It's easy to feel overwhelmed if you have no idea what's going on. You feel helpless, vulnerable and alone.

Let me paint you a picture: After Sam's car accident, I was at his bedside for a week as he lay in a coma. I felt helpless. I was scared, shocked and very vulnerable.

I don't have a medical background, so I just had to put my faith in the doctors and believe what they were telling me. If I had left it at that, I don't think I would have made it through.

Instead, I decided to ask questions, talk to the nurses about what they were doing, find out what all the monitors meant and what happened if they beeped, what all the tubes were for and what the next step was going to be.

In doing this, I began to feel more in control – although there still was not a lot I could do, at least I no longer had to sit there in fear each time an alarm went off on one of the machines.

Do everything you can at this stage to protect your fragile nerves.

By filling your head with knowledge about the problem, not only are you helping yourself to understand what you're dealing with, you're also giving yourself a distraction from those feelings of being overwhelmed.

Above all else, for this step you need a certain degree of strength, faith or hope. It might be hard to find at this time, but *we all have what it takes within us to deal with whatever life throws our way*.

Search for it, and you'll be amazed to find strength you never knew you had. It's deep within you – allow yourself to let it out.

Step 2 » Weave Your Safety Net

Your **safety net** is the network of people you surround yourself with to help you deal with the problem emotionally, physically and mentally.

Before you pick up the phone and start to gather your friends around you, let's look at the structure of a good safety net.

If you think about it literally, a safety net is something strong and sturdy that will hold you up if you fall. Your support network needs to have all these qualities.

When trouble strikes, most of the time we run to the people closest to us. This is a natural instinct. What we fail to see sometimes is that the people closest to us can have the potential to be a *hole* in our safety net.

For example, let's say that you've just discovered your husband is having an affair. You pick up the phone and call your best friend, Jenny. Jenny knows exactly what you're going through because it also happened to her, years ago. She's full of advice on getting even, and offers plenty of tea and sympathy.

Now don't get me wrong, sympathy can be a good thing. But what's going on here is more complicated. By calling Jenny, you're dwelling on your problem *and* bringing up Jenny's old feelings – and those feelings taint her advice and ability to support you. Jenny is going to make a *hole* in your safety net.

Support for you

In this instance, the best friend or person you could turn to is someone who can support you in *your* feelings, decisions and concerns about your problem.

They should be able to listen to you, provide understanding without judgment (toward either party) and give constructive advice.

Take a look at your friends closely before you share your problem with them or ask them for support. A poor choice could leave you feeling worse rather than better.



An example of the kind of person I'm talking about here would be a pastor, an older person with more life experience, a mature friend (mentally or chronologically) or even a counsellor. This type of person is going to *reinforce* your safety net.

It's vital that we have friends around us in difficult times. And it's equally important which of those friends we choose to help us.

When we feel supported and encouraged, we feel stronger and more capable. Weave your safety net from strong, positive, level-headed people. They can carry you through and help stop you falling back into just 'coping'.

Step 3 » Sack Your Superhero

“ I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody ”

Bill Cosby

In the stress and trauma following Sam's accident, I found myself trying to take control of *everything*.

I thought if I could handle the kids, the house, my friends and family, the insurance paperwork, and being at the hospital every day with Sam, then it would show that I was 'coping'.

What I failed to see was that I was burying myself under all these tasks and not fully giving myself to any of them. I was trying to focus on too many things and struggling to centre myself. It took time to realise that I needed to let go of some things, in order to bring the focus back to what I really needed to do.

Learn to let go

This was by far the hardest step for me. It took a lot of coaxing from Sam and my family, but I needed to learn to let go of the image I was trying to live up to – Superwoman.

We hired a cleaner two days a week. I struggled with this. I couldn't even be at home while the cleaner was there, I felt so guilty. But the feeling of coming home to a clean house, washing folded, kitchen sparkling, floors mopped and the kids' rooms CLEAN ... was worth any feelings of guilt or inadequacy, even misplaced ones.

We also put the children into day care two days a week. This was another huge personal decision. But eventually I realised that while I was stretching myself to cover all the tasks I 'believed' I needed to do, I was leaving little of myself for my children. At the end of the day I was exhausted, physically and emotionally.

By giving myself two days a week I was able to get *more* done and be there for my kids at the end of *every* day.

Those two days were also an opportunity for me to *find some time for me*. This was invaluable in helping me through.

I know how important it is to feel as though we can manage it all, that we can keep up with all of our responsibilities as well as new obstacles. We feel a sense of accomplishment or achievement, when we get things done – even if it's at the expense of our health and wellbeing.

Well, I'm here to tell you that *you will get to be the superhero at the end*. You'll take charge again. Once you deal with this thing you're dealing with and look back, you'll realise what an amazing, strong, powerful person you've become!

Step 4 » Find YOU again

“ Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure ”

Nelson Mandela

At this point in your journey, **finding you again** is the most important step. When we're in the midst of a problem, it's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day battle, and let life revolve only around the issues we face.

When you can take a step back, and take some time to think about yourself again, you're on the road to overcoming your obstacles. Find a hobby, read a good book, take a course on something you've always wanted to learn, spend some time outdoors ... whatever it is, taking the time to find out what makes YOU tick is invaluable in your journey.

You'll realise that you're more than just a support person, and when you feel refreshed and rejuvenated you're able to give so much more of yourself to the people that need you.

If your journey is going to be long (as in the role of a carer for someone with a disability) then you need to know who YOU are besides being in that role. It's easy to hide behind your responsibilities and put off spending time on yourself. Whether it's because we feel guilty, or feel we don't have the time, we all invent excuses for not finding our true selves.

Once you realise the power that comes from unlocking your inner warrior – YOU – then you'll know that you're truly capable of anything.

The Love Tank

Think of yourself as a water tank, except instead of water you're filled with love, or energy if you like. Each time you give of yourself to someone else, your love/energy stores are depleted. If you keep giving out without getting a refill, you're going to run out, and nobody's happy.

Here's another scenario; when your car's petrol tank gets below half, fuel quality decreases and performance worsens. *It's the same with you – as your love tank empties, so does the quality of love that you are able to give out.*

Find out what fills your tank, and fill it regularly. Only then can you keep giving what you need to the ones you love.

Here's a diagram to help you get it. These examples work for me, but it's vital that you discover what fills *your* love tank.

Things that **fill** your tank:

- + Alone time/Exercise
- + Watching a movie
- + Having dinner out with a loved one
- + Reading a great book



The LOVE Tank

Things that **empty** your tank:

- Giving support to others
- Running errands
- Cooking dinner for the family
- Helping with homework

Step 5 » Hit Replay

I know what you're thinking – 'This has been traumatic; something I don't ever wish to repeat. Why on earth would I want to go through it again?'

Before you start emailing me with threats, this is what I'm on about: journaling – keeping a diary, writing a memoir, or even just a notebook of your feelings when you get a chance to write them down.

The simple act of writing something down on paper can sometimes be enough for you to let it go. It's a cathartic experience – and the cheapest form of therapy!

Professor James Pennebaker (University of Texas in Austin) has done numerous experiments on the health benefits of writing expressively, and has shown that regular writing can boost the immune system and help you recover from traumatic events more successfully.

People who had survived traumatic events and who wrote about their experiences for 20 minutes a day, three to four times a week, visited the doctor half as much as those who didn't write.

The journal writers also produced less of the stress hormone cortisol.

Rise above

Following Sam's accident, I had a brief battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I saw a counsellor once a week and we worked through some issues, talked things through and discussed my feelings. I felt better, but didn't experience the 'breakthrough' I hoped for.

I definitely recovered from PTSD, but there was no real 'bounce back'. Once I started writing my book though – a memoir of Sam's accident from my point of view – I immediately began to feel a release from all the pent up feelings I'd been holding inside without realising.

Parts of the book were very hard to write, and I often found myself in tears over the keyboard. But once I'd written those hard parts, I could then go over them, read them again and again, and begin to feel myself rising above the feelings and looking back over the whole situation as something *that I have come through*.



Final Word

I have emerged from the depths of despair and traumatic experience of Sam's accident.

And the five stages I've discussed in this e-book helped me through, and I know they'll help you.

Once you stop 'coping' and find yourself again, I know you'll be stronger, wiser, and so much more confident, as I am.

Someone get the capes. We ARE superheroes!

Kate Cawthorn



Contact

Sam Cawthorn

Empowering Enterprizes Pty Ltd

PO Box 292
Balmain NSW Australia 2041

info@samcawthorn.com

www.samcawthorn.com
www.empoweringenterprizes.com

Speaking events

To book Sam at your next event or conference-
contact **O2Speakers** on

+61 2 9818 5199 or info@o2speakers.com

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