

**From My
Heart
To Yours**

David

Dedicated to

My parents Wallace and Lorraine Gabbert
who gave me the gift to believe in myself, dream big, and
modeled the rewards of setting goals and taking action

Written for

My personal growth,
my wife Gail,
daughters Jennifer and Jill,
sons-in-law Brad and Josh,
grandchildren,
sister Yvonne,
sister-in-law Sue,
and all my other relatives and dearest friends

My wish for you

My wish for you is to be happy, to love yourself and your life every day;

...to have meaning in your life;

...to reach your fullest potential;

...and to pass your success on to others.

Whether you are searching for a more fulfilling purpose in life, or you are happy with your life and simply interested in new ideas for self-improvement, my personal notes from key self-improvement books may be helpful in improving your life and the ones you love.

I believe we all have the power to change, improve, and grow. We can all love our lives, be fulfilled, and pass on our success to our family and friends. I hope you find the information contained within as insightful, meaningful, and helpful as I have.

From my heart to yours,
David

"We know what we are, but not what we may become."
—William Shakespeare

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**Your Life on Purpose:
How to Find What Matters and Create the Life You Want**
by

Matthew McKay, Ph.D.

John P. Forsyth, Ph.D.

George H. Eifert, Ph.D.

(New Harbinger, 2010)

About the Book

With *Your Life on Purpose* you will discover how to find and do what you are passionate about. You will learn how to keep mental obstacles, fears, and daily demands from blocking your path to fulfillment. You will learn how to find your way when values conflict with your goals and passions. You will learn how to focus on what truly matters to make your dream a reality. You will learn how to make a lasting impact on the world. Life is short. What are you waiting for? Stop postponing your goals and dreams. *Your Life on Purpose* is about doing what matters to you every day to feel fulfilled and alive.

Dr. McKay is in private practice and specializes in cognitive behavioral treatment of anxiety and depression. He is a professor at the Wright Institute in Berkley, California and has authored numerous books. Dr. Forsyth is a scientist, writer, and professor of psychology, is the author of several books, and has won numerous awards for his research and teaching. Dr. Eifert is a psychology professor at Chapman University in California, is the author of numerous books, and is ranked as one of the top thirty researchers in behavioral analysis and therapy.

Introduction

You always have two choices. You can put in your days without a planned purpose, letting your days slip away until the clock runs out; or you can work to make something important

to you happen with every free moment you have. It is important to understand that how you live your life affects you, and many, many other people. Do you feel stuck in quiet desperation? We are all creatures of repetition and habit, and this can leave us feeling stuck. We have our dreams and ambitions, but most of us get caught up in the day-to-day grind of survival and never move forward with our dreams. There are many ways to feel stuck. You can feel stuck in a relationship, in a job, in an unhealthy or aging body, in the routines of the food you eat, or in your daily, repetitive tasks. We can also get stuck in our own heads; we do this by replaying old hurts, painful thoughts, our perceived limitations, and our unfulfilled needs. These feelings of being stuck can be the red flag that signals that you are off course.

Most people work hard, but often at things that don't really matter to them; the things that are really important to them get left unattended. Whenever your daily activities, goals, and directions do not support your core values, you will feel lost and adrift; you will feel your life has no meaning. To re-energize your life with meaningful activities, you must discover what matters to you.

This book looks at three broad categories where you can benefit from being guided by your values. The three categories are self-growth, service, and life purpose. Consider these three categories to be the three legs of a stool. Where you will find your core meaning in life is in the commonalities that these three legs of your stool share.

Your empty feelings will not go away until you turn your values into planned intentions, and your intentions into committed actions. But even with the best of intentions and planning, you can get stuck. You may face fears, difficult emotions, thoughts of failing, or behavioral, financial, or knowledge barriers. But to create a life worth living to your fullest potential, you have to be willing to accept the costs. The

process is your call to action; it will be a challenge.

Values Matter

Knowing what values really matter to you is critical to creating a life of meaning. With values, you can pursue a course of action that will take you on a never-ending journey. You will pursue your values as long as you are alive. In contrast, when you reach a goal, your journey is complete. For example, a need to buy a new set of paintbrushes and easel or take painting lessons is a time-limited goal. The desire to paint for the joy of sharing your creativity and beauty with others is a value, a timeless direction for your life. The value is what links the goals together and gives them purpose. So how do you discover your core values? The authors offer exercises to help you discover your values. But knowing what matters to you is just the first step; more importantly, you must do what matters. And if you are going to do what matters, you must understand the barriers that are going to get in your way. The first obstacle will be your own mind and your second obstacle will come from your emotions.

Most of us run toward near-term pleasures and the safe feelings of everyday routines. The core problem is that most of us focus our attention on what will make us feel better. When you ask people what is important to them, they will often say they want to feel more confident, happier, loved, or more secure. These wants sound like values, but they are really emotions. When you make the satisfaction of emotions the reasons for your actions, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. When you live your life just to satisfy the feelings you desire, you are going to get lost; you are investing your efforts into what comforts you and not what you care about.

Willingness is the key to facing your monsters, or your feelings. Willingness is what keeps us on track so we don't let our emotions lead us astray. The absence of willingness is what

most often keeps us from pursuing our values—what really matters to us. But you have to be 100 percent willing to overcome the obstacles and pain. If you are not 100 percent willing, you will reach a point where you will give up. Realize there is no getting away from the pain. You either face the pain and obstacles in pursuing what matters to you; or you avoid your valued path, only to create a deeper, worse kind of pain. This is the pain of emptiness, lack of life meaning, a pain that threatens your core identity. Willingness shapes your life and history.

Pursuing Self-growth Values

There are two types of values that matter most in life, *service values* and *self-growth values*. Service values focus on relationships, family, friends, and being a service to others. Self-growth values are more personal, they deal with you and your growth as a human being—so let's start there.

You need to know who you are and what you are living for before you can be a service to others. Self-growth can easily fall to the wayside as we become involved in the day-to-day struggle of survival—a job, a family, and maintaining a home and ourselves. Instead of spending our free time on self-growth we spend it on feeling better, and sometimes those actions are even destructive to our being. But the cycle of living just to feel better leaves us feeling worse about where our lives are going. This is why it is so important to connect with areas in your life that are important to you. You don't need to justify them to anyone; you just need to know it. Self-growth values will involve you and your relationship with yourself; they will involve your mind, body and soul.

STEP ONE: To help you with the process of discovering your self-growth values, the authors suggest you consider each of the following areas and ask yourself whether it is important to you or not.

1. Physical self-care and health: How important is your physical health to you? What role do you want physical exercise and healthy eating to play in your life? Why do you want to take care of your body? Why is it important to you? What benefits would it provide you? Take a moment to reflect on the importance of this category.

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

2. Spirituality: We are all spiritual beings pondering life's purpose and eternity. This is true whether you practice a faith, pray, meditate, reflect, ponder life's questions, or search for ways to grow your awareness of yourself, your connection to others, and the universe. Take a moment to reflect on your spirituality. What are things larger than life that inspire you? What are the mysteries in life of which you stand in awe? Describe the role you would like to see spirituality play in your life. If you had spirituality in your life, what benefits would it provide you?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

3. Creativity: Life offers endless avenues to express your creativity. Creative activities allow you to absorb yourself in activities that fully engage your creative mind and generate euphoric feelings. Creativity isn't just expressed in the traditional artistic mediums, but also in cooking, creating clothing and accessories, sewing, photography projects, gardening, writing, knitting, floral arrangements, etc. Reflect on what place creative activities play in your life. How important are they to you?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

4. Leisure and Play: The way you spend your leisure time can profoundly affect the quality of your life. This area can include just about anything. Play allows you to fully absorb yourself in activities that include all your senses and express the playful part of yourself. What value do you place on expressing a playful spirit? Is it important to you to have time to unwind and have fun? How would you like your life to be in this area? What kinds of interests, activities, and hobbies would you like to cultivate?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

5. Work and Career: Work can include a paid job, a volunteer position, or being a homemaker. What is important to you about your work? What qualities do you receive from work? How do you envision your dream work? What energy, talents, skills, and knowledge would you like to be using? What would your work look like? What would you do if you could do anything at all? Describe the qualities of work that would be perfect for you.

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

6. **Personal Growth and Education:** Personal growth is most often related to learning. This means gaining a deeper understanding of who you are, exploring yourself, and developing as a human being—emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and behaviorally. Do you enjoy sharpening your skills? Do you enjoy learning new things? Do you enjoy growing as a person?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

7. **Self-Kindness and Compassion:** Many of us have old wounds and losses that need to be healed. We have hurts and fears. We blame ourselves or others and retreat from the world, which ultimately hurts us even more. Practicing acts of kindness and loving self-care can help you to stop being at war with yourself. Would you like your life to be different? If you are not happy with yourself, what does your life look like if you loved yourself? How do you want to think of yourself? How do you want to treat yourself?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

Develop Your Self-growth Intentions

STEP TWO: Move from thoughts to intentions. Write down your intentions for each of the self-growth areas you indicated were important to you. Don't confuse intentions with goals. Goals have an endpoint; intentions reflect the direction you want your life to move for your entire life. Your intention should be a statement of how you would like to live your life in that particular area. The statement should genuinely reflect

your personal wishes.

Write down your statement of intention for each category that matters to you:

1. Physical Self-Care and Health:
2. Spirituality:
3. Creativity:
4. Leisure and Play:
5. Work and Career:
6. Personal Growth and Education:
7. Self-kindness and Compassion:

Congratulations, you have finished the first leg of your stool.

Finding Meaning by Serving Others

“A person starts to live when he can live outside himself.”
—Albert Einstein

“Life’s most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

We all live in interdependency. We all have a role to play in making a difference in the lives of others. We must realize we are part of something larger than ourselves; serving others requires a shift in consciousness.

There are a number of factors that disconnect us from other human beings. For example, the dark side of technology is how

it interrupts face-to-face interaction. There is no substitute for the experience of sharing the five senses of a personal interaction with another human being. Technology can help you to become more connected, but also more disconnected. The mode of mind that keeps us focused on our own needs and desires keeps our days filled with busyness, distractions, and routines. We become both self-serving and self-preserving. Both of these factors conspire against our becoming more connected with other people. When we are disconnected, we feel alone. When we feel alone, we shut down and focus on ourselves. When we cannot see beyond our own needs, we do not see the need to reach out to others.

Servicing others does more than connect to other people. It helps us find meaning and purpose in our lives. It allows us to share and express our self-growth values to others. The very act of sharing your values is empowering, it acts as a gift to yourself as well as others. As you develop your values, you add something to the lives of everyone you touch. Servicing others doesn't operate from a position of strength, but from your core, heart, and soul. As you give of yourself with no strings attached, you receive love in return and begin to see your influence and interdependence on all other human beings. It is a shift in thinking to see ourselves all living together in a "pond of life."

To find the core of your service epicenter, you must uncover your talents, passions, and values. Your talents are unique to you; they are the things you are especially good at. Your passions are those things that tug at your heart and lift up your spirit. Your values were identified in the previous exercise. Together, your talents, passions, and values come together to add meaning to your acts of service to others. The authors offer exercises to help you clarify your talents and passions below, which will help you explore your service values.

STEP THREE: Start by creating four columns on a sheet of paper labeled with the following headings:

- My Self-growth Values:
- My Talents:
- My Passions:
- My Impact on Others:

Copy your self-growth values into the first column.

Opposite each self-growth value, write down what natural ability you have in each of these areas. Think about each self-growth value in terms of your unique talents and interests. Think of things you are naturally good at. Anything you enjoy doing over and over again is a strong indication of a unique talent. We all enjoy doing what we do best. If you have trouble identifying your talents, think back to when you were a child. What did you enjoy doing? Where did you thrive? Once you have written down your talents, look for a common thread of talents that continues to show up in the various self-growth values. Maybe you are creative, love to solve problems, organize people, work with your hands to build or fix things, enjoy intellectual challenges, or plan for future activities. Identifying your talents is important because they are fodder for development and sharing with others. When you act on your talents, you derive a sense of personal satisfaction, meaning, and purpose to your life.

Discovering your passions will give your life direction and a sense of purpose—both for yourself and your role to others. Our passions appear in whatever raises our spirit and tugs at our heart. If there is something you feel is missing in your life, it may be a clue to your passions. Examine your heart: What is missing in your life as you examine each of your self-growth values? Write it down in the appropriate column.

The following are some exercises to help connect you to your passions as you consider the meaning in your life and your service to others. Imagine that you can have all your self-growth values without any barriers. Everything is possible. Now imagine you have taken all of these self-growth values with you on a trip on a boat. As you are on this trip, your boat starts to take on water and you have to discard one of your self-growth values. Which would be the first one you would throw overboard? As the boat continues to take on water, you have to continue to decide which one to discard. Continue this exercise until you have only one self-growth value left. Why did you choose the last self-growth value? What is in that value that you feel so strongly about? This is one of your passions. Write it down in the passions column.

Now imagine someone very special to you. Imagine that you can grant this person just one wish and it will come true. The wish has to be for something that is durable and will last a long time. For example, a successful fifty-year marriage, raising a happy, successful family, becoming an accomplished pianist, or organizing a meaningful charity. These are all examples of wishes that have durable, long-lasting, positive effects on a person's life. Do not wish for money, material possessions, or anything emotional that may include a state of mind. After giving it a lot of thought, write it down. Is this something you feel very strongly about? Does it pull at your heart? Is it something you could also wish for yourself? Is it something you would wish for other people as well? Write down your wish in your passions column.

Tears can open a window to what you really care about. Pain can teach you something about that which you really care about. Where have you suffered? Did other people's actions contribute to your pain? What do you cry about? What would you need to restore your sense of wholeness? Give your answers some quiet reflection. Write down your thoughts. Now expand your thinking to other people's suffering. When you

experience others experiencing your suffering, how does that make you feel? Many times your pain will point you toward your passions and to where you have a strong interest to serve others. Whatever you have come with, write it down in your passion column.

Now let's explore your service values and how you will affect others. Obviously your service values are social in nature and they will be most successful when they flow from your self-growth values. As you did with the self-growth categories, answer yes to any of the following service areas that are important to you. If you are on the fence or if you only judge it as kind of important, do not answer yes. Remember that a category can be important to you even though it is not a well-developed part of your life right now.

1. **Family:** This category covers all aspects of your family life including your significant other, your siblings, children, grandchildren, parents, etc. Are family bonds important to you? Do they give your life a sense of meaning and purpose? What kind of a caregiver do you want to be? How are your family relationships important to you? What talents do you bring to this area? What passions do you bring to this area? What do you feel strongly about in this area? Is there anything missing in your life in this area?
Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)
If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?
Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied.
2. **Friendships and Other Social Relationships:** There are a lot of variations in what people value in social relationships. Some value knowing a lot of people while others place a premium on a few quality friends. Think about the kind of social relationships you prefer. Are social

bonds important to you? What kind of relationships would you like to have? To what degree of intimacy, whether emotional, spiritual, or intellectual? What type of personal qualities would you like to develop? How would you interact with your friends if you were the “ideal you?” Where would you like to create service in your friendships? How can you use your talents and passions in your friendships? What are you missing in this area?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied.

3. Community and Volunteerism—This area can be as broad as being a citizen of your country or state to being involved in your neighborhood, workplace, religious organization, or local charity. What degree of importance do you place on giving back in terms of your talents, time, and energy. Do you care about making a difference in the lives of others? Do you want to share your talents and passions with others? Do you feel there is anything missing in your life in this area?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)

If it is important, how satisfied are you with your life in this area now?

Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied

4. The Environment and Nature: Are acts of protecting the environment important to you? Do you enjoy taking care of your landscaping or gardening? Do you enjoy being outdoors with nature walking, hiking, bicycling, hunting, fishing, sailing, etc.? How would you like to spend more time in the environment? How would you like to use your talents and passions to influence the environment?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)
If it is important, how satisfied are you with
your life in this area now?
Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very
satisfied.

5. The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” What the golden rule means simply is taking care of others as you take care of yourself—and showing it through your actions. How do you treat yourself? Is being kind to yourself important? When others are not kind to you, do you feel hurt? When you see a lack of kindness to others, do you want to reach out? Do you want to be available to people when they need help? Do you want to touch others to lift people up? How would you want to use the golden rule to reach out to others? What talents could you use to offer kindness to others?

Is this area important to you? (Yes or No)
If it is important, how satisfied are you with
your life in this area now?
Not satisfied, moderately satisfied, very
satisfied.

Now it's time to move on to writing intentions for each of the service categories that you indicated are important to you. Your intention statement for each category is simply a statement about how you would like to live your life in an area that is important to you. Remember, intentions are statements about how you want to live your life every day—not goals that have an endpoint. Visualize what direction you would like to move in each category that is important to you. What do you see yourself doing? Write them down for each category you selected. Transfer the information to your fourth column, how you will affect others.

1. Family:
2. Friendships and Other Social Relationships:
3. Community and Volunteerism:
4. The Environment and Nature:
5. The Golden Rule:

Congratulations, you have now completed the second leg of your personal analysis, your service to others. Are you starting to see any common threads yet? Look for life values that are repeatedly woven through your self-growth values, talents, passions, and service intentions.

Your actions in your life will determine your ultimate influence on others. There are three core aspects to being successful at developing your service values: awareness, choice, and action. To grow your awareness, ask yourself the following two questions: “How can I respond in this situation to benefit those around me?” and, “How are my actions right now benefiting others?” Look to your values, talents, and actions to guide you.

Every day you will be offered several opportunities to serve others. You will always have a choice whether to serve or not. Some will tug at your heart, others will flow from how you chose to live your life. As you become aware of these opportunities to serve, you will have to decide where you want to make a difference. Be aware that acts of service flow best from you when you are expressing your growth values.

Service is ultimately all about action—what you do with your mind, mouth, feet, and hands. What actions do you wish to take in your service to others? What do you want to be known for? Serving others leaves your impact on this world—both immediate and lasting. When you serve, you live your values

by turning your intentions into actions. When you act, you share your talents and passions with others. The more you give, the more your life expands; you gain the renewed sense of purpose and meaning that comes from being a part of something larger than yourself.

Life's Core Purpose

Your life's purpose is not necessarily what you are doing for a living, nor is it likely to be found in your daily roles as a parent or spouse. Rather, your core life purpose is going to be found in the common threads that wind through all of the roles you play and the things you do and care about. What we do day-in and day-out doesn't reveal why we are here. But how we respond to the various events and happenings in our life provide hints about our core purpose. When we ponder the key moments in our life over a span of several years, most of us will discover key themes in our lives that point to our core purpose. For example, when I look back over one of my closer friends life, it is obvious his whole life has been about organizing people to build stuff and do things. As a kid he organized groups of kids to build clubhouses and lemonade stands. As he got older he organized friends to field teams to play football, basketball, and baseball. As he got older yet he organized people to build businesses from the ground up. Now he is organizing people to build charity organizations. When you look at him you see a businessman, but when you look at the core purpose that drives his soul, you see the love to organize others to help build things of value to others.

The author points out another example of a woman named Helen who became an RN. After a year she felt something was missing so she registered for additional training to treat children suffering from asthma. A few years later her grandmother suffered a stroke; Helen immediately moved to Chicago to make sure her grandmother received the proper care. Later she saw an article in a newspaper about refugees

that were driven from their homeland and needed help. Helen immediately signed up as a teacher. When you observe Helen's life she appears to be flighty and ungrounded, running off in various directions. Yet the opposite is true. Helen has a common theme running through her core values—protecting vulnerable people.

A life on purpose compels us to action, to work toward something, and to do it over and over again. You will discover that a life of purpose will usually involve a reciprocal relationship between learning and doing.

STEP FOUR: The original book includes four exercises to help you explore and identify your purpose. Try each of them to see which is most helpful to you.

First, imagine you have the ability to look back at your life immediately after your death. You have the opportunity to carve your own tombstone. Under your name you can write a single sentence. The phrase starts with, "A person who..." This sentence somehow has to capture what your life was about. It should express an ideal or value of what matters to you the most in life. Don't worry about whether it is true right now or not; the past doesn't make any difference. This is your life; it is what you are here to do. Write it down. Look at the words. Do you feel them in your heart?

A second, great way to zero in on your life's purpose is to look back at self-defining memories. These recollections stand out because they say something about your identity. Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. Label the left side, "Memories that make me feel good about myself," and label the right side, "Memories that disappoint myself." Next divide the paper into several blocks using horizontal lines. Each open block will represent a decade of your life starting with the first ten years. Try to write down up to five memories from each

decade that make you feel good about yourself and five that are disappointing. Recall events in relationships that stand out in your mind. Examine both the positive and negative memories in this area. Write down a brief sentence to capture the events. As you write them down, look for the common threads that connect these memories to your talents and passions. Look at things you have done to pursue goals and dreams. Reflect on outstanding memories from school, work, or around your home. Recall anything that involved creativity or something you did for or to another person. Think about books, movies, stories that have made an impact on you.

Once you have completed the memories, examine all your feel-good memories and reflect upon what ties them together. Look at the memories that disappoint you and see what the common elements are. Reflect upon what you have learned about yourself. Who are you trying to be? What are you trying to learn? What are you trying to do? Your answers should point you to your life purpose.

Another way to uncover your life purpose is to journal once a day. For a two- to four-week period, be alert during the day for experiences that lead to feelings of well-being, rightness, significance, or admiration. Write them down each evening. The types of experiences you should be looking for are ones that create a sense of well-being or fulfillment—experiences that make you feel right and aligned with your values, generate a feeling of significance and importance, or lead you to feel admiration for someone. Also make a note of the experience that triggered these feelings. After a two- to four-week period, review your journaling to see what is pulling at your heart. Write down the common threads that weave throughout your entries.

Fourth, search for your purpose by exploring your personal strengths. Begin by writing down several personal qualities you are trying to develop. These may be qualities you already

possess but wish to strengthen; or maybe they are new virtues you feel would be of the most help in accomplishing a key goal. For example, you may be wanting to learn how to be more compassionate, strengthen your perseverance, become more accepting, open up your ability to express and receive love, or develop the courage to face a fear that is crippling your happiness. Once you have completed this step, select the one strength from your list that you feel would be of the most help in accomplishing a key goal. Write about how your life would be different if you already possessed this strength. What would you do differently in your relationships?

Remember that passion and purpose go hand-in-hand. Use the four exercises above to find the words to describe your key purpose. Review everything you have written down about it. Are there some common threads that weave in and out through the various exercises? Try to write down your life purpose in a few concise sentences.

What Matters to You Most?

Go back and review your answers to the various steps for your self-growth values. What stands out? What are the values that are most important to you? Now go back and review your service values. What stood out? What matters to you? How do your self-growth values, talents, and passions all tie together into your service values? What are the common threads that bind it all together? Now review your final statement on your purpose. Examine how this ties together with your self-growth values and service values.

Tie this all together and write a short paragraph on what matters to you most.

Navigating Value Conflicts

Value conflicts are not only inevitable but life can take us down paths that pull us further away from our values. Many times life can pull us in too many directions at once. Financial demands can exert an especially strong pressure on us. As our lives are put on hold or interrupted by all of the external demands and pressures, our minds can complicate things further with an unending stream of defeating self-talk.

Most of us hold many different self-growth values that create conflicts and demands for our time. The role of providing an income or being a full-time homemaker will also establish limits on your time available to pursue what matters to you most. You no doubt will experience other people pulling you in the opposite direction, moving you further away from your purpose. Every day you will be forced to make decisions about how you will spend your time and energy. You must choose between the conflicts of your various values, your roles, and the demands of others. To succeed you will need to prioritize what is important to you and remain flexible. Remaining flexible will require balancing all of your demands by moving gracefully between the various areas of your life. When you are faced with choices, you will need to listen closely to your heart; don't argue with it.

But remember yourself-growth values, your talents, passions, and purpose are all interwoven together with a common thread. If you look closely, you will discover that much of what is important to you is a common theme in many of your activities. This awareness offers a solution to the stressful time conflicts between your values.

Life is always about choices. When you decide to live your values, your decisions will benefit you. When you procrastinate or postpone doing what matters to you or you follow the easy path to feel good rather than to follow your heart, the decisions

will be bad for you. Whenever we postpone living our life of purpose, we hurt ourselves. Whenever we choose the easiest path, one that will give relief from the pain of sacrifice or conflict, we hurt ourselves. Always remember that choosing between two of your value conflicts is always a win-win situation. You lose only when you choose activities that do not have any meaning to you.

Developing the Willingness to Overcome the Barriers

“There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect.” —Ronald Reagan

Once you are clear about what direction you want to take, you will be in a position to learn about what barriers might be standing in your way. We will begin by looking at the negative thoughts and self-talk, the emotional roadblocks that will inevitably arise, and the behavioral obstacles to success. One of the biggest challenges will be facing your fears. Your fears will push you off course and fill you with the desire to escape. But when we turn away from our fears, we can travel toward what is important to us.

Your own mind will offer you the most challenges in pursuing what matters most to you. The fear of the unknown, thoughts about what can go wrong, will enter your mind every time you plan to act on your values. Your mind will also make judgments about your future actions. So every time you choose a path of action toward what matters to you, your mind might try to sabotage you with negative thoughts about the future.

Your ultimate goal will not be to focus so much on what thoughts are flashing through your mind, but instead on your relationship to your thoughts. Whenever your mind starts dealing in fear, fortune-telling, or judgment, you need to respond by taking a step back to simply observe the thoughts

without attaching any significance to them. Once you can do that, you enable yourself to develop a new perspective on your thoughts and a new relationship with them. The following are a few techniques that may help you.

A constant stream of thoughts are normal, but they are not necessarily “you.” The goal is to observe your thoughts passing through your mind just as you would look at the stars in a night sky. Imagine you are sitting in an empty room with a door to your left and to your right, each leading to darkness. Watch your thoughts enter the door to your left, pass through your mind, and exit the room through the door on your right. Watch your thoughts pass through the room until they lose importance and you feel detached from them. To add a physical awareness of releasing your thoughts, close your left hand to receive the thought and open your right hand to release it. Remember that the thoughts your mind creates are just that—thoughts. Sometimes the thoughts may help you, sometimes they may hurt you, but your mind isn’t “you.” Your thoughts are no more than dreams; they cannot hurt you unless you give them power.

You can also use repetition to distance yourself from your thoughts. Try selecting a few key words to label your recurring thoughts, and repeat those words over and over again until the thought loses its meaning.

Another exercise is to identify the purpose of your thought. What is the thought suggesting that you do or feel? Regarding your values, you will find that the purpose of your cognitive barriers is to make you either feel scared to force you to withdraw or to make you feel stupid or wrong so you won’t do something. You can disrupt these mental blocking methods by acknowledging and thanking your mind for these thoughts. For example, “Thank you for reminding me I cannot make more friends because most people don’t like me.” “Thank you for reminding me I can’t go back to school because I’m not smart enough.” “Thank you for reminding me I cannot

start a new hobby because I don't have the time."

Another exercise to detach yourself from your thoughts is to reduce them to letters and words. Write your blocking thoughts down a small index card. The point is that you cannot get rid of negative thoughts, because they will always reappear in your mind. But when you write them down they become insignificant letters and words on a piece of paper; you can relate to them differently. You must reduce thoughts down to what they are—harmless thoughts. Your thoughts shouldn't control you or define who you are. Write them down.

It is empowering when you realize your thoughts do not need to be trusted, believed, or listened to. Explore your thoughts. Do they help you move closer to what is important to you, or do they move you further away? Does listening to your thoughts and letting them stop you ultimately help you or hurt you? Start by listing five blocking thoughts that steer you away from what matters to you. Opposite the blocking thoughts, write down what happens to your life. What are the specific outcomes of listening to your blocking thoughts?

You can also use your senses to focus on the present moment. Whenever you are experiencing blocking thoughts, your mind will be in the past or the future. That is where blocking thoughts live, in the fear of the unknown future or digging up mistakes of the past. Blocking thoughts don't like the present moment much, so take refuge from your painful thoughts there.

Our emotions color just about everything we do; they can be helpful, serve as protection, and hold us back from danger. There is a dark side to emotions, too, and it is most often expressed in feelings of anxiety and fear. Fear drives us further away from what matters most to us. We are afraid of failure, embarrassment, and rejection. The more we fear emotional pain, the more often we turn away from the values that matter. When fear wins, our lives lose. The following are three reasons

why facing your fears is important: First, emotions have a life span; they will peak but later subside. You will never conquer your fears if you resist what you have no knowledge of. Rather than avoiding the pain of your fears, experience them—the fear will eventually subside, and you will no longer remain stuck in your fearful life pattern. Second, the longer you resist fearful emotions, the stronger those emotions will become; the cost of avoidance will further complicate your life. Third, the more you avoid your fearful emotions, the more control they impose on your life. To let an emotion control you is to give up control of living your life as you choose. In contrast, every time you face a fearful emotion, its power to control you will recede and transfer power back to you.

To help you overcome your fearful emotions, experience them in small, gradual steps. Zero in on your fearful emotions, describe them, and write them down. Talk to yourself about the emotions you are feeling. Reflect about what you have learned. As you repeat the exercise several times, the words and thoughts will become less powerful.

When painful feelings block you from attaining what matters most to you, focus on the positive outcomes of living your values. Choose a value that is important to you, and visualize the success in your life. Feel the emotions of success. What does it feel like on the inside? Positive visualization will help you develop clear intentions to face your emotional fears.

Remember that your painful emotions are not the barrier; rather, they are the power you give to them when you avoid them. As we pursue our values, we must take our painful fears with us, experiencing them along the way.

Many of us have good intentions to pursue our values; but we get lost. We fail to turn our good intentions into actions. Why? Many times, behavioral challenges present roadblocks to us. The good news is you can overcome these behavioral

barriers. First you need to be clear on what these barriers look like. Behavioral barriers will fall into four general themes.

1. **Failing to identify the steps that will take you toward your valued direction.** The first thing you need to do is to develop some specific, step-by-step goals. Write them down. Under each specific goal, write down time-and-place actions.
2. **Lack of knowledge.** Moving in the direction of your values may require more knowledge or information. Many times you cannot proceed without this being your first step. Write down what information and knowledge you will need to gather. Commit yourself to learning it. Many times the knowledge gained from the “School of Hard Knocks” can be your best learning tool—you just need to get started.
3. **Weak or underdeveloped skills.** Having some general knowledge about something is far different than having actually done it. To pursue your passions, you may have to practice and hone the necessary skills required to pursue your values. Remember, mastering a skill takes time and hard work. Expect many disappointments along the way. To fight giving up, focus on what you learn from failing and the happiness of pursuing your life’s values.
4. **Logistical issues such as time, distance, finances, resources, etc.** The best method to solve logistical blocks is with good old-fashioned problem solving. Start by identifying the goal you want to achieve. Next, brainstorm a list of solutions; recruiting ideas from others is often helpful. Narrow the list down and evaluate the remaining options. Choose what you think is the best option and develop a time commitment for implementing your choice of action. Select a Plan B

and establish an evaluation time period. Keep in mind that the most common logistical block is lack of time. Lack of time is a great setup for giving up on what matters to you most. The good news is, time is always there for you to use however you wish. To find more time, inventory how you use your time for one week. Once you have it all recorded, study what you are doing with your time. Ask yourself, are some of these activities really important to me? Does this activity serve a value of mine? Count up the amount of time you spend on value-based activities and non-value-based activities. Develop a list prioritizing the activities on which you will spend your time.

Action Review Points

1. Your life up until this point has not been a series of accidents. Everything you have done and experienced up to now has gotten you to where you are today. If you want to go after something new, you need to do something new.
2. No one can make choices for you; you will have to make the decisions that make up your life. Your choices, your intentions, and your actions will make up your destiny. What you do will be what you are remembered for. What you are remembered for will reflect your values.
3. To live your life toward a purpose means making a commitment; the commitment is saying yes to both your values and the pain of sacrifice you will incur. Living a life on purpose is developing the responsibility to put desires into actions and repeating those actions over and over again. To live a life of action means moving forward toward a value.

4. Think of your values in terms of verbs, like writing, planning, walking, reading, praying, caring, leading, loving, and playing. Also think in terms of adverbs that describe how you will carry out those actions. Use words like skillfully, confidently, knowledgeably, diplomatically, respectfully, lovingly, compassionately, wisely. When you focus on verbs and adverbs, you will notice you cannot buy any of them. They are all choices in life that anyone can choose no matter what your circumstances.
5. When you focus on goals rooted in your values, you will be moving forward. But moving forward will mean change. This is the basic idea of living your life toward your purpose—change. Everything in life is constantly changing.
6. If you commit yourself to do something new for three consecutive days, the change will start to become a new habit. You can apply this three-day rule to any of your self-growth values. Make a commitment to yourself, write down your goal, and take action for three days.
7. Everything in life has a message. Life gives us challenges and pain to prepare us for the future. When we learn from the experience, the message can strengthen us. Throughout it all we must look for the common threads of life's values and purpose that pull it all together. Even the pain can teach us something, alerting us to what matters in life most. When you look back on your life, search for what it has taught you. Remind yourself that everything that happens to you has a purpose. Seek out that purpose and you will find the meaning in your life.
8. To live your life on purpose will require a knowledge of what matters to you, a willingness to face the barriers, and the action that is necessary to link it all together.

9. How you live your life is no accident. Only you can decide what matters most in your life and if you will live out your values. You have a say in what you will do with your time and energy. We know our time is limited; the awareness is powerful. How do you wish to use your time? Life can be vital or just about surviving from day to day. The choice is clear. The proof is in the doing. The answer lies in your heart.

“Life is a process of becoming, a combination of steps we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death.”

—Anais Nin

“The life you have led doesn’t need to be the only life you have.”

—Anna Quindlen

“For all of the words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these:
‘It might have been.’”

—John Greenleaf Whittier

The How of Happiness:
A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want
by Sonja Lyubomirsky
(Penguin reprint edition, 2008)

About the Book

The How of Happiness is a gift to people who have sought to take their happiness into their own hands. Drawing upon years of her own research with thousands of men and women, Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky reveals that much of our capacity for happiness is within our power. *The How of Happiness* details and delivers a positive and empowering way to sustain a new level of joy in our lives.

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky is a professor of psychology at the University of California and an award-winning researcher.

Introduction

Many people look for happiness in the wrong places. Often, we believe certain things will make a huge difference in our lives, when in fact, those things actually make just a small one. We have been conditioned to think that things like a promotion, a hot date, beauty, or material possessions will make us happy. It is true—many of these things can bring happiness for a short time—but unfortunately, while we pursue these short-term pleasures, we ignore the more effective routes to long-term happiness.

Furthermore, people believe happiness must be found. Do you ever find yourself thinking, “If only I could find my true love... If only I could get that promotion or job... If only I could find that perfect neighborhood to live in or find a faithful best friend...”? Happiness is not “out there” someplace, however, just waiting for certain things to happen before it makes its way to us. The truth is if you are not happy today, you will not be

happy tomorrow unless you take things into your own hands and take action. Likewise, one of the great ironies of our quest to become happier is that so many of us focus on changing the circumstances of our lives in the misguided hope that those changes will deliver happiness. We say, “I would be happier *if...*” and “I will be happy *when...*” Yet as significant as many major life events are to each of us, studies reveal that over the long term, all life’s circumstances and situations only account for ten percent of our happiness.

Consider this definition of happiness. *True happiness is a feeling of contentment, a sense of positive well-being; a belief that one’s life is meaningful and worthwhile.* It is a truism that how you think—about yourself, your world, and other people—is more important to your happiness than the objective circumstances of your life. Therefore, becoming lastingly happier will demand effort and commitment every day of your life to making some permanent changes. Pursuing happiness takes work and a sustained effort.

Happiness-Increasing Activity

Find a happy person and you will find them busy with fulfilling activities. Happiness activities expand your mind and body. When you are constantly striving to accomplish something that is difficult, something that challenges you, an activity that feels worthwhile and beneficial, you will experience feelings of contentment and happiness. When activities are intrinsically rewarding, you naturally want to continue the activity because you derive contentment and pleasure from *the process*.

Ask yourself the following questions about potential happiness activities:

- Do you want to repeat the activity?
- Does the activity make you feel creative?
- Do you lose track of time when doing the activity?

- Does it challenge your mind?
- Does the activity elevate you and teach you new skills?
- Do you obtain a sense of a euphoric high?
- Do you look forward to doing the activity?
- Does it make you feel good?

Committing yourself to intrinsic goals is inherently more satisfying and meaningful than tangible end products. People who strive for something personally significant, who have strong dreams or aspirations, are happier people. It is usually the process of working toward a goal and participating in a valued, challenging activity that are more important than attaining the goal.

Your commitment to the process will allow you to grow as a person, develop emotional maturity, learn new skills, and develop a sense of self-worth. Having meaningful goals stimulates our self-confidence and gives us a sense of anticipation. Each sub-goal brings an opportunity for yet another emotional boost. You add structure and meaning to your life and feel happier, because an *intrinsic goal* is inspiring and enjoyable and we devote more time to them.

The types of goals you pursue will determine if they will bring you happiness.

1. **They must be intrinsic goals** rather than tangible or circumstance-related goals. It is proven that people are happier working toward intrinsic life goals that have been freely chosen because of the personal rewards they deliver.
2. **You must own the goal.** Pursuing goals for others' sake is not happiness-inducing. It will take a bit of self-awareness to select goals that will consistently make you feel good. When you are doing "your thing" you should feel you are becoming the person you want to be.

3. The goal must allow you to strive for a **desirable outcome**. It is important to recognize that avoidance goals with undesirable outcomes will not deliver real happiness. For example, performing an activity so you will not feel guilty, so another will not be angry with you, or to prevent an unpleasant event from occurring—such as working diligently to secure your job or saving your deteriorating home—will wear you down more than it will make you happy.
4. Goals that are **activity-based** are more happiness-inducing than goals that seek to improve your circumstances. For example, moving to a home that offers a better view, finding a roommate who is quieter, or acquiring a larger TV to watch movies at home will bring happiness in the short-term, but you will quickly adapt to your new situation and return to your previous level of unhappiness. On the other hand, activity goals will allow you to experience a continuous stream of new challenges and experiences.

How to Commit

First, go public. When you announce your goals and make them public, you raise your chances of carrying them out. Second, care. You must commit to the pursuit of your goals and dreams with passion—because all pursuits that are worthwhile will require you to endure obstacles, failure, and personal sacrifice. To fulfill your dream will require patience, practice, time, and labor. It will be your passion for the doing of the activity that will allow you to overcome obstacles and ultimately succeed.

Ultimately, it is the journey that will bring real happiness. You have to commit yourself to simply “doing it.” The act of simply doing something and experiencing small successes is what will put you into an upward spiral of feelings of jubilation and satisfaction.

Investing in Social Connections

In order to become happier, you must imitate the habits of happy people. Generally speaking, happy people have a large circle of friends and devote time to nurturing those relationships.

By cultivating healthy social relationships, you will receive the benefits of positive emotions—which make you happier.

Outwardly happy people tend to attract an ever-increasing quantity of quality relationships, which tend to make them even happier. In other words, nurturing your circle of relationships will lift you in an upward spiral of happiness.

To increase your circle of friends and maintain meaningful friendships does not just happen; friendships are made. The following are strategies for making friends.

1. You must make the investment of **devoting time** to friendship-building. Show people you care about them by giving them your time. Once a friendship is formed, you must create events that will encourage you to get together and stay in touch on a regular basis.
2. **Communicate** feelings of affection and admiration. The self-disclosure of intimate thoughts and feelings is critical to building close friendships.
3. **Hugging** is enthusiastically endorsed to increase happiness, health, and connectedness.

Committing Acts of Kindness

Acts of kindness and compassion are happiness-inducing. To maximize happiness, it is suggested you commit acts of kindness on a regular basis, but not so often it begins to feel like a burden. It is also important that you mix up your acts of kindness so they do not become routine acts (and again become burdensome). Planned acts of kindness satisfy a basic human need to connect with others.

There is also a considerable benefit from acts of kindness to your self-perception. When you commit acts of kindness you begin to view yourself as a compassionate person.

Practicing Gratitude

It is a truism that how you think—about yourself, your world, and other people—is more important to your happiness than the objective circumstances of your life.

Expressing gratitude is a meaningful way to increase happiness levels. Gratitude is appreciation. It is being thankful for someone in your life; it is counting your blessings; it is thanking God; it is an antidote to negative emotions; it is feeling grateful and fortunate even amid setbacks; and it is a sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life. The practice of expressing gratitude involves focusing on the present and appreciating your life for what it is today. People who are consistently grateful on a regular basis are found to be relatively happier.

A promising way to begin a habit of gratitude is by keeping a gratitude journal. Choose a time of day when you have several minutes to reflect and step outside your daily routine. Ponder on a few things for which you are *currently* grateful. Reflect on why you are grateful and how your life has been enriched. Write in your journal daily, weekly, or monthly; determine the ideal timing tailored to your lifestyle. So you do not become bored with the routine, keep your gratitude strategy fresh by varying it and not over-practicing it.

Cultivating Optimistic Thinking

Building optimism is not only about celebrating and feeling grateful for the past and the present, but also anticipating a bright and positive future. Happy people give themselves the benefit of the doubt, strive to find the positive side of any

situation, and feel good about the future and the world.

Optimism is not only fostered by positive thoughts about the future but also on planning exactly how you will get there. A suggested method to develop optimism about the future is by participating in an exercise where you write a description of your “best possible future self.”

The exercise does not hinge on imagining a better future that relies on others’ actions, more money, or on circumstances changing due to a lucky coincidence—but rather on seeing the big picture of your life anew and where *you* want to take yourself. Looking into the future at your best possible self forces you to become more structured in your thoughts. You encourage yourself to write coherent thoughts and give yourself a better opportunity to learn about your inner person—understand your priorities, emotions, motives, and what’s in your heart. Making a commitment to write about your best possible future self helps you recognize your power to transform. Best of all, as you begin working toward making your future come true, you are building your optimism and best possible self for today.

To practice the exercise, start by writing where you want to take your life in the next five to ten years. As you write about your future and your goals you will be amazed to discover the new insights which will come to you. Do not expect to finish this exercise in one sitting; sit down to write several times as new ideas will come to you over time. As you establish your long-term goals, begin to break them up into shorter-term sub-goals. Next take time to identify the steps of actions you will take to accomplish your shorter-term goals. As you work toward your goals, identify pessimistic thoughts and replace them with more positive ones by asking yourself the following questions:

- What else could this situation or experience mean?
- Can anything good come from this?
- Does it represent any opportunities for me?

- What lessons can I learn and apply to the future?
- Did I develop any strengths as a result?

The strategy of writing your best possible future self taps into the power of optimistic thinking. Optimism motivates us to take the initiative, engage in effective coping, and maintain well-being even when we face inevitable obstacles. Optimistic thinking promotes positive moods, high morale, and happiness.

If you are optimistic about the future you will gain confidence in your ability to achieve lifelong goals. When you are confident, you are more likely to invest time and effort into reaching your goals. As a result, optimistic thinking can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Savoring Life's Joys

Unfortunately, many people postpone their happiness by forgetting to live in and savor the present moment. Most people who have overcome long-term pain or uncomfortable living conditions truly understand what it means to savor. The ability to savor positive experiences is one of the most important ingredients to happiness. Savoring requires you to step outside of the experience and review it, relish it, and immerse yourself in it. It has been proven that people who savor the past as well as the present experience intense and frequent happiness. Here are some strategies to foster savoring:

- Relish ordinary experiences. Learn how to appreciate and take pleasure in mundane, everyday experiences. Take pleasure in using your senses. Linger over the aroma of the morning's coffee or a sweet treat, the sound of the birds singing, the beauty of a blossoming dogwood, the smell of the freshness of the air after a rain, the sound of the wind through the trees, the smiles on your children's faces, the warmth of a hot shower, a walk in the moonlight. Enjoy the little things, for one

day you may look back and realize they were the big things.

- Savor and reminisce with family and friends. It is often easier to savor when you share your positive experiences with others. Researchers have found that sharing memories with other people triggers an abundance of positive emotions such as joy, amusement, and contentment.
- Replay the happiest days of your life through your mind, remember as much detail as you can, what you did, what you said, what emotions you felt. People that replay and savor happy events several days in a row will feel positive emotions from the experience for several weeks.
- Celebrate good news. Sharing and celebrating good news, successes, and accomplishments with family and friends is shown to elevate happiness, pleasant emotions, and well-being.
- People who admire objects of beauty and displays of talent or genius, and who strive to feel a sense of awe, are more apt to find joy and meaning in their lives.
- Be mindful of the here and now and strive to become keenly aware of your surroundings. Mindful people tend to be models of positive mental health.
- Create a savoring album filled with your favorite memories and experiences. For example, consider pictures of children, loved ones, mementos of special moments or places, love letters, special cards, favorite recipes, or a child's drawing.
- Savor with your camera. Teach yourself to use your camera in a way that enhances the visual experience. By taking your time, searching for the beauty in things to photograph, and learning to see through the camera to frame the best picture you can, you will become more mindful and appreciative of your surroundings and enjoy the experience more.

Religion and Spirituality

Religious people who actively attend church and engage in prayer tend to be happier than non-religious people. Members of a religious organization derive social support and a sense of identity from the group. Members often share social values and receive social and emotional support. The affiliation creates a sense of community, reinforces identity, and affirms a lifestyle.

The one ultimate supportive relationship for religious and spiritual individuals is their relationship with God or a like divine power. This relationship offers a source of comfort and a feeling of unconditional love. It offers a sense that God has a purpose in everything, and helps you find meaning in everyday events. We all need to feel that we matter, that our life has a purpose. We need a reason to focus beyond just ourselves. This sense of meaning in our lives reinforces a sense of self-worth.

Seek Meaning and Purpose

A genuine sense of meaning in life must be rooted in a person's own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Embracing someone else's sense of meaning will not bring about happiness and growth. As you reflect on what has meaning in your life, consider these points:

- Life has more meaning when you are pursuing your own goals and they are within reach.
- Meaning emerges from a coherent picture of your life. Write down who you are now, what your future self looks like, and what obstacles lie in your path.
- Creative pursuits and self-discovery can impart a sense of meaning.
- Many times, pain, trauma, and suffering can bring about a new perspective on life and renewed sense of purpose.
- At the heart of religion and spirituality are strong emotional experiences, like the comfort of a religious

service, the awe of the divine when experiencing the immense and mysterious universe, exquisite natural beauty, or the intensity of love. All these experiences deepen your faith and give your life greater meaning.

- The ultimate path to a meaningful life is in developing your faith. Faith provides the answers to the big questions: Who am I? What is the purpose in life? Where do I fit in? Who is the creator?

The practice of prayer, collective worship, and spiritual pursuits cultivates hope, gratitude, love, compassion, and joy; all being happiness-increasing feelings. For spiritual individuals who do not want to be affiliated with a religious organization, meditation, prayer, and instilling a spiritual dimension into their daily lives is also associated with increasing happiness.

Meditation

People meditate for a variety of reasons: to gain inner peace, to explore a higher reality, to gain insight, to heal themselves, and to achieve happiness. To meditate, sit alone in a comfortable place. Close your eyes and focus on breathing in and out. As you breathe out, silently repeat a short two to three letter word. When your mind wanders, restart by refocusing on your breathing. Build the length of time you are able to meditate from five minutes to twenty minutes. Meditation has many rewards but it doesn't come effortlessly.

Taking Care of Your Body

Exercise may be the most instant happiness booster of all activities. And if that isn't enough, exercise will also reduce anxiety and stress, protect from heart disease, and reduce your risk of cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. It improves sleep, helps control weight, and helps to protect against cognitive diseases as we age. Stress exercise builds bones, muscles, and joints. Seeing yourself get better at improving your endurance,

muscle tone, weight, appearance, and quality of life provides a terrific sense of self-worth. It is recommended to exercise at least thirty minutes most every day of the week.

Getting enough sleep is also very important to becoming happier and healthier. If we do not obtain enough sleep we will suffer in terms of our moods, energy, alertness, longevity, and health.

Action Review Points

1. Experiencing positive life events and changing circumstances will not bring long-term happiness. To cultivate permanent happiness, you must make changes that require your daily commitment. Those changes may be to how you think about yourself, other people, and your world.
2. Set intrinsic (rather than tangible) goals that challenge you, and allow you to learn and grow as a person.
3. Invest time and effort into expanding your circle of friends and building healthy, nurturing relationships.
4. Commit planned acts of kindness regularly.
5. Express gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation for all the good things in your life today.
6. Build optimism by fostering positive thoughts about the future and how you are going to get there. Write a description of your “best possible future self.”
7. Step outside of the experience and savor the moment. Immerse yourself in savoring the past *and* the present.
8. Develop a spiritual relationship with God or a like divine power to help you find purpose and meaning in everyday life.
9. Meditate to gain inner peace, explore a higher reality, derive insight, and heal.
10. Regular exercise and getting enough sleep are instant happiness boosters.

YOU CAN BE HAPPY NO MATTER WHAT: Five Principles for Keeping Life in Perspective

Richard Carlson, PhD
(New World Library, 2nd ed., 1997)

About the Book (from the publisher):

Number-one *New York Times* bestselling author and nationally known stress-management consultant Dr. Richard Carlson reveals a profound breakthrough in human psychology. Most of us believe that our happiness depends on outside circumstances, that by solving our problems, improving our relationships, or achieving success we will find contentment. But Dr. Carlson clearly shows that happiness has nothing to do with forces beyond our control — in fact, he says, it is our natural state.

With this simple and practical guide, Dr. Carlson shows us how to be happy now, before we solve our problems. By understanding five principles—Thought, Moods, Separate Realities, Feelings, and the Present Moment—we can discover a new mode of living that doesn't repress natural emotions yet doesn't allow feelings and thoughts to overwhelm us. *You Can Be Happy No Matter What* is a navigational tool that gently guides readers through life's challenges and restores the joy of living.

Overview: The Relationship of Thoughts and Feelings

We all are thinking beings. Cognition is not something that just happens to us, nor is it generated by some outside power—to the contrary, we are each responsible for our own thoughts. They come from inside us, both positive and negative, and they directly prompt our feelings. Yet many people blame their unhappiness on life's circumstances, which of course makes them feel powerless to find happiness. But it's our thinking, our negative thoughts—not our circumstances—that make us feel unhappy.

The good news is that we are in control of our thoughts. Thinking is possibly the most basic function we possess; it goes on continually and automatically. We all fill our heads with information, which in turn becomes our personal reality. But these thoughts are not necessarily reality—they only reflect the reality inside our heads. Once you can separate your thoughts from reality, you can dismiss negative thoughts as meaningless. Likewise, once you acknowledge the link between your feelings to your thoughts (rather than your circumstances), you can control your feelings, too. The way we relate to our own minds can determine how much our thoughts affect us, while rendering outside circumstances neutral.

Ultimately, the relationship you have to your personal thinking will determine your health and happiness. Do you believe that everything that goes through your mind must be taken seriously? Do you understand you are a thinking being, and what happens if you confuse your thoughts with reality? Can you have a thought and simply dismiss it? Why is it so easy to dismiss someone else's thought as irrelevant while taking your own thoughts so seriously? The answer is because you generate your thoughts, and they are close to your being; you take them personally. But our thinking is not reality, only an attempt to interpret a situation or information. Thoughts can shape our life experiences and bring meaning to our circumstances. Our interpretation of a situation triggers a feeling or emotional reaction—thus making us fully responsible not only for our thoughts, but our feelings, too.

Our level of happiness seems to fluctuate with our circumstances. But circumstances are neutral. It's our interpretation of them that affect our happiness. To prove the point, simply recall any situation where two people reacted differently to the same set of circumstances. Once we understand this fundamental relationship between thoughts and feelings, it is up to us to dismiss the negative thoughts that cause stress and unhappiness—and choose ones that lead

instead to contentment.

Thousands of thoughts pass through our minds every day. Yet the fact is, one thought is no more important than another. Consider the thoughts you have while you are dreaming. While asleep, you recognize those thoughts as reality, but when you wake you dismiss them. Why should your thoughts during the day, which seem just as real, be any more infallible? We can dismiss one and favor another. Our out-of-control thoughts need not govern our feelings.

Once we see thinking as a human function, we can see both positive and negative thoughts for what they are—merely thoughts. There is really no such thing as positive thinking, only an understanding of thought. We can dismiss negative thoughts as meaningless, and render them powerless.

Our Personal Thought Systems

Your “thought system” contains all the information you have accumulated in your lifetime. It is based upon your past experiences and predicts your concepts, beliefs, expectations, and opinions. Everything that happens to us in life is filtered through our *conditioned* thought system.

Because our thought system is so personal, it leads us to believe that life is really the way we see it. Our beliefs make perfect sense to us; our reality appears to be the truth. As we filter information through our thought system, we accept familiar ideas and reject the rest, validating our thought system and beliefs as true. This is why people rarely change heartfelt religious or political beliefs. Our thought systems are self-validating.

When we can acknowledge that our beliefs are the result of past teachings, conditioning, and life experiences, we can begin to understand that if our past had been different, our ideas

about life would be different, too. Our thought system—our very concept of truth—would be different.

Unless we truly have a desire to understand and respect each person's own thought system, we will never be able to really hear another person's point of view. We will simply dismiss what our thought system does not agree with and accept only the information with which we already agree. But if we truly understand the subjectivity of thought systems, we will never expect others to see anything exactly as we do—and begin to value others' opinions.

Separate Realities, Better Relationships

Each thought system is unique unto itself. Our individual thought systems depend upon a lifetime of input from our parents, teachers, experiences, backgrounds, interpretations, and memories. The moment we understand that no two people see things the same, react the same, or do things the same, compassion and harmony become possible. The moment we close our minds to another's separate realities, conflict brews.

Any attempt to change others is futile. The nature of separate thought systems makes it impossible for any two people to see things the same way. When you carry this understanding into your relationships, it will free you from disappointments—which arise from expecting others to agree with you—and will bring more joy to the connection.

Unfortunately, few of us question our own version of reality; instead, everywhere we look we find examples to support our truths. Yet to accept our personal realities as subjective need not diminish the strength of our beliefs and opinions. Joy in your life is possible anytime you open yourself to having a *relationship* to your values. The point is not to label your thought system as right or wrong, but to understand how you derived it. Understanding its source helps you to see,

understand, appreciate, and respect others' realities.

No matter how true a situation appears to us, someone else will assess it differently. When we view other people's positions as inferior or wrong, we close our hearts and minds and stop listening. When we can truly open our minds to accept others' realities, people are drawn to us. Their defenses drop and hearts open. When we accept others' separate realities, individual differences become a source of interest, knowledge, and inspiration—and relationships become more fulfilling.

Moods

Part of being human is experiencing moods. We are never in one place emotionally for very long; our moods are always changing. When you are in a high mood, life seems easy. You have good perspective and common sense, problems are easy to solve, and relationships and communications flow smoothly. In a low mood, you lose your ability to listen well, proper perspective vanishes, communications break down, and you are irritable and negative. In a low mood, everything is about you and you are not fun to be around.

You will gain a better perspective of events when you acknowledge that your *life is not changing* as your moods swing from high to low—all that is changing is your emotions. Everything appears differently through the lens of various moods. When you make a habit of simply noting your mood, you can begin to understand the source of your current outlook on life.

Furthermore, once you understand this principal, your compassion increases—both for yourself and others. When you begin to recognize other people's moods, you will compassionately cease to judge them when you witness the more negative side of their emotions. For instance, our words and actions are mood-related, so when someone is in a low mood it is not a

good time to question or argue with them. Instead, give them space and leave them alone.

We can also learn to be more understanding toward ourselves when we are in a low mood. First, understand that everything you see in both high and low moods will seem reasonable to you. The trick is to recognize your state of mind and know that when you are in a low mood, you are generating negative thoughts and your perspective is misguided. Once you come to recognize your low mood, you can begin to focus on discarding the negative thoughts they engender.

Learn to respect the power of low moods, de-emphasize what you are thinking, and delay focusing on any problem. The problem will still be there to deal with when you are in a higher mood, and your thinking is clearer. Low moods only create confusion and resentment. The feelings you have in a low mood are not necessary your true values—so it is best not to give much meaning to your negative thoughts. It is best to ignore a low mood until it passes.

How to Harness Positive Feelings

Have you noticed that when you are in the flow of doing something you enjoy, you feel content? That is a positive flow of feelings—the mental state in which we see things most clearly. This is this state in which we are the most creative, develop new ideas, and easily find solutions to our problems.

Positive flow is possible only when we are not caught up in our thought system. When we are stuck in a low mood, our thoughts are negative and our thinking is dysfunctional. The only value in negative feelings is as warnings: They tell us that we are seeing a distorted view of life. Whenever we feel angry, resentful, jealous, greedy, depressed, or in any way unhappy, we must recognize that our thought system is grinding out negative thoughts that do not represent a useful reality.

Healthy mental function derives from a clear mind, and from focusing on something we enjoy. Children are good examples of healthy mental function—they live in a positive state with little on their mind. They simply enjoy the experience of life without much negative thought. You, too, can practice living more often in a positive state by realizing that outside events do not create these positive states in your mind. Only you do.

Living in the Present Moment

Whenever your mind steps out of the present moment, it is vulnerable to worry, anxiety, stress, regret, guilt, and jealousy—in short, to the passing realities of your thought system. No matter how much time you spend analyzing your past or speculating about your future, you will never find real joy in your life until you learn to live in the present moment.

Living in the present moment is a commonly accepted principle for living a happier life. Yet very few people make a habit of it. Here are a few pointers. First, keep a realistic view of your past thoughts. They have contributed to how you see life today, but that's where their relevance in your life stops. Understand your memories for what they really are, harmless thoughts passing through your mind; they do not need to be analyzed, nor do they represent reality.

Second, when you empower yourself to consciously decide which thoughts to look at and which ones to let go, it is much easier to stay in the present moment. If you don't give a thought any significance, it cannot hurt you. When you understand its essential powerlessness, *you* retain power over your feelings.

Third, use your feelings as a sign of when your mind has slipped from the present moment. The next time you feel angry, bothered, annoyed, frustrated, or irritable, take a quick, honest assessment of where your thoughts are. You will notice

that your mind has spun forward or backward. When you develop the awareness to observe your mind, you have the power to make mental adjustments and bring it back to the peaceful present.

Now is where happiness lies. Happy people understand that life is really nothing more than a constant sequence of moments to experience. It lets us thank the past for teaching us how to live smarter in the now. Focus on making your present moments special and keeping your attention on the present—you will maximize your productivity and creativity, and accomplish goals you have set for yourself. Too many past and future thoughts distract you from achieving your full potential. As Thoreau said, “Above all, we cannot afford to not live in the present.”

Relationships

You determine the quality of your relationships. When you are in a positive state, your positive feelings will open the door and attract people to you. Remember: every human being functions the same way. We each have our subjective realities, high and low moods, and feelings. We each use self-validating thought systems, and are very protective of our perceived truths. As a result, we do question the way other people do things. When other people’s beliefs or methods do not match our beliefs, we judge these people as strange, different, weird, or just plain wrong.

Unfortunately, the better we get to know people, the stronger the tendency to question their beliefs and truths becomes, not the opposite. As soon as we understand the psychological mechanism that is common to everyone, we can gain a new sense of respect for and understanding of the uniqueness of each person’s thought system. When we open our hearts and minds to others in this fashion, we will generate positive feelings of love and the differences will cease to be a

problem. We don't have to see eye to eye with everyone—this epiphany will help our relationships flourish. We will be able to take our own beliefs and realities less seriously, take other people's thoughts less personally, and not be so irritated by other people's way of doing things.

The words you speak to another person are not as important as the feelings behind the words. To project warm feelings toward another, you must overlook differences between you and them. You must also overlook their poor behavior. The principle of moods teaches us that we are all two (or more!) different people at times. To improve our relationships, we need to be able to give people the benefit of the doubt when they are in a low mood and maintain our positive feelings for them.

Your feelings affect the person on the other side of the relationship. That person will respect and appreciate you when you project loving feelings and understanding when others have momentarily lost their heads. You can generate positive or negative feelings with your thoughts; you can control the feelings you project by dismissing negative thoughts and embracing positive ones.

Do you want to be right, or do you want to experience a happy relationship? The need to be right puts us in a negative frame of mind. It derives from a failure to understand the principle of subjective realities. If you believe your thought system represents an absolute reality, you will insist on defending your beliefs. You cannot stay in a positive flow of thoughts and project positive feelings if your heart and mind are closed to the other person's reality. Instead, you just focus on selling your point of view—and put your opinions and the need to be right above your compassion in a relationship.

Also, you can improve your relationships by paying attention to your moods. Moods affect our feelings about situations, and therefore affect the quality of our relationships. When we are in

a high mood, there is little on our mind and relationships feel easy and comfortable. When we are in a low mood, we lose our perspective of life, become defensive, stubborn, angry, and narrow-minded. You may not be able to avoid low moods, but you can learn to recognize the warning signals and postpone difficult discussions. We can maintain peace and harmony in our relationships by recognizing our low moods, and take actions to avoid discussions, reacting with anger, and saying things we will regret.

Because each of us possesses a subjective reality, we are all like foreign countries. When we accept that our individual thought system creates our view the world, we become free to expand our minds by learning from others' perceived truths. We feel less threatened when someone disagrees with us and take things less personally. Furthermore, when we accept the principle of subjective reality, we spend less time selling our point of view, and see more to gain by sharing positive feelings. We open the door to more loving, nurturing relationships.

Stress

Stress is a major source of unhappiness in many people's lives. Yet like all other circumstances, the moment we decide stress comes from anywhere other than within our own mind, we set ourselves on a course to experience more stress. If we validate stress as something that is "out there," we will surrender our day or week or month to it.

Stress is not something that happens to us. It results from our own thinking. The more we attempt to cope with stress or change something to lessen it, the more we are validating that the stress is coming from an outside source. This pattern will develop no matter where you think the stress is coming from—it could be your job, relationship, financial situation, political environment... anything. The more we attempt to cope, the

worse the continuous loop of stress becomes.

First, accept that stress does not exist anywhere but in your own mind. There is not a cause-and-effect relationship between an event in your life and the amount of stress that will result. The stress involved in any situation exists only in your own perception of it. Consider two people faced with the same situation; one person will have thoughts that produce stressful feelings and another will feel nothing. Once you believe that there is no such thing as stress—only stressful thinking—you are on your way to a more joyful existence.

The more we focus our thoughts on our stressful situation, the bigger it grows in our mind. We call that “being stressed out.” How many times a day do you hear those words? When you take your negative thoughts too seriously, you get trapped in the details of your thought system and your problems. When you become emotionally stressed, you lose your common sense and wisdom. The more stress you feel, the more angry and demanding you will be to others, making them feel negatively toward you. Whenever we blow anything up in our mind we are just creating more stress, in a vicious cycle.

Your feelings can be used as a directional guide once you have developed an awareness of them. Once you treat stressful feelings as a friendly warning, you can dismiss the thoughts from your mind and focus on brighter thoughts—and the clearer thinking and happiness they engender. Learn to use your feelings as a barometer of your psychological state. The more intense your feelings, the more important it is to stop what you are doing and reorganize your thoughts. Remember: You are always just one thought away from a more content state of mind. The more happy and content you feel, the more productive and creative you will become.

Habits and Addictions

Drugs, food, gambling, arguing, obsessive work or exercise, and compulsive approval-seeking are all forms of addictions and bad habits. We all have an inherent need to live in a state of happiness and positive feelings. When you don't understand how to use the power of your own mind to fill yourself up with happiness, you will turn to outside sources to fill your emptiness. Emptiness is the root cause of all addictions.

Your actions will always follow where you put your attention. The more you think about something the more those thoughts will take on a life of their own in your mind. You cannot deny your habits, but you can free yourself from them by understanding your thought system and subjective reality. For your habits to become harmless, you must see your thoughts you are accepting as false reality.

Once you understand the power of your thoughts, you can move your mind to a happier place. You can learn how to recognize negative thoughts and feelings as warnings of dysfunctional thinking, and impending destructive behavior and unhappiness. You do not need to become a victim of your own thinking. Once you understand the relationship of your thinking to your feelings, you have a choice. You can use your thoughts to bring meaning and happiness to your life, or you can treat your negative thoughts as a demanding reality.

Solving Problems We Create

The more we focus on a problem, the more detail we give it. The more clearly we see our problems, the larger they grow in our minds. Many people will attempt to solve problems by either trying to change the circumstances surrounding the problem or over-thinking its causes and consequences. In short, most of our problems are self-generated. When we are in a low mood we will generate perceptions that will generate what

appear to be problems. Yet when we fully understand the relationship between our present low mood and our problems, we will begin to realize that the problem has no footing in reality. Circumstances are always neutral—it is your perception of your circumstances that gives them life in your mind.

It is best to postpone thinking about any problem until you are in a clearer state of mind. When you are in a higher mood, we will more easily be able to access our common sense and the obvious answers therein. In an unproductive state of mind, we can over-analyze a problem. When we think too much about the same old things, we continue to see the same old solutions. Many times to see a fresh new solution we need to simply stop thinking about it. Einstein said, “The solution to a problem will never come about from the same level of understanding that created the problem in the first place. ... Stop focusing on it.” Surprisingly, once you stop focusing on a problem, a creative new solution will pop into your mind.

Consider the adage, “Time heals all wounds.” Yet no matter how far back in the past a painful event occurred, your thoughts can bring it back to life. Is this adage really true? When we think about something, the more detail and focus we put on it, so the more real it seems. It can become so real it feels like it’s happening right now; all the depressing emotions come rushing right back. So in fact, the passage of time has no relevance on helping us get over a painful event. This is proven time and again by the various speeds at which different individuals recover from grief and depression. This understanding has enormous practical implications—namely, that it’s up to us to determine how long we want to take in moving to a happier state of mind.

Once we discover how nice it is to live in a more positive state of mind, the less apt we are to resurrect negative feelings from our memory. Our memory only serves the purpose of carrying our events through time—nothing else. The function of our

memory should not stop us from enjoying life in the present. We always have a choice regarding our thoughts, and if we keep our mind positive and in the present, we will find peace, joy and contentment.

Happiness

Abraham Lincoln said, “People are just about as happy as they make their minds up to be.” You must grasp the idea that happiness is a state of mind. You will never find long-term happiness outside of yourself.

For example, when you search for happiness in a set of circumstances—perhaps a different job with better benefits, or a loving long-term relationship—you are implying you can only find happiness outside of yourself. The fact is, if you measure happiness externally, it will never be enough. True happiness is right now. It’s in the present moment. It occurs when you take your thoughts off of the past, off current concerns, off the future, and focus your thoughts in the moment. When you are letting your mind take in positive information and letting it flow right back out without clinging to it for over-analysis, your mind will be in a relaxed, happy state.

Happiness is a feeling, and it must come from within. When you place your thoughts on the task at hand and not the outcome or self-evaluation, your mind will be clearer and better-rested. When happiness is your goal, you can experience it at any time, regardless of the circumstance. You are in control of your thoughts. Happiness is right now, awaiting you in positive feelings you can choose to experience. Once you have mastered an understanding of your thinking, you are well on the way to a life of contentment.

Here are some tools for putting the principles of this bestselling book into practice.

First, as you encounter various events and messages throughout the day, simply note your reaction to them. At the end of the day, take a few minutes to consider the memories, experiences, and education that compose your thought system. How might that thought system give rise to, or affect, a variety of your most deeply held beliefs?

Second, start thinking about the thought systems of the people you encounter on a regular basis. Do their thought systems complement or contradict yours? If there is friction, how do you react to their thought system? How do they react to yours? Practice looking at all forms of behavior as products of a different thought system—nothing more—and giving them the same amount of respect that you give your own. The goal is to neutralize conflict and feel more compassion.

Third, what mood are you in? Is it a high mood or a low mood? Is it generally easy or generally difficult to gauge your mood? In the next few days, remind yourself a few times a day to practice noting your mood. Simply take notice of it—and if it feels low, if possible, hold off on taking action on any important issues at hand until your mood improves.

Fourth, as you take notice of your mood, begin to listen to the thoughts arising in your mind. What kinds of things are you saying to yourself? Are they positive or negative messages? How do they make you feel—and do those feelings reinforce your mood?

Action Review Points

Practice taking action against runaway thoughts before they can affect your mood. Place your focus on the present moment. Ask yourself the following questions, and put the advice below to use.

1. Am I really unhappy or am I just in a low mood? Wait for the mood to pass and your feelings to change.
2. Are my thoughts following a road to unhappiness? Dismiss your negative thoughts and replace them with thoughts of things you love and things for which you are grateful.
3. Am I putting more emphasis on being right or being happy? Open up your heart and mind to understanding others' subjective realities.
4. Am I reacting to someone else's low mood? Gain an understanding of others' moods and stop taking them personally. Focus on what you love about them and dismiss their bad behavior.
5. Am I conducting arguments with myself in my own mind? Acknowledge that your thoughts are not an absolute reality, and then dismiss them. Return your mind to the present moment.
6. Am I struggling with a problem? Stop growing the problem in your mind by giving it so much attention. Stop giving the problem attention, which blocks your channels of wisdom. The answers will appear when your mind is in a content place.
7. Am I focusing too much thinking on a situation—creating stress? Understand stress does not exist except in your own mind. Dismiss your thoughts and move them to clearer thinking.

8. Am I thinking about myself? Stop evaluating yourself. You can only do your best based on your present level of awareness.
9. Am I digging up my past? Stop giving power to your past by giving attention to it with your thoughts. Move your thoughts to the present moment.
10. Am I postponing my happiness by waiting for a future set of circumstances to develop? Happiness is not contingent on events, people, or circumstances. You can be happy right now by focusing on positive thoughts in the present moment.

SUCCESS IS NOT AN ACCIDENT: CHANGE YOUR CHOICES, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

By Tommy Newberry
(Looking Glass Books, 1999)

About the Book

There is no magic. The process of living your dreams is not complex or even sophisticated. It's simple. It's straightforward. It works. And the moment you fully accept it, your life and the lives of those you love will never be the same again.

Tommy Newberry is the founder and head coach of The 1% Club, an organization dedicated to helping entrepreneurs and their families maximize their potential. Tommy is the author of several books and numerous audio programs, including the best-selling series, *Success Is Not an Accident*. With the help of America's success coach, Tommy Newberry, you'll learn how to:

- Develop a life-changing mission statement.
- Create, set, and achieve exciting and attainable goals.
- Manage your time and stress levels to achieve peak effectiveness.
- Unleash the amazing power of visualization and self-talk.
- Quickly boost your natural energy levels.

Introduction

Success is not an accident. The single most important point you must grasp is that success in anything—your family life, your personal life, your career, your faith—is something you *make* happen. The process is not complicated, but you must be willing to invest your time. It is also difficult to become successful at anything if you do not have a well-defined target. The most highly successful people are those who know exactly what they want to become, and then invest their time in

pursuing their goals. In contrast, mediocre people are directionless and allow their lives to be determined by circumstances; their lives drift aimlessly with the wind.

Successful people are multipliers. When you are successful, you not only benefit yourself, but your success also encourages others to pursue and live their dreams and to become the best they can be. As a result, successful individuals benefit an entire society. It is beneficial for anyone to break out of their comfort zone, abandon mediocrity, and pursue a path of reaching his or her full potential.

Do you feel you are experiencing success right now? What is your definition of success? Consider this definition of success: Whenever you are working towards any predetermined goal that allows you to feel the emotions of success, you are developing an awareness of being a successful person. Remember that success is an ongoing process. Whenever you take action toward any written goal, you are instantly experiencing success.

Success begins with recognizing that you are responsible for all your choices, decisions, and actions. You will never be able to realize the results of success if you have not first been willing to pay the price of service, contribution, and creating value. Success is always a planned outcome. Where are you today? You are where you are because of your choices; every one of your choices bears a consequence—that consequence can be positive or negative. Exceptionally successful lives are simply the accumulation of thousands of actions toward accomplishing worthwhile written goals.

You must begin by believing that only *you* can be responsible for changes in your life. In the quest for success you must stop pointing the finger at others or offering excuses; you must only look at yourself. Every time you look for an excuse rather than solutions to your challenges, you diminish your chances of

success. You must refuse to play the victim. You must refuse to justify your situation. Instead, empower yourself, focus on how you are going to turn the situation into a learning experience, and move forward in a positive direction. The moment you determine a positive goal and desire it more than the excuse, you are on a path toward success.

We can think in terms of “abundance” or “scarcity.” Scarcity thinkers are always in a survival mode, simply trying to get by. Because scarcity thinkers have never taken the time to develop worthwhile goals, just getting by becomes their goal and their ceiling. Individuals with a scarcity attitude take action only when they feel like doing it. Their decisions to take action are based on what feels good to satisfy their short-term emotions. Because they have no written goals or purpose, they suffer a lack of conviction and determination to achieve. On the other hand, abundance thinkers focus on opportunities and positive possibilities, and dream big. Nothing is impossible for them, and they are doers. They focus on long-term goals rather than short-term goals, and make deliberate decisions concerning their actions that move them in the direction of their goals.

The decision is always yours. You can acquire an abundance attitude and take responsibility for your actions, or develop (or maintain) a scarcity attitude. Remember that as your successes increase, the quality and quantity of your services to others will increase, and as a positive consequence, your rewards will multiply.

Choosing Who You Want to Become

We need a life filled with deep purpose and long term meaning in order to become fully absorbed in the pursuit of our goals. When life is void of significance, we tend to look to outside events or other people to fill up our lives. Think about it: When you have a mission in life, you live from the inside out. What is your dream?

Before you select your specific goals, you need to first contemplate who you want to become. You are a unique person; there no one else in the world like you. Your personalized dream is waiting for you because no one else can fulfill it. You will discover your dream when you decide to look for it in earnest. As you move through life, it is important to move in the direction of your dream and not let life's circumstances shape your life and move you further away from it. As you search for your dream, get as far away from mediocrity as you can. Be unconventional. Be original. You will not find your dream searching for or living in the shell of your comfort zone. There is always a price for success and it requires the surrender of safety, comfort, and security. It requires facing challenges and moving forward with action before you have the money or experience.

The following is your answer to where you can excel—and where you will make your largest contribution to society. It is at that point where what you enjoy doing most intersects with what you do best. When you operate in an arena of what you love to do, you will naturally produce outstanding results and serve others well.

The following are seven guidelines to help you identify the right dream for you:

1. You are passionate about your dream. Your dream generates boundless energy and enthusiasm in the pursuit of it.
2. The learning process is invigorating, easy to comprehend, fun, and never-ending.
3. Your memory of key points is vivid and effortless due to your intense interest.
4. When you are working on your dream you get emotionally high.
5. Your intuitive hunches will most often be the correct choices.

6. Since working on your dream is what you love to do best, you never experience burnout.
7. The strong desire to work on your dream never goes away.

Compose a first draft of your dream today. Make sure it is in writing and written in the present tense, as if you are already pursuing it.

Establishing Goals

It is guaranteed that if you do not have specific goals written down for each area of your life with a plan for how you will accomplish them, you will be accepting a life by default rather than choosing who you wish to become. Goal-setting is the master skill of successful people. Unfortunately, only about one percent of the population is committed to accomplishing predetermined goals.

So many people think small, possess tiny goals, have little motivation, and as a result, live lives less than their potential. Without a doubt, the ability to dream big and set and achieve goals will add more to the quality of your life than anything else. When you have goals, you know where you are going and you can more easily recognize opportunities; you can base action-oriented decisions on whether you are moving closer or further away from your goal. You will have boundless energy for pursuing your goal, and be driven to become more competent in your area of interests. And most importantly, you will experience a sense of control over your life because you are inner-directed, and do not allow outside events, circumstances, and other individuals to steer you along.

Being busy doesn't mean accomplishing anything of great life importance. Most people spend more time planning their weekends or a vacation than they do planning their lives. They end up running hard but getting nowhere. If you do not

continually set challenging goals for yourself, you gradually become complacent and expect very little from yourself: Without goals your life is adrift.

People who lead successful lives understand the skills and importance of setting goals and the satisfaction of accomplishing them. When you set a goal it must really inspire you; it must arouse a deep passion within you. As you work toward your goal you will experience contentment. Progress will elevate your creativity and encourage your growth as an individual. And finally, as you begin succeeding, you will inevitably increase your benefit to others.

Ten benefits to setting written goals are the following:

1. They promote a long-term perspective.
2. They place you in a position to lead your life rather than drifting through life.
3. They provide a source of consistent motivation.
4. They help you to stay focused.
5. They make it easier to make daily decisions about which actions will move you closer to your goal.
6. They allow you to dream and visualize about the future.
7. They help you to deal with change and adjust your course with your goal in mind.
8. They make you more aware of opportunities that align with your goals.
9. They allow you to become the person you wish to become.
10. Working toward goals builds your self-confidence.

In light of all these benefits, why do so few people set goals? The main reason is simply the lack of *taking responsibility* for their lives and who they want to become. The starting point for personal success is accepting responsibility. Another reason for not committing to goals is the *fear of failure*. While successful people are inner-directed, and realize that failure is synonymous with not trying and is the prime source of learning

and growth, most individuals are outer-directed. Outer-directed individuals are more concerned about how well they are publicly measuring up to conventional standards. The *fear of criticism* is another deterrent. It can be painful to have your dreams squashed by others' comments. Another roadblock to goal setting is the *lack of knowledge*. Many children are not fortunate enough to be brought up by parents who model the benefits of life planning and goal-setting. Many others spend their lives in relationships with people who are not goal-oriented and never do anything but coast through life. Unfortunately, most people will start to think like the people they keep company with. Yet another reason people do not set goals is because of *easy success early in life*. These individuals have never experienced the joy of the struggle to accomplish goals. It is the struggle of the journey that builds persistence and character. Those that experience easy success early in life have never learned how to fight for growth and progress. Lastly, many people do not *realize the importance* that goal-setting plays in fulfilling their potential.

Many people question how to get started with setting meaningful life goals. The first step is to see the benefits of setting goals, and then simply make the decision to get started. Begin by dreaming about everything you want to become. Suspend all judgment about whether you can achieve it; just enjoy the creative stimulation and inner excitement you experience as you imagine the best life and make wishes for the future.

The next recommendation is to begin developing more vivid pictures in your mind of your future. Write them down. You will be ten times more likely to achieve your goals if they are in writing. Written goals will allow you to see your accomplishments, giving you a powerful boost in self-confidence. Start by asking yourself some of the following questions:

- What do you want to become? For example, a kinder person, more thoughtful, a better father.
- What do you want to have? Perhaps a better running automobile, a home in the suburbs or a retirement account.
- What extraordinary things would you like to accomplish? Maybe you would like to start a charity teaching immigrants how to read and speak English.
- What parts of the world would you like to see?
- How would you like to improve the quality of the special relationships in your life?
- How would you like to improve your spiritual life?
- What is special in your life that you would like to share with others?
- What charities would you like to become involved in?
- What new hobbies would you like to learn?
- What are your financial goals?
- What are your career aspirations? Would you like to start a new business?
- What experiences would you like to share with your children? Grandchildren?
- What new friendships would you like to initiate?
- What new self-improvement initiatives would you like to start?
- What new health and fitness goals would you like to accomplish?
- What new things would you like to learn?
- How would you like to change your life?

Your goals need to be long-term and match up with your ultimate, desired future. You cannot manage your life to its fullest potential with only short-term goals. Successful people possess tremendous clarity about where they are going and what they want to achieve. It's the long-term perspective that builds determination and self-discipline.

Once your vision is in place, start by developing shorter-term subgoals. Subgoals in three-year increments is about right to achieve something big, but not so far away that you will lose your motivational pull.

- Convince yourself that your goals are worthy by listing the benefits of accomplishing your goals for both yourself and others.
- Most failures can be traced back to lack of planning. Good planning involves evaluating where you have been in the past, where you are in the present, and where you want to be in the future. You must be willing to look in the mirror and question how well you have been managing your life up until now. You must be willing to make changes in your life today if you want to make changes in the future. Things will not improve by themselves. Things will not change if you do not change. Planning must be a deliberate act of placing it in writing. Remember, plans are rarely 100 percent accurate. Adjustments and improvements will need to be made along the way to your goal.
- Make a list of the resources you will need to make accomplishing your goal possible.
- Make a list of potential obstacles and ideas for overcoming them.

Establishing goals will work for anyone willing to put in the time and effort. The following are some rules for developing effective goals:

1. Goals must be in writing. You will be ten times more likely to achieve written goals than mental goals. As you review your progress toward goals that are in writing, you will be able to witness your progress toward achieving your goal. Witnessing your accomplishments will give you the power and motivation to continue, and add to your self-confidence.
2. Effective written goals are stated in the present tense. Rather than stating your goals using “I will...” or, “I am

going to..." say, "I am starting my business this year," or, "The company is doing \$1,000,000 in sales this year." Stating goals in the present tense helps recruit your mind to visualize the goal and believe it is possible.

3. Effectively written goals are stated positively rather than negatively. For example, a negatively stated goal would say, "I will not sit around on the weekend and evenings after work watching television," whereas a positively stated goal would say, "I exercise on my bike every day." Your mind will react more positively to the picture you paint for yourself. It is therefore important to express what it is you want to accomplish, not what you don't want to do.
4. Your goals must be personally meaningful to you. The most important things to you in your life are your values. Therefore, you must have a link between your goals and your values. Since your goals are focused on your purpose in life, you must identify your values and what you stand for before you can establish meaningful goals.
5. Your goals must be stated in very specific language. The clearer your language, the more motivated you will be as you begin working toward your goal. The clearer you are about each step toward the goal, the more aware you will become of the people, resources, and ideas you will need to accomplish it.
6. Effective goals must have a target date for completion. Unfortunately, many people procrastinate and put off what will really improve the quality of their lives. Feeling comfortable leads to complacency, not success.
7. Effective goals are challenging yet reasonable. Reaching for a worthwhile goal should push you out of your comfort zone; it should stretch your personal growth. You must be willing to place yourself in uncomfortable situations if you are going to strive to reach your full potential. Yet your goal must also be

believable and reachable. The gap between where you are now and where you want to go must be possible. It is best to set goals that are slightly outside of what you currently believe about yourself—ones that will push the envelope. It is always better to shoot too high.

8. Effective goals are well planned. You must break your goal down into smaller sub-goals, developing actions steps to accomplish the first sub-goal. All the activities of each action step must be in writing. It is important to think on paper, review it often and revise it as you work toward your goal. Nothing ever works out as planned, so it will be important to use what you learn as you move toward your goal to make revisions. As you accomplish each step you will bolster your self-confidence.

Time Management to Enhance the Quality of Your Life

Efficient time management enhances the quality of your life by maximizing your productive time and minimizing your wasted time. Everyone has the same amount of time, and each segment of time we receive, we must use instantly. Your success in life will greatly be determined you utilize the twenty-four hours you receive every day.

If you want to improve your life, you must be willing to change. In order for your life to get better, you must get better. Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” Successful people realize they will never get a second chance to use the minutes and hours of their life to do the things that move them closer to their goals. When you start to manage your time well, you will gain a sense of control over your life.

Build your self-image as a time manager by talking to yourself. For example, “I always manage my time perfectly. I know exactly what I am going to get accomplished today. I have a list of tasks to move me closer to my goal and I have

prioritized my list. I am a very productive person.” When you change your self-talk, you change your image of yourself. Changing your self-image changes your attitude. Changing your attitude changes your daily actions.

Why is it that unproductive people never have the time to establish clear-cut long-term goals or establish priorities in their lives—yet successful people always find the time to manage their lives? Those four simple words, “I didn’t have the time,” characterize mediocrity. There is always enough time to do the right thing when it comes to maximizing your success as an individual. When you tell yourself you don’t have enough time you confirm a self-image of being an underachiever and irresponsible.

The following tips will help you use your time and keep your life on track to reaching its fullest potential.

1. Know your goals. Nothing wastes more time than not knowing where you are going.
2. Make daily priority lists. Each evening prepare a written priority list for the next day.
3. Wake up early. Be sure to get your day started early enough so you are relaxed rather than stressed when you arrive at work.
4. Return your phone and e-mail messages first thing in the morning. Your goal is to remove routine tasks early in the day so the remainder of the day is free to pursue priorities on your list.
5. Group errands together for time efficiency.
6. Do it right the first time. If you do not do it right the first time, when will you have time to do it again?
7. Prune unnecessary obligations or projects. Eliminate activities that do not move you closer to your goal.
8. Remove yourself from distractions and interruptions. To work efficiently you must be able to have a quiet place to work and think.

9. Remind yourself that the quality of your life equals the quality of how you spend your time. Constantly ask yourself, “How do I want to spend my time?”
10. Defeat procrastination. Peak productivity and procrastination are incompatible. Procrastination is all about excuses—excuses that delay high-priority tasks in place of tasks irrelevant to your goals. Today’s excuses typically become tomorrow’s excuses. You can defeat procrastination by making decisions quickly, breaking larger jobs down into smaller tasks, and creating urgent timetables. Just getting started will generate positive feelings that you will want to recreate.
11. Organize yourself. You cannot manage your time well and work efficiently if you are disorganized. Most disorganization comes from indecision: what to keep, what to discard, what to file, what is the priority action for the day, etc.
12. Read more efficiently. You simply cannot read everything that comes your way and be time efficient. The secret is to scan the title of the key articles quickly, cut out an article that has information relative to your goals, and quickly discard everything else. To be efficient, you cannot devote time to handling reading material twice.
13. Focus on one thing. Once your routine morning phone calls, mail review, etc., is complete, start each day by focusing only on the task at the top of your priority list. Focus on only that one task until it is finished.
14. Block your time for larger, more important projects. The more important the project, the more important it is to block out a chunk of time, possibly with others, to brainstorm or work on it. Make sure your workspace is quiet and uninterrupted.

15. Delegate effectively. To be efficient is important to know what to delegate. Keep for yourself those tasks for which you have the most passion and are apt to excel in doing. Delegate tasks that others can do better and more efficiently than you can.
16. Manage interruptions. To manage time efficiently you must be able to control both phone and personal interruptions. You must refuse to be a slave to the phone. If you do not control the phone, it will control you. To work efficiently, place your priority phone calls first thing in the morning. Have your assistant or voicemail screen your calls and only accept the return calls you placed to accomplish your objectives for the day. Unplanned personal interruptions are also a huge time-waster; they delay you from accomplishing your day's objectives and divert your mind's focus. A few suggestions for dealing with interruptions are as follows: Position your desk so it eliminates eye contact with people walking by your desk or office, discourage drop-in visitors by standing up and politely informing them of an urgent meeting or business that must be attended to, encourage your subordinates to responsibly solve problems on their own, or at a minimum, write out the problem with three solutions and give it to you for discussion at a later time.
17. Run time-efficient meetings. The following are some guidelines for running a productive meeting:
 - a. Develop the purpose of the meeting in writing. List the objectives, problems, and goals for which you are searching for ideas and solutions. Develop a written point-by-point agenda.
 - b. Identify the people who are necessary to attend and require them to prepare written ideas and solutions prior to the meeting.

- c. Lead the meeting with consideration of time management. Keep the conversation on-topic. Close out each point before moving on. As decisions are made, assign tasks and deadlines for completion.
- d. Instruct people to depart the meeting once their presence is no longer needed.

Get to Where You Want to Go With Successful Self-Talk

Every moment of every day, you are talking to yourself either into or out of success. The most powerful influence in reaching your full potential is your inner dialogue. Your self-talk is the sum of those silent conversations in your own mind—estimated to be twenty to sixty thousand thoughts per day. Every thought you have moves you closer or further away from your goals. The problem lies in that an estimated 90 percent of your thoughts are repeats; if your thoughts today reflect past thoughts, then where you are going will not change.

The focus of your thoughts must be on the future and what you want to become. Most individuals get bogged down in the reality of today rather than visualizing things as they could be. To become a visionary, you must make the change from reactive thinking to proactive thinking. Positive, visionary self-talk is intentional and linked to producing your best possible self. When you master it, you will undoubtedly produce opportunities for yourself and others. Unfortunately, most individuals become very comfortable with their beliefs and never challenge them. They limit their opportunities for a better future by allowing their limited beliefs and perceived reality to exonerate them from taking actions outside of their comfort zone.

What we all must understand is that the reality we perceive is not necessarily true. It is only our personal version of reality. As humans, we continue to do what is consistent with

our thoughts and habits, resisting anything that makes us feel uncomfortable. It is human tendency to shrink from discomfort and gravitate toward doing things the same old way. But this tendency must be overcome if you are ever going to succeed at reaching your fullest potential.

The following are mental principals of self-talk.

1. Most end results in your life can be traced back to a thought. Most things do not happen by accident.
2. Whatever you believe about yourself will become true. You will come to believe anything you tell yourself often enough and long enough. Once you have developed a belief, you will only seek out information that reinforces your beliefs, and you will only experience in life that which relates to your own narrow perception of reality. As a result, your beliefs produce your life experiences, not the other way around.
3. You can learn how to substitute thoughts. Both positive and negative thoughts are constantly flowing through the conscious mind. You have the power to dismiss negative thoughts and replace them with positive, empowering thoughts. You can learn how to become more aware of your thoughts and exert control over your thinking.
4. Before you can change the results you see on the outside of your life, you must first change on the inside. Improvement outside must begin with a mental creation. You must be willing to free yourself of old mental pictures and replace them with clear, detailed pictures of the goals you want to achieve.
5. Be aware of what thoughts you are concentrating on. Whatever thoughts you continually focus on will grow and expand in your mind. This is true for both positive and negative thoughts. Choose positive things to concentrate on and grow those thoughts in your mind.

6. Mental tug-of-wars over a thought can be counterproductive. It is more beneficial to calmly replace negative thoughts with more positive ones.
7. Effective self-talk utilizes positive language, induces positive emotions, is stated in the present tense, and uses personalized words such as “I am.” Remember that any self-talk which is repeated often enough will become part of your mental makeup.

To use self-talk to accomplish everything you want in life, you must start by defining what are your most important life goals. Write them down; develop a detailed picture in your mind. Clearly define why these goals are important to you and how you are going to accomplish them. Next, make a list of all of the reasons you have not already accomplished these goals. List what you think are logical reasons, list your fears as well as your excuses. Whatever reasons you have listed represent limiting beliefs that you hold to be true in your mind. They are your realities, your mental roadblocks. You can now practice self-talk using the law of substitution. Write down a positive self-talk statement for every reason you stated for not having accomplished your goal.

Practice the following four rules of effective self-talk: Positive language, positive emotions, present tense, and personalized words. The benefit of this exercise is to focus your energies on where you want to go rather than where you have been. For example:

Goal: I would like to learn how to play the piano. Answer the question, “Why haven’t I already done it?”

- “I don’t have the time.” Replace this with, “I will prioritize my time better and get rid of time wasters and less important activities.”
- “I probably don’t have the talent.” Replace this with, “With practice I can do anything I set my mind to.”

When you are developing your self-talk ideas on paper, write down what skills, habits, knowledge, and beliefs you will need to successfully complete your goals. When your list is complete, develop self-talk to move yourself in the direction of the person you need to become. As you formulate your self-talk, start with the words *I* or *my* and add one of the following phrases:

- expect to...
- am ready for...
- am prepared for...
- am open to...
- accept...
- receive..
- love...
- am comfortable with...
- allow...
- am worthy of...
- am willing...
- deserve...

Incorporate action verbs such as *doing*, *achieving*, *satisfying*, *winning*, *accumulating*, *creating*, *finding*, *helping*, and *loving*.

Also try to incorporate the word *now* at the beginning or the end of each statement.

Repeat in your self-talk that you are *ready* to reach your goal, *prepared* for it, *accept* it, are *worthy* of it, *deserve* it, are *comfortable* with it, and *willing* to do whatever it takes to reach it.

It is good to develop the habit of writing and rewriting your self-talk statements. The benefit of writing your self-talk statements is that it activates several senses and helps you internalize what you are developing on paper. It becomes more real. Every time you rewrite your self-talk, it will become more detailed and vivid in your mind. Because your mind thinks in

pictures, it magnifies your thoughts if you write in bold print letters with as much clarity and detail as possible. Continually revise your self-talk as you think of better ways to express it. Get in the habit of rewriting your self-talk statements daily and reading them to yourself out loud to heighten the importance of your self-talk commands in your mind. By practicing “mirror talk” out loud, looking deeply into your own eyes when you speak, and repeating the statements, you will activate strong emotional reactions that will strengthen your belief. It is important to build awareness on a daily basis to raise the significance of your self-talk commands relative to the thousands of other thoughts that are constantly flowing through your mind.

The following are additional ideas where you can apply positive self-talk:

1. Involving relationships with others, never phrase statements of something you do not want them to be. Rather state the outcome of what you hope they become.
2. When you notice negative thoughts creeping into your mind, say the words, “Dismiss thought,” and control your mind by asking yourself a question to entice a positive thought.
3. Refuse to take possession or mental ownership of anything you do not want in your life. Instead focus on what you do want.
4. Refuse to be a participant in conversations with others involving gossip, worry, fear, skepticism, cynicism, or negativity about the present or future.
5. Refuse to acknowledge any statements or thoughts that are in direct conflict with who you want to become.
6. Dismiss the past you want to detach from yourself. If it becomes necessary to talk about it, use language that implies it is past history and is long gone rather than an ongoing problem or concern.

7. Always use positive, action statements such as *I will* rather than *I'll try*.

Unfortunately, many people take the easy way out and simply take life as it comes. But you have a choice; you do not have to be programmed by your fears and doubts about yourself—you have the power to chart your own course, accomplish your goals, and become the person you want. It is very important to understand that you have only one thing in the world you have complete control over, and that is your thinking.

Start by reflecting on the following: Which of your beliefs about yourself are not useful to you, are creating doubts about yourself, are limiting you from reaching your goals and full potential? Make a list of those beliefs and develop self-talk to start changing your belief system today.

The Benefits of Positive Visualization.

Self-talk is the starting point of developing new mental images in your mind. The act of visualization transfers your self-talk into a mental picture of the outcome before it has occurred; it creates a vivid picture that becomes imprinted in your mind. Visualization will intensify the effectiveness of your self-talk. Successful individuals train their minds to think about what they want to happen in their lives. They think about and plan their goals, and the person they want to become. Through repeated visualizations you can imprint your goals into your subconscious mind as if they are already completed.

There are two types of visualization—outcome visualization (visualizing the outcome) and process visualization (visualizing the steps to accomplish the goal). The following are recommendations for successful visualization.

1. Frequency is vital. The more frequently you visualize your goals the more you will engage in actions that will move you closer to your goal.

2. The more clarity and detail in your visualization, the more motivated you will be to take action to achieve it.
3. The more emotion you can generate during visualization, again the more motivated you will be to take action.
4. Write down your visualizations to add more detail and clarity to your future actions.

Where else can you practice without consequence other than with visualization in your mind?

Action Review Points

1. The most highly successful people are those who know exactly what they want to become and invest their time in pursuing their goals. Whenever you take action toward any written goal, you are instantly experiencing success.
2. Without a doubt, the ability to dream big, and to set and achieve goals, will add more to the quality of your life than anything else.
3. Success begins with recognizing that you are responsible for all your choices, decisions, and actions. You will never be able to realize the results of success if you have not first been willing to pay the price of service, contribution, and creating value. There is always a price for success and it requires the surrender of safety, comfort, and security. It requires facing challenges and moving forward with action before you have the money or experience.
4. What is your dream? Before you select your specific goals, you need to first contemplate who you want to become.

5. The following is your answer to where you will make your largest contribution to society and excel. It is at that point where what you enjoy doing most intersects with what you do best. When you operate in an arena of what you love to do, you will naturally produce outstanding results and serve others well. Refer to the guidelines in this material and write down your dream.
6. Write down your long-term goals. They must match up with the end result of where you want your life to go.
7. Once your vision and longer-term goals are in place, start by developing shorter term sub-goals. Sub-goals in three-year increments is about right to achieve something big but not so far away you will lose your motivational pull.
8. List the benefits of accomplishing the goals
9. Plan a list of actions toward accomplishing your goals.
10. Make a list of resources needed to accomplish your goals.
11. Make a list of obstacles and how to overcome them.
12. To be successful, you must manage your time well.
When you start to manage your time well, it gives you a sense of control over your life. It helps to improve your self-image as a time manager by talking to yourself. When you change your self-talk, you change your self-image. Changing your self-image changes your attitude. Changing your attitude changes your daily actions. Refer to the tips in this material to help you manage your time more efficiently.

13. The most powerful influence to reaching your full potential is your inner dialogue to yourself. The focus of your thoughts must be on the future and what you want to become. To become a visionary you must make the change from reactive thinking to proactive thinking. Refer to suggestions in this material to develop successful self-talk principals.
14. When you are developing your self-talk ideas on paper, write down what skills, habits, knowledge, and beliefs you will need to successfully complete your goals.
15. Develop self-talk scripts to move yourself in the direction of the person you need to become.
16. Self-talk is the starting point of developing new mental images in your mind. The act of visualization transfers your self-talk into a mental picture of the outcome before it has occurred; it creates a vivid picture that becomes imprinted in your mind. Visualization will intensify the effectiveness of your self-talk. Train your mind to think about what you want to happen in your life. Think about and plan your goals, and the person you want to become. Through repeated visualizations you can imprint your goals into your subconscious mind as if they are already completed.

The Ultimate Secrets of Total Self-Confidence

By Dr. Robert Anthony

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About the Book

Dr. Robert Anthony, bestselling author of 15 books and a specialist in behavioral therapy, offers a handbook for breaking loose from mediocrity and dissatisfaction. *The Ultimate Secrets of Total Self-Confidence* helps us find the roots of our dissatisfaction in the ways and reasons we underestimate ourselves. His approach is founded on the principle that every person does his or her best in every situation given their current level of self-awareness; by being willing to open our minds and question those old beliefs, realign our thoughts using our creative imagination, and reach for our passionate motivation and sense of purpose, we can raise our awareness as well as our expectations, and set ourselves on the road to a better future.

Introduction

Resignation to mediocrity has become a way of life for the majority. Feelings of inadequacy cause people to blame society, their circumstances, and other people for their disappointments. Yet many of our self-imposed limitations are due to our willingness to conform to the majority.

Do you concentrate on your failures, blunders and limitations? Do you feel like you are going nowhere, lack confidence, are drifting through life with no purpose? If you do not perceive your own self-worth, you cannot achieve total self-confidence. But, you can break the bonds of limitations that have been holding you back. Shakespeare said, “We know what we are, but not what we may become.” Our outward lives at this moment are the culmination of what has been going on in our minds in the past and present.

But the good news is that the self-healing powers are within us. Happiness, fulfillment, successful lives with purpose are within our power if we break the bonds of negative thinking. In order to be totally free, compassionate, warm, and loving, we must first begin to love and understand ourselves. To make the necessary changes in our life, we will need the intellectual understanding, the desire to make it a part of our thinking, and the motivation to take action.

Is What We Believe about Ourselves Really True?

Once a person believes something is true, he or she will act as if it were true. We are all the result of what we have been taught by our parents and others throughout our lives. We are the sum total of our experiences, what we have been sold and what we have bought to be true. All of these ideas we have accepted as true are then indulged by our mind, and affect our thoughts and behavior.

You must not assume that what you believe to be true is, in fact, really the truth. Unfortunately, the average person never comes close to reaching their full potential because they live under false assumptions about themselves and their potential. They have never actually attempted to disprove their perceived limitations. For example, many people believe they are not good at public speaking and have a resulting, deep fear of being placed in a speaking situation in front of others. Yet with knowledge, practice, and the repetition of actually doing it, anyone can overcome their fears of public speaking, gain confidence, and perform adequately.

People who accept their beliefs as truth can't explore their potential because they only deal with that which lies inside their walls of belief. Like walls, beliefs can imprison us. We see only what we want and reject everything else. We refuse to recognize anything outside of our beliefs and feel threatened by anything with which we disagree. It is difficult to change our

present beliefs about ourselves and the world because:

- Our beliefs and images in our mind are what we believe to be true. These truths are what control our actions and thoughts.
- It is easier to give logical reasons why it is not possible to change rather than changing our beliefs.
- We tend to only take actions consistent with our present beliefs.
- We have programmed into our subconscious the wrong actions or responses to many life situations. It is difficult to change this pattern of reactions which we have self-created.

If you have a desire to improve your life, and to build self-confidence and success, you must possess an open mind and be willing to challenge your beliefs as misconceptions of the truth. It is these misconceptions which have been holding you back. We all must realize that our present level of awareness has been determined by our education, environment, life experiences, successes, failures, and religious beliefs. Therefore, everything that you are presently relating to, accepting, and rejecting is based on your present level of awareness. In order to achieve self-confidence and your unlimited potential, you must acknowledge that your present level of awareness may be distorted.

To reiterate, the main obstacle to new awareness is our refusal to recognize the misconceptions we hold to be true and which have distorted our perceptions. If we are going to become a successful, self-confident person, we must be willing to expand our awareness by:

1. Ceasing to defend our viewpoints as right or wrong, blocking the acceptance of new ideas.
2. Being willing to reassess our beliefs, ideals, values, concepts, compulsions, and goals.
3. Being willing to reorganize our needs and motivations.

4. Being willing to identify our misconceptions and mistakes and attempt to correct them.
5. Learning to listen with an open mind for a true understanding, without prejudging your conclusions.
6. Striving to improve our awareness to provide ourselves with the motivation to self-improve.

Our greatest problem is underestimating our capabilities. A distorted self-image keeps us from reaching our full potential. Our misconceptions prevent us from understanding how worthy, capable, and unique we all are. And we can change. But first, we must challenge everything we do not like about our life right now. All change starts with a transformation of the beliefs that have been limiting our success and self-confidence. By changing our dominant thoughts, we can change the inner aspects of our thinking. Once we change from within, an outward change of actions will follow.

Breaking Our Dependency with Self-Reliance

People who have feelings of dependency believe that others are more capable and wiser. They look to others for their welfare and happiness, thus becoming dependent on something external to do for them what they should be doing for themselves.

A self-confident personality is impossible until you can confidently stand alone on your own two feet. In other words, self-confidence requires self-reliance. The main obstacle to self-reliance is the set of mistaken doubts you have of yourself. When you start to believe you are dependent upon another person, you are. You stunt your self-reliance and your resulting ability to solve your own problems. For many, the habit of finding security in another person, organization, or religious affiliation favors this dependency, and creates a situation where happiness depends on external factors. A sign of this dependency is also when you look up to others as

superiors, comparing yourself to them. These thoughts are counterproductive to the task of becoming self-reliant. The person who is self-reliant never needs anyone to lean on. They are confident that they can meet every life situation on their own. Confident individuals do not need motivation or inspiration from others, and instead rely on their internal powers of self-confidence.

Likewise, every time you do something for someone when they are capable to do it themselves, you are stealing an opportunity for self-reliance from them. The alternative is manipulative behavior—individuals who have not become self-reliant will resort to manipulation to get what they want. Even children must be allowed to make their own mistakes, from which they can learn. No matter how much you love someone and want to help them, the more you deprive them of the opportunity to think and do things for themselves, the more you limit them and undermine their confidence. We must allow people to think for themselves and do whatever they feel is correct so they may grow to become self-reliant. It is our job to love, encourage, and offer recognition for their decisions and actions. The greatest gift a parent can give to a child, for instance, is to help them build self-confidence. You do this by giving children as much responsibility as is age-appropriate.

It's useful to continue this parenting example, because a root of self-confidence is often found in a person's early life experiences. If a teenager is not self-reliant, he or she is simply not prepared to go into the adult world. The resulting action will be conformity to peer norms. In fact, children are taught to conform as the road of least resistance with an "obey or suffer the consequences" upbringing. During our childhood and adolescence we were controlled with a system of reward-and-praise and blame-and-punishment. This control system can become destructive, as it makes you identify with your actions. Praise says that your actions were good. The result is praise-seeking people who will go to any length to

conform to norms and hear the resulting praise. Unfortunately, conformity is one of the greatest restrictions placed on an individual in the pursuit of self-confidence. The person trapped in the fears of conformity will never reach for new goals or fulfill his potential. He can't. His primary motivation is to seek the approval of others.

The conformist has a need for constant approval from others. As a child, he seeks approval from parents and teachers, as an adult from supervisors and co-workers, and in his personal relationships, from his spouse and friends. He always needs someone to tell him he is doing a good job, to compensate for his lack of self-confidence. People who have a need to constantly seek approval are running away from the responsibility of creating their own success and happiness, resulting in total dependence on others. The problem lies in always measuring up in someone else's eyes to prove your worth. You cannot be both praise-seeking and totally self-confident—self-confident people never seek praise or place others above themselves. They respect people for their accomplishments but never look up to anyone for any reason. It is important to understand the difference between praise and recognition. Praise is a value judgment. Recognition is a factual observation. Recognition is neither a compliment nor a value judgment, but rather recognizing someone has done their best. For example, if your child brings you breakfast in bed, you would not want to say, "You are a good girl for bringing me breakfast." If you do, you are placing a value judgment on her for her actions. To give the child recognition for her actions simply say, "Thank you for breakfast, I really appreciate it."

Competitiveness, too, can be self-defeating in the task of developing self-reliance. When an individual is in competition with someone, they are struggling to surpass them to prove they are superior. This act of competition places them in a position where they are always comparing themselves to someone else's achievements. They need others to compete

with in order to validate how well they are doing. In contrast, a self-reliant person compares himself to no one. He competes only with himself to advance his own personal growth. He strives for excellence only within his own standards, which he has set for himself.

Nothing can stop you from achieving total self-confidence. But first you have to free yourself from dependency, manipulation, conformity, comparison, and competition. You must free yourself from the approval of your family, friends, and co-workers. It is your responsibility to successfully break away. You can do it at any time you want but if you are reluctant you are simply prolonging your dependency. The question is bondage versus freedom. The choice is always up to you. To create a self-confident life requires freeing yourself on a mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual level.

Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance, the belief of your own uniqueness and worth, is another critical factor in building self-confidence. The level of your self-acceptance or self-esteem corresponds to how you feel about yourself in relation to others. Developing positive self-esteem is the foundation on which you build your whole life. The following are common causes for low self-esteem. As you open up to the reality of yourself, consider the following, common factors in a negative self image:

- Self-defeating concepts, beliefs, and values that you have accepted from your parents.
- Put-downs and negative experiences received throughout your adolescence.
- Negative religious conditioning with emphasis on feelings of guilt and unworthiness.
- Low self-esteem of parents, particularly the mother.
- Belittling yourself by the comparison to others.
- Parents' lack of recognizing your uniqueness.

- Physical appearance outside the norm
- Emphasis on materialism
- Raising a child through a system of reward and punishment.

Responsibility, Awareness, and Change

Your awareness is the clarity with which you perceive everything about your life. Your present level of awareness indicates your understanding of your attitudes, emotional reactions, prejudices, habits, desires, fears, anxieties, aspirations, goals, and how you feel about yourself. But awareness is also your concept of reality. Remember that the truth and reality are not necessarily the same. When your mind has accepted false beliefs about yourself, your awareness will be distorted. Since every action you make is based on your present level of awareness, you can only do the best you can at the moment. You will only be happy with yourself when you take the responsibility to recognize this fact. No one can do better than their best at any given moment based on their present level of awareness. In order to improve, you must change that level of awareness. You must accept reality for the moment and change your thinking as to how you react, and control your actions. You cannot feel hurt, resentful, angry, or less worthy if you successfully change your present level of awareness to encompass reality.

Our failure to recognize other people's level of awareness and our tendency to impose our values on others are the main causes for disagreement in relationships. When you resist understanding other people's perception of reality, but rather insist on seeing things as you would like them to be, this is the point where you begin value-judging others. All value judgments of right versus wrong are totally unfounded because everyone must do what their present beliefs and level of awareness permit them to do. And to avoid value-judging others, you must first stop value-judging yourself. As soon as

you start loving yourself, and start loving others as they are, others will start loving you.

In order to motivate yourself to improve, first understand what motivation is. Motivation simply describes the attitude of wanting to take a particular action at a particular moment in time. Everyone is self-motivated. Whether you prefer to lie in a hammock and rest or go outside to weed the vegetable garden, you are motivated. If you wanted to do something else, that would become your motivation. You do not start anything without being motivated to do it; and without external coercion, you will always do what you prefer to do.

Yet the difference between positive and negative motivation is important. Every action you take is a response to a personal impulse to make you feel good—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Positive motivations are worthwhile and constructive to your well-being, while negative motivation is destructive. To make a positive change in your life requires evaluating the benefits of your contemplated actions. For you to make the change, you must be satisfied that the benefits will outweigh the price you are going to pay in time and effort. When you are considering the benefits of your actions, think in terms of wise actions versus unwise actions rather than good or bad actions. “Good or bad” imposes a value judgment.

Remember that whenever you choosing actions for yourself, your decision can only be as right as your present level of awareness at that moment. Therefore, you will always be making the best possible decision at the time. However, you must be prepared to make mistakes and take the responsibility for the consequences. Always remember that making mistakes creates an opportunity to expand your awareness. Action, as opposed to indecision and doing nothing, is always the more beneficial path to growth. Before you take any action in a new direction, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this a wise or unwise act?
- Will the action contribute to satisfying my basic needs?
- Will my actions harm me or someone else?
- What is the total price I must pay?
- Will I be able to accept the consequences if my actions turn out to be unwise?

Asking these questions will help us circumvent the influence of our subconscious habits, and raise our conscious awareness of our behavior. Much of our lives are built around habits that are both good and bad. The bad habits we have built our life around exist because we have absorbed the wrong responses into our subconscious. The first step to changing a bad habit is recognizing that you have one. Once you have acknowledged your bad habit, you will not change it with self-discipline alone. You must be sold on the benefits of changing; you must create new, positive thoughts to replace your old negative thoughts of your bad habit. The following are some important facts to remember about changing habits:

- Recognize your negative habits without placing a value judgment on yourself.
- Never feel guilty about a bad habit. Your actions can only reflect your present level of awareness.
- List the benefits and the price you will have to pay to overcome the bad habit.
- Realize that willpower alone will not achieve your goal of changing.
- The change you desire must satisfy a basic need to be successful.
- Keep your dominant thoughts and self-talk focused on what you want.

Removing Guilt

The world is full of guilt-ridden people. Unfortunately, guilt has been associated with “caring”; if you don’t care you are a bad person and should feel guilty. What we must understand is that guilt is a learned emotional response. Guilt comes from many sources. Parent–child guilt is one of the most common. As a child you were conditioned to respond to good or bad, right or wrong. Guilt was reinforced through reward and punishment strategies. Parents tell their children if they don’t do a certain something, “You will make us unhappy, and you will disappoint and embarrass us.” As a result, children learn a behavior of pleasing their parents and others to avoid the feelings of guilt. Children become fast learners, reverse the roles, and will begin to use guilt to manipulate parents and others. As long as he gets what he wants, he will continue to manipulate through guilt.

Guilt is also used in love relationships. For example, the underlying desire to impose guilt shows up in phrases such as, “If you loved me you would...” or resorting to manipulative silence, refusal of sex, anger, or tears. Others will punish their partners if they feel their behavior is inconsistent with their values and beliefs. They will remind their partners of how wrong they are, until the guilt successfully manipulates change.

Society also inspires us to feel guilty if we do not adapt to social norms. Guilt conforms us to be overly concerned about other people’s opinions and political correctness; we learn that we must be so careful not to offend anyone.

Many people experience sexual guilt. When society or religion places a value system around what is considered morally unacceptable sexual expression, people who do not conform are made to feel guilty or ashamed. Always remember that guilt is no more than a value judgment placed on us by an outside authority. Religion has been responsible for using guilt

in many ways. Many religious institutions have used guilt over the centuries to silence those who do not meet that religious sect's interpretation of the scriptures. How can you possibly expect two people to perceive God's truths the same way? After all, is it not man's imperfections that allow him to make mistakes and grow?

Yet one of the most destructive forms of guilt is when it is self-imposed. Self-imposed guilt occurs when we examine our past behavior and feel guilty about our unwise actions. You cannot feel guilty about your past behavior and build self-confidence. Feelings of guilt immobilize you in the present and keep you from moving forward and growing your self-confidence. Rather than self-inflicting guilt, learn from your past experiences and move on into the future.

Examine the difference. Guilt will always bring punishment to yourself, either in the form of lack of self-confidence, poor self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, or the inability to love yourself. If you focus your thoughts on your past actions or what you should have done, you cannot function properly in the present. You cannot learn from your past actions if you are obsessed with feelings of guilt that trap you in the past. Rather than feeling guilty, remember that your actions at that moment can never be better than your present level of awareness. You must also realize that your choices to satisfy your basic needs may be wise or unwise, but they do not classify you as a good or bad person. Learn from the past but focus your thoughts on the future; do not let yourself be exploited by guilt or manipulation.

The Power of Love

Love is one of our strongest needs. But you cannot go out looking for someone to love you; you cannot go to others for love. Love can only begin in earnest by loving yourself first. Only when you generate love toward others will it be returned

to you. But remember, you cannot give love to another person; you can only be loving.

Unfortunately, many young women do not have the self-confidence to believe they can be loved for who they are. They feel they need a boyfriend to make them feel loved and worthy. These women often marry the first man who tells them what they want to hear. They marry for all of the wrong reasons.

In contrast, everyone is simply a separate individual, even in a relationship with another. You come into this world alone, and you will leave alone. Between birth and death you will only find happiness and love when you love yourself first.

Being a loving person means you have a strong desire to support another person to help them grow emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Love is a moment-by-moment experience. You must earn the love in a relationship every day. Love will only continue when each person contributes to fulfilling the needs of the other person. Rather than attempting to change a person, love requires supporting the other's individuality. True love depends on true freedom for each person in the relationship—freedom to express oneself as an individual. Only those who are free can afford to love without reservation.

Love is expressed by helping others become successful, feel important, and feel capable of self-improvement. **One of the greatest gifts you can give to another is to help them see their own greatness.** Giving your love to others freely will lift you to your highest emotion while satisfying your need for loving; in return for your loving actions, love and self-confidence will be returned to you.

Success Requires Desire

Most people look to something or someone outside of themselves for help, love, and happiness. People look, pray, and struggle searching for self-confidence, refusing to believe that nothing outside of themselves can help. Government, educators, and religion organizations create subtle atmospheres of dependency. But you don't need to look any further than yourself to find the self-confidence you need to solve life's problems and create the fulfillment you desire. The powers are within you, waiting to be released.

Whatever your dominant thoughts are, that is what will attract your attention. You can control your thoughts: so it becomes imperative to know where you want to go, and what you want for yourself. Many people will say they want success, but they do not want to do the things that will bring them success; they do not want the responsibility that is required to become successful. Once you know what you really want, focus your dominant thoughts on it and your older, smaller thoughts will receive less attention. But you must first have the desire to do what you want. Every person who attains what they want starts out with desire.

Imagination Controls Your Future

None of us are bound to the reality of our lives at the present moment. We can all free ourselves from the limitations in our mind that hold us back. The limitations we have accepted with regard to our capabilities can be broken by our creative imagination. While we must be aware of our present reality, we can set our lives on any path we choose for ourselves by persistently imagining what we really want. Albert Einstein said, "More important than knowledge is imagination." Imagination is what allows us to break through limited thinking, conceive new ideas, and discover opportunities in problems.

What we see with our conscious mind is limiting, because we can only accept what we believe to be the truth based on our present level of awareness. When we look for answers externally, we simply continue to experience the same conditions that have been holding us back. To free ourselves from the limitations of our conscious minds, we must know how to send our subconscious mind in a positive direction. People who invent, create art, compose music, and start businesses know how to utilize the powers of creative imagination and their subconscious mind.

Here are three tips on how to program your subconscious mind to deliver positive results:

- Imagining the future using self-talk. Self-talk is verbalized thinking. The way you talk to yourself will have a profound effect on your future actions, feelings, and accomplishments. Your self-talk about the past is what you have become in the present. Remember that there is tremendous power in the words that you speak to yourself.
- Creative thoughts must be carried with emotion to be effective. Your subconscious mind will respond to strong emotions more than anything else. This is why most successful people who work relentlessly for years pursuing a dream are able to successfully forge forward through many challenges; they are passionate about pursuing their dreams. Positive emotions are continually feeding their subconscious mind. Remember that your emotions will work with the same power with negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, frustrations, jealousy, or hate as with positive emotions. Bear in mind that you can improve your subconscious impressions by speaking out loud or listening to music while you are programming your subconscious mind with creative imagination.

- Visualize an image of your accomplishments in your mind. Think of yourself as the architect and your imagination as the blueprint. Your subconscious will respond to images you visualize in your mind.

The images in your mind will determine your behavior and the kind of life you will lead. Whatever you desire, you can visualize; and whatever you visualize, you can have.

You can train your subconscious mind to perform any act you choose. But remember, your conscious mind will try to tell you that it cannot be achieved. Your conscious mind has limitations, but your subconscious mind has no boundaries. Continue talking and visualizing your desires as if the end result is already yours.

Planning Your Life's Course

All of the world's great achievers are individuals who listen to their creative imagination. They become emotionally vested in their ideas; these ideas produce a strong desire within, and inspire them to achieve their goals. Those who create and achieve are individuals who are in full control of their destiny with a sense of both purpose and desire. People who have plans and goals for their lives are generally happier and more successful than those who do not. Look at each area of your life and design a plan for getting where you want to go and doing what you want to do. Without written goals, you cannot possibly know if you are making progress or being successful. Once you begin designing goals for yourself, you will discover the pleasure of making detailed plans. To achieve success, remember the following two rules: First, break your major goals down into smaller sub-goals. As you achieve each sub-goal, the reality of your progress will give you the encouragement to strive for the next sub-goal. Second, to be happy and satisfied does not require 100 percent success in

achieving your goal. Always remember that it's the journey that provides the satisfaction and learning experiences. The fact that you have changed your thoughts and actions in a new and positive direction is all that is required to improve your life.

The prevailing reason the majority of people fail to achieve goals is because most people never write down an exact description of what they want. The simple act of writing anything down in black and white creates a visual impression on your subconscious; visual impressions will have more of an affect on your sub-conscious mind than just thinking about it. You can have anything you want in life if you are definite about it; rather than vague goals, write down precisely what you want. Too many people never make a decision because they are afraid of failure, rejection, or making a mistake, so they settle for indecision. But not to decide is a decision, too.

To develop life goals for yourself, focus on the following eight major areas of your life. As you develop these goals, think in terms of a five-year plan while imagining the best possible life for yourself. Remember to revise your life plans periodically.

Focus on the following eight areas:

1. What do I want to accomplish in my career?
2. What are my financial goals?
3. What are my health goals?
4. What areas of my life do I want to improve my knowledge?
5. What relationships do I want to improve?
6. What do I want to accomplish with my spiritual goals?
7. What personal improvement goals do I want to pursue?
8. What hobbies do I want to advance my skills or pursue?

Once you have developed written goals for yourself, ask yourself the following screening questions:

1. Do I really want this for myself?
2. Does this correspond to my value system?
3. Do I believe it is possible for me?
4. Will I be a better person when I accomplish it?
5. Can I visualize the completed goal?
6. Do I have a strong desire to accomplish the goal?

While all of this planning for the future is necessary, the only time for action is the present moment—NOW! You must get into the habit of taking action toward your goals today. To achieve your goals you must do the following:

1. Have a detailed plan as to how you are going to get there.
2. Be willing to sacrifice.
3. Take action.

Wherever you are today in your life is exactly where you want to be. You are in your present situation because you have decided not to pay the price required to change it. If you are not where you want to be at this moment, you have turned the power to control yourself over to some external factor.

Success favors those who are bold enough to take action. Wishful thinking will never make your dreams come true. You must use your creative imagination to design your dreams and the greatness you want to achieve. He who hesitates to act because he is afraid of failure loses his opportunity to succeed. If you are a prisoner of fear, you will remain where you are. You must take action to achieve anything. Remember, there is no such thing as great people. There are only ordinary people with burning passions to express their unlimited potential; they are the people who take charge of changing their present situation.

If you are to reach your full potential, you must break out of your comfort zone by making friends with failure. Without failure, growth is impossible—yet it is the biggest fear most people have. Just think about your childhood. Everything you learned was by trial and error; you accepted failure as part of your growth process. Somewhere, probably in your teens, you started to care about what others thought of you when you failed; your primary concern was peer approval. You ultimately decided the best way to avoid failure was by only pursuing those things that were safe and guaranteed you success. As failure became the thing to avoid, approval from others became your driving motivation. Unfortunately, this pattern of thinking may have deepened to a habit.

We create a comfort zone and live inside of it, which has the negative side effect of shutting us off from all of the unlimited possibilities that exist. The only way to break out of a comfort zone is to abandon fear and make friends with failure.

The reason people succeed is persistence. Persistence will always separate the achievers from the non-achievers. When it comes to success, persistence will take a front seat even to knowledge and experience. People also succeed because they expect to succeed. Aristotle said, “What you expect, that you shall find.” Unfortunately, most people have negative expectations. Total self-confidence is built through just the opposite thought process—positive expectations. Your mind must focus on where you want to go and what you want to become; as a result, expectations control your life. Your expectations of today will be your life of tomorrow.

Manage Your Life by Managing Your Time

I don’t have the time, I’m so busy, I have big plans and I’m going to do great things after the kids are out of college, the car loan is paid off, I finish school, I get a new job... You will never have more time than you have today! Time itself imposes

no limitations upon us. The only limitations are the ones we self-impose.

Because our entire lives are composed of a limited amount of time, it is significantly important how we use it. We must learn how to control time, to make room for the most important things in our life—things that we want to do. The real secret to finding the time to do what you want to do is *knowing* what it is you want to do. What is it that you want to spend your time doing? Our job is to learn how to love time; to learn how to use time to create value in our lives by using time wisely.

Using time wisely means accomplishing tasks for things you *want to* accomplish. When you have a passion to complete a project or learn a new skill or hobby, you generate enthusiasm and excitement within yourself. It's the enthusiasm for what you want to do that gives you the discipline to make time for what is important to you. Using time wisely or creating value in time means you have to first set time aside for planning. Write down the most important things you want to accomplish tomorrow, then put them in order of importance. Investing the time to plan and prioritize guarantees you a successful use of your time tomorrow. Always try to do your most unpleasant tasks first, so you have fun tasks to look forward to.

Positive Communication

One of the greatest threats to any endeavor is failing to communicate effectively. Most business and personal relationship failures are simply people failing to communicate. Whether we know it or not, we are always communicating. We communicate through our body language, facial expressions, gestures, and our silence. We communicate as much through what we don't say as what we do say.

The first thing you must understand and accept as a truth is that you are responsible for others not understanding you.

Generally speaking, most people do not communicate well; they simply take turns talking. They really don't listen to one another because they are too busy rehearsing in their mind what they are going to say next. If two people are talking and one of the individuals is not listening for a true understanding, the conversation does not really exist. The quality of your listening skills has a much greater effect on people than the way you talk. Think about the people with whom you enjoy spending your time. We are all attracted to those people who are sincerely interested in what we have to say. To become a good listener you must be truly interested in gaining an understanding of what other people think; you must be passionate about learning from others; you must be genuinely curious about people.

How do you make people feel important? You will never be successful at getting someone's attention until you talk about what interests them. And what people are interested in talking about is themselves: what they have done, what they plan to do, what has happened to them, and where they have been. To make people feel important, try to find out what interests them. Next to talking about themselves, people like to talk about their opinions. Beware, if you want to make them your friend, never disagree with their opinions or beliefs. Third on the most popular subject list is talking about other people. Be sure to point out the good qualities of the person being discussed. The fourth thing people enjoy talking about is any topic they are well educated on. Welcome this as a great opportunity to learn. The last thing people want to talk about is you. When the conversation does come around to you, be sure to tie the conversation into the interests of the other person. Always communicate positive thoughts. Talk about subjects that will inspire them. Everyone wants to be around positive, happy people. Positive attitudes are contagious.

Remember that others will form their opinions of you by the way you talk to them. When you talk to them about their goals,

interests, ideas, and experiences, you will attract their attention. Giving sincere recognition is yet another way to attract their attention. When you recognize and remark about others' attributes that are often overlooked, you are saying, "I notice you as a person." Sincere recognition lifts people up and helps to build their self-esteem. Also offer small acts of kindness to make others feel special. Many times your actions toward others will speak more clearly than your words. You also make people feel important by saying their name often, giving people genuinely warm smiles, and showing your interest with introductory small talk. Taking the time to get caught up on what's new in people's lives says you care about them. And remember to be on time for appointments, because being late says, "You are not as important to me as what I was doing."

When you speak, keep your conversation uncomplicated; use simple stories and examples to help convey meaning and understanding. One of the most effective ways to ensure understanding is to ask for feedback. Utilize questions such as, "Do you agree?" or, "How do you feel about this?" or, "Have I expressed myself clearly?" As a listener, it is important to also ask follow-up questions to gain a true understanding of what is being said. It takes two people fully engaged in a conversation to communicate.

Positive Thinking

Positive thinking is the way you look at problems and attempt to solve them with positive actions. Individuals with a positive mental outlook focus on what is right rather than what is wrong. When you are thinking about other people, yourself, your present situation, and the world, search for the positive. Be aware of the words you speak to yourself; they have a strong influence on your moods, feelings, personality, and life experiences. Flood your mind with positive thoughts and focus on actions of what you can do to make every situation more positive.

Action Checklist for Implementing the Ultimate Secrets of Total Self-Confidence

1. What are you dissatisfied with in your life right now? What on that list is your recurring problem? When you accept your beliefs as truth you can't explore your potential because you can only deal with what lies inside your walls of belief. Search for any perceived limitations that seem to bar you from fixing the problem, and try to identify what past experiences and messages might be coloring your beliefs. Our biggest obstacle to changing our lives is our habit of underestimating our capabilities.
2. What are you dependent on? In other words, is there someone or something that you need from your environment to make you feel good about yourself? If so, what doubts about yourself does that exchange assuage? Dependency keeps us from being self-reliant, and prevents us from controlling our destiny. Remember, it's better to be willing to stand on our own two feet, make mistakes, and learn from them—that is how we become self-reliant.
3. To whom do you compare yourself? What doubts about your own capabilities does this comparison reveal? Think about the confidence you desire—confident individuals do not depend on motivation or competition from others. Begin to compete only with yourself as you strive for excellence.
4. Pay attention when you feel hurt, resentful, angry, or less worthy. Most of the friction in our lives arises when our value judgments meet reality. Judgment is an obstacle to confidence and happiness—and in order to open our minds and ourselves to more harmonious relationships, we need to first stop judging ourselves, and then stop judging others.

5. Much of our lives are built around habits that are both good and bad. The bad habits exist because we have absorbed the wrong responses into our subconscious. The first step to changing a bad habit is recognizing you have one.
6. What motivates you? As you begin to raise your level of self-awareness and seek greater self-confidence, think about your motivations and whether they are positive or negative—what do you do to increase your pleasure and satisfaction, versus to avoid negative attention? Then, identify what positive change you want to make in your life, and which of its benefits are significant enough to outweigh the complacent pleasure of staying in your comfort zone.
7. What compromises do you make in order to fit in to your society and family? Refusing to conform often gives us unwarranted feelings of guilt—i.e., that we’re somehow “bad” for refusing to meet someone else’s expectations. Start noticing what you do to avoid the guilt of nonconformity, and when you do, turn your attention to the positive future you want to create.
8. Only when you generate love toward others will it be returned to you. Love is expressed by helping others become successful, feel important, and feel capable of self-improvement. Giving your love to others will lift you to your highest emotion; in return for your loving actions, love and self-confidence will be returned to you.

9. Whatever your dominant thoughts are, that is what will attract your attention. You can control your thoughts: so it becomes imperative to know where you want to go, and what you want for yourself. As you contemplate your best future, realize the limitations you have accepted can be broken by your creative imagination. Set your life on any path you choose by persistently imagining what you really want.
10. Fully, emotionally imagine the future you want to have. Write it down in black and white—what do you want to accomplish? Consult the questions this summary offers for making a five-year plan and developing a list of goals and sub-goals.
11. Program your subconscious with verbalized thinking in the form of positive self-talk. Carry your creative thoughts to your subconscious with strong emotions and practice visualizing your accomplishments in your mind.
12. Because our lives are controlled by limited amounts of time, it is significantly important how we use it. You must learn how to control time, to make room for the most important things.
13. One of the greatest threats to your endeavor is failing to communicate effectively. You must understand and accept as a truth that you are responsible for others not understanding you.
14. How do you make people feel important? You will never commit people to your cause if they do not believe you care about them.
15. What type of words do you speak to yourself? The attitude of your words will determine the way you look at problems and attempt to solve them.

16. Take responsibility. Remember that everyone wants success; but successful people are the ones who hold themselves to the responsibility of creating success. They allow their burning passion for something to help them grapple with inevitable obstacles, and complete the tasks they set for themselves. On an ongoing basis for the rest of your life, make time for those tasks, continually reconnect with your vision, and favor positive thinking over negative, self-defeating thoughts. This work creates self-confidence and success.

Self-Esteem: A Proven Program of Cognitive Techniques for Assessing, Improving, and Maintaining Your Self-Esteem

Third Edition By

Matthew McKay, PhD and Patrick Fanning

About the Book

Self-Esteem serves as a comprehensive guide, offering proven programs for assessing, improving, and maintaining your self-esteem. It is the only book that offers proven cognitive techniques for talking back to your self-critical voice. Learn step-by-step methods to help you achieve the following: Handle your mistakes and respond well to criticism, foster compassion for yourself and others, set and meet goals that will enrich your life, use visualization for self-acceptance, and build self-esteem in children.

Matthew McKay, PhD, is a clinical director of Haight Ashbury Psychology Services and in private practice in San Francisco. He is the co-author of thirteen popular books. Patrick Fanning is a professional writer in the mental health field. He is the author and co-author of nine self-help books.

Introduction

The capacity for humans to judge and reject parts of themselves can be enormously painful; you eventually find yourself avoiding activities or situations that might bring about the pain of self-rejection. To avoid more negative judgments and self-rejection, you erect barriers of self-defense. Your self-imposed barriers limit your ability to be open with others, express your sexuality, be the center of attention, listen to criticism, ask for help, accept the challenges of change, and solve personal problems.

The way you perceive yourself and feel about yourself can be

positively changed. You have the power to stop the hurts of self-judgment and self-rejection. Your self-esteem is simply your awareness of yourself; to be able to form an identity and attach a value to it. Self-esteem is also more than recognizing your own positive qualities; it is a total acceptance of yourself, and the absence of judgment toward yourself and others.

The Pathological Critic

Your “pathological critic” is your negative inner voice that attacks and judges you. People with a lower self-esteem tend to have a more active pathological critic, which acts as their inner voice. This negative inner voice sounds natural and familiar to you while it undermines your self-worth every day of your life. It becomes a habit to judge yourself; the self-attacks seem reasonable and justified to you, and so you always believe them.

Another hallmark is that you have no defense against the critic as he blames you for everything that goes wrong. The critic compares you to others—to their achievements and abilities—always leaving you wanting. He sets impossible standards and beats you up for your mistakes. He keeps reminding you of your failures and calls you names like stupid, ugly, selfish, weak, and incompetent. As if that weren’t enough, your critic reads your friends’ minds and convinces you they are not interested in you or what you have to say. The critic exaggerates your weaknesses and insists you are always messing things up.

Your critic appears to have more control over your mind than you do; yet his independence is all an illusion. You have the power to tune him out and turn him off. You have the power to stop poisoning your self-worth.

The Origin of Your Critic

Your critic is born from your earliest experiences of socialization with your parents. It is natural for parents to teach a child which behaviors are acceptable with loving hugs and praise, while simultaneously punishing inappropriate behaviors that are wrong and annoying. The child learns very quickly that his or her parents are the source for all physical and emotional nourishment. Forbidding gestures become very frightening and rejecting for a child; seeking parental approval becomes a matter of life or death.

All children grow up with the emotional baggage from their parents' forbidding gestures. The strength of your parents' disapproving voice will determine the viciousness of your own critic's attacks against your "not-OK" feelings. The following are five factors that shape the intensity of your critic's attacks"

1. Making a child feel morally wrong for personal decisions involving taste preferences, poor judgment, or decisions regarding personal needs or safety.
2. When parents fail to use language differentiating between behavior and identity. The child never learns to separate the difference between what he does and who he is, even though inappropriate actions do not make the person bad.
3. The frequency of negative messages will eventually lower self-esteem. After a while you get the message, "You're not OK."
4. Inconsistency of forbidding actions by the parents creates confusion. When the topic being forbidden is not enforced consistently, the child will become confused and eventually determine it is him that is not OK rather than the action.

5. It becomes especially damaging when parents' forbidding actions are accompanied with anger and physical separation. The message when anger and withdrawal is present is, "You're bad and I'm rejecting you."

Why Do You Listen to Your Critic?

Every human has certain basic needs to fulfill: to feel safe and unafraid, to feel competent, to be accepted by our parents and significant-other relationships, to feel a sense of OK-ness in most situations. People who have high self-esteem possess a higher degree of self-confidence. They confront things that frighten them. They solve problems instead of worrying about them. They talk out interpersonal conflicts rather than waiting for them to pass. They find ways to make people respond positively to them. When low self-esteem robs you of your confidence, you become anxious and less able to cope with the challenging risks of life. You rely on your pathological critic to help you cope with the feelings of anxiety, helplessness, rejection, and inadequacy. The critic makes you feel more safe and comfortable while undermining your sense of worth.

Any behavior that stops the pain will be rewarding, and will increase the likelihood of your repeating that behavior. When your critical thoughts are reinforced by reduced anxiety and pain, the success of your short-term negative thoughts will begin to shape how you think overall. For example, blaming others might relieve your anxiety about mistakes you've made, or feelings of hopelessness by escape activities such as obsessive television viewing or reading. The stage in mourning of obsessive remembering is reinforced by tension reduction. In short, negative reinforcement is a problem-solution process. You are in pain and you want to feel better. Unfortunately, while the critic is solving your problems, he is also tearing you down.

In the short term, there are two ways your critic augments your feeling of self-worth: by comparing you to others and setting high, perfectionist standards. Most efforts to compare yourself to others are self-defeating, but once in a while you feel moments of satisfaction of being the better person. These moments stroke your self-esteem. When your critic sets high standards, most of the time you fail—but once in a while you live up to your critic’s lofty standards and feel good about yourself. More often than not, your critic attacks your self-esteem to drive you to accomplish your goals.

The following are some examples of how your critic makes you feel better by reducing pain in the short term at the expense of your self-esteem.

1. The feelings of inadequacy are so painful that you will do anything to escape them. Your critic helps you do this by setting almost impossible standards for you to achieve.
2. Your critic reads others’ minds to help you deal with your fear of rejection by others. For example, “She won’t like me,” or, “They really don’t need me.” Your critic predicts what others are thinking to spare you the pain of anticipated rejection.
3. To reduce anxiety when you are angry with the people you love, your critic attacks you by re-directing your anger back on yourself.
4. Your critic helps you deal with guilty thoughts by providing the punishment. As your critic attacks you for your self-imposed selfish feelings, you gradually feel a sense of atonement.
5. To reduce your frustrations level with your own life, you use your critic to get angry at all the stupid things you have done to blow off steam. For a few moments of reduced anxiety, you let your critic beat you up.

In order to gain control of your critic you need to develop an awareness of his inner dialogue. For one week, keep a notebook handy to record a monologue of all of your critic's negative statements. Become aware of the problematic situations where your critic becomes active. For example, meeting strangers, situations where you have made a mistake, situations where you feel you are being criticized, interaction with authority figures, situations where you feel someone is angry with you or you have been hurt, and situations where you sense risk of failure or rejection.

Disarming Your Critic

Part of the process of disarming your critic is to become aware of your low moods. These moods are your critic's work. Uncover his purpose. Is he beating you up so you will achieve more and feel better? Is he saying you can't do it so you don't have to worry about failing? Is he telling you that a guy or girl won't like you to save you the hurt of rejection? Or is he beating you up so you can atone for your guilt?

Once you have become aware of your critic, you must learn how to talk back. Learn how to reject the old negative programming. When you talk back to your critic, interrupt him early before he can get started. Choose phrases that help you feel angry. For example, "These are lies. I am not listening. To hell with you." It may even help to swipe your hand across your forehead, throw the thoughts of your critic to the ground and step on them.

Once you have started talking back to your critic, you will need to replace the negative language with a new language affirming your worth. Your critic wants you to believe that your worth is tied to your behavior. He would have you believe there is no intrinsic value to your life, only your accomplishments and achievements. You also must learn how to control the negative feelings of little value, failure, rejection, anger, guilt, and frustration.

Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are not beliefs, but are actually bad habits of thought that you use to interpret reality in an inaccurate way. These habits of thinking get you into trouble. Even the most rational people operate at some distance from reality; it's unavoidable.

Distortions are judgmental; they apply labels to people and events before properly evaluating them. Distortions tend to be inaccurate and imprecise, general in scope, allow you to only see one side, and are based on emotion rather than a rational thought processes. The most common cognitive distortions that affect self-esteem are as follows:

1. *Overgeneralization* is when your critic takes one event and uses generalized absolutes to close the door on all possibilities. For example, "I never get to work on time," or, "No one really likes me."
2. *Labeling* or stereotyping is an overgeneralization by your critic of whole classes of people, behaviors, and personal experiences.
3. *Filtering* is your critic's thought process, in which he listens for negative things about yourself when you are engaged in a conversation. As a result, you miss critical content of the conversation.

4. *Polarized thinking* is your critic listening for an “either/or” message. You tend to live in a black and white world with no shades of gray. You are either good or bad, successful or a failure.
5. Your critic uses *self-blame* to verbally punish you for all of your shortcomings. People who wrongly blame themselves are constantly apologizing. Self-blame simply blinds you to your accomplishments and good qualities.
6. Your critic *personalizes* every event and comment to somehow involve you negatively. For example, a supervisor communicates that productivity is down; you personalize the statement to mean your supervisor is unhappy with your work. Personalizing events or statements makes you react inappropriately.
7. Your critic *mind reads* others’ thoughts that are fatal to your self-esteem. When you mind read what others are thinking about you, your perception seems right, so you proceed as if it were. Unfortunately your thinking is distorted. Mind reading would sound something like this: “I just know they do not want to include me in the activities so I am not going to attend the meetings any longer.”
8. When your critic creates *control fallacies* and makes you feel you have no power or control over the outcome of any situation, you feel helpless and hopeless. In these situations your pathological critic says things like, “You’re weak, you’re helpless, and there’s nothing you can do.”

9. When you use *emotional reasoning* rather than rational thought, you rely completely on emotions to direct your actions and interpret reality. You become what you feel. You feel useless, so you must be useless. You feel unwanted, so people must not like you. Letting your feelings dictate your thoughts is disastrous for your self-esteem.

Combating Distorted Thinking

To combat distorted thinking involves a commitment. You must be willing to bet the short-term discomfort of cutting off your critic against longer-term gains to your self-esteem. Every time you have a low opinion of yourself, use the following three-step approach:

1. Write down what your pathological critic is saying to you.
2. Examine your self-statements and identify them for distortions in thinking. Your most common distortions to search for will be the nine listed above.
3. Write a rebuttal to your self-statement.

Here are some rules for composing effective rebuttals. Your rebuttals must be spoken in a loud, forceful voice.

Rebuttals must be specific. You must constantly be asking yourself, "What are the facts?" Rebuttals must be balanced with positive statements as well as the negative facts.

The following is an example of a rebuttal for an *overgeneralization* attack by your critic telling you, "Nobody ever invites me anywhere," or, "I'll never have any friends." A proper rebuttal would be composed as follows: "Stop it. There are lots of people everywhere to meet. Some people may dislike me but people like Sally enjoy my company. I don't get invited out much but I have friends who do invite me to join them. So I do have some friends, and I will have more new friends in the future. So stop being negative and predicting loneliness."

To refute *labeling* yourself with words like lazy, not attractive, stupid, loser, clumsy, you should replace the blanket label with a specific statement. The statement should remind you that this label only applies to a tiny part of you and there are many qualities you like about yourself. For example, instead of, “I’m fat, “ say, “I am twenty pounds over what I would like to weigh, but I really look good in my new outfit.” Use the following phrases to fight labeling: “That’s not me, it’s just a label. Labels exaggerate a small part of me. Be specific. I have a lot of good qualities.”

When your critic is *filtering* the negatives from a situation, look for the opposite or the positive. If you are focusing on what you have or may lose, focus on all of the things that have not been lost or the opportunities that might become available. When your critic is describing your life in black and white absolutes (*polarized thinking*), use the following rebuttal phrases: “Nothing is totally one way or the other. There are no absolutes. Let’s be more precise. Every situation is more vague and clouded than what I am imagining in my mind.”

When your critic is attacking you with *self-blame* statements, fight back with the following phrases: “No more blaming. Everyone makes mistakes. The important thing is to learn from them and move forward. I always do my best relative to my awareness at the moment.”

When your critic is *personalizing* and comparing you to others, offer rebuttals like, “Stop! No comparisons. Everyone is different. I am unique, possessing my own strengths and weaknesses. Don’t be so paranoid. I am proud of my individuality.”

When your critic is *mind reading* what others are thinking about you, fight back with the following thoughts: “Stop it! I have no way of knowing what they are thinking. Assume the best. Guessing is just an excuse for me to use to protect myself from fears.”

When your critic makes you feel as if you have no power or *lack of control* over any situation, use the following rebuttal tactics: “Stop! I’m doing it again to myself. No more playing the victim. I got myself into this situation and I can make the decisions how to make it better. I am not helpless. I am responsible for my actions.”

When emotional feelings are causing you to feel low or bad about yourself, analyze your underlying thoughts that are creating the painful emotions. For example, examine the following thoughts: “There is nothing true about my feelings. I cannot trust them. These are feelings not facts. What am I telling myself that is making myself feel this sad, anxious or angry? Let’s examine my thoughts. What do I really know for sure?”

Compassion for Yourself

Compassion is your most potent weapon for fighting off your pathological critic. When you have compassion for yourself, you expose your sense of worth, you understand and accept yourself. When you make a mistake, you forgive yourself. When you talk compassionately to yourself, you can wash away the feelings of hurt and rejection. When you are compassionate, it shows by being kind, sympathetic, and helpful to others. When compassion relates to self-esteem it inspires you to be kind to yourself. There are three basic skills to be compassionate to yourself—understanding, accepting, and forgiveness.

Understanding is the ability to know what you are most likely to do in a given situation and why you react that way. Acceptance is simply the acknowledgment of the facts. You suspend all value judgment; you neither approve nor disapprove of your actions or situation. Forgiveness flows out of understanding and acceptance. You must let go of the past, reaffirm your self-respect, and look forward to a positive future.

What gives people a sense of worth? Most criteria devised for measuring human worth is dependent upon a cultural context. For example, the ancient Greeks valued personal virtue in a human and political sense. The Romans valued patriotism and bravery. Our culture equates worth to your work, the status of your profession, and your accomplishments. Buying into these cultural concepts of worth can be deadly for your self-esteem. The solution to coming to terms with the value of your worth must lie outside any predetermined cultural criteria. You must determine your own criteria for how you view your worth. Perhaps you want to believe everyone is born with equal worth; nobody is worth more or less than anyone else. This viewpoint frees you from comparing yourself to others. You can also acknowledge your own worth by the personal value and good feelings of your own positive experiences. Think of your worth being like the sun, it is always there even when you cannot feel it. Another way to sense your own worth is through the understanding and compassion for your struggle to survive. Every day you struggle to satisfy your basic needs as a human being. Given your resources, you do the best you can. The degree of your mistakes and successes is irrelevant; the only thing that counts is your effort.

When you understand you are doing the best you can, it becomes possible to accept everything you do without judgment. When you can forgive yourself, let go of your mistakes, and understand you were born into a world where each of us must struggle in our own way to survive, you can better accept your worth.

The Shoulds

Your beliefs and values have power because they spring from the deepest human drives. Since most beliefs and rules are formed in response to needs, they have nothing to do with truth or reality. Your beliefs and values are generated by your need to be loved and approved of by your parents, your need to feel

a belonging and approval from your peers, and your need for emotional well-being and physical safety. This process generates your shoulds. When you don't live up to your shoulds, you judge yourself as a bad and unworthy person. This is why many people punish themselves with guilt and self-blame.

What do healthy values look like? Healthy values are flexible, whereas unhealthy values are very rigid. Rigid values must be followed or your critic makes you feel worthless. Healthy rules and values have a built-in reality for your present level of awareness and allow for mistakes. Rigid rules allow no room for errors and set you up for punishment from your critic if you fail to abide by them. Healthy values are ones you have taken ownership of because *you* have decided they fit into your unique life. In contrast, unhealthy rules have been accepted from others without any conscious determination on your part how they can fit into your life. Healthy values are realistic; they have been assessed for their negative and positive consequences.

A realistic value promotes behavior that leads to a positive outcome. Unrealistic values and shoulds have nothing to do with outcomes, but instead require behavior based simply upon what is "right" and "good." Healthy values are life-enhancing. They give you the flexibility to pursue your emotional, intellectual, sexual, and recreational needs. They encourage you to do what is nourishing and supportive. Unhealthy values deny you the pursuit of life-enhancing needs and leave you feeling depleted by your self-sacrifices.

Your shoulds affect your self-esteem, because your pathological critic uses your beliefs and values to attack you. Your critic is constantly comparing you to your rules and ideals of perfection; since you can never live up to the high standards of your shoulds, your critic has endless reasons to attack you as bad and worthless.

Keep in mind that many of the rules and values you grew up with do not apply to you. These unhealthy shoulds that do not fit you demand behavior that is impossible or unhealthy. As an exercise, list your shoulds and underline the ones that your critic uses to attack you. When you can recognize a should is undermining your self-esteem, you must cut it out of your self-talk and attack it with a rebuttal statement. When you fail to reply, your silence is saying you are accepting what your critic is saying. The following are a couple of examples:

Should: “You should have a better job.”

Rebuttal: “A status job was my father’s rule and ideal. I like my job. It is safe, offers security, and is low stress.”

Should: “You should diet and be thinner.”

Rebuttal: “*Being thin* is my mother’s rule and our culture’s value. I would rather weigh what I do and eat what I enjoy than starve myself with diets.”

Handling Mistakes

As a child your parents corrected your mistakes. As you grew up, you took over the job of criticizing yourself; this is also the point when you created your pathological critic. Society’s contradictory values help you create your critic. Society says you must be equal yet superior, generous yet thrifty, spontaneous yet controlled. This lose–lose system allows your critic to find evidence for errors. You may grow up to rationalize mistakes, ruminate over mistakes, or even constrict activities in fear of making a mistake. Making or avoiding mistakes has nothing to do with self-esteem; your self-esteem is rooted in the unconditional acceptance of yourself as a worthy being. The only real mistake is allowing your pathological critic to point out mistakes as evidence of your worthlessness.

The key is to possess the ability to reframe your mistakes as a natural and valuable occurrence of life. Mistakes are nothing more than a prerequisite for learning, and a natural function of growth and changing awareness. It is impossible to learn without errors, and those mistakes are nothing more than informative experiences about what works and what doesn't; they are nothing more than steps to an ultimate goal. Mistakes have nothing to do with your worth or intelligence.

Mistakes are nothing more than a label you have applied to your actions at a *later time*, when your awareness has changed. Your motivations to act at the moment always come down to meeting your current needs. The actions you choose are based upon your present level of awareness, experiences, and understanding of the situation at that moment. A responsible person accepts the consequences for their actions; as you become more responsible you will undoubtedly become more aware of the price you have to pay for wrong actions. It helps to not label your mistakes as bad, but more accurately as unwise or ineffective choices.

You can develop a healthy habit of strengthening your awareness by asking yourself the following questions prior to a decision:

1. Have I ever experienced this situation in the past?
2. What negative consequences might be expected from the decision?
3. Are the consequences worth it, relative to what I expect to gain?
4. Is there an alternative choice that would have fewer negative consequences?

Responding to Criticism

The negative opinions of other people are damaging to a person with a weak self-esteem, as it gives their pathological critic ammunition. In contrast, individuals with strong self-esteem are never damaged by negative comments. When you possess strong self-esteem, you just have it; it is not increased with praise or diminished by criticism.

We all have a myth of reality. We trust our senses, but when people enter the picture, it gets more complicated. What behavior you think you are seeing is affected by what you have seen before and what you are expecting to see. As we take in information through our eyes and ears, we filter and edit information, distorting it on the screens in our minds. You never know what is on some else's screen and you cannot fully believe what is on your screen. The genetics of your personality, your psychological and emotional state, your habitual coping strategies, your beliefs, and your needs all have a powerful effect on what you see on your mental screen. Once your self-esteem is intact, you can understand that people can only criticize what is on their screen—and can effectively respond to the criticism. If you determine that the criticism is constructive, yet inaccurate, you can point out the error. If the criticism is accurate, all you have to do is acknowledge it.

Ask for What You Want

We all have basic needs that need to be met—physical needs, emotional needs, intellectual needs, social needs, and spiritual needs. Somewhere beyond the basic life necessity needs are a varying degree of wants, which vary with each individual. When someone is reluctant to ask for what they want, they exhibit a classic symptom of low self-esteem. The root is fear: You fear asking for what you want, especially when the request creates conflict with someone else.

If your self-esteem prevents you from making requests, the best course of action is to attempt to identify the situations where your assertiveness deserts you. When asking, it may be helpful to let the other person know your feelings. People are usually less likely to ignore you when they understand your emotions.

Goal-setting and Planning

Strong self-esteem depends on two things. The first is learning to think in healthy ways about yourself. The second is the ability to make things happen. Lack of action, and feelings of paralysis or helplessness makes you dissatisfied with life. An action-oriented life, one that moves you toward achieving goals, makes you feel strong and in control.

The first step in determining what you want is to make a list of what you yearn for in the following eight categories. Think in terms of what would make a difference in the quality of your life. Remember, your goals must be possible through actions on your part. The eight categories are as follows:

1. Material goals
2. Relationship goals (for both family and friends)
3. Educational or professional goals
4. Health-related goals
5. Leisure goals
6. Spiritual goals
7. Creative goals
8. Emotional or psychological growth goals

Make a list of your dreams. List the things you have always wanted to do, or change, or become. Also, make a list of little comforts in life that would make your life more agreeable.

Next, evaluate your goals with a rating system. Evaluate the desire or importance of the goals, the costs of pursuing each goal, and the roadblocks to achieving the goals. Based on your rating system, select the goals you think would be best to pursue now; and by the way, make sure your many goals have

varying time frames. For example, some goals should be able to be accomplished immediately while others should be medium-range (take weeks or months to achieve) while others need to be long-range (take months or years to achieve).

Be specific when you describe the goals intend to pursue. Describe the what, when, where, and with whom. Next, list the steps necessary to accomplishing each goal, including general time frames. For the longer-range goals, you may want to limit your action list to just the steps that will be necessary to get started. As you begin to take these steps, also be aware of the roadblocks that many people experience in an attempt to accomplish their goals:

1. Insufficient planning
2. Insufficient knowledge
3. Poor time management
4. Unrealistic goals
5. Paralysis resulting from fear of failure.

Keep the following tips for success in mind:

1. To make starting easier, break down bigger steps into smaller components that can be completed easily and quickly.
2. Assemble the resources to acquire the necessary knowledge. Search out mentors or educational classes.
3. Create the required time by making to-do lists, prioritize in writing the tasks that are the most important to complete, and learn how to say no to lower-priority demands on your time.
4. Be sure the goal is being pursued and accomplished to benefit yourself and not someone else.
5. Weigh the consequences to your self-esteem of not pursuing your goal versus the learning opportunities and boosts to your self-confidence from taking the risk to experience the journey, regardless of the outcome.

Visualization

Skepticism may keep you from trying this particular technique, but it won't stop the technique from working once you do it. Visualization will improve your self-esteem in the following ways:

1. By improving your self-image
2. By changing the way you relate to others
3. By helping you achieve specific goals.

The benefit of visualization is greater control over what is on your mind's screen—through the powers of your imagination, you can change the channel on your pathological critic. When you consciously visualize a positive event in your mind, you can overpower your critic's negative comments. For example, assume you have insecurities about going to an event where you will not know anyone and your pathological critic is telling you to skip it. You can override your critic's negative comments by visualizing yourself mixing freely with other individuals and enjoying yourself. The most effective times to conduct visualization exercises are when you are relaxed, especially right upon awakening or before falling asleep.

The rules for creating effective visualization exercises are as follows:

1. Visualize yourself each day making small steps toward your goal.
2. Visualize yourself behaving in a manner that reflects your image of a person possessing high self-esteem. What do I want my behavior to look like, sound like, feel like?
3. Visualize the positive consequences of your higher self-esteem behavior.
4. Visualize the accompanying higher self-esteem body language.
5. Visualize yourself liking your new behavior.

Visualization sessions for building self-esteem should be designed to correct the way you see yourself. Create scenes where you visualize yourself being worthy instead of unworthy, confident instead of doubtful, secure instead of anxious, cheerful instead of sad, self-loving instead of self-hating, outgoing instead of shy, attractive instead of ugly, self-accepting instead of self-critical.

Visualization sessions for building self-esteem in relationships should be designed to show you being an equal, worthy participant in your interactions with others. Create scenes where you feel comfortable with others, engage others in meaningful conversations, express yourself adequately, ask for what you want, and feel you can hold your own in any social setting.

Setting and achieving goals is a huge contributor to your self-esteem. Visualizing your goal, your positive actions while working toward your goal, and a successful outcome are some of the most effective tools for accomplishing your goals.

Core Beliefs

Your core beliefs make up the foundation of your self-esteem. Your inner dialogue will in turn reinforce and strengthen your core beliefs about yourself. A great deal of what you do, what you think, and what you feel will be a direct response to your core beliefs. The first step to improving your self-esteem is becoming aware of your negative core beliefs.

To uncover your negative beliefs, record every situation where you are feeling that your self-esteem is particularly low. Record your inner monologue to yourself during these low periods of self-assessment, as well as your feelings. For example

Situation: Afraid to ask for what I want in a meeting with my supervisor.

Inner dialog: I know they don't think I'm worth more money so why cause trouble by asking?

Feeling: Disappointed and angry with myself.

Once you have recorded the situations where your self-esteem is low, analyze each situation by asking yourself, "What does this mean to me?" In the example above, your answer may be, "If I continue to fear speaking up I will never get what I want or deserve."

Next, ask yourself, "What are my current rules in this situation?" Your answer may be, "Never rock the boat by expressing my wants." Chances are, all the rules you record are supported by a false belief that something awful is going to happen to you if you break your rules. So, to successfully discard your negative core beliefs, you must test your rules. Once you have tested enough of your rules and recorded the outcome, you will be able to rewrite your negative core beliefs. For instance, in the above example you may write, "When I speak up, express what I want, and my wants are reasonable, instead of bad things happening, I usually get what I request. It makes me feel good about myself."

As you develop new core beliefs you automatically develop new rules. For example, "I speak up for things that are important to me."

Building Self-Esteem in Children

Parents will exert the strongest influence on how a child feels about him- or herself. The child with strong self-esteem will have the best chance to lead a fulfilling, happy life. The following are several paths for building self-esteem in children:

1. Look for strengths, interests, and talents in children; give them opportunities to develop their skills. Give the child occasions to showcase and receive praise for their positive qualities and accomplishments.
2. Remember every action a child takes is to meet a need. When the behavior is inappropriate ask yourself, “What need is being expressed by this behavior?” and, “How can I help my child express herself in a more positive way?”
3. Never attempt to make your children fit into your mold. Look for their unique talents and reinforce their differences in a positive way.
4. Be an active listener. Invite your children to talk. Listen for the main point of the story. Pay attention to the feelings they are expressing and acknowledge negative feelings. Share similar stories of negative feelings about yourself. Be a good role model in how you deal with negative feelings. Help your children feel good about themselves when they feel negative or defeated. When you stop listening with care you are saying, “You are not important to me.”
5. Use language that describes your child’s behavior without judging him or her. It is important to distinguish between worth and behavior. Explain to the child why you are reacting to his or her behavior. Use language that validates the child’s feelings, predicament, motive, and confusion.
6. Praising language is what motivates children to learn; your approval shapes their behavior. Children who are not given clear indications as to what kind of behavior is expected will feel defeated and hopeless. It is important to share stories with your children about yourself so they have an opportunity to learn what is important to you. Find as many opportunities to praise them as possible, because recognition helps see themselves in a

positive light. A child whose efforts are not recognized and praised will feel misunderstood.

7. Children who are given corrections to their behavior without reasons will act unreasonably. Corrective language structured in a positive manner contains the following four steps: (a) Describe the inappropriate behavior in a non-judgmental language; (b) calmly state the reasons *why* the behavior is not appropriate and needs to be changed; (c) acknowledge and discuss the child's feelings; (d) deliver a clear statement as to what type of behavior is appropriate and expected.
8. Avoid the following language styles: (a) Over-generalizing negative behavior and ignoring the positive. For instance, "You never think about anyone else." (b) Giving your child the silent treatment by refusing to talk to him/her or look at them. (c) Making vague or violent threats of punishment.
9. When rules are arbitrary and inconsistently enforced, children feel shamed, blamed, overpowered, humiliated, and learn they are worthless, and lose confidence. Children raised in an environment where learning can take place, where specific rules and limits are discussed, and where consequences are predictable, reasonable, and fair will grow to develop a higher sense of self-worth.
10. Punishment is defined as external control over another person by force. When the reason for punishment is to teach a child to behave differently, the punishment will not achieve the objective. The child sees the parent as the bully and himself as the victim. The child feels powerless and gets the message that to be accepted he has to do it the parent's way regardless of his personal needs. Punishment can start a cycle of misbehavior,

punishment, anger, revenge, and more misbehavior to strike back. To grow a child's self-esteem you need to make it easy for him or her to behave well. Consider the following guidelines: (a) The parents need to develop reasonable expectations within their own minds, ones that are appropriate for the child's age. (b) When you know a situation will be difficult, plan ahead. Anticipate the child's needs and plan how to help him or her cope. (c) Discuss and even practice specific behavior ahead of time so there is no question about the expected behavior. Be clear with your instructions and provide detailed examples. Provide choices whenever possible to give the child a sense of control. (d) Use every opportunity to praise good behavior as it is taking place.

11. Engage your children in solving family problems. These problems could be bedtime conflicts, picking up toys, helping clean up after dinner, doing homework, curfews, or any areas of disagreement and struggle within the family. Sit down as a family and discuss solutions. Let everyone's ideas, feelings, and needs be heard; write them all down. As a group, discover the best solution for everyone.
12. Allow your children to experience the consequence of their actions. Experiencing the consequence is the mechanism for teaching responsibility, giving the child control, and building self-esteem. The following rules will help you create effective and fair consequences: (a) Match the consequence to the event. For example, if they do not put their toys away, relate a reasonable consequence to their toys. (b) Enforce the consequence fairly, close in time to the event. (c) Enforce consequences consistently. (d) Discuss consequences in advance with your child.

13. Promote confidence in your child by teaching him or her the variety of skills every individual needs to function independently. Keep track of their new learned skills so you can remind them of how much more capable they are becoming. Give your child responsibilities that contribute to the family's daily functions.
14. Promote feelings of success by encouraging your child to try new experiences. Prior to experiencing a new adventure, let your child know what to expect. Be patient as you let your child practice learning the new skill. Make it safe for him or her to fail by encouraging learning through failure.
15. Promote success in school. If problems are developing, deal with them early in the child's school career. Reasonable grades not only support self-esteem, but children also learn good life habits in school. They learn how to plan their time, finish assignments on time, organize, follow through, work neatly, and exercise self-control.
16. To be successful socially as a teen and an adult, a child must learn social skills by practicing with other children. They must learn how to share, take turns, cooperate, negotiate, get along, and how to react to others.
17. You must model self-esteem to your children. Modeling strong self-esteem means you value yourself enough to place your basic needs first. When you put yourself last, constantly place your child's needs in front of your own, you teach them you are only worthy relative to your service to others. When you model self-forgiveness, they learn to forgive themselves. When you talk about your behavior and appearance with acceptance, they learn to accept themselves. When you are strong enough to set limits to protect yourself, they will do the same. Children learn the most by watching the example their parents set.

Action Review Points

1. Your critic appears to have more control over your mind than you do; yet his independence is all an illusion. You have the power to tune him out and turn him off. You have the power to stop poisoning your self-worth.
2. Your critic's negative reinforcement is a problem–solution process: You are in pain and you want to feel better. Unfortunately, while the critic is solving your problems, he is also tearing you down. In the short term, there are two ways your critic helps you falsely feel more self-worth; by comparing you to others and setting high, perfectionist standards.
3. In order to gain control of your critic you need to develop an awareness of his inner dialogue. For one week, keep a notebook handy to record the monologue of all of your critic's negative statements.
4. Your cognitive distortions are not beliefs, but are actually bad habits of thought that you use to interpret reality in an unreal way. These habits of thinking get you into trouble. You must combat distorted thinking with specific rebuttals.
5. Compassion is your most potent weapon for fighting off your pathological critic. When you have compassion for yourself, you expose your sense of worth, and you understand and accept yourself.
6. List your shoulds and underline the ones that your critic uses to attack you. When you can recognize that a should is undermining your self-esteem, you must cut it out of your self-talk and attack it with a rebuttal statement.

7. Mistakes have nothing to do with your self-esteem. Mistakes are nothing more than a prerequisite for learning, a natural function of growth and changing awareness. It is impossible to learn without errors.
8. Self-esteem is something you own; it is not increased with praise or diminished by criticism.
9. Attempt to identify the situations where your assertiveness deserts you when you want something. Tell yourself you deserve it, and then ask for it; when asking, it may be helpful to let the listener know what your feelings are. People are usually less likely to ignore you when they understand your feelings about a given situation.
10. Strong self-esteem depends upon making things happen. The first step is to determine what you want and to make a list.
11. Utilize the power of visualization. When you consciously visualize a positive event in your mind, you re-script the expectations in your head, dubbing out your pathological critic's negative comments.
12. To discard your negative beliefs you must identify your rules and test them.
13. You must model self-esteem to your children. Modeling strong self-esteem means you value yourself enough to place your basic needs first.

What to Say When You Talk to Yourself

by Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D.

(Pocket Books, 1990)

About the Book

Dr. Shad Helmstetter shows you how to make positive self-talk a permanent habit. Learn how to create the energy to turn your dreams into reality by unlocking the secrets of what to say when you talk to yourself. Imagine relying on no one but yourself to optimize your outlook, focus your plans, and keep you on top, in touch, and going for your dreams.

Helmstetter is a behavioral researcher, author, and lecturer in the field of motivational behavior. He is also a best-selling author and chairman of the Self Talk Institute, and as such, appears as a featured guest on radio and television talk shows throughout the United States.

Introduction

What we are told when we are children has an immense effect on what we believe. It forms what we believe about ourselves and the world around us. In other words, we have all been unconsciously conditioned by others as to what we should accept as true. Our experiences, what outside messages we internalize, and what we have told ourselves all become the mental program that directs our beliefs and actions today. Some of this programming may be good, but some of it may be negative and damaging to your self-esteem and ultimate happiness.

The good news is you can re-program. When you learn how to talk to yourself, you can replace the old, negative programming with healthy, new, positive, productive programming.

We all talk to ourselves all the time; most of our self-talk is unconscious. The more you think about something in a certain way, the more you will become to believe that your view of that *something* is true. The mind always tries to align any new thought with our existing beliefs, effectively anchoring it to our worldview. The longer you believe something to be true, the harder it becomes to change that belief. The following are some examples of common self-talk that is counterproductive and self-defeating:

- Today is going to be one of those days.
- I know it won't work.
- I don't have the talent for that.
- I'm just not creative enough.
- I can't seem to get organized.
- I already know I won't like it.
- I never know what to say.
- I'm too shy.
- I never have enough time.
- I don't have any patience for that.
- When will I ever learn?
- I get sick just thinking about it.
- With my luck I don't have a chance.
- Things are just not working out for me.
- Sometimes I just don't like the way I am.
- I've never been any good at that.
- My desk is always a mess.
- Nobody likes me.
- I never get a break.
- It seems like I'm always broke.
- I'm just no good at _____.
- That impossible.
- I'll never get it right.
- You can't trust anyone anymore.
- I never can get anywhere on time.
- If only I were _____.
- If only I had _____.

- I hate my _____.
- I just can't take it anymore.
- I just can't handle this.

Remember that every time you make a statement about yourself that is negative, you are directing your subconscious mind to become the person whom you are negatively describing. If you are programming yourself with the wrong information, you cannot possibly get to where you want to go. Unfortunately, it is natural for us to pass the same programming on to others, including our children. Here are a few examples of negative talk commonly passed on to children:

- Your room is always a mess.
- Can't you do anything right.
- Why can't you be more like your _____?
- You just don't try.
- You'll never be any good at _____.
- I tell you to do something and you just do the opposite.
- You talk too much.
- You're being lazy.
- You don't care about anyone but yourself.
- You just don't think.
- You seem determined to cause problems.

Notice that all of these accusations use of the word "you" in each statement, thus pointing directly at the listener. Be careful what you tell the subconscious mind, because it is like a sponge; the subconscious mind will believe anything you tell it if you tell it often enough and strongly enough.

The Dynamic Power of Self-management

The step in self-management that will have the biggest impact on our success each day, and in everything we do, will be our *behavior*—in other words, *our actions*. The right sequence of actions will always deliver more successful results than the wrong sequence of actions.

The effort behind our actions will always be determined by *how we feel* about something. If we feel good about something, our actions will be more positive. Therefore, our actions will be influenced by our feelings.

Our *attitudes* can be described as our perspective, i.e., how we view life. Whatever attitude we possess about anything will determine how we feel about it, and consequently whether our actions will deliver positive, average, or poor results. So, a good attitude is imperative to deliver successful results.

Likewise, *what we believe* about something will determine our attitude toward it, which will determine our feelings toward it, which will affect our actions and determine whether we will succeed or fail. In short, belief is powerful stuff. Belief does not require something to be true; it only requires us to believe it to be true. Reality to each of us is based on what we have come to believe—whether it is true or not. We all have thousands of beliefs about ourselves, and many of us could store a file cabinet full of negative beliefs about ourselves; and unfortunately, the mind will act as if those beliefs are true. But what makes us believe negative things about ourselves? We believe what our minds have *been programmed to believe*. From the day we were born, our minds have been programmed with what we should believe about ourselves, and about what goes on in the world around us every day. Whether the programming was right or wrong, good or bad, it is what we believe to be true. *As a result, the most effective way to manage ourselves and achieve more desirable results is to change our programming.*

Change your programming by talking to yourself with positive language; talk to yourself often enough and strongly enough, and you will gradually change your beliefs. Change your beliefs and you change your attitude, which in turn changes how you feel about something. More positive feelings generate more positive actions, which lead to more successful results.

Can we create more positive actions by developing a more positive attitude about ourselves and everything that goes on around us every day? Simply by making a decision to never again think negatively may work for a short period of time. The reason it will not last is because your subconscious mind still believes the old programming. You will not be successful thinking positive thoughts over a longer period of time until you have totally replaced the old programming with new, positive beliefs. Positive thinking will work only when the negative thoughts have been replaced.

Self-talk is a way to erase the past negative programming and replace it with positive new directions. Positive self-talk allows us to actively control the direction of our lives rather than passively accepting our negative programming. The following are examples of different levels of self-talk. The most harmful type of self-talk is when you say something bad about yourself, and your subconscious mind accepts it. This level of self-talk usually starts with the words, "I just can't..." or, "I could never..." or, "I just can't seem to..." or, "I just don't know how to..." or, "I wish I could..." These phrases we say to ourselves program our minds with all kinds of doubts, fears, and hesitations about our abilities. It doesn't make any difference how harmless the words seem; they are the backbone of everything that works against us. Negative self-talk turns self-assurance into self-doubt. It cripples our ability to achieve positive personal growth and seduces us into accepting mediocrity. Another type of negative self-talk is characterized by phrases such as, "I ought to..." or, "I need to..." or, "I should..." This language identifies a problem but

doesn't offer a solution. For example, when you complete the sentence, what you are really saying to your subconscious mind is, "I should organize my closet... *but I'm not.*" The unspoken words are programmed as negative self-talk. Carefully examine these directives. "I really should lose weight... *but I'm not.*" "I need to be more patient... *but I can't.*" "I ought to see my father more... *but I don't.*" "I need to become a better listener.... *but I won't take the time.*" "I should improve my vocabulary... *but I'm not doing it.*" When we feed what seems as innocent phrases of negativity to our mind, what are we accomplishing? Will it help us succeed? No, it will not. Instead of giving ourselves a path to dreams and accomplishments, we are creating disappointment, guilt, and self-imagined inadequacies.

The next type of self-talk becomes more positive and is characterized by the phrases, "I no longer..." or, "I never..." This positive wording is beneficial when you want to make a specific change. For example, "I no longer arrive late," or, "I never miss my exercise day." Notice how the statements are in the present tense even though the change has already taken place. The wording indicates you have recognized a need for change and you have made a decision to do something about it.

The most positive kind of self-talk, however, is when your statements paint a picture of who you want to be. For example, "I am healthy because I exercise five times a week," or, "I am a great salesperson," or, "I am organized." The past procrastinator may say, "I do everything that needs to be done right away." The person who has always wanted to re-activate old friendships will say, "My friends are important to me and I communicate with them monthly."

Can you imagine the power of your mind when you fill it with positive self-talk? You deserve to get the best out of your life. Start telling yourself today, "I am a winner!" "I believe in myself!" "I like who I am!"

Supplying Motivation

All of us need motivation every day from the time we get up to the time we got to bed. The problem is that most of us rely on external motivation. Have you ever experienced a good coach, teacher, or mentor, a person who encourages you, supports you, gives you the energy to try? But what happens when the coach is gone? The energy, rewarding encouragement, and support are also gone. This is known as “external motivation,” something that has come from the outside. Keep giving most people positive external motivation and they will do better... but they do it with someone else’s energy. Take the external motivation away and they will return to the same place they were before the motivation began. The external motivator will tell us we can accomplish anything we want to accomplish; and we want to believe the motivator, and that we are successful achievers, but as soon as the motivator is gone we will return to the comfortable old negative programming which tells us, “No, you can’t do it alone.”

As much as we enjoy being told how terrific we are by someone else, every form of motivation is short-lived. Any progress you are going to make in believing in yourself and motivating yourself is always going to be filtered first through your old programming. For people who want to improve and change, they must first start to see themselves in a different way and be willing to make changes within themselves.

The kind of motivation that is consistent, reliable and effective is the kind of motivation you will never get from anyone else but yourself. Self-change requires changing your programming with positive self-talk. How about becoming your own motivator? What motivates you? Are you being motivated by outside influences, or are you your own best motivating factor in your life? The only kind of motivation you can count on to last indefinitely is internal motivation. Become your own internal coach. You must become your best friend, your strongest believer, your internal motivator.

Take Responsibility for Your Mind's Programming

Personal responsibility is the bedrock of all individual actions. No one will ever breathe one breath for us. No one will ever think our thoughts. No one will ever stand in our bodies. We are born, live, and leave this life entirely on our own. Personal responsibility of how and what we think is the essence of self. It is your responsibility to employ your own mind. It is your responsibility to speak to yourself, to call your mind to action, to educate and program your own mind to your own choosing. With daily self-talk, you are consciously in control and in charge of every action and change you are making within yourself. With *positive* self-talk, you are in control of generating successful results.

Keep It Simple

Unfortunately, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and negative self-belief are barricades to a life that could otherwise be filled with positive results and accomplishments. Many people want to make significant changes in their lives, but making changes on the inside is seldom accomplished easily.

When we want to improve ourselves, we are constantly competing with our old programming and the obstacles of day-to-day living. Any desire to improve ourselves will compete for the *time* we need to work and take care of day-to-day personal chores, it will compete for the *energy* we consume to keep our lives going in some reasonable order, and it will compete with our *minds*, which have a plateful of decisions to make, problems to solve, and things to deal with on a daily basis. As a result, self-improvement is easily delayed because it competes for our time, energy, and mental focus.

When it comes to spending our time doing those things that could help us the most, self-improvement rarely comes first. For this reason, for any self-improvement program to be

successful it must be simple, easy to use, and effective.

Types of Self-talk

Silent self-talk goes on all the time. Silent self-talk includes everything you think about yourself and everything going on around you. You must realize that your old self-talk is a habit, and it feels natural to you even though it is negative. Now you can start to recognize how your old self-talk worked against you and you can start to override it. You have to get tough and kick the old self-talk out. To correct yourself will take more awareness than effort. Make a mental note of anything you say to yourself that sounds negative and immediately rephrase it in the positive. For example, “I’m fat and cannot lose weight,” would be rephrased to, “I am losing weight. I only eat what I should. I am in control and looking better every week.” When you say, “I am so unorganized I cannot get anything done,” you might replace it with, “I am organized, in control, and productive.”

Speaking self-talk happens whenever you speak out loud about yourself, either to yourself or to others. What you say is the picture of yourself you are feeding to your subconscious. If your speaking is painting the wrong picture, you are feeding your mind negative information about yourself. The hundreds of comments you make every day are important. They have a lot to do with what you accomplish, how you feel, and who you become. Listen to the self-talk of the winners in life. Listen to how they talk about anything—the positive attitude and confidence of their language. The more positive the self-talk, the more successes it creates. Listen to yourself and immediately rephrase any negative pictures you paint with your self-talk. Insist on giving yourself a refreshing new program of self-talk—it is one of the greatest gifts you will ever give to yourself.

Anyone can benefit from the results of self-talk. The more you use it the more you will benefit. Your success will depend more on just getting started than for what reason you use it.

Children

Children accept positive self-talk naturally. The inner self would rather hear the best of who we can be rather than the mistakes we make. Children who listen to and learn positive self-talk develop a “Yes I can!” spirit. Children with a winning self-belief create strong self-esteem and good habits. What a child thinks about himself will affect how well s/he will do in school, the kind of friends s/he will choose, how well s/he gets along with others, how s/he deals with problems, how well s/he deals with peer pressure, the kind of life partner s/he chooses, and how well s/he will do in most areas of his or her life. It is important to start early with positive self-talk so the picture children form of themselves will be a positive one.

The Right Words Spell Desired Results

Your success will always depend upon what you tell yourself and what you think of yourself. Imagine setting worthwhile goals for yourself and fueling them with non-stop self-talk. It is our choice to see things the way we want to see them. If we give ourselves the right picture, with the right input, we will get the right output. All of us have the possibility to re-direct our self-belief by adjusting our picture of ourselves with the right words. Self-talk is at the root of your success to accomplish almost any goal, surmount any problem, or change anything in your life you wish.

Examples of Self-talk

When you use self-talk, always say it in the present tense as if the change has already taken place and the habit is ongoing. Also be specific. Examine the problem from every perspective

and develop self-talk to cover every point. The following are some examples:

Self-talk to Take Responsibility for Yourself

- I take full responsibility for everything about me, including the thoughts that I think.
- I alone am responsible for what I do and what I tell myself about me. No one can share this responsibility with me. I enjoy being responsible. It puts me in charge of being me—and that’s a challenge I enjoy.
- I allow no one else, at any time, to assume control or responsibility over my life.
- I choose to leave nothing to chance. When it involves me, I choose to make a choice for myself.
- There is no “they” on whom to lay blame. I am fully responsible for my actions. I have learned that “they” is I.
- I accept the responsibility for living my life in a way that creates my happiness, my attitude, my beliefs, and my actions in the past, present, and future.

Self-talk to Build Self-esteem

- I really am very special. I like who I am and feel good about myself.
- Although I always work to improve myself and I get better every day, I like who I am today.
- I am positive. I am confident. I radiate good things.

- I am full of life. I like life and I'm glad to be alive. I am a very special person, living at a very special time.
- I like to be around other people and other people like to be around me. People like to hear what I have to say and what I have to think.
- I smile a lot. I am happy on the inside and the outside.
- I am warm, sincere, honest, and genuine. I am all of these things and more. And all of these things are I. I like who I am, and I'm glad to be me.
- I have many beautiful qualities about me. I have talents and skills and abilities. I even have talents I don't know about yet.

Goals can be far-reaching or simple. When we set longer-term goals that will take years to reach, do not fail to recognize the little goals that ultimately get us there. These are the goals that we will live by every day. Goals can be as simple as becoming more organized, connecting with friends more frequently, giving gifts of appreciation to loved ones, exercising more regularly, or going to church more often. Problems will get in the way of accomplishing our goals. It is important to change your language and to think of problems as challenges. Any act of setting goals will create challenges. What we believe about those problems; how we look at our problems play an important part in how we handle them. Do we avoid them or confront and solve them? If you want to overcome your challenges, you must give yourself the right directions, the right words. The more positively you program yourself, the closer you will move toward your goal.

The emotions of fear, anger, despair, concern, pride, love, passion, joy, compassion, and elation are our motivators. These are the emotions that create action in our lives, or turn

us inward toward submission. Motivation affects everything you do—it creates every action, positive or negative. Since our emotions are the root of our motivators, the emotion must be redirected if the right motivation is to take place. The secret lies in how you use these emotions to generate positive actions. The power is within you when you learn the right language to talk to yourself. You must learn how to harness your emotions to give you the motivation you need, whenever you need it.

You have to give life to your self-talk. When you write out your first self-talk script, you will feel strange the first time you say them to yourself. To take ownership of your self-talk, shout them out loud the first time to make them yours. Visualize pictures in your mind that embody the person you are describing. Once you internalize your self-talk, it will take on a personal meaning and become your best friend. If you feed your mind the right words every day, you will overcome your fears. You will become a doer and start to achieve your goals, becoming the person you want to be.

Situational self-talk is valuable because it does not require a script to achieve results but instead is used in the moment. This type of self-talk is used to positively adjust our minds to how we look at a situation; it is immediate and deals with the present. The results are instant. Situational self-talk is usually used when you are faced with an unexpected situation. When the situations are unpleasant and create negative emotional stress, the resulting anger, anxiety, and frustration can toxify our physical being. In those situations, positive self-talk can prompt our thoughts, moods, and attitudes to adjust to the unexpected situation.

With positive self-talk, you can stay in control and change your reaction, setting off a positive emotional and physiological cycle. A negative thought in reaction to an unexpected event will only set off a chain reaction of negative emotional and physiological reactions. Bear in mind that the manner in which

you choose to handle the unexpected may very well affect your happiness for the remainder of the day. Making the best of any situation plays an important role in mental and physical health. You cannot let unexpected situations and circumstances control you; you must recognize the reality of the situation and accept it—or better yet, search for ways to enjoy it.

How we react to unchangeable events is the truest test of your self-control and attitude. The next time an unexpected problem pops up, become aware of how you respond. Make an effort to use positive self-talk to take a positive position. Focus on giving yourself the right words to positively control your situation.

Examples of Situational Self-talk

- I always give myself the necessary amount of time to get anywhere I am going. I always arrive at or before the time I need to be there.
- Traffic lights change at their own discretion, not mine. As I wait for the light to change, I will relax while I am waiting.
- Slow moving traffic is not a problem for me. I enjoy the time to organize my thoughts and think about things beneficial to me.
- It's raining today and that's fine with me. I'm going to have a great day being productive.
- I don't mind standing in line. That's where I am and I'm doing what I need to do.

Self-talk for Solving Problems

- Problems are my teachers. They help me to learn and grow. Without them I would be going nowhere. With them, I am moving forward.
- There is no problem I cannot conquer. My will and determination are always greater than any problem I face.
- When I meet a new problem, I do not see the problem as my enemy. I know that finding the solution to the problem will move me forward in my own personal growth.
- *Challenge, conquer, solution, and win* are words which I live by daily. “Challenges” are opportunities. “Conquering them” is the inevitable outcome. “Solutions” are the stepping-stones to my success, and “winning” is my way of life.

Self-talk for Being Organized

- I am organized and in control of my life. I am in control of myself, my thoughts, my time, my actions, and my future.
- I know what to do and when to do it, and I do everything I need to do when I need to do it.
- I never waste time—I always plan time. And because I plan my time I always have the time to do the things I choose to do.
- I am very well organized. Each night I make a list of the things I need to do the next day. I set my priorities and I follow them.

Self-talk about Goal-setting

- I am the director of my destiny. I know where I am going, how I am going to get there, and why I am going there. My life is in my control.
- I control my goals and the achievement of my goals. I organize my goals by writing each of them down, along with the steps I need to reach them. I am successful because my goals are clearly defined.

Self-talk for Controlling Weight and Eating

- Each time I sit down to eat I reaffirm my determination to achieve my goal by eating right and never giving in to temptation. I am reaching the weight I want.
- Whether eating in or eating out, I really enjoy eating less.
- I never feel the need to finish the food in front of me. I eat only what I should—and never one bite more.
- When I sit down to eat, at no time do I allow anyone to influence, tempt, or discourage me in any negative way.
- Being in situations that put a lot of food in front of me is not a problem for me now. I simply say no to food and yes to success.

Self-talk to Help You Get Motivated

- I can do anything I believe I can do. I have talent, skills, and ability.

- I set goals and I reach them. I know what I want out of life. I go after it and get it.
- People like me, and I feel good about myself. I have a sense of pride in who I am and I believe in myself.
- Nothing seems to stop me. I have a lot of determination. I turn problems into advantages. I find possibilities in every situation.
- I know I can accomplish anything I choose, and I refuse to let anything negative hold me back or stand in my way.

Remember, if you say anything about yourself, to yourself, you will believe it; and you will become what you believe.

Action Review Points

1. Remember that every time you make a negative statement about yourself, you are directing your subconscious mind to become the person you are negatively describing. The more you think about anything in a certain way, the more you will come to believe it is true.
2. From the day we were born, our minds have been programmed for what we believe about ourselves and what goes on in the world. Whether the programming was right or wrong, good or bad, it is what we believe to be true. As a result, the most effective way to manage ourselves and achieve more desirable results is to change our programming.

3. Change your programming by talking to yourself with positive language; talk to yourself often enough and strongly enough and you will gradually change your beliefs. Change your beliefs and you change your attitude, which in turn changes how you feel about something. More positive feelings generate more positive actions, which lead to more successful results.
4. Any progress you are going to make in believing in yourself and motivating yourself is always going to be filtered first through your old programming. If you want to improve and change, you must first start to see yourself in a different way and be willing to make changes within yourself. Self-change requires you to change your programming with positive self-talk.
5. Many people want to make significant changes in their lives, but making changes on the inside is seldom easily accomplished. When we want to improve ourselves we are constantly competing with our old programming and the obstacles of day-to-day living. For this reason, for any self-improvement program to be successful, it must be simple, easy-to-use, and effective.
6. You have to get tough and kick the old self-talk out. To correct yourself will take more awareness than effort. Make a mental note of anything you say to yourself that sounds negative, and immediately rephrase it in the positive.
7. The right words create desired results. Your success will always depend upon what you tell yourself and what you think of yourself. Imagine setting worthwhile goals for yourself and fueling them with non-stop self-talk. If you give yourself the right picture, you will get the right output.

8. The act of setting goals will create challenges. What we believe about our problems and how we look at our problems play an important part in how we handle them. If you want to overcome your challenges you must give yourself the right directions, the right words. The more positively you program yourself, the closer you will move toward your goal.
9. The emotions of fear, anger, despair, concern, pride, love, passion, joy, compassion, and elation are our motivators. These are the emotions that create action in our lives or turn us inward toward submission. The secret is how to use these emotions to generate positive actions. The power is within you to learn the right language, harness your emotions, and create positive actions.
10. To take ownership of your self-talk, shout it out loud the first time to make it yours. Imagine the person you are describing. If you feed your mind the right words every day, you will overcome your fears. You will become a doer and start to achieve your goals, becoming the person you want to be. Use the instructions and examples in this material to write your self-talk scripts today.

Reinventing Yourself

By Steve Chandler
(Career Press, 2005)

About the Book

Reinventing Yourself develops your hidden potential. You will learn techniques for breaking down negative barriers and letting go of pessimistic thoughts that prevent you from achieving your dreams and goals. The book offers many recommendations on how to reinvent yourself from the limited, fictional personality of old to the person you have always wanted to be.

Steve Chandler is one of America's best-selling authors, a world-famous public speaker, and a trainer and consultant to more than forty Fortune 500 companies. He graduated from the University of Arizona and was recently named to the faculty at the University of Santa Monica, where he teaches a graduate program.

Introduction

The greatness you see in others is also in you. You just have to release the spirit that is in you, and let it shine out in the world. No matter what you believe your personality to be, you can set yourself free from that so-called "destiny" by how you talk to yourself about your capabilities. You can find the strength inside of yourself to do anything you set your mind to do, and become whatever type of person you choose to be.

Others don't possess anything you don't have also. Like them, you just have to believe that you can be successful. There are people who are "owners of their spirit," and they are in complete control of their life—they achieve happiness, have purpose, and fulfill their goals. Victims, on the other hand, are victims in life only because of their own defeatist

thinking. Victims do not believe they can escape the personality or the person they have become. They allow fears and doubt to control their lives; and never daring to break out of their personality, they become comfortable and feel safe living a life of mediocrity. They allow their lives to be led by others and leave their future in the hands of fate rather than taking control of who they want to become.

Instead, you can take ownership of your spirit and energy, to live a life of greatness.

Breaking Free of the Personality Myth

Let's consider an example. In school you are told you are boring, and at home your parents tell you that you are an underachiever. By the time you reach high school, you developed a self-concept about who you are. This is true of everyone, and a negative self-concept can freeze us in a negative but secure and safe place.

Unfortunately, most of our personality has been shaped by fears: fear of embarrassing ourselves; fear of being rejected by our peer group; fear of disappointing our parents, teachers, or friends; fear of failing. When you label yourself as shy, lazy, disorganized, a poor speaker, intellectually inferior, or not liked by others, you are limiting yourself to the one personality you believe yourself to be. We sentence ourselves to the lives we live by who we say we are. We can stay stuck inside our childhood self-concept of our personality forever. But the good news is you don't have to limit yourself anymore.

Personalities are dynamic. People can change. People can leave their personalities behind and reinvent themselves. People can become happier, make new friends, become goal-oriented, and lead fulfilling lives with purpose. Breaking through the myth of being trapped inside one's personality leads to pure joy. And this is possible for everyone once you realize how much

control you possess—you can overcome your fears and move forward in the direction you choose.

People who are owners of their spirit know they are in control of who they want to become. They live a life of action.

Victims, on the other hand, are controlled by their fears and live without direction from day to day inside their safe and comfortable personality. But you must realize: The personality you are “trapped in” is an illusion. You can break free as soon as you understand where the power is. You must realize the power to improve your life is not out there somewhere; there is no magical partner, friend, event, or possession that is going to improve your life over the long term. The power to improve your life can only be found *inside you*.

As you think about your own potential, Nathaniel Branden’s words are on-point: “I am convinced that one of the most helpful things we can do for people is to refuse to buy into their inappropriate restricted views of their limitations.”

Build Self-Confidence by Tackling Problems

Tackling problems builds self-confidence. Victims who feel trapped inside their personality look at problems as something to avoid or delay. Their first thoughts are to avoid embarrassment, the judgment of others, and the risk of failure. They are so stuck inside their personality they are afraid to try; they don’t know who they could become if only they took action.

In contrast, owners of their own spirit see problems not as obstacles but as learning experiences. They welcome challenges and tackle them with action-oriented solutions. The process invigorates them, brings joy, satisfaction, and builds self-confidence.

Effort Equals Happiness

As the generations pass and the standard of living rises, we all strive to become more comfortable and passive in our lifestyle. We all desire a hassle-free existence, a life without any real problems or stress. Notice the motivational message of most advertisements—"no effort," "quick and easy," "immediate results." The mass majority of people avoid personal pursuits that require a significant amount of time and effort. The largest myth we can tell ourselves is that success is available without effort. And I am not referring to financial success alone, but to personal success as well. Many people believe personal pursuits that involve a significant amount of time and effort are unnecessarily painful; that effort adds no rewards or value to their lives; that pursuits requiring sacrifice should be avoided at all costs. Owners of their spirit know that personal pursuits that require effort are valuable and lead happy, purposeful lives. It is the effort of the journey that leads to learning and personal growth. As William Butler Yeats said, "Happiness is growth. We are happy when we are growing."

Responsibility Is Powerful

To be an owner of your spirit and energy means you have declared that it belongs to you. You have claimed it. It could be a talent, a skill, a project, a goal, a success, or even a mistake. When you are an owner of your spirit you are in control of what your life becomes instead of allowing it to belong to fate.

People who own their own energy and spirit see the benefits of personal responsibility. Taking responsibility adds power to your being; it adds the ability to choose your responses to every situation. When you take the responsibility to set a goal and pursue it with action, or to own a problem and solve it, you build self-confidence and happiness. We will become what we give our thoughts to.

It is everyone's responsibility to plan his or her own life, for it adds great value. Planning allows you to continually be reinventing yourself and focusing on what is most important to you. Therefore, put this vital responsibility at the top of your list of priorities.

Complacency and Comfort Create Ruts

Becoming complacent with your life and living inside your comfort zone is not a healthy place to reside. What curtails us from breaking out of our shell is fear; fear of failure, fear of effort, fear of embarrassment. To become complacent with one's life is the result of lack of planning and confidence. Victims who allow their lives to drift from day to day never experience the pure joy of leading their lives in a totally new direction; to reinvent themselves with purpose and action.

Owners of their spirit and energy lead their lives by continually reinventing themselves. Owners welcome new challenges and let everyone and everything provide learning experiences. Owners focus on what they want for their lives while victims focus on their fears. Both of these positions are created by internal messages—thoughts.

Consider the sought-after goal of retirement. Why do people look forward to retirement? Because they imagine a life where no effort is required, a life free of stress and hassles, and a lifestyle of comfort. But the human mind does not want comfort and complacency; it wants challenges and new experiences that push the mind's creativity. Owners of their spirit and energy welcome any experience that breaks them out of their comfort zone; it is on the outside of your comfort zone where you find true happiness. Notice what people are talking about when their eyes and voice get filled with excitement, enthusiasm, and happiness. It is almost always about some new project, experience or challenge; it is something that took effort.

When you are on your deathbed, you will not be thankful for how comfortable your life was, but you will reflect with joy about the experiences that dared you to venture outside of your comfort zone, challenged you, and provided you with great purpose and personal growth. Listen to the voice that says, “Living a life of comfort and complacency is a dead end.”

Remember, there is only a few feet difference between a rut and a grave.

Discard the Crutch of Growing Older

Our first experience of independence is when we leave the womb and separate ourselves from our mother’s body. Our second journey to independence is when we leave home to go out in the world to take care of ourselves, totally independent from our parents. Unfortunately, many of us curtail the journey of independence by finding a mate or spouse on whom we can become dependent.

Becoming dependent on someone else only blocks our development and delays our personal growth. We must all discover for ourselves that in order to continue to grow as individuals, we must continue the journey of ongoing self-reinvention. As we age we must continue to break out of our comfort zones and search for new experiences that will give our lives purpose and fulfillment. We can only find true happiness if we are willing to continue down a never-ending path of learning and personal growth.

Like the obstacle of depending on someone else, the aging process is another popular excuse for stopping the search for new experiences and new knowledge; self-pity is often the focus of an aging person’s thoughts.

Be aware of the direction of your journey. Are you making decisions which are moving you toward being an owner in

complete control, or a victim whose independence and freedom of personality are stolen from them? Which direction do you want to travel in? By being aware of the direction of your journey as you age, you can stop using excuses to lessen the effect of your activities and efforts. Instead you can pick up your pace of reinvention and personal growth until the day you die.

Taking Ownership of Your Relationships

The task of reinvention is complex and exciting. Your relationships, thoughts, and actions are the grounds of transformation, and the following several sections break down each into some helpful considerations.

Finding Love for Yourself

Love is like any other form of energy in your life—the more energy and effort you put into loving others, the more you will get in return. The passive personality will wait for love to be given to them, or to find them. It lives in fear of freely giving love to others for fear of the love not being returned—because victims internalize rejection as failure. People who are owners of their own spirit do not wait for other people to love them; they replace waiting with action.

Reinventing one's life is all about moving from passive thoughts to active thoughts; actions can be anything that involves caring, helping, and enlarging and communicating your love to others. Owners understand that rewarding, loving relationships require an investment of time and effort. Building these relationships is a task done over time, like decorating a home or designing a magnificent garden. Create a list of people who are meaningful to you. Make an effort to visit, communicate how much you care for them, and make kind gestures—do it weekly. You will be amazed at how much love comes back to you.

Think in terms of life as the steps of a mental ladder. The lower steps occupy your thoughts with things required to take care of your physical self; they require the least amount of consciousness. The next steps up are the needs of your perceived personality – and with it comes a set of reactive emotions that we typically use to protect our identities, like anger, guilt, fear, resentment, and jealousy. But these emotions that cripple personal growth and love prevent us from reaching higher steps on the ladder – where the need for functional, rewarding relationships with other people exist. With those relationships come brighter emotions like thoughtfulness, kindness, mindfulness, creativity, imagination, innovation, curiosity, joyfulness, and playfulness. Highest on the ladder is the ability to achieve the spirit of happiness and fulfillment. This is where our pure spirit lives.

What keeps you stuck on the lower rungs of your ladder is the crippling belief you are who you are. You believe you can never change because you are stuck with your personality. The key to finding your spirit – your fulfillment – at the top of the ladder is on the inside of you. There is no permanent you. You can strive for, and climb for, and climb to, the top of the ladder anytime you want.

We experience confusion when we feel love and the accompanying positive emotions when they come from another person (i.e., an external source); those feelings are at odds with how we perceive ourselves. To eliminate this confusion, this contradiction, we must create the same positive emotions internally. Owners of their spirit understand the internal thoughts and actions that are necessary to climb the ladder and reach the positive emotions of joy and love. Remember, there is no permanent you; you can reinvent yourself at any time. The key to finding your spirit of love is to know you can climb the ladder to your positive emotional steps anytime you want. The power is within you.

Love is not an emotional reaction but rather a consciousness that comes from the spirit deep within you. To assess your interpersonal communication habits, assess these two options. The owner of his or her spirit mindfully *creates* meaningful and loving relationships with planned and controlled actions and communication. Victims are in the habit of emotionally *reacting* to other people. The difference is creating versus reacting. The first step toward replacing reacting with creating is awareness. Once you are fully aware, stop emotionally reacting and think about how you can help the other person. Serving other people, and giving love to others, is action-oriented. If you are in action, lovingly serving others, you can never become the passive wounded victim.

Living in Fear of NO

The passive personality does whatever it can to avoid the word no; to victims, it means rejection and is offensive to them. Avoiding the word no is the major reason passive people are afraid to ask for anything. And if you never ask you miss out on many of the benefits and opportunities in life.

In contrast, owners of their own spirit understand that nothing can be gained without asking for what you want. Owners respect other's rights to say no. When an owner hears no they accept it and without personal offense; and simply move on the next request. To the owner, yes and no reside together.

You must realize that action doesn't care about yes or no. When you replace the fear of no with action you have learned reinvention.

Replace Your Negative Emotions

There is more to you than one emotion. There are a variety of human feelings—fear, guilt, anger, joy, resentment, jealousy,

sadness, and heart-wrenching depression. Regardless of what emotion we experience in the moment, we all have the ability to move on from it to a different, next emotion. You may feel extreme anger or pain, but there is more to you than that one feeling. You can acknowledge the anger or pain, but you don't have to identify with it; you don't have to let it control you.

For over two decades I was incapacitated with restrictive nerve pain in my left leg. When the episode escalated, I could not put any weight on my leg or move my leg forward to walk; standing and walking were impossible. Every two weeks an unavoidable event, such as standing for fifteen minutes, would trigger an episode that would incapacitate me for several weeks at a time. The pain, lack of mobility, and loss of independence created depressive moods. I learned to refuse to let the negative emotions control my life by learning how to implement positive actions to create more joyful emotions.

When we become aware of our emotion in the moment and understand that we have the power to control it, we can turn a negative emotion to a positive action, by simply replacing a negative emotion with a more positive one. By having the power to control our emotions we can improve our relationships.

Become the Giver in Your Relationships

In every relationship there are givers and there are takers. Givers see themselves as making a contribution to the lives of others. Givers burst with energy; this energy comes from the positive self-concept they hold of themselves. True giving from the heart does not focus on any reward or payback; it focuses on the giving. Givers give without conditions and never look back, instead searching with energy for the next person to give to. Givers do not expect happiness in return because the happiness is already there. It lives inside them.

Reinventing yourself from taker to giver requires action and effort. The act of becoming a giver activates ownership of spirit, soaring self-respect, and self-esteem.

Modeling to Others How to Change by Reinvention

Do you have a close friend, relative, or partner in your life who is dragging you down with their negativity? Do you think, “If I didn’t have this other person in my life I could be a lot happier”?

Gandhi said, “You must be the change you want to see in others.” Before you can expect others close to you to make changes in their lives for the better, you must first make the changes within yourself to become an owner of your own spirit. You must take control of your happiness. If we are successful at continually reinventing ourselves, than those close to you will follow your lead. Modeling and inspiration are strong teaching tools. Children are a prime example. Children do not listen to what we say—they listen to what we do.

If you are in a position where you must deal with negativity and victimized behavior, it is a mistake to communicate what you feel is wrong with their actions and thoughts. Along with positive modeling, the most positive thing you can do is to wait for the person to demonstrate an ownership moment, and respond with sincere praise. Everyone has ownership moments; the problem is the lack of frequency.

Take Ownership of the Language You Speak to Yourself

Just like taking ownership of your role in relationships, you have another important relationship in your life: the one with yourself. How you evaluate the world affects what you see—and the words you choose to narrate the story you are living have the power to shape our lives.

When you are an owner of your spirit and in control of your happiness, you guide the patterns of your thoughts with positive words that paint pictures to create fulfilling actions. Consider the mental attitude of one who uses words such as wonderful *challenges* and *opportunities* versus another who thinks in terms of words such as *problems* and *troubles*. The words we choose to speak to ourselves commit us to the lives we live. By becoming aware of the words we use when we speak to ourselves, we can change our life experiences.

Behind every action is a thought, formed in words that paint a picture. You will notice that some people use language to *create* the lives they lead while others use language to *describe* the lives they lead. People who are productive and lead fulfilling lives talk to themselves in a different language than those who are struggling. Owners of their own spirit have goals, projects, challenges, and learning opportunities, and use the words, “I can.” Challenged individuals have problems, drift without specific objectives, wish instead of plan, and use the words, “I never have enough time.” None of us have permanent personalities. We can all change once we start to practice a new language.

Consider the language of people who have labeled themselves a procrastinator. They come to believe it is part of their personality. Of course it isn’t—they can change at any time by changing their language. Procrastinators use the language, “I should,” or, “I ought to,” rather than, “I want to.” When you do things because you *want to*, you are doing it with a different spirit. When a victim is doing something because *he should*, he is doing it reluctantly. When you believe procrastination is a permanent part of your personality, you never change. On the other hand, when you do things because you want to do them you discover a happiness, a flow of creative energy.

Understanding how you speak to yourself and the effect it has on who you become is the most important self-improvement

project you can ever take on. Start using the language, “I want to,” and you will be practicing using your owner’s voice. “I want to organize my clothes closet today.” “I want to go to work today.” “I want to dust the house today.” “I want to clean my car today.” “I want to exercise today.” Continue to acknowledge throughout the day that you are doing what you want to do; visualize the completed project and how happy it will make you feel. Reinvent yourself to make things happen and find joy in the journey.

The list of comparisons of the way people talk to themselves goes on and on. Challenged individuals say they’re swamped, which of course is simply a feeling of being overwhelmed. Owners of their inner spirit are never swamped; owners are in control, focus, prioritize, and do one thing at a time. When challenged individuals are offered a new opportunity, experience, or adventure, they say they will wait and see. Owners say, “Let’s do it.” Challenged individuals get their feelings hurt a lot, are easily wounded, and offended by comments of others; they take other people’s comments personally. Owners do not allow themselves to be offended; they do not personalize others’ comments or obsess about their opinions. They think about everyone and everything in life as a teaching moment.

You have options for who you want to be in any situation. Do not make the mistake of shrinking yourself and pretending you are weaker than you are. You have the power within you to revise your conception of yourself. Examine what you like about yourself and build on your strengths. Increase the volume of your rebel voice, the part of you that does not care about what others think. The stronger your rebel voice, the freer you become. Whatever it is that you think is a weakness in yourself, welcome it as an opportunity to learn and grow. You will never find happiness and personal satisfaction hiding inside your comfort zone. Real happiness comes from challenges, learning, action, and growth.

Become aware of how you speak to yourself; start shaping your life today with the correct language.

Take Ownership of the Spirit within You with Action

Happiness becomes a thing to be mastered. Typically happiness comes to those people who are busy doing. Ironically, the more you do, the more you can do and the more self-confidence you build. Think back to when you were a child; you were reinventing yourself every day. You were connected to your spirit. You were Cinderella or Snow White, Davy Crocket or Superman all in the same day. You built forts and tree houses. You played house and envisioned your wedding day. You reinvented yourself to be anyone you wanted to be until the day you started to become too concerned about what other people thought. That's the day you crawled inside your safe shell of a self-imposed personality. That's the day you quit becoming a doer. The good news is you are the roadblock to who you want to become; which means you are also the solution. Become like a child and set yourself free today.

True happiness that flows from your spirit within you is a gift to others. One of the best gifts a friend can give to others is his or her own happiness. One of the best gifts a husband can give a wife or a parent to a child, is being a happy person. Your pure joy of living is a gratifying experience to share with others. Happy people have more energy and therefore have more to give to others.

Everything You Want Flows from Action

Passive people tend to live their life backwards. Because they don't have the confidence or courage to do something new, they tell themselves they don't have the power to do it. They wait to act until the power to do it shows up. Owners of their own spirit act first. They know that the confidence will only appear later, after the act of doing it several times. You must

take action first and you will gain the power and confidence later.

As we get older, we talk ourselves into fears that curtail the action of doing things. Too much fear stops the process of action. The only way to defeat fear is with action; *action defeats fear*. All successful people have fear—they just do it anyway.

When you reinvent yourself by doing the things you don't have the confidence to do, you begin to realize there is no permanent "you." The experience of overcoming your fears with action will bring you pure joy. Children know the feeling of joy because they continually are trying to do things they have never done before. As adults we forget how to do that. As adults we begin to search for a hassle-free existence; we find comfort in security and living inside our comfort zone. But living inside our comfort zone is settling to live inside a permanent personality. We start to think that feelings instead of action will make us happier. Then we start to think that other people, different circumstances, or material possessions will start to make us *feel* happier. This path of thinking disconnects us from ownership of our own spirit.

Most people are programmed to focus more on how to be more comfortable, more secure, rather than what actions they can take to create new challenges and experiences. Think about what you could do today to free the spirit of a child in you—something that requires a glorious new effort.

Feed the Language of Optimism to Your Mind

Nothing heals and gives life more than laughter, music, and dancing. Have you ever witnessed anyone singing along to music or dancing who was not showing outward signs of happiness? Optimism is powerful. How can we recognize the positive in every situation? The language we feed to our mind

in our conversations to ourselves is where we will find the power of optimism.

To reinvent yourself, stop asking yourself how a certain situation makes you feel. Instead, ask yourself, “What are the thoughts that make me feel this way?” Alter your thoughts and language to find the positive in every situation. Optimists are aware they have choices, always choosing their thinking after reviewing all the options. They understand the effectiveness, power, and energy received by always thinking in terms of optimistic responses.

Grow Your Optimism with Enthusiasm from the Inside

To successfully feed the spirit of ownership within you, you must reignite it each day. Knowing that you have the power to make all unhappy experiences become temporary and inconsequential, it is possible to light the fire of happiness each day. People who own and control their happiness from deep within their spirit are infectious; they spread enthusiasm, inspiration, happiness, and passion for a cause to everyone with whom they come into contact. After you meet with people, ask yourself whether you left them feeling higher or lower. Start to focus on shaping your conversation, attitude, and thinking for others to feed on. Once you have developed this habit, people will naturally want to be around you.

It is a mistake to look for people who will make us happy and light our fire inside us. It is a mistake to search for that special something outside of us—for some special place or Prince Charming to rescue us; something out there that will allow us to live happily ever after. The doors to happiness are only inside our own mind. The fire of our spirit is only to be found inside us. We must learn to search inside of our own solitude, where we will light our beacon to happiness and fulfillment.

Anyone can create a great life by reconnecting to the enthusiasm of childhood. That connection is available at any time. It has nothing to do with the other people in your life or your circumstances. The spirit is already in you; simply reconnect with your enthusiasm for self-creation. In our teen years, many of us make a fixed personality mask to wear, shaped from our fears of embarrassment. We hide the love of enthusiastic experimentation we had as a child and crawl inside our perceived personality to die. Freedom from this fixed personality is found in the spirit to set new goals, and seek inspiration in new projects and experiences. Find a new self-improvement project to tackle and reinvent yourself upward.

Action Review Points

1. Victims do not believe they can escape the personality or the person they have become. They allow fears and doubt to control their lives. Never daring to break out of their personality, they become comfortable and feel safe living a life of mediocrity.
2. You don't have to be stuck within a static personality. People can change. People can leave their personalities behind and reinvent themselves. People can become happier, make new friends, become goal-oriented, and lead fulfilling and purposeful lives.
3. To break out of your personality you must look at problems as challenges to tackle and as learning experiences. Success and personal growth is only available to those willing to invest time and effort.
4. You must take responsibility for yourself. Taking responsibility adds power to your being; it adds the ability to choose your responses to every situation. When you take the responsibility to set a goal and

pursue it with action or own a problem and solve it, you build self-confidence and happiness. *You will become what you give your thoughts to.*

5. You must push yourself to break out of your comfort zone. It is not a healthy place to reside. What curtails us from breaking out of our shell is fear; fear of failure, fear of effort, fear of embarrassment. Owners focus on what they want for their lives while victims focus on their fears. Owners of their spirit and energy welcome any experience that challenges them out of their comfort zone; it is on the outside where you find true happiness.
6. As we age we all must search for new experiences that will give our lives purpose and fulfillment. By being aware of the direction of your journey as you age, you can stop using excuses to lessen your activities and efforts. Instead you can pick up your pace of reinvention and personal growth until the day you die.
7. Create meaningful and loving relationships with planned and controlled actions and communication. Victims are in the habit of emotionally *reacting* to other people. The difference is learning to create love for yourself versus waiting and reacting.
8. Ask for what you want. Respect others' rights to say no. When you hear no, accept it and take no personal offense; simply move on to the next request. Nothing can be gained if you do not ask for something.

9. Replace negative emotions with positivity. We all have the ability to move on to the next, different emotion. You may feel extreme negative emotions, but there is more to you than that one feeling. You can acknowledge the negative emotion, but you don't have to identify with it; you don't have to let it control you. You have the power to isolate a negative emotion and move forward to more positive thoughts.
10. Become a giver. Givers burst with energy. They give from the heart. Givers do not give to be given happiness in return; the happiness is already there. It lives inside them.
11. Before you can expect others close to you to make improvements in their lives, you must first make the changes within yourself to become an owner of your own spirit. You must take control of your happiness.
12. Take ownership of your words. Behind every action is a thought, formed in words that paint a picture. Use language to create your life and control your happiness. Guide the patterns of your thoughts with positive words.
13. You have options for who you want to be in any situation. Do not make the mistake of shrinking yourself and pretending you are weaker than you are. You have the power within you to revise your conception of yourself. Examine what you like about yourself and build on your strengths. Encourage yourself with positive language.
14. Increase the volume of your rebel voice. The stronger your rebel voice, the freer you become from negative thoughts.

15. Be optimistic. To reinvent yourself, stop asking yourself how a certain situation makes you feel. Instead ask yourself, “What are the thoughts that make me feel this way?”; alter your thoughts and language to find the positive in every situation. Optimists are aware they have choices, always choosing their thinking *after* reviewing all the options.
16. Whatever it is that you think is a weakness in yourself, welcome it as an opportunity to learn and grow. You will never find happiness and personal satisfaction hiding inside your comfort zone. Real happiness comes from challenges, learning, action, and growth.
17. Take action first and you will gain the power and confidence later. Too much fear stops the process of action. The only way to defeat fear is with action; *action defeats fear*. All successful people have fear—they just do it anyway. When you reinvent yourself by doing the things you don’t have the confidence to do, you begin to realize there is no permanent “you.” Become a doer.
18. To successfully feed the spirit of ownership within you, you must reignite it each day with an enthusiastic attitude. Knowing that you have the power to make all unhappy experiences become temporary and inconsequential, it is possible to light the fire of happiness each day. It is a mistake to look for people who will make us happy and light our fire inside us. The doors to happiness are only inside your own mind. The fire of your spirit is only to be found inside you; you must simply reconnect with your enthusiasm for self-creation every day.
19. The good news is you are the roadblock to who you want to become; which means you are also the solution.

The Power of Self-coaching

by Joseph J. Luciani, Ph.D.

(Wiley, 2004)

About the Book

Nobody is born insecure, angry, bored, or depressed. *The Power of Self-coaching* explains how unhappiness is just a bad habit. This self-coaching program will help you unlearn reflexive, destructive thinking and arm you with the tools you will need to free yourself from your mental and emotional traps. You will learn how to identify patterns of thought and feelings that are making you unhappy. Develop self-talk techniques to develop new, healthy ways of thinking and feeling, and tap into your creative, intellectual, and emotional potential to live the life you deserve.

Joseph J. Luciani, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist who has been in private practice for over twenty-five years. He is a frequent lecturer and guest speaker.

Introduction

As Shakespeare put it, “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.” Do you ask the question, “Why are some successful when others are denied success?” It’s not fate that dictates success or failure, happiness or unhappiness—it’s what we do with our fate.

To overcome your personal struggles and achieve the life you want will require change. No therapist can make you change; any change must come from you. The capacity to create the life you want resides within you. This is where therapists can become a crutch if you believe they have the gift to heal you. Once you acknowledge that the power to transform your life comes from within, self-coaching can teach you the responsibilities to change your life.

The first step is to develop an awareness of what to change. It boils down to two words: *control* and *habit*. The second step will be how to change them. The third step will help you rid yourself of the insecurity, self-doubt, and distrust that has been robbing you of life's true happiness. This final step to successfully change yourself must involve believing you can do it.

You were not born ineffective, unhappy, frustrated, or insecure. Your life's struggles consist of learned patterns of perception and reacting. The person you are at this time is the end result of your life's choices. The sooner you take responsibility for the choices you make and the attitude you embrace, the sooner you will have the life you want. To get that life, you must break the habits of control and insecurity that are ruining your life. Once you learn to replace self-doubt with self-confidence, your life will soar.

Understanding how control and habit can dictate the quality of your life is a path toward dismantling the most stubborn problems you face. *Control* is an attempt to manage and manipulate life because you have come to distrust your natural, spontaneous capacity to handle it. *Habit* refers to specific control patterns that have become automatic for you in your everyday life. You can transform your life by understanding how these two simple words have the power to rob you of the life you desire. Everything you will need to have a happy successful life, you already possess. You simply have to allow yourself to believe it.

Happiness

The pursuit of happiness is the only highway that matters in life. Happiness will find you if you are willing to trade control for spontaneity. Happiness is a natural state; all you have to do is stop what is blocking it—insecurity and control. Let's break happiness down into its three sub-groups:

Personal happiness is living with joy and connectedness to your life. You can experience joy when you learn to release yourself from your insecurity and controlled thinking. Once you release yourself from these self-imposed boundaries, everything will happen naturally and happiness will leap forward.

Functional happiness is about feeling good about what you do. It is true that your value as a person is not increased or lessened based upon what you do, but it is an important component of your happiness. There is a legitimate need to find meaning and importance in what you do every day. What you are doing is not as important as how it makes you feel. One of the keys to happiness is receiving joyful feelings from your daily actions.

Social relationship happiness is the natural happiness that arises from connections between human beings. We are social creatures who naturally enjoy relating to one another. Adequate integration and relationships with others represent the ultimate level of happiness. But if relating to others is a natural need for human happiness, why does it seem so unnatural for so many? Many people consider relating to another human being risky. They have learned to rely on emotional controls and reflexive, habitual thinking to deal with their insecurities; their emotional controls filter and dilute feelings to eliminate or reduce the risk of perceived vulnerabilities when relating to others. Once you unleash yourself from your insecurities and emotional controls, you can handle the risks of building relationships. If you never risk change, insecurity will own you.

Be careful not to make the mistake of equating goals of acquiring money, power, and status to the fulfillment of happiness. Money cannot buy you security and happiness. Power will not create loyalty, and status will not make people love and respect you.

Insecurity and the Roots of Change

The frustrations and struggles that prevent you from having the life you want can all be traced to insecurity. The thing that insecurity does best is make you believe fiction rather than fact. Insecurity is the false belief that you cannot handle some aspect of life. Ongoing insecurity is a distortion of reality. When it's a habit, insecurity distorts your self-perception. Insecurity minimizes your ability to be accurate about who you are, and over time, it comes to feel like a natural part of your personality. The following are signals of insecurity:

- Uneasy with strangers
- Prefer to stay home rather than go out on a new adventure
- Pessimistic
- Wish they were better looking
- Hate the way they look in pictures
- Don't think they are as good as others
- Tend to cling in relationships
- Afraid to get close to others
- Worry a lot
- Have lots of fears
- Tend to hide feelings
- Wonder what people really think of them
- Find it difficult to trust people
- Have difficulty saying no
- Tend to be too sensitive
- Overly cautious
- Often feel guilty
- Do not think of themselves as emotionally strong

Start by identifying one thing you feel insecure about. Now recognize how natural it feels, how you identify with it as a part of your personality. Now try to understand that what you feel just isn't true about yourself. Remember no one is born insecure; it's something you learn. The good news is you can change.

Choose Not to Worry

Worry is insecurity-driven. Worrying is nothing more than a speculation of what might go wrong. Worrying about the future is a destructive kind of thinking that leads to a life of stress and robs us of our energy. Worrying doesn't solve anything; it simply opens the floodgates for more worries, doubts, and stress. In other words, worrying offers no solutions. In fact, it's a problem-maker.

Whenever you find yourself worrying, ask yourself, "Do these thoughts serve me or hurt me?" The purpose of asking yourself a question forces you to think, stop the cycle of reflexive thinking (worrying), and expose it to see how silly it is. The goal is to stop living in your mind about the future (worriers are always what-iffing about the future) and start reacting to the present day challenges. Worrying only sees things going wrong, never sees the complete picture, and always over-thinks the situation. It can take a significant awareness and effort for insecurity-driven individuals to tackle fearful challenges in the present.

Stop Controlling Your Life

The opposite of control is risk. If you are insecure about a part of your life, trying to control life seems a lot safer than risking spontaneity. Realize there is good control and there is bad control. Circumstance-driven control is an appropriate response to real-life circumstances. Insecurity-driven control is not driven by external events but rather by inner thoughts and perceptions. Insecurity-driven control has nothing to do with the actual, external event and everything to do with our interpretation of the event relative to our insecurities.

There are many strategies you may have been practicing your entire life to control your insecurity. "What-iffing" may be one of those tactics. Another option may be, "I have to..." as an

attempt to eliminate your struggle. Or maybe you use the, “Yes, but...” phrase to rationalize and eliminate your responsibility of dealing with events of your life.

Remember that the thoughts you use to control your insecurities *distort your life*. Every time you are struggling, ask yourself, “How are my thoughts and perceptions related to controlling my fears rather than living spontaneously and just letting the event unfold?” The hard truth is that change may feel impossible. Your controlling tactics and feelings have become so natural to you that they have become convincing. When your boundless desire to live your life is restricted by the limits of control, you lose the joyful spontaneity of living your life. You restrict your capabilities of who you want to become.

You need to learn that control is the cause of your limitations. The goal is to eliminate control from your life and let your natural instincts carry you through events as they unfold. Otherwise, controlling life gives you only an artificial feeling of security. You can’t prevent bad things from happening to you and live your life fully at the same time. Control holds life back and bars you from the life you want. The only reason controlling lifestyles become habit is because they work: they successfully reduce your anxiety from insecurities or fears. Unfortunately, you pay a price—a life of control guarantees that you will be pulled away from your source of strength and the life you want.

Reflexive Thinking

When our behavior shifts from being an action requiring conscious effort to becoming automatic, we say it has become “habit” or “reflex.” For example, the repetitive skills learned in any sport become reflex. The same is true inside our minds.

Understanding reflexive thinking will help you to figure out why your life has stalled, why the same old problems keep

holding you back, and why you feel powerless to change. We develop destructive forms of reflexive thinking at a young age, and they become a repetitive theme throughout our life. This type of thinking is expressed in self-doubt, pessimism, and certain fears driven by insecurities. Reflexive thinking is a habit; and today you are the sum total of a lifetime of your accumulated habits. When insecurity is driving some of your reflexive thoughts, your compulsive habitual thinking fills your life with things you *have* to do rather than what you *want* to do. These longstanding habits of worry and what-iffing keep you from the life you want.

It is helpful to challenge some of your typical reflexive thinking. Taking the time and effort to consciously question your reflexive thoughts separates healthy thinking from defensive and destructive thoughts. For example, ask yourself, “Is what I’m feeling fact or fiction?” This simple question has the power to consciously question habitual insecurity-driven thinking. What is the nature of healthy thinking? Healthy thinking is conscious problem-solving without the reflexive thinking driven by insecurities. Healthy thinking promotes the possibility to live spontaneously, letting life’s events unfold naturally. In contrast, reflexive thinking is habit thinking driven by insecurity.

When you are faced with a struggling thought, think of your psychological “light switch.” You have two choices” flip the switch down or up. Flip the switch down, and you let your habitual, insecurity-driven thinking dictate the course of your life. Flip the switch up and you choose to face your fears and handle life.

Stop Avoiding Life’s Challenges

Reflexive thinking is a misguided defense you habitually use to insulate you from life’s challenges. Here is a partial list of controlling strategies used as defenses to insulate you and

excuse you from life: emotional detachment, excessive reading, watching TV, workaholism, social avoidance or shyness, aloofness, excessive eating, passivity, alcohol or substance abuse... Are you trying to gain control over your life by avoiding it? Check out your answers to these questions as they pertain to your life.

- I am most comfortable when I am alone or with family.
- I have no problem entertaining myself.
- I am usually guarded around other people.
- I don't have many close friends.
- I tend to enjoy solitary activities or hobbies.
- I have a tendency to overindulge in alcohol or drugs.
- I like most forms of escape such as projects, puzzles, TV, reading, video games, etc.
- I would rather do busywork than go out with people.
- People often wind up disappointing me.
- I'm shy.
- I often screen my phone calls.
- I'm not very spontaneous.
- I have a tendency to react critically when I feel defensive.
- I tend to keep my feelings hidden.
- I have been criticized for being emotionally aloof.
- I have trouble with emotional intimacy.
- My temper can get me into trouble.

Notice in the following example how insecurity (fiction) is driven by insulating responses that tend to be highly reactive rather than rational.

“Some of my friends are going to a movie tonight but Carol is going to join us. She is so opinionated (fact). Tonight I am going to try to gain an understanding of Carol's viewpoints.”
(Rational thinking.)

“All of a sudden I am feeling too tired to go out. No one will miss me anyway.” (Reflexive thinking that insulates from insecurities.)

Think of your psychological insulating actions in the form of a turtle’s shell. The shell protects you from life’s challenges. Your shell protects you from your insecurities by giving you a sense of control. It can become impenetrable. Think of your psychological approach to life as balancing two weights on a scale. When you take away from one side, it affects the other side. As you psychologically grow one tendency, the other weakens. When you keep adding to your shell of insulation, you end up taking away (weakening) your ability to face your life’s challenges (insecurities). It’s that simple.

Did you ever consider why people guard showing their emotions to others? People guard their emotions and feelings because they are less controllable than thoughts. If you are not guarded, if you do not insulate yourself with controls, you can wind up showing people more than you want them to see. Holding back your feelings is a lot safer than being hurt. It’s safer to be expressionless. Reflexive thinking helps you to control the feelings and emotions you feel cannot be trusted. But by hiding your emotions inside your shell of control, you give up living a life of joy and spontaneity.

Another expression of insulation is anger. Whenever anger is inappropriate to the circumstance, you are dealing with an insecurity-driven reaction. It’s a “who needs ‘em” attitude and is one of the most dangerous control strategies. The reasoning of individuals who use anger to insulate themselves is straightforward: If you threaten one of their insecurities, they can push you further away with hostile reactions, further insulating themselves.

You must challenge yourself to abandon the shell that represents your reflexive thinking approach to handling life. Happiness and purpose can fill your life when you replace your

control thinking with a willingness to believe in your potential. There is always a choice in your thinking. You just need to learn to see it.

Dismiss Perfectionism, Welcome Mistakes and Failures

Security is an illusion. None of us grows up in a perfect world and no one has perfect parents. So it's not about whether you are secure or insecure; it's about to what extent you are. The extent of your security is a relative issue. As we have stated earlier, it's not control that brings you a sense of safety and security; it's trusting yourself.

Another illusion of security is perfectionism. Perfectionistic habits can invade your life in the shape of compulsion and rigidity. You could be afraid to say the wrong thing, unable to say no, feel conspicuous if your attire is not perfect, obsess about your weight, or have to stay in the gym for that extra thirty minutes.

The need to strive for your perception of perfection is one of insecurity's most demanding lifestyles. The perfectionist is often held back from living his or her life spontaneously in fear of making a mistake; but mistakes are an important part of the growth and maturation process. The truth is that you need all of your experiences to grow—positive and negative. Mistakes are not failures, but challenges and opportunities to learn. Just keep in mind that it's not the number or successes you experience but the number of planned actions and what you learn from your efforts. In contrast, growth and maturity are stunted by reflexive thinking. Reflexive thinking doesn't allow you to grow—it only permits you to hide from life as you attempt to control it.

No More Lies

The problem with expressing the truth is like most emotions. It exposes you and leaves you feeling vulnerable. The most popular form of white lying is the inability to say no.

If you are a pleaser, you may feel that you have no choice in the matter; you have to please because you have to control. But who is being controlled? You keep other people happy but in return you give up what you want. Being a habitual pleaser can become a negative form of control and can devastate the quality of your life.

Pleasers feel the need to control a situation because their insecurity tells them the truth is too risky. The habit makes you believe that you can't handle the assumed resulting conflict. Because you lack confidence and fear the outcome, you never learn to deal with people honestly and directly. If you find yourself trying to control by pleasing or making idle promises, start building awareness of the insecurity that is driving your decisions.

Trust Yourself

What is self-trust? To trust yourself is a willingness to believe in yourself. Your biggest obstacle will be your insecurity and reflexive thinking telling you that if you let go of your habitual control your life will shatter. You must reject your insecurities and replace them with a desire to believe in yourself.

What you now feel to be negative limitations are not reality; they only feel like limitations because your insecurity has filled you with fear and hesitation. The more you rely on the habits of reflexive thinking and control to seek a false sense of security, the more you deplete your ability to trust and believe in yourself. When you what-if every decision, when you are afraid to make a mistake, when you are afraid you might

change your mind, you continue to delay living your life in the hopes of finding the perfect answer. A compulsion to avoid mistakes creates nothing but self-doubt and an erosion of life. This is what insecurity does—it robs you of trusting yourself and living your life spontaneously.

To separate yourself from the devastating effects of reflexive thinking, try this drill. Create an image in your mind of a person who possesses strong qualities of self-belief and self-trust. Someone who is confident and handles life without doubt. Creating this persona in your mind will create a mental image which will awaken this potential within you. Every time you find yourself retreating into self-doubt, ask yourself, “How would my persona handle this?” By removing your destructive reflexive thinking and depersonalizing it, you can get a more positive, uncontaminated response. But remember, it is important to consult your persona’s likely response and not your own.

The Five Steps of Self-talk

Step One: Build Awareness

You must be able to recognize and assess the habits of control that are curtailing your life. Being successful at anticipating the control habits of reflexive thinking is the first step toward breaking your destructive habits of insecurity. Start by charting your most common expressions of control habits from the following list:

- **Yes, but** phrases (e.g., “Yes, I didn’t... but I couldn’t...”) allow you to sidestep and rationalize responsibilities.
- **I have to** phrases convince you that you have to do something. Have-tos are compulsive strategies designed to help you control others and your own life.

- Worrying by **what-iffing** is a control strategy to run from fearful events or situations rather than face life's challenges.
- **I can't** phrases are excuses you use to avoid challenges and possible failure.
- **GUILTS** are powerful emotions that keep you from going against someone or something. You control avoiding conflict by relinquishing to the pressures you feel to do something you think you are expected to do.
- **Black-and-white thinking** is all or none thinking without any gray ground for discussion. Case closed. In control.
- **Maybe I shouldn't** or **how do I know** phrases are filled with doubtful thoughts. Doubtful thinking acts to help you to postpone or avoid perceived dangers or fears.
- **Shoulds** serve the same purpose as have-tos. They are both compulsive strategies to attempt to control life.
- **Name-calling** or putting yourself down is way to excuse yourself from challenges and conflicts.
- **Not caring** phrases are a form of denial. When you insulate yourself with a callous, don't-care attitude it insulates you from fears and mistakes. You remain in control.
- **Hostile** phrases insulate you by pushing someone away. Insulation is a control mechanism to protect you from insecurities.
- **White lies** remove your responsibility of facing the perceived conflicts of telling the truth. You remain in control of your fears.
- **Mountain-out-of-molehill generalizing** is an attempt to prepare for the worst; it is an attempt to control not being prepared or avoiding a future event.
- **Fatalistic thinking** is in effect throwing in the towel. You feel a sense of control when you give up and can walk away from your fears.

Step Two: Separate Fact from Fiction

There is your healthy, spontaneous, trusting self, and then there is the insecure, distrusting, controlling side of yourself. If you struggle from time to time, you know that the truth is not always apparent. When you struggle, part of your problem is you are not separating fact from fiction. You attempt to control life and fill your mind with insecure chatter, letting the monkeys in your mind control your life. When your mind becomes contaminated by insecure thinking, you let reflexive based thinking (fiction) override reality based thinking (fact).

Nothing will alter your outlook on life more than seeing you have a choice between reflexive thinking and reality-based thinking. This breakthrough starts the moment you begin to realize you can separate fiction from fact. Fictional thinking is the domain of insecurity; it is where your doubts, fears, misperceptions, and negativity must be protected. Start thinking about what you think about and stop reacting to your thoughts. Hint—feelings are not facts.

Insecurity has its own inner dialogue of psychological talk that becomes habit and can go unnoticed. When you accept what is being said, you identify yourself with it. However, you can fight back and reject fictional dialogue by saying, “What can I do to change how I feel?” When you can develop awareness of your habitual dialogue, you will be able to separate fiction from fact. The words you speak to yourself can change your life. In any struggle recognize who is talking, fact or fiction.

Step Three: Stop Listening to the Noise

Healthy thinking is a choice. You can't stop reflexive thinking from popping into your head, but you can *take action* by not listening to it. Start getting used to the fact you can say no to your reflexive thinking. It helps to create an image in your head or an action every time you must fight off reflexive thinking. I like an action image that swipes your hand across your forehead and throws your thoughts on the ground. Then

proceed to step on them. You are rejecting your thoughts by saying no with an action statement.

Step Four: Let Go

Once you have successfully reached this step, your mantra is to *separate, stop, and let go*. Separate fact from fiction, stop listening to the fiction, and now to let go of the struggle, insecurity and reflexive thinking. When you are caught up in a rush of insecurity, fears, doubts, and hesitations about life, it can seem impossible to stop. Remember, the feelings of insecurity only give you the impression you are powerless. But it's only an impression! Now you are going to be challenged in a way you are not used to—by not thinking. By letting go. When we say to stop thinking we are not referring to stopping all thinking, that is impossible, just letting go of the insecurity-driven thoughts. This will feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar at first.

There are three exercises to help you learn how to let go. The first the author calls changing the channel. Think about how easy you flip from one TV or radio station to the other. Why can't flipping from negative to positive thoughts be just as easy? They can, with practice. Experiment with writing down a negative experience and the accompanying feelings on one side of a paper, and on the other side write down a positive experience with the accompanying feelings. Immerse yourself in the negative experience for thirty seconds, followed by immersing yourself in the positive experience for thirty seconds. As you complete exercises like these you can accustom yourself to flipping from negative thoughts to positive thoughts.

The second exercise is to become more reckless. When you find yourself over-thinking a life challenge, you become more rigid, fearful, leery, and distrustful. Letting go, not worrying, becoming more trusting may feel dangerous. Just imagine yourself being a coach. Give yourself a pep talk to encourage

yourself to overcome the struggle or challenge you are facing in your mind. Use the following self-talk examples:

- “I trust myself; I believe I’m going to be OK. I am just going to be reckless and go for it.”
- “I’m over-thinking the problem. I need to let go, be more reckless, and get lost in just doing it.”
- “I realize letting go of my comfort zone is going to feel reckless. But it’s not being reckless, it’s just stepping out of my comfort zone. If I take a shot I will probably be pleasantly surprised.”

The third exercise is what the author calls a serenity mantra. When you are confronted with a problem, repeat these three statements.

1. “Let life unfold. I know there will be obstacles, but no dead ends.”
2. “I trust that my instincts and intuition will serve me.”
3. “Every problem has a solution. I realize I may have to wait for the answer.”

Step Five: Motivate Yourself

Your bad habits are not simply going to roll over and go away. It will not be that easy. You must challenge your reflexive thinking over a period of time. Never forget that your habits of control and insecurity have been ruining your life for a long time. You are going to need to maintain momentum to continue the battle over a period of time. Begin with small steps to experience small victories of success. As you build confidence, take bigger steps forward.

As you build more confidence in your new abilities, you will be developing the momentum to forge forward with a full head of

steam. Positive self-talk replaces negative reflexive thinking with empowering truth based thinking. But it will require more than just telling yourself positives, you have to believe it. The words alone will not be powerful enough. You will harness the motivation to change when you develop the attitude you are going to risk believing in yourself. The following are some self-talk phrases for combating your controlling language:

- **Yes, but...** “There is no but about it. Yes, period. *But* is just another word for self-doubt. I will not drown out positive thoughts with insecurity.”
- **If only...** “Hoping is hesitating. When did I ever become so powerless?”
- Instead of hoping to be more effective, I’m going to choose to be.”
- **I can’t...** “No more reflexive thinking. Who says I can’t. It only feels like I can’t. The truth is I can.”
- **I should...** “Who is running my life, anyway? It’s time I start figuring out what I want to do rather than what I should do.”
- **I have to...** “Who says? From now on it’s not weather I have to; it’s weather I want to.”
- **What if...** “There I go projecting negatives again. I don’t have to worry about what-ifs, I can handle what ever life throws at me.”
- **I’m not smart enough...** “Another excuse. Stop hiding behind fears and start trying.”
- **It’s too hard...** “Poor baby. So what if it’s hard? I can do whatever I set my mind to.”
- **Nothing ever turns out right for me...** “From now on it’s not what’s behind me but what’s in front of me. No more thinking like a failure.”

The only way to reclaim your power over your future is to take it. The motivation you bring is the belief you can change your life. What stopping you? The answer: nothing. There never has been.

Use Your Power

Change requires that you understand that no one can change you other than yourself. Change will require action, motivation, and true desire. Don't expect much until you are ready to accept full responsibility. All of your problems, whether they be anger, stress, unhappiness, ineffectiveness, loneliness, or depression, all need to be seen for what they are: habits.

Remember that all habits are learned, which means they can be overruled. The following are four ways to beat habits driven from insecurity:

1. Begin to take a lighter, less serious response to your challenges and struggles.
2. Call out the childlike connection to your reflexive thinking. Point out how foolish this would look to others if you said it out loud.
3. Inject conscious thought into struggling situations by using the previously learned steps to *separate, stop, and let go*.
4. Take the risk to win a few small battles to build confidence.

The solution to understanding your problems is to realize control is at the center of your struggles. When you are struggling ask yourself on simple question: "What am I trying to control?" Remember, controlling life is an illusion. Controlling your life is not possible and eventually the pursuit becomes the problem. Try becoming task-oriented rather than filling your head with a bunch of what-ifs. The moment you believe you can handle the situation is the moment your anxiety goes away.

Life is a challenge for everyone, so don't think you are alone. You are never going to be able to find a life without problems. So accept life for what it is and search for opportunities in every challenge. Your goal is to trust yourself, and build self-confidence and a belief you can handle anything life throws at you. Learn to accept those things which cannot be changed or you will never be free to move forward. The key to creating the life you want is simply the willingness to accept responsibility for it; responsibility for your thoughts, what you tell yourself, and what you listen to.

Action Review Points

1. Once you begin to acknowledge the power to transform your life comes from within you, self-coaching can teach you the responsibilities to change your life.
2. *Control* is an attempt to manage and manipulate life because you have come to distrust your natural, spontaneous capacity to handle life. *Habit* refers to specific control patterns that have become automatic for you in your everyday life. You can transform your life by understanding how these two simple words have the power to rob you of the life you desire. Everything you will need to have a happy successful life, you already possess. You simply have to allow yourself to believe it.
3. The frustrations and struggles that prevent you from having the life you want can all be traced to insecurity. Start by identifying one thing you feel insecure about. Now recognize how natural it feels, and how you identify with it as a part of your personality. Now try to understand that what you feel just isn't true about yourself. Remember no one is born insecure; it's something you learn.

4. Whenever you find yourself caught up worrying, ask yourself, “Do these thoughts serve me or hurt me?”
5. Every time you are struggling, ask yourself, “How are my thoughts and perceptions related to controlling my fears rather than living spontaneously and just letting the event unfold?”
6. Taking the time and effort to consciously question your reflexive thoughts separates healthy thinking from defensive and destructive thoughts. For example, ask yourself, “Is what I’m feeling fact or fiction?” This simple question has the power to consciously question habitual insecurity-driven thinking.
7. Think of your psychological approach to life as balancing two weights on a scale. When you take away from one side, it affects the other side. As you psychologically grow one tendency, the other weakens. When you keep adding to your shell of insulation you end up taking away (weakening) your ability to face your life’s challenges.
8. It is not whether you are secure or insecure; it’s to what extent you are. The extent of your security is a relative issue.
9. Perfectionists are often held back from living their life spontaneously for fear of making a mistake; the truth is you need all of your experiences to grow—positive and negative. Mistakes are not failures. They are challenges and opportunities to learn.

10. The most popular form of white-lying is the inability to say no. Being a habitual pleaser can become a negative form of control and can devastate the quality of your life. Pleasers feel the need to control a situation because their insecurity tells them the truth is too risky.
11. Learn to trust yourself. Learn to believe in yourself. Create a persona in your mind to consult when you struggle with doubt.
12. Start today to incorporate the five steps of self-talk and stop robbing your life with destructive thoughts.
 - Step 1: Build awareness of your reflexive thinking habits.
 - Step 2: Recognize if your inner voice is speaking fact or fiction.
 - Step 3: Stop listening to your fictional reflexive thinking. Reject it with an action image.
 - Step 4: Utilize self-talk to let go and start to trust yourself.
 - Step 5: Utilize self-talk to defeat your insecurity-driven habits. Time is your friend.
13. To move forward you must accept responsibility for your thoughts, what you tell yourself, and what you listen to.

Parenting with Love and Logic
By Foster Cline, MD, and Jim Fay
(NavPress new edition, 2006)

About the Book

If you want to raise kids who are self-confident, motivated, and ready for the real world, take advantage of this win-win approach to parenting. Your kids will win because they will learn responsibility and the logic of life by solving their own problems. You'll win because you'll establish healthy control without resorting to anger, threats, nagging, or exhausting power struggles.

Foster Cline, MD, is an internationally recognized psychiatrist. He is consultant to mental health organizations, parents' groups, and schools across North America. He specializes in working with difficult children. Jim Fay has thirty-one years of experience as an educator and school principal. He is recognized as one of America's top educational consultants.

Introduction

Responsibility is about making good choices. And making good choices is like any other activity—it must be learned. A teenager who makes the wrong choice is probably the same child who never was allowed to make decisions for himself. In the name of love, parents will do everything possible for their children. But love can get us into trouble. Many parents think love means their lives revolving around their children. The author calls them helicopter parents. They rescue the children from every crisis, stealing learning opportunities from them in the name of love. These parents hope to create the perfect childhood for their children, where they never have to face discomfort, disappointment, or struggle.

Then there are what the author calls drill sergeant parents. These parents are into power. They feel the more they bark orders, the more they control, the better the kids will be disciplined and the better they will act. The parents are constantly telling them what to do. Unfortunately these children are never given a chance to think for themselves. They have been trained by their parents to listen to voices outside of themselves. Unfortunately, when they get older they will do the same thing—but the voices will be those of their peers. These children will become followers, never having developed the confidence to listen to their own voices.

Love and logic teaches a consulting parenting style. Consultant parents help children to feel in control by giving them a choice. They step back and let real world consequences do the teaching. They ask their children questions and offer options within limits. This puts the burden of decision-making on the child's shoulders. This approach helps children understand that they are responsible for their actions and will suffer reasonable consequences. If you do not allow children to make bad choices and fail, you cannot give children the opportunity to choose success.

You cannot tell children to be responsible. Caring and loving a child does not equate to protecting them from their consequences. The key to raising responsible children is giving them the opportunity to be responsible. Help children understand they can solve their own problems. Be sympathetic to and understanding of their problems, but let them solve their problems themselves. By giving children the opportunity to learn responsibility, you grow their self-esteem.

Responsible Children Feel Good about Themselves

Many parents do not give their children the opportunity to build a positive self-concept. Children will think they can become whatever they think you think they can become.

Unfortunately many of the messages we send our children have covert negative meanings. Whenever we order our children to be quiet, stop arguing, or turn off the television, we are sending them messages that undermine their self-concept. Why?

Because when you give children orders you are saying;

1. You have to be told what to do by a voice outside your head.
2. You can't figure out the answer for yourself.
3. You don't take suggestions.

The following are three messages necessary to building a child's self-concept.

1. **I am loved.** Parents must give love with no strings attached. Love for a child should never be granted conditionally. Love must be given regardless of accomplishments. Kids can't build a positive self-concept until we prove to them, without doubt, that they are good enough just the way they are. Effective parents tell their children their okay with their covert and overt messages. When love is combined with smiles, hugs, and words of recognition, a tight bond will be created between child and parent.
2. **I have the skills I need to make it.** Parents must send encouraging messages to their children that they have the necessary skills for their age to do well. Children learn how to do things by watching their parents; so the parent's modeling is very important. Make sure to model work being fun as you work alongside your child. Whenever a child is learning a new task, never pass judgment on the work but rather express how much fun it is to get the job done. Focus the child's attention on the learning that is taking place and not the quality of the outcome.

3. **I am capable of taking control of my life.** When you allow children to make decisions for themselves and experience the consequences of poor decisions, they feel capable of thinking for themselves. When they develop the confidence to make decisions for themselves, they begin to build the confidence they need to feel capable of taking control of their life.
4. **I can solve problems.** A positive self-esteem or self-belief is developed by accomplishing difficult tasks. The child will get the most out of the process when they are allowed to make their own decisions and mistakes. It is best for the parents to offer encouragement during the process but withhold praise of the outcome. Children can make their own decision regarding the goodness of the project.
5. **I can relate to people.** Children learn interpersonal relationships and strong self-esteem values from what their parents model. The key to parental modeling is to always model healthy, adult behavior and take good care of yourself. When the parent is happy the child is happy. Wise parents put themselves first and model the importance of taking care of themselves before others.

Mistakes Are Learning Opportunities

Parents who get in the middle of their child's problems rob them of a chance to learn and grow in responsibility. When you tell children what to do, sometimes adding anger to the message, you give the child the message they cannot think for themselves. When anger is present, they get swept up in the power of the anger rather than learning a lesson. Children who deal with their own problems and find their own solutions will feel much better about themselves. It is best to allow the consequences of their decisions to do the teaching. On the other

hand, when their problem drifts into your personal domain, it becomes a problem for the child. To model strong adult self-esteem, you must not let others abuse your rights, including your children.

The basic rule of love and logic is as follows: Parents must set firm limits using enforceable statements without anger, lecturing, or threats. The statements are enforceable because they deal with how you will respond. When the child causes a problem, you show sadness through your empathy for the child dilemma and then lovingly give the problem and the consequences to the child.

The use of an “enforceable statement” is best done by giving the child choices. The choices must be reasonable relative to the situation and you must be able and willing to enforce them. For example, let’s say a child is acting inappropriately at home and annoying you in your space. Do not tell the child how to act, but do point out their behavior is annoying you and if they want to continue the annoying behavior they will have to move into their own room. You give them the choice of stopping the behavior and staying where they are or going to their room. If they continue the annoying behavior without going to their room, you give them another choice such as, “Would you like to walk to your room right now or do you want me to carry you?”

When a child makes a poor decision, it is important to let the child take ownership of the problem and the consequences while at the same time showing sadness and loving understanding for the consequence of their poor decision. For example, in the above situation, let’s say you were forced to act upon your statement of choices and had to carry your child into their bedroom where they had to remain until a timer went off. As you place your child in their room and set their timer for how long they must stay in their room, you should express loving understanding for the consequence of their poor

decision. If pleading and arguing by the child is initiated, you return to one-liner, brain-dead statements such as, “I love you too much to argue with you,” or, “Nice try, I know just how you feel, sorry you made a poor decision.”

Many times the learning consequence cannot be delivered right away. Don’t be concerned—children have a good memory and a delayed consequence will be just as effective as an immediate or naturally occurring consequence. Some examples will follow below. The secret is to always keep the problem in the kid’s court and to model taking care of yourself as well as appropriate adult behavior. Always remember, the best solution to any problem lies within the skin of the person who owns the problem. The more you step into your children’s problems, the more you cater to satisfying your own emotions rather than to the child’s needs to learn.

Setting Limits with Thinking Words

If you are not going to order your children around, how will you talk to them? Strong statements can give guidance, set limits, and still offer choices. By giving choices, you force the thinking back upon the child. Children will automatically resist a command. When you tell them what to do they see it as a loss of control. Anytime you usurp control away from them, the child will exhibit behavior to regain control. A child’s motivation and beliefs come from a voice inside their own heads. They will learn better from what they tell themselves versus what you tell them. So instead of using fighting, command-oriented words when you talk to your children, use thinking words. When you formulate your statements, ask questions and establish limits by offering choices. For example:

Fighting words: Get dressed now; we are leaving in ten minutes.

Thinking words: We are leaving in ten minutes. Would you rather get dressed now in your bedroom or get dressed in the car?

Fighting words: Be quiet. I am trying to watch this television program.

Thinking words: I am watching a television program. Would you rather play quietly in this room with me or be noisy in your bedroom?

When you use fighting words you are calling your kids to battle; fighting words will invite disobedience from your children. Fighting words include the following three types of commands.

1. Telling children what to do.
2. Telling children what we will not allow.
3. Telling children what we will not do for them.

Instead, steer your statements away from commands by using enforceable thinking words that offer a choice. When children are too busy thinking about their options they have little chance to fight. For example, tell your children:

1. What you will allow.
2. What you will do.
3. What you will provide.

Whenever possible, compose statements with choices that relate to the real world. Also get in the habit of saying yes instead of no. For example, you are shopping and your child asks for a toy and you reply, “Yes, if anyone deserves a new toy it’s you. Why don’t you buy it.” Of course the child will reply that they don’t have any money in which case you reply, “Sorry about that, but that’s the way the world works for me, too. I work, get a paycheck, pay the bills, and most often I have the same problem—not enough money to buy what I want.”

Most children will have their own testing routine. It is important for the parents to stand firm. If you give in you

demolish the learning capability of the consequences. If you get angry you allow them to redirect anger back at you, destroying any learning opportunity. If you blast them with an “I told you so,” you will again undermine the learning potential.

Gaining Control through Choices

Many parents don’t feel they are doing a good job of parenting unless the children do exactly as they are told. We want children to do what we want them to do, when we want them to do it. Before you know it, you and your child will be locked in power struggles for control.

Love and logic parents enforce limits through thinking questions that offer a choice. The amount of control allotted in thinking questions should diminish as the child gets older. For example, to a five year old, a mom might say, “Do you want more food or have you had enough?” A twelve year old may be able to make all of her own decisions regarding how she spends her allowance, while an eighteen year old is making most decisions on nearly every aspect of his or her life. For younger children, it is important to focus on establishing parental control only on the battles where you can win. For example, you cannot control what or how much food they eat but you can offer choices and set limits on when they will eat. You cannot make them get dressed but you can control when the car is leaving. You cannot control what comes out of their mouth but you can control not having them in your presence. You cannot control when they do their chores but you can control other events that might not occur if the chores are incomplete. You cannot control when they go to sleep, but you can control what time they go to their room. The secret is to give away the control you don’t need and establish limits through choices you can control.

Choices work because you force children to think. The child has options to ponder, and various courses of action to consider. They must make a decision. Choices work because they give children an opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them. The natural consequence offers the punishment rather than the parent. The children get angry at themselves for making the wrong choice rather than getting angry at the parent. Offering choices allows the child to realize the parent trusts their own ability to make a decision, which in turn builds self-confidence and a stronger relationship to the parent.

Children learn best from experiencing the consequence—not hearing about it. For example, you ask your son nicely to pick up his room any time today before he goes to bed. When you witness the room not cleaned up at bedtime you can calmly say, “You did not make a wise decision about ignoring my request to clean your room.” The next day when your son asks you nicely to drive him over to a friend’s house, you can respond, “I appreciate you asking me nicely for what you want, but yesterday you taught me that asking you nicely to pick up your room doesn’t get the job done. Why don’t you give that decision you made some thought and maybe next time I will cooperate with your requests when you start cooperating with me.”

A few more rules. First, never let your children see you sweat. Kids will take advantage of any parent who shows signs of difficulty with setting limits, aggravation, or anger. From a kid’s point of view, seeing a parent lose control or become frustrated and angry is the ultimate power trip. Second, relinquish any temptation to prod the child to make the right decision. You have given him a choice—it’s his turn to think through his own decision. Third, when it’s time for the consequence to be experienced, keep your mouth shut and let the consequence do the teaching.

When composing your choices, think—gain control by relinquishing control. For example, you have a child in a restaurant who is playing with his food rather than eating. You don't need to control if he eats or not; whether the child leaves the restaurant hungry or not hungry is the child's problem. You only need to control when the car is leaving. With a smile on your face, say, "The car will be leaving in ten minutes. It's no problem if you do not eat—you simply need to decide if you want to leave the restaurant hungry or not hungry. We will not be eating again until dinnertime." Now it's time for you to sit back, relax, say nothing, and enjoy the next ten minutes. This is an example of relinquishing any emotional involvement and control while placing the monkey on the kid's back. Assuming the child didn't eat, becomes hungry, and asks for food before dinner time, this is your opportunity to let the natural consequence and learning pay off. Express sincere understanding and compassion when you say, "I'm sorry you are hungry. I would be hungry too if I didn't eat lunch. I will make you an extra big dinner tonight."

The following are some guidelines for composing your choices:

1. Always select choices you like and can live with.
2. Never give a choice you are not willing to let the child experience the consequence of that choice.
3. Never give choices when the child is in danger.
4. Never give more than two choices, but make sure the child understands there is an implied third choice—if he cannot decide, you will decide for him.
5. Your delivery needs to be calm and presented with the following phrases:
 - You're welcome to _____
or _____.
 - Feel free to _____ or _____.
 - Would you rather _____
or _____?

- What would be best for you _____
or _____?

Consequences with Empathy

Learning how to make decisions and handle power and control are essential if children are to develop into self-confident leaders. Wise parents allow both natural and imposed consequences to do the teaching while being empathetic to the child. The real world operates on consequences. When you don't make your car payment, they don't take television privileges away for one week—they take your car. When a parent punishes a child for poor behavior, you provide the child with an escape from a consequence tied to his decision and ultimate action. The child doesn't have to think. There is no learning taking place; only blame and anger directed at the parent for the punishment. Consequences tied to decision-based actions leave the child thinking very hard about their choices, behavior, and responsibilities. Consequences tied to decision-based actions lead to self-examination and thought. When children are allowed to learn from the consequences of their own decisions, they learn how to point the finger at themselves for their pain.

Consequences don't have to be immediate. A consequence that occurs naturally is best, but many times you may need to impose a consequence when the child's actions do not lend themselves to a natural consequence. For example, when a child refuses to finish his chores before a specified time, there is no natural consequence for his actions. There are three rules for imposed consequences to be effective: (1) They must be enforceable; (2) they must fit the crime; and (3) they must be communicated firmly. When these consequences are imposed without threats or anger and they are presented in a way that logically connects the behavior to the consequence, they are effective learning tools.

Consider the following example: Your son comes home late

from playing with the neighborhood boys and, as a result, you were worried about him. A suitable and enforceable consequence would be imposed the next time he asks to go out and play. The parent could say, “Remember the last time you went out and played, and you didn’t come home on time? I do not want to worry today so I think it’s best for you to play inside by yourself today. Let’s talk about coming home on time the next time you ask to go out and play.” By allowing the child to suffer a consequence directly related to the offense, the child is forced to think about and learn from his action of not coming home on time.

When there is not a natural consequence to your child’s poor decisions, you can use the following phrases to give yourself time to think of a delayed consequence:

- I’m not sure what to do right now. I will let you know.
- I’m not sure how to react to that. I’ll have to give it some thought.
- I’ve never faced this situation before so I’ll have to give it some thought. I’ll get back to you on it.

When our kids make a mistake and suffer a consequence, it is important to express our sadness to them. When you explain to them what they did wrong and why things didn’t work out, you distract them from their own thinking and the learning lesson of the consequence. By expressing sadness and loving empathy, you place the relationship between you and your child at the forefront. When they mess up, there is only one message from the parent that must be consistent: telling them they are loved, talented and capable. For example, let’s say your twelve-year-old daughter comes home from school with a D on her history exam. She has already suffered the consequence handed out by her teacher. It’s the parents’ job to balance the consequence with loving empathy. You could say, “It must be difficult to face your teacher when you didn’t prepare for the exam. I’m sorry, you must feel awful.” When

you have nothing more to say, place the problem back on the child's shoulders by asking a question. For example, "What are you going to do to make things better for yourself?" When the parent shows sadness rather than anger, the child has no one to direct their anger at except themselves. In contrast, when the parent shows anger in conjunction with punishment, it transfers the child's anger off of themselves and back at the parent. Demonstrating empathy about the consequence allows parents to show love; it allows the consequence to do the teaching.

The following are some statements parents can use to let their children know how much they love them and how badly you feel about the problems they face as a result of their decision. Use a sincere, loving tone of voice to communicate the message you want to convey.

- Really? I know you and I'm sure you will come up with something.
- That's terrible. How are you going to handle it?
- Oh no. You must feel awful. What can you do?
- That's an interesting way of looking at it. Let me know how that turns out for you.
- Wow, what a mess. Let me know what solutions you come up with.
- Hope things go better for you.
- If anyone can learn from this mistake, it's you.
- With a little more thinking, you'll probably come up with the right answers.

Getting Started

This may all seem overwhelming to you as there is a lot to remember. You must separate yourself from the problem, use thinking words, offer choices, deliver empathy and allow consequences to do the teaching. To become successful will require practice, practice, and more practice. The author recommends you pick one thing that bothers you the most with

your child's behavior and start there. Don't initiate the principals taught here until you have first rehearsed it. Once you have built some confidence, tackle another behavior problem. Remember, the parents must always lead with proper modeling. If you want your children to have self-control, you must model it in front of them. If you want your children to be responsible, you must model responsible adult behavior when you are dealing with them. If you want your children to treat you and speak to you with respect, you must treat them and speak to them with respect.

Common Disciplinary Problems and How to Deal with Them

Allowances—The first rule is to not pay children to do their household chores. Being paid for chores robs them of their genuine goodness and dignity to contribute their fair share of the workload for the family. Start paying a weekly allowance when the child is five or six years old. Give it to them the same time each week inside an envelope with a note stating what it is for (i.e., \$5 lunch money, \$5 allowance) and a statement saying, "Because I love you. Spend it wisely and make it last." Let the consequences of the real world do the teaching. Let your children go through their own economic depressions. When they waste money, they will have none when they need it. But just like the real world, when it's gone, it's gone. No more allowance until next week. It's not recommended to ever insist a child save their money, however, they may discover on their own why it's a good idea to tuck money away for a rainy day. When a child wastes their allowance and they do not have the funds to pay for something which is their responsibility, you resort to your empathetic reply, "Oh no, that's really awful. What are you going to do?" The consequence will do the teaching.

Bedtime—Going to sleep is another one of those events you cannot control. Like many other control issues, the best solution is to give up control and give it to the child. For

example, explain to your child you need to go to bed at 10 p.m. to get eight hours sleep and you require two hours of alone time before you got to bed. Tell your child, “That means you need to be in your bedroom with your door closed by 8 p.m. Regardless of when you decide to go to sleep, you must get up at 6:30 a.m. to be on time for school.” Let the natural consequence of lack of sleep be your teacher. If the child is cranky and not acting appropriately due to lack of sleep, it will become an option for you to have the child remove himself from the family space and move into his room.

Bossiness—Parents who order their kids around end up with children who want to order others around. When children get bossy, diffuse the situation by not putting any emotion into it. Remember, you are the adult role model. Respond by smiling and saying something like this, “Nice try, Eddie. What usually happens when you get bossy with people? Does it help or hurt your cause? But please don’t answer the question right now; give it some thought for a moment.” Then simply walk away.

Chores—All family members need to develop an attitude of pitching in to help with family household chores. At the age of five or six children become responsible enough to start doing some elementary chores. At this age it is important to carry on a dialogue that makes chores fun. By third grade children are old enough to start taking on some helpful responsibilities. The authors suggests making a list of all chores and letting the kids have input as to how the jobs are going to be divided up. The challenge is going to be getting the chores done on time. It will be important for the parents to establish time boundaries by saying phrases such as, “By dinner time...” or, “By the time we go to the baseball game...” Of course if the chore is not finished on time, you must wait for the appropriate time to enforce an imposed consequence.

Church—Kid learn early in life that parents cannot control what to think or believe. So the important thing to remember

is parental demands will result in rebellion and disobedience. When you want to influence, proper modeling will always get the best results. Speak positively about going to church by using phrases like, “I really enjoy church; I enjoy seeing my friends and I always get a welcoming lift of encouraging words and feelings.”

Fostering creativity—Creativity is encouraged by doing in conjunction with curiosity. Make sure your children spend more time doing rather than engaging in passive activities such as watching television. Search for your child’s strength zones and share time doing activities with them in those areas. Share excitement about new discoveries; work together to figure out how things work. Encourage curiosity and creativity.

Dealing with crises—We are referring to drugs, pregnancy, death, injuries, divorce, etc. Diffuse the crisis by realizing something doesn’t have to be done right now. The following four thoughts will help in dealing with any crisis.

- A crisis is most often temporary in nature.
- No crisis must be dealt with immediately.
- Ask yourself, what is the worst possible outcome?
- Keep the monkey on the back of the person responsible for the problem.

Discipline rules—Abide by the following general guidelines.

- Avoid physical tussles.
- Never give orders.
- Tell your child what you wish he or she would do.
- Give complete messages that tell the child why you feel that way. For example, “I would appreciate you going to your room now so I can relax in quiet for a few moments.”
- Thank the child for their cooperation in advance of making a request.
- Do not try to change behavior. Rather, change the location of the child.

- When things are done right, show emotion, excitement. When things are done poorly, show no emotions.
- When a natural consequence does not exist, delay the consequence and take time to recruit ideas.
- Use firmness rather than anger.

Discipline in public—Kids are born smart; they know their place to triumph over parents is in public places. Children who misbehave in public places must be disciplined. You may need the help of friends or family members to come and get the child so they can be returned to their room. Many times taking the child to the car may be enough.

Eating and table manners—Problems with eating can be handled with good parent modeling and allowing the child to make choices. Children should always be allowed to decide how much they are going to eat. Let them make the decision by asking, “Have you had enough to make it to the next meal?” Regarding table manners, if you can’t change the behavior, change the location. With older children, simply allow them to eat somewhere else, but make sure it is unappealing, like the laundry room. With younger children, when behavior reaches an unacceptable point, calmly announce that the meal is over. If the child gets upset, that is okay.

Entitlements—Children who have been spoiled with entitlements will arrive at college not knowing how to attain their desired lifestyle without demanding it be provided by their parents. Wise parents do three things.

1. Let children learn how to get what they want through their own personal effort and struggles. For more expensive needs, use the “matching funds” approach.
2. Expect children to do their fair share of the household chores.

3. Let children make choices and suffer the consequences of their decisions.

Fighting—The thing to remember about your children's squabbles is to butt out of them. If the bickering starts to invade your space, ask the children to move to a different room. Once the tempers have calmed down, it becomes the parent's role to become the counselor. Help your child to identify their feelings and explore different ways of handling them.

Friends—One of the biggest mistakes parents can make is getting into control battles over who their friends are. It sends a message they cannot do their own thinking. But it is your right to tell them what you think. Children cannot rebel against your thoughts and opinions. Many times your children see good in others that the parents simply cannot see without spending more time with them. When you get to know your kid's friends, you learn more about your kids, too.

Getting ready for school—First decide which jobs belong to the child. For example, setting the alarm, selecting clothes, getting dressed, preparing breakfast, eating breakfast, etc. Second, stay out of the reminder business. Third, don't rescue your child. Fourth, replace anger with sadness and empathy for the consequences the child will suffer at school. For example, say, "I'm sorry you are going to have a problem at school. I hope you can work it out."

Gifts—If your child shows little appreciation for gifts, they are showing you the signs of an entitled brat. Your response should be to give less. Be creative about opening gifts; spread holiday gifts out over a few days so they only open one gift per day. Don't buy into the demands of a child's wants. It's fine to say, "I don't feel right about buying these things for you but I can understand you wanting it. You can buy it with your own money if you would like it." To teach the value of gift giving, model your enthusiasm and joy for giving gifts to others. In

order for gift giving to be of value to a child they must spend their own money.

Grades—Keep the monkey on the child's back. It is their problem to solve. Show them you care. Be unemotional about negative grades and become emotionally enthusiastic over good grades. In reality the poor grade is not the problem—the reason for the poor grade is the problem. When you discuss poor grades do it in an unemotional but caring manner. For example, “What are your thoughts about your grade in science?” or, “What are your plans for improving your grade in math?”

Homework—Getting homework done is your child's problem. There is nothing wrong with helping your child do homework as long as they ask for help and it is profitable to the child. The parents' responsibility is to provide a good workplace for the child to study. The parent should allow the child to choose the time, place, and desire to do their homework. Whether they study or not is their business. The parents can provide a good role model by engaging in positive “work before play” language and work ethics.

The Internet—Your goal is to raise children that are in control of their own behavior; children that listen to their own inner voice. Always empower children to be a participant in the decision making process. The happiest children rely on internal controls and self-discipline. For example, let's say you are considering placing filters on your child's computer. Explain to the child why filters are used, at home and at the office. Get the child involved in deciding what types of filters will be used.

Honesty—When you question a child's honesty, always make them do the thinking. Some appropriate phrases sound like this: “Do you think I believe you right now or do you think I don't believe you?” or, “I don't believe you.” You are not calling

them a liar but simply stating your frame of mind. When kids tell the truth, respond with support thanking them for their honesty. Children will always learn more about honesty from your actions and language than your commands.

Nasty looks and body language—Negative body language and looks are not a problem for the parent, assuming you do not acknowledge it. Say what you want to say and walk away. Another approach is to say, “It looks like things are not going well for you right now. When you can put your thoughts into words, come and talk to me. I will be glad to listen.” Then walk away.

Peer pressure—Peer pressure is listening to the voices of your peers rather than listening to your own inner voice. Parents teach children to listen to voices outside their own head while they are young; parents do this when they teach their children to listen to the strong parental voice outside their own head. The more parents ask their children questions, the more we let them make decisions, the more we discuss issues using thinking words, the more they will listen to the voice inside their own head. Second, when children hit eleven or twelve, teach them how to say yes to their friends while at the same time saying no. For example, “I would really like to do something with you, but I would really like it to be something other than smoking.” It can also be helpful to tell your children to use you, the parent, as the fall guy.

Picking up belongings—Until the children are at least six years old, picking up toys is a community project. You pick up one toy and the child picks up one toy. When children leave toys lying around their own room, it should not be a big concern of the parents; however, when toys or belongings are left lying around in the family’s space it becomes the responsibility of the child to put them away.

Keeping their room clean—When the children are small, help clean the room together, talking all the while about how much fun it is to have an organized room. Once the child becomes eight or nine years old, room organization becomes the child's responsibility. This is a battle you can win. Be sure to let the child decide when to clean his room. It is much better to set a time by which it must be done.

Sending a child to their room—When you cannot change a child's behavior, change their location. Once you send a child to their room, they should go there under their own power; they should also stay there until they are told they can come out to join you. You can ask them if they would like to stay in their room with the door open or closed, the door locked or left unlocked. When they rejoin the family, give them a big hug for their accomplishments.

Sassing and disrespect—Kids thrive on parental emotion. When your child sasses you, do not give them an emotional response to feed upon. Rather than responding to their disrespect, get them out of your sight and earshot. As always, give them a choice. Calmly and politely say, "Would you like to go to your room or to the basement? When you can talk to me as politely as I am talking to you right now, you can come back and join us." If the child continues to talk, use the broken record routine and continue to repeat your previous statement. When the child's temper has calmed down try to figure out the reason for the child being disrespectful. Listen without being defensive or judgmental. After the discussion, thank your child for sharing. Your goal is to keep them thinking about their response rather than yours. Hopefully they will find better words in the future when they become upset.

Sports—Participation in organized sports is wonderful as long as everyone stays focused on the positives of character building, working together, and staying fit. The competition to win and be the best should be secondary. Let the kids choose

the sport they want to play and enjoy. Let the child own the sport.

Swearing and crude language—when inappropriate language comes out of your child’s mouth, say without anger, “I’ll be happy to talk to you when you can speak with clean and mature language.” Then walk away. When the child has calmed down, discuss the reasons for using poor language. You can take the low self-esteem route, the lack of intellect path, or the limited vocabulary reason. Then drop the issue.

Teacher conferences—Children act differently in school than at home. When you approach your child’s teacher, your mission should be to collect information. Parents who get the best information use the word describe. It is up to your children to handle their own school problems. The parent’s role is one of a counselor.

Telephone interruptions—When your children interrupt you when you are on the phone, handle it on a businesslike way. You are not chained to the phone; you can put it down to deal with your child. Say to your caller, “John, can you hold one moment please while I deal with my five year old.” Tell your child, “Sweetheart, you need to be quiet and not talk to me if you are going to stay in this room or you can go to your room while I am on the phone. You decide, thank you.” If the child does not choose one of the options you have offered, tell your caller you will call him right back as soon as you have dealt with your child.

Television watching—The most important learn-by-doing years are before the child learns how to ride a bike. Keep television to a minimum in these developmental years. Parental modeling is again the key. Most kids would prefer to do something with someone they love or friends. Keep your kids busy with family, friends, hobbies, and sports.

Temper tantrums—Have you ever seen a child throw a temper tantrum when they are alone in their bedroom? Kids will only throw a temper tantrum when they have an audience and they get results. The important thing is not to show any emotion or lose your composure. You cannot control the tantrum but you can control the location. Say, “Where would you like to have the tantrum—in the basement or your room?”

Passing on values—Parenting is all about passing on our values to our children. There are several ways parents can pass values on to their children. First is by what kids see you doing. When they see you being kind and friendly to others, they learn to treat others the same way. Second is what they experience when they relate to you. Third is what they hear you say when you talk to others. Fourth is the way in which you treat them. Treating our children with respect teaches them to do likewise to others. Kids have a mind of their own. Kids will not accept your lectures but they will accept your actions and words to others. Kids values come from what they see and hear.

Whining and complaining—When the child is calm, have a discussion with the child about proper communication. Explain that in order for you to have a conversation with him he must talk nicely, in the same tone of voice that you’re using. Only then will you talk to him and give him an answer. Once you have had this discussion, whenever the child whines, simply reply by saying, “When you can talk to me in a voice that sounds normal like mine, I will be glad to speak to you.”

Action Review Points

1. Do the following to raise responsible children who feel good about themselves:
 - Give love unconditionally.
 - Send a message to the child they have the skills to make it.
 - Allow children to make decisions so they feel in control of their life.
 - Allow children to learn from their mistakes during the process of completing a task. Let them judge the success of the task.
 - Model strong, self-confident behavior.
2. Children who deal with their own problems and find their own solutions will feel much better about themselves.
3. Set limits by using statements that offer choices. By giving choices you force the thinking back upon the child.
4. Use thinking words rather than fighting words.
5. Your delivery must always be calm and unemotional.
6. Do not prod the child into making the right decision.
7. Children learn best from experiencing the consequence, not hearing about it. When it's time for the consequence to be experienced, keep your mouth shut and let the consequence do the teaching.
8. Consequences don't have to be immediate. They can be imposed at a later date.

9. There are three rules for imposed consequences to be effective: (1) They must be enforceable, (2) they must fit the crime, and (3) they must be communicated firmly.
10. When our kids make a mistake and suffer a consequence, it is important to express your sadness to them. Demonstrating empathy about the consequence allows parents to show love; it allows the consequence to do the teaching.

THE SECRET: THE POWER

By Rhonda Byrne
(Atria Books, 2010)

About the Book

The life of your dreams has always been closer to you than you realize, because the power of love is inside you. To create anything, to change anything, all it takes is just one thing: the power of love. Rhonda Byrne says life is so much easier than you think it is, and as you come to understand the way life works and the power you have inside you, you will experience the magic of life in its fullness—and then you will have an amazing life.

“Love and I have a thing going on and it is the most magical and exciting relationship anyone can ever have,” she says. When you give the power of love, it will come back to you. Rhonda Byrne began her journey with *The Secret*, a film viewed by millions across the world. She has followed with books in forty-six languages revealing the single greatest force in the universe. Rhonda shows you how the power of love gives you everything you want.

The Force of Love

Everything you want to be or do comes from love. Without the love for doing something or being someone, there would not be any positive reason to get out of bed in the morning. It is the positive force of love that inspires you and gives you the desire to do things. Every time you experience good feelings in your life, you harness love’s positive force. Every time you experience negative feelings, it is because you didn’t love. Love is more than just a feeling; it is a positive force. The power to live an amazing life is inside you. Every person who has a great life has used the power of love to achieve it.

To harness the positive force of love you must understand the law of attraction. The law of attraction is the force that attracts bees to flowers; it attracts all the animals, birds, and fish of its own species together to multiply. The law of attraction draws people to other people. It draws people to form cities where they share common interests. It's the force that attracts one person to become a doctor and another a farmer. The law of attraction draws you to do your favorite things and travel to your favorite places.

The law of attraction says whatever you give out, you get back. Give positively and you receive positive feelings in return. Give negativity and you receive negativity. How do you give positivity or negativity? You have positive thoughts that you give out through positive feelings. Your negative thoughts transfer to giving out negative feelings. During any moment you will give out positive or negative thoughts through your feelings. You will receive in return what you have given out. Life just doesn't happen to you. You receive everything in your life based on what you have given out.

You are like a magnet. What you give, you receive. The law of attraction gives you every thing in your life based on what you give out. So whatever you think and feel creates everything that happens to you.

“Give and it will be given to you... for by your
standard of measure it will be measured to you
in return.”

—Jesus, Luke 6:38

“Love is the fulfilling of the law.”

—St. Paul, Romans 13:10

But this means that you can improve the joy in your life simply by changing your thoughts—start thinking about what you love. Give out positive thoughts and feelings, and you will

change your life. Your thoughts will become your words and actions, which will be either positive or negative.

Your words and actions will be positive when your thoughts are about what you love. Don't make the mistake of talking about what you don't love more than what you do love; it only gives more power to negative thoughts. People who have great lives focus on what they love; it shows in their words and actions and what is returned to them. Talk about your great relationships and how much they add to your life. Talk about the wonderful opportunities you have at work. Talk about what you loved about your day. Talk about how great you feel when you walk through your organized garage. Talk about the savings plan you want to build. Talk about all of the things you love about your life.

You have an unlimited ability to bring everything that's good in life to you because you have an unlimited ability to think and talk about what you love. You have the power to improve your life by what you think and say.

Everything Is About How You Feel

You are a feeling being. You perceive everything through your skin, taste, what you see, hear and smell. Your thoughts and words have no power by themselves. Your thoughts and words only have power through your feelings. Just like your thoughts and words, your feelings can be positive or negative.

All good feelings will come from words and actions that arise from love. All negative feelings will come from thoughts and words that arise from lack of love. The lower you feel, the more negativity you will give out, and therefore, you will receive more negativity in return. When you feel good, your words and actions will also be good; by feeling good you will be giving love, which will be returned to you. Understand that life isn't happening to you; life is responding to you. You are

the creator of your life. You write your life story every day by what you give out.

Whatever you want in life, you want because you love it. Pursuing what you love makes you feel good. When you feel good, your actions and words will be positive and your good feelings will be returned to you. The most motivating power in your life is pursuing what makes you feel good. Every decision you make is in relation to your feelings. Saying you will be happy when, for instance, you have that new house, the kids are in college, you get that promotion, you find the perfect mate, all defy the law of attraction. You must be happy first. You must give happiness before you can receive what will make you happy or what you want and love.

You must understand you are in command of generating good feelings by focusing your thoughts on what you love. When you generate good feelings, you will attract people on the same frequency. You are like a magnet; you will receive what you feel. If you are enthusiastic, you will attract enthusiastic people, situations and events. If you are feeling low, you will attract negative people, situations, and events.

The goal is to take charge of your feelings rather than allowing your feelings to become reactions or responses to what is happening to you. Once you are effective at thinking positive thoughts about what you love more often than negative thoughts about what you don't love, you will reach the tipping point and give more love than negativity. Every day you control the direction in which you will tip—you are the one who will determine what your day will be like. Your thoughts determine what you are feeling and giving. You will receive during the day exactly what you have given out.

Imagine Your Best Possible Life

Your life has become what you imagined it to be. Successful people who have imagined the best have received the best. Unfortunately, many people imagine the worst, and they live in fear and think about all of the things that can go wrong. You have to stop putting limits on your life and push your imagination to its unlimited potential. You have to imagine the best of what you want. Individuals who have a great life can feel the love of what they want more than other people. But those who struggle focus their imagination on what they don't love and don't want; they feel the negativity of their imaginations. Understand that your desire is the love of what you want. Desire is love. You can create what you desire with your imagination when you focus on what you love. If you love what you desire with all of your heart, you will receive what you love.

When you give love through your good feelings, you create a positive magnetic field that surrounds you. Every time you give love through your feelings, words, or actions you add more power to your magnetic field. The more love that is felt by others in your magnetic field, the more you will attract the things you love. When you are feeling bad, your magnetic field will give off negativity. When you recognize you are feeling low, understand that the bad feelings are due to a lack of thinking about what you love. Your glass is empty of loving thoughts. Continuing to focus your thoughts on your bad feelings will only add more power to them and increase the negativity you will give out. You can change your feelings as soon as you start focusing your thoughts on what you love; you must fill up your empty glass with love.

Everything in life is presented to you for you to choose what you want to love and what you want to dismiss. Your destiny is in your hands. It is not a matter of chance but a matter of choice.

Life is not happening to you: It is following you. It follows you by what you give out through your thoughts and feelings. When you feel good about another person's abilities or accomplishments, you are bringing those qualities to yourself. When you judge another person, feel envious or jealous, you bring negativity to yourself and push the good things you want away. Give love and appreciation to another person and you give it to yourself. Give judgment and criticism and you give it to yourself. Simply turn away from the things you don't love without giving them feelings and say yes to the things you love and want for yourself. There is only one person affected by the law of attraction: you. Whatever you feel about anyone else, you are bringing to yourself.

The Power of Beliefs

“To believe in the things you can see and touch
is no belief at all; but to believe in the unseen is
a triumph and blessing.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Your beliefs, whether they are true or not, form your world. What you believe and feel to be true become your life because what you give out is what will be returned to you. You may believe the real world is what you see and believe to be true, but in fact most things you believe about yourself and the world are not true.

What is important to understand is that you are an unlimited being. The world and the universe are unlimited. There are all kinds of possibilities you cannot see. Your beliefs will determine the outcome of your life. Fortunately, you have the power to shape an unlimited future for yourself by freeing yourself from your limited realities.

Don't ever listen to anyone who says your life is limited in any way. Don't listen to anyone who says you cannot do what you

love and want. Don't listen to anyone who says you are not as worthy as any being on Earth. You can be whomever you want. You can do and have whatever you want. Imagine what you love, and you will give off good feelings. The force of love will return to you the people, circumstances, and life that you want and love.

Let go of anything you do not like in your past or present. When you keep playing the pictures over in your mind of the things you don't love about yourself or your life, you are giving more detail and power to your memories. You continue to be a victim of your thoughts. Instead, fill up your mind with thoughts about what you love and you will find the anger, resentment, jealousy, guilt, and negative feelings will leave you.

“Everything is possible for the person who believes.”
Jesus, Mark 9:23

The Keys to Your Power

“Your most precious, valued possessions and
your greatest powers are invisible and
intangible. No one can take them from you. You
will receive abundance for your giving.”
—W. Clement Stone

There is no limit to the opportunities that are available to fill your life because there is no limit to the amount of love you can feel inside you. You can love more than you have ever imagined. When you fall in love with life, every limitation will disappear; what you love will pour into your life.

Look for the things you love in life everyday. Your favorite café, your favorite music, the beauty of the clouds, what you love about the people with whom you come into contact. Talk about the things you love. If you need to create good feelings,

go through your mental list of everything you adore. It's easy to go about your everyday life in a trance and miss the things you love. You have to be alert and make a conscious effort to be aware of the things you love.

One way to improve your awareness is to ask yourself questions. Your mind cannot wander when you are busy asking it questions to answer. For example, "What do I see that I love?" When you learn how to control your mind by asking it questions, you become the driver; you take charge of your thoughts, feelings and happiness.

Gratitude

Gratitude is one of the greatest expressions of love. Gratitude begins simply by saying thank you. When anything good happens to you, say thank you. Express gratitude for your health, your home, your job, the roads you drive on, the plumbing and electricity that make your life much easier. Express gratitude to others with all of your heart, and everything you want will be returned to you. Give thanks to your magnificent body, your ability to walk, your incredible mind. It is impossible to feel low or think negative thoughts when you are expressing gratitude.

When you are grateful you harness a force of love that replaces any negative feeling you may have. If you are having a difficult time, look for something to be grateful for. After you have found something to be grateful for, look for another and another and you will change your bad feelings. It is only through gratitude that life can become full and rich. The more you practice gratitude, the more love you give; the more love you give the more you will receive what you want. Practice gratitude and release its power on your life.

Extend to each person, no matter how trivial the contact, all the care and kindness and understanding and love that you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.”

—Og Handine

The force of love doesn't care whether you know someone or not. It doesn't care whether it is a family member, a coworker, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger. With every person you meet, you are either giving out loving feelings or you are not. And what you give out is what you will receive in return. Since relationships with other people are your best avenue to give out loving feelings, you can make big changes in your life just through focusing on the loving feelings you give out to others.

“The entire law is summed up in a single command, Love your neighbor as yourself.”

—Paul, Galatians 5:14

When you give love to others through encouragement, kindness, and support, it will come back to you and multiply into every other area of your life. When you give negativity to others through anger, criticism, or impatience, you will receive the negativity in return. You cannot say you will only give love out after the other person has given it to you. You cannot receive what you want if you are not willing to give out the power of love first. So it's never about what the other person does: It's all about what you do.

You can change or improve any relationship immediately simply by looking for the things you love and appreciate in another person. Looking for what you love in another person will replace any negative thoughts you may be having toward them. You do not give love to another person when you try to

change them, when you think you know what's best for them, or when you think you are right and they are wrong. Criticizing, nagging, and finding fault with another is not giving love.

When you give out loving feelings to others, you will have an incredible life. When you freely love others, you will receive the life you want.

“Hate is not conquered by hate. Hate is conquered by love. This is a law eternal.”

—Gautama Buddha

“Your own soul is nourished when you are kind; it is destroyed when you are cruel.”

—King Solomon, Proverbs 11:17

When you celebrate an individual's successes, their good fortune will come to you. When you gossip and discuss someone else in a negative light, you attract negativity to you. When you react to others, you react with your feelings. Whatever feelings you react with—good or bad—they are the feelings you will be giving, and you will receive the same feelings in return. You can exchange any bad situation with another, but you must exchange your bad feelings for good ones; two people with bad feelings will amplify each other's negativity; people with bad feelings do not see clearly. To change the situation you must focus your thoughts on what you love about that other person. When you can give good feelings, the positivity will multiply.

Have you ever noticed how people who are popular possess a magnetic field that attracts other people? These popular individuals feel good and give off feelings of joy that attract people to them. The more you give love, the more good feelings you give off, and the stronger your magnetic field becomes.

You can never improve a relationship with negativity and bad feelings. Whenever you are faced with a negative situation, the positive reaction will always be to maintain good feelings and give love. The solution will eventually appear.

The Power Is Inside You

“We need to be the change we wish to see in the world.”
—Mahatma Gandhi

Life is always responding to you. Life is communicating with you. There are no coincidences. To see what is going on in your life, you must be alert; you must pay attention to your thoughts and feelings to see what is happening. If your mind becomes too absorbed with too many details, you will lose sight of what is happening and your thoughts and feelings will get pulled down.

When you become distracted, you can lift yourself out of bad feelings by asking yourself questions. When you ask yourself questions, you must be alert to give yourself feedback. When you are in control of your mind, you give meaning to everything in your life. No situation comes with a label of good or bad. Everything is neutral; only your thinking can give any situation power. There are no negative things in the world, only lack of love. There is no force of sadness, only lack of happiness, and all happiness comes from love.

When you are alert and in control of your thoughts, you can focus on what you love, give off good feelings, and receive everything that is good in return. When the populations of the world reach the tipping point by giving more love and good feelings than bad feelings, we will see negativity and sadness diminish everywhere.

Action Review Points

1. It is the positive force of love that inspires you and gives you the desire to do things. Every time you experience good feelings in your life, you harness love's positive force. Every time you experience negative feelings, they are because you didn't love.
2. The law of attraction draws you to do your favorite things. The law of attraction says whatever you give out, you get back. Give positively and you receive positive feelings in return. Give negativity and you receive negativity. You are like a magnet.
3. Your thoughts and words only have power through your feelings. Just like your thoughts and words, your feelings can be positive or negative. All good feelings will come from words and actions that arise from love. All negative feelings will come from thoughts and words that arise from lack of love.
4. Life responds to you. You are the creator of your life. When you generate good feelings, you will attract people on the same frequency. You are like a magnet, you will receive what you feel.
5. You can create what you desire with your imagination. Focus on what you love. If you love what you desire with all of your heart, you will receive what you love.
6. There is only one person affected by the law of attraction: you. Whatever you feel about anyone else, you are bringing to yourself.

7. Every time you give love through your feelings, words, or actions, you add more power to your magnetic field. The more love that is felt by others in your magnetic field, the more you will attract the things you love.
8. Your beliefs, whether they are true or not, form your world. What you believe and feel to be true become your life because what you give out is what will be returned to you. You simply must imagine what you love and you will give off good feelings. The force of love will return to you the people, circumstances, and life that you want and love.
9. There are no limits to the opportunities that will fill your life. One way to improve your awareness is to ask yourself questions. Your mind cannot wander when you are busy asking it questions to answer. For example, “What do I see that I love?” When you learn how to control your mind by asking it questions, you become the driver; you take charge of your thoughts, feelings and happiness. Look for things you love in life every day, every limitation will disappear; what you love will pour into your life.
10. Gratitude is one of the greatest expressions of love. The more you practice gratitude, the more love you give; the more love you give the more you will receive what you want. Practice gratitude and release its power on your life.
11. With every individual you meet, you are either giving out loving feelings or you are not. And what you give out is what you will receive back into your life. Since relationships with other people are your best avenue to give out loving feelings, you can change your life just through focusing on the loving feelings you give out to others.

12. Life is always responding to you. When you are alert and in control of your thoughts, you can focus on what you love, give off good feelings, and receive in return everything that is good.

THE POWER OF KINDNESS

By Piero Ferrucci
(Tarcher, 2006)

About the Book

In eighteen interlocking chapters, each devoted to a single aspect of kindness, Piero Ferrucci builds his case that the kindest people are ones most likely to flourish, and in turn enable others to thrive. Ferrucci, one of the world's most respected transpersonal psychologists, explores the many surprising facets of kindness and points out that it is this trait that will lead to our own individual happiness and the happiness of those around us.

He is a psychotherapist and philosopher who lives near Florence, Italy with his wife and two sons.

Introduction

Acts of kindness give meaning and value to our lives, raises us above our troubles, and makes us feel good about ourselves. Likewise, it is worth our time to show consideration for others, because our happiness is inextricably bound up with the happiness of others.

Kindness has surprising power to transform us, perhaps more than any other attitude. It is a choice in the life of each of us—to take the road of selfishness and abuse, or the way of solidarity and kindness.

The Facets of Kindness

Honesty is the very basis of kindness. Even at the risk of saying the unpleasant truth, or saying no and causing distress—if done with tact and intelligence, is the kindest thing you can do, because it respects your own integrity and acknowledges in

others the capacity to be competent and mature.

We cannot live without the **kindness of warmth** and closeness of others. We all need someone to talk to, someone who knows, appreciates, and cares about us, and to whom we can reveal our dreams. The benefits of touching and talking are enormous acts of warmth and kindness.

Our **capacity to forgive** is inherent in kindness. We cannot be kind while we carry the weight of our resentment. We can be kind only if the past does not dominate us. If we do not face our anger, it will remain, and kindness can find no room in us. We will be able to forgive only if we can place ourselves in another's shoes; if we are less concerned with judgment and more with understanding.

Contact is a door through which kindness can flow. Where you find a person that has facility with finding contact among others, you find kindness of the heart. You find an attitude that makes you feel that this person is there just for you; that you are his or her priority at that moment—that you count.

Some people have the extraordinary capacity to enter into contact with anyone at all. They block all inhibitions and have a true talent of knowing the right way to engage another and touch them deeply. Understandably, people who have this capacity for contact have a bigger and better network of social support than those less able to establish relationships with others.

The act of allowing someone to **feel that they belong** is an act of kindness. The sense of belonging is a basic human need. It is nearly impossible to know who we are without some reference to others. Also, we all need the protection and security that only other human beings can offer. Research has found that offering support to others is extraordinarily important for physical and mental health. The greater the number of friends

upon whom we can count, and the better the quality of these relationships, the greater our longevity and health. We are all parts of a greater whole, and our involvement with that whole is physical, mental, and also spiritual.

Trust and kindness go hand-in-hand. Kindness is about being trusting and ready to take an emotional risk; it brings us close to others. If we could be sure of everyone and everything, trust would have no value. Rather, trust is costly. Our survival is linked to trust. Distrust has destructive effects on our personality. Distrust sets up a distance, perhaps a barrier. Trust produces the opposite: it aids and nourishes us, and it multiplies our possibilities. Trust creates intimacy. Trust nourishes relationships.

At the center of trust, we find surrender. Trust is about letting go and realizing you cannot control everything. To be kind and bring yourself closer to others you must be willing to trust enough to let yourself go like a leaf that has fallen from a tree and is whirling through the air with no reference point. We can have breakthroughs in our lives if we let go with trust.

The gift of **being in the present** and giving your full attention to others is one of the kindest gifts of all. By paying attention, we attribute meaning and importance to the object of our attention, we offer nourishment, and we draw close to another human being. We give the presence and the energy of heart. We can enjoy one another only in the present.

That intangible moment of the present is all that we really have. The past is already lost. The future is still a fairy tale. We are always in the present. There is no moment in which we are not in the present. The present never escapes us, because we are eternally immersed in it. We must approach every moment with the surprise of a child opening a special gift.

Empathy is to understand other people's feelings. Empathy becomes an act of kindness when we are able to step out of ourselves and enter into the lives of others.

The moment someone feels understood and realizes that we see something valid in their point of view, they change. When suffering individuals feel that someone identifies with their experience, they are better able to let go of their suffering. It is when someone is in distress that we need someone to empathize and understand us. Compassion is the final and noblest result of empathy. It brings us out of selfishness and unites us with others. It fills our hearts.

Pain teaches us how to empathize. In varying doses, pain is a companion for life. When confronted honestly, pain can bear fruits of great importance. Pain digs deep inside us; opens us, makes us grow more mature, discover emotions and resources we were not aware of; develops our sensitivity—our humility and wisdom. With this knowledge, sensitivity, and capacity for empathy acquired through pain, you succeed in healing the pain of others.

Only a **humble** person can be kind. We cannot be kind if, deep down, we think we are special. Only when you realize that you are not the only one and that other people exist, when you accept that other people can do things better than you, can you attain humility.

Humility places us in a state where learning becomes possible. It is also linked to renewal; we must never give up questioning. We need the courage to ask ourselves: What can I learn from this person? We must not be afraid of failure, as we often become humbler from failure, which renews learning. Learning opens us up for rapport with others, and for being open to a world full of interesting opportunities.

If we practice **patience**, we come to understand profound aspects of other people's lives. Caught up in urgency, we forget

what is truly important in life, and often leave our souls behind in the rush. With patience, we can understand others' rhythms. How can we be kind if we do not respect the rhythms of others? We forget the soul—theirs and ours. To practice the art of patience is to help people feel better about themselves.

Patience also opens your mind to the different perceptions of time. The flow of time is a magical illusion. When you dwell in the eternal, you are not hurrying away to some other place. Patience is the ability to face the flow of time without fear.

Further, in order to develop kind relationships, we must be patient and make time. To experience a true union between two souls, there must be no expectations or desire, otherwise we fall into an “I” relationship of satisfying our own demands.

When you are **generous** you do not spare yourself. For the generous person—your sufferings and problems are also mine. What is mine—my knowledge, abilities, resources and time—is also yours. In a similar vein, relationships are defined by how much of ourselves we communicate. Generosity is sharing your stories, emotions, ideas and dreams with others to nourish and inspire them. Generosity is also sharing your power of thought and attention with another. These are all acts of kindness.

When you make someone feel worthy and special, you give the kindness of **respect**. If someone is not seen for their true self or what they could be, it can have disastrous effects to their self-esteem. If someone takes the trouble to get to know us and to treat us for who we are, and to recognize us for being real and unique, we no longer feel invisible—we feel like a person of interest and appreciation.

Kindness is respecting others by acknowledging talents and qualities that they do not see. We are all made of our perceptions. If you change your perception of someone, they will change the perception of themselves and manifest talents

and self-esteem otherwise not possible. If we appreciate others and see people as interesting and special, our world will become more stimulating and open.

But respect is not just about seeing. It is also about listening. True listening only happens in silence. To truly listen you have to empty yourself of yourself. True listening requires a commitment to pause, slow your pace, and focus on gaining an understanding of another's viewpoint. If we truly listen, everyone has something interesting to say.

Kindness is giving the spacious respect that people deserve, and letting them be what they are without surrounding them with judgments, advice, or pressure. Judgment and control of others' lives is damaging. They feel it and are negatively influenced by it. Being tolerant and giving spacious respect is a great virtue. Without it there is no chance for creativity, love, change, or growth.

Flexibility implies the freedom from attachments and the acceptance of what is. The only way to survive consists of learning the art of adaptation, a strategy for responding to the events that continually take us by surprise. Being flexible makes us easier to be with. Being flexible is a kind of wisdom that comes from understanding that we cannot control everything. Flexible people can let go of beliefs they are fond of, and open up their minds to the new. They are able to release old models, and become humble enough to start over.

It can be difficult to be kind without also being a flexible person. If we can manage to relax our rigidity and not take our expectations too seriously, we can give others the space they need to be what they want to be. If we are flexible, not only do we adapt more easily to other's changes, but we will also better manage the difficult task of yielding to others. Yielding is often the kindest choice.

The ability to be flexible resonates in our relationships. If we cannot adapt to the new, we will be stressed by situations we do not expect. Because flexible people accept what is, they are easier to be with.

We cannot be kind if we do not utilize our **memory** of others or if we forget those who are no longer useful to us. Why is it that many people in our lives grow obsolete? For a while they are useful and interesting, and they stimulate us. Then they lose their importance and we forget them. To ignore and forget someone, especially the elderly, is invisible violence, especially when it pushes the person into loneliness and irrelevance. To be forgotten because we do not count is devastating. To be remembered, valued, and taken into consideration makes us feel worthy.

We all must remember that the people who belong to our history are part of us, and we need their presence and support in order to feel whole. Kindness is taking the trouble to rediscover the connections with those who have crossed our paths in the past.

Loyalty gives substance and strength to kindness. The essence of loyalty is to hold a friend in our heart without judgment or demands, and to simply care for this person. Loyalty is a state of “being with,” without allowing distractions or interruptions to create obstacles in honoring our loyalty in friendship.

Loyal relationships are not concerned with immediate advantages or with extracting a tangible benefit, but instead with the good feeling that comes from giving presence, support, and friendship over time to a person. The capacity to remain loyal in difficult and uncomfortable moments is an essential ingredient of kindness. When we show loyalty in hard circumstances, we show how much we care. These moments are when we are seen for what we are.

Exhibiting **gratitude** is a realistic view of what we are. If I think of everyone in my life to whom I owe thanks, bit by bit I realize that all I have has come to me from others. My parents, teachers, employees, spouse, children, friends, and even the mailman, snow remover, garbage collector, etc., have all been beneficial to my life. To be grateful is to be thankful for what you have. Gratitude is an attitude of the mind. It is based on recognizing the value of what life offers us. The ability to appreciate the simple things that many take for granted is essential to our happiness. If we are grateful, we feel rich and fortunate. The possibility of feeling grateful is open to us in every moment of our lives.

You must be grateful to be unselfishly kind. People who do not know how to receive and who do not feel thankful for what they have been given are also those who exhibit problematic kindness, because they associate acts of kindness with being a benefactor of indebtedness from others.

When you take the time and energy to **serve others** for their benefit, you cultivate the basic attitude of being open and sensitive to the needs and problems of others. Serving others brings out the best in ourselves.

If our goal in serving others is to gain admiration and recognition, we will not continue. If our goal is to help someone heal, feel better, find him or herself, and to make progress in his or her growth, then we will continue. When you help someone and never mention what good you have done, the receiver has a greater capacity to enjoy it. When you are in the presence of someone who has graciously served you, their mere presence makes us feel better and happier about ourselves.

A **joyful**, happy, optimistic attitude is at the core of kindness because true kindness is given with joy. We find happiness and

joy when we have meaning in our lives. If we are joyful, we are much more positive and open to others. We can find joy if we follow that which enriches and inspires us. When we succeed in being kind without ulterior motives, we are more likely to feel enriched and joyful.

Action Review Points

1. *Honesty* acknowledges the capacity of others to be accepting of the truth, competent, and mature.
2. Offer *kindness and warmth* by talking to, touching, and showing your genuine concern for others.
3. The *capacity to forgive* is kind. Be less concerned with judgment and more with understanding.
4. Display kindness by *making genuine contact* with others; make them feel special at that moment.
5. Help others *feel that they belong* by offering protection, security, and support.
6. Offer *trust* and you offer kindness by demonstrating your willingness to risk.
7. Offer importance to others by *being in the present moment* with them.
8. Practice *empathy* by stepping outside of yourself and emotionally entering the lives of others.
9. Being *humble* opens the door to learning and building a rapport with others.
10. Practice *patience* and respect the rhythms of others.

11. Be *generous* by sparing nothing and sharing everything of your “self.”
12. *Respect* others by making them feel worthy and special.
13. Offer *flexibility* by yielding to others changes, adapting to the new and accepting what is.
14. Taking the time to *remember* people in your history makes people feel worthy.
15. *Loyalty* offers friendship in good times and bad, and being present without judgment or demands.
16. To offer genuine kindness without expectations you must *be grateful* for what you have received from others.
17. *Serve others*. Lift them up and make them feel better about themselves.
18. Offer kindness and you will feel enriched and *joyful*, spreading your positivity to others.

LIVING IN LOVE

By James and Betty Robinson
(WaterBrook Press, 2010)

About the Book

With a down-home wisdom, James and Betty Robinson reveal how a committed, growing, lifelong relationship is built and sustained. They offer no-nonsense advice on marital issues like expectations, trust, past baggage, money, conflict resolution, sex, parenting, communication, and more. Above all, they emphasize that with God at the center of a marriage, all good things are possible.

James Robinson is the founder and president of Life outreach international, and along with his wife, Betty, hosts Life Today, a syndicated daily television show seen by more than 300 million households. Since James entered into the ministry in the sixties, he has spoken to millions of people through his evangelical crusades. He has also written numerous books.

Introduction

When a man and a woman decide to share their life together, both have certain expectations, hopes, and dreams. You may be looking for love, someone who really cares about you, security, an identity, a family, and/or a home. You no doubt desired lifelong happiness, joy, and peace with your partner, and you decided to commit yourselves to each other with your words, actions, and emotions. You both probably had different expectations that you assumed would be met by the other.

If you want to live in love and have a successful marriage, three qualities will be essential: commitment, communication, and cooperation. And there is another important concept you must be willing to embrace change. The journey of a joyful marriage will require continual transformation. As you submit

to the necessary changes that confront you in life, don't impose them on the other. Don't be tempted to scrutinize your partner; but instead, stay flexible yourself. If your marriage or relationship is something less than what you expected, do you want to make it better? Do you want to communicate and work together to make it better? Do you want to grow spiritually as a team? Do you want to get to know each other better?

Here is the important part: The "would you like to get better" question is never for your partner. It's for you. Are you willing to change?

The author message is not about how to change your partner. Real, lasting change can never be imposed from the outside. It has to come from inside of us. Growth in a marriage has to happen on the inside of each partner before it can be seen on the outside. Qualities like commitment, trust, and concern are all interior traits that cannot be imposed on another person. This is not to say you cannot be committed to yourself and your own interests but you also have to be committed to making the necessary changes to becoming a better partner.

The starting place will always be in your own heart. Meaningful change always begins with oneself. Until we can be honest with ourselves and face our own shortcomings, we will not be able to grow our relationship. Real change will always begin with the transformation of your own heart. Inner transformation will not only make you a better partner, but possibly inspire your spouse to pursue a true heart-change as well.

Commitment

Commitment in a relationship is a covenant, not a contract. In a contract you guard your rights and you free yourself from any obligation if the other person doesn't live up to the agreement. In a covenant, however, you agree to give up all your rights

on behalf of the other person and take up the responsibility to love, meet your partner's needs, and assume the responsibility for the success of the marriage or relationship. It means listening to your partner's concerns, respecting her thoughts, and listening to gain a real understanding. Learn what interests and excites your partner and support her in those areas.

Yes, it is important to maintain relationships with other family members and friends, but not at the expense of your partner. You must also learn to leave behind your own selfishness. Selfishness is as dangerous to a marriage as an outside allegiance, and probably even more so since it's on the inside of a marriage. An unhealthy self-focus can show up in many ways. The most common is trying to change your partner to meet your expectations. This is always a mistake. Rather than attempting to change your mate, it is best to allow God to change you. You can never be successful living solely for yourself and remain committed to your partner. If you take the attitude, "This is how I am, so learn to live with it," you are being selfish.

You cannot have a harmonious relationship without staying attuned to each other's thoughts and feelings. The path of your own self-interest is best found with the best interest of your partner and the relationship. Commitment is the bedrock principal of a successful relationship. Commitment creates safety, which builds trust and the ability to grow as an individual.

Building Trust

Trust doesn't happen right away; it takes time and is built brick by brick. Trust is built on the foundation of a strong commitment. Trust guides us when we are uncertain of our partner's actions and reactions. To build trust, you and your partner must work long and hard to learn more about each other. You don't need to understand why something is

important to your partner; you just need to make it a priority in your life. Whatever your partner feels is important, you must consider important. This type of thinking is the cornerstone of trust.

Trust takes time to build. At first you will have a limited understanding of the other person. When confrontations occur, you must learn how to *respond* rather than *react*. Be careful not to judge the other's words or actions but instead to look at their heart and strive to gain an understanding. In this way, trust is earned. When your partner's actions don't necessarily align with his intentions, you must be able to look into the depths of his heart to gain an understanding. You must learn to trust his good intentions and his heart rather than his actions. If commitment is the foundation of a relationship, trust is the glue that holds it together.

True love and trust is something that grows over the years. You have to decide how badly you want it. There will be a price to pay. It will require love, devotion, respect, sacrifice, desire, and forgiveness. Trust cannot be achieved without determination.

Baggage

Every couple has personality differences and baggage from the past that will affect a marriage or close relationship. Your baggage is the sum total of your life experiences, both good and bad. It includes personality traits, ways of thinking, emotional states, habits, hang-ups, feelings about yourself, insecurities, fears, personal preferences, and vices. You can attempt to hide your baggage, but it will eventually show itself to your partner. When you don't have a solid commitment to your partner, the weight of the baggage will strain your relationship.

One thing that is certain is that the past cannot be changed. But that does not mean it cannot be forgiven, restored, or redeemed.

Regardless of whether your marriage challenges are a holdover from past baggage or are a present reality, you cannot let those failures and disappointments stick around. If you want to live in love with your partner, you can't be held captive by past or present problems. When you are willing to forgive the person who wronged you, you will discover the ability to overcome the disappointment that has plagued you.

A strong relationship needs such a depth of commitment that you willingly share your innermost, heartfelt feelings, battles, struggles, concerns, challenges, and failures. As long as partners hold things back from each other, the relationship will never be as healthy as it could be. With effort, every couple can achieve a high level of transparency and honesty.

Communication

If you are committed to your partner, concerned about what is best for your partner, and trusting of your partner, you have all the pieces needed for effective communication. Good communication means straightforward talking and listening.

Remember, words are not enough. Only seven percent of communication is through word content; the remaining fifty-five percent is determined by body language and thirty-eight percent by the tone of voice. Done properly, communication is clear, honest, and open; it will always include love, understanding, and a willingness to listen to each other's heart.

It helps to start with a positive attitude toward you partner; for example, "Your feelings and thoughts are important to me. You must have a reason for them, so I want to understand it." The key to good communication with your partner is to remember that you are both on the same team. When you approach communication as a competition with a winner and a loser, your marriage will grow weaker. Although it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to win an argument, crushing and

disregarding his or her thoughts and feelings serves only a selfish interest not the relationship. When you are competing with the one you love, you cannot live in happiness or harmony.

Always keep in mind you will much more likely be listened to if you choose your words lovingly and express them with a kind tone of voice. When tempers begin to rise in a communication, take a time out. When you are ready to listen with an open mind and heart, say, "Okay, I am ready to listen to you with my heart." If you need time to formulate your thoughts say, "Can we talk about this in an hour?"

The success of your relationship depends on the quality of your communication. When you stop sharing openly, you stop living. To refuse to communicate is to accept a form of bondage in your relationship.

Learn to communicate in three steps. The steps are stop, repeat, clarify. Instead of just talking, you have to *stop* to listen not just to your partner's words but to his or her heartfelt feelings. When your communication is competitive or unforgiving, you will not be able to listen to the words being spoken from your partner's heart. Next, allow your partner the opportunity to *repeat* their thoughts to enable them to expand their thoughts in more detail. By allowing your partner the opportunity to repeat, you gain the opportunity to hear more than the words. After this step, it is best to *clarify* by putting into your own words what you think the other person is saying. This gives you an opportunity to receive a confirmation of your understanding of your partner's thoughts and feelings.

There is no shortcut to successful communications with your partner. To create an honest flow of communication with each other is going to take time and commitment.

Confrontation

Communicating effectively with your partner will occasionally mean pointing out something that bothers you. If your partner has hurt you or done something that bothers you enough that it sticks in your mind, then you must confront the issue.

Remember, it is more important *how* you confront the issue than what the issue, by itself, is about.

It helps to adopt the attitude of “confronting the problem and not each other.” It is important to speak the truth but to say it in a loving manner. When confrontation is done properly, it will preserve both the relationship and the message you want to convey. Always keep the goal focused on a peaceful resolution.

Confession

When it comes to intimate relationships, each partner can see the other’s weaknesses and needs. It is difficult to hide the baggage. Your partner has an unobstructed view of your flaws and weaknesses. Partners in a healthy relationship understand the importance of providing a safe haven where your partner can confess his or her weaknesses, flaws, fears, and temptations without fear of reproach. One of the greatest gifts you can give is a feeling of safety and security when your partner needs to get something off of his or her chest.

Finances

One of the biggest challenges every couple will face is the task of managing their finances. You will never be happy if you try to base your identity on what you own. When you build your self-worth on material goods, you set your relationship on an unstable foundation. Moreover, self-gratifying spending never satisfies. Both of these reasons for spending money can lead to the oppressive weight of debt, which can crush a relationship.

Money itself is not good or bad. It is simply a tool to use to manage your financial welfare. Consider managing your relationship and your finances by living below your means. That means you spend less than your income. You refrain from buying anything on credit that you cannot pay for at the end of the month (excluding a home mortgage and possibly automobile financing). When you live below your needs, you allow yourself to build savings to become an accumulator of assets.

Do not invest in anything unless it can provide equity growth. Anything you purchase, do out of necessity not to fill some emotional void in your life. And with every purchasing and financial decision, discuss it with your partner, first. Together, you will discover the safety and security of living below your means, free from the bondage of debt.

Sex

Sex is an expression of intimacy that only two people committed to one another in a loving relationship can truly understand and share. To use sex in any other context degrades our humanity.

In order for sex to be all that it can be, both husband and wife must decide and express what is meaningful to them. A meaningful and fulfilling sexual relationship can only begin with a meaningful and fulfilling marriage. It is impossible to create a satisfying sexual relationship if the environment for the marriage is not built upon commitment, trust, and valued communication. In other words, the quality of a sexual relationship is not necessarily about the sex itself but the feelings of creating a close connection. When men and women provide their top sexual needs, what is at the top of the list is the need to feel valued, affirmed, and desired.

The Power of Encouragement

One of the greatest gifts you can give your partner is affirmation and encouragement. When you are continually comparing yourself to other people, you create a great source of insecurity. Likewise, when a partner is continually affirming your strengths and helping you deal with perceived weaknesses, you feel more secure as an individual and in the marriage. It works both ways.

You can also encourage your partner by spending time together, and by letting him or her know you genuinely enjoy the company. Learn to appreciate each other's interests by coming to love what the other person loves. For instance, when you truly listen to your partner when he talks about his activities and what he's doing, it goes a long way to establishing an intimate connection to your heart.

By building a strong, encouraging, foundation to a relationship, you will be better equipped to handle the unpredictable and unexpected storms that we all will face.

Action Review Points

1. The three cornerstones of any relationship are commitment, communication, and cooperation to defeat challenges.
2. Real, lasting change can never be imposed from the outside. It has to come from inside of us. Growth in a marriage has to happen on the inside of each partner before it can be seen on the outside.

3. You must be committed to making the necessary changes in order to become a better partner. The starting place will always be in your own heart. Meaningful change always begins there. Until we can be honest with ourselves and face our own shortcomings, we will not be able to grow our relationship.
4. Commitment means you agree to give up all your “contractual” rights on behalf of the other person and take up the responsibility to love, meet your partner’s needs, and assume the responsibility for the success of the marriage or relationship.
5. An unhealthy self-focus can show up in many ways. The most common is trying to change your partner to meet your expectations. This is always a mistake. Rather than attempting to change your mate, it is best to allow God to change you.
6. You cannot have a harmonious relationship without staying attuned to each other’s thoughts and feelings.
7. You don’t need to understand why something is important to your partner; you just need to make it a priority in your life.
8. When confrontations occur, you must learn how to *respond* rather than *react*. It is important not to judge the others words or actions but instead to look at the heart, and strive to gain an understanding.

9. A strong relationship needs to effectively deal with personal baggage through forgiveness and understanding. You must be willing to share your innermost heartfelt feelings, battles, struggles, concerns, challenges, and failures. If you hold things back from your partner, the relationship will not be as healthy as it could be.
10. Good communication means straightforward talking and listening. Remember, words are not enough: only seven percent of communication is through word content, the remaining fifty-five percent is determined by body language and thirty-eight percent by the tone of voice. Done properly, communication is clear, honest, and open; it will always include love, understanding, and a willingness to listen to each other's heart.
11. The key to good communication with your partner is to remember you are both on the same team. When you approach communication as a competition with a winner and a loser, the strength of your marriage will be compromised. It is easy to fall into a pattern of trying to win an argument with your partner. But to crush and disregard your partner's thoughts and feelings will only crumble the foundation of your commitment to the relationship.
12. Learn to communicate in three steps. The steps are stop to listen, repeat, and clarify.
13. If your partner has hurt you or bothers you enough that it sticks in your mind, then you must confront the issue. Remember, it is more important *how* you confront the issue than what the issue is about.

14. Provide a safe haven where your partner can confess his or her weaknesses, flaws, fears, and temptations without fear of reproach.
15. Manage your finances to live below your means.
16. The quality of a sexual relationship is not necessarily about the sex itself but the feelings of creating a close connection. Keep in mind the top sexual needs are to feel valued, affirmed, and desired.
17. One of the greatest gifts you can give your partner is affirmation and encouragement.

Boundaries in Marriage

By Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

About the Book

Whether you are just starting out as a couple, have been married for several years, or are seriously contemplating marriage, *Boundaries in Marriage* will show you how to establish your own boundaries and respect those of your partner. Drawing on principles from the bible, it can help you safeguard against relational fractures and mend existing cracks. Only when you and your mate know and respect each other's needs, choices, and freedom can you give yourselves freely and lovingly to one another. This book can help you make even the best marriage better.

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend are popular psychologists, speakers, and co-hosts of a nationally broadcast radio program, "New Life Live." Both maintain practices in Southern California. They are best-selling coauthors of a number of books.

Introduction

When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear, and love dies. Marriage is foremost about love, yet love is not enough. For a marriage to grow and thrive, the relationship must also give freedom and responsibility to each person; likewise, when there are freedom and responsibility problems, love will struggle and the marriage will die.

Boundaries are about love—promoting it, growing it, developing it, and repairing it. Boundaries promote love by protecting the person. They protect the individual by providing an environment of freedom and responsibility. Boundaries will always be about taking ownership of your own life rather than

a method for fixing, changing, or punishing your mate.

Understanding Boundaries

Are you the one in a relationship who sacrifices everything for the love of your mate? When you are the one who is doing all the sacrificing, or the one who is being controlled, you will eventually come to feel detached and angry. The commitment level may be strong, but deep sharing, true love, and intimacy struggle. Sadly, the one who is constantly giving never achieves intimacy in the relationship, only pain.

When a relationship begins without clearly established boundaries, it often withers when it moves past the initial stages of attraction because it lacks the stability needed to grow into long-term intimacy. Strong relationships will require each person to have a strong sense of ownership of himself or herself. Conversely, whenever you blame your negative behavior, feelings, or attitude on the other person, you are not taking ownership of your own behavior.

Boundaries help us see where one person ends and the other begins. In other words, once we know the boundaries, we know what the problem is and who should own it. If we know who owns the problem, then we also know who should take responsibility for it. The knowledge, even if it reveals that the problem is ours, empowers us. To understand boundaries means understanding each spouse must take ownership and responsibility for their own feelings, attitudes, behavior, choices, limits, desires, thoughts, values, talents, and love. By setting boundaries, each spouse can avoid being a victim of the other spouse's behavior and problems. The process always begins with taking responsibility for your own part of the problem.

Responsibility also involves action. If anything is going to happen, if anything is going to change—your attitudes,

behavior, or reactions—you will need to take action. God designed us to have freedom of choice as we choose how we respond to life and to other people. Paul tells the Galatians to set boundaries against control and to become free: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1 NASB). Boundaries help you discern where someone’s control begins and ends. For love to work, each partner must realize his or her freedom. In a responsible relationship, boundaries will help you define the freedoms you have and the freedoms you do not have. When you realize the freedoms from a spouse that you are entitled to enjoy, many options will open up for you. Marriage is not slavery. Marriage is based on a loving relationship based on freedom of each person. You will only be free to love a person when you are free from them.

There are three ingredients that make a thriving relationship: freedom, responsibility, and love. When these three qualities work together, partners become more free from the things that enslave, such as self-centeredness, past hurts, and self-imposed limitations; as freedom grows, love grows, too, and over time it deepens. Where there is no freedom, there will be rebellion.

Boundaries are all about yourself. There can be a lot of misunderstanding and misuse of the term “boundaries.” Some people see boundaries as a tool to be used to control a partner’s behavior. Boundaries are not something you set or establish *for* another person. Boundaries are all about self-control. When you establish a boundary and your partner trespasses it, the boundary allows you to take control of yourself rather than being controlled or hurt. This is an act of self-control, which serves love, not selfishness. When you take control of yourself, you protect your personal freedom, which in turn makes you freer to love.

The words you use define you. Your words tell people who you are, what you believe, what you want and what you don't want. The words you choose shape your boundaries. For example:

- No, I don't want to do that
- No, I won't participate in that
- Yes, I want to do that
- I will
- I like that
- I don't like that

Truthfulness is another important boundary. If two people are not truthful with one another, the love in the relationship will go into hiding. Instead, you will have two relationships, an outside relationship built on falsehoods and an inside hidden relationship. Without truthfulness, intimacy and love will be lost. Love and truth must exist together. Paul says, "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25).

When we establish boundaries we will have to search our hearts to make sure our boundaries protect our personal freedom and serve the growth of love rather than some selfish motive. For example, withdrawing love from a partner is not a helpful boundary to resolve a conflict; it is revenge.

Unfortunately some conflicts are not resolved with healthy boundaries and words but require more severe actions until the hurt can be stopped. For example, sometimes people do not get the message with words alone; they only respond to the pain of consequences to show them where your boundary is. Other times we may have to protect our heart with some emotional distance. When all else fails, you may need to get other people involved as well as a physical separation.

The Ten Laws of Boundaries in a Marriage

The author's goal is to teach you healthy principles by which you can structure a healthy marriage. The following ten laws of boundaries will hopefully help to give you a better understanding of how to apply boundaries to solve problems and build a healthier, more loving relationship.

1. The Law of Sowing and Reaping

When we use loving, responsible actions, we draw people closer to ourselves. When we use unloving, irresponsible actions, people will withdraw from us; they withdraw from us by shutting down, avoiding us, or eventually by leaving the relationship. In other words, our actions have consequences.

One of our most effective pathways to growth is by suffering the consequences of our actions. When a relationship involves daily intimacy, as in a marriage, the actions of one person can deeply affect the other. The law of sowing and reaping is not only important for the partner who has taken on the problem of her spouse, but also for the spouse who is shirking his responsibility. It is an act of love by a partner to allow the spouse who is being selfishness and irresponsible to reap the consequences of his actions. When we set and keep limits with our partner we are saying, "I may love you, but I am not going to pay for your problems." The bottom line of this law is, the one who has the problem must face its effects.

The author used the following example: The husband, whom we'll call Bill, is often in a low mood. Anything can set him off. As a result, Linda walks on eggshells in fear of setting off his negative moodiness; all of Linda's emotional energy is directed at keeping Bill happy. In this situation Bill is not paying the price for his irresponsible behavior. Linda, however, has taken on Bill's problem and carried the burden of his moodiness. Linda's feelings are hurt, her freedom is

dampened, and her love for Bill is in a downward spiral. For Linda to protect her heart, to be able to be free to grow her love for Bill, she needs to set a barrier; the barrier needs to be communicated properly so Bill suffers the consequences of his actions and Linda is therefore free to love. For example, the next time Bill becomes pouty and moody, Linda enforces her barrier by kindly saying, “Sweetie, I know you feel stressed, but your moodiness is making me miserable. I am not free to love you when you feel so negative; you bring me down with you and it makes it difficult for me to love when you force your negative emotions on me. When you get down, I would appreciate it if you would stay in different room from me until your low mood has lifted. You need to deal with your low moods yourself, away from me, so I am free to love you.”

2. The Law of Responsibility

You must avoid taking ownership of your mate’s daily life. You must be responsible for your own actions and how they affect your mate; likewise, he or she must do the same for you. For your part, you should actively support your mate when they face overwhelming burdens. But you cannot accept responsibility for your mate’s daily feelings, attitude, values, or his or her dealing with everyday life challenges. The bottom line of the law of responsibility is this: We are responsible *to* each other, but not *for* each other.

3. The Law of Power

Many couples struggle with understanding how much power they actually have to make changes in a relationship. Partners may attempt to use boundaries to force change in a partner, but it only makes matters worse. The law of power clarifies what you do have power to change, and what you don’t. You don’t have the power to make a spouse grow up. You cannot change his or her attitude, actions, annoying and troublesome habits, or character flaws. You do have the power

to change your own actions, which may be hurtful to your spouse. And even though you do not have the power to change your partner, you can influence them through your own actions: You can model the behavior you would like your partner to use toward you. You also have the power to communicate your feelings, how you would like to be treated, and your boundaries.

The bottom line of the law of power is you have no power over your partner, but you have the power to control your “self” and your own freedoms.

4. The Law of Respect

Many partners will feel that they both should see things the same way—so much so that the word “no” becomes difficult to hear. That is when the law of respect must be applied.

Respecting and valuing your partner’s boundaries is the key to building a loving relationship. When you respect your partner’s boundaries you are extending a gift of freedom and love. To demonstrate to your partner his or her freedom to say no, ask him or her the following questions:

- How might I be crossing your boundaries?
- Do you feel I respect your right to say no?
- Do I give you guilt messages or withdraw when you say no?
- Will you let me know the next time I don’t respect your freedom to say no?

The bottom line of the law of respect is to grant your partner the freedom of choice, the freedom to disagree and say no. This law fosters love. When you protect your partner’s freedom of choice, you show love. You appreciate your spouse has his or her own mind, values, and feelings.

5. The Law of Motivation

What motivates your choices and decisions? Fear, or love and responsibility? If you feel you *have to* make a choice, you are not free to say no. If you are not free to say no, you cannot whole-heartedly say yes. *Having* to do anything is a sign that someone is afraid. The following fears prevent a spouse from setting boundaries to protect his or her freedom of choice:

- Fear of losing love
- Fear of a partner's anger
- Fear of being alone
- Fear of being a bad person
- Fear of one's guilty feelings
- Fear of losing a partner's approval
- Fear of hurting feelings by not reciprocating love which has been given

Fear negates the freedom to make a choice. Fear always works against love. The *have to* feeling destroys the freedom that precedes real love. Many times we have to make sacrificial choices for our partners, but when made with freedom, these choices are motivated by love and responsibility, not fear of loss. The bottom line is that the law of motivation keeps fear out of the picture when making one's choices.

6. The Law of Evaluation

Do not neglect to set boundaries in a relationship because you fear causing pain. Pain can be a friend to relationships. Just because someone is in pain does not mean something bad is happening—the pain inflicted by your boundaries may be helping your partner to grow up. You need to evaluate the pain your boundaries cause your partner. Are they helpful to his or her growth as a person, or are they hurtful in the long run?

7. The Law of Proactivity

Emotional reactions to your mate's words or actions are damaging to any relationship. Emotional outbursts restrict the freedom to love. Emotional outbursts distance partners.

Proactive people solve their problems without having to blow up. The law of proactivity has three rules:

1. Reactive boundaries are often necessary to allow a partner who is being victimized the freedom to protest.
2. Reactive boundaries will not foster and grow love in a relationship.
3. Proactive boundaries are necessary to maintain love, freedom and responsibility in a relationship. Proactive people disagree, confront issues, and maintain their freedom; they do not get caught up in emotional storms but rather work through their reactive stages.

For example, when one spouse uses sarcastic and hurtful comments about the other in front of friends, a proactive communication could sound like this, "Sweetie, I love you but I will not subject myself to your hurtful comments in front of our friends. I want you to work on this so it doesn't happen again."

Work on using proactive communications to set deliberate boundaries based on your values and built on love.

8. The Law of Envy

It is impossible to set boundaries in a relationship when you are envious. You must take ownership of your problems, work through your envy and take action to establish boundaries to protect your freedoms.

You will never get what you want if you focus on what other people have—be it abilities, material possessions, or personality traits. Envy leaves you feeling powerless. Envy

devalues what you think of your own skills, abilities, self-worth, relationships, etc., for it always means you find yourself not being good enough. Because you are dissatisfied with your own state of being, you are miserable; you feel powerless to change.

Don't confuse envy with desire, however. Desire doesn't focus on emptiness. When envy is transformed into healthy desire, it motivates us to take action to get something we want.

9. The Law of Activity

When you are an active person rather than a passive person, you will take action to solve problems and face challenges. When both spouses are active in setting boundaries, solving problems, and forming goals, they will both grow as individuals and in their relationship. Active people are doers, make a lot of mistakes, and learn and grow as a result.

Passive people have trouble learning because they are afraid to take risks. As a result, they also have a harder time taking charge of their lives and setting boundaries; with passive people, problems always get worse. When one spouse is active and the other passive, the following problems can occur:

- The active spouse can dominate the passive one
- The active spouse can feel abandoned by the passive one.
- The passive spouse may resent the power of the active one.
- The passive spouse may be too intimidated by the active one to say no.

The bottom line of the law of activity is to take responsibility for your own life with action.

10. The Law of Exposure

A boundary that is not communicated to your partner is a boundary that is not given a chance to work. It has the same effect as an absent boundary. When boundaries are hidden, love struggles. You cannot wait for your partner to make the first move. You must assume the responsibility of taking the first step.

When exposing a boundary for the first time, make it very clear to your partner what you want and what you don't want. You, in turn, must make a strong effort to clearly understand what your spouse is saying in his or her reaction to your boundaries, and when he or she sets boundaries of their own. Clearly exposing your boundaries is the only way for a relationship to heal and grow. The bottom line is that boundaries must be communicated to each other.

Setting Boundaries with Yourself

When you stop blaming your partner and take ownership of the problem yourself, you empower yourself to solve your problem.

Remember, boundaries in a marriage or relationship are not the same as boundaries on your partner. Setting boundaries is not about changing, fixing, or making your partner do something. Setting boundaries is about creating a framework in which both partners can grow. Who is at fault is irrelevant; the goal is to resolve the problem. So even though you may not be creating the problem, you will more than likely need to take the initiative to solve it.

For example, Maria was continually getting angry because Bill was never ready to leave the house on time for dinner dates at friend's homes. Maria routinely became angry and nagged Bill to be ready on time. Maria finally changed from seeing it as Bill's problem to seeing it as her own unhappiness. The shift in

Maria's attitude allowed her to stop blaming Bill and empower herself to solve the problem. She simply communicated her boundary to protect her freedom and values by lovingly informing Bill that she would leave for invitations on her own when it was time to leave and he could follow by himself whenever he was ready.

The innocent partner needs to see the part he or she plays in the problem. Jesus called this the plank in our eyes: "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5). Once Maria dealt with her anger she could adjust her attitude to deal with the problem maturely. Blaming someone else does nothing more than shift the truth away from ourselves. When we neglect setting boundaries on ourselves, we limit our own growth. When you set limits on yourself, as in the above example, your partner is given freedom of choice and is allowed an opportunity to grow. It is always tempting to try to change your partner, but your nagging, controlling, blaming, will all be futile. The partner will only react with concerns about how to stay free from your attempts to change him. Therefore, we must be more concerned about our own issues than our partner's.

The highest calling of a spouse is the call to love, just as it is the highest calling of our faith: loving God and each other (Matthew 22:37–40). Love means doing what you can for your partner. Setting boundaries around your own weaknesses is one of the most loving things you can do for your mate, and one of the most powerful things you can do for your own growth. When you grow you become more tender, more empathetic. To learn more from your spouse to improve your relationship, ask the following question: "What do you see me doing that hurts or bothers you?" Doing this without an agenda but rather for the sole purpose of improving your weaknesses is the purest path to personal growth.

Just as we do not have the power to change our spouse, when we look at our own character issues, we cannot will ourselves to change. However, we do possess the power to make different choices. One thing we can do is choose to tell our partner the truth about our faults and weaknesses. Setting limits on ourselves sometimes involves taking a troublesome problem—emotional, attitude-related, or behavioral—and bringing it to light within the support of the relationship. The following are some character issues on which we can set limits:

1. **Denial:** What we deny about ourselves is absent from love. For example, if you deny your insecurities, your partner cannot exhibit compassion toward your weaknesses. Work on your tendencies to deny or rationalize your weaknesses, selfishness, or hurtfulness. When you set limits on yourself to confess your truths about yourself, you are more emotionally present for your partner.
2. **Withdrawal from the relationship:** Most couples struggle with their tendency to withdraw their hearts from one another. Withdrawing their hearts allows people to protect their fears and emotions. But failing to make true emotional connections with your partner is a serious issue, too. Set limits on your tendency to withdraw by soliciting the aid of your partner every time he or she notices you pulling away.
3. **Irresponsibility:** Some of us have more difficulty accepting responsibility than others. Many people would prefer to have someone else take the responsibility for them or to avoid the consequences of their actions. If you need help in this area, ask yourself for help from safe people. Tell your spouse that nagging will not help you, but that instead, you could use some help with providing and placing loving limits on yourself.
4. **Self-centeredness:** Nothing comes more naturally to people than to think about their own situation rather than their partner's. Self-absorbed people attempt to

live as single people while living in a relationship with another; the result is a partner who doesn't feel her thoughts and feelings are valued. Remember the structure of marriage is anti-selfish; an intimate relationship will always expose our weaknesses and failings. To set limits on your own self-centeredness, ask your partner to tell you when he or she feels things are not mutual between you.

5. Judgmentalism: When you live with a judgmental person, you are constantly on trial. This creates an atmosphere of living in fear of your mate's wrath. Love cannot grow in a climate of fear. "There is no fear in love...fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18). Many partners struggle with judging and criticizing their partner's actions. They tend to see most things as black and white and have trouble accepting the differences in other's thoughts, values, and actions. Nothing will kill a relationship faster than judgmentalism. Place limits on yourself by asking your partner how your judgmental attitude hurts those you love. Work on developing a compassion for the differences in your partner.

Of all the areas where it is most crucial to set boundaries upon ourselves is in our tendency to control our partners. The surest way to destroy love and trust is by attempting to control someone else. Whenever we feel controlled, freedom disappears and love is threatened. Unfortunately, the tactics and manipulating many partners use to control their mates are endless. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Boundaries relinquish other-control for self-control (Galatians 5:23).

If someone is exerting control they will not respect others' "no." They will find ways to punish choices with which they do not agree, and they will not value your freedom

of choice. The following are several ways couples try to control one another:

1. **Guilt:** Guilty messages are words designed to control by creating the impression that our partner's freedom of choice will injure us. Statements such as, "If you really loved me..." and wounded silences convey guilt. Guilt messages are an attempt to make our partners feel responsible.
2. **Anger:** Anger is nothing more than our childish protest that we cannot control reality. Often, anger springs from disappointment at the other partner's desire to do something distasteful to the angry one.
3. **Persistent assaults on the partner boundary:** This often occurs when one partner says no and the other is relentless in attempting to change their mind.
4. **Withholding love:** When one partner disagrees, the other disconnects emotionally until they get what they want. Withholding love may be one of the most powerful and dangerous forms of control. This form of control puts extreme pressure on us to reconnect with the one we love.

To increase love in our relationships, we must be willing to relinquish our control strategies in exchange for freedom—and hence, love. The following are some ways to place limits on yourself to eliminate attempts to control your partner:

1. **Realize the cost of controlling others:** When you control others, you may get compliance, but you will lose your partner's heart. Control negates freedom and the restriction of freedom negates love.
2. **Communication:** Ask your partner to let you know when he or she feels controlled and how it makes them feel. Often when the controlled partner reveals how hurtful and emotionally distant they feel, the controlling spouse is better able to set limits on themselves.

3. Accept your helplessness: Realize that you cannot make someone do what you consider to be the right thing. Control strategies give the illusion of power, but they really don't. You must accept your helplessness to control your partner; that is where reality lies.
4. Value your partners freedom: Jesus' Golden Rule of doing to others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12) is the basis for any relationship. When you consider the value you place on your own freedom of choice, you are more apt to have compassion for your partner's freedoms as well.

Marriage has everything to do with your own self-controls. As you relinquish control of others and instead strive to protect your own freedom, you are better able to grow the love in the relationship.

It Takes Two to Make One

In the beginning stages of many relationships, a couple tends to give up all internal boundaries as they feel the euphoric sense of falling in love and a sense of oneness. But these feelings are not reality. Oneness can only be built over a long period of time as the relationship grows out of two *complete* sets of individuals. When the euphoric feelings have disappeared and the faults of the partner become obvious, half give up and search for another. Unfortunately, a new relationship will require the same growing pains that the separated couple attempted to avoid. The remedy always lies in the growth of the two individuals.

The requirement of two people coming together as one requires two complete individuals. Marriage or any intimate relationship is not a place to go to complete yourself. A meaningful relationship is a place where two complete individuals come together to form a "we" that is better and stronger than the two "I's." A *complete* person is able to give

love, survive as an independent person, be responsible, possess self-confidence, be able to deal with and solve problems and failures, utilize their talents and skills, pursue their own goals, and have a successful life of their own.

Only when two people are complete will the oneness in their relationship be genuine. To whatever degree one or both of the partners are less-than-complete individuals, the oneness of the relationship will struggle. Unfortunately, many people don't get involved in long-term relationships out of strength, but out of weakness. They get involved with or marry someone to make up for insecurities or something they do not possess, which erodes the possibility of a successful relationship.

Below is the author's partial list of abilities that both partners must possess; they cannot be borrowed from a partner. These human characteristics must be developed entirely by oneself.

- To be able to connect to your partner emotionally
- To show vulnerability and to be able to share feelings
- To possess a sense of power and assertiveness
- To be able to say no
- To possess initiative and drive
- To have a sufficient amount of organizational skills
- To be "real"
- To accept imperfections and to be able to forgive
- To be able to grieve for loss
- To be able to think for oneself and express your opinion
- To strive to learn and grow as an individual
- To be willing to take risks
- To be responsible and follow through
- To be free and not controlled by external or internal factors
- To be sexual
- To be spiritual

- To have a strong moral sense
- To have an intellectual life

Whenever we see our partner in terms of how they affect us, we have problems. This type of thinking is at the core of self-centeredness. It is simply reducing our partner to an object to satisfy our own needs. We need to overcome this egocentricity and see our partner as a separate person with his or her own needs and feelings. This concept of both people in the relationship being separate individuals is the most important aspect of boundaries. We are not extensions of each other; you are not me.

Rather than self-centeredness, mature adults value the talents, knowledge, and skills of their partners. Mature people think in terms of how to nurture, develop, and take care of the treasures of their partners. Mature people in a marriage place a great value on the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes.

To have good boundaries on yourself is to separate yourself enough from your partner to allow him or her to enjoy their own life experiences. If you attempt to control your spouse's freedom to be separate, you are not a loving partner. If you take freedom away, there is no longer two to become one; there is only an extension of the controlling partner. You must also allow your partner the freedom to be different from yourself, because in a successful relationship, partners value and respect each other's differences. Oneness can only develop when two-ness exists! In short, if you love someone you set them free to be their own person.

What You Value Is What You'll Have

What you value in life is what you will have. In a relationship, what you value is what you will invest time in, nurture, and protect. The values that are important will become the identity and protective boundary of the marriage. They will dictate what its nature is going to be, what goals are going to be pursued, what type of connection will be sought, and what behavior will

not be allowed. Think of the values in your relationship as the frame of a house; they give it shape. The author believes that if you hold the following six values high in esteem, and pursue them as a couple, you will be building your relationship on a solid foundation.

But before we discuss the six values, let's discuss the worst value to pursue—your own happiness. You cannot think about happiness like a child. Children are self-centered and view relationships existing for their immediate gratification. You must be willing to work hard first and happiness will find you. The reason for this is because happiness is a *result*. Happiness is sometimes the result of having something good happen to us, but more often it is the fruit of hard work—in our relationship, our career, our spiritual life, or our personal growth. But more often, happiness is an inside job, being content and joyful regardless of our circumstances.

All marriages will require a lot of character work. But it will always be the result of fighting through a lot of problems—conflicts, fears, rejections, arguments, and hurt feelings. The problem lies in your attitude when you hit these walls of problems. If you view them as interfering with your happiness, you are in real trouble. If happiness is your guide, you will no doubt be angry over the inconvenience of loss of happiness and leave the relationship. The truth is, when happiness goes away, you find an opportunity for great growth and an opportunity to strive toward completeness.

Value 1: Love of God

Loving God must be first. He empowers us to change. He tells us how to change. And most important, God becomes the one that keeps us from imagining ourselves to be ultimately in charge. Love God first with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Lose your life to him, and you will gain it.

Value 2: Love Your Spouse

When you truly love someone, you celebrate who that person is. He or she adds value to your existence. Love has nothing to do with how that person can gratify you at that moment. It has to do with what you can do that is good for the other person. To deeply love another person is to get out of your self-centeredness and think about how your behavior affects someone else. How can you make your partner's life better? Love means you want the best for your partner even when they cannot see what that is.

Love cannot thrive without commitment. Commitment drives the need for growth as well as security. Love is also not just an attraction. Love is an expression of that attachment. Without action, love is dead. The author cites an example of a husband who writes his wife a note every day about something he values and loves about her. He is active in his communication about his love for her. The need for loving action can never go away if the relationship is going to grow and flourish over the years.

Value 3: Honesty

Deception damages a relationship, erodes confidence, and is impossible to work through if it denies the problem. Intimacy comes from deeply knowing the other person. If there are barriers to honesty, deep knowledge of a person's self is out of the question. You must feel safe enough in your relationship to allow yourself to be vulnerable to sharing. There is nothing more important than sharing your deepest feelings, needs, hurts, desires, and failures. The areas couples find the most difficult to be honest about are as follows:

- Feelings
- Disappointments
- Desires
- Hurts

- Anger
- Sex
- Sins
- Failure
- Needs and vulnerabilities

Deception usually takes place in a relationship for defensive reasons. Fears drive deception. So, in order for a partner to reveal the whole truth, they must deal first with their fears. Some of the more common fears are as follows:

- Fear of real closeness and being known
- Fears of loss of love or abandonment
- Fears of being controlled
- Fears that one will be seen as not good enough
- Fears of one's own feelings, desires and needs.

To live a life of total honesty, you must promise each other that you will never punish the other for being honest. Honesty must always be accompanied by enough grace to hear and deal with the truth it brings.

Value 4: Faithfulness

The author sums up a faithful partner as one who can be trusted, depended upon, and believed in, and one in whom you can rest. Faithfulness means to be trusted in all areas, not just the physical body but in matters of the heart as well. This does not mean you cannot have deep, supportive, emotional relationships with other people. Close friendship is a powerful tool in the areas of healing, sustaining and supporting. Many times close relationships are necessary to make you whole enough to help you get closer to your partner.

In troubled relationships, other things are often used as excuses to avoid the relationship. These objects of unfaithfulness can be numerous: outside relationships, work, hobbies, or addiction.

When these objects come between you and your partner, when part of you is disconnected from the relationship, when part of you is using these objects to purposely avoid the relationship, there is a problem.

Close friendship is not unfaithfulness. Different interests and aspects of a personal identity keep two people from completely identifying with each other, and therefore, one person cannot satisfy all of your needs in life. Friends will be able to connect with parts of you that your partner cannot. These friendships only become unfaithfulness when you take your heart away from the marriage to pursue them.

Value 5: Compassion and Forgiveness

The people you love the most are all imperfect humans. At some point, they are bound to fail you and hurt you. When a partner fails, you can deny it, verbally attack, or show love. No hurt exists that love cannot heal, but there must be tenderness and compassion. Jesus says in Matthew 9:8, failure is not the cause of divorce, but hardness of the heart is.

You must have an attitude of humility toward your partner's failures. Identify with his or her weaknesses as if they were your own. Become a partner in the healing process rather than a judge.

Value 6: Holiness

Don't get holiness confused with a religious picture. Pursuing holiness means you pursue growing as a person; that is, becoming the kind of person that is trustworthy, honest, faithful, and loving. You become whole. When holiness is valued in a relationship, the following is present:

- Confession and ownership of your problems

- A relentless personal drive toward personal growth and development
- Giving up everything that gets in the way of love.
- Surrendering everything that gets in the way of truth
- Possessing a pure heart in which nothing toxic is allowed to grow.

To be successful in becoming this kind of person, to be a partner in building a stronger relationship means placing your own growth first.

Three's a Crowd

Over time, relationships can become a warehouse for lots of activities, friendships, and interests. Couples' relationships can easily start to overindulge in work, kids, outside interests, television, in-laws, internet, finances, friends, addictions, and obviously affairs. Over time these forces can diminish your relationship. As many different things start to compete for your love, couples need to work at keeping their love secure.

Of course, couples in a relationship are still individuals and individuals are different people. Your friends and activities may be different than his, and that's okay. Everyone needs others to meet their emotional needs, places to go outside the relationship for comfort, help, truth, and growth. In fact, outside sources of nourishment help a marriage to flourish; close relationships are about growth of the individual, not about suffocating a partner in your interests alone. Intimate relationships are intended to be a home base to feel safe and express your feelings.

The author calls the problem of taking your heart outside the relationship *triangulation*. For example, triangulation is when you go beyond the normal desire for nourishment and invest

an excessive amount of time in your parents rather than your partner, or make your child your confidante instead of your spouse, or confide your problems with a friend rather than your life partner. When you start saying yes to everything outside of your relationship, you are saying no to your marriage.

Intimacy can create vacuums that may invite intruders into your or your partner's life. In an intimate relationship, you spend a great deal of time with a person—time that will undoubtedly reveal both their strengths and weaknesses. Many times these negative truths are hard to live with and cause friction; thus, one of you may distance yourselves from the relationship and cause a fracture in the intimacy.

It is helpful to work on signaling each other when one of you senses that love and truth are lacking. The best solution is to always love and not to attempt fixing a problem yourself. Express your loving feelings by communicating your feelings about the intruders that are coming between the two of you. Couples need to regularly check in with each other and ask the hard questions, such as, “Am I doing anything that hurts or bothers you?” The reality is that a relationship is only as good as the investment people make in it. We are always going forward or backward in the growth process; we can't stay the same. The connection either deepens or deteriorates.

Conflict

The goal in conflict resolution is not to place blame or to figure out who is right and who is wrong. In order to find a solution, it is helpful to first distinguish from what type of conflict the relationship is suffering. The author identifies the following six types of broad conflicts:

Sin of One Partner

With this type of conflict, one of the partners has done something wrong to damage the relationship. The list could

include continued angry outbursts, impatience, critical attitudes, judgmentalism, out-of-control spending, deception, controlling behavior, emotionally injurious behavior, verbal abuse, misuse of power, selfishness, greed, jealousy, envy, drug abuse, and sexual misconduct, to name a few.

Couples need to take a hard stand against anything that violates their values. First you must examine your own attitude and rid yourself of any judgmentalism. Second, let your partner know what he or she is doing is not right and let him know how it makes you feel. Use the “I” statement—not blaming. The bible says in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Third, offer your help to resolve the conflict. Fourth, discuss a follow-up plan where you discuss how the two of you as a team should deal with the subject if it comes up again. The best thing a partner can do when facing conflict is express humility and grace.

Immaturity or Inability in One Partner

Some people get married totally unaware of their partner’s shortcomings. “Falling in love” tends to idealize an imperfect person. But in every relationship, the flaws eventually surface and conflicts will arise from a partner’s inabilities—mandating growth on both sides.

The disillusioned partner must first accept the reality of his or her partner’s flaws. Some of the more common personal shortcomings that result in conflict include relational inabilities to communicate feelings and get close, lack of parenting abilities, emotional shortcomings in dealing with life problems, inabilities to manage money, sexual guilt and hang-ups, lack of completeness as an individual, and irresponsibility. Second, you must tell your partner what you

see that is a problem. You must let her know how it makes you feel and how it affects you. You must do this without being judgmental or lacking grace. Everyone needs to feel their partner is on their side and ready to offer support.

Third, the one being confronted about their shortcomings must own the problem. Try not to get defensive; instead, attempt to learn from what the other person is seeing in you.

Fourth, get a plan. Get help if necessary; remember that no one grows up alone. Last, always make your efforts mutual. No one is truly ever a complete person. Everyone's partner possesses different strengths and weaknesses; we are all always growing. So regardless of one person's shortcomings, make the problems mutual so that you can help one another grow.

Hurt Feelings That Are No One's Fault

We all have wounds. Things happen to us that make us sensitive—usually innocent actions by our spouse that set us off but were completely unintentional. When you know you are hurt, acknowledge your feelings and figure out what is bothering you. Take ownership of the hurt, as it is coming from inside you. Don't blame your partner, but instead communicate so he or she can gain an understanding of your feelings.

For the partner that is on the other end of the hurt, demonstrate caring, understanding feelings for your partner's feelings. Above all do not go to court trying to prove who is right and who is wrong. What is important is that your hearts connect with empathy for whoever is hurting.

Conflicting Desires

Whenever you have two people, you will have conflicting desires. Avoid moralizing your preferences as right and refrain from devaluing your partner's preferences. Instead validate his

or her desires as real and good. Do nothing out of selfishness but instead try to make sure your partner gets what he or she wants first; this will certainly stop most disagreements. When you are going to do an activity together, make sure you both want to participate. Try to give in to the activities of your partner and see the activity through his or her eyes as a learning experience.

Individual Desires vs. The Relationship's Needs

No relationship is going to thrive if the members are not getting their individual needs met, yet a strong relationship means giving up some individual rights for the sake of the relationship. Here are some tips:

- The relationship must come first. Give your best to the needs of the relationship before your individual desires.
- Tell your partner clearly what you want.
- Be excited about what your partner wants.
- Make sure your personal wants that tax the relationship are balanced with your partner's personal needs being met as well.

Resolving Conflict

Conflict is normal. If you did not have conflict, one of you would not be necessary in the relationship. When you attempt to resolve conflict, you will find two types of people in the world: The ones who listen and who love boundaries, and the ones who will not listen and are resistant to boundaries. The boundary lovers are characterized by the following traits:

- They are open to feedback and correction from others
- They do not become defensive when their partner shares feedback
- They take ownership of their own problems

- They have the ability to see themselves and observe their behavior
- They see their own need for growth and change
- They value the individual treasures of their partner
- They see their partner as an individual separate from themselves
- They allow their partner the freedom to be different from them
- They respect the freedom and space of their partner

The following is a process for dealing with all kinds of conflicts:

- Observation: One of you has to see the problem.
- Confrontation: You cannot fix a problem if you do not communicate what is wrong.
- Responsibility: If you are the problem, you must own it. If you have been hurt, you must own the hurt and communicate it.
- Repentance: Once you see your part in something, commit to change.
- Involvement: Become committed to staying involved in the process of solving the problem.
- Reexamination: Develop a system for reexamination of the problem if it reappears.
- Communication: Remember the basic rules of communication. Listen to seek understanding before you seek to be understood.
- Active listening: Use statements to let the other person know you are really listening.
- Non-judgmentalism: Do not devalue the other person's feelings. Just listen.
- Curiosity: Ask questions to clarify your understanding.
- Gentleness: Use the "I" statement to clarify your feelings, rather than the blaming "you."

Resolving Conflict with a Boundary-resistant Spouse

Boundaries are designed to protect love. They allow people to be separate yet stay connected. They enhance freedom. They define responsibility so the partners know what their tasks are. But you don't want to use your freedom to hurt your partner—only to better your love each other. The following benefits result when both partners preserve the boundaries of the other:

- You increase your ability to feel compassion for your partner's needs, desires, and hurts.
- You develop self-control and patience.
- You become humble and self-correcting.
- You appreciate your partner for who he or she is and not for his or her usefulness to you.
- You depend more on your own values for your happiness and not your partner's reactions.

The boundary message doesn't come as good news for those partners who control others and refuse to take ownership of their lives. They hear that things need to change, and change is perceived as difficult and carries the connotation of curtailing freedom. The changes required may involve any of the following by the boundary resistant partner:

- Allowing your partner to say no
- Admitting you have been trying to control your partner
- Respecting your partner's freedom
- Restraining from withdrawing from your partner, attacking him or her, or making him or her feel guilty
- Asking for your partner's feedback when you cross his or her boundaries

Boundaries may seem unpleasant to some partners but they are ultimately the only way to keep love alive and growing.

Unfortunately, boundary-busting partners have a basic attitude toward life that says, “I should be able to do what I want.” In order to accept boundaries, a person must be able to see the effects of his behavior toward others. Partners who refuse to admit faults can be boundary-busters; they avoid owning their faults. They look at a partner’s boundaries as being unfair. The following are suggestions by the author if your spouse is aware of your feelings but ignores, minimizes, or resists your boundaries.

- Do not minimize the situation.
- Don’t ignore the situation hoping it will get better.
- Do not become more compliant and pleasing.
- Don’t nag.
- Don’t blame your partner. Take ownership of your part of the issue.
- Don’t rescue your partner by taking total blame of the problem.

You will become free the moment you realize that to some extent you have contributed to the problem. As you open up to your partner and discuss your needs you will grow both spiritually and emotionally. The following things can happen during this process:

- You may discover why your partner has this particular issue.
- You may learn how to be more honest and confronting.

Before you can connect yourself to a specific boundary you will need to know the following:

- What boundary of yours is being violated?
- How does it affect the love of your spouse?
- Why is it important enough to risk possible conflicting discussions?
- When you deal with a specific issue, ask

yourself, “Am I requesting my partner to change his/her heart or simply his/her behavior?”

More than likely a boundary resistant partner will resist anything that has to do with change. People will have a difficult time changing if they do not feel that their perspective is understood. During these discussions you need to communicate to your partner that your goal is not to change him or her, but to protect your love. You must communicate you are trying to solve this problem so love can grow. It is important to remember that you cannot expect your partner to grow up before you do. Search for ways in which you have been a contributor to the problem. Move forward to make the changes you must make, even if your partner does not.

You must be responsible to both state the boundary problem and make a request for change. “Where there is no law there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15). Be clear and specific about your request. Use the “I” statement. Before you establish consequences, see what happens by appealing to love and understanding. Have the grace to see what time can do, once you have brought the issue to light between you (Matthew 18:15). If your partner does not respond to your boundaries, you must establish consequences so he or she will experience some discomfort for his or her irresponsibility. A consequence should have the following characteristics:

- Consequences are not designed to control or change your partner but to protect you and help with your reality.
- Consequences should not be established in anger or for the benefit of getting even but to stop enabling your partner and to protect you.
- Consequences should be based in reality.
- Consequences need to be enforceable. Make sure it is something you can and will do.

- Consequences are not something you do to control your partner or limit his freedom. They are reactions to his choices.
- The consequence should be as immediate as possible.

Remember, establishing boundaries are more for you than your partner. Enforcing consequences is more for your own emotional well-being. The misuse of boundaries will only result in increased alienation rather than increased love. The goal of boundaries must always be to preserve and deepen love.

Action Review Points

1. The ten laws of *setting boundaries* for a relationship are as follows.
 - The law of sowing and reaping: The one who has the problem must face the consequences of the problem.
 - The law of responsibility: We are responsible to each other but not for each other.
 - The law of power: You have the power to control your “self” but you have no power to control others.
 - The law of respect: If you want others to respect your boundaries you must respect your partner’s freedom of choice, freedom to disagree, and freedom to say no.
 - The law of motivation: We must be free from fear to say no in order to wholeheartedly say yes.
 - The law of evaluation: We need to evaluate the pain our boundaries may cause, realizing good pain leads to personal growth.
 - The law of proactivity: We must be proactive in communicating our boundaries, and being responsible to solve our own problems based on our own values.
 - The law of envy: We will never get what we want if we focus outside of our boundaries on what others have.
 - The law of activity: We must take responsibility for our own lives by taking action.

- The law of exposure: Boundaries must clearly be communicated to each other.
2. When you stop blaming your partner and take ownership of the problem yourself, you empower yourself to solve your problem. When you set limits on yourself, you grant your partner freedom of choice, allowing him or her an opportunity to grow. Of all the areas where it is most crucial to set boundaries upon ourselves is in our tendency to control our partners.
 3. Building oneness can only be built over a long period of time as the relationship grows out of two complete sets of well-adjusted and mature individuals. In the beginning stages of many relationships, a couple tends to give up all internal boundaries as they feel the euphoric sense of falling in love and a sense of oneness. But these feelings are not the reality of oneness.
 4. What you value is what you will invest time in to make your relationship grow. Invest time in the following values to help build a solid foundation:
 - Love of God
 - Loving actions to grow the relationship so it may flourish
 - Complete honesty to grow the intimate knowledge of who you really are
 - Being faithful, both with the physical body and the emotions of your heart
 - Accepting your partner's failures and hurts with compassion and forgiveness
 - Placing your own personal growth first to become whole
 5. You need outside sources of nourishment to help a relationship flourish but problems develop when outside activities and people become so intense they take your heart away from the relationship.

6. The goal of any conflict is not to place blame but to focus on identifying the problem and developing a solution.
7. A conflict resolution process is as follows:
 - a. Identify the problem.
 - b. Communicate what is wrong.
 - c. If you are the problem you must own it. If you have been hurt, you must own the hurt and communicate it.
 - d. Repent and commit to change.
 - e. Become committed to staying involved in the process to solve the problem.
 - f. Develop a system for reexamination of the problem if it reappears.
 - g. Listen to seek understanding before you seek to be understood.
 - h. Use statements to let the other person know you are really listening.
 - i. Do not devalue the other person's feelings. Just listen.
 - j. Ask questions to clarify your understanding.
 - k. Use the "I" statement to clarify your feelings.
8. Boundaries may seem unpleasant to some partners but they are ultimately the only way to keep love alive and growing. Be clear and specific about your request. Use the "I" statement. Before you establish consequences, see what happens by appealing to love and understanding; have the grace to see what time can do. If your partner does not respond to your boundaries, you must establish consequences so he will experience some discomfort for his responsibility.
9. Remember, establishing boundaries are more for you than for your partner. Enforcing consequences is more for your own emotional well-being. The misuse of boundaries will only result in increased alienation rather than increased love. The goal of boundaries must always be to preserve and deepen love.

The Dumbest Relationship Mistakes Smart People Make

By Carolyn N. Bushong, L.P.C.

(Villard, 1997)

History does not have to repeat itself. Mistakes don't have to happen. Why is it that men may be different but the relationship problems never seem to change? You can break the pattern. Once you arm yourself with the knowledge and insight of the seven dumbest relationship mistakes people make, you can build one that lasts. Carolyn N. Bushong gives you her time-tested techniques to building successful relationships.

Carolyn is a private-practice psychotherapist who specializes in relationship and sex issues. She has a master's degree in counseling and a bachelor's degree in education. She appears regularly on national talk shows and is host of her own radio show.

Introduction

Unfortunately, there is a self-defeating, unrealistic belief that true love should be easy. But I assure you, it isn't. This is true with anything worthwhile in life: If it is worthwhile it will undoubtedly require a vast amount of effort. The good news about broken or difficult relationships is that the problem is not you or your mate, but rather simply bad mistakes. In this book, Carolyn shows you how to understand your script and rewrite it, showing you how to accomplish the following:

- Recognize your mistakes and take responsibility for them.
- Stop blaming others.
- Recognize and change negative behavior.
- Establish and protect personal boundaries.
- Hold others accountable for the way they treat you.
- Avoid staying in relationships for the wrong reasons.

- Take charge of your happiness.
- Attract and maintain relationships of integrity.

How Relationships Work

When a relationship goes bad, instead of saying, “Why did he turn out be such a jerk” ask, “What could I have done to prevent this?” Several factors can contribute to making relationship mistakes. It can be our past relationships, basic beliefs about people and love, or low self-esteem. In order to correct our relationship mistakes, we must understand why we make them and what leads us to repeat them.

Among our many misunderstandings is our flawed conception of romantic love. As children we learn how to act in a relationship based on what we observe in our parents’ relationship. Because children are so dependent on their parents for love and acceptance, their relationship with their parents teaches them what to expect from love. What parents say and do—the sum of their behaviors—all serve to establish what is considered to be “normal” in someone who loves them. For children, it is difficult to fight back in a dysfunctional family, so they experiment with a variety of methods to psychologically survive and cope. Eventually children will discover a strategy that works to curtail their parents’ hurtful behavior. These childhood interactions are test sites for future relationship behavior. As we struggle to seek relationships that provide approval, acceptance, and love from a world of strangers, it is not a surprise that we would gravitate toward people whose attitudes and behavior is familiar and comfortable to us.

One of the reasons we make mistakes in relationships is because we embrace false beliefs that do not work for us. Another is that our intense need for love, approval, and acceptance clouds our judgment. If we can learn how to identify the cause of our relationship problems, learn why we

end up with the same type of guy or girl over and over again, we can learn how to break the cycle of making the same mistakes. Your goal should be to build healthy relationships for what it can do for you, to enhance your life and to facilitate your dreams and goals as an individual.

As you strive for balance in a relationship, it is important to remember the differences between men and women.

Generally, men are more solution-oriented, where women are more process-oriented. Men tend to have a need to control where women are raised to cooperate and place others' interests before themselves. Men are brought up to compete and place their interests first. Men are also forced by society to pretend their emotions do not matter. Unfortunately, many women are not comfortable with men who are willing to share their emotions.

The following beliefs are the foundations on which unhealthy relationships are built: Dad is the breadwinner and earns most of the money, taking care of the family while Mom stays home to take care of the kids. Dad enforces the rules while Mom threatens. Mom provides the emotional support by being the caregiver, problem solver, and nurturer. Mom models self-sacrifice, always placing the needs of her husband and family before her own.

The following are all poor beliefs to build a relationship on:

- You should expect to give more than you get out of a relationship.
- It's necessary and noble to sacrifice for those you love.
- You should not say things that will hurt your mate.
- If something you do feels right and good, it can't be wrong.
- Anger should be left unexpressed.

- Punishing your mate for bad behavior will make him change.
- Your primary obligation is to make your partner happy.
- There is a clear difference between right and wrong and most people know what it is.
- People who are in love agree on most things.
- When two people love one another, it doesn't take much work to keep love alive.

In contrast, the following are elements of a healthy relationship:

- Allow yourself to be vulnerable, and admit your weaknesses and when you are wrong.
- Allow yourself to express a full range of emotions, including anger.
- Express love, admiration, and respect for your partner.
- Possess high self-esteem.
- Communicate your emotions, thoughts, and feelings regularly.
- Bond regularly through experiences you both enjoy. Reminisce about the past and plan for the future.
- Participate in emotional sex regularly.
- Bring problems out into the open and negotiate solutions.
- Establish and respect each other's personal boundaries.
- Take responsibility of your own life while supporting your partner's endeavors.
- Be willing to experience new activities outside your comfort zone both with and without your partner.
- Recognize the first signs of resentment and speak up to resolve the issue.

- Live your life so you are an asset to your partner rather than a liability.
- Make and keep long-term commitments to one another.
- Assume the best about your partner in any situation.
- Continually remind each other of your love for one another.

In order to keep a loving relationship alive, you must be willing to make a commitment and invest great effort. A long-term, loving relationship is within your power if you are willing to work at it.

Finding a Balance in Relationships

Every relationship involves two people who play different roles. Both contribute to the relationship by what they do, by what they say, by what values they bring to the relationship, by how they feel, and by how they make the other person feel. When each partner in a relationship is firm about their individual identity and personal boundaries, there is an equal flow of respect, compromise, consideration, and effort. There is an equal balance between both people involved in the relationship.

By the time we are in adolescence, we should be learning a set of skills that teaches us how to stand up for ourselves, how to address our problems, and how to confront the people who cause the problems. Unfortunately, no one ever teaches us how to set personal boundaries and most of us never see others practicing it. Instead of building strong, balanced relationships by establishing personal boundaries, we use new relationships to correct the imbalances of previous relationships. As we move into new relationships we attempt to balance relationships by withholding trust and love—the very emotional capital we should be investing into the relationship.

Every imbalanced relationship conforms to a controller-dependent relationship. The controller is the person who makes all of the decisions, assumes a majority of the responsibility, and defines the relationship. The dependent person is the one who yields all of her or his power in these areas to the partner. The imbalances created in a controller-dependent relationship are at the heart of the seven dumbest mistakes. Healthy relationships are found in the middle ground where partners seek closeness through setting personal boundaries. We are more likely to attract healthy partners when we understand the importance of protecting our own identity and how to build an emotionally balanced relationship. Understanding the dynamics of a controller-dependent relationship is the key to avoiding mistakes in a relationship.

Our natural need to be loved and accepted motivates us to form relationships. This is certainly a healthy drive, for without it we would have no social interaction or real purpose in life. But seeking acceptance and chasing after approval leads to behaving in ways that undermine our self-interest, self-esteem, and our relationships. Any time you relinquish the responsibility of control over your own life, you throw away the power to control, influence, and change your life. Everyone and everything around you may be unhealthy, but until you change, nothing else ever will.

Rather than build relationships on equality and mutual respect, the controller-dependent relationship requires you to trade in your identity and your share of control for his or her love. In order to stop making the seven dumbest mistakes, a person in the controller-dependent relationship must separate him- or herself from the partner playing the opposing role. This will require you to become angry enough to stop playing your role. To claim your identity, you must begin to trust yourself, defy the authority of your partner, and worry less about what others think of you.

Focus on controlling yourself, not your partner. By changing your own behavior, you will change your partner's. In order to build an intimate, balanced relationship, you must take time to talk, touch, share, laugh, and resolve problems with open understanding and communication. A balanced relationship takes on the attitude, "It's you and me against the world."

Mistake Number One: Forcing Intimacy

Forcing intimacy never produces the healthy relationship people want. The pattern of forcing intimacy usually involves some of these characteristic behaviors: (1) forgoing socializing with other people as well as your own personal interests so you can spend more time together, (2) having sex very early in the relationship, or (3) idealizing the other person to the point where you believe he or she is "the one." Forcing intimacy is self-defeating because it makes you dependent upon your partner's approval. As long as you pursue his or her love, your partner will be in control.

Unfortunately, we are brought up to believe that everyone should be part of a couple. As a result, when we are alone we may feel unlovable, undeserving, and willing to do anything to avoid it. The drive to be loved and emotionally connected to someone is one of our most powerful fantasies. The problem lies in what we do to fulfill that fantasy. When we rush into a relationship, have sex too soon, and give up our identity, we have not taken the time to really get to know what our partner is really like. In fact, we really don't even know him or her.

But what goes up must come down. This is especially true when you have sex too soon. In the rush to have sex you are chasing the feeling to be loved, appreciated, valued, and wanted. When you have sex with someone you do not really yet know, the intensity of the physical relationship has more to do with your own need to be loved than any love your partner possesses for you. You must remind yourself that the feelings

you receive from an emotional physical encounter has nothing to do with a long-term loving relationship.

Rushed relationships are built on our dreams of what life should be like, not on true intimacy. At the beginning of any relationship, we are all on our best behavior and present only the best of ourselves. But sooner or later reality will set in. You have to approach new relationships slowly to really get to know what your partner is like, what a future with him or her would look like, and how would the two of you feel together. Remember, everything will be different once you let your guard down and really get to know each other.

True intimacy develops over time, when both partners move closer together at the same pace—neither one feeling pressured or rushed. Real love cannot flourish without emotional intimacy developing in the relationship first. Emotional intimacy involves the expression of both positive and negative feelings as well as an awareness of your partner's weaknesses and strengths. True emotional intimacy provides a shelter where we can be vulnerable, stay open, feel safe, and create an environment where honest communication flows.

A picture of a developing relationship may look something like this: You meet and chat several times at committee meetings at your local church. You may have coffee and indulge in some friendly small talk. At some point you may decide to meet for lunch. Over the next several months you eventually become friends, talking about life, work, relationships, philosophy, hobbies, politics, or whatever. You eventually plan a first date doing something fun together that you both enjoy doing. Eventually you may move to increased intimacy slowly—a first kiss, a lingering hug. As you continue to date you both continue to pursue your own personal interests as well as continue socializing with your own friends separately. In other words, you continue to live your own life and protect your individual identity. As you really get to know

one another and your emotional intimacy grows, you will eventually share a special night together. This is the beginning of a healthy, long-term relationship where neither partner would feel pressured or rushed from the other. For couples with strong, healthy relationships, this is no dream; it is how their love really begins.

From early childhood we seek approval. When someone new rejects us, we attempt to change his or her mind. If the person rejecting us is someone we love, the drive to chase his or her approval is even stronger. We attach false romantic beliefs to that chase. It is here that you must be careful not to put more time and effort into the relationship than your partner does. When you do, you send a message you are not worthy. Chasing after approval not only reduces your sense of self-worth, it also relinquishes control, makes you dependent, and actually can push your desired partner further away.

To avoid unbalanced relationships, don't idealize a person and don't be intimidated by him or her. We always present our best face when we meet someone we like, but don't get caught up in the first date façade. Take your date off of that pedestal and develop a realistic picture of who he or she really is as you get to know each other. Keep a mental ledger of what you like and what you don't like—remind yourself of that person's strengths *and* weaknesses. Find out each other's fears, insecurities, and personal problems. Most important, do not start the mental process of sizing him or her up for marriage material and fantasizing about how your life will change with that particular person in your future. It's natural to have goals and dreams about long-term relationships, but it becomes a problem when you overlook really seeing the person for who he or she really is and trying to force another individual into your personal fantasy. Whenever we focus on future expectations at the expense of present reality, we damage our potential for building a healthy relationship.

Also remember you will never be happier in a relationship than you are alone. A healthy relationship can compliment your happiness but it can never be the source of your happiness or create a sense of self-worth. If you are single now, imagine a future for yourself filled with happiness without one permanent partner. If you are currently married, adopt the idea of being responsible for your own happiness.

Sometimes the emotions of a new relationship can sweep over you so fast you don't realize you are giving up your own identity. There is a big difference between remaining two separate individuals with interests in common and becoming two people with one identity. Merging your identity into your partner's involves dropping your friends, your social life, and personal interests to accommodate his.

It is important to protect your personal identity by doing the following:

- Refuse to alter aspects of your personality to please your partner.
- Continue to spend time with your friends and family. Do not feel obligated to always include him or her.
- Continue to pursue your outside interests and hobbies.
- Do not share emotional intimacies unless it is in a give-and-take, balanced relationship.

People usually force intimacy because their needs are not being met in any other relationships. The irony, however, is that we end up more needy and lonely when we force intimacy. There are times in every relationship when we need to pull back and rebalance the power of things between the two people. At times like these, you need to pull back and direct your energy away from your partner; stop making him or her a priority in your life. Return your efforts back to your friends and your interests. The following are tips by the author for women who desire

well-bonded, balanced relationships:

- Don't have sex too soon.
- Tell him or her what you want from the relationship and what you will do if you do not get it.
- Do not ever give him the power to make you feel good about yourself.
- Make it a condition of the relationship that you will be as open and honest in your communications as he or she is with you.
- Don't give more love, time, or commitment than you get.
- Don't bend over backwards just to make the relationship easy. When you do, you are telling your partner that you value him/her more than you are valued in return.
- Encourage the treatment you want and discourage the behavior you do not want.
- Don't hide your strengths or weaknesses. Make sure your partner gets to know the *real* you.

Mistake Number Two: Expecting Your Mate to Read Your Mind

A partner cannot understand what a person is thinking or feeling without some form of communication. We just can't know. When women or men in a relationship fail to communicate in a direct and healthy manner, it is a sign of weakness. No matter how you rationalize the reason for not communicating, clamming up never will improve a relationship. Quality communication is at the heart of love. It is more important than romance, friendship, or anything else. Only communication can bridge the gap, solve problems, and build intimacy between two individuals. And remember, communication is a choice—we relinquish responsibility and control when we choose not to.

As soon as people decide to stop communicating fully, a chain of events is triggered. When you fail to express yourself, you feel misunderstood, you hold in negative feelings, and your resentment builds. As all of the little resentments build, a little irritation all of a sudden becomes a major catastrophe. Unfortunately, men very rarely discuss their feelings and women rarely ask directly for what they want or take action to change something they are unhappy about. Invariably these actions lead to feelings of not being loved.

Feelings are like bricks; depending upon how you use them, you can build bridges or walls. When you express your feelings to work through problems together, you build bridges. When you withhold your feelings, and express your anger indirectly through sarcasm, criticism, or judgmental statements, you build walls. Watch out for these unhealthy communication styles: judgmental, argumentative, whiny, authoritative, advisory, sarcastic, moralistic, analytical, and critical. These indirect or wordless styles of communication are, unfortunately, easily misread.

When you participate in open communication, however, you reveal your true feelings and expose your vulnerability; and your partner will tend to move toward you rather than further away.

The four steps to healthy communication are as follows:

1. Express yourself. Say how you feel, and be specific about who and what makes you feel that way. Don't attack. Start your statements with, "I feel..."
2. State what you want. Be specific. Start every statement with, "I want..."

3. Ask for a commitment. By asking a question that requires a yes or no answer, you are finding out whether or not your partner really heard you. Start each question asking for a commitment with, “Will you...”
4. Specify your consequences if your partner refuses to commit. If you really want to get what you want you need, put a plan in place for what you will do if you don’t get it. If you don’t follow through with your plan, you will remain in a dependent role, relinquishing control over your own life. Start each statement with, “If not, I will...”

Some may think it is selfish to ask for what you want; actually, this is healthy behavior. Always be very clear about what you want. Being strong means being able to take the risks required to express your feelings and be proactive in seeking a solution. When you ask for what you want, your partner should be eager to change his or her behavior or attitude to improve the relationship.

When we edit our feelings because we are afraid to hurt our partner’s feelings, we edit our very selves. When we edit our conversations with our partners, we leave our *selves* starved for honest communication. While we may rationalize that, “It’s a bad time to talk” or, “This will just cause an argument,” deep inside we know the truth. If we keep denying voice to our feelings, we will begin to lose touch with ourselves. Soon there will be no personality with whom our partner can bond. Eventually the negative energy of our pent up feelings will be directed toward our partner and taint our feelings about the relationship.

No one enjoys confrontations with a loved one, but productive conflict is necessary for a healthy, intimate relationship. We are taught not to hurt people’s feelings, that everything about love

should be happy. But when you hold this attitude, you leave no room for conflict, disagreement, and resolution of problems. Therefore, it is always best to address issues as they arise by using the four healthy steps to good communication, listed above.

You can never change another person's basic belief system, but you can change the way your partner treats you. To do that you have to communicate personal boundaries and take risks. The sooner in a relationship you express your likes and dislikes, what is acceptable and not acceptable, the greater your chance of altering your partner's behavior toward you.

To build an emotional relationship requires building an atmosphere that encourages mutual emotional participation. You must reveal your strengths, weaknesses, hurts, and fears. You must expose enough of yourself for someone to grow attached to the real you.

Mistake Number Three: Playing the Martyr

Playing the martyr involves the following behaviors:

- Making sacrifices. Do you rarely say no and usually agree to do things for your partner?
- Depending on your partner for happiness. Do you hand over responsibility to your partner for certain aspects of your life? Do you isolate yourself from friends because he or she doesn't like them?
- Putting your partner on a pedestal. Do you believe your partner is better than you are?

In a healthy, balanced relationship, our sacrifices are gifts to our partner, who matches our gifts in return. "Martyrs" are people who sacrifice their personality, dreams, ambitions, and self-esteem in the name of love. Martyrs assume they are at fault. Martyrs instinctively assume that any mistake is their fault and willingly take the blame. They automatically question themselves first when criticized, and continually beat themselves up.

Martyrdom creates a darkness of unspoken thoughts and feelings, unresolved conflicts, and unprotected personal boundaries. It results in feelings of resentment, anger, disappointment, and self-hatred; it pushes love away. If we play the martyr, we become eternal givers in a world of takers.

Those who embrace martyrdom permit unacceptable behavior. But unfortunately, they see damaging behaviors as normal because of their childhood surroundings. They consider being controlled normal. But remember that normal is not necessarily healthy. People who maintain strong, healthy boundaries can see controlling behavior as abuse. No matter how much you love someone, no one has the right to judge your choices or decisions. If someone criticizes you, ask them, “How have my choices or decisions affected you?” Remember that abuse is anything that feels hurtful to you. The following are behaviors that you may not think are abusive, but they are.

- Judging or criticizing you or anyone close to you.
- Blaming you.
- Insisting that you do things his way.
- Ordering you to do things.
- Accounting for the time you spend independently.
- Addressing you in a sarcastic, condescending manner.
- Acting jealous.
- Isolating you from friends.

Learn to spot your partner’s insecurities. An insecure partner will seek to control you. They will try to push your acceptance buttons to drive you to chase after his or her approval. When you do not call your partner out on such unacceptable behavior, you give permission to repeat it. Signs of insecurity are as follows:

- Has few friends.
- Acts tough when people try to get past his or her wall.

- Talks about what you and other people should do.
- Is unable to be spontaneous.
- Seeks his or her parents' approval.
- Is unable to share feelings.
- Is selective about revealing his or her past.
- Tries to control you and others.
- Relationships are filled with stories about how "people don't understand him/her."

To end the pattern of playing the martyr, you must drop the excuses and begin to see things as they are. Take charge of your own life and begin to stand up to anyone who tries to control you. Use the four steps of healthy communication. Learn to set and protect your boundaries. Follow through with your consequences. Stop accepting someone else's judgmental version of who you are.

Mistake Number Four: Thinking You Are Always Right

People who act as if they are always right seek a controlling role. Yet it is a mistake to believe that loving someone gives us the right to criticize and correct him or her. Acting as if we know more than someone else creates the temporary illusion that we are stronger, smarter, and better than someone else. Unfortunately, it is impossible for anyone to create a healthy, intimate relationship while hiding behind a wall of self-righteousness.

Think about romantic-partner arguments you have witnessed or experienced for yourself. Do you find yourself falling into a pattern of viewing any disagreement as right or wrong? If you feel you must win every minor argument, you may be vying for more control in your relationship.

Many people believe that concepts of right and wrong are absolute—especially in the areas of religion and politics; also

that there is only one right way regarding certain life values, and many times these beliefs lead to sexism, racism, and homophobia. Generally, people who hold very firm right or wrong views end up with a partner who shares the same views.

Power is the ability to influence and dictate the terms of the relationship; this is what the struggles in every relationship are ultimately all about. But intimacy requires vulnerability. When we allow ourselves to become vulnerable, we feel more threatened. We proceed to protect ourselves by asserting more control. The thinking becomes, “If I win an argument, my identity remains intact. If I lose, I relinquish who I am.” When you tell your partner what he or she should and should not do, you are trying to change another person’s identity. And even worse, if you attempt to change your partner through punishment, you will open the doors to great resentment.

In contrast, people in healthy relationships work out disagreements while keeping their individual identities intact. They respect each other’s differences, compromise, negotiate, and sometimes simply agree to disagree.

If you recognize the controlling urge in yourself, the wisest thing to do is to step out of that role in your relationship. Get into the habit of admitting you are wrong each time you find yourself acting self-righteous. Accept responsibility for your behavior and apologize. Whenever you uncover a condescending comment or an unsolicited piece of advice, ask yourself, “Is this important? Does it really matter if it’s done my way?” Ask yourself, “Why am I acting like this? What am I afraid of? Do I feel more in control when I’m telling my mate what to do or when he/she is wrong?” Many times we try to control the little things in life because we cannot control the bigger problems in our relationships. Eliminate the big problem and forget about the small stuff.

While it is important to learn to compromise, it is also important to identify the point at which compromise is out of the question. On issues where compromise is impossible, learn to listen to your partner's point of view respectfully and express an earnest desire to understand. But continue to explain your point of view and expect respect in return. Complete agreement is not always the only path available.

You can stop the controlling power struggle at any point by simply communicating openly and honestly. Start by using the four steps to healthy communication: (1) Express how you feel, (2) state what you want, (3) ask for a commitment, and (3) specify what you will do if you don't get what you want. In a balanced relationship where couples compromise to find solutions, no one ever loses. It is important to see self-righteous behavior for what it is—a hindrance to intimacy.

Mistake Number Five: Rescuing Your Mate

It is a sign of strength and maturity to give and receive help. This is the ability to open up and accept assistance from a partner when we need it, balanced by the willingness to appropriately place our partner's needs before our own. In contrast, when one partner is constantly in need of help and you provide constant support, the giver is making the mistake of being a rescuer.

One way to tell the difference between a rescuing relationship and a healthy one is how you define crisis. Are you supporting your partner in a situation that is beyond control, or are you solving his or her problems and shielding consequences? When a partner is functioning as a rescuer, he or she is also the controller in the relationship. You have crossed the line into rescuing when you:

- Always handle the other person's problems;
- Believe and act on what you believe is best for your partner; and

- Never let him or her suffer the consequences.

Whoever functions in the rescuer role becomes the controller, forcing the rescued partner into a dependent role. People who are made to feel dependent do not tend to feel empowered in their own lives and eventually come to resent the controller.

When we equate rescuing with love, we have lost sight of the importance of the balance of give and take that is necessary in a healthy personal relationship. The author offers the following perspective, using the example of a male dependent and female controller:

While rescuing a partner involves trying to fix his life, lending support involves being there for him, listening, showing empathy, and most important of all, sending him the message that you believe he can solve the problem himself. When you love someone, you need to help him on his journey, not carry him down the road. Rescuing is a controlling, self-defeating mistake. It is never wise to do more for someone than he is willing to do for himself or for you. When you have developed the habit of rescuing your partner and you are not quite sure how to arrive at a new role—begin by visualizing a more equal relationship; a relationship where he supports you. Imagine give and take in every aspect of your relationship.

Mistake Number Six: Taking Your Mate for Granted

It's all too easy to stop appreciating the ones we love—the most important people in our lives. When the person we love has been around for a long time and the relationship becomes habit for us, we begin to take our partner's love for granted. Not only do we all need to be loved and appreciated, but we need to be reminded of it every single day. If you find yourself thinking, "He knows I love him," or, "She knows our relationship is strong," ask yourself why you believe that. Have you said, "I love you," recently? Does your partner really know

how much you love him or her?

As soon as we stop giving special attention to our partners, we are taking the first step toward letting our love and passion die. Ask yourself the following questions to gauge if you might be taking your partner for granted.

- Do you spend non-quality time with your partner feeling bored?
- Do you think of your partner more as family and less as the romantic person he or she was when you dated?
- Do you share your feelings more openly with friends than your partner?
- Do you view going home to spend time with your partner as something you have to do?
- Do you seldom make an effort to look your best when you are with your partner?
- Do you seldom spend spontaneous time together?
- Do you say more negative comments to your partner than loving ones?
- Do you treat your partner more like a roommate than a lover?

When people are together for a long time and feel secure in their relationship, they feel less of a need to make a special effort to include gestures of affection. It's no wonder we start to forget to say please and thank you. We often deny our partners the simple courtesy we extend to strangers.

When we continuously choose to spend our time and energy on people and things other than our partner, we invite suffering into our relationship. When two people meet, they put all of their effort into nurturing love. The love you build between the two of you is what brings you together to create your family, dream house, and circle of friends. But eventually you become so focused and busy on what the love has created that you stop

devoting time to maintaining the love that made it all possible.

The little things like taking the time to show consideration, say a heartfelt thank you, and offer an unexpected kiss or hug are all little ways to say, “I love you.” Romantic love cannot stay alive without respect. Respect suffers when we treat our partners like family members or do not show them the same respect we give our friends when we are in their company. Your love flourished because you spent quality time together; love will die when there is an increase of non-quality time that discourages meaningful, intimate communication.

Another way that love dies is when you stop sharing emotional, intimate pieces of information. Maybe we are afraid to confide in our partner because we fear judgment or rejection. Ask yourself the next time something really good or bad happens, “Whom do I call first or talk to the most about it?”

Relationships can only grow stronger when the two of you are talking, sharing, supporting each other, and discussing your feelings honestly. A neglected partner will eventually begin to withhold love and turn his attention to someone who appreciates him or her. Another common problem is to get so stuck in the roles we play every day as a breadwinner, homemaker, etc., that we become overwhelmed with our daily responsibilities. We must remember that regardless of who we are to our children, employer, clients, and family members, we must protect our identity to our partner as a romantic lover.

Unfortunately people do fall out of love. Maybe you married out of impulse, desperation, fear, insecurity, or loneliness. Maybe the better you got to know your partner, the more you realized he or she wasn’t right for you. Maybe you have grown and changed so much it is impossible to continue a relationship. Or maybe you still love him or her as a parent to your children or a provider, but not in a romantic way. Once you have fallen out of love it is very hard to maintain a bond

that involves honesty and integrity.

The following is a guide how to keep love alive:

- Be affectionate.
- Set quality time aside to spend together.
- Examine how you spend your time together.
- Negotiate roles that fit your relationship.
- Cherish your memories and put effort into creating new ones that you can cherish tomorrow.
- Play together.
- Establish courtesy rules around the house.
- Talk about your relationship. Check in regularly how your partner is feeling toward you.
- Reminisce about the good times you have shared.
- Talk about events of your life from the past as well as the future.
- Check in with each other during the day.
- Be spontaneous and break out of your regular routine to have fun together.

Mistake Number Seven: Letting Passion Die

Do you think this to yourself, “I love my partner, but I am just not romantically *in love* with him/her anymore.” Those words reflect a relationship with pain, sadness, regret, resignation, and hopelessness. You must take personal responsibility for the course of protecting your intimate bond by not letting the sexual passion in your relationship die

The mistake of letting passion die usually begins with a breakdown in communication. The failure to communicate all of the little problems that can creep into a relationship will eventually trigger an avalanche. When you don’t deal with these little problems on a daily basis, a wall begins to slowly

rise until one day you simply cannot reach around it. The following are some of the false beliefs that give us excuses to let passion die:

- I think it is normal to have less interest in sex once you have been with your partner for a while.
- I think our sex life will improve once we have more time.
- I would love our sex life to be passionate again, but I have accepted the fact it will never be like that again.
- With our hectic lifestyle it is no wonder our romance has died.
- Since I have gained weight (turned forty, etc.) I just don't feel sexy or attractive anymore.

In a romantic relationship, sex is the critical element that distinguishes between two people who are in love and two people who think of themselves as family. Because good sex requires the ultimate in vulnerability, trust, honest expression, and total emotional commitment, there is nothing in the relationship that can replace it. When you neglect the sexual part of your relationship, you weaken its bond and remove an important part of yourself from it.

To keep the passion alive, grow the sexual part of your life in the same manner you grow the other segments of your life. Once two people settle down their life takes on dramatic changes with careers, homes, children, accumulating wealth, etc. Because the courtship phase is officially over, your energy is focused on other aspects of your life; the need to keep exploring your sexual life ends. As we grow older our horizons and knowledge are supposed to broaden. We develop new hobbies, take on new activities, and become stimulated by new experiences, yet we seldom think about our sexual life with our partner in these terms. Most of us invest more time considering what to wear to a dinner party than we do about

our sex lives. Some couples become so entrenched in the same predictable sexual choreography that it becomes more exciting to bake a cake or read a good book.

We must talk about sex with our partner in order for it to improve, while being careful to avoid a range of threatening emotions—love, rejection, failure, and guilt. What many of us fail to recognize is that as people grow and change, their sexual life must also evolve and change. When we discuss it in the context of a healthy relationship, it can be a positive experience.

Action Review Points

1. We must learn how to identify the cause of our relationship problems. In a world of strangers, we struggle to seek relationships that provide approval, acceptance, and love, so it is not a surprise we would gravitate toward people whose attitudes and behavior is familiar to us—complementing the strategies we learned as children.
2. One of the reasons we make mistakes in relationships is because we embrace false, unsustainable beliefs. Another is that our intense need for love, approval, and acceptance clouds our judgment.
3. Our natural need to be loved and accepted sometimes leads to behaving in ways that undermine our best interests, self-esteem, and relationships. Any time you relinquish the responsibility of control over your own life, you throw away the power to influence its course.

4. We are more likely to attract healthy partners when we understand the importance of protecting our own identity. Your goal should be to build healthy relationships that enhance your life and to facilitate your dreams and goals as an individual. Healthy relationships are found where there is a balance of power in the relationship; where partners seek closeness through setting personal boundaries.
5. A person in a controller–dependent relationship must separate themselves from the partner playing the opposing role by becoming angry enough to stop playing your role. To claim your identity, you must begin to trust yourself and worry less about what your partner thinks of you. By changing your own behavior, you will change his or hers.
6. Do not force intimacy early in the relationship. Forcing intimacy is self-defeating because it makes you dependent upon your partner’s approval. True emotional intimacy emerges over time and involves the expression of both positive and negative feelings, as well as an awareness of your partner’s weaknesses and strengths. It is never wise to initiate physical intimacy until you have achieved emotional intimacy.
7. Do not expect your partner to read your mind. Withholding communication never will improve a relationship. Quality communication is at the heart of love.
8. Do not be a martyr. Retain your personality, dreams, ambitions, and self-esteem even while you are in love, or else feelings of resentment, anger, disappointment, and self-hatred will push the love away. In a healthy, balanced relationship our sacrifices are gifts to our partner which are reciprocated.

9. Do not think you are always right. It is impossible for anyone to create a healthy, intimate relationship when hiding behind a wall of self-righteousness, clinging to a controlling role. In contrast, people in healthy relationships work out disagreements through respecting each other's differences, compromising, negotiating, and sometimes simply agreeing to disagree.
10. Do not rescue your partner. Rescuing creates a controller–dependent dynamic. People who are made to feel dependent do not tend to feel they have much power over their own lives and eventually become to resent the controller. Instead, lend support by being there for your partner, listening, showing empathy, and most important, sending the message that you believe he or she can solve the problem independently.
11. Do not take your partner for granted. It's all too easy to stop appreciating the ones we love—the most important people in our lives. We all need to be loved and appreciated, but we need to be reminded of it every single day.
12. Do not let your sexual passion die. Good sex requires the ultimate in vulnerability, trust, honest expression, and total emotional commitment, so there is nothing in the relationship that can replace it. The failure to communicate is the first step in letting passion die.
13. You will never be happier in a relationship than you are alone. A healthy relationship can compliment your happiness but it can never be the source of it, nor create a sense of self-worth. If you are single now, imagine a future for yourself filled with happiness without one permanent partner. If you are currently married, adopt the idea of being responsible for your own happiness.

How to Stop the Pain

By Dr. James B. Richards

James Richards is an author, teacher, theologian, and businessman. His success has placed him in demand as a speaker and personal advisor. While he holds degrees in theology, human behavior, and medicine, he emerged from years of personal pain, dysfunction, and deep bitterness. His personal process has given him the tools for the process to free himself from personal pain. The end results of his teachings and methods include a peaceful, productive life of loving, meaningful relationships.

How to Stop the Pain is about the pain we all experience every day. Every day millions of people live in heartache. You've been wounded, and you just can't seem to heal. You try to get on with your life but you just can't seem to move forward. Everyday exhumes the pain you try to bury. It cripples your relationships with people, God, and your everyday life. It destroys your ability to pursue your dreams. This book will free you from the forces that would turn you into a victim. It will lead you through a step by step process that will free you from the pain of the past and protect you from the pain of the future. Learn how to break the link to the pain of the past. Identify the sources for your suffering. Learn how to not be hurt by insults or criticism. Free yourself from the need to judge others.

By applying the principals in this book , you can free yourself from emotional pain that can linger for a lifetime. You can have more personal freedom than you have ever known. Relationships can become more peaceful and less stressful. You can reduce the amount of conflict in your life, You can eliminate your past pain and stop creating new pain.

Judgement

Life is like a garden, what you grow in it you will receive. If you give judgment and criticism, others will give you judgment and criticism. If you give kindness and love, others will give you kindness and love. Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

The quality of your emotional life is found in the quality of your relationships. Meaningful relationships are one of the deepest needs we have as a human being. Our judgments influence those relationships more than any other factor. It is when we assume to know *why* a person did what he did that we have entered into judgment. The moment you attempt to determine why another person is doing what he is doing, you have given it *significance*. There is nothing that can ever hurt you unless you give it *significance*.

Breaking the power of pain

Nothing that happens outside of you has the power to hurt you until you judge it. Only when you judge something does it become significant within your life. It is this significance that can turn a single event into suffering. So it is our judgments that produce our pain. Consider that when a personal offense presents itself, it is our reaction that is the determining factor. We do not experience pain accidentally, we fall into pain in response to events and circumstances. Realize that most personal offenses have nothing to do with us. Most people say and do things not because of us but because of who they are. It is because of our self-centeredness that we think everything a person does is intended for us. So in our haste to judge, we react, we add significance, and create our own pain. True healing from an offense happens when everyone benefits from the event. The goal can never be punishment of the offender

but instead forgiveness. When a person offends us we must take it as an opportunity to grow in love and mercy.

The power of significance

The effect of another person's words or actions has little to do with the intent of the person. People can take actions with no harm intended for anyone, the actions may even be intended for good, but they end up creating pain. You may think "Why are they doing this to me?" The truth is, regardless of people's intentions, we do it to ourselves. We do it by making judgments, and attaching significance to the event. The measurement, or size and value we attach to the perceived offense, will determine the effect it has on us. Consider the boss who is late for an expected conference call and rushes by his secretary into his office without saying a word or flashing his normal good morning smile. His secretary could make a judgment that he is unhappy with her work and add significance to his actions in her mind by asking herself, "Why doesn't he like me?" "Why is he mad at me?" "Why doesn't he speak to me?" by adding significance to your judgments, you have added power and pain to the event.

Become an observer

If we could return to experiencing life as an observer, we would be free from the need to judge others. For example, knowing a person's track record gives us observable, measurable information so we can act wisely in relating to him. Knowing his track record, however, does not give us the right to make judgments about his motives in a particular situation; it simply tells us what he has a tendency to do. It certainly does not give us the right to treat him without love or respect. After all, people can change and grow. In our attempt to protect ourselves, we judge. Unfortunately, judging distorts our observations and results in more pain. When we judge we focus on the other person and act for the other person's reasons. We

need to justify our excuse for saying yes or no. When you observe rather than judge, you are free to act for your own reason and be motivated by your heart. For example, A response based on observation rather than judgment would say,” My past experience with you makes me believe this will have a negative outcome, and I don’t want to risk the relationship.” One of the most gracious things you can do is to refrain from passing judgment and give the person an opportunity to establish a new track record.

Fixing others

Love can compel us to be sensitive to the needs of the ones we love. But with a twist of motivation, we can find ourselves becoming more focused on the fault rather than the need. The moment you come to the point where you can see your loved ones faults clearer than your own, you have become a hypocrite. The best thing you can do to take care of a loved one’s problem is to take care of your problems. When you focus on yourself, you will develop the heart to walk in love. It is never our job to fix anyone. It is our job, however, to create an environment to help others heal and solve their problems. In an environment of love and acceptance, people feel safe enough to face their problems. Finding fault with others is typically the result of fear, low self-esteem, or anger. It is a vain attempt to change others, resulting in more conflict and lost love. When we believe we know why people are the way they are, we can see clearly see how to fix the problem. But that very judgment blinds us to reality and renders us unable to help anyone. When you see things clearly you will see that loving, accepting, encouraging, and nurturing will achieve superior results to finding fault, condemning, and fixing.

What is wrong with our negative thinking that leads us to believe that teaching people what we think is right starts by telling them what is wrong. We tend to believe that knowing the truth is what qualifies us to instruct others. If we believe, “I

am right” that qualifies us to help others see the truth. But being right does not qualify us to teach others. It is only the motive of love and caring that qualifies us to teach others. Too often we try to lead from a position of superiority. The issue becomes more focused on proving our judgment right rather than helping the other person. But it is our judgment that makes it impossible to hear what the other person is communicating and holds dear in their heart. The whole thing can end up more about your needs rather than the other person’s needs.

Whenever people feel we are trying to fix them, they will feel controlled and rejected. They feel the entire process is about proving them wrong. They feel that we are imposing our choices upon them rather than empowering them. The best thing we can do to help others is to help ourselves. We must be motivated by love for the other person. We must be able to convey hope, confidence and trust. We must make people feel loved and safe. We must become models for others to follow rather than someone trying to fix people. Until love motivates us, we will be governed by a self-centered agenda trying to fix others.

Matthew 7:3-5 TLB “And why worry about a speck in the eye of a brother when you have a board in your own? Should you say, ”Friend, let me help you get that speck out of your eye,” when you can’t even see because of the board in your own? Hypocrite! First get rid of the board. Then you can see to help your brother.

If I don’t blame you, where does that leave me?

Judgment is a characteristic of people who find a false sense of security from finding fault with others rather than looking and listening to their own hearts. Externalists do not follow the love from their heart but rather the behavior of others. Their entire way of life is built on measuring and criticizing others faults. For the externalist, judgment works as a defense mechanism.

When you keep your focus on others you avoid dealing with your own issues. Whatever we hold in our mental focus for extended periods of time can work for us or against us. If we are experiencing condemnation in our hearts, we will express condemnation to those around us. If we feel love and acceptance, we will give love and acceptance. When your sense of security is from the love in your heart, you will be free to model that love rather than judge the behavior of others.

The critical eye

Fault finding critical eyes find what they judge to be a problem in others. The devastation can be so great that the heart of the person being judged is destroyed and is left with nothing. Once we have negatively touched a person's self-worth, all meaningful communication is over. Our speech should preserve people, not destroy them. The person who will influence you the most is not the person you believe in; it is the person who believes in you. We must make people see that we believe in them regardless of their problems. People also experience by watching. People learn more from what they see us doing than from what they hear us saying. How you see others is a reflection of how you see yourself.

Boundaries

The statement "If it affects me, it is my business" is not true. It is only our judgment that causes us to take ownership of another person's actions. Our justification is that we believe the other person deliberately tried to offend us. But getting your feelings hurt is not an offense. Being made angry is not an offense of someone's actions toward you. Most of these experiences come as a result of our judgment. They may not even be the intentions of the other person. When you judge others you cross over their boundaries into a territory where you are not invited.

Control

Judgment is always a part of the process of control. When we make judgments we feel we have the right to control others. But controllers immobilize people by robbing them of their freedom to act independently. When the controller sees people failing to change, he creates new judgments as to why they are not changing. Those judgments bring on more pain and disappointment. While we are making judgments, the other person has their own judgments going on. As a result, the relationship can become polarized, pushing people even further apart. Soon the relationship can fall apart, not based on the issues but rather the judgments.

How I see it

Reality is always distorted by our perception. Our perception is created by many subjective factors including our self-worth. How we see and interpret the world around us is determined by how we see ourselves. People with low self-worth tend to interpret information in a more negative way, making them feel like victims. The more negative one's sense of self-worth, the more judgmental their attitude. The more positive your self-worth, the less likely you are to judge others words or actions as having any relevance toward yourself. Remember, judgment wants to know why and the questions and answers always revolve around self-centeredness. Self-centeredness makes self the focus for interpreting life and all of its events. Unfortunately, when you do not think well of yourself, you will also think others do not think highly of you. As a result, you judge others actions in light of your own negative self-perception. These negative judgments, based on your self-perception, become your reality.

When people pass judgment and develop strong opinions, they lock themselves into a selective process of filtering information. For example, once you make a judgment about a

person, whether it is good or bad, you will notice information only when it validates your judgment or opinion. Future experiences with that person will then be based on your past judgments, regardless of the intention of the person. In order to see something differently, you must be willing to surrender your judgment and opinion.

Behavior patterns

One of the greatest reasons we are lead into judging others is the assumption that other people do things for the same reasons we do. It is helpful to understand four general behavioral styles.

- Direct person – Prefers to get to the point, strong force of character, prefers a lot of personal space
- Inspirational person - People person, is inspired and discouraged easily, looks for social acceptance, wants to be liked, very touchy-feely personality.
- Steady person – Very kind and personable, remains very calm, very indirect, avoids conflict, seeks to keep things calm and steady
- Conscientious person – Analytical, detail oriented, wants everything to be right, dislikes conflict, prefers control through quality standards.

The problem is that people fail to understand that other people do things because of their behavior patterns. When you rush to judge someone based upon your behavior pattern, you are assuming others do things for the same reasons as you do. For example, let's say an inspirational woman starts talking to a direct man. She notices as she moves to get closer to him he backs away. The more she attempts to get closer the more he

pulls back. As a result she makes a judgment he does not like her. We often cheat ourselves out of many wonderful relationships because of our initial judgments. We reject people before we ever get to know them. And what we believe to know about them is seldom who they really are. Only when we learn to release people from our judgment will we become able to know them and value them for who they are.

Destroying new relationships

When we were children we naturally interpreted every event in our lives as if it were all about us. Then we interpreted the world through our judgment of those experiences. As mature, we fail to realize that our world view was established from a very self-centered platform. We don't necessarily realize why we see things the way we do, but it forms our self-perception and all of our actions. To a certain degree, most of the major decisions we make in our life will have been pre-determined from a very young age by the way we view the world and ourselves. Because we have previously determined how the roles of our life should be played out, we approach new relationships with a definition as to what this person will be like. Those views were made by previous judgments throughout our lives. We have a view of what is a good friend and what is a bad friend. Based on these predetermined views, we will accept or reject a new acquaintance before we really get to know the person. This is why people fall into repetitive patterns in the types of people with whom they build relationships. In this system, we stay within our comfort zone. But because we are not interacting with different types of people, we are never challenged to grow.

We need new relationships with different kinds of people in order to break out of past patterns and grow. Relationships should be places of personal development. They should challenge and stimulate us. They should open us up to new and different experiences.

Your heart is your guidance system

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.” Proverbs 4:23.

All that you do emerges from the beliefs of your heart; it is the core of your being. It is from the beliefs of the heart that your self-perception and world view revolve. All that we do, see, and feel is affected by that perception. Our self-perception is the color of the lens through which we filter and interpret everything that passes through us. It determines how we experience our own individual reality.

Our self-perception, what we believe in our hearts about ourselves, is the result of positive and negative experiences that were out of our control. We did not choose these experiences, and when they occurred, we did not realize what kind of effect they would have on our heart and self-perception. Most of what we believe about ourselves is the product of other people, adults and children, of who many may have been acting in a dysfunctional manner. What happens is adults and children express themselves in the sphere of our emotional experiences, and when we are young, we judge these experiences with the perception and understanding of a child. As we mature, we define our world and our self-perception from those judgments. We thought those people did what they did because of us, but in reality they did it because of themselves. We just happened to be there. But we subjectively judge that conduct and believe it is about us. Our judgments and self-centeredness add importance to the experience and it manifests negative or positive self-talk. Our self-talk becomes written on our hearts; it becomes the information we experience in our daily lives. It forms our self-perception and how we see ourselves and others.

The hearts of children are extremely vulnerable. Healthy self-perspectives do not happen because a child is given the

right information; it is the result of how a child is made to feel. Teaching a child what is right is worthless if the heart is filled with low self-esteem. Teaching a child to be good usually results in a self-belief that says I'm bad. The objective in parenting is to make the child feel loved, accepted, and secure. If the heart feels safe, it is open and teachable. People should never be taught because they are wrong, but because they are loved. Successful parents model love and acceptance to their children.

Writing the truth on your heart, the shaping of who you are, happens when your mind is in the alpha state. The alpha state occurs when your brain waves slow down to around seven cycles per second. (The awakened state of the brain for adults is at fourteen cycles per second or more.) Some studies indicate that children under eleven are in an alpha state almost all of the time, whereas adults experience an alpha state only during prayer, meditation, and right before falling asleep and upon awakening. During the alpha state the conscious mind loses its hold on the thought process, and thoughts of the heart begin to emerge. This can mean that almost every experience a child has can effect what is written on his or her heart.

As adults it is important to make it a priority to establish the time to develop a meditative prayer life to develop your heart. It is an investment that will pay huge dividends throughout your life. And one of the greatest benefits will be to deliver you from the need to judge.

Freedom from judgment

We must free ourselves by attempting to feel our superiority through judging others. But we simply don't know why anyone does something. Even if we think we do, it doesn't change anything. When we judge, it only binds us to the judgment of others. We must give up our vain attempt to control others through our judgments and surrender our rights to judge. Only

then can we find freedom from the judgment of others.

In order to fulfill our passions and dreams, we must live free from the judgment of others. We will never learn to follow our hearts if we are controlled by the judgments and opinions of others. To follow your heart, you must realize if it is worth doing, it is worth doing wrong until you get it right. You cannot grow as a person if you are consumed with how it looks to others. When we are controlled by the fear of others judgments and opinions, our personal development will be curtailed. But this type of control by others is imaginary. This control over you is not because of their intentions, it is determined by your beliefs. No one can take control of us, instead we give our power to act away. We give our control away in exchange for something else – removal of the fear of being judged by others. When you value the approval of others, when you value freedom from responsibility, you are giving away your freedom to act on behalf of your dreams. So whenever you feel controlled, do not look at others but ask yourself, “What do I value so strongly in this situation that I am willing to give up control in my life?” The starting point for freeing ourselves from the control of others is releasing others from our own judgment and control.

Overcoming the need to judge

If you want to be wise only deal with the facts. Our assumptions concerning the motives of others is dangerous. All we can really know about anyone else is what we observe. Every day we judge people hundreds of times and act on those judgments. It is amazing how often we assume to know why someone does something. The moment we judge *why* someone does something rather than *what* they are doing we have entered into judgment. The whole concept of relating to people based upon our judgments removes us from the truth and reality. When we approach someone, do we confront them with a heart of judgment or a heart of love? Before you confront someone

ask yourself these questions: “Am I doing this to prove myself right?” “Am I trying to get in the last word?” “Am I trying to get even?” Will the way I am doing this promote peace or conflict?” “Will the way I am planning on handling this negatively affect the person’s self-worth?”

In a healthy confrontation we observe what they did rather than judge why they did it. We can inform them how their actions made us feel; but we cannot pass judgment. Your goal is to help the other person understand the affects of his actions. You make your response to people with a heart focused on love, and the response will usually be one of gratitude. When you accept that loving communication will accomplish what you desire, you will feel free from the need to judge.

Freedom from justification

From our earliest life experiences we learn to live a reactionary life. A big part of our reactionary life is our need to justify our actions. Our parents trained us to justify our actions by asking us “Why did you do that?” As a result, our behavior becomes a reaction to the world all around us, and those reactions are usually based on judgments. But reactionary living, regardless of the reason, puts us out of control. So our actions are no longer based on our choices, but the actions or perceived future actions of others. Whenever our actions are based on the judgment of actions of others, or on the attitudes of others, we are out of control; we are no longer acting on our own decisions. Judgments play a major role in shaping our reactionary living. When we crave the acceptance of others we become controlled by their judgments. Our sense of self-worth comes from others. The motivating principal that sets us free is acting with our hearts in love. When love motivates everything we do, we are free from judgment.

We can always fulfill or deny a request when we walk in love toward others. When you are free from the need to justify your actions through your own judgment of yourself, you are free to

say no in the kindest way.

Freedom from self-judgment

The most pain producing and destructive aspects of judgment is self-judgment. Why? Because self-judgment becomes the basis for our internal negative self-talk. Negative self-talk will write a negative self-perception on our heart, influencing everything we do and think. When we judge ourselves as a standard of self-approval, we subject ourselves to our perception of everyone else's judgments as well. As a result, we cannot free ourselves from the control of the judgment of others until we successfully free ourselves from the negative power of self-judgment.

Don't carry others' pain

We have crossed others' boundaries when we take on the emotional issues and problems of others. We call it love when we intervene in others' problems and make decisions for them. But people learn through consequences. Whenever you cross someone's personal boundary, you make their problem your problem. By doing so you refuse to allow them to go through the learning process where they face the consequences of their actions.

Pain through association

We tend to associate certain events, words, and behavior with past experiences. Because of these past associations we have made, we tend to stereotype others based on a variety of factors. When we allow these associations or stereotypes to have an effect on our emotions, we are giving control of our lives to people in the past who have possibly offended us. Through our judgments, we are allowing their past actions to control our present and future happiness. When our associations cause our emotions to make us feel angry,

threatened, or hurt, we are being controlled by something that doesn't exist. We are being controlled by what "I think you think." All we need to do to free ourselves from phantom control is to refuse to judge.

Acting out of love

Commit yourself to a life of love. When you see faults in others, show them the kindness of love to make them feel safe in dealing with their problems. When people realize you love them just as they are, their hearts will be touched. That is a real gift. When you cross people's boundaries and attempt to control them, you are not serving them. You can submit ideas and thoughts with words of kindness and love, but in the end people must direct their own lives.

Learning from criticism

The wise listen to the criticism of their enemies. They will tell you the truth where your friends will probably not. Not every criticism is a judgment. Many critical moments are merely observations where someone is stating their opinion. The fool will react with a defensive reaction while the wise will utilize the criticism as information from which to learn. Remember, not every lesson will be taught with kind, loving words. There are many ways you can respond to criticism that will produce personal growth.

Proverbs 15:31-32 NLT "If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise. If you reject criticism, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding."

Relationships

Relationships are the foundation of all personal growth and development. They are the only thing that give us eternal value to our lives. Relationships are both the joy and pain of our

lives. All meaningful relationships are built around communication, giving and receiving information. Relationships that work must be reciprocal, there must be give and take; there must be a sharing of ideas, strengths and weaknesses. Through this sharing we grow, and the relationship becomes more positive and fulfilling. But to be successful, we must surrender some of our rights. We cannot ask people to be in our lives and then not give them the right to give input into our lives. In other words, in a successful relationship you give people the right to speak into your life and write on your heart. In meaningful relationships, love will want us to know how our behavior and communication is affecting those around us. The true meaning of any communication is in the response, regardless of the intent of the communicator. We can never know how our communication affects other people unless we are willing to speak into their lives and inquire how our words and actions affect them. And don't reject input from those people with which you have a relationship just because you don't like their input. Whenever you find yourself being defensive or reactionary, ask yourself why you are being so resistant. It is good to listen to the ideas of people with whom you disagree just to get another perspective.

Make your words sweet and soft

All we can really know about someone is what we see and hear. Anything beyond that is judgment. So if someone has a low opinion of us, they are not judging us, they are using the only information they have to form an opinion about us. If we don't like the way people are judging us, we must accept the responsibility. You must ask yourself, "What am I doing or saying that provokes this kind of response?" Start investigating what you are saying or doing to create others opinions of yourself. Rather than judging others by what they say, ask the question, "When you say this to me, this is how it makes me feel? Is this what you intended?" Likewise, ask others how your words and actions make them feel? You may find your

behavior is affecting others different than what you intended. So choose your words wisely, make them sweet and soft.

In Matthew 12:37 Jesus said, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Confession

People will stop convicting us when we confess our wrongdoings. Confession is the only thing that frees us from the expectation of judgment. When we say why we did something, there is nothing left to judge. But people will not confess unless they feel safe. What constitutes a safe place is when the goal is never to punish. Confession will not only appease the offended, but it will also free a guilty heart. Confession is truly the pathway to peace. It is part of the healing process, it leads to transparency and open communication, and releases from places where we are stuck.

Find the real you

Many of us live under the judgment of others and a distorted self-view for so long that we really believe that is who we are. Instead of seeing limitless possibilities, we live in the realm of our fears and self-judgments. We have lost our destiny by accepting our own self-judgment as reality. Unfortunately for most, every individual lives out his or her limited view of their own self-perception. We can change our circumstances, we can change our physical surroundings, but if our self-perception never changes, we will always be controlled by the same factors.

The world around us has trained us to be externalists, we attempt to make ourselves feel better by adjusting everything on the outside of us. We make the mistake of judging our identity by our performance. In order to renew our minds, we must release ourselves and everyone around us from the

shackles of our judgment. To find the real you, you must listen to your heart. Anything you find in your heart that you do not like is not the real you. It is a false belief written on your heart by your own self-judgment. When you seek the reality of the real you, you will find it. When you start to live your new identity, you will have found the real you and the path to fulfilling your destiny.

Freedom from the past

There is a scriptural principle that says, “We become what we behold.” Anything which we focus our attention on is made larger in our experiences. For example, we can magnify a fault or annoyance of someone to the extent we lose all respect for them regardless of their other positive attributes. Usually the thing we focus on and magnify is insignificant, yet it can destroy the friendship. When we focus on something and give it significance in our minds, the problems, fears, and pains are magnified out of proportion to the point where it can control our lives.

Trying to forget the pain of the past will not necessarily heal the pain. Unresolved issues can become the focus of our thoughts and consume us. It can render us incapable of giving our attention to the present because we are stuck in the past. Beliefs that are written on the heart are established by a combination of information and experiences. The way we have interpreted a strong emotional event becomes our reality. Most often the negative information in our minds has been created by our own self-talk which is expressing our judgments. Since our judgment determines why people did what they did “to us”, their actions become about us. So our judgment gives the action of others significance and pain in our lives. The pain is then magnified until it becomes a consuming torment. Remember, we never remember anything the way it happened. We only remember how it made us feel. And every time we remember an offense, it grows in intensity and pain.

The actions of the offender, in reality, had very little to do with us, but we judged them as if they did. We tell ourselves, “They did this because they didn’t love me,” or “I was unlovable.” Until we release these people from our judgment, the torment of the past will not go away, regardless of how many times you say, “I forgive you.” When you release people from judgment you will be free from the pain of the past so you can pursue the future. You are really not releasing the offender from judgment for them, you are doing it for yourself. In reality, it is an act of kindness toward yourself.

Life without limits

When we release ourselves and others from judgment, we enter into a new universe of freedom and opportunity. Our boundaries that once controlled our lives are replaced by vision without limitations. It is the releasing yourself from judgment that opens yourself up to a life without limits. When you remove yourself from the limitations of self-judgment, the past no longer controls you, previous experiences do not limit future opportunities. You free yourself by letting go of your old life. When you are blinded by walls of self-limitations, you cannot see the opportunities that come your way. When your self-perception lacks confidence, an opportunity can be perceived as a threat, limiting your success. Your body will do what you believe. For example, if you believe you do not deserve love, every cell in your body will work to deny you a loving relationship. When you release yourself from judgment, all of those barriers and boundaries will be removed. Every moment of your life can be fulfilling. Every friendship can be rewarding, every job successful. You really can live a rewarding, purposeful life if you believe the real truth about who you are.

The self-worth solution

We make every decision based on our sense of our own self-worth. How we perceive ourselves inspires us to take action in confident boldness or retreat in timidity and fear. Through our self-centeredness we have made judgments about why people did things to us and have reached conclusions about ourselves based on these faulty judgments. When our self-worth is low, we look to others to find our value. We use the actions of others to determine our worth. We are constantly comparing ourselves to others, evaluating ourselves to find validation and worth. As a result, in order to survive, our self-need requires us to interpret every word and action as if it is about us. When we come to understand that God's free gift and Jesus sacrifice to everyone is our source of worth, freedom and equality, we are freed from the need to interpret others words and actions as well as judge others. Instead of spending every day in judgment, you are free to reach out to others in love. You become a giver rather than a taker. You become a servant rather than a judge. You live free from your own pain and suffering.

The love factor

Love sees past the faults of others right to the good. Love has no need to determine innocence or guilt. People who walk in love do not judge others or seek validation of their worth through others judgment.

The person who lives in judgment does not understand how to live free from it. Judgment becomes the roadmap to their lives. They do not know how to walk in love; they believe love is something that must be earned. As a result, because they only give love conditionally, they cannot receive love from others unconditionally.

You must understand love cannot be explained; it can only be experienced. As we give love to others, we will be able to receive love. This life of love frees us from the need to judge.

Action Review Points

1. Our judgments influence relationships negatively. When we assume to know *why* a person did what he did, we have entered into judgment.
2. Nothing that happens outside of you has the power to hurt you until you judge it. Only when you judge something does it become significant within your life. It is this significance that can turn a single event into suffering.
3. Rather than judge others, become an observer of others actions without judging.
4. The moment you come to the point where you can see others faults clearer than your own, you have become a hypocrite. The moment you desire to teach others your truths, you will be flawed by your own judgments. The best thing you can do to help others is to take care of your own problems, enabling you to develop the heart to walk in love. You must be able to convey hope, confidence and trust. We must make people feel loved and safe.
5. Avoid judgmental criticism to attempt to help others. The person who will influence you the most is not the person you believe in; it is the person who believes in you. We must make people see that we believe in them regardless of their problems.

6. When we make judgments we feel we have the right to control others. But controllers immobilize people by robbing them of their freedom to act independently.
7. Reality is always distorted by our perception. Our perception is created by many subjective factors including our self-worth. How we see and interpret the world around us is determined by how we see ourselves.
8. People do not do things for the same reasons you do. When we judge too quickly, we reject people before we ever get to know them. And what we believe to know about them is seldom who they really are.
9. Based on our predetermined views, we will accept or reject a new acquaintance before we really get to know the person, remaining stuck in repetitive relationships. We must renew our minds with new relationships with different kinds of people in order to break out of past patterns and grow.
10. What is written on the heart determines our self-perception and how we view others and the world. As adults, it is important to make it a priority to establish the time to develop a meditative prayer life to write on your heart, growing your self-perception.
11. The objective in parenting is to make the child feel loved, accepted, and secure. If the heart feels safe, it is open and teachable.
12. When we are controlled by the fear of others judgments and opinions, our personal development will be curtailed. The starting point for freeing ourselves from the control of others is releasing others from our own judgment and control.

13. Observe *what* people did rather than judge *why* they did it. Inform people how their actions make you feel with a heart focused on love, and the response will usually be one of gratitude.
14. Judgments play a major role in shaping our reactionary living. When we crave the acceptance of others we become controlled by their judgments. When love motivates everything we do, we are free from reactionary living.
15. Avoid self-judgment as it only leads to negative self-talk and negative self-perception.
16. Do not make others problems you problems. Let them learn from the consequences of their actions.
17. When you see faults in others, show them the kindness of love to make them feel safe in dealing with their problems.
18. Develop the attitude to learn from criticism.
19. Relationships work when they are reciprocal, there must be give and take; there must be a sharing of ideas, strengths and weaknesses. But to be successful, we cannot ask people to be in our lives and then not give them the right to give input into our lives.
20. Start investigating what you are saying or doing to create others opinions of yourself. Ask others how your words and actions make them feel?
21. When we say why we did something, there is nothing left to judge.

22. If your self-perception never changes, you will always be controlled by the same factors.
23. Remember, we never remember anything the way it happened. We only remember how it made us feel. And every time we remember an offense, it grows in intensity and pain. When you release the offender from judgment you will be free from the pain of the past so you can pursue the future.
24. When you are blinded by walls of self-limitations, you cannot see the opportunities that come your way. Releasing yourself from self-judgment will open yourself up to a life without limits.
25. When you walk in love you become a giver rather than a taker. You become a servant rather than a judge. You will free yourself from your own pain.

The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Speaking

by Dale Carnegie
(Pocket reprint, 1990)

About the Book

Dale Carnegie's easy-to-master five-step program will put you on track to be a powerful, effective speaker. Exchange self-consciousness for self-confidence. Learn how to persuade, to get action, to impress and convince, and to entertain.

Dale Carnegie (1888–1955) began teaching his first public speaking course in 1912 in New York City. Today the Dale Carnegie course circles the globe. The textbooks Dale Carnegie wrote for his courses went through more than fifty printings, were translated into eleven languages, and were revised several times by the author to keep pace with his increased knowledge and experiences.

Developing Confidence

Fear defeats more people than any other force in the world. Learning to speak in public is one of the best methods to build up your self-confidence. To overcome the fear of public speaking, begin by focusing on the following:

1. Never memorize a talk word-for-word.
2. Prepare your thoughts beforehand on paper. Assemble your thoughts, ideas, and convictions from your background. Speak about your experiences that have taught you something about life. Speak about that which you are passionate and stirs your soul.
3. Rehearse your speech by talking in everyday language to friends willing to listen. By doing this, you will discover points that need further clarification or information that has been missed.

4. Sell yourself on the importance of the subject. Ask yourself how your talk is going to benefit people who have listened to you.
5. Give yourself a pep talk. Tell yourself you are more qualified to talk on this subject more than anyone in the audience.
6. Prior to your talk keep your attention off of yourself. Focus on the previous speakers and what they are saying.
7. Act confident! By controlling your actions with confident body language, you can indirectly regulate your feelings.

Select Effective Topics

1. Speak about something you know about through your own personal experience.
2. Talk about lessons learned in your life.
3. Find an interesting topic by searching for stories in any of the following areas: examples of your early years, early struggles to get ahead, special areas of knowledge, unusual experiences, and beliefs or convictions.
4. As a speaker you must be excited about your topic and eager to share the information with your audience.

How to Command Audience Attention

1. Limit your subject to one or two main points for a five-minute talk and four to five main points for a thirty-minute talk.
2. Dig deep for ten times more information than you will need. Ask yourself the following questions that will expand your understanding and prepare you to talk with authority: “Why do I believe this?” “What are real life examples of the main point?” “Exactly how did this happen?”
3. Do not write out your speech word-for-word. When

you speak anything that is written, the delivery ends up stiff and inflexible. If a speech is to command attention, develop a theme and live with it for several days or weeks. Deliver your information over and over again in your mind and by speaking out loud.

4. Support your material with illustrative examples. There are five ways to do this: Humanize, Personalize, Specify, Dramatize, and Visualize.
 - a. The most interesting talks are filled with human-interest stories to support your major points. The richest human-interest stories will be from your own background and experiences.
 - b. To personalize your talks, attach names to your stories, even if they are fictitious. Get enough detail (but not too much) into your talk to support your main points. Here is a test to see if you are supplying enough detail: Does the information you are supplying answer the questions, When? Where? Who? What? Why?
 - c. When appropriate, tell your story using the direct quotations of a conversation; using dialogues adds an interesting drama to your talk.
 - d. Search for opportunities to use visuals to support your point. Eighty-five percent of knowledge comes from visuals and demonstrations.
5. Hold attention by painting mental pictures in your audience's mind. Do this by using descriptive words that create vivid mental pictures. For example, "The soft white pedals of the lilies were silhouetted on the white sand of the beach by the vibrant pink sunset."

To Vitalize Your Talk

1. Select a topic that emotionally charges you up. If you expect your audience to believe your message you must be emotionally invested in your subject.

2. Express your feelings and excitement to gain interest. Your enthusiasm must be authentic.
3. When you walk out in front of your audience, stay away from the podium, hold your head high, and walk with a spring in your step. Display your eagerness to speak.

How to Share Your Talk with Your Audience

1. Talk about what interests your listeners. Ask yourself how the knowledge of what you are going to convey will help your audience solve problems or achieve their goals. If you do so, you will have the audience's attention. Always remember that people are primarily interested in learning about how to satisfy their own needs.
2. Research your audience and tell them something about themselves they didn't think you would know. When you show your appreciation for something they have done, you will win over their hearts.
3. Identify yourself with the audience in your opening statement. Indicate how you relate to the group and express your gratitude for being invited to speak. Also become fluent in using the word "you," which includes your listeners in the talk.
4. Select someone in your audience to be a participant. Whenever you select someone from the audience to help you dramatize a point, you will increase the attention of the audience. You can get audience participation by asking questions or simply inviting them to solve a problem. Whatever you do, it is important to get audience participation—and in the process, to play down your own importance.

Pointers for an Informative Talk

1. Restrict your subject for the time allowed.

2. Arrange your ideas into an organized sequence based on time, space, or special topics. For example, in a time sequence, you may consider presenting your information based on the past, present and future.
3. Enumerate your points so they are easy to understand. For example, “There are three principal points: first... second... third... In summation...” or, “My main point is... Specifically... in addition... further... In conclusion...”
4. When you are attempting to explain something unfamiliar, compare it to something familiar.
5. To improve the comprehension of stated facts, try using a picture example for improved understanding. For example, the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. At that speed you could circle the circumference of the earth approximately seven times in one second.
6. Avoid technical terms. Express yourself in understandable language backed up by detailed examples to clarify your point.
7. Use visual aids. We are twenty-five more times likely to retain visual information than audio information.

Delivering the Talk

Your ability to deliver a talk will be judged on the following four criteria: What you do, how you look, what you say, and how you say it.

1. Speak naturally, as if you were talking to your friends. Be yourself and express your individuality.
2. Talk *with* your audience, not *to* them. The audience must feel a message being delivered from your mind and heart to theirs. Pick out people in the audience to whom to talk directly. Speak to them as you would in a chat. Have a conversation with that person. Grab

audience attention by asking yourself a question and answering it. For example, “You may be asking the question...”

3. To successfully speak naturally with your audience, you must speak with energy from your heart. Put your heart into your talks.
4. When you are speaking naturally on a topic directly from the heart, you will be more apt to use both physical and vocal variations in your delivery. The variations of tone, physical gesturing, and facial expressions will naturally convey your emotional involvement in the subject being delivered. It is best to practice these variations in delivery but not be concerned about them when you are delivering your talk.

Suggestions for Organizing a Longer Talk

1. Get attention immediately. The following is a list of ideas:
 - a. It is almost foolproof to start with a story about your own experience. If you can arouse curiosity and suspense, all the better.
 - b. Start out with a factual statement that will grab attention.
 - c. Ask for a show of hands.
 - d. Promise the audience that you will get them something they want. For example, “I am going to tell you how to...” or, “I promise if you listen to me, I will tell you how to...”
 - e. Use an exhibit.
 - f. Never open with an apology or a funny story.
2. Support your main ideas. Longer talks have several main points, each of which will require support material. The quality of your support material is what brings your subject to life. The following is a list of ideas:

- a. Use statistics but don't use numbers by themselves. Whenever possible, put the numbers in terms of experiences.
 - b. Use the testimony of experts.
 - c. Use analogies to support your main point.
 - d. Use a demonstration to support your main point.
3. A good talk must have a good ending. The conclusion of a talk is that part which points toward everything that has preceded it. The closing words are what your audience will remember. The following are a few suggestions:
 - a. Summarize by telling them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you have told them.
 - b. Ask for action. Ask them to do something specific like contribute, vote, join, telephone, buy, investigate, research, or whatever.

Be persistent to seek out every opportunity to speak. Prepare, practice, and keep the rewards of building your self-confidence in public speaking in the forefront.

Brief Review Outline

Overcoming fear:

1. Speak about your experiences, something about which you are very passionate.
2. Prepare your thoughts (not a word-for-word script) beforehand on paper.
3. Rehearse by talking to friends in everyday language. Ask for feedback.
4. Never memorize a talk word-for-word.
5. Sell yourself on the talk's importance by delivering benefits to your listeners.
6. Believe you are the most qualified to talk on this subject.
7. Utilize confident actions to regulate feelings.

Select effective topics:

1. Speak about something you are excited to share with your audience.
2. Select a topic from your early years, struggles, unusual experiences, beliefs, or special areas of knowledge.

Commanding audience attention:

1. Limit your subject to one or two main points for a five-minute talk and four to five main points for a thirty-minute talk.
2. Prepare to talk with authority. Ask yourself tough questions about the topic to prepare deep material.
3. Practice the delivery of the talk for several weeks.
4. Support your material with illustrative examples.
5. Utilize visuals whenever possible.
6. Use descriptive words to paint vivid mental pictures.

Vitalizing your talk:

1. Select a topic that fires you up.
2. Express authentic enthusiasm.
3. Stay away from the podium; use energetic body language.

Sharing your talk with your audience:

1. Talk about what interests your listeners. Satisfy their needs, solve their problems, and help them achieve goals.
2. Show appreciation for something the audience has done.
3. Identify how you relate to the audience in your opening statement.
4. Become fluent in using the word “you” to include your listeners in the talk.
5. Get audience participation.

Pointers for an informative talk:

1. Restrict your subject for the time allowed.
2. Arrange your ideas into an organized sequence based on time, space, or special topics.
3. Enumerate your points so they are easy to understand.
4. When you are attempting to explain something unfamiliar, compare it to something familiar.
5. To improve the comprehension of stated facts, use a visual example.

Delivering your talk:

1. Speak as if you were talking to a friend.
2. Talk *with* the audience, not *to* them.
3. Speak from the heart, using natural facial expressions, gestures, and tone modulations.

**The Maxwell Daily Reader:
365 Days of Insight to Develop the Leader Within You and
Influence Those Around You**
by John C. Maxwell
(Thomas Nelson, 2008)

About the Book

The Maxwell Daily Reader provides you with timeless leadership principals that can begin to transform your leadership today. *The Maxwell Daily Reader* draws its unique power from an ageless truth: The heart of leadership is created through actions, put into practice one day at a time. Each message will equip you with the inspiration to unlock and bring out the leader within you.

John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert and author who has sold over 12 million books. His organizations have trained more than one million leaders worldwide.

Introduction

John C. Maxwell introduces his book by saying,

What is the key to being successful? What separates people who achieve much to those who merely get by? It's what they do every day. The secret to your success can be found in your daily agenda. People who achieve their potential do so because they invest in themselves every day. They take the time to add value to themselves. Because they do, they are also able to add value to others.

You cannot grow unless you are willing to change. And you will not change unless you change something you do every day.

The *Maxwell Daily Reader* is designed to provide you with valuable thoughts about several leadership topics to help you make that investment in yourself every day of the year. Each thought is designed to teach you, challenge you, and prompt you to grow. Skim through and find the ones that speak to your needs right now, and absorb the thoughts at your own pace. They're meant to inspire you and help you evaluate your life, one day at a time.

Passion

- Each of us has a dream placed in our heart; a vision deep inside that speaks to the very soul. It's the thing we were born to do. It draws on our talents and gifts. It appeals to our highest ideals. It is inseparably linked to our purpose in life. Dream power does many things for us:
 1. It gives us direction.
 2. It increases our potential.
 3. It helps us prioritize.
 4. It adds value to our work.
 5. It predicts our future.
- You can never lead something you are not passionate about. You can't start a fire in an organization unless one is first burning in you.
- Following your passion is what allows ordinary people to achieve great things. The stronger your fire, the greater your desire, dedication and productivity.
- Cultivate the courage to pursue your passions. British theologian John Henry Newman said, "Fear not that your life will come to an end but that it will never have a beginning."

- Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”
- What gives people the stamina to overcome severe setbacks and become successful is an inner dream that lights a fire that cannot be extinguished. Cherish your visions and dreams, as they are the blue print to your ultimate achievements. The essence of leadership is to possess a dream or vision that can clearly be articulated.
- Identify your mountain, your purpose in life, so that the work you do is meaningful. If you are purpose-driven, success will come: You will be more apt to persist through setbacks. Abraham Lincoln said, “Always bear in mind that your resolution to success is more important than any other thing.
- Listen to the voices of your passion. The inner voice tells you what stirs your heart. The unhappy voice tells you that your discontent stems from the status quo. The successful voice is advice coming from someone ahead of you. Nobody can accomplish great things alone. Find a mentor to help sharpen your vision.

Vision

- Vision is everything for a leader. It paints the target.
- What separates a motivated person from all others is that he or she has a vision—goals. The goals you set become your route to success as long as you keep moving forward toward your destination.
- Everything starts with a vision. It’s the leaders role to capture and communicate the vision.

- People must buy into the leader before they buy into the vision. Start with building relationships with your followers.
- A leader must chart the course for his or her followers by drawing on past experiences, examining the conditions, and gathering information from several sources.
- True direction for an organization is born with a vision. It begins when a leader accepts it. It gains acceptance when the leader models it. And it becomes reality when the people respond to it.

Prioritize

- William James said, “You can spend more time on what is important if you have developed the art of knowing what to overlook.”
- Business does not equal productivity and activity is not necessarily accomplishment.
- Only focus on things you can do something about.
- A clear vision becomes the energy behind every effort. The vision is the beacon that keeps everyone focused, and it is your real reason for existence.

In order to maximize your talents and realize your potential, make sure you align your passions with your priorities. In other words, align what you feel strongly about with what you are doing.

Attitude

- If you want to change attitudes, start by changing behavior. A change in attitude requires action. An act of your will shall lead you to action; and your positive action shall lead to a positive attitude.

- Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t—you are right.” The mind, more than anything else, determines how far you can go on the journey to success.
- Life is full of surprises, and the adjustment of our attitudes is a lifelong project.
- There is not a single part of your current life that is not affected by your attitude.
 - Its root is inward but its fruit is outward.
 - It is your best friend or worst enemy.
 - It is more honest about you than your words.
 - It is what draws people toward you or repels them.
 - It is never content until it is expressed.
 - It is the librarian of your past.
 - It is the speaker of your present.
 - It is the prophet of your future.
- A positive attitude makes it possible for you to be successful. It gives you fuel to pursue your purpose, grows your potential, allows you to benefit others, gives you the staying power to improve, and makes the journey more enjoyable.
- The winner’s edge is in attitude. What usually separates the best from the rest is their attitude in the areas that they can control.
- The happiest people in life don’t necessarily have the best of everything. They just try to make the best of everything.
- Failure is an inside job. If you want to achieve, you have to believe. If you want to believe, you have to win the war in your thinking first.
- Every challenge has an opportunity. And every opportunity has a challenge. A person’s attitude determines how he or she handles challenges and opportunities.

- How do the dominating thoughts of your mind affect your attitude? Your attitude is your emotional approach to life. It's the framework through which you see events, other people, and even yourself.
- Our feelings come from our thoughts. We can control our thoughts. Therefore, we can control our feelings by changing how we think.
- Most people can see problems. It is the person who thinks in terms of solutions instead of problems that is a difference maker. Approaching problems is a matter of perspective and attitude. Meet problems with a solution-oriented mind.
- Successful people have an attitude of teachability. It's a mindset that says, "No matter how much I know, I can learn more from anyone or any situation. If you live to learn, then you will really learn to live."
- The longer you live, the more choices you make—and the more responsible you are for how your life is turning out. Regardless of the circumstances you face, your attitude toward seeking happiness is still your choice.

Failure

- Success is based on one's ability to fail and continue trying. When you have the right attitude, failure can be your springboard to success. Learn the power of failing successfully. When talking about failures refer to them as "wrong turns," "learning experiences," "opportunities for growth," or "detours."
- If you persevere while you are in the valley, not only will you make it to higher ground but you will have developed character, too.

- When you continue to fail—and keep getting back up on your feet and keep learning from your failures—you are building strength, tenacity, experience, and wisdom.
- If you really want to achieve your dreams—fail early, fail often, but always fail forward. Turn your mistakes into stepping-stones for success.
- People who fail forward successfully are able to see their errors or negative experiences as a regular part of life, learn from them, and then move on. They persevere in order to achieve their purpose in life.
- Think about a recent setback. The key to overcoming it doesn't lie in changing your circumstances. It's in changing yourself.
- Every successful person is someone who failed, yet never regarded himself as a failure.
- The first step in weathering failure is not to personalize it—your failure does not make you a failure. You must realize that you will spend much of your life making mistakes. If you can start by taking action steps and keep making mistakes, you will gain experience. The experience will eventually bring competence, and you will make fewer mistakes. Theodore Roosevelt said, “He who makes no mistakes makes no progress.”
- Look for ways to keep mistakes in perspective. First, one has to be willing to admit mistakes and accept complete responsibility.
- Every failure you experience is a fork in the road. It presents an opportunity, if you choose, to learn from your mistake and take the right action.

- To achieve your dreams, you must embrace adversity and make failure a regular part of your life. If you're not failing, you're probably not really moving forward.
- Nothing can motivate a person like adversity. If you can step back from the negative circumstances facing you, you will be able to discover the positive benefits.
- Helen Keller said, "Security is mostly superstition. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Everything in life brings risk and potential failure. But you also risk failure if you stand still and don't try anything new. The more you risk failure and actually fail—the greater your chances for success.
- If you've been hitting all the goals you set for yourself, then you need to try something harder and increase your willingness to fail.
- If you want to seize an opportunity, you must take a risk. If you want to grow, you must make mistakes. If you want to reach your potential, you will have to take chances and learn from your mistakes. If you don't, you will be resigned to a life of mediocrity.
- Remember, mistakes don't define failure. They are merely the price of achievement on the success journey.

Sacrifice

- There is no success without sacrifice. You have to be willing to give up to go up.

- As a leader, to get others to sacrifice, you must model sacrifice. You must be willing to make financial sacrifices, keep growing, empower others, and make difficult decisions for the team. Once you have modeled your willingness to pay a price for the team, you will have earned the credibility to ask others to do the same.
- Success comes down to sacrifice—a willingness to pay the price, sacrifice your own desires, and give up a part of yourself for the success of the organization.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Stay in Efficient Action

- Become a process thinker. Getting ready requires thinking ahead so that you recognize now what you will need later. Focus on solid preparation today.
- It is extremely difficult to be successful if you procrastinate. To get things done, focus on the benefit of completing the task.
- Focus your energies on what you can control today to get better results for tomorrow.
- Your greatest enemy to good thinking is busyness. Manage your thinking. Your mind will give you back exactly what you put into it. Manage your thinking by developing a written agenda of what you want to think about and then create a time a place to think.
- A common obstacle to success is the desire to cut corners and take the short road to success. Cutting corners is a sign of impatience and poor self-discipline. Most people underestimate the time it takes to achieve something of value. You must learn to do what does not come naturally; to experience fear and act in spite of it.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Maintain Humility

- The ability to solve problems effectively comes from the experience of facing and overcoming obstacles. Each time you solve another problem, you get a little better at the process.
- Each person we meet has the potential to teach us something.
- What must you change in yourself to become a better leader? Self-improvement is never-ending. If you stop working to improve yourself, or if you ever think you have finished growing, then you're in trouble.
- Take yourself less seriously and lighten up. Most of us think that we are more important than we really are. On the day your die one of our pastor friends will give you a wonderful eulogy and twenty minutes later the most important thing on every ones mind will be, "Where is the potato salad?"
- When it comes to reaching your potential, nothing is more effective than your willingness to change yourself and your commitment to personal growth.
- Leaders are perpetual learners. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus said, "It is the capacity to develop and improve their skills that distinguish leaders from their followers."
- If you want to grow your organization, you have to remain teachable. When was the last time you did something for the first time?
- Create a growth environment around yourself with people from whom you can learn. You are more likely to grow if the people around you challenge you, are still growing themselves, willing to change, and create an affirming atmosphere.

- Surround yourself with creative people, and let their ideas inspire your own creativity.
- The first step to becoming a teachable leader is to learn to listen. Listen to others, remain humble, and you will begin to learn things every day that can help you to expand your talent and leadership skills.
- Talk your craft today with someone from which you can learn. Your goal is to learn what you can transfer from their strength zone to yours. That's where your growth will come from—not from what you are doing.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Foster Trust

- Our treatment of others results from our perspective of them. Put yourself in someone else's place before leading him or her. George Washington Carver wisely reminds us, "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these."
- Trust is the single most important factor in building successful relationships. Trust is built day by day with actions that are consistent, accountable, predictable, and reliable.
- Leadership is really a game of intangibles. What could be more intangible than influence? Leaders deal with things like morale, motivation, momentum, emotions, attitudes, and timing.
- If you want to develop trust with others, you must always be credible and consistent. Achieve those qualities by making sure that what you say, what you do, and what you say you do all match.

- When things don't go well, to help your team go farther and help your team members maximize their potential, take more than your fair share of the blame. When things go well, give all of the credit away.
- How effective are you at communicating with your followers? Open communication increases trust, trust increases ownership, and ownership increases participation.
- The most important element in building any relationship is trust. Say what you mean and do what you say.
- Few things will pay bigger dividends than the time and trouble you take to understand people.
- Focus on others, ask questions, and listen.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Model Right Behavior

- Leadership requires that one's ethics be without question.
- To grow as a leader, you need to first identify and focus on your strengths and then dedicate time to improving by stepping into new areas related to your strengths.
- People emulate what they see modeled. A positive model will develop a positive response. The most appealing climate to develop future leaders is in modeling leadership. What leaders do, potential leaders around them do. Albert Schweitzer said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others—it is the only thing."
- Focus on yourself professionally. Pick an area in which to specialize, one which brings together your skills, interests, and opportunities.
- There is no substitute for enthusiasm. When the members of a team are enthusiastic, the whole team becomes highly energized. And that energy produces power. Industrialist

Charles Schwab observed, “People can succeed at almost anything for which they have enthusiasm.” If you want to spread enthusiasm, you need to start acting that way.

- Energize your followers by sharing your enthusiasm, by showing a sense of urgency, demonstrating your willing to go the extra mile, and striving for excellence in your work every day.
- Strive to make the most of your potential. Make every day your masterpiece. If we give every day our very best, we can make our lives into something special. And that will overflow into the lives of others.
- The greatest achievers in life are people who set goals for themselves and then work hard to reach them. What they get by reaching the goals is not nearly as important as what they become by reaching them. Ben Franklin said, “Set time aside every day to review two questions. In the morning, ‘What good shall I do today?’ In the evening, ‘What good have I done today?’”
- Build character by doing the right thing. Men are alike in their promises. It is only in their deeds that they differ. The difference in their deeds is simple: People of character do what is right regardless of the situation. Honesty is not something you do; honesty is who you are.
- Belief determines expectations. If you expect to fail, sure enough, you will. If you expect to succeed, sure enough, you will. Personal breakthroughs begin with a change in your beliefs. Your beliefs will determine your expectations, and your expectations will determine your actions. A belief is more than an idea that a person possesses. The idea will possess the person. The change of your thoughts is an inside job. It is the change of your thought patterns that creates a better life.

- Successful people embrace the high road and make excellence their goal. They care more than others think wise. They risk more than others think safe. They dream more than others think practical. They expect more than others think possible. They work more than others think necessary.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Share and Maintain the Vision

- We are all on a journey. We are traveling inevitably toward the end of our lives. So the real question for each of us is whether we're going to select a destination and steer a course for it, or allow ourselves to be swept along with no specific purpose in mind.
- No matter what the game is, there is always a scoreboard. If a team is to accomplish its goals, it has to know where it stands.
- Leaders have a vision for what could be. They are never content with things as they are. To be leading is to be breaking new ground, moving away from the status quo, showing a willingness to be different, and taking risks.
- If you live your dream, and successfully share it by taking others with you and helping them achieve success, they will buy into your dream. It all begins with a dream and sharing it with others.
- People do not follow the dream itself. They follow the leader who has that dream and the ability to communicate it effectively. People do what people see. People depend upon visual stimulation for growth. Couple a vision with a leader willing to implement that dream, and a movement begins.
- In order to maximize your talents and realize your potential, make sure you align your passions with your

priorities. In other words, align what you feel strongly about with what you are doing.

- There is no one who isn't capable of doing more than he thinks he can do. We all have nearly limitless potential, yet too few ever try to reach it. When you know your purpose in life and are growing to reach your maximum potential, you're well on your way to being a success.

Grow Your Leadership Skills: Be a Good People Person

- The richest memories are those we plan and intentionally create. If you don't carve out the time, you can't create the memory. You simply can't make memories with people if you don't take time to be with them.
- Dealing with confrontation and critical comments:
 - Do it privately
 - Do it as soon as possible
 - Deal with one issue at a time
 - Do not continue to repeat the point
 - Deal only with actions the person can change
 - Avoid sarcasm
 - Avoid words like "always" and "never"
 - Remember to use lots of compliments
- Nobody does anything great alone. Leaders do not succeed alone. A leader's potential is determined by those closest to him in his inner circle. Ask yourself the following questions when determining whether people should be in your inner circle.

- Do they have influence with others?
- Do they possess strengths in my areas of weakness?
- Do they add value to the organization?
- Do they positively affect other inner circle members?
- To become a person of influence, you must help those who doubt themselves to have faith in themselves and think more highly of themselves.
- You must grow yourself before you can grow your business. General Electric CEO Jack Welch said, “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”
- Author Richard Exley explains friendship by saying, “A true friend is one who hears and understands when you share your deepest feelings. He supports you when you are struggling; he corrects you, gently and with love, when you err; and he forgives you when you fail. A true friend prods you to personal growth, stretches you to your full potential. And most amazing of all, he celebrates your successes as if they were his own.”
- People miss many opportunities for connection and the chance to build deeper relationships because they do not make themselves approachable. To make yourself approachable has everything to do with the message you send to others and your ability to put them at ease.
- Remember to use a person’s name often. The name is what sets the person apart; it makes him or her unique among all the others. We should always be aware of the magic contained in a name.

Building Character

- “Be not afraid of going slowly; be only afraid of standing still.” (Chinese proverb)
- Two-thirds of people surveyed set goals. Of those only ten percent of the two-thirds will make realistic plans to achieve their goals, and only two percent will follow through with action. Take action toward an important goal today.
- Instead of focusing on the learning event, focus on the learning process. To implement what you have learned, create a to-do-list, find ways to create action steps, follow through on what you have learned.
- We are all on a journey. We are traveling inevitably toward the end of our lives. So the real question for each of us is whether we’re going to select a destination and steer a course for it, or allow ourselves to be swept along with no specific purpose in mind.
- There is no one who isn’t capable of doing more than he thinks he can do. We all have nearly limitless potential, yet too few ever try to reach it. When you know your purpose in life and are growing to reach your maximum potential, you’re well on your way to being a success.
- In order to be disciplined in a big way tomorrow, it is essential to start developing self-discipline in a small way today. It takes time to develop self-discipline. Start small and concentrate on today.

- Steer yourself in the right direction and make the right choices that will empower you to become a person who builds upon the foundation of your abilities to live your life to it's fullest potential. Dr. Seuss wrote in *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*:

“You have the power to make the right choices!
 You have the brains in your head.
 You have feet in your shoes.
 You can steer yourself
 Any direction you choose.”

- Everyone experiences major turning points or changes in their lives. Your life's critical turning points are your best teachers of persistence. By learning from your turning points, you can grow at a deeper level within your career and life.
- There is nothing noble in being superior to someone else; progress is becoming superior to your previous self. To become self-improving, become teachable by placing yourself in learning roles. Plan your progress by picking an area where you want to improve. Then find learning moments every day so not a day passes without improvement.
- Opportunity does not come knocking. If you lack the initiative to go out and look for opportunity, you must change your mind-set. It starts with recognizing that the problem comes from the inside, not from others. Start changing your mind-set today by determining why you hesitate to take action.
- If the people close to you aren't adding value to your life, consider making some new friends.
- In a study of highly successful people, most had come disadvantaged situations such as physical handicaps,

poverty, broken homes, or other distressed situations. These high achievers overcame their problems because they turned their stumbling blocks into stepping-stones. They realized they could not determine their circumstances in life, but they could determine their choice of attitude toward every circumstance.

- If you want your life to be a magnificent story, then realize that you are its author. Every day you have a chance to write a new page in that story. Fill up those pages with responsibility to others and yourself.
- Feed the right emotion In life, both faith and fear will arise within you. The emotion you choose to continually feed is the one that will dominate your life. Don't give your fears any of your time or energy. Focus on what you have faith in, and feed it.
- Anything we do can be made to be more important. Most moments in life become special only if we treat them that way. Elevate an experience by giving it your best; make it special. An average conversation becomes better when you listen with great interest. A common relationship grows when you give it uncommon effort. An unremarkable event becomes something special when you spice it up with creativity.
- Competent people are committed to excellence, never settle for average, pay attention to detail and perform with consistency.
- To grow the limitations created by our own thoughts, we need to break down the walls of prejudice that exist in our minds and hearts.

- We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are. To become your best, you must constantly pursue change and continually seek to embrace positive change. Find something today you need to change about yourself and get started.
- Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, “The most satisfying thing in life is to give a large part of one’s self to others.” When we give generously, with an abundant mentality, what we give away will multiply.
- Albert Schweitzer said, “When you make it a goal to continually learn and enlarge yourself, you become the kind of person who can never be ‘used up.’” You’re always recharging your batteries and finding better ways to get things done.
- Most people simply accept their lives. Be proactive about how you live your life; describe your legacy in one sentence today. Your ultimate value will be measured by the success of your succession. Know the legacy you want to leave and the people who you wish to carry on your legacy.
- John Bunyan wrote, “You have not lived today successfully unless you’ve done something for someone who can never repay you.”

Relationship Building

- The stronger the relationship you form with your followers, the greater the connection you forge—the more likely they will follow you.
- Within the first thirty seconds you make contact with people, search for something encouraging to tell them, search for ways to make them look good.
- Never try to lead others without first making a relationship with them.

- Good relationships make influence possible. Abraham Lincoln said, “If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend.”
- You have to adapt your leadership style to each person you are leading. A major factor in building successful relationships with each person will be your ability to understand him or her and make a connection. Recognize that all people have some things in common:
 1. They want to feel special... so compliment them.
 2. They want a better tomorrow... so show them hope.
 3. They desire direction... so navigate them.
 4. They are selfish... so speak to their needs.
 5. They get low emotionally... so encourage them.
 6. They want success... so help them win.
- All good mentoring relationships begin with a personal relationship. To build relationships, begin by listening to people’s life stories. Your genuine interest in them will tell them you care. If you first find their hearts, they’ll be glad to give you their hands.
- To build bridges that connect you to people in a lasting way, share common experiences with them.

Communication

- Leadership rises and falls on communication. The best leaders listen, invite, and then encourage participation.
- Words have great power. Use them to give people energy.
- What most people want is to be listened to, respected, and understood. The moment people see that they are being understood, they become more motivated to understand your point of view.

- People of influence understand the incredible value of good listening. The ability to skillfully listen shows respect, builds relationships, increases knowledge, generates ideas, and builds loyalty.
- Herb Cohen says, “Effective listening requires more than hearing the words and ideas being transmitted. It demands that you find meaning and understanding in the person, not just in the words. You must learn to listen with your heart.”

Enlarging Others: Empowerment

- Believe in people, and give your power away to enlarge others.
- Invest time in teaching someone a new skill today to empower him or her to go to the next level. Loyalty to a leader will reach its highest peak when the follower has personally grown.
- The essence of empowerment is when employees make decisions concerning that which most directly affects themselves. When employees are engaged in this manner, they will “buy in” and take ownership of everything they’re doing.
- Have high opinions of people. The opinions you have of people in your life profoundly affect them. People will generally perform as they perceive you expect them to perform, so give people a high expectation to live up to.
- Treat people like a “ten” today and watch them grow.
 1. Build people up by encouragement.
 2. Give people credit by acknowledgement.
 3. Give people credit by gratitude.
- Help people win by giving them opportunities. Poet Henry van Dyke said, “There is a loftier ambition than merely to

stand high in the world. It is to stoop down and lift mankind a little higher.” Doing for others what they can’t do for themselves is simply a matter of attitude.

- Thomas Jefferson said about enlarging others, “A candle loses nothing when it lights another candle.”
- To enlarge people and produce leaders, first develop them and share with them how to become a person of influence; second, empower them; and third, release them to go out and lead.
- No matter how much work you can do, you will not advance far in business if you cannot work through others. Simply defined, empowering is giving your influence to others for the purpose of personal and organizational growth. It’s sharing yourself, your influence, position, power, and opportunities with others with the purpose of investing in people’s lives so they can function at their best.

Enlarging Others: Recognition

- Tell you followers that they are valuable to you. Make each person feel that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization.
- No matter how successful you are, you need people. Take the time to let people around you know how much we need them and appreciate them. Lyndon Johnson said, “There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves.”
- Everyone is hungry for appreciation and recognition. It’s difficult for people to follow someone who doesn’t appreciate them for who they are and what they do.

- To lead others, you need to slow down enough to connect with them, engage them, and take them with you.
- When you catch someone doing something right and praise them for it, it gives them positive reinforcement. It helps tap into their potential and want to do better.
- Celebrate successes early and often. The closer people are to you and the more important the relationship, the more achievements you ought to celebrate.
- Ask to hear a person's story and make them feel special.

Enlarging Others: Encouragement

- People feel better about themselves and do better when you give them attention, affirmation, and appreciation.
- You have to show people you care about them by taking an interest in them before they will move toward you and follow you.
- Develop small goals for your followers that will allow them to experience success in small steps.
- Inspire someone by giving them a reputation to uphold. One of the best ways to enlarge others is to make them feel good about themselves by showing them who they could become.
- Encouragement is oxygen to the soul. Encourage your followers today.

- Ask someone to share their dreams with you today and be an encourager of the pursuit of dreams of others. To help people identify their dreams, ask them to complete the sentence:
 - If I had...
 - I would...
- People require outside encouragement. Encouragement is oxygen to the soul. Encouragement helps people reach their potential; it empowers them by giving them energy to continue when they make mistakes. Praise a person every time you see improvement. Personalize your encouragement.
- Enlarge someone by expressing your belief in him or her. Believe the best in others, and you will bring out their best. Poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "Treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be."

Enlarging Others: Servitude

- Servitude is at the heart of leadership. If you are going to be successful leading at the highest level, you must be willing to serve at the lowest.
- The bottom line in leadership is how far we advance others. That is achieved by serving others and adding value to their lives. The law of addition asks one simple question: Are you making things better for the people who follow you?
- Helping another person win is the greatest feeling in the world.
- Zig Ziglar said, "You can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

- Knowing what people need and want is the key to understanding them. If you can understand them, you can serve them and affect their lives in a positive way. Remember that everyone wants to be someone of significance. Everybody needs somebody to offer encouragement and be a friend. Everybody can be somebody when someone understands and believes in them.
- Because dreams are at the center of our souls, we must do everything in our power to help others turn dreams into reality. This is one of the greatest gifts we can ever give.

Right People, Right Place

- It takes a team to do anything of lasting value. If you want to do something big, you must link up with others.
- The quality to look for in people to join you on your journey is loyalty.
- The people closest to the leader will determine the success of that leader. Stop and think of the five or six people closest to you. Are you developing them? Are they growing?
- Any leader who has only followers around him will be called upon to continually draw on his or her own resources to get things done. Who are you developing into leaders to help you carry the load?
- Ask your staff once a year, if you could be doing anything, what it would be. Moving people from a job they hate to the right job can be life-changing.
- Promote people willing to think outside of their job description and who are willing to tackle the kinds of jobs that others are too proud or frightened of to take on.

- Reward your people according to the qualities you value. For instance, consider these qualities: positive attitude, loyalty, desire to self-improve, enlarging and encouraging others, creative thinking.

Focusing on People's Strengths

- Every person can do at least one thing better than ten thousand other people. Discover that ability in others and become the kind of leader that points out those strengths to others.
- Help people find their strength zones by looking for the best in others. Discover people's success seeds and point them out. Then fertilize those seeds with encouragement.
- If you don't put people in their strength zones, you're making it almost impossible for them—and you—to win.

Dealing with Change

- Whenever change is about to happen, we all look to see how it will affect our time. Half of knowing what we want is knowing what we must sacrifice before we obtain. Change will always cost you something, if not monetarily, then in time, energy, or creativity.
- A checklist for change:
 - Will this change benefit the followers?
 - Is this change compatible with our purpose?
 - Is the change specific and clearly stated?
 - Are the top 25 percent of the influencers in favor of this change?

- Is it possible to test the change before making a commitment to it?
- Are the financial and human resources available to make the change?
- Is the change reversible?
- Does the change offer both short- and long-term benefits?
- Is the timing right to initiate the change?
- In order to find a better way requires pushing the boundaries, breaking with tradition, making changes. Progress requires change.

Action Review Points

Passion—You can never lead something you are not passionate about. You can't start a fire in an organization unless one is first burning in you.

Vision—Vision is everything for a leader; it paints the target.

Setting Goals—To move forward you must commit actions toward written goals.

Planning—Getting ready requires thinking ahead so that you recognize now what you will need later. Focus on solid preparation today.

Prioritize—You can spend more time on what is important if you have developed the art of knowing what to overlook.

Attitude—A positive attitude makes it possible for you to be successful. It gives you fuel to pursue your purpose.

Failure—Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward. If you're not failing, you're probably not really moving forward.
Sacrifice—There is no success without sacrifice. You must model sacrifice to get others to sacrifice.

Grow your leadership skills—Nothing is more effective when it comes to reaching your potential than your willingness to change yourself and your commitment to personal growth.

Building character—Build character by doing the right thing. Men are alike in their promises. It is only in their deeds that they differ.

Build trust—If you want to develop trust with others, you must always be credible and consistent. Say what you mean and do what you say.

Building relationships—Never try to lead others without first making a relationship with them.

Communication—Leadership rises and falls on communication. The best leaders listen, invite, and then encourage participation.

Enlarging others—The bottom line in leadership is how far we advance others. That is achieved by serving others and adding value to their lives.

Empowerment—When employees are empowered they will “buy-in” and take ownership of everything they're doing.

Recognition—Encouragement is oxygen to the soul; it helps people reach their potential.

Right people, right place—Moving people from a job they hate to the right job can be life changing.

Focusing on people's strengths—If you don't put people in their strength zones, you're making it almost impossible for them, and you, to win.

Dealing with change—Progress requires effectively dealing with change.

Ten Powerful Phrases for Positive People

by Rich DeVos
(Center Street, 2008)

About the Book

Ten Powerful Phrases for Positive People offers you the key to unlocking your powerful potential. Simply by adding ten life-changing phrases to your daily conversations, you can help build relationships, motivate achievement, instill confidence, and change attitudes in your work and family life.

Richard DeVos is a successful businessman, philanthropist, and motivational speaker. He is the author of several best-selling books.

Introduction

Walt Disney said there were three types of people:

- (1) well-poisoners, or people who tear others down;
- (2) lawn-mowers, people who do their job and take care of their families but never venture far from their own yard; and
- (3) life enhancers, who by their kind words and deeds enhance the lives of others and leave the world a better place.

Every society needs people who can encourage, stimulate, and cheer others. You can improve the conditions of your world when you lift people up and inspire them to do more. It all starts with expressing an interest them, and listening for clues about the good things they are trying to do. Then we can respond sincerely with a positive phrase that fits, such as, “I’m proud of you,” or, “I respect you.”

Keep a positive frame of mind and look for the good in others, use lines that create a positive atmosphere, encourage, and lift people up. Here are the ten most powerful phrases you can use in your daily interactions and relationships. You have the power

to lift people up and inspire them with the words you speak. Every society needs people to encourage and cheer for others. Remember that change always begins with you.

I'm Wrong

Denial and rationalization are hard and fruitless work. Your ego will only take you so far, but your integrity and humility will carry you through to success.

Our outward expression of error can serve as an example of our willingness to change and can inspire others. Saying you are wrong is all part of our decision to shift our atmosphere from negative to positive.

I'm Sorry

I'm wrong and *I'm sorry* can be natural companions. Both show that we are able to see another person's point of view. Saying *I'm sorry* can also validate your concern for them. For example, "I am sorry you lost a loved one," "I am sorry I could not be there for you," "I am sorry you did not make the team, but I am proud of you and keep trying."

It can be amazing how all the anger, tension, and problems disappear when we say those simple words, "I'm sorry." What can be left to say?

You Can Do It

To inspire others with the confidence that they can do it, you have to create a positive attitude and develop the right kind of atmosphere that encourages and inspires others to have the confidence in themselves. When you model positivity, your attitude will rub off on others; you will create an atmosphere of positivity, a "you can do it" attitude. We can create this "can do" attitude among people when we instill confidence with

words of encouragement that come from our hearts. Build a positive atmosphere by using the simple phrase, “You can do it.”

I Believe in You

“The most powerful force in the world is the will of people who believe in themselves, who dare to aim high, to go confidently after the things that they want from life.”

—Rich DeVos

Many people are uncertain about their abilities and lack belief in themselves, but with each little success they begin to believe a little more. But first, leaders must create an atmosphere where people can start to believe in themselves and win those first little victories. Imagine the impact you can have on people’s lives by saying that you have faith in their abilities to achieve something that is yet to be done. All it takes are a few sincere words: “I believe in you.”

Saying *I believe in you* encourages others to believe in themselves. Everyone should believe that they too can be a winner, an achiever, a successful person who reaches goals.

I Am Proud of You

Rewards alone will not motivate people. Recognition must accompany rewards to motivate people to achieve their full potential. People need their achievements to be noticed. Nothing offers greater recognition than the phrase, “I am proud of you.”

Thank You

“Thank you” is an acknowledgement of another person’s kindness. Gestures of saying thank you express our kind thoughts about another person’s efforts. But just feeling

thankful does not properly demonstrate our gratitude. It is important to put your thankful thoughts into action with a handwritten note, a thank you card, a gift, or any expression of thank you that says, “I appreciate you.” We are often too slow to give thanks to others and too quick to complain. We need to start adjusting our attitude to one of being thankful for everything in our life. Norman Vincent Peale preached about those who are worried about their problems and find difficulty focusing on the positive when he said, “Get out of yourself. Start thinking of others.”

I Need You

Organizations in which people do not feel they are needed are doomed to failure. There is no *I* in *team*—businesses are built on the success of each individual contributing to the success of the whole.

Show interest in each and every person around you. Be willing to engage them in small talk, let them know that the company needs them to sell, produce, ship, solve problems, etc., because otherwise, the company could not function.

I Trust You

Our whole society works on trust. We need to trust those who know more than we do and do the jobs for us that we rely on. After all, we cannot ensure the delivery of our own mail, fly ourselves around the globe, control all air and land traffic, do all our own repairs and snow removal, etc.

You must trust other people, and you bestow an honor on someone when you say outright, “I trust you.” You are saying that you trust them to complete this task, handle this responsibility, pay back this loan, etc.

I Respect You

When we categorize or stereotype people, we rob them of their dignity and personality. If we want to be respected, we must first respect others—and one of the highest forms of respect is showing interest in someone and listening.

Therefore, earning respect begins with the simple act of listening. The supervisors and leaders who are remembered the most are likely the ones who remember your name, comment on what a good job you're doing or stop to chat with you about your family.

Everyone has some achievement in his or her life, has value as a person, is gifted in some way and is important to someone.

If you ask questions to learn something about that person and respect their point of view, you will quickly find reasons to tell them, "I respect you," and start gaining their respect in return.

I Love You

To say "I love you" and mean it with all of your heart has remarkable power. Love is a warmer way to express ourselves than saying, "I respect you," or, "I believe in you." It's a more tender way of expressing our feelings for people that we admire or feel close to. Saying "I love you" is the strongest phrase you can use to tell another person how you feel about them. Even though there are many levels of love involved in various types of relationships, we need to find a way to express our love to others who are important to us.

Hugging is one way to say "I love you" without saying the words. But to say those three little words is a powerful expression. To have a good friend you have to be a good friend. We need to make the expression of our feelings a personal habit with our family, friends, and communities. Saying "I love you" conveys your special relationship.

“I love you” is also a powerful phrase to say to children. Those words make them feel safe, cared about, and believed in. Start saying “I love you” more often.

Action Review Points

1. Saying *I’m wrong* demonstrates a shift in your attitude.
2. Saying *I’m sorry* demonstrates concern for another person.
3. Saying *you can do it* inspires confidence in people.
4. Saying *I believe in you* encourages people to believe in themselves.
5. Saying *I am proud of you* motivates people with sincere recognition.
6. Saying *Thank you* acknowledges another person’s kindness.
7. Saying *I need you* to acknowledge a person’s contribution.
8. Saying *I trust you* is necessary to build strong relationships with people.
9. Saying *I respect you* is the first step in gaining the respect of others.
10. Saying *I love you* is a powerful phrase to express your feelings.

Positivity:
Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace
the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions,
Overcome Negativity, and Thrive
By Barbara L. Fredrickson, Ph.D.
(Crown, 2009)

About the Book

With *Positivity*, you'll learn ten surprising forms of positivity and how to tap into your own unique sources of optimism. You'll learn to see new possibilities, connect with others, and become the best version of yourself. Experience what the author calls "the upward spiral."

Barbara Fredrickson, earned her doctorate degree from Stanford University. She is currently the Kenan Distinguished Professor for Psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has received numerous honors for her research on positive emotions. Her work has also received more than ten consecutive years of research funding from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Introduction

Psychologically and socially, individuals who flourish function at very high levels. They flourish because they go beyond simply feeling good; they are also doing good things. They are driven by goals and a sense of purpose, and as a result, they add value to society. They are happy because they are doing something valuable with their lives; they are becoming the best they can.

Positivity will fill you up whenever the positive emotions of love, gratitude, inspiration, and interest touch your mind and heart. In order to reshape your life you must be able to learn how to increase your positive ratio beyond the tipping point.

As humans we do not live in a static state—we are either on a negative path, reinforcing our bad habits and closed mind, or we are on a positive path becoming more creative, productive, open minded and filled with good feelings. When a person's life is fueled by negativity, their behavior becomes rigid and lifeless. Positive emotions broaden and build us.

Positivity opens our mind and awareness to accept a new range of thoughts, ideas, and actions. The positive feeling of joy sparks an interest to become playful and creative. Interest encourages us to explore and learn. Serenity allows us to savor the present. When we are on a positive path beyond the tipping point, we will flourish.

Embrace Positivity and Joy

What is joy? Visualize your surroundings as safe and familiar, in which things are going your way—even better than expected—and your good feelings are effortless. You are experiencing joy and your face lights up with an inner glow.

Experiencing positive emotions depends upon your thinking. Positive emotions, like negative emotions, are formulated from how you interpret events and ideas. Positivity is a challenge for many people because their minds are full of worries, doubts, and fears. But the simple truth is that we all have the power to turn positivity “on” at any time. We all have a surprising amount of control over the emotions we feel.

We cannot simply *want* to feel positively, we have to turn our positive emotions on by thinking something or doing something to spark a positive path. Experiment with asking yourself the right questions. The following represent a broad range of positive emotions, and each will arise for different reasons.

- **Gratitude:** Gratitude comes from appreciating and being thankful for things in our lives. When we express thankfulness, it opens our heart with joy and urges us to give back.
- **Serenity:** You experience serenity when your surroundings are safe and familiar. Feelings of serenity make you want to sit back and soak it all in; you are very comfortable and your good feelings require no effort. Think of the last time you savored a serene moment.
- **Interest:** When you feel interest in what you are doing, you feel alive. You are filled with a rewarding sense of new possibilities, exploring, and learning. You become utterly fascinated by a new set of challenges and the opportunity to build new skills.
- **Hope:** Hope sustains you. It inspires you to make plans for a better future. When you feel hope, you have a belief that possibilities exist and things can change for the better.
- **Pride:** You feel pride when you can take the credit for doing something good. Pride is a self-conscious emotion; you have invested your skills and you have succeeded. Successful actions that create pride build self-confidence and fuel your inspiration and motivation to push forward.
- **Amusement:** Heartfelt positive emotions arise from sharing laughter with others.

- **Inspiration:** Periodically we come across human excellence that grabs our attention and leaves us in awe. Inspiration is a form of self-transcendent emotion that urges us to become the best we possibly can.
- **Awe:** When you experience feelings of awe you literally feel overwhelmed. You feel something larger than yourself. The feelings you experience with awe can be closely related to inspiration.
- **Love:** Feelings of love arise from any close relationship in which you experience feelings of joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, and awe. Any of these feelings can inspire moments of love.

Broaden Your Mind from Me to We

There is a way of breathing that can suffocate your mind. And there is another way: a breath of love that lets you open up your mind to the wisdom of others.

An upward spiral to positivity is opened when we embrace the concept of self-expansion. When you are positive, you view people and relationships closer to the center of your heart. You go from classifying people as separate (me and you) to seeing your “self” connected to “others.” The boundaries from me to you begin to fade and become we and us. This type of thinking helps us incorporate others’ skills, knowledge, and helpful resources as our own. We begin to see oneness with others.

When you feel heartfelt oneness with others, the resulting positivity will change the way you interact with other people, even strangers. When you act with oneness and show care, you internalize your positivity. These good feelings will move

from your heart to others; positivity is extremely contagious. Once you act with good feelings and compassion, you create an upward spiral of positivity all around you.

At such moments, you realize that you and the other are, in fact, one. It's a big realization.

Negative feelings toward others have their own agenda and take us away from oneness. They encourage you to protect yourself and your personal truths, pulling you away from others. As you expand the concept of oneness and positivity toward others, you will begin to look past what separates you from the rest of humanity. You will think "we" instead of "me." You will be inspired to do what's right for others. It will open you up and connect you to humanity and the great mysteries of life.

Positivity Transforms Us for the Better

We are constantly changing. The human body unbelievably replaces dying cells every day. More fascinating, it is believed the pace of cell renewal can be hastened with positive feelings. Positivity cannot only transform our health but it transforms us psychologically as well.

Positivity creates psychological growth. We become more optimistic, more resilient to difficulties, more open-minded, more accepting of others' behavior, more driven by goals and purpose. The power of positivity can transform us by opening us the moment, allowing us to more enjoy our present surroundings and situation. Positivity helps us build social relationships; when you open up to people and share your heartfelt joy, the stronger your social connections will become. When you share gratitude, laughter, and kindness, you say, "Let's build something together."

Positivity builds health. Positivity has the ability to change your biochemical makeup. It lowers your blood pressure,

reduces pain, improves sleep. You are less likely to experience hypertension, diabetes, or a stroke. A slow and steady accumulation of hugs and touching increases the level of oxytocin in the blood and helps to lower blood pressure. At a deeper level, positivity can change who you are and make life itself more fulfilling.

Positivity Increases Resiliency

Negative emotions narrow our scope on life, and make us walk a lonelier path, one that insulates us from the comforting touches of others. Upward, positive spirals are more social inducing. Positive people open their hearts and minds and connect with others with caring feelings. Each connection refuels the never-ending upward spiral.

Faces hardships, there are two responses: despair or hope. When you choose despair, your thoughts will multiply your negativity. Despair smothers out all hope of positivity and swells sadness. It leads into a negative, downward spiral, pushing you further away from others. Hope is different; its positive thoughts revive and renew you. People who choose hope can smile when adversity confronts them because they adopt a wait and see attitude; they find a way to give off good feelings and attract others to them.

Tipping the Positivity Ratio

What exactly do we mean by a tipping point? Positivity and negativity work together to tip your life between languishing and flourishing. When positive thoughts and actions can be measured at three times one's negative thoughts and actions the positivity ratio is said to be 3:1. Below a three-to-one ratio your life will languish, while above the tipping point of 3:1 your life will begin to flourish.

Consider the following questions to assess your style of talk:

- (1) Are your statements constructed to be positive or negative?
- (2) Are your statements pointed outward toward the concern of others, or self-focused?
- (3) Are your statements in the form of an inquiry or a defense?

Dr. Fredrickson has done research tracking team members based upon these three dimensions. High performance teams that stood out had high positivity ratios of 6:1. The lower performance teams had positivity ratios below 1:1, while the mixed performance teams were around 2:1. These high-performance groups had higher connectivity with others, asked questions, and focused their attention outward as much as they did inward. The lower performance teams exhibited much lower connectivity, asked no questions, and showed very little outward focus. The teams that possessed positivity ratios above 3:1 illustrated the complex dynamics of flourishing.

If living your life above a positivity ratio of 3:1 leads to a flourishing life with all kinds of possibilities, why not eliminate negativity and shoot for 100:1 positivity?

Unfortunately negativity just has a way of finding us, but is also useful; in fact, negativity is a necessary ingredient to a flourishing life. For example, studies show that what makes marriages work is anger and constructive engagement in conflict. Unchecked positivity can leave a person flighty, ungrounded, and unreal. An appropriate amount of negativity provides you with the lift one needs to flourish.

Research studies tell us that the upper bounds of flourishing is around 11:1. When your thoughts, feelings and actions are at a minimum of a 3:1 positivity ratio, you will begin to tip your life toward good and joyful feelings. When you tip the ratio upward even further toward 11:1, you are ready to flourish. To achieve a flourishing life, it will be essential for you to be able to recognize your lows and highs and how to raise your number of high emotions.

Decreasing Negativity

Reducing negative thoughts is possibly the most expedient way to increase your positivity ratio beyond 3:1. One effective way to stop the negative spiral is to dispute the negative thinking. To dispute a negative thought, write down the answers to the following questions: What are the negative thoughts and beliefs that got triggered in your mind? How do those thoughts and beliefs make you feel? How do those thoughts and beliefs compare to reality? What are the real facts of the situation? To be effective you must answer these questions honestly and objectively. When you dispute your negative thoughts in this manner you are not suppressing them or trying to push them out of your mind, but rather checking them against reality and dissolving them.

When an event stirs negative thinking, it's easy to go over it in your mind again and again. Reviewing negative thoughts in your mind repeatedly gets your mind stuck in a rut, and fans the flames of your negativity. This is called rumination. When you ruminate, you cannot think objectively about what's bothering you, nor can you see reality. Before you can think straight, you must stop this downward spiral. The first step toward positivity is awareness. You must first recognize the thought pattern as unhealthy. Then, you can take a time out to lift your mood. The most effective way to lift your mood is to totally absorb yourself in a healthy, rewarding activity. The goal is to break the cycle of rumination so you can face the problem with clear eyes.

Another technique to disarm negative thoughts is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the acceptance of a positive or negative thought as nothing more than just a thought. This practice allows you to accept a thought without acting on it or attaching any emotion to it. When you learn to accept a negative thought as no more than a thought, you can let it go and disarm it.

Be aware of what researchers call gratuitous negativity. Examples include snapping at the customer service clerk, road rage, sharing negative comments with co-workers about your supervisor, a continuous banter of sarcasm and gossip, berating yourself for not getting the house organized, talking negatively to yourself about your weight, or verbalizing negativity about the condition of society or life in general. This type of continuous negativity is not helpful or healthy. It can easily become excessive, redundant and ugly; it serves no useful purpose in your life.

Increasing Positivity

A Cherokee chief once told his grandson an excellent, instructive insight. “There is a battle between two wolves in everyone’s mind. One wolf is evil. It is angry, envious, jealous, regretful, greedy, arrogant, guilty, dishonest, self-pitying, resentful, inferior, and falsely proud. The other wolf is good. He is joyful, peaceful, loving, hopeful, generous, truthful, serene, humble, kind, empathetic, and full of compassion and faithful.” The grandson asked, “Which wolf wins?” The chief replied, “The one you feed.”

Feeding your positivity ratio upward of 3:1 is your key a flourishing life. When you flourish you will be happier, more resilient to negativity, and more creative. The feeling of positivity is a gift you give to yourself and those around you. Positive individuals are always learning and growing, prepared to make a positive contribution to society. Everyone is different when it comes to the events and circumstances that will trigger positive emotions; everyone’s path to flourishing will be unique. The following are the tools that can help you discover your own path to positivity.

- **Sincerity matters.** Positivity will not have an effect on your heartfelt feelings if it is not sincere. The pace of

modern life is very busy and keeps you focused outward, moving you further away from your core. To really feel the goodness of your positivity you must match your words and actions with sincere heartfelt positivity. Slow down, revel in the goodness, and absorb your positivity with all of your senses.

- **Be open to the moment.** To be open to the moment requires ridding your mind of all expectations and judgments, and accepting whatever you are currently experiencing. The goal is not to wish for change or view some thoughts or feelings as disruptions, but rather acknowledge them, appreciate them, and then allow them to pass.
- **Find positive meaning.** Plans and goals for the future are fruits of positivity for the mind. When you are moving toward your goals, you infuse your everyday thoughts and actions with meaning and open the way for a stream of positive emotions.
- **Savoring.** People who savor events in their life get more positivity out of it. They drink in the positivity, extracting more heartfelt goodness before, during, and after the event. Notice the small details and savor whatever touches your heart the most. After the event, replay it in your mind, reliving all the good feelings that surround the event. People who savor multiply the positivity by sharing their good feelings with others.
- **Express gratitude.** Being grateful simply requires you to focus on whatever in your surroundings that you love. People who regularly focus on aspects of their lives that make them feel blessed increase their positivity. Shift your thoughts to expressing gratitude for the ordinary things in your life, especially the ones

that are easy to take for granted. Talk to yourself about the things you love each day and feel the boost in your positivity. Another way to increase your positivity is to appreciate your endings. Acknowledge whatever good has occurred at any event throughout the day and express thanks before departing. You will be surprised by how many endings exist in the course of one day, and how much positivity you can find in each.

- **Acts of kindness.** Individuals who flourish are more attuned to acts of kindness, more focused on others, and sincerely interested in helping others reach their fullest potential. By stepping up the number of your acts of kindness and recognizing the good in your actions, you will initiate an upward spiral of positivity.
- **Follow your passions.** When you pursue activities about which you are passionate, you enter into a state of flow. When you are in the flow, you love what you are doing so much that time disappears, you are overcome by a euphoric feeling, you are fully engaged in your activity, and you would not choose to be doing anything else. Individuals can experience flow in many ways, for example at work, in their hobbies, practicing their faith, or learning a new skill. We should expect nothing less in our lives than to experience the positive feelings of being in the flow several times per day.
- **Visualize your future.** Dream more frequently about your future. Where would you be if all of your dreams came true? Visualize your success in detail. Give words to your vision; write out your life's mission and a ten-year plan. When you can visualize your future, it gives you more insight into your everyday actions and how they fit into your dreams. This exercise helps you extract more positivity and meaning from your daily actions.

- **Utilize your strengths.** Individuals who have the opportunity to use their strengths everyday are more likely to flourish. You can discover your strengths at www.authentic happiness.com or the website at the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center (www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu). Once you discover your strengths, you can reshape your daily life to use them more often, thus boosting your positivity.
- **Connecting with others.** Individuals gain positivity by being with other people. Every person who flourishes spends time each day with other people and less time alone. Just the act of cultivating loving concern for other people generates feelings of positivity.
- **High-quality relationships.** High-quality relationships recharge your energy and bring real physiological change; they are literally life-giving. They foster mutual appreciation and encourage doing things together. Build deeper relationships by supporting the other person's endeavors and creating a bond of trust. The ultimate goal is to pursue a continuous effort of cultivating high-quality relationships from your casual acquaintances.
- **Connect with nature.** Another simple way to increase your positivity is to simply go outside. The natural environment may be as important to flourishing as social relationships. People who spend as little as twenty minutes outside show a boost in positivity as well as expanded thinking. Go outside to exercise, socialize, or just commune with nature.
- **Develop distractions.** Alter your repeated acts of needless negativity by engaging planned distractions.

Make a list of activities that fully absorb your mind and spirit. The list should include things you can do at work, when traveling on the road, at home, and during inclement weather. When you become aware of experiencing a downward spiral of negativity, distract yourself with positive activities to lift your mood.

- **Dispute negative thinking.** Hear your critic's negative voice and dispute it immediately—loudly and with conviction. Negative thoughts can enter your mind against your best intentions; your goal is to dispute them just as fast as they enter your mind.
- **Open your mind.** When you are positive you naturally have a more open mind. One reinforces the other. By practicing mindfulness or focusing on the present moment, you deliberately open your awareness to your present situation. The act of opening your mind amplifies positivity.
- **Open your heart.** Loving kindness meditation is a technique used to increase feelings of warmth and caring for others and yourself; it helps you experience a connection with others. Practitioners find the positivity generated from this special type of meditation beneficial. The book offers helpful details on this form of meditation.
- **Study your yesterdays.** Discover from your yesterdays which parts of your daily routine fueled your positivity. Identify the circumstances that supported your upward spiral. Think about the emotions they triggered. Where were you? What were you doing? What was happening?

Life gives us negativity all on its own. It is our responsibility to create positivity; positivity is a choice. The more you value positivity, and the more it is built into your daily activities, the

more often it will lift you up into upward spirals of good feelings.

Who teaches children how to play? That's right, no one does. They play because it feels good. As you grow into adulthood you forget how to live just to feel good. Feeling good is vital if you want to feel fully alive. When you decide to tip the positivity ratio in your favor, you too can feel good, flourish, and feel fully alive.

Action Review Points

1. Positivity will fill you up whenever the emotions of love, gratitude, inspiration, and interest touch your mind and heart. In order to reshape your life you must be able to learn how to increase your positive ratio beyond the tipping point of 3:1.
2. You experience joy when your good feelings are effortless. You must turn positive emotions "on" by thinking or doing something to spark a positive path.
3. An upward spiral to positivity is opened up when you go from "me vs. you" to seeing yourself as connected to others. When you act with oneness and show others you care, you internalize your positivity.
4. Positivity fuels a never-ending upward spiral for you both physiologically and socially.
5. When your thoughts, feelings, and actions are at a minimum of a 3:1 positivity ratio, you will begin to tip your life toward good and joyful feelings. When you increase the ratio upward toward 11:1 you are ready to flourish.

6. Increase your positivity ratio by decreasing your negative thoughts. First, you must be able to recognize your negative thoughts and take a time out. Second, you must stop the negative spiral by disputing the negative thinking. Third, totally absorb yourself in a healthy, rewarding activity.
7. Increasing your positivity ratio beyond 3:1 is your key to a flourishing life. The following are the tools to help you.
 - Match your words and actions with heartfelt sincerity.
 - Be open to experiencing the moment.
 - Pursue goal-oriented tasks to add meaning to your daily activities.
 - Savor the events of your life.
 - Express gratitude daily for everything in your life.
 - Increase your acts of kindness to others.
 - Pursue activities that align with your passions.
 - Visualize your future.
 - Use your strengths in daily activities.
 - Connect with other people and generate caring feelings.
 - Build quality relationships by investing time in shared activities and by offering caring support.
 - Connect with nature.
 - Dispute the negative voice of your critic.
 - Practice mindfulness; open your mind up to the present moment.
 - Study what triggered yesterday's positivity.
 - Make a list of positive activities that can lift you out of a low mood.

Attitude is Everything

10 Life-changing Steps to Turning Attitude into Action

By Keith Harrell

A nationally acclaimed, award-winning speaker, trainer, and consultant with more than fourteen years of corporate experience, Keith Harrell was one of IBM's top training instructors. *Attitude is Everything* is an enlightening, inspiring, and practical guide for gaining control of your career and your life by ridding yourself of negative baggage, building positive attitudes, and turning them into actions to help you achieve your dreams.

Introduction

Attitude is everything. Each of us has the power to choose a positive attitude over a negative attitude. If you want an attitude that will improve the quality of your life, you will have to gain the necessary knowledge and work at putting it to use. The following will give you the tools in ten effective steps. Remember, this is an investment in you and the quality of your life.

Step 1: Understanding the Power of a Positive Attitude

Attitude can be defined in one word—life. Attitude is everything because it involves everything. Attitude is the cornerstone upon which you build your life. Attitude is your most powerful tool for positive actions, and it determines whether you are living life or life is living you.

Your attitude is an outward reflection of what resides inside you. In order to successfully change your attitude, you must change your heart. The programming of our attitude comes through what we hear, see and say. We can be programmed for success or failure based upon how well we monitor what we see and hear. Remember that regardless of what you have taken

to your heart, it is possible to start reprogramming your attitude today.

Attitude Is a Choice

The paths our lives take are determined by the choices we make every day. One of the best things to remember about life is that we have the freedom to choose. We can choose either a positive or negative attitude for every challenge with which we are faced. Choosing a positive attitude can change our lives.

One of the critical differences between people with strong self-confidence and those who lack it is their understanding of the power of attitude. The people who are the most confident and successful realize they can control their attitudes rather than letting their attitudes control them. Individuals who let their attitudes control their lives do not believe in their own power to overcome many of life's challenges and difficulties; they tend to be more pessimistic when facing life's events.

The loudest and most influential voice you will ever hear is your own. Therefore, you have to control what comes into your mind, what messages you are programming from yourself and others. What you allow to come in is what will come out. You have the power of choice—you can choose to reframe your perspective by changing your inner dialogue. The key to ridding yourself of helpless feelings is to replace negative inner language with positive, helpful messages. Although realistically you will continue to hear negative language and thoughts, you don't have to accept it into your mind.

You have the choice in life to determine your career path, which friends and partners you choose, and the lifestyle you embrace. Likewise, you can choose not to be hurt or discouraged. You can choose a positive attitude over a negative attitude. You can overcome any challenge. But to stay on top of life requires a commitment to continually improve. (Proverbs

18:15 says, “Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights.”)

Transform Turning Points into Learning Points

Knowing yourself and understanding what drives your attitude and emotions is the first step to self-knowledge and self-control. When you develop self-awareness—the ability to recognize your feelings—you improve your control over your actions. Start by looking back at the mistakes you have made and the losses you have suffered. Examine the choices you made at each of those turning points in your life and how they ultimately shaped your life. Instead of beating yourself up over any responsibility you may have had in those events, you must adjust your attitude to learn from them. Rather than being burdened by your baggage, adjust your attitude, learn from past mistakes, and start to walk through the open doors of opportunity.

There are three types of bad-attitude baggage, of which you need to be aware.

If-only baggage is the baggage from the past. It is full of regret, hurt feelings and if-onlys. The language sounds like this:

- If only I would have thought before I said it.
- If only I’d finished college.
- If only I’d listened to my parents.
- If only I’d spent more time with my children.
- If only I’d put more effort into my relationship.
- If only I’d given the decision more thought.

The if-only baggage of the past will only serve to weigh you down in negativity. You must let it go and focus on the present.

What-now baggage is the stressful baggage from the present. This baggage paralyzes us with the negative attitude we have chosen for our inner dialogue about current events. The dialogue is full of now-what’s and sounds like this:

- I have just lost my job. Now what?
- I cannot afford my mortgage payment. Now what?
- I have missed my plane. Now what?
- My spouse is always unhappy. Now what?

Rather than focusing on the negatives of the problem, focus on positive opportunities.

What-if baggage is packed with worries about the future and carries a lot of what-if statements. For example,

- What if I lose my job?
- What if my husband leaves me?
- What if my daughter doesn't get into a good college?
- What if I lose my savings?

It can be prudent to examine potential problems as long as your focus remains on solutions, rather than on the negativity of something that may never happen.

What types of attitudes do you present to the world? Are you a pessimist or an optimist?

Generally, the type of baggage you are carrying around will shape your attitude. It can be helpful to develop an awareness of your attitude by completing an attitude assessment. Make a list of the negative attitudes that have held you back in the past. What type of negative-attitude baggage are you carrying? What hurts you? What angers you? What makes you jealous? What shames you? How do you react to stressful situations? How do you react to changes at work or in life? How do you react to situations that come up at work? Some of the most common underlying causes of a bad attitude are a low self-esteem, stress, fear, resentment, anger, and an inability to handle change.

Change Your Perspective, Change Your Attitude

Most people surveyed reveal they are at the mercy of their moods. The emotion that gives people the most difficulty

controlling is anger. Grief, jealousy, hatred, resentment, fear, and anxiety are other common carriers of negative consequences. Fortunately, it is possible to change your attitude by changing your perspective. For example, you can substitute gratitude for anger. Or you can lose a large account, or worse yet, your job, and adopt a defeatist negative attitude—and the individuals who wallow in negativity will immediately start looking for people to blame. Another option is to change your perspective and adopt a positive attitude; one that says, “Now I am free to take advantage of the many opportunities which are sure to exist.” Many times, opportunities are not obvious right away but benefits are almost always present in anything that happens to you. We all have very little control over life’s events, but we all have the power to control how we respond.

Keep these three points in mind when you find yourself in a negative mood over something that has happened to you. First, it is not going to last forever. Why aren’t we better at savoring the good things and letting go of the bad? Second, it’s not going to destroy your life. Third, don’t personalize it. Life is random. Everything is not personal, so get over it. It’s not about you; it’s about life. Maintain faith that you can overcome any problem and focus on a positive response.

Two of the best antidotes for a negative attitude are gratitude and forgiveness. All it takes is an exchange of one mindset for another. When you stop blaming, criticizing, feeling hurt, and being angry, you are free to forgive, love, and be grateful and accepting. What others do to you cannot cause a bad attitude. Only your own thoughts can fill your mind with negativity and low moods. When you allow yourself to be grateful and forgiving, you will be able to let go of anger, vindictiveness, judgment, and hurt, and the negative consequences attached to them. Once the blaming stops, you accept responsibility and become free to embrace a better mood.

If you want more friends, you have to be a good friend. If you

want love, you have to give love. Remember your real wealth is not measured by what you have, not by where you are, but by the spirit that lives within you.

Turn Attitude into Action

Think about the happiest people you know and they will all have two things in common. First, they are working toward goals so they have purpose in their lives. Second, they love what they do; they are living their passions. Many times, people get stuck in the fears of their baggage because they do not know where they want to go with their lives. When you don't understand the importance of goals, you don't have a vision of where you are going; you keep running into walls. When you develop well-defined life goals in writing, you are not as likely to develop a bad attitude.

Write down your dreams. What do you enjoy doing over and over again? What can you do for hours and lose track of time while doing it? What are you better at than most people you know? Remember that the level of your talent isn't nearly as important as your intensity. Develop goals for both your work life and your personal life. Once you have determined your goals, make a list of shorter-term goals for which you begin to see immediate progress.

Remember it is the journey, not achieving the goal that will provide daily meaning to your life. The quality of life you experience, the person you become, and the difference you make in the lives of others while on the journey is what will matter the most.

Being Prepared for Warning Hazards

Whenever you discover a negative attitude in your mind, you simply need to flush the garbage away. Often in life, it's the negative comments from others or the negative things we say

to ourselves that create hazards in our lives. Physical action can help you purge your mind: Take your hand to your forehead and wipe your mind clean. Visualize the garbage leaving. Throw it to the ground and step on it.

Victory lies in having faith that you can get through the problem or hazard. You must prepare yourself to deal with things you cannot control. You must be determined to get a positive learning experience out of even the most negative experiences. The following is a sample list of warning hazards with the accompanying negative self-talk for which you must prepare:

- Self-doubt—I don't know if I can do this.
- Frustration—What am I doing wrong?
- Fear of failure—If I cannot do this they will not want me on the committee.
- Anxiety—This is my only chance or I'm finished.
- Anger—Why am I so stupid?
- Victimization—Nobody care what happens to me.
- Blame—It's all his fault.

It can be amazing how quickly a positive attitude can be shut down by a few bad experiences and negative thoughts. That's why it is so important to monitor your attitude. When you develop awareness and respond, you make a constructive adjustment. When you intentionally respond, you engage a thinking brain. When you react rather than respond, you behave in a purely emotional way that rarely improves the situation. When you react, you go with your gut rather than your mind.

When you have a goal, you have prepared for hazards, you accept responsibility for your own attitude, and you can stop making excuses and start taking action to improve the situation. When you maintain faith in yourself, you are equipped to handle any of life's challenges.

Developing-Your-Attitude Toolkit

Attitude Tool #1

Repeat affirmations to yourself out loud several times a day. Statements of affirmation contain elements of your belief, positive attitude, and motivation to action. When done properly, repeating affirmations triggers positive feelings that drive action. Imagining the affirmation brings you closer to achieving it. Crafting a custom affirmation should strive to include these five elements:

1. Be uniquely yours.
2. Be uplifting.
3. Deal with what is going on at the moment.
4. Paint a picture in your mind.
5. Touch your heart.
6. Avoid using words such as *try*, *wish*, or *hope*.

Attitude Tool #2

To *maintain an internal self-motivation*, you will need to develop the following five qualities:

1. You have to be excited about your goals and receive feedback from small accomplishments.
2. You have to find the positive side of every situation that you encounter.
3. You need to maintain a positive physiology. Smile more, hold your head up, and walk faster.
4. Expressing gratitude and recalling good memories to fight off periods of bad attitude.
5. Identify your unique talents, skills and knowledge so that when doubts manifest themselves, you have the ammunition to believe in yourself.

Attitude Tool #3

How many times does your use negative self-talk and negative visualization hold you back? You can use the same principles for moving yourself forward. Utilize positive self-talk along with *visualization of a positive outcome*.

Attitude Tool #4

Take a closer look at what you are *saying to yourself*. Your positive internal talk is attitude talk. Override negative programming by replacing it with a positive internal voice, thus planting the seeds for personal and professional success. As you monitor your internal dialogue, consider the three major inputs of negative sources of information—television, newspapers, and other people. Keep in mind that positive people dismiss the daily garbage and replace it with insights from great writers and positive inner dialogue.

Attitude Tool #5

The *words we speak* to others are just as powerful as the words we speak to ourselves. Choose your words wisely, as they are the pen of your heart. Use words to lift others up, affect your attitude positively, and affect those around you positively. When you speak words to empower others, you empower yourself.

Attitude Tool #6

There is incredible power in a *positive greeting*. The instant you meet someone, choose words with power and energy; express your words with enthusiasm. For example, “I’m super-fantastic,” or, “I feel brand new—what a wonderful day.” You can have a positive and lasting effect on another person’s life with small gestures of kind and encouraging words.

Attitude Tool #7

Enthusiasm is important to maintaining a positive attitude and staying motivated. Enthusiasm is an important internal spirit that speaks through your actions from your belief in what you are doing.

Attitude Tool #8

We are all spiritual beings. Just as we feed our bodies we need to *feed our spirit* for empowerment.

Attitude Tool #9

Utilize humor and laughter as a positive motivator. The more humor and laughter in your life the more positive energy you will employ to turn positive attitude into action.

Attitude Tool #10

Regular exercise is important to maintaining a positive attitude. Physical exertion has the power to move us mentally from a low-arousal state to a more positive, high-arousal state.

Embrace Change

Bad attitudes can arise when we feel we are not moving forward. This is often because we are afraid to take the necessary risks or because we resist change in our lives.

Change is one of the few constants in life, so it is wise to always be on the alert for it. There are two types of change—planned and unplanned. Planned changes are those that you have chosen in order to improve your life. Unplanned changes are forced upon you by circumstances beyond your control. These unplanned changes can throw you off balance temporarily or longer, depending upon the severity of the change. The important thing to remember is you can control the attitude you take toward the change. Those who choose to resist change are threatened with their ability to enjoy life and live it to their fullest potential.

Adopt the attitude that change is something to be expected and you will be better prepared to deal with it. You can expect a great deal of turmoil and anxiety when faced with any major life change, planned or unplanned—moving, marriage, deaths, divorce, health changes, demotion, changes in income, retirement, pregnancy, births, and ending a relationship can all have both positive and negative effects. It may hurt now, but it helps to know it is part of a growing process. Embracing a positive attitude and searching for hidden opportunities make

the difference when faced with a major life event.

The gradual changes that accompany aging are no different. Whatever your age, remember that *you* define the age; the age does not define you. As with everything else, *you* ultimately define yourself through your attitude. Are you going to become bitter, fearful, and withdrawn as you age, or are you going to embark on an exciting life journey filled with new opportunities?

It helps to understand where you stand in the process of accepting change and your ability to cope—there are four stages. The first is where the fear of taking a risk is very strong; you dearly want to return to your comfort zone. But you can't move ahead without letting go and facing your fears. It helps to remain focused on the excitement of a new experience. The second stage is the feelings of regret that you have just made a huge mistake. During this stage you must understand that negative emotions are bound to creep in; just stay focused on where you are going and keep moving forward. During the third stage you begin to realize the rewards of taking risk with every successful step; you have begun to welcome new challenges and new opportunities. The fourth stage welcomes a new you who prefers a “whatever it takes” attitude over settling back into old comfort zones. It can be natural to go through these four processes to successfully cope with a change in your life.

Here are ten strategies for developing a positive attitude about change.

1. Program your mind with positivity. When you get out of bed in the morning, thank your creator for giving you another day to savor, develop a plan for the day, and clap your hands repeatedly to get yourself psyched up.

2. As you look in the mirror in the morning, monitor your inner dialogue. Be on the alert for any negativity or self-criticism. Visualize yourself clearing out any pessimism with optimism.
3. What you can see in your mind you can make happen. Visualize well-defined goals to help you stay focused.
4. If you don't find direction for your life, it will direct you. You are not helpless; you have the power to set goals and take action.
5. Handling unexpected changes can be challenging. That's why it's important to maintain physical, mental, and spiritual balance. Getting rest, healthful food, regular exercise, and time with family and friends are all important.
6. Accept change. Letting go empowers you. Remember the only thing you can ultimately change is yourself.
7. When you are faced with change, reframe it as an opportunity.
8. Turn change into a challenge. Remember what Martin Luther King said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenges and controversy."
9. When faced with negative situations, repeat affirmations several times a day.
10. Seek support for the people who truly care about you. Lean on them in difficult times.

Make a Mark that Cannot Be Erased

Your attitude is your most priceless possession. On the path to living your dream you will have to make many sacrifices. You will need to become fully committed and unswerving. But once you start seeing the results of your efforts, you will be ready to make a difference.

The most important thing you can do with your life is to understand your purpose and realize your potential—so you

can plant positive seeds of hope, love, encouragement, and faith in the lives of others. God has given each of us special gifts, but they are not for us alone. Our gifts are meant to bless the lives of others. Remember, your attitude is your most priceless possession on the journey to reach your fullest potential and leave your mark on others.

Action Review Points

1. Your attitude is your most powerful tool for positive actions. A positive attitude is the foundation of a successful life.
2. We have the freedom to choose. We can choose either a positive or negative attitude for every challenge that faces us. Choosing a positive attitude can change our lives.
3. Develop self-awareness—cognizance of your feelings—so you can improve your control over your actions. Start by looking back at the mistakes you have made and the losses you have suffered. Examine the choices you made at each of those turning points in your life and how they ultimately shaped your life. Adjust your attitude to learn from them.
4. To change your attitude, change your perspective. Substitute a positive emotion (e.g., gratitude) for a negative one (e.g., anger).
5. Develop well-defined life goals in writing; you are not as likely to develop a bad attitude when you know where you are going.

6. Be prepared for negativity from others and yourself. Identify these negative hazards and monitor your attitude. When you develop awareness and respond, you make a constructive adjustment to a more positive attitude.
7. Maintain a written attitude toolkit or to-do list for positivity. Review it often to keep your attitude on track.
8. Accept change. Letting go empowers you. Remember the only thing you can ultimately change is yourself.
9. Your gifts are meant to bless the lives of others. Plant positive seeds of hope, love, encouragement, and faith in the lives of others. By lifting others up you will fill yourself up with positivity.

HOW TO START A CONVERSATION AND MAKE FRIENDS

By Don Gabor

(Simon and Schuster, 2001)

About the Book

Follow Don Gabor's simple guidelines and you'll be able to strike up a conversation with anyone anywhere. Learn how to keep the conversation going by asking the right questions, using the right body language, and avoiding conversational pitfalls.

Don Gabor is a communications trainer and author of seven self-help books and audio-tapes. He helps organizations in need of people with high-impact communications skills. He is a frequent media guest, a spokesperson for Sprint, and a member of the National Speakers Association.

Introduction

Good conversation is what makes us interesting, attracts others to us, and builds meaningful relationships. When we have the skills to keep a channel of conversation interesting and meaningful, we are successful at connecting with other people. When the communication channel is closed, starting and sustaining a conversation become a real hindrance to building successful social connections.

Most people can converse successfully in situations where they feel confident and safe with family members and close friends. The problem arises for many when we are placed in situations where we feel anxious, tense, and self-conscious. With time, you will be able to transfer new conversational skills to a variety of communication situations.

The ability to connect with more people through good conversation will expand your horizons and opportunities. You will successfully build new friendships and deepen relationships, developing a real sense of personal fulfillment. To successfully improve your conversational skills, you will need to change attitudes and skills. Realize it will take time to make changes, so be patient and focus on making small changes. To accomplish your goal, cultivate a desire to make the change, a willingness to experiment with new ideas, and a sincere wish to reach out to others.

Body Language

Body language communicates our feelings and attitude before and during conversation. Research has shown that over half of all conversation is nonverbal. The following “softener” gestures will make people more receptive and responsive to you: smiling, open arms, leaning forward, touching, eye contact, and nodding.

Smiling. A warm, friendly smile indicates your positive attitude toward the other person; it says you are friendly and willing to communicate.

Open arms. We cannot read minds but we can read body language. Crossed arms says, “Stay away, I am not interested.”

Leaning forward. When you lean forward it indicates your interest and demonstrates you are listening. It says, “I hear what you are saying, I’m interested, and I want you to tell me more.”

Touching. A soft touch is a meaningful way to extend warmth and friendship. A friendly touch on the arm, shoulder, or hand creates a very meaningful connection. In our culture it is most acceptable to offer a warm handshake to initiate contact; be the first to extend your hand in a greeting.

Eye contact. Direct eye contact indicates you are listening, says you are interested and want to know more. Eye contact may be the strongest nonverbal signal.

Nodding. A slight nod of the head show that you are paying attention, interested, and understand what is being said. It signals encouragement to the other to keep speaking.

The total communication package we will talk about includes using a cluster of softening gestures together with a friendly tone of voice and inviting, positive words.

Six Steps to Getting a Conversation Going

1. Take the risk. Shy people tend to wait for someone to come along and start a conversation. You will get a more positive response if you are the first to say hello and initiate the conversation. By initiating a conversation, it gives you control over the conversation, and gives the other person the impression you are confident and friendly. By approaching another person, you are also showing you care about them. Look for receptivity when searching for someone to approach. People who are sending receptive signals will be easy to make eye contact with and will offer a friendly smile.
2. Ask easy to answer questions. The easiest way to start a conversation is to offer a compliment and ask a follow-up question. For example, “I love that sweater, where do you enjoy shopping?” Another option is to comment on something a person is carrying followed by a question. A third idea is to comment on something that relates to the situation. For example, let’s say you are at an event; you could comment on something you have observed. For example, “Isn’t this a beautiful home? Where did you meet the owners?”

Whenever possible ask open-ended questions to solicit more than a one-word yes or no answer. Whenever you receive a longer answer to a closed-ended question, it tells you the person is interested in talking. Keep in mind it is advantageous to introduce yourself to the other person as soon as possible after making the initial contact. When you ask a ritual question, listen for free information that accompanies the answer. When you communicate, many people will reveal quite a bit of information about themselves. By focusing on the free information, you can explore each other's experiences and interests.

It is not possible to move to deeper more meaningful friendships without first going through the rituals of small talk conversations. Small talk allows people to exchange basic information to discover the possibility of common interests. It also provides an opportunity for the individuals to reveal the topics they wish to talk about. The ritual questions used in small talk allow individuals to reveal personal information in a natural way. It also allows an opportunity to discover the big things in a person's life that are important to them. The goal is to search for topics that generate an enthusiastic response. When you discover areas of interest, follow up with open-ended, information-seeking questions.

3. Active listening keeps the conversation going. Do not be thinking about what you are going to say next; instead, be an active listener. Listen for free information, facts, feelings, and opinions. Listen for key words about people, places, things, and activities. Ask follow-up questions to improve your understanding. To clarify information, ask for examples. Summarize the main theme to confirm an understanding. By being an active listener, you encourage people to continue to speak, and you show them you are interested in them. Avoid playing the devil's advocate.

4. Seek more information. Once you have initiated a conversation, ask a few ritual questions to gain more free information. The goal is to search for areas of mutual interest. Be sensitive when asking for personal information by prefacing your question with a softener. For example, "If I'm not being too personal, I would love to know..." When you are seeking information avoid the topics of death, crimes, unhappy events, personal gossip, and racial or ethnic slurs.
5. Disclose free information about yourself to help others to get to know you. You must be enthusiastic, share your goals, hopes, fears, rewarding experiences, and big events in your life. Typically self-disclosure will escalate in steps as the relationship develops. Once you have provided some background experiences, the next level will begin to reveal personal opinions and preferences. The final level will be personal feelings. When you begin to express your hopes, dreams, loves, joys, goals, struggles, and sorrows, the relationship will start to become meaningful.
6. Always remember the sweetest sound to anyone is his or her name. Use it often to make a person feel important. To remember a name, repeat the name immediately, think of someone you know with the same name, and then use the name during and at the end of the conversation.

Keeping the Conversation Going

To keep the conversation going, find the hot buttons. What are the big events in a person's life? Where do they put their time, money, and effort? What do they value? Search for common goals, experiences, and ideas. It's important to discover common interests, as this is where friendships begin to develop. You can signal your desire to learn more about what is really important to the person by asking questions such as:

- What do you like to do in your free time when you are not working?
- What do you like to do to have fun?
- What are your major interests?
- What type of things do you do to relax?

Some of the more common high-interest topics include: Education, exercise, books, movies, music, pets, family, sports, cooking and eating out, clothing fashions, technology, gardening, home improvement, and travel.

As you uncover the big events and hot buttons in a person's life, listen for free information to build future conversation on. The easiest way to sustain a conversation is to listen intently for good conversational material. As the conversation flows, it will not be uncommon for it to jump around about a variety of subjects. Good conversation is typically an interweaving of a variety of subjects and ideas. To keep the conversation going or change the subject, refer back to previously revealed free information by asking open-ended questions. This is possible when you listen intently for key words. For example, the key word "food" may trigger questions about what restaurants they visit or what their favorite recipes are to prepare.

When you successfully seek out interests and experiences from others, provide immediate feedback with quick inserts. For example, "I have always wanted to go there," or, "What's it

like there?” When you couple positive body language with quick inserts, you encourage your conversational partner to continue talking. Also remember to let the other person know which interest you have in common. You can successfully communicate your interest by saying, “I like that too,” or, “Me, too.” When you let the other person know you can identify with their interest, you begin to build the common bridge of friendship.

Conversation is a great way to learn about new experiences through others. When you uncover a topic that excites people, encourage them to tell you about it. It is important not only to uncover the other person’s hot buttons but to also share information about your own interests. When you talk about your hot buttons, be sure to be specific and share details to give them a look inside you; show them what excites you. Be aware that the information exchange is balanced between talking and listening. Keep track of that balance. It is imperative to ask questions, encourage the other person to talk, and listen intently, but it is also important to be a participant in the conversation.

To keep the channels of communication open and flowing, you must increase receptivity by showing your conversational partner their ideas are important. When you ask questions to explore a person’s opinions, tell him or her why you want to know. Increase conversational cooperation by being receptive to your partner’s viewpoints and exploring the purpose behind their ideas. Remember that simply by asking for someone’s opinion, you are giving him or her a compliment—you’re saying that you value their viewpoint.

Overcoming Conversational Hang-ups

- 1. I’m right, you’re wrong.** Competitive conversationalists think good conversation means winning a discussion. They present their opinions as indisputable facts. Their closed and aggressive attitude

will not allow others to open up to them in any meaningful way. Don't assume what you believe is true. When you present your point of view, there is a major difference between absolute fact and what we assume to be true. Our opinions are the result of preferences, biases, assumptions, and our conditioning—not facts. Avoid confrontational statements implying, "You're wrong." To avoid conversational killers when you disagree with someone's opinion, preface your statement with, "You have many valid ideas. Here is how I see it..."

2. **Sizing people up.** When you form hasty conclusions from a person's actions or comments, you jump to inappropriate conclusions.
3. **It doesn't matter to me.** By not expressing your opinion or feelings you are not involving yourself in the decision-making process. If you do not express your preferences, wants, desires, or feelings, people will not know what you like or are seeking. People are not mind-readers. It's always better to be assertive and express your thoughts and preferences. Remember, you always have the right to say no without feelings of guilt. It's important to stand up for your rights. You will be destined to a life of frustration and disappointment if you only respond to what others give you.
4. **Being a know-it-all.** When you convey the feeling the other person's message or ideas don't matter to you, it is a conversation killer. When you project a superior attitude it cuts off a two-way exchange of information. The key is to demonstrate a sincere interest for the other person's point of view.
5. **I'm boring.** Many people simply take the easy way out and don't participate in the conversation. They think they have nothing of interest to say. When you don't

make the effort to carry on a conversation, you are choosing to avoid people. You must shut down your inner voice that says, “No one is interested in what I have to say.” Focus on sharing the positive events of your life; project your enthusiasm to others. Shying away from interacting with people blocks meaningful conversations and prevents people from developing meaningful friendships.

Ending a Conversation

Follow these easy four steps:

1. Restate something interesting the person said.
2. Reveal how much you enjoyed the conversation.
3. Discuss a date for meeting again.
4. Use the person’s name in conjunction with friendly body language when you say goodbye.

Making Friends

Friends can be allies, supporters, and sympathizers, and they can offer encouragement, honest feedback, opinions, and advice. A friend is someone you can trust with sensitive information; someone with whom you share common interests and experiences; someone who adds to your sense of fulfillment. But to develop close friendships takes a real commitment of time and effort. One of the reasons friendships take time to develop is the requirement of mutual trust; to develop trust takes time as you gradually reveal personal information and feelings that conveys a sense of who you really are.

If you want to meet people, it only makes sense to go to places where you have a mutual interest with the people you meet. The “right place” could be your church, a political event, educational programs, or any social gathering attracting your type of people. When you are meeting with people who have

common interests and you continue to see them continually, it makes it easier to start a conversation. After you have said hello a few times, take the opportunity to stop and chat. Stopping to make small talk will send a message you are open to making conversation. When you initiate a conversation, ask your ritual questions discussed earlier. Uncover the other person's hot buttons as quickly as possible to see if you have anything in common. Remember the free information the other person discloses so you can bring it up in a future conversation. For example, "How did the move into your new apartment go?" Recalling the details of another person's life makes them feel special. During a casual conversation, if you want to get better acquainted suggest meeting for coffee or lunch. After you spend some time together, propose doing an activity together; do something of mutual interest to both of you.

When you call to make plans, proceed with the following steps:

1. Identify yourself.
2. Ask a question about a detail in the person's life. For example, "How is your painting project coming?"
3. Tell the person why you are calling.
4. End the conversation with a friendly comment. For example, "I'm looking forward to seeing you Friday night."

Friendships grow slowly over a long period. Your friendships will grow as you spend time together and share experiences. It is imperative to make an all-out effort to maintain contact, arrange get-togethers, and accept invitations to go to new places and try new experiences. In the best friendships, growing, learning, laughing never stops. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The only way to have a good friend is to be a good friend." You must accept your friends as unique individuals with all of their baggage of problems and hang-ups.

Ways to Improve Your Conversation

- Go out of your way to meet new people.
- Be the first to say hello.
- Introduce yourself to others.
- Make eye contact and smile as you approach another person.
- Greet people you see regularly.
- Encourage others to talk with you by sending out receptive signals.
- Make an extra effort to remember people's names.
- Ask for a person's name if you have forgotten it.
- Reintroduce yourself to someone who has forgotten your name.
- Be aware of positive body language.
- Compliment others about what they are wearing or doing.
- Be receptive to new ideas.
- Show curiosity and interest in what others are saying.
- Tell other people about the important events in your life.
- Demonstrate you are a good listener by restating their comments.
- Communicate enthusiasm and excitement in your conversation.
- Accept a person's right to be an individual.
- Tell others what type of work you do in a few short sentences.
- Tell something interesting and challenging about what you do.
- Seek out common interests and experiences in your communications.
- Make a sincere interest to help people.
- Let others play the expert.
- Be cooperative in answering and supplying details to others ritual questions.
- Balance the giving and receiving of information.

- Be open to understanding other people's opinions and feelings.
- Express your feelings and opinions.
- Ask other people to share their opinions.
- Look for the positive in people you meet.
- Ask others about things they have told you in previous conversations.
- Listen carefully for free information.
- Change the topic of conversation when it has run its course.
- Search for the other person's hot buttons.
- When you tell a story, state the main point first, and then give the supporting details.
- Let others know you enjoyed the conversation.
- Let others know you want to get to know them better; suggest lunch or coffee.
- End your conversation with a handshake and the person's name.
- Invite people to social events.
- Keep in touch.

Action Review Points

1. Good conversation is what makes us interesting, attract others to us and build meaningful relationships. When we have the skills to keep a channel of conversation interesting and meaningful, we are successful at connecting with other people.
2. To successfully improve your conversational skills, you will need to change attitudes and skills. Realize it will take time to make changes, so be patient and focus on making small changes. To accomplish your goal will require a real desire to make change, a willingness to experiment with new ideas, and a sincere wish to reach out to others.

3. Body language communicates our feelings and attitude before and during conversation. Research has shown that over half of all conversation is nonverbal. Practice the positive body language presented in this information.
4. Be the first to approach another person with a warm greeting. You will get a more positive response if you are the first to say hello and initiate the conversation.
5. The easiest way to start a conversation is to offer a compliment and ask a follow-up question. Comment on something they are wearing, carrying, or about the surroundings.
6. Be an active, focused listener. Listen for free information, facts, feelings, and opinions. Listen for key words about people, places, things, and activities.
7. Ask follow-up questions to improve your understanding. To clarify information, ask for examples. Summarize the main theme to confirm an understanding. By being an active listener it encourages people to continue to speak and shows them you are interested in them.
8. Disclose free information about yourself to help others to get to know you. You must be enthusiastic, share your goals, hopes fears, rewarding experiences, and the big events in your life.
9. Always remember that the sweetest sound to anyone is his or her name. Use it often.

10. To keep the conversation going, find out their hot buttons. What are the big events in a person's life? Where do they put their time, money, and effort? What do they value? Search for common goals, experiences and ideas.
11. Let the other person know which interests you have in common.
12. It is important not only to uncover the other person's hot buttons but to also share information about your interests.
13. When you ask questions to explore another's opinions, tell the person why you want to know. Increase conversational cooperation by being receptive to your partner's viewpoints and exploring the purpose behind their ideas. Remember that simply by asking for someone's opinion, you are giving him or her a compliment. You're saying that you value their viewpoint.
14. To end a conversation, restate something interesting the person said, reveal how much you enjoyed the conversation, discuss a date for meeting again, and use the person's name in conjunction with friendly body language when you say goodbye.
15. To develop close friendship will take a real commitment of time and effort. One of the reasons friendships take time to develop is the requirement of mutual trust; to develop trust takes time as you gradually reveal personal information and feelings so the other person can get a sense of who you are.

16. Your friendships will grow as you spend time together and share experiences. It is imperative to make an all-out effort to maintain contact, arrange get-togethers, and accept invitations to go to new places and try new experiences.

The Fine Art of Small Talk: How To Start a Conversation, Keep It Going, Build Networking Skills—and Leave a Positive Impression!

by Debra Fine
(Hyperion: 2005)

About the Book

Debra Fine will show you how to connect with others regardless of the occasion, come across composed and self-assured, start a conversation, avoid awkward silence, adopt effective listening skills that will make you a better communicator, convey warmth and enthusiasm, make a positive lasting impression, and exit gracefully.

Debra Fine is a nationally recognized speaker and trainer who presents her small talk programs more than one hundred times per year to Fortune 500 companies and many other organizations.

Initiating and Conducting a Conversation

First and most important, always remember that you are a wonderful person with interesting life stories, experiences, and information to share with others. Believe in yourself! You are a person people want to get to know—however, you must give people the opportunity to get to know you.

To become a better conversationalist, you must take two risks. First, it is up to you to take the risk to start a conversation with a stranger. You must make the first move. Second, you must be willing to assume responsibility for coming up with topics to discuss. It is up to you to carry the conversation and make people feel comfortable.

To expand your circle of friends you must engage in conversations with strangers and acquaintances. After all, how

else can you pursue building a new relationship? You must start thinking of strangers as individuals who can teach you something and possibly add new interests to your life. Start by simply walking up to someone, extend your hand, make eye contact, smile, and say, “Hello, my name is...” Good things happen to the people who take the initiative to start a conversation.

The first step in becoming a good conversationalist is to take responsibility for carrying your fair share of the conversation and making efforts to put the other person at ease. Relying on the other person to carry the conversation for you is selfish. A monologue conversation is a chore for the person shouldering the responsibility of the conversation, not to mention boring. In addition, one-word answers to questions is not taking responsibility for a conversation.

It is important to remember and use the person’s name, so stay focused during the introduction. Repeat the person’s name back during the greeting and immediately use the person’s name in the conversation.

Start the conversation with any of the following icebreaking questions:

- What is your favorite thing to do on a rainy day?
- What was your favorite movie? Restaurant?
- Tell me about your best vacation.
- If you could replay any moment in your life, what would it be?
- What is the one thing you would really like to own and why?
- Who was the most influential person in your life and why?
- What do you think is the perfect age and why?
- What is the best book you have ever read and why?
- What is a typical day like for you?

- What is your favorite holiday and why?
- What are some family traditions you enjoy?
- Tell me about the first car (home) you ever bought.
- How has the Internet affected your life?
- Who were your idols as a child and how have they changed?
- Tell me about your most influential teacher?
- What is the origin of your last name?
- What is the best surprise you have ever received?
- What is the neatest surprise you have ever planned?
- Who is the most famous person you have ever met?
- Tell me about some of your New Year's resolutions.
- What is the most anti-establishment thing you have ever done?
- Describe the best costume party you have ever attended?
- What political position would you like to hold and why?
- What is the most memorable meal you have ever eaten?
- What motion picture star would you like to interview and why?
- What aromas bring forth special memories?
- What are your favorite things to do alone?
- Tell me about your best childhood friend.
- Describe your first experience living away from home?
- What is your most special memory of a grandparent?
- Describe one of your most embarrassing moments.
- How did you learn how to...?
- Tell me about your family.
- What do you like best about being a (father, mother, grandparent)?
- What do you do for fitness?
- What kind of things do you do for fun?

When you enter a crowd of people who may be mostly strangers, scan the room to see who is in a position to be approachable. Approachable people are those who are getting

a bite to eat, sitting alone, or moving about the room without a friend. Take the initiative to make eye contact, smile, and approach the other person. After the appropriate introduction, use their name and make a statement, following it up with one of the sample open-ended icebreaking questions from above.

The following is an example of a statement with a follow-up question.

- What a beautiful day. What is your favorite season of the year?
- I love your shoes and purse. What are your favorite stores?
- I read in the newspaper that our governor has cut spending on education. How do you think that will affect the quality of our teachers?
- I love your landscaping. What is your secret?
- I watched *Gone with the Wind* last night. What are your all-time favorite movies?

It is simple to start conversations when you ask people to disclose information about themselves. Try to always ask open-ended questions that start with the following words or phrases:

- Describe for me...
- Tell me about...
- How did you...?
- What was that like for you to...?
- What brought you to...?
- Why did you...?
- How do you feel about...?

The following are some ideas for initiating conversations around some favorite topics of most people:

- Instead of asking, "Are you married?" Ask, "Tell me about your family."

- Instead of asking, “What do you do for a living?” Ask, “Tell me about you work.”
- Instead of asking, “Do you have kids?” Ask, “Tell me about your family.”
- Instead of asking, “What’s your favorite hobby?” Ask, “Tell me about your favorite hobby.”
- Instead of asking, “How was your weekend?” Ask, “What was the best part of your weekend?”

In order to keep conversations going you need to dig deeper with follow-up questions. Not only do follow-up questions continue the conversation but they show the other person you care. It becomes easy to ask follow-up questions when you listen for *free information*. For example, you ask an open-ended question inquiring about the person’s type of work. They reply while they lived in Chicago they worked for a Fortune 500 company creating tax shelters but decided to move to Boston to pursue setting up venture capital investments for medium-sized companies. You can choose from the free information being offered what interests you and ask any of the following questions:

- Tell me about what you enjoyed about living in Chicago?
- Tell me about what you enjoyed about living in Boston?
- Give me an example of the type of tax shelters you created.
- What did you like best/worst about working for a Fortune 500 company?
- What made you decide to leave your career in Chicago and move to Boston?
- Tell me about the most interesting venture capital investment with which you have been involved?

You can also use your eyes to find interesting subjects for which to ask people? For example, when you are in someone’s home or office take notice of the furniture, art, family pictures, and decorations—ask questions about them. When you are at a

special occasion you can create questions concerning the event or the location of the event. Many times you can even start a conversation about a person's dress, behavior or accent.

Listening

It takes two people to carry on a meaningful conversation. Listening plays a vital role in conversation. You demonstrate your desire to listen intently by utilizing both visual and verbal skills.

Give the speaker your full attention by keeping your eyes focused on only them.

Use positive body language to portray your interest in what the speaker is saying.

- Lean forward
- Open up your arms
- Relax your body posture
- Face your partner
- Nod and smile

Avoid the following body language:

- Covering your mouth
- Pointing
- Fiddling with body, clothing, jewelry
- Swinging legs
- Crossing arms
- Putting hands on your hips
- Glancing away
- Tapping a pencil

Give verbal responses to confirm that you are listening as well as asking questions to continue the conversation. For example, say

- That is very interesting. Tell me more about it.

- That was quite an accomplishment (or must have been quite rewarding, etc.). How did you do it?
- That must have been difficult (frustrating, etc.). How did you manage?
- I would like to do that. How would I get started?

Ask probing questions to encourage the speaker to continue or to gain a better understanding.

- On the other hand, what do you think of...?
- I'm not clear on your feeling about that. Can you explain...?
- Can you give me an example to help me understand?

Display enthusiasm with emotional responses that display your sincere interest.

Paraphrasing

Periodically it is important for the listener to paraphrase what is being said to confirm an understanding with what he or she is saying. Repeating back what is being said to confirm understanding tells the speaker you truly care about what is being said. To avoid merely parroting the information, though, also subtly redirect or add to the conversation.

- When you were talking about _____, it reminded me of _____.
- I just read about a similar story in the paper. It said _____.
- I've always wanted to ask you...

Filling Pauses

Prepare a list of open-ended questions for when the conversation pauses.

- Have any of you seen the movie, _____?
- I just finished reading _____. Has anyone read it yet?

- Have you heard about that new _____? (Technology, medical procedure, etc.)
- Does anyone have a _____ (hairdresser, investment advisor, cleaning lady, plumber) they could recommend?

With acquaintances you can also use any of these:

- Bring me up to date on_____.
- What has changed in your life (or at work) since we last talked?
- What's new with the family (kids, grandchildren)?
- What was your most interesting event in the last year?

Responding to Other's Questions

A three- to ten-word response is a conversation stopper. It says, "I am not interested in pursuing this conversation or topic." Instead, open yourself up, provide as much detail about yourself and your thinking as possible when answering a question. Volunteer stories and information about yourself so the other person gets to know the real you.

When finished, ask open-ended questions to gain an understanding about the other person along the same topic lines.

Giving Information or Opinions

When giving information or an opinion, it is best to humble yourself with an introductory statement to open up the listener's attitude so he or she is more willing to receive your information. For example, "You may not agree with me, but I liked this thought expressed in the..." Always be careful not to state information as fact or attempt to sell someone on the idea that you are right. Doing so only incites knee-jerk, defensive responses.

Giving Compliments

Giving sincere compliments makes people feel special and appreciated and is an effective way to develop an immediate connection between two people.

You can compliment people about their possessions, appearance, efforts, accomplishments, or behavior. You can also go beyond the compliment and introduce conversational material by, for instance, expounding on why you like the _____; asking questions about where it was bought; why did they choose to _____; how they learned to _____; and how they thought of _____.

Ending Conversations

End the conversation by showing an appreciation for the exchange. Recall how the conversation started or the main topic discussed and bring the conversation back to that topic. When you end a conversation with sincere appreciation for the exchange of information, you leave the conversation on a positive note as well as promoting goodwill for your reputation. Seal the conversation with a handshake and a smile. Think in terms of starting the conversation with a compliment and ending it with another compliment. The following are examples of offering appreciation when ending the conversation:

- I really enjoyed talking with you about...
- Thank you for the delightful conversation...
- I appreciate your willingness to share your stories about...
- It's nice to meet someone involved in _____ and so passionate about...

If you have met someone who you would like to get to know better, take the initiative to issue an invitation to meet again.

- I'd enjoy visiting with you again.
- Will you be at the next meeting?

- Would you like to meet for coffee?
- Can I phone you to schedule a time to meet again?

Braving It Alone to Meet New People

To grow your circle of friends, it is imperative to take the initiative to do the necessary planning and action-oriented steps to put yourself in situations where it is possible to network and socialize with other people.

When you are entering any social function alone, don't think about the fact that you are a single, but that you are socializing to expand your network of friends. You are simply connecting with humanity to offer your thoughts to others and gain knowledge from other's thoughts. Portray self-confidence when you enter the room. Wonder around the room slowly to get a feel for the crowd. Get yourself some food and something to drink. Look around the room to see who is approachable. Consider approaching someone of the same gender and making a few comments about the gathering as an icebreaker. Offer information about yourself and ask questions of others in your search for someone with which you share common ground. When you use the three elements of conversation—questions, follow-up comments, and follow-up questions—it is possible to keep the conversation going indefinitely.

When you get to the point of interest where you would like to call someone to ask for a date, you may want to consider making small talk on the first phone call. A good topic is reviewing the event where you first met. You can comment about how much you enjoyed the conversation and mention you would like to resume it over coffee some time. For a first date think of a venue that will allow for you to engage in conversation; the key is to get to know one another.

Remember, building a trusting and intimate relationship takes time. It has to happen in layers over a span of countless

engagements. During each encounter it is important to raise, yet match the level of intimacy in your conversation to what the other person reveals.

The Don't List

- Don't gossip
- Be a know-it-all
- Tell stories or jokes of unquestionable taste
- Play the role of advisor
- Reveal personal misfortunes
- Interrupt
- Disclose health problems
- Tell how much things cost
- Discuss controversial subjects
- Interrogate with a million questions
- Brag
- Be the one-upper
- Monopolize the conversation

Action Review Points

1. To expand your circle of friends you must engage in conversations with strangers and acquaintances. After all, how else can you pursue building a new relationship?
2. To become a better conversationalist you must take two risks. First, it is up to you to take the risk to start a conversation with a stranger. You must make the first move. Second, you must be willing to assume responsibility for coming up with topics to discuss. It is up to you to carry the conversation and make people feel comfortable.

3. It is important to remember and use the person's name so stay focused during the introduction. Repeat the person's name back during the greeting and immediately use it in the conversation.
4. To get the conversation going, make a statement and ask an open-ended question like the samples offered in this material.
5. Keep conversations going by digging deeper with follow-up questions. It becomes easy to ask follow-up questions when you listen for free information. Not only do follow-up questions continue the conversation, but they show the other person you care.
6. Listening plays a vital role in conversation. Demonstrate your desire to listen intently by using both visual and verbal skills. Use body language to portray your interest. Give verbal responses to confirm you are paying attention. Display enthusiasm to convey your sincere interest. Paraphrase what the speaker has said to confirm your understanding.
7. Have a prepared list of open-ended questions ready for when the conversation pauses.
8. When you respond to other's questions, open yourself up, provide as much detail about yourself and your thinking as possible when answering a question. Volunteer stories and information about yourself so the other person gets to know the real you. When finished, ask open-ended questions to gain an understanding about the other person along the same topic lines.
9. When giving information or an opinion, it is best to humble yourself with an introductory statement to open up the listener's attitude so he or she is more willing to receive your information.

10. Giving sincere compliments makes people feel special and appreciated and is an effective way to develop an immediate connection between two people.
11. End a conversation with sincere appreciation for the interchange of information.
12. Do the necessary planning and action-oriented steps to put yourself in situations where it is possible to network and socialize with other people.

**Taking Charge of Anger:
How to Resolve Conflicts, Sustain Relationships, and
Express Yourself Without Losing Control**

By W. Robert Nay, PhD
(The Guilford Press, 2003)

Dr. W. Robert Nay has a six-step program that can help you regain control from anger, even in the most stressful, hot-button situations. The proven program shows you how to stand up for yourself without losing your temper.

- Figure out which of the five “faces of anger” are a problem for you.
- Recognize the early warning signs of anger.
- Identify and change unrealistic expectations.
- Communicate effectively when differences arise.
- How to practice management skills alone and in public.

Dr. Nay is a licensed clinical psychologist in a private practice. He has been on the faculty of several universities and most recently is a Clinical Associate Professor at Georgetown University School of Medicine. Dr. Nay is the author of two textbooks, has written numerous articles, and has served as associate editor of the academic journal *Behavior Therapy*. He offers seminars on anger and aggression nationally to mental health professionals, as well as other agencies, and has appeared repeatedly on *Entertainment Tonight* to discuss media violence.

The Faces of Anger

Anger becomes a problem when it has certain effects on you, your life, and others. Have you experienced any of these telltale signs that others are having a problem with the way you express your anger?

- Do others comment on your reaction to a stressful situation or criticize your behavior? Remember most people will not share their concerns with you until the frequency becomes too high and the problem is becoming serious.
- Do you feel embarrassed following an angry outburst and find yourself apologizing?
- Do you strain valued relationships with your angry outbursts?
- Is your anger a problem for significant others?

How often do you express your anger? Any negative anger that serves as a normal function in life will have a negative impact on you and others. The following are different ways to express anger. Which of them apply to you?

1. Passive-Aggression. You tend to withhold from others by failing to do what they want. You deny your anger when others question your actions.
2. Sarcasm. You use sarcasm and put-downs as a way of indirectly expressing your anger. Your tone of voice or facial expressions may also convey disgust.
3. Cold anger. You refuse to talk things out and withdraw, allowing minimal or no contact for hours or days.
4. Hostility. You handle stress poorly, acting it out with a loud, forceful voice and disgust when situations do not meet with your expectations. You may make nasty comments that others find stressful.
5. Aggression. You act in a manner that intimidates others, e.g., yelling, name-calling, putdowns. Physical aggression includes holding, blocking, pushing, or hitting.

The contents of this book are intended to guide you on a journey that will change your relationship with anger.

Behind the Mask of Anger

Why do we get angry? What triggers each person's anger is unique. Each person's childhood experiences are different, so yours taught you particular beliefs of what to expect. When these expectations are not met, anger is often the result.

Events in and of themselves have no power to create an emotion. It is your thinking, expectations, and self-talk that sustain an angry reaction. It is how you think about things that fuel anger. Also, whenever we perceive a threat and our feelings of safety and security are threatened, our self-talk can magnify a situation into an expression of anger.

The physiological symptoms of anger include the following:

- Heart rate and blood pressure increase.
- Breathing rate increases.
- The stomach and gastrointestinal systems empty of blood.
- Your muscles begin to tighten, particularly around your shoulders, neck, forehead, and jaw.
- The blood vessels begin to constrict, especially around the face and hands.
- Vision, hearing, smell, and touch become magnified. Voices seem louder, pupils dilate.
- Adrenalin and cortisol, the body's chemicals, are released into the blood.

If you have difficulty managing your anger, you are likely to act out angry feelings in ways that frustrate or threaten others—and often yourself. You will fail to resolve the issue because the anger prevents any rational discussion. But you have a choice to use what the author calls “assertive problem solving.” You can learn how to express your anger in a thoughtful discussion that can lead to a resolution.

Record keeping is an excellent way to help you to understand your anger. The more familiar you become the kind of events that trigger your anger, the more you will learn to rationally recognize the thoughts your mind jumps into, the emotions that overcome you, the physical symptoms you experience, and the negative effects of your anger. The goal is to learn how to recognize the five components of every anger episode: *trigger, thoughts, feelings, anger expression, and outcome*. Understanding and breaking down these five anger components will help you recognize how your own anger unfolds. A record of your episodes will help you to see the connections between them.

Understanding Anger Triggers

When you hold unrealistic expectations, you set yourself up for disappointment and anger. Your expectations were shaped by your parents and other significant people in your life. They taught you what to expect regarding how others and the world around you should function. Think about the last time you became angry. What triggered your anger? Did someone fail to do or say something? Was it some action or behavior by another person? Was it something someone said? Now think about what you were expecting to happen. Were your expectations reasonable? The more realistic your expectations, the less often your anger will be triggered.

When you expect yourself to perform at a level that is beyond what is reasonable, anger is more apt to be triggered. Consider the following examples.

1. Physical endurance and performance: In exercise, sports, and other physical tasks, do you expect more than you can physically deliver?
2. Intellectual and task pursuits: When learning new things or new tasks, do you set your goals to high and end up feeling angry and frustrated?

3. Time and speed: Do you set unrealistic time frames for yourself and others and then become angry because your time standards were not met?
4. Success and failure: Our needs for recognition are fulfilled when we achieve our goals. Often the need for recognition drives us to set our goals too high, leaving us feeling frustrated and angry.

In childhood you learned what to expect from others and how to respond. When you determine someone has acted outside the scope of your expectations, you are likely to trigger anger. For example:

1. Manners and social etiquette: You learned the rules for what defines the appropriate social behaviors for various occasions. When others violate your rules, your anger may be triggered.
2. Affirmation and intimacy: You have developed certain expectations as to how your partner, family and friends should treat you—for example, how a loving partner acts or how often children or friends should call. Whatever your expectations, you will feel hurt and angry when they are not fulfilled.
3. Equity and fairness: Based on our morals and beliefs, we all have expectations as to what is equitable and fair. For example, when you compare what others have received for their efforts and it appears to be inequitable, you may feel angry.
4. Intrusions and annoyances: Others may act in ways that are simply annoying to you because they violate the peace or smoothness of function that you expected. In these situations you can find yourself impatient and angry.

Every day we expect the world around us to function a certain way; when it doesn't, we might become angry. For example, your appointment is late, a snowstorm delays your plane, your car has a flat tire, your best friend can't make it to your party

at the last minute... And the list of daily frustrations that can trigger your anger goes on and on.

Anger Awareness

The secret is to recognize when anger is starting to escalate. Accomplish that, and you have made it possible to master it before it masters you. When anger escalates, we are flooded with feelings of fury or irritation, making thinking and emotional control more difficult.

Also keep in mind that lack of sleep, increased stress, increased use of alcohol and caffeine, inadequate nutrition, and coping with pain or sickness all serve to make your anger triggers more sensitive. Whatever you can do to control these body and environmental factors will help when dealing with the escalation of anger. Becoming aware of the escalating steps of your anger is the first step to anger control. Any time you can pause for a time-out to release some of your tension, you will have regained a measure of control.

Dampening Anger Arousal

The following are some relaxation techniques to dampen your anger arousal and return to a calmer state.

1. Diaphragmatic breathing: take a deep breath and feel your lungs filling your abdominal area. Hold your breath momentarily and release your breath slowly over fifteen seconds. As you slowly exhale, feel your forehead smooth, your jaw muscles relax, your shoulders drop, and your arms go limp.
2. Autogenic relaxation: Focus your mind on one part of your body while taking a full, deep breath. Repeat each body part four times. For example:
 - a. (Breathe in) Say “My arms are warm... (breathe out) and heavy.”
 - b. “My shoulders are limp... and loose.”

- c. “My neck is loose... and relaxed.”
 - d. “My back is loose... and relaxed.”
 - e. And continue with all of your body parts.
Because this technique occupies your mind,
it successfully blocks out any anger-arousing
self-talk.
3. Imagery: Merely imagining a future or past situation can trigger anger arousal, even days or months away from the actual event. But you can make good use of imagery to dampen anger arousal. First, set a goal for the emotional experience you would like to invoke. For example, peaceful, serene, calm, relaxed, confident, in control, or secure. Second, close your eyes to concentrate on your goal—the goal is to replace the anger-inducing image with a completely different scenario, focusing your imagination’s energy somewhere else. Develop detailed scenes in your mind’s eye. Third, sit or lie down and use all your senses to imagine the scene as vividly as possible. Notice what you can see, hear the sounds, be aware of pleasant smells, and notice how your body feels.
4. Distractions: Almost anything that successfully refocuses your attention on something that is more neutral can be effective at dampening your anger. Concentrate on mind-occupying tasks, read a poem or verses from scripture, or sing a song.

Recognizing Thoughts that Fuel Anger

How we feel in response to what’s going on around us depends on the thoughts we allow to enter our mind. These thoughts spring from our expectations. When your reaction is anger that creates problems for you and those around you, it is time to examine your expectations and thinking. There are two levels of thinking that contribute to unhelpful emotions—self-talk and images. Understanding the self-talk and images that promote your angry emotions can help you change your thinking, and

you're your inappropriate responses.

The nature of self-talk is sneaky. Your self-talk are things you tell yourself so often that thinking them has become habit. When your self-talk misinterprets facts, it makes the situation seem more threatening and unmanageable. We need to successfully eradicate certain types of self-talk if we are going to control our anger triggers. The following are some rules of *cognitive distortions*, or self-talk that misinterprets the facts.

- When self-talk is not based on facts, it is distorted and many times contributes to anger.
- When facts are unpleasant, thinking and self-talk that contributes to the uncomfortable feelings should be identified and replaced.

Applying these rules will allow you to identify distorted thinking. The following is a list of examples of cognitive distortions.

1. Personalizing: You believe another person's actions or statements are targeted at you.
2. Catastrophizing: You magnify the negative impact of another person's actions or statements.
3. Forecasting: Without any basis in fact, you predict that a situation will turn out badly.
4. Polarized thinking: You think in over-generalized terms, only seeing the extremes of the positive or the negative of a situation rather than the gray in the middle area.
5. Mind reading: Without asking, you assume to know what another person is thinking or feeling.
6. Labeling: You use name-calling to describe another person or situation.
7. Filtering: You only see the most upsetting or negative things that happen without looking for the neutral or positive events.
8. Blueprinting: You instruct yourself how you will punish or get even with another person.

Imagery can contribute to anger as well. These images can focus on past, present, or future events. Resentment is a chronic anger that continues long after the event has passed. Every time you imagine an upsetting event, the anger can actually grow in intensity. When anger occurs in the present or even a few minutes or hours ago, you may find yourself producing anger-provoking images accompanied by self-talk that escalates your anger again.

Imagery can also whip up anger over future events as you vividly imagine a threatening outcome. When you find yourself focusing on images of what could go wrong before you enter a situation, ask yourself, is there any basis for fact in my thinking?

With practice you can learn to rewrite your inner dialogue, challenge irrational self-talk, and revise images that provoke anger.

New Thinking for New Solutions

It would be unrealistic to think you can change your distorted thoughts and unrealistic expectations without much effort. It will take repetition and practice over an extended period of time. Rewriting your script will require you to first shut off old, angry thinking and shift to rational new thoughts; and second, each time your anger gets out of control you must reconstruct what happened in writing to help you learn from your mistakes. When doing this exercise, it is important to identify the trigger. Whenever you are angry, emotions tend to cloud thinking, making it hard to think straight. The following four steps will effectively help you dampen rising emotions of anger.

1. Stop: The first and most important step is to stop your anger from escalating. To do this use your relaxation techniques discussed earlier.
2. Think: Once you have enforced the “stop” command, you will have given yourself enough time to think. Your

goal is to uncover the thought that is fueling your anger.

Ask yourself these questions:

- a. Is my thinking based on observable facts?
 - b. Is my thinking giving me good ideas to calm myself?
 - c. Is my thinking free of cognitive distortions?
3. **Objectivity:** Now replace old thoughts with new thoughts. Focus on realistic expectations. Place an unpleasant situation into a context that is more acceptable to you. Review the facts to help you understand another person's actions. Review your own strengths to help you discover a better way to improve the situation.
 4. **Plan:** Having a written plan that includes the new self-talk (that is, self-talk that allows you to handle anger triggers and decide in advance what the outcome should be) will increase your sense of control and dampen anger arousal.

Assertive Problem Solving

Relationships are interactive. Conversations are unpredictable. Life is complicated. These are the facts that make anger management a challenge. Losing control when faced with perceived injustices not only fails to right the wrong but also ends up hurting you. Once you have used the four steps to dampen arousal, assertive problem solving is what helps you get your needs and expectations met.

The first step is to become fully aware of the rising emotions of anger during communications with others and to get assertive problem solving working for you.

1. **Step one:** Awareness is knowing what you think, feel, and need. Take a few moments to consider your awareness of the triggering event, which can be divided into four parts: factual events, feelings, thoughts, and needs.
2. **Step two:** Assertive communication means rather than

using “you” language and telling the other person what they did wrong, use “I” language and focus on communicating the four parts of your awareness as follows:

- a. When... (fill in the factual event that occurred).
- b. I felt... (fill in the emotions you felt).
- c. My thoughts... (fill in your opinions and ideas).
- d. What I’m requesting... (fill in a polite request of what you need the other person to do).

If you remain calm and cool the other person will not feel threatened. Remember that your body language and tone of voice are major communicators. Once you have calmly explained each part of your awareness, you can invite the other person to offer comments.

The following is a strategy for two parties to collaborate to reach a win–win resolution.

1. Summarize positions: Give time for each person to explain his or her position and be understood by the other party. Determine what you agree on and then determine the points of difference.
2. Set priorities: Take turns stating what is important to each party. It is critical that each person’s priorities are incorporated into the final resolution.
3. Meet in the middle: Once differences and priorities are identified, the focus should be on finding a mutually acceptable solution.

Anger Aimed at You

When anger is aimed at you, there are things you can say and do that will not escalate the other person’s anger. The first step is to dampen your own anger arousal, and the resulting desire to defend yourself.

Second, refuse to provide the desired payoff—that is, an angry

response. If you succeed in remaining in control, you will reduce your own discomfort. Sadly, the person who confronts you with yelling, glaring anger has learned in the past that their kind of behavior gets the job done. The following will help to dampen the other person's anger: Do not raise the volume of your voice to meet or exceed the other person's. Maintain a calm voice. Reduce the tension by sitting down. Use active listening strategies. Delay the discussion if necessary until you are both calm. Do not touch the other person. Ask for clarification of the other person's thoughts, feelings, and needs as a way to get him or her to calm down and reflect. Asking for clarification communicates you care and are listening.

How should we react to indirect or passive faces of anger, such as sarcasm or cold anger? While you have no control over how another person acts toward you, you are in complete control over how you react. Your goal is to provide no reward. Even if the other person doesn't express their feelings, communicate with an "I" message the impact their passive actions are having on you. Let the other person know that regardless of their reason for passive aggression, you will react in a way that gets your needs met while providing no positive outcome for their actions.

When responding to sarcasm, use your "I" message to make it clear that the other person's message is not pleasant. The secret is to state how it makes you feel and how you will react to sarcasm in the future—that's all. You remain in control. Likewise, when another person withdraws with cold anger, use the "I" message to identify the behavior you are observing and state what you need.

To Practice

Old habits run deep and are difficult to break. Find the opportunity to practice rather than wait until you are in the middle of a tough situation. Based on what you have learned,

think about your last conflict with someone. Use your imagination and picture what triggered the anger, what you said, and how you said it. Now replay the encounter using what you have learned. Practice in your mind and practice out loud to get a feel for your new actions before you have to use them.

1. Listen, speak only to clarify what was said, and paraphrase what the other person said to gain an understanding.
2. Think about your awareness: What was factual? What are or were your feelings, thoughts, and needs?
3. Practice assertive problem solving. Formulate an “I” message to communicate your needs. Use the format, “When... I felt... In my opinion... I would appreciate it if you would...”
4. Imagine yourself initiating the steps of problem solving—summarizing positions, prioritizing, and meeting in the middle.

If you really want to control your anger, you need to develop an awareness and practice, practice, practice. Believing only that your anger is part of your personality and cannot be controlled is a cop-out.

Action Review Points

1. Learn to recognize your faces of anger. Remember that what triggers each person’s anger is unique. Events in and of themselves have no power to create an emotion—it is your thinking, expectations, and self-talk that sustain an angry reaction. When you hold unrealistic expectations, you set yourself up for disappointment and anger.

2. Understand your anger triggers:
 - a. When you expect yourself to perform beyond what is reasonable, anger will be triggered more often.
 - b. In childhood you learned what to expect from others and how to respond. When you determine that someone has acted outside of these expectations, you are likely to trigger your anger.
 - c. Every day we expect the world around us to function a certain way; when it doesn't, we can become angry.
3. Be aware of your anger. Recognize when anger is starting to escalate so you can control it before it controls you.
4. Dampen your anger arousal with the following relaxation techniques:
 - a. Deep breathing.
 - b. Autogenic relaxation of your body parts.
 - c. Positive imagery.
 - d. Focusing on distractions.
5. Recognize that thoughts that fuel anger. How we feel about what's going on around us depends upon the thoughts we allow to enter our mind. Our thoughts reflect our expectations. There are two levels of thinking that contribute to unhelpful emotions—self-talk and images.
 - When self-talk is not based on facts, it is distorted and many times contributes to anger.
 - Images can focus on past, present, or future events and contribute to anger.
6. Practice rewriting your inner dialogue, challenge irrational self-talk, and revise images that provoke anger.

7. Rewrite your script for new thinking and new solutions. First, shut off old, angry thinking and shift to rational, new thoughts. Second, each time your anger gets out of control, you must reconstruct what happened in writing to help you learn from your mistakes. Be sure to identify the trigger.
8. Remember the four steps to dampen rising emotions of anger:
 - a. Stop your anger from escalating.
 - b. Think: Uncover the thought that is fueling your anger.
 - c. Objectivity: Replace old thoughts with new thoughts. Focus on realistic expectations.
 - d. Have a written plan that includes the new self-talk. The new self-talk should allow you to how to handle anger triggers and decide in advance what the outcome should be.
9. Be assertive in solving problems.
 - a. Step one: Develop awareness, i.e., knowing what you think, feel, and need.
 - b. Step two: Use assertive communication. Rather than using “you” language and telling the other person what they did wrong, use “I” language and focus on communicating your feelings, thoughts, and request.
 - c. Step three: Summarize each other’s positions, set priorities of what is important for each individual, and then meet in the middle.
10. When anger is aimed at you, remember you have no control over how another person acts toward you, but you are in complete control over how you react. Maintain a calm voice. Reduce the tension by sitting down. Use active listening strategies. Delay the discussion if necessary until you are both calm.

11. Practice. Find the opportunity to practice rather than wait until you are in the middle of a tough situation.

**On Grief and Grieving:
Finding the Meaning of Grief Through
the Five Stages of Loss**

By Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler
(Scribner 2005)

About the Book

The book applies the five stages of death to the grieving process and weaves together theory, inspiration, and practical advice, including sections on sadness, hauntings, dreams, isolation, and healing.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's books on death and dying have been translated into twenty-seven languages. She is a loved and respected author on the subject. David Kessler's books have been translated into eleven languages. He is a nationally recognized leader in the fields of hospice and palliative care. Before her death in 2004, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler completed *On Grief and Grieving*, which focuses on the way we experience grief.

Introduction

There is no correct way or time to grieve. Anticipatory grief is the "beginning of the end" in our minds. We feel sadness and the unconscious need to prepare our psyche.

Most people associate grief with a loss in the past, but in anticipatory grief, we occupy ourselves with the loss ahead. We grieve when someone dies, but we also grieve before.

Anticipating a loss is an important part of experiencing that loss. Yet for those who will survive the loss of a loved one, it is just the beginning of the grieving process. The anticipation may help us prepare for what is to come, but experiencing anticipatory grief will not necessarily make the grieving process any easier. Anticipatory grief stands alone from the grief we feel after a loss.

The Five Stages of Grief

Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are the five parts of the framework that will make up our learning to live with our loss. The knowledge of these five stages will help us identify our feelings, and stay grounded in faith that our sometimes-overwhelming emotions are meaningful. You can better cope with life and your loss. Not everyone goes through all of the stages or experiences them in any specific order. Your task in your own grieving and mourning is to fully recognize your own unique loss. The material to follow will focus on a variety of challenges which we have divided into two segments—the inner and outer worlds of grief.

Denial

For a person who has lost a loved one, denial is more symbolic than literal. When we are in denial, we respond by being paralyzed with shock and numbness. We feel we cannot go on; we simply try to find a way through each day. But these feelings are important: They are nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle. It is the psyche's protective mechanism at work.

As the denial fades, you begin to question the how and why. As you are able to accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are beginning the healing process. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.

Anger

This stage will present itself in many ways; it does not have to be logical or valid. The anger stage will surface once you are feeling safe enough to know you will survive.

Anger is usually the first of many feelings including sadness, hurt, panic, and loneliness. For instance, you may find yourself angry to find yourself in this unwanted situation. Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process, however, and the more

you feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate. When you allow yourself to experience your anger, you are progressing. You are allowing all of those feelings that were too much to experience before.

Likewise, if you are supporting someone who is grieving, asking him or her to move through the anger too fast will only alienate that person. It is important to accept them where they are and for who they are.

Bargaining

In this stage, we become lost in a host of “if onlys” and “what ifs.” We want our lives to be restored to the way it was; we want our loved ones back; and we want to go back in time. As we move through the bargaining process, the mind will alter past events while exploring all the “what if” statements. But sadly, the mind will always come to the same conclusion that your loved one is gone.

Depression

After bargaining, we move directly into the present. Empty feelings of grief enter into our lives at a deeper level than we ever imagined. We withdraw from life; it seems pointless. We don’t care enough to care as we try to get through the daily activities.

This depression is a normal and appropriate response. The depression is a way for nature to protect us by shutting down our nervous systems until we feel we can handle life’s situations.

As tough as the feelings of depression are, you must welcome the sadness to cleanse you and help you explore the loss. When you allow yourself to experience the depression, it will serve its purpose and then leave you. Dealing with depression is a balancing act; you must accept the sadness, explore your feelings, and yet not allow the depression to rob you of the quality moments of your life.

Acceptance

This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and realizing that this new reality is permanent. We may never like this reality, but we learn to live with it; we accept it.

As we try to live in this new world that does not hold our loved one, we must learn to readjust. We must reorganize our roles. The more of your loved one that was connected to your identity, the more difficult the readjustment will be.

Remember that acceptance is not about liking a situation it is about acknowledging what has been lost and learning to live with that loss. It is a process we experience, not a final stage with an end point. Little by little, we withdraw our energy from the loss and invest it in life. We put the loss into perspective and put more time into new and old relationships. Instead of denying our feelings, we listen to our needs, we change, we grow, we evolve, and we move forward. In a strange way, the healing process brings us closer to the person we loved. A new type of relationship begins with the loved one we lost.

Your Inner World of Grief

Everyone experiences losses, but the loss of a loved one is unmatched for its emptiness and profound sadness. Your life continues, but you are not sure why. A new life starts to appear before you, and as you rise to meet it, the grief you experience on that journey will be uniquely yours. The following may be some of the challenges you face in this unique, inner world of grief.

Your Loss Is Uniquely Yours

Losses are very personal, so comparisons never apply; no loss counts more than another. It is your loss and it affects you. You are the only one who can feel the magnitude of your own loss. No one will ever understand the meaning of what you shared or the deepness of your void. Your task in your mourning is to

recognize your own loss, to see it only as you can.

Relief

Grief brings with it a variety of emotions, which we can feel individually as they occur. Most important, understand it is not unusual to feel relief in the midst of sadness. Perhaps your loved one was suffering, and now the suffering has ended. Or you may feel relief when you return to your work life and take comfort in its familiarity. These are normal reactions and not reasons to feel guilty.

Emotional Rest

Here is the reality: One minute you're okay, and the next minute, you're in tears. It is natural. Your life is out of balance and you need time to find a new balance. Figure out what is emotionally restful, and do it without judgment. Your emotions need time to repair, so be careful about not taking on any new relationships too quickly.

Regrets

When a loved one dies, we are often left regretting things left unsaid or undone. The illusion of infinite time clouds our understanding of the preciousness of one another. It is important to make peace with your regrets; forgive yourself, knowing you did the best you could. It is unrealistic to have done everything correct in your life. If there are things you have left unsaid, you can still say them in your heart to your loved one.

Tears

Tears are a wonderful, natural mechanism to release sadness. The worst thing you can do is to stop short of really letting it out; un-cried tears having a way of filling the well of sadness. Remember that unexpected tears will periodically appear and remind you of the loss that is always there.

Dreams

Dreams can provide information about what is really going on inside of us. After a loss, it is not unusual to dream that a loved one is still with us. These visits from the dream world provide brief respites from the pain of the real world. Regardless of a dream's meaning, it helps us deal with difficult feelings while we sleep and create a sense of peace afterward.

Roles

Loved ones play so many parts in our lives that when they die, all of the roles they fulfilled are left open. We each carry a great deal of knowledge that will die with us. Always remember that you have not lost all of the things you loved most about your loved one; they reside within you and will live in your heart the rest of your life.

The Story

Telling the story of the death of your loved one is part of the healing. Telling the story repeatedly helps to dissipate the pain. Ultimately you will learn that not telling the story is unnatural; telling others you are fine and holding it back requires a tremendous amount of energy and delays the healing process.

Fault

Sometimes it may feel as if the loss were your fault. But blame is futile because it does not accurately reflect reality. It is not for us to ask why someone lives or dies. Those decisions are left to God and the universe.

Other Losses

You will not grieve just one loss. When you lose a loved one, the grief will bring with it many losses. One example includes all the old pains that can reemerge, evoking previous losses. Another example is the "old you," the person you were before you lost your loved one. Yet another is the world in which you

lived with your loved one. That world encompasses the activities you did together, the friends you shared, the dinners at a special restaurant you frequented together.

In addition to the external losses, there are also the ones that are part of you the loss of your loved one as a companion, a life partner, the one to whom you told everything and who witnessed your life. With time, you will discover a new world of things outside of yourself and inside yourself that you never knew existed. What will be left is a new and different you.

Life Beliefs

Grief is the shattering of what your life was “supposed to be,” how you had always imagined it. When a loss hits, we not only grieve the loss of the person but also what we believed our life would become in the future. These life beliefs must be mourned separately; you must heal your shattered beliefs about the future by rebuilding a new future belief system for yourself.

Isolation

The death of a loved one leaves you alone and isolated, both symbolically and physically. The feeling of isolation after a loss is normal, expected, and healthy. It is very important to the healing process that you allow this retreat, but it should only be a brief stop, a darkness to experience not a place to live. Isolating yourself for too long or too much can become paralyzing. You must work gently to move back into the world. Talk to bereavement groups, call a friend to ask for companionship, become involved with old or new activities, and spend time with nature.

Secrets

We usually do not share all of what we have done or where we have been with our loved ones. It can be shocking when a secret is discovered. Death can invade our loved one’s privacy while depriving them of the chance to explain their actions. The secret ultimately doesn’t change the person you knew.

What you knew was real. If what you found out was negative, forgive your loved one and accept the parts you didn't know.

Strength

Bravery does not mean being unfeeling. Strength can be channeled into the grieving process, but it can also violate it. If we try to shut down our pain, it will not go away rather, it will multiply in a variety of ways.

First, we need to understand that grief and strength fit together. We must be strong to handle grief, and in the end, grief also brings out strengths we never knew we had. When the pain and sadness hit, just sit with it, feel it. The only thing to avoid is repressing it. Your goal is to feel the pain and the release that will follow it. If you resist the pain, it will only amplify it. When you surrender to grief, you will find you are so much stronger than you ever imagined. Peace lies in feeling the pain; you will move through the process a lot faster than you will by attempting to distract yourself with external pursuits.

For those who are experiencing the dying process themselves, there is a struggle that ensues when the soul is attempting to leave the body. For many, there is a quiet moment of surrender, when strength is all about letting go rather than struggling to hold on. We can be powerful to battle the disease and live the best life possible, but real strength is portrayed when we finally let go into the unknown, dying into strength, not weakness.

Afterlife

Our personal belief in the afterlife plays an important role in how we grieve. Therefore, whatever you believe, your grief will be tied to how you feel about the afterlife.

Questioning the afterlife is nothing new. Since the beginning of time we have raised the question, "What happens to us?"

Whatever the truth is about death, one can be certain it does not exist as we imagine it. If you feel your loved one's presence, do not doubt it; he or she still exists. Birth is not the beginning and

death is not the end.

In some ways, death can be viewed as a transition to a higher state of consciousness from which you continue to perceive, understand, and grow; you simply do not need your physical body any longer. In our society, we demand proof for most things, but many things in the universe can simply not be proven. Some may think the importance lies in the answer, but in the case of an afterlife, just asking the question is enough. What is important is the comfort the belief in an afterlife offers for those left behind.

The Outer World of Grief

The inner world of grief is the internal part—how we feel as we navigate turbulent emotional waters. Mourning events, on the other hand, are part of the external or outer world of grief. Dealing with both the inner and outer worlds of grief will be a journey that should be uniquely yours.

Funeral Arrangements

Take comfort in the business of making arrangements, as it is an important part of the mourning process. Whatever you are doing, slow down and take your time. The rituals are a way for you to find meaning and externalize your pain. It's okay to say you need a little more time to slow down and catch your breath; you need to do what you feel is right, not quick. Take the time to feel and experience your emotions. Let yourself receive the help, support, and love you need. As you need it, be sure to take time alone, ask for company, or cry whenever or wherever you want.

Clothes and Possessions

The emotions of going through someone's things will be overwhelming. When you deal with a person's possessions, you must clearly face the fact that they are gone. More than anything else, their clothes and belongings emphasize their absence in your life. Do not start this task until you are strong

enough. The ritual of dealing with your loved one's clothing facilitates the grieving process.

Do keep your loved one's favorite things. They will remind you of a special feeling you had with them and for them.

Your Body and Your Health

You have been through a lot. Your body is worn down, having endured a great loss and all the emotions that come with it. Now it needs time to rest and rejuvenate. This is your time to rest and get back in touch with yourself and to see how you feel.

Do not take on more than you can handle; go slowly. You must take the time to help your body repair. Try to eat well, get some exercise, go to bed earlier and sleep later; be good to yourself.

Anniversaries

During the journey, your life will be made up of bad days and good days. After a death occurs, all of those special anniversary dates take on heightened meaning. Now the person who made those dates so special is gone. The joy you used to feel on those days is replaced with sadness. When special anniversary dates come, commemorate your loss. Find your own way to honor your loved one's memory. It may bring feelings of extreme sadness, but it will also bring with it some of your best memories. Honor the love and memories left behind. It deserves a special place in your heart.

Sex

Sex represents an important part of the intimate relationship you shared with your loved one. After the loss, you not only miss your partner, but also the sexual part of yourself the part that lives on after your loss, yearning for a connection.

Rejoining the living is a series of uncomfortable steps: dating, sex, and maybe love. The right timing depends upon the per-

son, the relationship, and what feels okay inside. You'll simply have to trust yourself to know when you are ready. The bonding that happens in sex can be comforting; for many people, closeness and sexuality are bound together. Many times it's not about the sex but the closeness sex makes possible. While death is the breaking of a connection, sex can be the establishing of one.

Holidays

Holidays are a time for being with the ones you love most. Holidays magnify the loss; the loneliness goes deeper. This is one of the hardest parts of grieving, and when we miss our loved ones the most. For those in grief, staying involved in the holidays is a symbol of life continuing. They offer a time to be with loved ones and to feel less alone.

There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays when you are grieving. They will certainly never be the same. In time, most people are able to find meaning in new holiday traditions.

Remember, holidays are part of the journey; it is important to be present for the loss in whatever form it takes on. Whatever you experience, remember that sadness is allowed. Don't do more than you want and don't do anything that doesn't serve your soul.

Letter-writing

Grief must be externalized. For many, writing letters to their loved ones is an available way to get the words out and communicate. Writing has always been a way for us to say, "We are here and what happened to us matters." Writing always originates with a longing to connect. That longing is never stronger for a connection than when a loved one is lost.

You can find in writing in a way that you cannot find in other forms of communication; writing externalizes what is in us. Writing can also be a way to communicate unsaid things to

our loved ones. We believe death does not have to be an end of communication. Letters can comfort us and offer proof of our existence.

Closure

There are two basic types of closures that come to mind when we speak of a loss. The first involves doing the things that help put the loss into perspective. Understanding what happened that is, getting answers to the hows and whys all help to fill in the gaps.

The second type of closure involved the unrealistic wrap-up we expect to eventually come after a loss; we mistakenly think we can finish everything. But grief is not a project with a beginning and an end. The reflection of a loss never goes away. We simply learn to live with it. You don't ever bring the grief over a loved one to a close.

The Face of Grief

Grief is real because the loss is real. Each grieving process is as unique as the person you lost. The pain of grief is so intense because the connection with someone you loved so deeply is broken. As a result, the grief and your love for the loved one will forever be connected. But grief will also be the healing process that will comfort you in your pain. You cannot escape the pain of the loss, for to deny the pain of the loss is to deny the love.

We plan almost everything in life. We plan birthday parties, vacations, weddings, anniversaries, holiday gatherings, and retirement, but we never plan for death. We are never prepared to lose a loved one. Death is a big, black line; a heartbreaking divide between our world and theirs. It is a line that divides the time we had with them and now without them. It is a line that is drawn without our permission. It is a line that separates us from those we love. The healing process of grief is an overwhelming and lonely experience.

But you can choose to make the dying process more meaningful. In our worst times we all have the power to discover new threads of hope. Take the time to grieve. You may find a future in which your loved one is remembered, and your loss honored without pain.

How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less

By Nicholas Boothman

(Workman Publishing Company, 2000)

How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less teaches you how to establish instant rapport and make the very best of any relationship within the most critical first 90 seconds. Learn how to make instant and meaningful connections for interviewing, in sales or management, or when searching for a best friend. Step by step it shows you how to make the best of any relationship.

Nicholas Boothman is a world-renowned expert in turning first impressions into lasting relationships. Nicholas spent more than two decades studying the ways in which humans connect, communicate, and collaborate. His corporate certification programs are delivered by licensed trainers throughout the world.

Introduction

Connecting with other people brings unlimited rewards. It is your single greatest resource as a human; you simply cannot live in isolation. When you connect with others, both new and old friends alike, your mind and emotions flourish; humans are supported and validated by the emotional feedback we get from others. From time to time, we even meet someone who influences us in such a pleasurable way that we call it love. In short, we use the emotional input from others just as we use the water to drink and air to breathe. Deprived of emotional and physical contact, we wither.

Connections with the right people can make your hard times more bearable and the good times much sweeter. And these connections are established through your body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and the words you speak. When people like you, they feel comfortable around

you. So likeability has everything to do with how you make people feel. Likable people send out a warm, relaxed feeling that radiates welcoming acceptance of others. They send clear signals that their willingness to communicate is open, and their confidence and sincerity are evident.

In making connections—this most fundamental of all skills—many of us get very little training. Your success in face-to-face communication will ultimately come down to three things: Your presence (what you look like and your body language), your attitude (what you say and how you say it), and how you make people feel.

First Impressions

We will discuss the three parts of connecting with people: meeting, establishing rapport, and communicating. Each part overlaps with the others. Meeting is what we do when we come together with another person, communicating is what we do the moment we meet someone, and establishing rapport is what links it all together.

The goal in the first few seconds of “meeting” another person is to establish a feeling that you are sincere, safe, and open. The first few seconds is what the author calls the “greeting.” The following are five steps to an effective greeting.

1. Open your attitude and your body directly at the other person.
2. Be the first to make eye contact and reflect a warm heart and positive attitude with your eyes.
3. Be the first to smile. Let your smile also reflect your warmth and positive attitude.
4. Be the first to say hi and to introduce yourself when meeting a new acquaintance. Be the first to extend your hand to the other person.
5. Lean forward toward the other person as you introduce yourself.

Rapport is the establishment of common ground. Your ability to establish rapport will depend upon four things:

1. Your attitude.
2. Your ability to synchronize aspects of body language and voice tone.
3. Your conversational skills.
4. Your ability to uncover and adapt to the other's visual and auditory senses.

Communicating is the exchange of information between two people. It is getting your message across; it is being understood.

Establishing Rapport

Establishing rapport means being so much like the other person that they feel comfortable with you; he or she thinks, "I really like this person." Research has shown that you have about 90 seconds to create a favorable impression.

The success of building rapport is dependent upon a successful first impression. A natural rapport will occur when you have similar interests. This is the reason you get along so well with your close friends. Rapport can happen when we respond to a shared interest, of course, but what happens when none exists? There is a way to establish rapport "by design." When you establish rapport by design, you reduce the distance between you and the other person by finding a common ground. You do this by deliberately altering your behavior to become like the other person. You become the "adapter."

Your Attitude

Your attitude controls your mind, and your mind delivers your body language, thoughts, tone of voice, and words. The quality of your attitude will deliver the quality of your relationship. Since your imagination is the strongest force you

possess, imagine what you want from the communication. The better the information you can feed your mind, the better your attitude. In face-to-face situations, your attitude will always precede you. Other people will respond to you based upon the signals you send them.

Useful attitudes are warm, enthusiastic, confident, supportive, relaxed, obliging, curious, resourceful, comfortable, helpful, engaging, laid-back, patient, welcoming, cheery, and interested.

Useless attitudes are angry, sarcastic, impatient, bored, disrespectful, conceited, pessimistic, anxious, rude, suspicious, vengeful, afraid, self-conscious, mocking, embarrassed, and dutiful.

Body Language

Your facial expressions, nods of the head, gestures, and posture all have a vocabulary that exceeds your spoken words. Your body doesn't know how to lie. It will unconsciously transmit your thoughts and feelings in a language all its own. There is something magic about pointing your heart at another person. Open body language exposes the heart, while closed body language protects it.

If you want to be believable, your body language and your spoken language must say the same thing. Fifty-five percent of what we respond to takes place visually, 38 percent to the sound or tone of the communication, and 7 percent to the actual words. It is important to make sure your words, tone, and gestures are all saying the same thing.

Synchronizing

The fact is, we like people who are just like us. We like people who share our important interests, be they similar ideas, business interests, sports, taste in music, or theater.

Rapport is also created when we naturally synchronize ourselves to others. We all do this all the time; we are always influencing each other's behavior. We do this by adjusting our behavior to other's emotional feedback, and they to ours. It is the effective synchronizing of behavior that makes people feel comfortable, open, relaxed, and happy to be with you. But why wait to develop rapport naturally? Why not use the following techniques to develop rapport in the first 90 seconds?

There is a thrill in making a new connection with someone. Start with an attitude of warmth. Open up your stance and face your heart toward his, synchronize to his posture, gestures, facial expressions, tone and speed of his voice, and word choices. Anything that will increase the common ground while reducing the distance between the two of you is a positive. The quickest way to do this is focus on synchronizing attitude, body language, and voice tone.

- When synchronizing attitude, you must pick up on the other person's feelings. Tune into the overall mood suggested by the tone of their voice. Once you are aware of their feelings, synchronize to their tone of voice, movements, breathing pattern, and expressions.
- Synchronizing body language accounts for 55 percent of your communication and it is one of the easiest features to synchronize. Do this by simply mirroring the other person's hand and arm movements. You can also mirror the other person's body movements. For example, if they are leaning against the wall, you do the same. Hands on hips, sitting on something, legs crossed—whatever the posture is, subtly duplicate it. Also pay close attention to the angle of the head. When you subtly duplicate tilts and nods of the head, you say, "I hear you; I feel your emotions." Synchronizing facial expressions also demonstrates agreement and understanding. When someone smiles at you, smile back. When someone gleams a wide-eyed surprise, mirror the facial expression right back to them. Synchronizing

with the pace of their breathing can also be very comfortable to another person.

- Synchronizing the voice accounts for 38 percent of communication. The first step is to notice the emotions conveyed in the tone of the voice. If people are excited, they will sound excited. If they are confused, concerned, worried, angry, curious, they will sound that way. Your goal is to synchronize these sounds. Synchronizing the volume of the voice is also very important; the speed is also a consideration to make the other person feel comfortable. It's the same philosophy as walking down the street with someone at the same speed. And finally, your word choice must also be synchronized to make people feel comfortable.

Start Asking Questions and Listen

The hunting ground for establishing rapport is in the realm of small talk, the search for a common interest. A simple formula for striking up a conversation is to begin with a statement about the location or occasion, and then follow-up with an open-ended question. Once you have uncovered a common ground, you will instantly build rapport.

Open-ended questions begin with the words, who, when, what, why, where, and how. For example, "What exactly happened?" or, "Why did you enroll?" or, "How do you do that?" or, "Where do you do that?" You can jump-start the conversation by using sensory verbs such as see, tell, and feel. For example, "How do you see yourself doing that?" or, "Tell me how you came to that conclusion?" or, "How did that experience make you feel?" In contrast, any questions beginning with forms of the verbs, "Are you...", "Do you...", or, "Have you...", will have the opposite effect and close down the conversation.

The goal of asking open-ended questions is to trigger conversation in search of common interests. When you meet a

stranger, introduce yourself and add on free information about yourself; when you tag on free information about yourself, you will tend to get a response. If the other person does not respond, you have at least set up the situation to proceed with open-ended questions. This format makes it relatively easy to gather free information about the other person and feed continued conversation.

Active listening means you make an active attempt to understand the facts and show the other person you are interested and care about what her or she are saying. You do this by giving appropriate feedback. Listen with your eyes. Listen with your gestures. Listen with your body by leaning in. Listen by nodding your head. Listen with your facial expressions. Listen with verbal responses such as oh, wow, ah-ha, oh really, then what, or you're not serious. Any kind of active listening makes the other person feel as if you care about what is being said.

Handling Compliments

Accept all compliments graciously, simply, and directly. A simple "thank you" is sufficient, but if you want to turn it into a conversation, add information. For example, "Thank you. I bought it at a sale that is going on right now at Macy's."

Giving compliments are wonderful as long as they are sincere. Try to avoid general words like nice, good, and great. Specific compliments come across as being much more sincere. For example, rather than, "Great table setting," say, "What a beautiful table setting. You are so imaginative. The china and flower arrangements are exquisite." If you are complimenting a performance, take the time to go into some detailed examples.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Don't interrupt and don't end other people's sentences for them.
- Avoid giving one-word answers.

- Avoid looking anywhere else but at the person who is speaking.

Understanding the Impact of Senses

Humans are mobile sensing devices. We see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. We then process the information to form our thoughts and ideas. Therefore, our attitudes are triggered by pictures, sounds, and feelings. People can be categorized into how they filter the world's information through their senses: (1) Visual people tend to filter through picture words; (2) auditorys filter through sound words; and (3) kinesthetic people prefer physical words.

Because we receive our information from the outside world in either pictures, sounds, or feelings, there are three ways in which we can be influenced: internally in our mind's eye from an image, from something we hear, or from something we feel emotionally or touch. Usually it's from a combination of these experiences that we interpret the outside world, but one of these three senses dominates the other two. Studies have shown that approximately 55 percent of the people in our culture are motivated by what they see, 15 percent by what they hear, and 30 percent by physical sensations (kinesthetic information).

When you connect easily with someone, it all comes down to natural sensory harmony. When two visuals meet, they are comfortable with one another because they see things and express their experiences in the same way. When you can successfully figure out other people's sensory preferences, you can communicate on their wavelength.

Visuals are people who care about how things look; they think in pictures. Because pictures come into their minds so quickly, they tend to be fast talkers with frequent gestures. Visuals usually look up to the left and right when they speak. Because they tend to be meticulous about their appearance, they tend to

be tidy dressers who hold their body and head upright. Visuals tend to be found in positions where they can have some control of the outcome; they have a vision of the future and tend to be confident, fast decision makers.

Auditories respond emotionally to sound. They love conversation but things must sound right for them to tune in. Auditory people tend to move their eyes from side to side and gesture less than visuals. Many auditories are teachers, lawyers, writers, or counselors.

Kinesthetics must have things feeling right in order for them to feel comfortable. They have been known to speak unbelievably slow and add all sorts of unnecessary detail to their conversation. This is due to the fact that it simply takes longer to put feelings into words than it does to translate pictures or sounds. Kinesthetic people tend to look down when they speak, toward their feelings. Kinesthetics will normally be found in hands-on positions.

People will give verbal clues as to their sensory preferences. For example, visual people will express their experiences in picture words. For example, "How do you see yourself?" "I see what you're saying," "He is such a colorful character," "Can you imagine," or "We have a bright future." Now listen to the phrases of people who see and feel the world through their hearing: "Sounds familiar," "Does that ring a bell with you?" "These colors are really loud," "She's a scream," and "In a manner of speaking." Now consider the touching phrases that kinesthetic people use due to their sensitive feelings: "How do you feel about...," "I'll get in touch with you," "I'm all shook up," "I can't handle the pressure," "I can't put my finger on it," "Let's explore the possibilities," and "He's a pain in the neck."

The eyes give clues as to how people access information and which senses they use. Ask someone a question and watch their eyes dart off for the information. When people answer a

question while they are looking up, they are visualizing their answer. If they look left or right toward their ears they are recalling sound information. If they look down, they are accessing their feelings or some internal self-talk.

During a conversation, it is important to talk in color. Describe your experiences by involving as many senses as possible in your description. Describe in your description sights, sounds, touch, smells, and tastes. The more senses you involve, the interesting people will find you and the more memorable your information.

Action Review Points

People are naturally drawn to one another and are eager to connect and to be liked. The basics of making people like you in the first 90 seconds are covered in four basic areas—attitude, synchronization, conversation, and sensory preferences.

1. Choose a useful attitude to accomplish the following:
 - Be the first to make eye contact, smile, say hi, extend your hand, and lean forward.
 - Establish rapport by altering your behavior to become like the other person.
 - Your attitude always precedes you. Use welcoming attitudes in your gestures, facial expressions and words.
 - Fifty-five percent of what people respond to is visual. Use welcoming facial expressions, nods of the head, and gestures.
2. Synchronization: Rapport is created when we synchronize ourselves to others. Synchronize your posture, facial expressions, gestures, tone, speed of voice, and word selection.

3. Establish rapport with conversational small talk.
 - Begin with a statement followed by an open-ended question.
 - Begin your open-ended questions with who, when, what, why, where, and how.
 - Add free information about yourself.
 - Be an active listener with your eyes, head, facial expressions, head nods, and verbal responses.
 - Listen for free information.
 - Search for a conversational common ground of interest.
4. Connect with people by identifying their sensory preferences. Appeal to their visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (feeling) preferences.
 - Use eye movement and word choices to discern a person's sensory preferences.
 - Talk in color to describe experiences in sensory detail.

**25 Ways to Win with People:
How to Make Others Feel Like a Million Bucks**
by John C. Maxwell and Les Parrot
(Thomas Nelson, 2005)

About the Book

John C. Maxwell and Les Parrot's best-selling book, *25 Ways to Win with People*, offers specific action steps for building great relationships. Learn how to unlock your personal charisma to win with every person you encounter.

Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert and author who has sold over twelve million books. His organizations have trained more than one million leaders worldwide. Les Parrot, Ph.D., is a best selling author and sought after speaker to fortune 500 companies. He hosts a radio show, "Love Talk," and has made several television appearances. Dr. Parrot is founder of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University.

Introduction

Some people possess invisible qualities that attract people to them; they are like a magnet. These traits are more learned and honed than they are inherited. They are skills that can be taught and learned. In this abridged summary, I have reviewed fifteen of the more compelling points to help you win with almost everyone you meet. Increasing your circle of friends and maintaining meaningful friendships will not just happen; friendships must be made. Making new friends and maintaining friendships will take an investment of time and effort. But the secrets of attracting people to you are skills you can readily learn; they are within the reach of anyone who wants them.

Start with Yourself

First and most important, always remember that you are a wonderful person with interesting life stories, experiences and information to share with others. *Believe in yourself! You are a person people want to get to know.*

Smile, be happy, and be positive. People want to be made to feel good. People want to surround themselves with others that will make them feel joyful. People want happiness in their lives. This is the most valuable thing you have to offer in any relationship, so begin here.

Utilize the 30-second Rule

Within the first thirty seconds of every conversation, say something encouraging to a person. Let others know you value them and they are important to you. Let them know you value their help and their friendship. Remember—smile, be happy, and be positive.

Compliment People in Front of Other People

Everyone wants to feel important and worthwhile. If you want to win with people you have to give them affirmation and praise—sincerely and meaningfully. Also learn to give your compliments in front of other people rather than just in the privacy of one-on-one conversations. Turning a compliment public instantly gives it more value.

Sincere compliments affirm a person's actions and dreams, and will resonate in their heart. When you compliment people in a positive way, you will strengthen and reinforce their personalities and they will be more apt to demonstrate those same qualities again.

Use the Power of the Right Words

Words have incredible power. Saying the right words at the right time will offer encouragement and trust to a relationship. Keep these thoughts in mind.

- Pay attention and be sensitive to the circumstance. Choose the correct words for the situation.
- Pay attention not only to what you say, but how you say it. Speak with sincerity, from the heart.
- Sometimes the best approach is to say nothing. When you are tempted to point out another's error, the best practice is to keep quiet. Rather than reacting with the wrong words, it is many times more difficult to be silent and simply leave the wrong thing unsaid.

Look for opportunities to uplift other people with your words of encouragement. The power of the right words at the right time just might change someone's life!

Create a Shared Memory

Make memories. Few things bond people together like shared experiences. But memories don't find us; we find them. Most people make the mistake of not *leading* their lives, but instead *accepting* their lives. They wait for memorable experiences to just happen rather than taking the time and making the effort to plan an experience that will make a memory. To build relationships requires the investment of time and energy to plan events and activities that you can do together. Be proactive and intentionally make room for memorable experiences with you and your friends, to strengthen the bond between you.

Offer the Benefit of the Doubt

In order for others to be drawn close to you—that is, to be an approachable person—you must always assume the best in others' actions. When you take the high road and try to see another's actions from their perspective, it will help you to

withhold rash judgments and discern the best intentions. When you mine the gold of others best intentions, they will be drawn closer to you and begin to open up.

Listen

Listen to people with your heart. Listen for people's feelings. Listen to understand. Rather than placing your highest priority on preparing your reply and expressing your idea, focus on what the other person is really saying. Most people just want to be listened to, respected, and understood. To reiterate: Keep your focus outward, on others.

Remember Their Story

To connect with another person, you might ask them to tell you their life story. By doing so you focus the conversation on him or her—the interests, dreams, uniqueness, disappointments, hopes, and life's journey that he or she holds close to heart. You get the benefit of insights into a life, on which you can build a stronger relationship.

Show him or her you truly care. Inquire and show an interest in the things that are important to them—their work, family, hobbies, and projects.

Talk about Dreams for the Future

Consider it a privilege when people will share their dreams with you; it takes a great deal of courage and trust to do so. At that moment, be aware that the right words can inspire someone, but the wrong words have the power to crush a fragile dream. If the speaker thinks enough of you to share with you, consider this a gift you have been given to lift them up.

Always remember dreams are at the center of the soul; you must do everything you can to help them turn their dreams into

reality. When you show an interest in learning about people's dreams and let them know you value their dreams, you will encourage friendship.

It also helps to let the person know you recognize in him or her the traits that are needed to achieve their dream. Revisit the dream with them often to see how they are doing. Give them encouragement. To give the greatest gift in the world, offer your assistance to help them overcome the challenges they must overcome to realize their dream.

Be Your Best

It is natural to value people who value us, and who make us feel important to them. Likewise, if you want to be important to others, first treat them as important.

The most effective way to communicate someone's importance to them is to give them your very best. Anything you do with another person can be made into a moment that communicates importance. Maybe it's as simple as a phone call on their birthday, a framed picture of a special moment you shared together, or taking the time to offer a helping hand when they are in need of assistance. As with anything, most moments in life can only be special if we take the time and effort to make them that way.

Use the Positive Power of Secrets

To make someone feel special, share a secret. It doesn't mean to inappropriately expose a deep, dark corner of your life—as with anything in relationships, keep it upbeat and positive. Sharing a secret means giving valuable information, making people feel special, and including others in your journey. It is a special act of inclusion that invites others into your life.

When you let someone know that you are sharing the secret

for the first time, it can create a powerful bond. Who wouldn't want to know what's going on in the mind of someone they care about? Use the opportunity to make acquaintances into trusted friends.

Stay Away from the Mirror

Always remember that the entire population of the world is composed of other people, with one minor exception. A wonderful way to win with people is to focus on others instead of on yourself.

Focusing on others needs will bring you friends, energy, contentment, and happiness. Focusing on others' needs is what will make you successful.

Offer Needed Help

Do things for others that they cannot do for themselves. Add value to their lives. Introduce others to people they cannot get to know on their own. Take others to places where they couldn't go on their own. Offer others opportunities they couldn't reach on their own. Share ideas with others that they don't possess on their own. See the pattern?

By doing these things for others, you stretch them, and you show them that you believe in them and have their best interest at heart.

Give Notes

Handwritten notes add a personal touch to a relationship. When a note is written directly from the heart, it represents an investment in the relationship by the writer. You can never predict when you write to others how you may encourage them or sustain them in times of difficulty.

Stay in touch. Communicate often. Make a list of the most important people in your life and commit your time and effort to communicating with the people on your list. It is impossible to build or maintain friendships without communication. Remember special occasions with a special note or, if you are truly pressed for time, a telephone call—but notes are better.

Work from People's Strengths

Your ultimate goal is to help others win at something that is important to them. When you believe in someone's ability, you stimulate them and give them energy; you help to create an atmosphere in which they can win. There is nothing more powerful than giving others hope for a better future, and enabling them on their way.

Action Review Points

1. Making new friends and maintaining friendships requires an investment of time and effort.
2. Believe in yourself! You are a person people want to get to know. Smile, be happy, be positive.
3. Say something genuine that makes others look good.
4. Let people know you value their friendship.
5. Choose the right words with care. Speak with sincerity from the heart.
6. Assume the best of others' actions and words.
7. Make memories with people.
8. Listen to understand, not just to hear.

9. Ask people to share their dreams with you.
10. Ask people to tell you their life story.
11. Treat others in a way that makes them feel important.
12. To make someone feel special, share an appropriate secret.
13. Focus on other's needs.
14. Look for ways to add value to people's lives.
15. Send handwritten notes.
16. Help others win at something that is important to them.
17. Stay in touch. Communicate often.