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5 Steps to Personal Power

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Introduction

Paradigm Power

Parable of the Cookies

A woman who had just bought a cup of coffee and five chocolate chip cookies sat at a table in front of the cookie shop, next to a man, a stranger, sitting at the same table. After taking a sip from her coffee, she took a cookie out of the bag.

As she started to eat it, the man also reached into the bag and took a cookie. In stunned anger, silence, and disbelief, she ate her first cookie and considered what to do next. Could she have imagined what she was sure she had seen? Would the man have the nerve to do it again?

Finally irritated curiosity won out, and she reached into the bag for a second cookie. Sure enough, the man reached into the bag and extracted another cookie, grinning broadly as he ate it. Only her vision of herself as impeccably self-controlled kept her

from screaming angry protests at this cookie thief.

After all, the arrogance of this man was extraordinary, and the fellow hardly looked like a beggar, dressed as he was in a suit and silk tie.

Since there was now only one cookie left, she gulped down her second cookie and again reached for the bag. But he beat her to it. With a radiant smile, still not a word spoken, he broke the remaining cookie in half and offered half to her.

In total disgust, a sneer of indignation creasing her face, she stood up, gathered her large purse, and stalked off, fuming all the way to her car. At her car she even allowed a muttered curse to escape her lips as she fumbled in her purse for the keys.

Then her fingers found, next to her keys, her unopened bag of cookies!

This woman faced an abrupt change in her vision of her own behavior as the extent of her misjudgment of the cookie situation dawned on her. Her

paradigm, in this case, had led her to a series of mistaken judgments.

The basis upon which we make judgments, the ideal against which we measure individual human behavior, is our paradigm.

As the woman in this story found out, our paradigms are not necessarily correct, for different views on the same events are possible, given a change of heart or additional information, and different people carry individualized paradigms.

Constructing paradigms that are flexible, useful, and powerful, one of the talents that empowered people often have, can be developed by anyone with some guidance and willful concentration.

Or consider a more personal example. When my daughter, Kim, was in the fifth grade, she was one of the tallest kids in her class. So when she told us she was trying out for the basketball team, my wife and I, of course, encouraged her because she was good at it and enjoyed the game.

However, our own paradigms were tweaked when we showed up for her first game and only then discovered

that it was the boys', not the girls' basketball team she had tried out for, and made, and she was their starting point guard! Needless to say, our paradigm quickly changed.

My Journey toward Empowerment

Why is it that some people seem to be born winners, people who regularly and easily achieve their personal and career goals? What empowers such people to succeed where others might fail?

On the other hand, we all know people who have an incredible knack for turning even the very best ideas and feelings into negative thinking and into recurring failure and frustration. They seem to move through life as if under a "black cloud." In fact, many such people appear to be happiest when they are miserable!

Is this cast of personality and character merely due to the lack of the draw? To one's past? To one's heredity? To one's social class and upbringing?

Searching for answers to these questions has occupied much of my personal and professional life for the past two decades.

Back then, before my search began in earnest, I was a sorry case. I was overweight, out of shape, sick a great deal, and smoked two to three packs of cigarettes a

day. Worse, I had been teaching psychology for about fifteen years, and I was often running on empty, gliding on automatic pilot.

Despite my professional boredom, I kept quite busy by throwing my energies at one series of activities after another to cover my lack of a personal mission and meaningful goals.

Most bothersome of all, my psychological state of mind was dreadful. I was rapidly becoming an angry, negative, and cynical person, and for the first time in my life, I didn't much like myself. From the hindsight of two decades later, I can see that I was having a classic mid-life crisis, the kind that professors who are savvy in the ways of psychology are supposed to avoid by virtue of their accumulated wisdom.

Then Dan, a very close friend, a vigorous man in his mid-40's, died suddenly of a heart attack. I felt the chill of my own mortality, and forced myself to look at my own, full-blown, type A personality, complete with a negative psychological cast of mind that invited tension, pressure, and all of the dis-comfort and dis-ease that such a state of mind attracts if left unrestrained.

Since I had spent most of my adult life in the field of psychology - first as a counselor, and then, for a much

longer time, as a professor of psychology - I naturally looked there first for help.

I am unhappy to report that traditional psychology was of little help in my case, and I have come to believe this is due to the fact that traditional psychology emphasizes normality, abnormality, and learning theory, not how to alter a state of mind or to take responsibility for feeling better. In fact, the deterministic nature of several of psychology's major schools of thought made it easier for people like me to blame others, or external forces for almost any kind, of problem.

After taking stock of my condition in the aftermath of Dan's death, I clearly understood what I needed to do was to take responsibility for my own destiny and regain a sense of internal control over my life. What I needed was empowerment.

One day shortly after learning of my friend's death, I found myself in the "Self-Help" section of a large bookstore. Although I was embarrassed to be there - in traditional academic circles, the self-help field is looked upon with skepticism and suspicion by many and outright scorn by some - a curiosity born of psychic desperation led me to a book by Albert Ellis, one of the

pioneers of the field of cognitive psychology. Since I had at least a working knowledge of cognitive psychology, and the field was not as scientifically suspect as I then thought much of the self-help field rightfully should be, I bought Ellis' book. That seemingly accidental occurrence began to change my life, for Ellis introduced me to a simple and revolutionary idea, a concept so powerful that it bears repeated emphasis:

Reality is not so much what happens to us; rather, it is how we think about those events that create the reality we experience.

In a very real sense, this means that we each create the reality in which we live.

As a corollary of this basic belief about the nature of existence, many humans get into trouble, in Ellis' words, "because of their nutty, irrational thoughts and beliefs"¹

¹ Laurie Bobskill (September 30, 1987). "Albert Ellis School of Psychotherapy." *Union-News*

The good news is that, since the one thing we can all learn to control is our thoughts, our responses to the situations life brings us, whatever they are, are entirely our own responsibility!

The bad news is that, since the one thing we can all learn to control is our thoughts, our responses to the situations life brings us, whatever they are, are entirely our own responsibility!

Cognitive psychology gave me a new frame of reference, a new mental map through which to view the world, a new paradigm through which to see my environment. Remember, a paradigm is a filter, and it is created from our genetic predispositions, our past learning and experiences, and our self-concept.

As I was later to discover, paradigms can be limiting as well as liberating, and they are never quite the same from one person to another.

However, as if the universe bent itself to answering my deepest concerns, my paradigm shifts led to rapid and long-lasting changes in my life. I began to experience an enhanced sense of inner serenity, personal control, self-esteem, and goal direction.

During this same time period, largely because of the exciting changes in my own life, I developed a course

entitled the *Psychology of Personal Growth*. Since the community college students where I teach are interested in practical, real-life applications of knowledge, I began exploring the self-help, empowerment, peak-performance, self-esteem literature.

Was I in for a surprise! All of my staid academic predispositions about self-help literature were at best simplistic and at worst dead wrong. What started out as preparation for a single course soon became a quest, and I have read nearly every self-help book in print.

I also have listened to many audio tapes, watched several video programs, and attended many seminars in the realm of self-help. As my research, teaching, and experimentation continued, three central questions began to emerge, questions that helped me organize my approach to the field that I call Personal Empowerment Psychology (PEP).

Three Questions with the Same Answer

1. Despite differences in semantics, are there some common themes, principles, and skills that consistently recur in the research on empowered people?
2. Have these principles and techniques been around long enough to establish a track record? In other words, have they worked for large numbers of people over an extended period of time?
3. Can these principles and skills be easily taught to, and learned by, ordinary people?

I now know the resounding answer to all three of these questions is "Yes!"

Personal Empowerment Psychology (PEP)

Ideally, science results in a tested, proven system that produces consistent results. Personal empowerment is the ability to find your own purpose or mission and then create a life that fully validates that essence of yourself.

Personal Empowerment Psychology (PEP), then, is the neonate science of how the brain and mind work best to produce empowering thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The basic principles of PEP have been used and have proven effective with people from all over the world, and the purpose of this book is to share with you the very "cutting edge" of personal empowerment technology, and to both explain its principles and skills and illustrate how to use them in your life.

There are four vital assumptions that I make about human behavior and human consciousness that need to be clear from the beginning. As I proceed through this book, each of these important assumptions will be discussed, but here I state them as simply as possible.

Four Assumptions

1. There is a source of incredible wisdom within us all.
2. Everyone already has all the internal resources needed for personal empowerment; those inner resources simply have to be nurtured, paid attention to, and trusted.
- 3. It is better for people to have many choices or options in their lives rather than only a few or no choices.**
- 4. All people have the capacity for incredible personal growth in their lives.**

My principle goals in writing *The 5 Steps to Personal Power* flow from these four assumptions.

All of these, I know from years of classroom and seminar experience, are attainable goals for those who want them.

Goals of the 5 Steps Program

To help you discover a more effective paradigm for how you think.

To give you an expanded vision of what you expect from yourself.

To help you discover your mission, vision, or purpose in life.

To help you get unstuck and re-focused.

To help you uncover a core of ever-available strength and serenity.

To help you see and act more effectively when how you are thinking and what you are doing is not working.

One of the strengths of my approach is that I am not married to any single school of thought or point of view. Rather, I have examined a wide range of techniques, including relaxation, visualization, self-talk, goal achievement, and the power of positive expectation, and I have harvested ideas from cognitive psychology, behaviorism, humanistic psychology, neuro-linguistic programming, recent brain research, and metaphysics.

In this personal and scholarly search, I have always kept two criteria in mind:

Does it work? A number of theories and skills sounded good on paper. However, when I tried them in real life, with average students, over an extended period of time, they were ineffective.

Is it simple? Can most people readily understand it? And, after devoting a reasonable amount of time to practice, can they use it effectively?

Unlike some empowerment facilitators who only get to meet with participants for a few hours or days, I have students for sixteen weeks, so I get to see what works and what doesn't over a longer period of time. From this experience, I confidently make the following claim. The techniques outlined in this book work.

They can work for you.

However, in case you think that the techniques in this book won't work for anyone but high-power business people or athletes, my own background testifies that this is not the case.

I was born into a large, working class family, had an alcoholic father, a mother who died of cancer at age 47, and a brother who committed suicide.

I was extremely shy as a child, I was a very poor student, and I had few role models for success, especially financial success. In short, if these principles and techniques can work for me, and they have, they can work for anyone.

My System

I now believe that there are five key ingredients to long-term growth and change.

5 Key Ingredients to Long-Term Growth and Change

DESIRE (The need to do);

KNOWLEDGE (The what I need to do);

SKILL (The how I need to do it);

ACTION (The doing what I need to do);

PERSISTENCE (Continuing to do what I need to).

All five of these characteristics are necessary for long-term growth--if any one is lacking, long-term change will not occur, though many people try to take short cuts around one or more of these essential characteristics of long-term change. Most commonly, people try to go directly from desire to action, without pausing to acquire the necessary knowledge or skill. Or they will go through the first three steps (desire, knowledge, skill)

but can't get themselves to act. Or they accomplish the first four steps, but they get stumped when change doesn't happen all at once, and they thus fail to be persistent.

In other words, if the principles, questions, and skills I offer you are to result in long-term, sustainable growth, they must become HABITS!

Nothing short of habit will work for the long haul. Habits are a powerful force in our lives which can work for us or against us, and often our old habits keep us from getting what we really want in life, for they focus our energies in directions that lead away from the clearest and best path toward our fulfillment.

However, if you persist in learning and applying the principles and skills detailed in this book, they will become your habitual path to personal empowerment, for they will help you focus your energy for long-term growth in fruitful ways by creating positive, productive habits.

Some of the material that I've reviewed focuses on a single skill, such as visualization, self-talk, goal-setting, or relaxation; others teach a combination of skills.

Similarly, some material stresses principles or theory more than skills development. However, only a few sources teach a system of both skills and principles, and almost no one teaches how to maintain or even expand gains once they are achieved.

This book focuses on teaching you a combination of skills, a sound system of principles, and the ability to maintain and expand self-empowerment gains.

Thus, the empowerment system I have arrived at has three important attributes intentionally built into it:

Three Attributes of This Approach

It is principle-based. Principles are the natural laws that govern human empowerment. They are timeless, fundamental, self-validating truths.

Learning skills without the guidance of principles often results in those skills becoming an unempowering end in themselves rather than a means toward an end.

It teaches people skills, and these skills are simple enough for people to learn. These skills will not necessarily be easy to learn, in that they will require persistence, but anyone who is willing to try persistently will be rewarded by an enhanced ability to control the flow of his or her life.

It teaches people high leverage activities that allow them to consistently maintain or expand their gains. Getting people to change is relatively easy; keeping them changed is the hard part.

This book, then, will teach you a system that is based on principles that provide a strong foundation for change; skills that provide the tools to make necessary changes; and high leverage activities that maintain and expand the changes. This approach, in other words, is a comprehensive system that is sustainable and results in long-term growth. This system is definitely do-able for anyone with intelligence enough to pick up this book and read it.

All that is required is that you ask yourself five questions, you become familiar with five principles, and you learn five skills.

The Five Questions

Where am I now?

How did I get here?

Where do I want to be?

How do I get there?

How do I maintain and expand my gains

The Five Principles

I am responsible.

I am a product, not a prisoner, of my past.

I need to discover my compelling future.

I need to become proactive.

I need to use Pareto's Law.

The Five Empowerment Skills

Relaxation

Self-talk

Goal achievement

Visualization

Positive expectation

Furthermore, this book's motto can be stated in three simple imperative sentences:

- 1. Learn from your past.**
- 2. Live fully in the present.**
- 3. Be compelled by your future.**

One of the amazing things that I have discovered is that it takes less energy to live a full, productive, empowered life than it does an empty un-empowered one. This is because an astonishing amount of energy is frittered away by most people in all manner of negative directions, and I can guarantee you one thing: if you continue to do what you've always done, you'll continue to get what you've always gotten! There is only one true, bottom-line test of empowerment, and it can be framed in two questions:

- **Are you getting what you want right now from your life?**
- **Are you reasonably sure you will get the results you want in the future?**

Personal Inventory

So we come to the first exercise element, taking a personal inventory of the five major areas in our life: personal, interpersonal, physical, financial, and spiritual. The idea here is to think of each of these, one at a time, and ask yourself about each: "Am I getting the results that I want right now?" If the answer is "No", ask, "Am I reasonably certain I'll get the results I want in the future?" In a journal or notebook, answer the following questions as fully as possible.

Exercise Element 1:

Personal Inventory

1. Do you control your life or does it control you?

Are you in control of your emotions, or do your emotions control you?

Do you have a mission or purpose for your life?

Do you have written goals for your future?

Are you reasonably sure you will get the results that you want in the future?

2. How are the major interpersonal relationships in your life going?

How are your relationships with spouse/lover, parents, siblings, friends, coworkers?

If your interpersonal relations are not going well, are you reasonably sure they will in the future.

If you are not getting what you want in any of these relationships, are you reasonably sure you will in the future?

3. How are you doing physically?

Do you eat nutritious, balanced meals?

Do you exercise regularly?

Are you addicted to cigarettes, alcohol,
or other drugs?

Are you overweight? If you are not getting what you
want physically or are not paying enough attention
to your physical being, will you in the future?

4. What is the financial side of your life like?

Do you have enough money left at the end of each
month, or is there too much month and too little
money?

Do you have a regular savings and/or investment
plan?

Are you financially independent?

If you are not getting what you want right now
financially, will you in the future?

5. Finally, how is the spiritual side of your life
going?

However you define spirituality, how is your
relationship with God , a higher power,

All That IS, or the universe?

**Will you get the spiritual results you want in the
future, if they are not what you have right now?**

Answering these questions is the quickest barometer of how much empowerment you are presently experiencing in your life.

You Can Get There From Here

I said earlier that paradigms are the frame of reference, the filter, the mental map through which you see the world. Your paradigm of the world, then, affects everything else in your life, including your thinking, your feelings, and your behavior. The ability to consciously reconstruct your paradigms is one of the keys to long-lasting empowerment.

Remember how the cookie lady at the beginning of this chapter let her paradigm lead her to inappropriate and mistaken reactions. Stephen Covey, in his wonderful book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, uses a similar metaphor to illustrate the effect of paradigms.²

A man drives to visit a friend in Chicago a city he has never visited before, and to help find his friend's house, he buys a Chicago street map. Unfortunately for this

² Stephen Covey (1989), *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp. 23-24.

traveler, because of a printing error the Chicago map is actually a map of Detroit. So when he tries to use the map, nothing seems to match up and, in frustration, he calls his friend for help. Alas, the friend merely exhorts the lost driver to "buckle down and try harder." So, with his friend's advice in mind, he does try harder, but that just gets him to a different wrong place faster!

By now, the driver is too embarrassed to call his friend a second time; thus, as an alternative to changing his behavior by trying still harder, he decides to work on his attitude. He stops by a bookstore and purchases a book on Positive Mental Attitude (PMA). After quickly skimming the book, he again starts out to find his friend's house, this time thinking more positively. Of course, he still can't find his friend's house, but now he has such a great attitude that he doesn't care!

I am not knocking either behavior change, or positive mental attitude: they are both essential ingredients in empowerment. However, neither behavior change nor attitude change alone will work if you have the wrong map, the wrong paradigm! This book provides you with the right map.

Again, one of the keys to long-term growth is to become more aware of our paradigms, and to be open to changing them if they are not working in our lives.

Let's return to the table in front of the cookie store and look once again at the unjustly accused cookie thief and his motivations. He, too, had bought five cookies and a cup of coffee and had settled in with his morning newspaper, the cookies in a bag on the table, perhaps reading a story about the homeless, when a perfectly nice looking woman carrying a handbag and a cup of coffee sits across from him. After taking a sip from her coffee, she brazenly grabs a cookie from his bag, without so much as a glance at him.

"She must be really hungry, even though she looks pretty well dressed," he thinks as he puts his hand into the cookie bag and extracts his high-caloric snack. This, however, provokes an angry stare from the cookienapping lady across the table.

"Maybe she's a bit off-center," he thinks as she grabs for a second cookie, this time looking him defiantly in

the eye. But rather than react angrily, the man smiles in as friendly a way as he can manage as he takes his second cookie out of the bag and eats it as the woman glares at him.

"Maybe I should be friendlier," he suddenly thinks, and he impulsively grabs the last cookie in the bag, breaks it in half, and offers half to the woman. Rather than break the ice, however, the woman gives him the cold shoulder, a cold look, and a hasty retreat.

Even though the man's knowledge is as incomplete as the woman's--he, too, is ignorant of the forgotten cookies in the woman's handbag--his paradigm is different, and this allows him to react with generosity and bemusement where the woman reacted with scorn and indignation. Much in human existence depends upon one's point of view.

Chapter one deals with choosing to take responsibility for your point of view, whatever it is, for the first step to true empowerment is to recognize that at the heart of the human experience lies the sanctity of choice, of exercising your free will.

I Where Am I?

Choosing to Take Responsibility

In this chapter, you will;

(I) learn the power of taking responsibility for your life.

(II) fully answer the question "where am I?"

(III) learn the first master skill: relaxation.

I start with a principle, here phrased as a simple and absolute statement, one that is so essential that without a comprehension and acceptance of it, empowerment will not and can not occur.

I choose to take responsibility for my life.

Learning to Take Responsibility

The single greatest cause of human unhappiness, misery, and lack of empowerment is the myth, or false belief, that our life is the result of some external influence, or some confluence of interests, over which we have no control. A great many people believe that there is some "hidden force" which secretly governs our lives. For some, this supposed hidden force is their parents, while for others, it may be one or more factors

such as upbringing, social class, gender, race, religion, education, or physical characteristics (including "handicaps").

None of these factors plays the deciding role in determining the directions our life takes us. On the contrary, my research and experience has taught me that the following statement is always so for everyone

.

Our lives are the result our own beliefs, attitudes, conscious and unconscious thoughts, and feelings, not the result of some outside, hidden factors or force.

Many of the greatest philosophers and thinkers have come to this conclusion. For instance, William James, the pioneering American psychologist, once said that "the greatest discovery of my lifetime is that a person can change the circumstances of his or her life by changing their thoughts and attitudes." Furthermore, more than two thousand years ago, the great stoic philosopher, Epictetus, stated: "It is not the events, but our viewpoint toward the events, that is the determining factor. We ought to be more concerned about removing wrong thoughts from the mind than removing

tumors and abscesses from the body." And Shakespeare has Hamlet say, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

In specifically religious contexts, the Bible says (Proverbs 23:5), "As a man thinkth, so is he," and Buddha put it as plainly: "A man's life is the direct result of his thoughts." In more modern times, James Allen, in *As a Man Thinketh*, maintained that: "A man will find that as he alters his thoughts toward things and other people, things and other people will alter toward him." In a talk he gave at Cornell University, I recently heard the exiled Dalai Lama of Tibet, a Buddhist religious leader of enormous moral stature, make almost exactly the same point.

This is not to say that we are all born on an equal playing field, for we are not. While it is true that external events can affect us physically, psychologically, and economically, our basic sense of self does not have to be altered at all, for growth comes from the inside, not from the outside. To achieve inner strength, we need to take responsibility for our lives-- there is no other way.

The external circumstances of our lives, for good or for ill, do not dictate how we experience our lives, unless

we let them. We all know people who seem to have everything, including the benefits of fame, fortune, good looks, and a supportive family. Yet they end up throwing it all away through drugs, alcohol, or even suicide. We also know of people who have every excuse not to get out of bed in the morning, people who have endured terrible abuse, unbelievable physical handicaps, the poorest of backgrounds, the worst of luck. Yet they manage to lead happy, productive, empowered lives, and we marvel at how this is possible. Consider, for instance, the cases of Viktor Frankl and W. Mitchell.

Frankl, like millions of others, was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp in World War II. He had already experienced the horror of losing his spouse, his parents, and a brother to the gas ovens. Despite being terribly discouraged, nearly naked, and completely at the mercy of his brutal captors, Frankl came to a sanity and life-saving realization. Even though most of his fellow prisoners had given up both physically and psychologically, there was still one vital human freedom that no one could take from him: They could not control his thoughts.

Even though his captors had complete control of his external environment, Frankl realized that he could still choose how to react internally to his experiences. In time, the realization began to transform Frankl as he began to visualize what life would be like after his release. His sense of personal empowerment grew to the point where he became an inspiration to his fellow prisoners and even to some of his captors. Frankl survived the camps and went on to become an eminent psychiatrist.

How can anyone find freedom and dignity under such conditions? Was Frankl just extremely lucky, a statistical anomaly? Or had he discovered a fundamental principle which anyone can apply to their own lives and circumstances.

Or consider the travails of W. Mitchell who, within a period of four years, lived through two tragedies, either one of which would probably overcome an unempowered human being. Before June 19, 1971, the popular and good-looking Mitchell, then 28, was on top of the world. Then, while riding a motorcycle he had bought the day before, he was distracted by something. When his attention returned to the road, a laundry truck had run a red light and hit him.

Unfortunately, the motorcycle's gas cap popped open, soaking him with gas which ignited, causing an explosion. Mitchell was horribly burned over 65% of his body. His face was completely unrecognizable, nearly burned off, and fingers were nothing but stumps. It was not uncommon for visitors to his hospital bed, where he hovered at death's door in a coma for two weeks, to take one look at him and faint.³

How would you have reacted if you had been Mitchell? Surely, no one would have blamed him if he had given up his will to live. But Mitchell chose another path. He realized that he did not have to accept society's notion that, to be happy, a person must be healthy and good-looking. Mitchell came to see, as he put it, that "I am in charge of my own spaceship--my own ups and downs. I can choose to see this as either a setback or a new beginning."

Instead of becoming overcome by his obvious problems, Mitchell turned those problems into challenges. Partly to overcome his fear of fire, he joined two friends in founding a wood burning stove

³ W. Mitchell. From notes taken at a talk he gave.

company, and in a few short years, he helped build Vermont Castings into a multi-million dollar company. Then, in November of 1975, disaster again struck Mitchell when, after ignoring wing icing on his Cessna, it crashed upon takeoff. He was left a paraplegic. But again, after a short period of understandable despair, Mitchell chose to survive. "Before all of this happened, there were 10,000 things I could do. Now there are 9,000. I could spend my life dwelling on the 1,000 that I lost, but I choose to focus on the 9,000 that are left."

In 1982, he married. In 1984, he ran (unsuccessfully) for Congress with the campaign slogan: "Vote for me. I'm not just another pretty face!" Mitchell now tells people that he has had "two big bumps in my life," but that he chose not to use them as an excuse to quit. Remember, as Albert Ellis maintained, that it is not so much what happens to us but how we think about what happens to us that makes our lives into what we experience.

Stories like Frankl's and Mitchell's can suggest several possibilities, depending upon one's beliefs: the first possibility is that both Frankl and Mitchell were incredibly lucky in that they were somehow blessed with a stronger survival instinct than most of us. But

luck, as many successful people have pointed out, is the residue of effort.

A second possibility is their survival was due to fate, some impersonal universal force that predetermines essential conditions of our lives. A third possibility is that their survival was due to some act of God, a special dispensation on the order of a miracle. Each of these possibilities may have some validity.

However, I hope to convince you, by getting you to demonstrate its validity to yourself through the exercises in this workbook, of a simpler and more elegant explanation.

**You are responsible for the
creation of your own reality.**

Frankl and Mitchell understood this basic principle of existence and applied it to their seemingly desperate situations; this, I believe, is why they successfully met their challenges.

The Problem with Perception

I strongly believe that all truly empowered people understand that reality is an internal, not an external, experience.

When I teach the section of my psychology course that deals with vision, I hold up a piece of chalk and ask the class, "What is this?" After looking somewhat perplexed that I would ask such an obvious question, they answer in unison, "a piece of chalk." When I then ask them how they know that it is a piece of chalk, they usually answer, "Because I can see it!"

From the point of view of the mechanics of the process of seeing, what actually happens when we "see" a piece of chalk is that we see a certain pattern of reflected light waves. This reflected energy is received by the sense receptors in our eyes, then is converted into chemical-electrical energy, and finally is sent to our brain for interpretation. So when we "see" a piece of chalk, what we are really seeing is our internal interpretation of that external stimulus, filtered through our individualized physical apparatus. Furthermore, once the stimulus gets to the brain for interpretation, individuals are capable of a wide number of alternate interpretations, depending on their education, their

cultural background, their personal physical characteristics, and their individual experience. So we see and hear with our brains, not just our eyes and ears.

When we see a map of the United States, we understand that the map is not really the United States but merely a graphic representation of it. Our perception of reality works the same way. What we see, hear, smell, touch is not the "real" world; rather, it is our unique internal perception of that reality. Thus, two people can experience the same event but report two totally different experiences, as the following story from Japan illustrates.

Provided he makes and wins an argument about Buddhism with those who live there, any wandering monk can remain in a Zen temple. If he is defeated, he has to move on.

In a temple...two brother monks were dwelling together. The elder one was learned, but the younger one was stupid and had but one eye.

A wandering monk came in and asked for lodging, properly challenging them to a debate...The elder brother, tired that day from much studying told the

younger one to take his place. 'Go and request the dialogue in silence,' he cautioned.

So the young monk and the stranger went to the shrine and sat down.

Shortly afterwards the traveler rose and went in to the elder brother and said: 'Your young brother is a wonderful fellow. He defeated me.'

'Relate the dialogue to me,' said the elder one.

'Well,' explained the traveler, 'first I held up one finger, representing Buddha, the enlightened one. So he held up two fingers, signifying Buddha and his teaching. I held up three fingers, representing Buddha, his teaching, and his followers, living the harmonious life. Then he shook his clenched fist in my face, indicating that all three come from one realization. Thus he won and so I have no right to remain here.' With this, the traveler left.

'Where is that fellow?" asked the younger one, running into his elder brother.

'I understand you won the debate.'

'Won nothing. I 'm going to beat him up.'

'Tell me the subject of the debate,' asked the elder one.

'Why, the minute he saw me he held up one finger, insulting me by insinuating that I have only one eye. Since he was a stranger I thought I would be polite to him, so I held up two fingers, congratulating him that he as two eyes. Then the impolite wretch held up three fingers, suggesting that between us we have only three eyes. So I got mad and started to punch him, but he ran out and that ended it!⁴

Since all reality is, ultimately, an internal experience, since that internal experience depends upon our thoughts, and since we are in control of our minds due to this remarkable thing we call thinking, we are responsible for the results of our thinking. Although many people have come to believe that our thoughts are caused by external reality, in fact our thoughts cause our reality. Indeed, our thought is energy, and it begins to produce itself physically the moment of its conception.

This process of creating reality with our thoughts, which is perhaps most obvious in the workings of artists and inventors, is a common human characteristic. That is,

⁴ Paul Reps, editor. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, pp. 28-30.

when Thomas Edison first conceived the light bulb, it was not yet a physical fact that could light the room in which I write this page. In order to make the idea of a light bulb into a useful object, innumerable changes had to be made in society such as wiring the country for electricity and developing manufacturing, distribution, and sales networks. Yet today, a scant century after the first light bulbs were mass-produced, Edison's idea can be bought in any grocery store and the modern world is unimaginable without electric lights.

Everyone constantly changes the outlines of their world with their thoughts, whatever those thoughts are, for the world as we experience it is always filtered through the medium of the individual's beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. So, the path toward empowerment begins at the same place for everyone, in the recognition of personal responsibility:

The first step to empowerment and having what you want from life is to take total responsibility for the way your life is now, at this second. Even though you did not always consciously control your past, the degree to which you take responsibility for your present will determine what you get in the future. Taking responsibility will give you the power to choose how you want your future to be.

Many people never understand that the barriers to greater empowerment are of our own making. It is not the externals that hold us back, but rather our thinking and our attitudes. Ken Keyes, in his book *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, sums this human situation up nicely:

A human being trapped in the wheel of unhappiness does not realize that the world is not doing it to him. The defenses of ego make it extremely difficult for him to realize that he is doing it to himself. He can prove that people are really treating him that way; and they are, of course. What he doesn't see is that his continuous criticism and rejection of others have

conditioned people to respond to him that way. The same people could have responded in an entirely different way...!⁵

Of course, many people have great difficulty accepting the fact that they are responsible for their lives.

Certainly, there is a compelling comfort in blaming others or externals for our present condition, and once blaming others becomes a deeply entrenched habit, it can tend to blind people to how they are creating the difficult or painful reality they face each day. But empowerment lies in breaking the hold of such useless, negative habits.

Look at the straight line below. On one end are unhappy, unempowered, even so-called "neurotic" people; in the middle are "normal" people; on the far end are empowered people. Where on this line are you? Where would you like to be?

Neurotic Normal Empowered

It has consistently been my experience as a counselor, teacher, and consultant that unempowered, unhappy, neurotic people and organizations have what is called an external locus of control.

⁵ Ken Keyes. *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, pp. 188.

In other words, they believe that "she, he, it, they did it to me." Also, these people, in most situations, tend to focus in a *reactive* way on *problems* rather than in a constructive way on solutions.

On the other end of the scale, empowered people have an internal locus of control. They take responsibility and insist, whatever the situation, that "I did it to me." They also tend to focus in a *proactive* way, more on *solutions* than on problems.

Most people, by definition, fall somewhere between these two extremes: They vacillate between reactive and proactive, between external and internal loci of control; sometimes they are reactive and problem-centered, while at other times, they are proactive and solution-centered.

I am not asking you to accept, at face value, anything that I say, including my strongly held belief that each of us is responsible for our own lives. I encourage you to try the following test for three weeks and decide for yourself.

Exercise Element 2:

Refocusing Thoughts

For the next three weeks, try the following.

Whenever you have a choice in a personal situation (and you always do have a choice), consciously assume that the situation is in your control rather than control being located in an external source; take a proactive, solution-centered posture rather than a reactive, problem-centered one.

This can be accomplished by turning your normal thought patterns on their head. Whenever you catch yourself thinking "she (he, it, they) did this to me." Consciously change the statement to "I did this to me." Instead of moaning helplessly, "Why won't they give me a raise?" ask "What needs accomplishing around here, and how can I contribute?" Rather than the unproductively negative question, "What is wrong with this relationship?" substitute the more positive, generous response, "What can I give to this relationship?" Try to be vigilant and catch every instance of disempowering thinking, and change each one into a more empowering thought focused

on your assuming total responsibility for the particular situation.

Even if you are unconvinced that this can work for you, try it: you have nothing to lose but your powerlessness. Three weeks is enough to convince most people that taking responsibility works.

I CHOOSE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

This simple statement is the first, and most important, principle of empowerment. Without it, empowerment simply can't happen.

Where Am I?

As I mentioned earlier, all empowered persons, and organizations, start with an honest answer to the question, "Where am I now?" Although it would be possible to spend an entire course on personal assessment, exercise element three works well for most people and is more than enough to get you started.

In exercise element one, you began the process of assessment in a broad way by asking yourself if you were getting the results you wanted right now

personally, interpersonally, physically, financially, and spiritually. Exercise element three continues that assessment process in a more specific and focused way.

Research at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and other universities has identified certain behaviors associated with consistently empowered people. These behaviors are arranged in five major categories: Personal, Interpersonal, Physical, Financial, and Spiritual.

Exercise Element 3

Personal Assessment Scale

For the following statements, based on whether the statement characterizes you, rate yourself using a 1 to 5 scale: 1=never; 3=sometimes, and 5=always.

PERSONAL

Positive Expectation: I expect the best to happen to me.

Score:

Self-talk: I catch myself when I talk to myself negatively and turn that into positive self-talk.

Score:

Inner Directedness: I take personal responsibility

for what happens to me.

Score:

Expanding the Comfort Zone: I try new things which are not necessarily familiar, routine, or comfortable for me.

Score:

Opportunism: I learn from my mistakes and turn "problems" into opportunities.

Score:

Visualized Goals: I write down my goals in sensory-rich detail (see, hear, feel) and visualize them as if they were already happening.

Score:

Becoming a "life athlete": I continually strive to develop my potential through reading, education, modeling, and learning from my experiences.

Score:

Persistence: I "hang in there," even without receiving immediate results, allowing myself to achieve long-term goals. Score:

INTERPERSONAL: Rate your capacity to develop deep, warm, lasting relationships with:

- A. Parents Score:
- B. Siblings Score:
- C. Friends Score:
- D. Lover/Spouse Score:
- E. Co-workers Score:

Empowerment: I increase the self-esteem of others.

Score:

Constructive Criticism: I receive and learn from constructive criticism without anger or rejection.

Score:

PHYSICAL

Controlling Stress: I avoid the buildup of stress through relaxation, leisure, music, exercise, or other means.

Score:

Diet: I eat in moderation and maintain a well-balanced diet.

Score:

Exercise: I engage in regular aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes, three times weekly.

Score:

Rest and Sleep: I can quiet my mind in order to achieve six to eight hours of rejuvenating sleep.

Score:

FINANCIAL

Budget Control: I budget and account for all of my money.

Score:

Delayed Gratification: I postpone acquiring luxury items until a solid financial foundation has been established.

Score:

SPIRITUAL

I acknowledge some higher power in my life.

Score:

Exercise Element 4

Strengths

The next important step is to assess your strengths. Think hard about the strengths that you possess, and write them down in the space below or in a notebook (you will need a notebook for several of the following exercises). Use additional pages, as needed. Do not be modest. Do not overlook or censor your more obvious or more unusual virtues. Be as exhaustive as you can be in your search for skills, talents, virtues, strengths, or other positive aspects of yourself. Should you need some prodding, ask someone you know well and trust to make a list of what they perceive your strengths to be. Write them all down: your strengths will come into focus and be much more useful if you put them in writing.

Exercise Element 5

Weaknesses

Next, think about your weaknesses. What are the personal, interpersonal, physical, financial, and spiritual behaviors that limit you? Try to be honest without being judgmental. Again, if you have a trusted friend, you can ask him or her for some gentle feedback on your weaknesses. Write down all of your perceived weaknesses, without censoring.

Exercise Element 6

Successes

The third area to assess can be quite interesting to complete. It involves writing down, in outline form, a list of all your successes. If you are among those people who mistakenly believe that they have had no successes in their lives, discard that attitude immediately! All of us, without exception, have achieved some measure of success in our lives. It is up to you to search your life for all of your successes, small and big, and write them down. Keep this written success list handy, for it can be an uplifting experience to consult this list when we need a lift. It might take you several hours to complete your initial success list, and you should spend a few minutes to update it every six months or so. Since I want you to be as exhaustive in your search for your successes as possible, you might want to keep your list in a journal or notebook.

Exercise Element 7

Assessing Relationships

Finally, each of us interacts with people on a regular basis (friends, spouse, lover, parents, siblings, co-workers, etc.). Although each of these people may influence us in different ways depending on the situation, overall each tends to affect us either positively, negatively, or neutrally. The extremely valuable process of assessing these relationships is broken down here into five steps.

In your journal, list the 5-10 people with whom you most frequently associate.

Using a scale of 1-10 (1=totally negative; 5=neutral; and 10=totally positive), rate each person on your list.

Since you have a choice about who you associate with, write down the names of people who are your support group and with whom you would like to associate more.

Next, write down the names of people who have a destructive influence on you and with whom you would like to associate less.

Finally, make a list of people who are currently not on your support group list but could be if you cultivated their friendship or support.

Me, Inc.

I strongly encourage you to treat yourself as a business. Give yourself a name like "Me, Incorporated" or "Ryan Enterprises." You might even buy a small file cabinet and keep separate folders for things such as your ideas, dreams, goals, and mission.

If you are comfortable working with computers, create document folders on a disk kept only for yourself as a business. One of the first folders in your file cabinet should be marked "Personal Assessment." In it you should now have information on your overall assessment, strengths, weaknesses, successes, and your relationships. You should acquire the habit of reviewing the material in your Personal Assessment folder periodically as the material will change over time, and the changes can help you chart the course of your life and empowerment progress.

The Master Skill of Relaxation

So far, we have examined the principle of responsibility and have answered the question, "Where am I?" Now you will learn about the master skill: relaxation.

Relaxation not only results in some important benefits in and of itself, it also facilitates other master skills.

Don't be deceived by the apparent simplicity of many of the exercises presented in this workbook and pass over them too quickly. Learning to deeply relax takes time and practice. The results, however, are well worth your effort.

One of the greatest physical benefits of relaxation is its use in the reduction of stress and one of the byproducts of stress, muscle tension. For many people, the muscle tension that accompanies stress becomes so automatic that it is essentially unfelt.

Many years ago, Edmund Jacobson, the creator of Progressive Relaxation, was among the first to maintain that stress and relaxation were mutually incompatible. He found that the stress response escalates the sympathetic nervous system while the relaxation response de-escalates it. Unfortunately, as Dr. Benson points out in his book *The Relaxation Response*, the stress response occurs automatically, and the

relaxation response has to be learned and "consciously and purposefully evoked."⁶ Learning relaxation, then, will improve the quality, and perhaps prolong the span of our lives.

The major psychological benefit of relaxation is that your brain, especially your superconscious, is most receptive to new programming (learning) when you are relaxed. Creativity, visualization, self-talk, clear thinking, and goal-setting all require an adequate supply of oxygen-rich blood to the brain, and stress deprives the brain of oxygen-rich blood.

Relaxation, however, assures an adequate blood supply. What this means, in practical terms, is that learning to deeply relax will result in far more positive changes in your life than will stress, anxiety, and worry.

⁶ Benson (1975). *The Relaxation Response*. News York: William Morrow.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on three practical ways to use relaxation:

- **An unobtrusive technique for relaxing using certain types of music.**
- **A system of relaxation that, once learned, will result in instant relaxation.**
- **A number of specific rapid relaxation techniques that you can experiment with and adapt.**

Using Music to Relax

Music's ability to relax people is widely acknowledged and used, even by the medical establishment. At some hospitals, patients who are preparing for, or recovering from, cardiac surgery, those with chronic pain, or those going through chemotherapy now have a choice. They can either turn to pain-killing prescriptions, and/or they can turn on their portable cassette tape players and listen to soothing music, or a guided relaxation routine.

Moreover, several drug rehabilitation programs for heroin and cocaine addicts are now experimenting with the use of Baroque music and guided relaxation as a regular part of their treatment routine. Soothing music has been routinely used by countless doctors and

dentists in their waiting rooms and dental chairs for years.

There are numerous additional examples of the use of music in medical contexts. Burn patients, whose treatments often take weeks or months, are learning to use music to lessen their pain between drug treatments. A combination of music and visual imagery has been used by the University of Kansas (among others) to lower the blood pressure of clients by an average of 10 to 20 points. Any number of hospitals now use a combination of music and relaxation as a childbirth aid. Nor are humans alone in their positive response to music; dairy farmers have discovered that musically contented cows produce more milk!

It should be noted that not all music has a positive effect on our behavior. The key seems to be that music that has about 60 beats per minute is most relaxing. Such music follows the natural one-beat-per-second rhythm of our heart. There are two readily available sources of such music: (1) Baroque music, a form of classical music written between 1650 and 1750; and (2) certain forms of a contemporary musical style, often called "New Age" music. Nor is all Baroque music suitable for relaxation. In my experience, the slower,

second movements of composers such as Bach, Handel, Pachelbell, Sammartini, Telemann, and Vivaldi are especially relaxing.

Since the term "New Age" covers such a huge variety of music, the situation is even more confusing here. Again, I would suggest one source for starters: the quintessential new-age relaxation music was composed by Dr. Steven Halpern. Excellent results can be obtained with Halpern's *Spectrum Suite*, *Comfort Zone*, *Dawn*, and *Crystal Suite*. All of Halpern's music has been scientifically designed to produce relaxation.

The research of Dr. Halpern and others indicates that you don't have to like a particular piece of music to benefit from its relaxation effect, and many people have to "learn to like" Baroque music, especially if you have been raised on rock-and-roll music. Give it a try, you will be pleasantly surprised!

Consider the research of Dorothy Retallack. She took plants grown in scientifically controlled chambers and exposed them to concerts of different music from Baroque to hard rock. The results were astounding! The plants exposed to the Baroque music grew the largest and learned as much as 60⁰, "so as to almost embrace the speaker." Plants exposed to jazz also

grew larger than plants in the control chamber without music, and they leaned toward the speaker by about 15⁰. Plants exposed to country and western music showed no reaction and were essentially like the control plant. But plants exposed to hard rock "shriveled and died"!⁷ Now I'll grant you that there is a huge difference between house plants and human intelligence, but this research is thought-provoking. Furthermore, thought I also listen to rock music, it has been my experience that, when I am doing something that really requires my relaxed concentration, Baroque or new-age music (or a combination of both) is a great help.

I team-teach two large lecture sections of Introduction to Psychology each semester. Once a week, the class takes a quiz. For the past several years, after first reviewing the research about the effects of music on relaxation with my students, we have played Baroque and new-age music softly during the quiz. Although some students are at first hesitant and skeptical, they very quickly learn to enjoy the music, and they consistently report that it relaxes them, so much so that

⁷ Dorothy Retallack. *Superlearning*.

many eventually acquire their own collection of music and use it at home as a study aid. On the few occasions when I have forgotten the quiz music, or have had some problem with the sound system, I hear about it immediately from students. "The reason I did lousy on the quiz is because you forgot the magic music," is a common response.

The System

Many stress-reduction workshops encourage people to learn some form of meditation or a relaxation routine. The problem is that such routines usually take weeks or months to learn and require twenty to thirty minutes of daily practice. The learning of such a routine is often highly desirable because of its many physiological and psychological benefits. Indeed, I have outlined a number of relaxation routines in the next section in order to illustrate how important I think they are.

So what's the problem? The problem is, in real life, we often need a system that works instantly. For example, when our spouse, child, or boss is "on our case" about something and we begin to feel stressed out, we usually can't say, "time out; I need 20 minutes to go through my relaxation routine." We need something that works immediately.

First, however, let me give you a brief review of the work of Ivan Pavlov who first studied the phenomena of conditioned responses. Pavlov, a Russian physiologist, was studying the digestive system in dogs (especially salivation) when he accidentally discovered classical conditioning. He found that if he rang a bell just prior to feeding the dog, the dog would eventually salivate to the sound of the bell alone (without the food). What happened, of course, was that the dog, after hearing the bell and then getting some food on several occasions, learned to associate the bell with the food. Eventually just the sound of the bell alone would make the dog anticipate food and would cause salivation.

Examples of classical conditioning abound. For instance, you are watching TV and daydreaming at the same time when a telephone rings. You jump up to answer the phone and then realize that it was ringing on the television program. Obviously, almost everyone in our culture has been conditioned to respond to the ringing of a telephone. Or have you noticed how your pet cat or dog is immediately at your side when it hears the sound of the electric can opener? The dog or cat has been conditioned to the sound of the can opener and has learned that it often means food. Or many of you may have a certain song that you associate with

falling in love for the first (or second, or third) time. Even years later, that song, because of conditioning, can elicit the same strong emotions.

Pavlov's principle of the conditioned response can be used to evoke instant relaxation

While many people are initially skeptical that the following procedure will work, let me remind you that you are at least as smart as Pavlov's dog or your pet cat. Indeed, intelligence is irrelevant to this procedure: if you stick with the following program, it has to work, it's automatic.

The instant relaxation conditioning program involves five steps: (1) choosing a relaxation routine; (2) picking a physical and/or visual-auditory "trigger"; (3) pairing your trigger with your relaxation routine; (4) practicing step number three until your trigger automatically causes you to feel relaxed; (5) continuing to use the system often enough so that extinction does not take place.

Exercise Element 8

Instant Relaxation Technique

Step 1: Choosing a Relaxation Routine

Although we may not realize it, we all have methods of relaxation. Aerobic exercise, a walk in the woods, a hot bath, listening to soothing music, or reading a book are all methods that work for some people. While all these methods work, I encourage you to be more systematic. Purchase one of the many inexpensive relaxation routines that are readily available. Some use meditation, others progressively relax you, and still others ask you to imagine feelings of heaviness and warmth in your extremities. Although there are individual variations, you should expect to spend about 20 to 30 minutes a day, five times per week, for the next three to four weeks for the necessary conditioning to take firm hold.

Step 2: Picking a Trigger

What we to do next is to pick some trigger, the counterpart of Pavlov's bell, to associate with our feelings of deep relaxation. A good trigger should have the following characteristics: it should be (1) simple and unobtrusive, (2) something that will not be obvious to others and (3) something that will not cause you to feel foolish or embarrassed. The trigger chosen should not contradict the feeling of relaxation or be too easily confused with other emotions. For example, a clenched fist would be a poor trigger for relaxation because it is often associated with anger or frustration. For many people, choosing a physical trigger is sufficient. For others, the physical trigger has to be supplemented with an auditory (sound, word) and/or a visual (picture, scene) trigger as well.

There are several possibilities for good physical relaxation triggers. Two tugs on your right ear lobe, touching a finger to the side of your nose, touching your chin with your thumb and index finger, or simply closing your eyes for a couple of seconds are all possibilities. My personal favorite is to bring

the thumb, index, and middle fingers on my right hand together. If you can imagine picking up something with the first three fingers of your hand, you will capture the movement. Again, for most people, the physical trigger is sufficient and therefore the simplest way to condition the relaxation response. For others, however, the addition of an auditory stimulus is also helpful. A good rule is to try just the physical trigger first. If it doesn't work quickly or powerfully enough, then experiment with adding an auditory or visual trigger as well. Some auditory triggers for relaxation include saying to yourself, "calm," "relax," "peace," or (my favorite), "alpha" (alpha is a pattern of brain waves associated with relaxation). Some highly visual people find it helpful to some add some mental picture or scene to their physical trigger. For example, they picture themselves floating in a beautiful lagoon, or lying on a warm tropical beach. In summary, a good trigger should be simple, quick, not confusing and, above all else, it should work.

Step 3: Pairing Your Trigger with Your Relaxation Routine

The next step is similar to Pavlov pairing the bell with the food. The secret is to continuously pair your trigger(s) with your feelings of deep relaxation. Eventually the two will become associated with each other in your mind, and just the trigger alone will cause you to feel relaxed. Neat, simple, automatic, and it works. I'll take you through the system that I originally used, Autogenic Training, to condition myself to relax at will. I chose both a physical (bringing thumb and first two fingers together), and an auditory (the word "alpha") stimulus as my trigger to be conditioned to relaxation. For the next three weeks, five times a week, for about 20 minutes per session, I listened to an audio-cassette tape with the Autogenic Training routine on it. Several times each session, while listening to the tape, it would occur to me that I was deeply relaxed (and this will happen more and more frequently with practice). Whenever it did occur to me that I was deeply relaxed, I would "hit my trigger." Specifically, I would inhale deeply,

saying the syllable "al," and then slowly exhale saying "pha" while bringing my thumb and first two fingers together. What is critically important is that immediately after hitting your trigger(s), you recapture the feelings of deep relaxation

Step 4: Practice

Within three weeks of practice, I could hit my trigger in a stressful situation and instantly feel relaxed. Once you discover that the system really does work, you gain more confidence and expect it to work. That, of course, just reinforces the whole procedure. In addition, most people no longer have to devote the 20 to 30 minutes to daily practice, for once the conditioning takes place, it takes a minimal effort to sustain it. Like any other learned skill, however, you do need to "use it or lose it". A simple way to do "use it" is as follows. Whenever it occurs to you that you are relaxed, get in the habit of immediately hitting your trigger(s). With increased awareness and practice, there should be several opportunities each day to strengthen your relaxation trigger. And, with time, the relaxation response will get stronger and stronger.

What sometimes happens to me during the summer, however, when I am not teaching or conducting as many seminars and can get easily side-tracked into other activities, is that one day in a stressful situation I

hit my trigger and it doesn't work as well as it should, a clear reminder to me that I need to take some time and re-condition my trigger.

I do that by going back to my original Autogenic tapes for a few days. Incidentally, once you understand the system you can use it to automatically condition other responses as well. For example, it is often important for me to feel quickly empowered or "psyched up." You need, of course, to choose a different trigger than the one you used for relaxation. My triggers for empowerment are a clenched fist and the word "Yes!" Whenever I do something unusually well, or perform better than expected, I hit my "empowerment" triggers. Other people use the system to condition themselves to feel more loving, or more intelligent, or to improve their concentration. If you are willing to spend the time, the possibilities are endless.

Rapid Relaxation Techniques

The most rapid and automatic relaxation technique is the trigger system that you just learned; here are some additional rapid relaxation routines with which to experiment.

Exercise Element 9

Rapid Relaxation Techniques

CONTROLLING BREATHING

The first rapid routine is one that uses your breathing. It involves breathing in and out nine times in three series of three breaths. In the first series of three, inhale deeply and, as you exhale slowly, say, "calm body"; (do this three times). In the second series of three, inhale deeply and, as you exhale, say, "calm mind." In the final series of three, inhale deeply and, as you exhale, say (and do) "smile."

FIVE-FINGER EXERCISE

Close your eyes, take several deep breaths, and relax. Touch your thumb to your index finger. As you do, think of a time when you felt an exhilarated, healthy physical or mental fatigue such as from jogging or skiing or from successfully completing an important project. Next, touch your thumb to your middle finger; as you do, think of a time when you had a loving experience. Now, touch your thumb to your ring finger; as you do, think about one of your successes in life or valued praise that you received.

Finally, touch your thumb to your little finger. As you do, go back to the most beautiful and relaxing place that you have ever been (or make up such a place if you want). Allow yourself to stay in that place for a while.

Anger Buster

One of the problems with anger is that it often causes us to automatically react to the situation. These automatic anger reactions are almost never helpful and usually result in even more anger. The Anger Buster is a rapid routine for displacing anger. The following exercise will both dissipate the anger and help you choose a more appropriate response. When you sense yourself becoming angry:

First, take a deep, slow inhale.

Second, as you exhale, picture your anger escaping with each breath.

Third, repeat this three more times, seeing your anger escaping with each exhale.

Fourth, think about the situation and choose at least one constructive response.

Mental Vacuuming

Many people have trouble falling asleep at night because negative words and/or mental images keep coming into their consciousness. What often happens is a negative feedback loop that goes something like this: the constant flow of negative

words and pictures keeps us from falling asleep; the fact that we can't fall asleep causes us to feel more and more anxious; the increased anxiety then results in still more negative thoughts and pictures. Dr. Irene Kassorla teaches her insomniac patients the following surprisingly effective mental vacuuming exercise. Simply visualize a toy vacuum cleaner sweeping across their forehead. As it does so, it vacuums up all negative words and images, leaving their mind calm and relaxed.

II How Did I Get Here?

Freeing Yourself from the Past Through Self-talk and Affirmations

In this chapter, you will;

1. explore the central question: "How did I get here?"
2. be encouraged to adopt an essential principle: while you are a product of your past, you do not have to be a prisoner of it.
3. learn the master skill of self-talk.

The initial aim of this chapter is to convince you of the need to be your own best friend, for you will rise only to a level that is consistent with how you think and feel about yourself. If you have been used to taking an overly critical attitude toward yourself, you will be urged to discard that attitude, and if you tend to judge yourself harshly, you will be challenged to stop your self-judgments. The reason for this is simple to state and understand, but the following

rule must be understood in the heart and mind of each individual:

Our self-esteem affects, positively or negatively, every aspect of our lives.

How Did I Get Here?

Answer this question, and the key to the doors of empowerment will be in your hands. In order to arrive at the answer, you will have to examine your thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Your self-esteem is largely the product of your past, specifically your early childhood. To honestly answer this question, you must go back and re-examine your life, "cleaning it up" when necessary in order to better align your past with your future vision and goals.

I often ask my students and seminar participants if they would purposely and consciously turn the major decisions of their life over to a five-year old? Usually at least one half-jokingly says, "Sure, my life is so screwed up anyway, what do I have to lose?" The vast majority of people, certain that a five year-old would not be capable of making important decisions involving their lives, answer that question with an emphatic, "No!" The ironic fact is that many people, by unconscious

default, have turned their lives over to the relic of a child within them.

One of the few points that nearly all major schools of psychology agree upon is that our early childhood (birth to age 6) is tremendously important in shaping our adult personalities. Even though it is estimated that, by age 20, we have had about one billion experiences (two billion by age 40; four billion by age 60), not all of these experience are equally important in shaping our personality. Those experiences in early childhood take on a special significance.

From the beginning of psychology, the connection between a person's childhood experiences and his or her adult personality has been emphasized. Thus, Sigmund Freud stated that "the child is psycho-logically the father of the man."⁸ He thought that the events of life's first years were of paramount importance for one's

⁸ Freud took his idea here from the English poet, William Wordsworth who, in his 1802 poem, "My Heart Leaps Up when I Behold," wrote "The Child is Father of the Man." Wordsworth, in turn, borrowed this idea from another poet, John Milton, who wrote (1671) "The childhood shows the man,/As morning shows the day," in "Paradise Regained."

subsequent life. More recently, Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis and author of *The Games People Play*, focused on patients who made the same mistakes over and over again, for it seemed to Berne that they were unconsciously following some predetermined plan for their lives.

Further exploration led Berne to discover that people did, indeed, have what he called a "life script," an unconscious plan that he believes is created in early childhood. A number of spiritual beliefs, particularly those that incorporate versions of reincarnation into their philosophies, even believe that these life programs are created before an individual's birth, perhaps programmed into the individual's genetic code along with such physical characteristics as eye color and body type.

There are fairly obvious psychological reasons why early childhood experiences are so important to us. Don Hamachek, author of *Encounters With the Self*, points out that in early childhood our self-system is incomplete and very impressionable.

Their sense of who they are and what they can do is incompletely formed. They are ready not only to please adults but also to believe them. Indeed, what adults

say about them or how they evaluate either their persons or performance is incorporated more readily, more easily, and more uncritically, than at any other developmental stage.⁹

Hamachek goes on to state that children, because they are not well-defended psychologically, are vulnerable and immature.

It has also been noted by a number of psychologists that the child's immature brain may suddenly "freeze frame" certain interactions with adults, especially parents. These "frozen moments" may appear to be totally insignificant from the adult's point of view, but they often take on special significance for a child. For example, in a sudden burst of anger, a parent may call the child "stupid" for spilling his milk. Although the parent may quickly forget the seemingly isolated incident, the child may remember it for years. Often, of course, with some parents, such responses are distressingly habitual, and any message repeated to young children with frequency and force is bound to affect their self-esteem. Thus, the label "stupid," if

⁹ Don Hamachek (1987). *Encounters With the Self*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, p. 267.

repeatedly applied by a parent to a child's behavior, can create unnecessary psychological hornets' nests for those children as they grow up and into their own adulthood.

Recent research indicates that there may also be a biological reason for the impressionability of early childhood experiences. Dr. Winson., in his book *Brain and Psyche*, argues that childhood experiences take on special power because of an early critical period in brain development when the neocortex (the center for emotion and decision-making) is formed. According to Dr. Winson, "Once this period passes, that brain circuitry will not easily change."¹⁰

Or consider the work of the late Dr. Penfield of McGill University in Canada who performed electrical stimulation on the brains of over 1,000 patients undergoing brain surgery. What he discovered is that cortical stimulation can bring back incredibly accurate memories of long-past events; the memories seemed to return like a real-life videotape. Some patients not only visually remembered the events, but could hear, smell, and feel them as well. It is also interesting that the

¹⁰Winson. *Brain and Psyche*.

memories could be stopped suddenly by turning off the electrode and, when restarted, the memory didn't continue where it left off, but went back to the beginning, suggesting that we not only have a videotape recorder in our brain, but that it also has an "automatic rewind mechanism!" Don Hamachek explains some of the startling implications of Penfield's work"

The implications here are enormous because more than we may have realized, much of what happens to us is recorded and stored in our brain's nervous tissue. This includes our childhood experiences, all that we incorporate from our parents, our perceptions of life events, and the feelings associated with those events. These experiences are stored as though they were recordings on videotape. They can be replayed and recalled and even relived. Together, these recordings constitute a huge storehouse of memories buried deep in our unconscious minds, which, when triggered by particular experiences, serve as subliminal motivations for expressing this phenomenon we call self, in ways

we sometimes understand but at other times can hardly fathom at all.¹¹

It appears that our superconscious mind is like a super computer, storing and reacting to literally everything that happens to us. We've all heard the saying, "you are what you think." We are, however, not only what we know we think, but also what we unconsciously think! Or, to expand the definition of what we are to include the emotions:

**Our reality is created by what we consciously
and unconsciously think and feel.**

Consider the kind of programming that most of us receive as children. In one study of average, middle-class families, all conversations between adults and 3-5 year-olds were tape-recorded. Parents gave their permission for this to happen, but were not told the purpose of the study until later. Both researchers and parents were astounded to find that these children heard an average of over 400 negative statements directed at them per day, ranging from, "Hey stupid, cut that out," to milder negatives such as "No," "Don't touch that," and "Stop that." Of course, some negatives are

¹¹ Hamachek, p. 33.

necessary to prevent children from doing themselves or others damage, but the cumulative effect of so many negatives each day can seriously undermine a child's self-confidence. And very often the negative voices of childhood are still echoing in the mind of the adult many years after leaving their childhood homes. This negative conditioning must be altered.

We are Products, Not Prisoners, of Our Past

One of the effects of our negative conditioning is what some psychologists such as Seligman call "learned helplessness," a phenomenon that has been observed with both animals and humans. This kind of behavior often occurs in prisoner of war camps, where every attempt to escape is thwarted and severely punished, where naked fear becomes the dominant instrument of control. What often happens to people in this situation is that they give up so completely that, even if eventually they do have opportunities to escape, they don't avail themselves of them because of their learned helplessness. The same process frequently operates with child and spouse abuse. Indeed, I am convinced that most of us as adults also limit ourselves in many ways due to a degree of learned helplessness, and these limitations are unconsciously self-imposed by our

past programming, the most potent of which occurs in those first few years of life.

It seems that the combination of negative programming, our needs to survive and receive attention as children, and an immature and very impressionable young mind combine to produce a life script (or unconscious plan) which can negatively affect our adult lives. Uncovering, re-examining, and changing these life scripts is one key to personal growth and happiness, and one fact is unchangeable:

**You are only at the mercy of your past,
if you choose to be so.**

**Your early programming was learned;
it can be un-learned and changed.**

Unfortunately, when you are not aware of your childhood programming and life scripts, you continually (and unconsciously) fall back on them. Think hard and absolutely honestly about this for a minute; the scripts you have of yourself as helpless, bad, stupid, or shy (or of yourself as independent, good, intelligent, and outgoing!) are all something that you have learned.

You may have discovered as a child, for instance, that temper tantrums brought you attention from an inattentive parent or that if you were quiet enough, you might avoid part of an overly critical parent's negative barrage.

In other words, we all learn strategies to psychologically cope with our early life situations, but our adult life situations normally warrant different adaptive behavior. This brings us to the second absolute principle of this series, one that you should emblazon in your mind and remind yourself of whenever you feel powerless:

While we are all products of our past, we do not need to be prisoners of our past. We can avoid becoming prisoners of our past only by becoming more aware of our childhood programming and consciously editing out-of-date life scripts.

Accepting this principle means that you can no longer blame your past for your present behavior. Your adult life script may be inappropriately looking out for the welfare of the long-grown child who first created the script. Those insistent childhood voices can frequently be heard if you begin to pay attention to your constantly chattering internal voices.

Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy, speaks about each of us having two inner voices, which he calls "Top Dog" and "Underdog." According to Perls' thinking, "Underdog" is largely the product of our childhood programming, and you know when it is in control because you can hear it speaking to you. Examples of negatively slanted, potentially limiting Underdog messages include:

- **"I'm too old (stupid, fat, untalented, etc.)."**
- **"This is too hard (stressful, silly, time-consuming, etc.)."**
- **"I can't do that (learn that, think that, feel that, etc.)."**
- **"I'll make an ass of myself (get hurt, fail, etc.)."**
- **"They will find out."**
- **I look ridiculous."**
- **"Watch out!"**
- **"What I think doesn't matter anyhow."**

Do any of the above sound familiar to you? There is no end to the ways in which the "child within" can sabotage you if you continue to ignore him or her. But you can gain control over your negative childhood

programming by becoming more aware of it and actively attacking its logic, in ways that this chapter will soon show you.

Some of you may be the product of a childhood and family that was so dysfunctional that professional help is necessary to clean up your past. If that is the case, I encourage you to get such help. For many people, however, full-blown psychotherapy is unwarranted, and you can get in touch with, recover, and reconcile, the "child within" all by yourself. The procedure for doing this is here taken from Dr. Nathaniel Branden, a gifted therapist and author of a number of books on self-esteem. The procedure is so simple that you may be tempted to dismiss it as childish: Do not. It is precisely the "child within" that we are trying to reach. According to Dr. Nathaniel Branden

What every you want from others, you must first give to yourself;

Only then can you give it to others, and receive it back from others.¹²

¹² Nathaniel Brandon (1986). Audio Tape. *The Psychology of High Self-Esteem*. Nightingale-Conant.

Exercise Element 10

Visualizing the Child Within

First, find a photograph of yourself as a 3-6 year-old child. Spend several minutes studying the photograph to get a clear mental picture of what you looked like at that age. Then, choose some quiet spot where you won't be disturbed for about 15 minutes. Slowly close your eyes, take five deep breaths, mentally say the word "relax" on each exhalation. Feel the tension drain from your body and mind.

Begin to consciously construct the following fantasy. First, mentally picture a home in which you lived at age 3-5. What was your favorite spot? Perhaps your home had a front porch, a balcony, a tree in the yard, or a nearby park where you used to go to sit. Now imagine yourself, at your present age, returning to that spot. Waiting for you in the distance is a young child. As you move closer, you see that the child is you, at a much younger age, and the child looks up and recognizes you as an adult. What are you feeling right now? Whatever you are feeling, it is safe to continue. Mentally

picture yourself sitting down and facing the child.

Start a conversation, as slowly as you need, answering these two questions.

What does the child say or ask?

What do you say or ask?

Imagine a full conversation.

Reassure the child that you know he/she did the best he could, that he/she survived, that you still and always will love him/her, and that you will never leave him. Actually picture this situation, hear yourself saying the words, let yourself feel what's going on. Picture yourself holding and hugging yourself as a child. Allow the child to respond or not, as he/she chooses; be gentle and patient. Tell the child that you will always be available for conversation, whenever he/she desires. Ask the child if he/she would be willing to do the same for you. Say goodbye for now.

The Master Skill of Self-Talk

Up to this point, we have (1) examined the question "How did I get here?"; (2) discussed the important part that our early childhood plays in answering that question; and (3) emphasized an important principle: while we are all products of our past, we don't have to be prisoners of it. Next, we turn to some specific techniques that will help you "clean up" your past and will propel you toward the future you want. These techniques, collectively called self-talk, constitute a master skill utilized by empowered people.

When I ask my classes, "How many of you talk to yourselves?" the response is fascinating. Typically, 60 percent will immediately raise their hands, and another 20 percent raise their hands haltingly, as if to say, "I talk to myself, but I'm not sure I want you to know that." Another 20 percent just sit there; these are people who either don't know that everyone talks to him or her self, or who are unwilling to admit that their inner conversations constantly occur.

The fact is, we all talk to ourselves, and we do so incessantly. According to psychologists who monitor thought processes through brain wave recordings, the average human talks to himself at the rate of 150 to

700 words per minute; or about 50,000 words per day! This self-talk is the single most important controllable variable in determining our happiness or unhappiness, our feeling of being empowered or helpless.

Unfortunately, most people tend to carry on negatively slanted internal conversations, and we talk to ourselves in harmful ways. Remember: if you talked to your friends the way you talk to yourself, you soon wouldn't have a friend left in the world!

So, in an effort to make you into your own positive, supportive friend, stop insulting yourself with negative internal messages. Often these are the very messages left over from our childhood training by well-meaning, but too frequently terribly negative, parents.

By self-talk I mean the largely unconscious and automatic silent thoughts and internal dialogues that continuously go on in our heads. It is no more possible to stop this self-talk than it would be to stop our heart from beating, for self-talk is an essential human activity. From early childhood (some researchers say from within our mother's womb), we have been watching, analyzing, judging, and storing in our brain everything that happens to us.

If most of what you have been feeding your super computer has been negative ("I'm bad," "I'm stupid," "I'm shy," "I'm clumsy,; etc.), then your inner computer will find ways of making those suggestions a reality. Or, as computer programmers are fond of saying:

GARBAGE IN - GARBAGE OUT

But the opposite is also true: if you think positively, that also will be manifested, sooner or later, in physical reality. Recall that earlier in this chapter I said that the answer to the question "how did I get here?" would provide you with the key to empowerment. Whatever your particular journey to this point in your life, the answer is the same for everyone in one respect: we all created the conditions, consciously or unconsciously, for how we experience the complicated miracle of existence.

Once you master the following one-sentence concept, you will have fit this key of empowerment in the door that will lead you from the self-locked prison of powerlessness into an expanded universe where you are free to operate without the old chains of negative beliefs. Indeed, the gist of self-empowerment, the ultimate secret of successful people, may be in their understanding that:

**Whatever you concentrate your
self-talk on, you will get**

This does not mean that, if you concentrate hard enough on winning the lottery, you will miraculously guess the proper numbers when you donate your next dollar to the state's legalized gambling business.

What it does mean is that your self-talk can alter the current negative course of any aspect of your life you choose to bring into focus, including your financial situation. Thus, if you habitually, consciously or unconsciously, dwell upon poverty, altering the course of your self-talk to nurture a feeling of prosperity will have real positive ramifications in your life.

This book is about choices.

You can choose to go through life on automatic pilot, letting your old, out-dated, negative programs dictate your life, even pretending that you are enjoying your misery and unhappiness. Or you can choose to change your past negative programming and replace it with new, healthy, more empowered programming. The quickest, most direct way of doing that is to learn how to talk to yourself productively, a skill which anyone can master. Restated once again, lest you

have so far failed to grasp the importance of this transformative idea:

Our success or failure at anything depend upon our programming, and we will become what we think about most. This principle is equally true for everyone.

This isn't a new or novel idea. In 1910, Emile Coue, a French psychotherapist, wrote: "We are what we think we are, and by imagining ourselves well we will become well." Moreover, he had his patients repeat the now famous affirmation: "Every day in every way, I'm getting better and better."

Replacement

The wonderful thing about the process of affirming is that it doesn't depend on intelligence, luck, your past, or the way things appear to be right now. Positive self-talk (also called affirmation) works on the principle of replacement. When you begin to replace old, negative thoughts with more empowered ones, your super computer begins to pay attention to those newly dominant thoughts. Indeed, the principle of self-talk works no matter what you think about; that is, you unfailingly materialize the reality you concentrate on, so the trick is to catch the negative thoughts that will bring

unpleasant or unwanted results and intentionally substitute more actively positive thoughts.

Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology, which can be traced to the work of Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, offers some methods to help in your self-talk endeavors. In 1980, the cognitive approach was made widely available as a self-help tool in David Burns' bestseller, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. Cognitive therapies share three fundamental assumptions:

An assumption of cognitive therapy is that emotional distress is the consequence of poorly adaptive thoughts, and the goal of therapy is to help the client establish more adaptive thought patterns.

Cognitive activity (thoughts) affects behavior.

Cognitive activity may be monitored and altered.

Cognitive change leads to desired behavior change.¹³

¹³ Keith Dobson (1988). *Handbook of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies*. Guilford Press, p. 4.

Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence that thoughts about events affect our response to those events.

To make this fundamental assumption of cognitive therapy more understandable, Albert Ellis uses a model that he calls the "ABCs." "A" is some activating event or stimulus (what someone or the environment does to us); "C" is the consequence (composed of our feelings and behavior); this is our response. Most of us believe that "C" (our feelings and behavior) is the direct result of "A" (what someone or something did to us).

For example, a person might say "I'm mad because X made me mad," denying response-ability for their emotions. However, Ellis and other cognitive psychologists believe that this is an erroneous and incomplete model of human behavior. While not denying the reality of "A" (a stimulus), they argue persuasively that there is a critically important step between "A" (stimulus), and "C" (response). That step, the "B" in Ellis' ABC model, is a person's thoughts, self-talk, and beliefs.¹⁴

¹⁴ Albert Ellis (1988). *How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything*. Lyle Stuart, pp. 52-53.

Recall the story I told earlier of the chocolate chip cookies where the woman assumed that the man was taking her cookies. She initially believed he was a thief and her anger was justified: the imagined cookie theft (stimulus, A) led to her huffing off (response, C). Now, with new knowledge of her fellow cookie-lover's innocence (thoughts and beliefs, B), she can no longer blame the man for her own feelings.

Again, to bring the focus back to a central point of this book: what happens to us does not create our responses, but it is how we process life's experiences in our minds that matters. If we are happy or unhappy, depressed or empowered, we are totally responsible for our frame of mind.

For many people, the idea of taking full responsibility for their life seems absurd, for they have gotten used to blaming others for their current situation. Sometimes parents get the blame, sometimes a spouse or children, sometimes society at large.

However, in all cases in which we try to put the blame for some aspect of our lives on others, we have made two basic errors: (1) the very idea of blame gives us an excuse to point a finger rather than to change

ourselves; and (2) others control us only when we give them that control.

Of course, some people seem to have an advantage in life in that they are intelligent, good looking, healthy, or born into wealthy families, while others are born into poverty or have mental or physical handicaps. What matters, however, is what we do with the hand that is dealt to us, and that is primarily determined by our thoughts, beliefs, mental pictures, and self-talk.

Thus, according to cognitive psychology, there are five basic points that you need to fully understand and accept.

Five Essential Beliefs

Others' actions never cause our emotional and behavioral response: we are the cause of all of our responses.

We always cause ourselves to feel every emotion we experience.

Our thoughts create and control the emotions we experience.

We can assume responsibility for our thoughts and, therefore, our behavior.

If we want to change our emotions or behavior, we have to change our thoughts, and these are manifested in our self-talk.

Beck correctly points out that we are usually unaware of the thoughts that influence our feelings and behavior.¹⁵ Instead, we fall victim to automatic thoughts, thoughts of which we are not fully conscious and, therefore, to which we do not give our full scrutiny.

¹⁵ A.T. Beck' (1976). *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*. International Universities Press.

In other words, we talk to ourselves so often, so automatically, and so negatively that we become experts at setting ourselves up for failure by repeating cognitive distortions that limit our options. Different people have and use their individual favorite set ups for failure, though the following half dozen are all quite common. You might be able to pick out your personal "favorites" from these, the ones most often used by you.

Six Common Ways of Avoiding Responsibility

Exaggeration. Wildly overestimating both your problems and your ability to deal with them. ("Why me, Lord? Nothing ever goes right for me!")

Negativity. Overemphasizing the negative aspects of situations and ignoring the positive aspects. ("It's all downhill from here.")

Overgeneralization. Making absolute rules and judgments for all situations. ("Nobody likes me." "All my co-workers are jerks." "I can never do anything right.")

Fortune Telling. Making statements based on inference rather than facts. ("I know I'll make a fool of myself." "I know my new co-workers will dislike me.")

Personalization. The tendency to always see yourself as the center of attention. ("I can't give that speech because everyone will be staring at me.")

Either/Or Thinking. ("Either you take me dancing or you don't love me.")¹⁶

Ellis draws a useful distinction between appropriate and inappropriate emotions. Although our past personal history often predisposes us toward irrational beliefs and negative emotions, such a predisposition is not necessary. We are not born with specific thoughts or feelings, nor does our environment make us feel or act in a certain way.

We should be encouraged to have and express strong feelings when, for example, something important goes wrong in our lives. However, some people choose to feel *appropriately* concerned, sorry, sad, annoyed, or frustrated, while others find themselves *inappropriately* panicked, depressed, enraged, or self-pitying. The same is true of anxiety: caution, concern, vigilance, and "light anxiety" are normal (and healthy). However, severe anxiety, nervousness, panic, terror, and dread

¹⁶ Ellis, pp. 45-49.

are not normal and can cause inappropriate reactions such as freezing up when action is called for.

The bottom line is that we have emotional and behavioral choices when something goes "wrong" in our lives. We can feel a little annoyed or very annoyed; we can be concerned when we fail or are rejected, or we can inappropriately demand that others respect or like us; we can feel disappointed when things don't turn out as expected, or we can feel shameful or embarrassed; we can regret it when we do something bad and behave like a fallible human being, or we can feel incapacitating guilt.

According to Ellis, "No matter how badly you act, no matter how unfairly others treat you, no matter how crummy the conditions you live under are--you virtually always (Yes, A-L-W-A-Y-S) have the ability and the power to change your intense feelings of anxiety, despair, and hostility. Not only can you decrease them, you can annihilate and remove them."¹⁷

¹⁷ Ellis, p. 16.

A special type of self-talk for overcoming self-defeating beliefs is necessary. What follows is a specific, four-step process for overcoming your self-defeating beliefs. These steps, which are explained in some detail in the following pages, are:

**Four Steps to Overcoming
Self-Defeating Beliefs**

Increased Awareness of Negative Self-Talk

Thought Stopping and Disputing

Reversing and/or Reframing

Reading and/or Listening to Positive Self-Talk

One preliminary step is necessary, and this involves clearly stating an objective that you would like to achieve and, further, declaring that this is a preference rather than a need. "I would very much like or prefer to have X, but I don't need it because I can be happy without it." Stated like this, you can more easily avoid the biggest problem that comes with the feeling of "need":

In a basic way, need comes from fear that what you want is not going to be available, whereas preference does not indicate this fearful bent of mind. Ultimately,

such fear, expressed as unvarnished need, will tend to undermine your efforts to attain personal empowerment, because you end up negatively concentrating on the fear at least as much as on actualizing your preference. Remember, you will create a reality for yourself based on how well you can focus your emotions and thoughts into positive channels. If you use any of the following techniques for even three days, I guarantee that your awareness of your self-talk will dramatically increase, and awareness is always the first necessary step in asserting personal empowerment.

Exercise Element 11

Step 1: Increased Awareness of Negative Self-Talk

Vague, unconscious, automatic negative thoughts cause much more harm than those that are brought into consciousness and scrutinized. Thus, the first step in overcoming self-defeating beliefs is to become aware of what we are thinking and feeling. Again, the inner dialogue we carry on with ourselves is incessant. Learning to become more

aware of, and to control, those inner voices is a powerful tool for reshaping our self-concept.

As an experiment, for the next three days, attempt to significantly increase your awareness of your self-talk. In almost all cases, two things will quickly become evident: (1) you will be amazed at how often you talk to yourself, and (2) you will be surprised at how much of your self-talk is negative.

One effective way of increasing awareness during this exercise is to carry a small note pad with you at all times in which you write down your negative self-talk immediately upon becoming aware of it.

Another useful technique, developed by Ellis and Beck, involves answering several questions about your negative thoughts. Examples of such negative thoughts are put in parentheses after the question that they answer.

What was the situation? ("I asked my boss for a raise and she said no.")

What were your emotions? ("I felt rejected, depressed, and worthless.")

What was your self-talk? ("I've failed again, I always fail, I'll never amount to anything.")

What Cognitive Distortions (e.g., exaggeration, overgeneralization, fortune-telling, personalizing, either/or thinking) are indicated by my self-talk?

Exercise Element 12

Step 2:

Thought Stopping and Disputing

Negative thoughts precede negative emotions and behavior; therefore, if the negative thought can be controlled, the negative emotions and behavior can be significantly reduced. Once you become aware of a negative thought, you must both stop, and dispute it. In other words, begin to treat negative thoughts as unwanted intruders in your mind.

Whenever you catch yourself in a negative thought, silently (aloud if you're alone) say to yourself STOP!

Now, if you do this in a timid voice, this technique will not work. Really get angry and mentally shout at the negative thought, cursing if that helps. Some people find it useful to pinch themselves or wear a rubber band around their wrist, and whenever unwanted thoughts occur, give themselves a snap. Though thought-stopping takes time, as you persistently interrupt your negative thoughts, they begin to recede in power.

The second part of thought-stopping involves

actively disputing your negative thoughts. Simply imitate a hard-nosed prosecutor, disrupting your negative thoughts with counter-questions such as "Where's the evidence that I am stupid?"

"Where is it written that I always have to be perfect?"

"What, exactly, can't I stand about my boss?"

"What's the worst possible thing that could happen if I lost my job?"

"Am I confusing a mere thought with a fact?"

"What cognitive distortion or negative personal belief am I using?"

"Why must I do very well at X?"

Exercise Element 13

Step 3:

Reversing, Reformulating & Reframing

After you become aware of your negative thoughts, and you actively stop and dispute them, the next step is to reformulate them. Reformulating means substituting positive statements for negative ones, as in the following examples:

"I prefer to do very well, but I don't have to."

"I acted badly, but I am not a bad person."

"I wish I could have a new car, but I don't need it."

"I can cope with my boss. I've done it before, and I can do it again now."

"Nobody's perfect. Everyone, me included, is fallible, but I will do my best."

Next, take your negative thought and immediately change it into a positive affirmation, as in the following examples:

"Things are going terribly for me at work today" becomes "The rest of today, work will go exceptionally well!"

"I just can't seem to lose weight" becomes "Losing weight is easy for me now."

"Damn, that was clumsy of me" becomes "I am relaxed and graceful."

"Math just baffles me" becomes "Math is easy for me now."

"I'll never be able to give that speech" becomes "My speech next week is going to be an exceptionally good one."

Reframing is a final way to gain control over self-defeating thoughts. Reframing simply means either finding the positive that exists in negative situations or the lessons that can be learned from those situations.

"You're fired!" elicits, "Good, I've always wanted to go into business for myself."

"I want a divorce." is answered by "Your loss, my gain!"

"You have terminal cancer" brings "Then, I'll really enjoy the time I have left."

"You owe \$10,000 more in income tax this year than last" prompts "That's fantastic, I must have made a lot more money this year."

"Your performance at work has got to improve dramatically!" produces "That's great, he cares enough to tell me, and he could have just fired me."

Step 4:

Reading or Listening to Positive Self-Talk

If you just follow the three steps outlined above, your life will change for the better. Some people, however, have such dramatic results with increasing their awareness of their own negative thoughts and editing those thoughts, they decide to read or listen to positive self-talk. Positive self-talk is usually referred to as an affirmation. An affirmation can be any positive statement or verbal description of a desired condition.

Until this point, we have looked at what might be called defensive weapons. Now you will learn an offensive weapon, involving the use of affirmations, for overcoming self-defeating beliefs. Affirmations are nothing more than a special kind of positive self-talk about which a number of excellent books have been written. Although you may want to use some of the affirmations in such books, there is much to be said for writing your own affirmations. Some affirmations are very general, others are very specific. Affirmations can be read silently, spoken (or even chanted) aloud, written down, listened to

on tape, or said to yourself in front of a mirror.

As with most other things, there are some general guidelines to follow in making your affirmations most powerful:

Three Rules for Affirmations

Your affirmations should be positive. Affirm what you want to happen, not what you don't want. "My lungs are now clear, pink, and healthy" is better than "I am not going to smoke any more." "I now weight 170 pounds" is better than "I am going to lose 30 pounds." "I am now deeply relaxed" is preferable to "I am no longer tense."

Your affirmations should be personal; that is, you can only affirm those things that you have direct control over. While it is nice to wish the best for your family, friends, or co-workers, you can not effectively affirm for somebody else. Similarly, it may be pleasant to daydream about winning a lottery, but the lottery is not under your direct control.

Your affirmations should be written in the present tense, as if they are already happening.

Affirmations that begin with "I am" or "I have" are more effective than those starting with "soon," or "someday." "My body is now slim and healthy" is preferable to "I will soon lose 20 pounds."

You can use affirmations for two main purposes: (1) to counteract past negative programming (negative fears, beliefs, self-image, characteristics, personality traits, or habits you want to change); or (2) to aid in the achievement of some future goal.

Exercise Element 15

Affirmations

In the case of the counteracting past negative programming, recall some of your personal favorite cognitive distortions or parts of your personality that you want to change. In each case, take that negative belief or characteristic and convert it into a positive affirmation. For example, the cognitive distortion of negativeness might be changed into a variation of Coue's positive affirmation, "Each day I become more and more aware of the positive things that happen in my life." Similarly, the personality characteristic of shyness might be converted into the affirmation, "I am an outgoing, interesting person; I now enjoy meeting and talking to others."

In the case of some future goal, project yourself ahead six months, a year, or some other definite time period, and imagine the goal having already been achieved. How would you feel, act, and be? Then write a short affirmation that captures the essence of how you would feel, act, and be. For example, "It feels great to be thin and

to see my wife's look of approval."

The ways that you can use affirmations are limited only by your creativity and imagination. They can be written, printed, or typed; they can be read silently or aloud; they can be chanted or sung; or they can be put on audio tapes and listened to. You can put them all on one sheet of paper, put them each on a 3x5 card, or make them into a sign or poster displayed in a prominent place. Or you can paste them on your dashboard, mirror, refrigerator, or telephone. You can say your affirmations to yourself in a mirror (a very powerful experience), work them into conversations, say them to your version of God or your inner self, or repeat them while exercising.

Three Hints for Effective Affirmations

First, your brain is most receptive to affirmations when you are relaxed, so go through your relaxation routine prior to reading or listening to your affirmations. Alternatively, use the natural periods of relaxation that occur just prior to falling asleep at night and just after waking up in the morning to do your affirming.

Second, if you are using your affirmations to change some personality characteristic, or to improve your self-esteem, say those affirmations while looking at yourself in a mirror. It is important that you look yourself right in the eye while doing this. The experience may seem a little strange at first, but it works, as you will quickly discover.

Third, put your affirmations on an audiocassette tape; this makes the process quicker and easier. Tapes are a time saver because you can listen to them while engaging in other activities such as driving, working, or exercising. You don't need to pay conscious attention to the words because your unconscious mind tunes in to the affirmations, even if you aren't actively listening.

Making Affirmation Tapes

It is natural to feel hesitant and a bit intimidated when first attempting to record your own tapes. Remember that you are not after "professional quality" audio tapes. When you take the plunge, however, you will find that they are actually quite easy and enjoyable to create after just a few experimental attempts. Following are a number of suggestions for making these tapes; although you need not follow these hints slavishly, let these suggestions guide you for at least your first tape.

Guidelines for Making Affirmation Tapes

Familiarize yourself with your tape recorder. When you need to temporarily stop the tape for any reason, use the pause button rather than the on/off switch on the microphone, or hit the stop button on the tape recorder. As people familiar with tape recorders know, by using the pause button, you won't record a clicking sound each time that you stop the tape.

Use a high quality tape. Usually a C-30 tape is more than enough (15 minutes on a side). I like to put identical affirmations on both sides of the tape so that I don't have to rewind after listening to one side.

If a microphone didn't come with your tape deck, buy one. Most people at first hold the microphone too close to their mouth and speak too quickly. Hold the microphone at a constant, comfortable distance from your mouth, and speak slowly.

Make sure that your affirmations are printed or typed, and practice reading them aloud several times to become more comfortable before you record them. On the other hand, don't strive for perfection. Remember, you can always rewind the

tape and record over the error.

Use appropriate Baroque or New Age music as a background.

According to some research, your tapes will be most effective if each of your affirmations is about four seconds long, followed by a four-second pause before the next affirmation. You don't need a stopwatch to do this, but keep the four-second rule in mind as you record.

Some people find it pleasing to repeat each affirmation twice, changing from first to second person as they do ("I'm a positive, energetic person" is repeated as "You are a positive, energetic person"). Others find it useful to change their tone of voice on the tape.

For example, say some of your affirmations in a normal, conversational voice, whisper others, and say some in a loud, dramatic voice.

Finally, have a friend of the opposite sex help you with your tapes. Alternating between a male and a female voice is a very powerful way of creating affirmation tapes. Also, when creating audio tapes with a friend, use the first person ("I") when saying

your affirmation; when your friend says an affirmation, have him/her use the second person ("you").

Situational Self-Talk

Up to this point, I have primarily been talking about affirmations. As discussed, affirmations are a type of positive self-talk that we consciously design to either counteract past negative programming or to assist us in achieving some future goal. Well-constructed affirmations take a degree of prior planning and thought to create, and we need to repeatedly use them if they are to work effectively. However, there is another type of self-talk, one that does not require repetition, and may or may not require prior planning. Shad Helmstetter calls this type of self-talk "situational," and others refer to it as "coaching" self-talk. Some of the following discussion is taken from Helmstetter's excellent book, *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Shad Helmstetter (1986). *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself*. New York: Pocket Books, pp. 203-209.

Many times situations arise in our lives that require immediate, unplanned, spontaneous, reactions on our part. Whenever those situations occur, there is always self-talk associated with them. When you learn to take control of this situational self-talk, you will acquire a tremendously valuable addition to your personal empowerment arsenal. Of course, at other times, we may know ahead of time that we have a difficult situation coming up. While we may not have the time to formally write affirmations for these situations, we can use coaching self-talk before, during, and after the stressful situation.

Universal Self-Talk

What follows are examples of "universal self-talk" that I listen to going to work in the morning. You can use this as a basis for constructing your own, personalized "universal self-talk" tape.

***I am happy that I was born and so is everyone who knows me.**

***My family is a source of happiness for me and they accept and respect me.**

***I feel safe and happy with my body.**

***I enjoy life--it is fun and great just to be alive.**

***I forgive myself for hurting others or letting others hurt me in the past.**

***I now know that success begins in my own consciousness and with my own thoughts.**

***From this moment on, I am determined to control my own thoughts.**

***My mind is constantly positive, loving, and enthusiastic.**

***I refuse to be stopped by the negative, self-defeating, cynical beliefs of others.**

***I now believe that, with my determination and faith, I can achieve anything.**

***My self-confidence is growing day by day, and I look forward to new challenges.**

***I take responsibility for changing those things in my life that I can affect.**

***I accept or refuse to concentrate on those things in my life I cannot change or control.**

***The more positive I become, the less I worry.**

***I and others can now see that I am a winner, and I act and look like one.**

***I concentrate on the present moment or the future, and I learn from my past.**

***I am attracted to others who are positive and who can help me achieve my goals**

***I now know that all problems are really challenges which present opportunities to learn.**

***I find many opportunities in situations that others overlook.**

***My successes are happening so easily that they are a pleasant surprise, even to me!**

***I am interested in, and pay attention to, the important events in my daily life.**

***I am energetic, enthusiastic, organized, and in control of my life.**

***I am discovering that people really like me, which makes me feel good about myself.**

***It is safe and pleasurable to make positive changes in my life.**

***It is satisfying to express my opinions.**

***I get things done by being an action person and by focusing on one thing at a time.**

***I say yes to doing only those things that I wish to, and I can say no.**

***I cheerfully complete any task that I have accepted.**

***I am getting expert at organizing my response to challenges.**

***I keep challenges in their proper proportion.**

***I enjoy setting, visualizing, and successfully completing my goals.**

***It is a constant delight for me that what I really want, and ask for, I receive.**

***It is probable that I will exceed my goals because success is now natural for me.**

***I enjoy my work, and it is appreciated by those who really matter to me.**

***I enjoy being paid well for those things that I love to do.**

***The excellence of my work increases each day.**

***It is safe and always best when I tell the truth.**

***I have more than enough energy and determination to succeed.**

***I have the talent to create my own happiness.**

***I deserve prosperity.**

***It is my natural tendency to be enthusiastic and positive.**

***It is great to be able to laugh at myself.**

- *I am grateful for the life that I already have.**
- *I am absolutely certain that I want to be happy and successful.**
- *My existence is miraculous!**
- *My urge to live fully is strong**
- *Staying healthy is an enjoyable part of my daily routine.**
- *I am able to relax whenever I need to.**
- *I am confident and full of self-esteem.**
- *I take full responsibility for all aspects of my life, and I never accept excuses.**
- *I thank everyone for helping me be who I am.**
- *Today I am absolutely unstoppable!**

Narrative Self-Talk

Following is a two-part example of what I call narrative self-talk: these beautiful passages on love and persistence were written by my brother-in-law, Bob Applegate. It has a lovely, almost prayerful quality about it.

Love

Today I will take time to love.

Friends and family, strangers, even enemies will be my unsuspecting quarry. For several times during the day today, I will deliberately put aside all other concerns and focus my loving awareness exclusively on one person.

Already, with each breath, I can feel the light fill my heart to capacity and beyond. I can feel it fill my entire being with an energy I know is mine only if I give it away.

So today I will take time to love.

Perhaps I will simply pay attention to someone I don't usually notice, privately taking a moment to hold that person up to the light, silently saying, "Through my heart from the God within, the Source, I send you love. I wish you health and happiness."

Or maybe I will stop to appreciate someone's unique qualities; his brand of courage or her special competence, a delightful turn of the eyebrow or an endearing insecurity. Silently I will say, "Thanks for being you. Your existence enriches my life."

Or possibly I will focus on someone who I have thought of as an enemy, silently sending and asking for forgiveness, privately praying for virtues I feel my enemy needs: "With all my heart I wish you the gift of patience, of tolerance, of self-worth."

Or I might even reveal my love today, with a glance, perhaps, or a smile, with an interested question or a word of encouragement. Even now, I can imagine the sensation in the corners of my mouth as I begin to smile directly from my heart. I will be saying, "Welcome. At this moment you are the absolute center of my universe. I value your presence."

Or perhaps I will be asked to give of myself. This I will do gladly, thinking: "Feel free, my friend, to know my worries, my triumphs, my opinions, my humor. Feel free to partake of my time, my focused attention, my possessions."

Today I will take time to love.

I know the more I love, the more I will be capable of loving. So in addition to the numerous unexpected opportunities the day will bring, let me deliberately plan to love these certain people today:

_____ and _____

_____ and _____

And sometime today let me also love myself, wish myself health and happiness, find in myself some endearing and admirable qualities, wish for myself certain virtues, be grateful for my own existence.

Today I will take time to love.

Persistence

Today is a new chance, a fresh opportunity to work toward my goal. Last night's rest has renewed me with energy and confidence. Today the wave will gather momentum, and I will sweep irresistibly forward.

Obstacles will challenge my mind and character, but I will persist. Indeed, I will develop my endurance. Even wrong turns will eventually show me the way. For the discovery of each approach that does not work brings me closer to finding the approach that does.

Today is a new chance to advance toward my goal. It matters not if today's progress comes in inches, feet, or miles, for success is mine if I persist. I am determined that if I stumble, I will regain my balance. If I fall, I will roll with momentum, put my hands on the gritty sidewalk, and get right back up, ready to go again. If I am restrained, I will twist and turn and push relentlessly to work myself loose from bondage.

I will persist.

Sometimes I will make a temporary retreat, to rest and regroup, but I will always come back and back again to achieve my goal. For nothing can stop the power of true persistence. The implacable dripping of single drops of water can drill a hole through stone. The constant erosion of gentle winds can carve caves in a mountain. Persistent commitment to my goal will bring me success.

Today is a new opportunity
to advance toward my goal.

III Where Do I Want To Be ?

Creating a Compelling Future

This chapter will lead you to do three things:

1. To ask the question, "Where do I want to be?"
2. To discover the secret of giving yourself a compelling future.
3. To learn how to set and achieve goals.

I. Where Do I Want To Be?

Because of negative past conditioning, the influence of family and friends, and even sexual stereotyping, many of us unconsciously fear thinking about what we want. Thus, the question "Where do I want to be?" is a difficult one for many people to ask, let alone answer. You may have been taught that "I want" goal-setting is either selfish or involves setting ourselves up for failure. In the following chapter, you will unlearn these self-defeating ways of thinking by acquiring an improved set of beliefs about goal setting and a way to play with setting and achieving your own goals.

Human life is motivated by four prime directives, programmed into each one of us by our

supercomputer programmer, encoded in each cell's DNA.

To live: **to dynamically engage in the stream of life.**

To love: **to both give and receive from our hearts.**

To learn: **to continually grow and strive for new knowledge.**

To make a difference: **to be the hero or heroine of your own life.**

It is that last need, to make a difference, that is the focus of this chapter, and making a difference involves nurturing yourself. Far from being selfish, it is only through knowing our wants and our mission or purpose in life that we can give fully and freely to others. Unless and until you can take care of some of your "I wants," you will not be able to give fully of yourself to your spouse, children, family, friends, or employer.

WARNING!

You may be tempted to just read this chapter and not do the exercises in it. However, in order for you to reach empowerment, you must actively and fully do these exercises. To quote the athletic shoe ad: **JUST DO IT!**

Consistently empowered people get themselves to act. If their actions work, they continue to use and improve them; if those actions do not work, they try something else. Remember, empowered people are proactive rather than reactive; they focus on solutions rather than on problems. The great majority of people, however, do only what is familiar, not what is truly in their best interests.

Discovering Your Compelling Future

What allows empowered people to be so proactive? The secret is that empowered people (even organizations) have a compelling future. They have discovered their mission or purpose in life, and it is that mission or purpose that becomes their inner truth and that guides their goal-setting. Every one of us, you included, is put on this earth for a purpose; discovering

and living that purpose or mission is a fundamental secret to empowerment and happiness.

Greater voices than mine have spoken this truth.

Abraham Maslow, the pioneering humanistic psychologist, maintained that "Even if all [our] needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop unless the individual is doing what he (or she) is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he/she is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man/woman can be, he/she must be."

The great playwright, George Bernard Shaw said, "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

Gail Sheehy, in her book *Pathfinders*, found that the one answer that separated her pathfinder/empowered people from others was to the question, "Are you devoted to some purpose or cause outside of yourself

and larger than yourself?" While most people responded, "no" to that question, empowered people almost always answered "yes."

Charles Garfield, who has studied peak-performing people for over twenty years, found, "that with few exceptions, peak performers are motivated by a deep and personal sense of mission, which is different from the specific and measurable goals each person may set."¹⁹

Put even more simply, the late Joseph Campbell, one of the great philosophers of our time, gave his formula for empowerment in three words: "Follow your bliss."

Finally, one of my favorite inscriptions, from a church in Sussex, England, insists that, "a vision without a task is but a dream; a task without a vision is drudgery; a vision and a task is the hope of the world."

Nor is mission, vision, or purpose important only to individuals. Many top management consultants argue that America's best companies and organizations are the ones that have the clearest sense of their mission, vision, or purpose. It is certainly true that most of us

¹⁹ Charles Garfield (1984). *Peak Performance*. New York: Warner Books, p. 64.

want to work for organizations that are successful, and that have a clear sense of purpose or vision. However, as Studs Terkel rightly points out in his oral history, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, most people work at jobs that constrict their spirits: "To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us...[Work] is about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying."²⁰

Mission/Vision/Purpose

What is mission/vision/purpose? I use the terms interchangeably, and I invite you to select the term that best fits your individual needs. In the considerable literature now available on mission/vision/purpose (hereafter called MVP), some common themes emerge about what MVP is and is not:

²⁰ Studs Terkel (1974). *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York: Pantheon, p. xi.

Characteristics of MVP

MVP is something that you discover. It has always been there; you don't have to create it; you don't have to do anything new.

Everyone has their own MVP. It is not something only given to a chosen few.

When we are "on purpose," our lives have more meaning. MVP, then, becomes the rudder, the anchor, the master map, the inner core, the divining rod that guides our life. MVP gives us the reason for doing and being. It becomes our compelling future.

Your MVP is not something selfish; it is always something bigger than you, usually lasts a lifetime, and can never be completely achieved.

MVP is the power that determines our goals, not the goals themselves. While your goals and values may change, your MVP stays relatively constant.

Your MVP is not hazy, abstract, or vague; it is very specific and understandable.

MVP is the key to: a compelling future; living longer, happier, less stressful life; prioritizing and focusing on what most matters in your life; allowing

us to live from a future vision, rather than reaction to our past.

A couple of years ago, I discussed my Psychology of Empowerment research with a nearby college's counseling staff. As I was crossing the parking lot to enter the counseling center, I noticed a personalized license plate: HELP. When I got to the section of my presentation that discussed the importance of MVP, I commented that I would be disappointed if that license plate didn't belong to someone in the room and, indeed, the director of the counseling center acknowledged the car was hers. That simple license plate spoke volumes about that person's sense of mission and purpose!

All sorts of people, from the famous to the obscure, are guided by their MVP. For instance, Oprah Winfrey, in a television interview, mentioned that from her early teens she knew she was going to be a successful talk show hostess. Closer to home, my older daughter, Robyn, from the time she was six or seven, knew that she would be a school teacher, an unwavering MVP that guided her through elementary school, junior and

senior high school, college, and into her work life where she is a successful and happy elementary school teacher.

Charles Garfield, a mathematician and computer analyst with the original Apollo moon shot program, speaks eloquently about MVP.

I experienced as never before or since the magnitude of what can be achieved through the power of people sharing a mission...What sparked everyone's imagination and harnessed powers few had known they possessed was the realization that they were taking part in a project that would fulfill one of mankind's oldest dreams; they had a MISSION. I saw men and women of average capabilities tapping resources of personal energy and creativity that resulted in extraordinary human accomplishments...One thing became clear to me-- it is not the goal, but the ultimate MISSION that kindles the imagination, motivating us toward ever higher levels of achievement.²¹

²¹ Charles Garfield, *Peak Performance* (New York: Warner, 1984), p. 66

Robert Allen, who has helped thousands of people achieve financial freedom and personal power through his real estate and personal empowerment seminars, feels that it is easy for most people to get started with personal goals; however, it is difficult to stay motivated. In other words, without a deep sense of mission, goals have little purpose.

Discover your MVP and you are 99 percent there; without it, almost any distraction will pull you off course.

"But," you may protest, "I haven't the foggiest idea what my personal MVP is or if I even have one."

You do have one. Everyone does. The trick is to discover yours, and the following exercises are designed to help you do this.

You must do these exercises fully and carefully, taking the time to explore whatever thoughts and feelings the questions elicit. Absolute self-honesty will help you enormously in making use of the following exercises.

Exercise Element 16

Finding Your MVP: Role Modeling

Find a period of at least one hour for quiet, deep, uninterrupted thought. Have your journal and pen handy. Write down all answers.

Go through your relaxation routine (from chapter 2) and, when you are relaxed, start thinking about the major roles in your life. For example, right now some of my roles include: grandfather, father, husband, teacher, empowerment facilitator, friend, and author. Think of at least five to seven roles you currently inhabit. List them in your journal. Then, go back and jot down the name of one person after each of your roles who you believe to be the most honest judge of you in that role.

Take as long as necessary to complete this portion of the exercise. Allow your mind to project ahead to your eightieth birthday celebration. See friends, family, co-workers, and members of your community as being present. One by one, a different speaker from each of the roles you listed above begins to express their feelings about you. Listen carefully to each of them. What did each say

about you? What do you wish they had said, that they didn't? Write all responses down in your journal.

When you have finished step 3, ask this question: "From the perspective of my eightieth birthday, how has my life made a difference?" Write down your answers.

Following are additional exercises that have been effective in helping people discover and focus in on their MVP. Write down all responses (5 for each question), for writing both reinforces the initial intent to get answers, and it preserves those answers.

Exercise Element 17

MVP-Defining Questions

What are the things that you love to do, that you get excited about?

B. What are you good at or have a talent for?

What are your major strengths? Add to your list from Chapter One, if necessary.

What have been your greatest successes? Again, review your list from chapter one, adding to it as needed.

What are the aspects of your life that you value most?

What are your goals for the future?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Who are the people you most admire? What are the specific characteristics in each that you most admire?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What would you absolutely have to complete in order to die in peace?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Now, take a look at all the information you have provided yourself with in the preceding exercises, and notice any emerging patterns. What are the common themes? Do certain responses occur in answer to several questions? Which items generate the strongest emotional reactions?

The next step is to write your MVP Confirmation, an exercise that is particularly helpful if you still

find that your MVP is incomplete or if you simply want some additional validation.

Exercise Element 18

MVP Confirmation

Find a quiet room where you will be undisturbed for at least half an hour. Either use the systematic relaxation exercise from chapter 2, or simply take a few deep breaths, relax, and think of a time when you were very contented and at ease. Then allow your unconscious to consider what you most want out of life; what you want to change most about your life; what your MVP is, could be, or should be. Phrase these as simple questions (e.g., "What do I want most from life?"), and trust the experience. Be patient: if you remain both relaxed and open, thoughts and/or images will start to come into your consciousness. Don't rush or force the experience; just let it happen. Write any pertinent thoughts down in your journal.

Writing Your MVP Statement

Following are two examples of MVP statements written in different styles.

MVP STATEMENT--EXAMPLE 1

My purpose in life is fourfold:

To become a positive influence and model for others' proactivity and empowerment.

To constantly strive for the freedom to live my life as I choose--as long as that freedom is consistent with my MVP and doesn't interfere with others' freedom.

To serve as a beacon and role model for my family, my friends, my colleagues, and my students by encouraging them to grow beyond their present paradigms.

To remain loyal and dedicated to myself, my wife, my children and grandchildren, my friends, my students, and my employer.

In order to fully accomplish my purposes I need to accept the following missions:

To become more loving;

To become more spontaneous;

To become more empowered;

To become more proactive;

To become more understanding;

To laugh more;
To become more of a servant to my community;
To become more of a "well-speaker" of people in
their absence.

MVP STATEMENT--EXAMPLE 2

I am a performing artist. The classroom is my stage. I dedicate my life to my art. I explain what I mean, by living it, with my body, brains, emotions and from my guts. I respond to the moment, passionately. I give all. I save nothing. I maximize! I wait for no one to make me happy. I nurture myself, and permit myself to be gifted. I inspire others with my integrity, my elegance, and my commitment to quality. I am a special gift to myself, and the world that I unwrap throughout life.²²

On the following page, write a draft of your MVP statement, in any format you wish. You may have one MVP or several, and what you write down now is not cast in concrete. You can add to or change it later because there is no "correct" answer.

Only your honest opinion matters here.

²² The mission statement of Dennis McLaughlen, teacher and facilitator.

Exercise Element 19

My MVP

Many people report a profound feeling of catharsis, personal power, and certainty after writing their MVP statement, and they often report a great increase in motivation to get started. And now that you have developed a clearer picture of what your MVP is, answering the following questions will help you begin making your MVP your reality.

Exercise Element 20

Making Your MVP Your Reality

What one activity could you commit yourself to completing in the next 48 hours that would move you closer to your MVP?

What are the most likely roadblocks to achieving your MVP in the next six months, and how will you deal with each of these roadblocks?

What do you need to start, complete, or end in the near future to make your MVP more of a reality?

What do you need to learn more about to maximize your MVP?

Who are the people who will help you move closer to your MVP?

Once your MVP feels compelling for you, try the following experiments: (1) distill your MVP into a single sentence; (2) create a symbol or picture that captures the essence of your MVP. These exercises will provide you with a simple, quick, powerful, and constant reminder of what your MVP is.

Exercise Element 21

MVP Sentence

Exercise Element 22

MVP Symbol/Picture

The Master Skill of Goal Setting

We now turn to another of the master skills of empowerment: **goal setting**. **For almost every empowered person, goal setting is vital.** Thus, you need a method for setting goals and ways of achieving those goals. Since you have now discovered your MVP, you already have a compelling future. Goals are one of the tools you will use to actualize your MVP.

Only about 3-5 percent of Americans have specific goals for their future, and less than one percent have written their goals down!

Yet, goal achievement can make the difference between living a life of empowerment, purpose, and self-respect or abandoning responsibility for our lives to others. Moreover, goals cannot be properly set in a moral or psychological vacuum; rather than being willing to use any means to reach our goals, we must come to regard our goals and our means of reaching them as identical.

In other words, in order to achieve worthwhile goals, both ends and means must be in harmony with the well-being of others.

Goal setting is about making choices. It is knowing where you're going and why you are going there. If

you are not achieving as much as you are capable of, it is probably largely because your goals are not clearly defined. Or, as the old saying goes, "If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

Many people fear goal setting because they mistakenly believe it limits their freedom; such people often take the attitude: "I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it!"

But genuine empowerment always involves making commitments and taking the personal responsibility for seeing them through.

Following is an effective and efficient process of goal-achievement which moves you from (1) wishing, to (2) goal statements, to (3) goal-scripting, to (4) planning, and finally to (5) action.

If you follow these five steps, your MVP and goals will become a reality.

Wishing

Wishing is the starting point for all meaningful goal setting. For some, wishing is easy; many people already have a long list of wishes in their head. Others need a gentle prod to engage in wishful thinking, but once they get started, wishing quickly becomes an

enjoyable activity. At the extreme end of the wishing spectrum are those people for whom wishing is very difficult, and I occasionally have encountered individuals who find wishing almost impossible to do. When I ask them, for example, to list things they want to see, do, be, have, learn, or achieve before they die, they can only come up with two or three possibilities in thirty minutes. With so little to guide themselves, such people often feel that they do not control their own destiny when, in fact, a little more effort and a lot more freedom for their imagination are all that is needed.

Our wishes tend to fall into at least six categories. By thinking of some "wishes" for each category your wish list (and later your goals) will have some balance. When completing your wish list, do so in a spontaneous, free manner. At this point, don't be concerned about whether your wishes are really possible or not. Just give yourself total permission to let your ideas and feelings flow.

On the following pages, list at least twenty-five things that you want to see, do, be, have, learn, or achieve before you die. List at least three in each of the six major categories, more in any categories in which you feel less empowered.

Exercise Element 23

Wish List

Personal (e.g., learn another language, travel to Europe, buy a dog, learn how to ski).

Interpersonal (e.g., get married, maintain friendships, have a child, get along with your mother-in-law).

1. _____

Vocational (e.g., start my own business, finish college, get a promotion, start a new career)

Financial (e.g., get a raise, buy a house, become financially independent).

1. _____

Physical (e.g., lose twenty pounds, eat a healthful diet, exercise daily)

1. _____

Spiritual (nurture a conscious relationship with God, learn to meditate, learn to forgive).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Goal Statements

The next step is to take some of these wishes and convert them into formal goal statements. To this end, you are going to put your wishes through a questioning process. As you begin this process, it is worth noting that, although most people make no distinction between their wishes and their goals, consistently empowered people do make a distinction between the two.²³

There are two problems with wishes that are left as just wishes. First, wishes usually fail to motivate us to action; second, pursuing poorly thought out wishes often leads to undesirable results. Consistently empowered people put their wishes through a questioning process before converting them to goals, a process you are about to learn. The brief time required to complete this questioning process now will save you enormous time and energy in the future.

First, you need to narrow down your wish list by picking six things that you would like to see or have; write these down below. Next pick six things that you

²³ In writing this section, I am indebted to L. Cameron-Bandler, D. Gordon, and M. Lebeau, from whose excellent book *Know How* (Future Pace, 1985, pp. 51-87) I have extracted much of this section.

would like to do, be, or achieve; write these down in the appropriate space below. Keep balance in mind. You can achieve balance in three ways: (1) by thinking of the major areas in your life (personal, interpersonal, vocational, financial, physical, spiritual) and making certain your goals are not confined to just one or two areas; (2) by reviewing the major roles you presently play in life (father/mother husband/wife, lover, friend, worker, student, etc.) and having individual goals for several; (3) by planning to have some short-term (less than one year), medium-term (less than five years), and long-term (more than five years) goals.

Exercise Element 24

See/Have Goals

Do/Be/Achieve Goals

Now that you have your lists of 12 items (six see-haves and do-be-achieves) and have checked that list for balance, ask the following four qualifying questions about each.

Is this possible?

It is necessary to strike a balance in answering this question. On the one hand, it is not necessary to believe in the probability of the wish coming true. You may answer "yes" if you or any other person you know has achieved the wish before, or if you can imagine the circumstances that would lead to the fulfillment of that wish. For example, it may now seem improbable that you will ever be financially independent, but you surely can imagine people in your circumstances who have achieved it. On the other hand, don't waste your time with ten million-go-one shots that are not within your direct control, such as winning the lottery. Go back over your list and place a P in front of any item that you deem possible.

Is this worthy?

What are the costs and consequences of having this wish? Will this get me what I really want? Is this consistent with my values and my MVP statement? Place a W before an item that is worthy.

Is this worth the price necessary to get it?

What will I have to give in return (time, energy, money, hard feelings) for achieving this wish? Is it worth the price? Place a \$ before any item you deem worth its price.

Is this legally and morally acceptable?

In some cases, what is legally and what is morally acceptable may differ significantly from one another. For instance, many civil rights movement leaders of the 1960s found it necessary to non-violently break immoral laws in order to reach their goal of racial equality. One question may guide your actions in such cases: who is helped and who is hurt by my actions? Make your actions morally correct. Place a L/M before each item that is legally and morally acceptable.

Once you have completed this questioning process, the next step is to take those wishes that have passed the test by gaining firm "yes" answers to all four questions and to convert them into formal goal statements.

A formal goal statement is simply a short, straightforward statement of what you want.

Following are eight guidelines for completing your goal statements.

Goal Statement Guidelines

Write them out. Ideally, type or print out your goals, taking the time to thoughtfully and carefully produce them. Writing out your goal will help you crystallize your thoughts, and the kinetic action of writing or keyboarding will make a powerful influence on your unconscious super computer.

Be specific about what you want. General goals such as "I want to be rich," "I want to be happy," "I want to get married," are too broad to be helpful. How much money would it take for you to feel rich? What exactly would make you happy? Who do you want to marry?

State your goals in positive terms. Say what you want to happen, not what you don't want to happen. "I want to lose 30 pounds," or "I want to weight 170 pounds is better than "I no longer want to be fat."

Your goals should be personal. You must be in control of your goals. They should not be dependent upon others for success. While it is OK to wish the best for others and to help them toward their goals, you can't set their goals for them and they can't set your goals for you.

Be careful with whom you share your goals.

Your relationships with friends, lovers, and family have been worked out in a very complicated (and often unconscious) fashion over a long period of time. In some cases, when you begin to change, to become more positive, or to achieve your goals, this becomes very threatening to those around you.

Break large goals into realistic increments. For example, if your ultimate goal is to lose 30 pounds, first set a goal of losing 10 pounds.

Whenever possible, set completion dates for your goals. This serves as an added incentive to complete them.

Your short-term goals should be realistic. Make these goals fairly easy to accomplish, and you will gain confidence. Your medium and long-term goals should be more idealistic and expansive. These goals should be a definite "stretch" for you in order to motivate and inspire you.

Scripting

Up to this point, you have been methodical in your goal setting, for your written goal statements are a necessary first step. But now we need to take your goal statements and make them come alive! In other words, what is needed now is to take those goals and make them **compelling** for you.

To do this you need to get the right hemisphere of your brain involved: you need to use your creative visualization powers. The art of creative visualization requires that you take your goals and experience the feelings of already having achieved them, a process called "as if" thinking. You imagine your goal "as if" it had already been accomplished.

This kind of visualized, "as if" thinking is the most powerful way of turning your goals into reality! It's not only fun, it also produces fantastic results.

Warning!

The technology you are about to learn is so powerful you had better be certain that your goal is something you really want because you will probably achieve it.

If you have the time and motivation, go through the following creative visualization procedure for all your goals. Or you can choose to prioritize your short, medium, and long-term goals and then use the procedure first with your highest priority goals. When your highest priority goals are achieved, then use the same procedure with your second and third priority goals.

Creative goal visualization involves the three steps you will follow in the Creative Goal Visualization exercise on the next page.

Exercise Element 25

Creative Goal Visualization

Close your eyes, relax, and then imagine your goal as if it had already been achieved. In other words, you must become that success in your mind. Ask yourself, if your goal became a reality, what would you see, hear, and feel? What people would be involved? What would you do? What would the environment look like? Don't rush this procedure; take the time to do it thoroughly and notice all the details.

Next, write a script of what you just imagined.

Pretend you are a Hollywood or television script writer who has to convert your goal into a mini-script. What would it look like, sound like, feel like? Following these steps for creative goal visualization are three examples of such scripts.

Read, visualize, and experience your script as often as possible. It is best that you do this when you are relaxed. On a scale of one to nine, just reading your script is worth a three; reading then visualizing it is worth a six; reading, visualizing, and feeling the emotion associated with the completion of your

goals is worth a nine. It also helps when you visualize your goal to make it bigger, brighter, and more colorful.

You don't have to be a genius or a professional writer to script a goal. The examples that follow were written by students of average ability.

Scripting Examples

Example 1:

Goal: to finish the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii. (This Triathlon involves a 2 1/2 mile ocean swim, followed by a 120 mile bike race, and concludes with a 26 mile marathon!)

This is incredible. I've finally finished the Ironman Triathlon! The cheers of family and the crowd still echo in my ears. I can't believe I'm sitting here looking at the finish line. I've thought about this moment 1,000 times. I'm feeling tired but very happy that I actually did it. All the time spent working toward his goal has paid off. I don't know when I have felt this exhilarated and satisfied. Now that I have accomplished this, I know I can do anything!

Example 2:

Goal: to have a healthy baby after two miscarriages).

God just granted me a miracle, and that's why I'm about to cry. This miracle will forever change my life. I just regained consciousness and looked around the room. There is Mom and Joe, and they both look so proud. Mom just told me that I have a baby girl and that the nurse is bringing her to me now. Oh Mom, look at her! God, she is so tiny. Her little pink hand is holding my finger as she nurses. Oh Lord, she just looked up at me, and I swear she tried to smile! The pain I felt in delivery was nothing compared to the deep joy that I feel at this moment. Now I have something of my own that I can forever treasure. No one can take these feelings of utter happiness away from me.

Example 3:

Goal: to lose 20 pounds

Wow! I did it. I really am thin. All those meetings at Weight Watchers rally did pay off. My bikini looks so good on me. I have no more hips and no more butt. I look in the mirror and see a thin face. Yea! It wasn't that hard, after all. I'm glad that I did this. I feel much better, and my boyfriend can't keep his eyes off me.

This is how I will look forever. I'll never go back to the way I was.

As you can see from these examples, goal-scripting involves writing goals in such sensory-rich detail that the goal becomes burned into our consciousness.

Exercise Element 26

Scripting Follow-Up Files

Once you have scripted your goals, create a file folder for each of them, and begin to collect all the data you can about your goal. If, for example, you want to lose weight, save articles on diets and exercise. If your goal is to visit Ireland, collect all the information you can about that country (cost, maps, travel routes, pictures, articles, etc.). If you have as a goal to one day own a Mercedes, cut out a picture of the model you want, buy a Mercedes key chain or mud flaps.

Rather than typing all your goal scripts on a single piece of paper, try the following combination technique.

Exercise Element 27

Scripting Combination Technique

Purchase some 5x8 index cards. On one side of the card, type your goal script. On the other side, type some affirmations that pertain to your goal. If you can find a picture that reminds you of your goal, paste that on the back as well. Another benefit of placing your scripts on index cards is that you can shuffle the order. In this way, you are not always reading the same script first.

Planning

Now that you have a compelling goal script written, you need some plan to convert that script into reality.

Planning is a necessary step in attaining what you want. Some people have fantastic goals and even well-written goal scripts, but they never devise a plan for putting them into action. In devising your plan, it is helpful to first ask yourself the following questions:

Exercise Element 28

Planning Questions

What are the behaviors, tasks, activities, or procedures that must be done?

What resources, abilities, skills, or assets do I already have that will help me?

Which resources, abilities, skills, or assets do I lack and need to acquire?

What information do I have, or do I need to acquire to attain my goal?

Which people can help me in achieving my goal?

Which people can hinder me in achieving my goal?

How much time is required to complete the various steps in my plan?

In constructing your plan, use "back from the future planning." Rather than thinking about where you are now and planning toward your goal, first think about your completed goal and plan backwards. For example, when I decided to write my book on Personal Empowerment Psychology, the first thing I did was to design the front cover of the book. The front cover hung over my desk at work for nearly two years, until the book was completed.

Action

A possible danger in planning is that you do it in such detail that the plan paralyzes you. You can only gather so much information, or specify just so many steps toward your goal. Sooner or later, you need to put that plan into action. Just as a goal without a plan will never bear fruit, neither will a plan without action. To be honest, doing is often the scary part, especially at first. However, as you gain some experience with goal setting, planning, and doing, the process becomes easier and easier.

What often happens to people is they start their plan, get to a certain step, and then that particular step doesn't work. They then view that as a failure, get upset, feel inadequate, and give up on their plan.

Instead, learn to view your "failures" as opportunities for corrective feedback. Keep reminding yourself that consistently empowered people get themselves to act, and if their actions don't work, they try something else!

Exercise Element 29

Action!

JUST DO IT!

I end this chapter with a wonderful story told by Harvey Mackay in his book *Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*. While attending a seminar in Japan in 1983, he overheard the following brief conversation with the 88-year-old president of the industrial giant, Matsushita Electric Company:

Q: How long are your long-term goals?

A: We have 250-year goals.

Q: What do you need to carry them out?

A: Patience.

IV How Do I Get There ?

In this chapter you will begin to effectively use; proactivity and visualization, powerful techniques that will lead you through the doors of empowerment.

Now that you have assessed where you are, have cleaned up your past, have discovered your mission, vision, or purpose, and have set your goals in accordance with your inner needs, an inevitable question arises:

How do I get there?

If you have taken the time and gone through the hard work to discover your MVP and to set goals, you already know your compelling future, and you possess the motivation to change and grow.

The time has come for action.

Of course, action is difficult for some people, as an experiment I often use with my Personal Growth classes demonstrates. As innocently as possible, I pass a five-dollar bill around the room so that everyone can handle it and see that it is quite real. "Who would be willing to give me 50¢ for this five dollar bill?" I ask.

Typically, in a class of 30, only one or two raise their hands, so powerful is their habit of suspicion. When I ask why the other people didn't raise their hands, the answers generally fall into two categories. Some believe that it is a trick. They have been taught that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Others are slow because they are too embarrassed or calculating; by the time they make up their minds, the money is gone.

While routine suspicion may always seem justifiable, such a reaction is not always applicable, and can actually hinder your progress toward empowerment. An empowered person in this situation might quickly ask (and answer) two questions that cast the situation in a different light: What's the best that could happen to me? (I can get a \$5.00 bill for 50¢.) What's the worst that could happen to me? (I could lose 50¢.) These are the folks who quickly raise their hands.

Proactivity

It is not enough to consistently act! Many people who are very busy, action-oriented people are still dissatisfied and unfulfilled. Thus, although action is important, the essential question for people who want true empowerment becomes "toward what am I acting,

and why am I pursuing this goal?" The principle of proactivity can help answer this question.

Proactivity is more than simple activity.

Proactivity, in the context of your bid for empowerment, means that your actions are guided by your MVP, your values, and your goals. Rather than just a series of hit-or-miss actions, proactivity means that your life becomes focused and balanced.

By now, this message should be clear: if you have not yet discovered your MVP and set your goals according to it, that is your first order of business. Indeed, proactivity is impossible without finishing this important step. In this chapter, you will learn about proactivity through (1) understanding what psychologists and biologists have discovered about the human brain and (2) learning the master skill of visualization.

Using Your Mind

One of the founders of modern psychology, William James, once said: "Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are dampened, our

drafts checked, and we are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources."

Put simply, you can't answer the question "How Do I Get Here?" without learning how to more fully use the incredible super-computer that is within your brain.

Although James died in 1910, when the physiology of the brain was only partially understood, the Brain Research Institute at UCLA agrees with James that the ultimate creative capacity of the brain may be nearly infinite, certainly far greater than humankind has previously imagined.

According to **Barbara Brown**, author of *Supermind*:

The mystery of the mind is so gigantic that it renders even the best of minds helpless to absorb its magnitude, let alone set a proper course for exploring the endless reaches of its power. This, more than anything perhaps, explains why for centuries human beings have failed to be much more than passingly curious about the power and potential of their own mental apparatus.²⁴

²⁴ Barbara Brown (1980). *Supermind*. New York: Bantam, pp. 3-4.

Ms. Brown emphasizes that "sleeping within everyone is a mind of superior intellect and ability, a mind that modern man, preoccupied with the wonders of physical nature, has neglected, and virtually silenced."²⁵

Experts in other fields concur.

For instance, the eminent mathematician, **Charles Muses**, maintains that "the potentials of consciousness remain well-nigh the last reachable domain for man not yet explored--the undiscovered country."

And **Frederick Tilney**, a prominent French brain specialist, insists that "we will, by conscious command, evolve cerebral centers which will permit us to use powers that we now are not even capable of imagining."

Finally, **Jon Franklin**, the Pulitzer prize-winning author of *Molecules of the Mind*, underscores the enormous power contained within each human mind, a power that is awe-inspiring:

This new science's equivalent of the atomic bomb has not yet exploded, but the moment rapidly approaches, and as it does insiders have begun to recognize the implications of what is about to happen, and tremble at

²⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

the prospect. A thousand years hence, when our descendants look back on this time, it will not be the name of Albert Einstein that comes to their lips. For while the forces contained within the nucleus of the atom are truly powerful...they pale when compared with the energy contained within the human mind.²⁶

It is estimated that the human brain has upwards of **one trillion** brain cells. Moreover, according to authors like Jon Franklin, the individual brain cell isn't either just on or off, but has a fairly wide range of possible responses. "In effect, the vocabulary of the gray neuron consists not only of 'yes' and 'no' but also 'perhaps' and 'maybe' and 'sort of,' and 'if you say so, I'll consider it.'²⁷ In other words, the brain in which the mind is contained has an enormous capacity.

Perhaps the most astonishing theory about how the brain operates comes from the neuroscientist, **Karl Pribham**, of Stanford University. In the late 1970s, Pribham theorized that memory operates much like holography, the laser-generated photographic

²⁶ Jon Franklin (1987). *Molecules of the Mind*. New York: Dell, p. 4.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

technique that produces the three-dimensional images that are now on most VISA cards, among other places. When holograms were first invented, in the 1960s, the process made use of heavy, glass photographic plates, imbuing them with an image imprinted using laser light. It took another laser to read them. It was discovered that, if a hologram-imprinted photographic plate dropped and shattered into thousands of tiny glass pieces, each smallest shard of glass, when lasered through and projected, would contain the whole photographic image. Each part, in other words, contains the whole. Pribham believes that "the brain's 'deep structure' is essentially holographic...[that] an eerie property of both hologram and brain is the distribution of information throughout the system, each fragment encoded to produce the information of the whole."²⁸

I recently read that if we could build a super-computer with the same memory capacity as an average human brain, it would have to be as tall as the Empire State Building, and would cover the entire state of Texas! Unfortunately, however, our personal supercomputer

²⁸Ken Wilber (1982). *The Holographic Paradigm and Other Paradoxes*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, p. 7.

doesn't come with a programmer's guide. In this culture of electronic devices, most of us spend more time learning how to run our VCRs, our microwave ovens, and our digital wristwatches that we invest in learning how to run our brains.

What we need to learn, then, is how to take our brains off "automatic pilot." We need to learn how to program our brains with strong desires and goals. As **Richard Bandler** says in his book, *Using Your Brain For a Change*:

Most people are prisoners of their own brains. It's as if they are chained to the last seat of the bus and someone else is driving. I want you to learn how to drive your own bus. If you don't give your brain a little direction, either it will just run randomly on its own, or other people will find ways to run it for you--and they may not always have your best interests in mind.²⁹

²⁹ Richard Bandler (1982). *Using Your Brain for a Change*. Real People Press, p. 7.

The Superconscious Mind

To learn how to best accomplish this programming of our mind, you need to learn more about one part of it-- **the superconscious**. The superconscious, what some psychologists still call the unconscious, is the part of our brain beyond our normal awareness. It is a false belief that our conscious mind is aware of what is really happening, both in the external world and in our internal world.

In fact, **our conscious mind may be aware of only one-millionth of the stimuli taken in by our senses.**

Whereas the conscious mind can deal only with a few stimuli at a time, our superconscious mind constantly deals with millions of unrelated stimuli simultaneously.

Our superconscious, then, takes in, classifies, and stores literally all the stimuli received by our senses.

Because of its tremendous storage capacity, the superconscious is the source of a great deal of information and wisdom.

One of the central purposes of the superconscious is to bring into reality the strong desires and goals given to it by the conscious mind.

It has been my experience that most people have very mixed feelings about the superconscious. On the one hand, they find the notion of the superconscious intriguing and interesting to talk about. On the other hand, they view the superconscious as mysterious, mystical, and too "far out" to be of much real value. Yet, to continue to ignore the considerable evidence of the existence of the superconscious is terribly unscientific.

In the following paragraphs, I ask a series of questions about experiences that have probably happen to you so often you never really stopped to consider their implications. While some of these questions may elicit a chuckle from you, think seriously about them.

What keeps you from falling out of bed at night? And how is it that many people use their built-in biological clock to wake themselves at a designated time consistently without an alarm clock, simply by saying, "I will awake at 6:30 tomorrow morning"? What part of your consciousness keeps track of your body movement and time while you are asleep? It certainly isn't the conscious part of your brain. Or how many of you have struggled with a problem for days consciously, only to wake up at 3 a.m. out of a dead

sleep with the solution to that problem? Again, what part of your consciousness worked successfully on the problem while you were asleep?

Perhaps the experience of a student of mine will illustrate how this ability to dream answers to problems can work. Cindy is a bank teller and, as an incentive, the bank she works for gives a \$50 saving bond to any teller who goes a whole month without an error in their cash out. She has been the recipient of that award several times because she takes a great deal of pride in the accuracy of her work. However, once she got to the last day of the month and discovered that she had made a \$12 error. It happened to be a Friday and she stayed late at work to see if she could find her error. After several fruitless hours, she took her books home and worked unsuccessfully for several hours more on Saturday. Finally, after spending more hours trying to solve the twelve dollar mystery on Sunday, she gave up in frustration. At 4 a.m. Monday morning she awoke, and felt compelled to get out of bed, go downstairs, and get a pad and pencil. On that pad she printed a person's name and a twelve-digit bank account number, although she had no conscious awareness of who that person was. Upon her arrival at the bank, you guessed it, she checked the name and account

number, and she discovered they were real and the source of her \$12 error!

Cindy's superconscious, working through the vehicle of her dreaming, knew the answer, as it did for the famous golfer, Jack Nicklaus, who attributed a change in his putting stroke to information gotten in a dream and to the inventor of the sewing machine, Elias Howe, who also completed that invention with the aid of a dream.

And what of the role of intuition in our daily lives? For instance, have you ever left home with the nagging feeling that something was "wrong," only to discover at the first red light or when pulling into the parking lot that you had forgotten your office keys, book work, grocery list, or wallet? What part of your consciousness was trying to jog your memory?

Or consider this: have you ever started home in your car and got "sidetracked" in deep thought or a daydream? You find yourself in your driveway, and you suddenly realize that you have absolutely no conscious awareness of how you got there! It takes some pretty sophisticated skills to drive a car. What part of your consciousness got you home while you were daydreaming?

There have been countless studies done on hypnosis, subliminal perception, biofeedback, and medically unconscious patients hearing and remembering comments made to them while under general anesthesia.

These studies point to the existence of a superconscious, a level of the mind that possesses enormous knowledge that can be made available to us with a relatively modest effort. Moreover, psychologists know a great deal about the superconscious, and two of its characteristics bear emphasis:

The superconscious is a data-storing mechanism. As mentioned previously, given a normal, healthy brain, everything that happens to us is stored in our superconscious. The superconscious can't tell the difference between actual and vividly imagined experiences!

As to point (1) above, the strongest evidence that our brains are a data-storing mechanism comes from the brilliant neurosurgeon, Dr. W. Penfield. As briefly discussed earlier, the late Dr. Penfield performed electrical stimulation on the brains of over 1,000 patients. What he discovered is that cortical stimulation can bring back incredibly accurate and vivid memories

of long-past events. Some patients not only visually remembered the events, but could hear, smell, and feel them as well. The memories seemed to return like a real-life videotape, and they could be stopped suddenly by turning off the electrode. When restarted, the memory didn't continue where it left off, but went back to the beginning, like a CD player. Apparently, we not only have a videotape recorder in our brain, it also has an "automatic rewind mechanism!" Thus, our superconscious mind is like a super computer, storing and reacting to literally everything that happens to us.

As to point (2), there is a considerable amount of anecdotal and scientific data to support the fact that our superconscious minds do not or can not tell the difference between real and vividly imagined experiences. For instance, several years ago at the University of Chicago, a group of young men who had played little or no basketball were recruited for a study, randomly assigned to one of three groups, and tested on their shooting skills. Group A, the control group, was asked not to touch a basketball during the experiment. Group B worked with a coach who taught them and allowed the young men to practice basketball skills. However, group C practiced in a different fashion: they used a form of imaginative, visual

practice. They were brought into the gym each day, seated in a semi-circle in front of the basket, and asked to mentally practice shooting baskets. At the end of three weeks, all three groups were again tested. Group A, the control group, not surprisingly showed no improvement. Group B, who had worked with the coach, had improved 24 percent. Astonishingly, group C, who had engaged in only visual practice, improved 23 percent, nearly as much as group B!

There are many stories about how the mind can operate if beliefs are held strongly enough, not always to the benefit of the individual. For example, some years ago, there were news reports of a railway worker whose job it was to check boxcars for break-ins at a large switching yard. During a routine check, he found a refrigeration car with its door ajar. Just after he jumped up into the car to investigate, the train suddenly moved forward, slamming the boxcar door shut, locking him inside in total darkness. This unfortunate man thought he was locked in a fully-functioning freezer car. In fact, the freezer car was not working at all: workers had gone for a needed part and hadn't returned prior to the train leaving the terminal. When the train finally arrived at another terminal hours later, the railway worker was found dead in the refrigeration car. On the

boxcar wall, he had scribbled several messages, including: "It is getting colder and colder," "I feel like I am freezing to death," "Can't hold on much longer--this will probably be my last words." Though it was later documented that the temperature in the refrigeration car never dropped below 55°, when an autopsy was performed, the railway worker showed all the symptoms of having frozen to death!

When I was a freshman in college, I learned to downhill ski, and I fell in love with the sport. (In fact, I spent so much time enjoying it that I almost flunked out of college.) Because I had a friend who was a ski instructor, I was able to make good progress, so that by the end of the season, I had just mastered the parallel turn. As summer turned to early fall, and my anticipation of the nearing ski season grew, I went to see a ski documentary film featuring about ten minutes of Stein Erikson, a classically beautiful skier. About then, a strange thing began to happen: I was so psyched up to start skiing again that I began to dream day and night about skiing. I would even see my head on Stein Erikson's body skiing down the hill! When the snow finally arrived, my skiing skills had improved dramatically, a fact that others also quickly saw. The discovery that just thinking could help improve a skill

was completely accidental on my part; no one, least of all me, knew anything about sports visual practice in the late 1950s.

Every moment of our lives we program our superconscious, and this helps create our self-concept. Since the superconscious has no logical functioning ability, it attempts to accommodate the attitudes and beliefs that have been programmed into it. It makes no difference if these attitudes and beliefs are good or bad for us, help or hinder us: our superconscious always attempts to give us what we concentrate on. Because of this, it is vital to remember that our past programming can be modified by more recent learning and by conscious training.

Several related questions emerge from the nature of the superconscious as an information gathering tool which has no built-in predispositions except to materialize our most deeply held thoughts and beliefs. If you do get what you concentrate on, are your attitudes and beliefs moving you in a direction you want to go?

Are they working on making you happy? If not, are you going to continue to leave that programming to others or to chance?

Remember, you have no choice about being programmed because your superconscious will respond to your thoughts and beliefs, whatever those are. You do have a choice about who controls the programming: you can hand over control to others or do it yourself. And you can choose whether that programming is conscious or unconscious. If, for instance, you were trained to be a racist by your parents, you can either believe "I can't escape my training" and remain a bigot, or you can consciously accept a more tolerant point of view, asserting your free will in order to improve yourself.

The Master Skill of Visualization

That the superconscious part of our brain cannot tell the difference between real and vividly imagined experiences is at the heart of the fourth master skill used by empowered people: visualization.

Visualization is the ability to create pictures in your mind, an ability that everyone has.

Among the many terms that can be used synonymously with visualization are: pictures, movies, or videos in your head; mental rehearsal, mental practice; daydreams, fantasies, and imagination; illusions, imagery, and memories.

Of course, most people routinely engage in certain kinds of visualizations without knowing quite what they are doing, for daydreaming and various other forms of imaginative activity are as intrinsically human as breathing. Some people imagine that they have won the lottery, and they spend many hours shopping for new possessions within the comfortable confines of their mind or sailing on the yacht that their winnings purchase.

Others imagine sexual conquests or falling in love with the perfect partner or being a rock star. Still others, out of anger, fear, or pain, imagine more unpleasant situations: the demise of an enemy or the pain of personal martyrdom, for instance.

Yet few people have been taught that, when we focus our minds on a select few goals, those goals strongly tend to become our reality.

Imagine you are a gymnast competing in the Olympics at the most pressure-packed moment. You have one final exercise to complete, the vault, and only if you do it perfectly will you win the gold medal. In the back of your mind, you are aware that over 100 million people worldwide are watching your performance on television. Indeed, many people who are watching in the U.S. are literally sitting on the edges of their seats in anticipation.

How would you react to such incredible pressure? Would the enormity of the situation make you think of every possible way that you could fail? Would the knowledge that you had to do the vault perfectly paralyze you? In short, would anyone really blame you if you "choked" under such pressure?

Mary Lou Retton found herself in exactly the situation described above in 1984. But instead of thinking of the millions of people watching her performance, or becoming paralyzed by the necessity for perfection, Ms. Retton chose another path. She quietly closed her eyes, turned inward, and visualized doing her vault perfectly. She especially imagined "sticking" her landing. This was not difficult for Mary Lou Retton to do, for in her own words, "I did what I always did before a major competition. Before I dropped off to sleep the night before, I mind-scripted it completely. I mentally ran through each routine, every move, imagining everything done perfectly."

May Lou Retton is a practiced visualizer, and I was one of the millions who watched her last vault on television that day, a performance that has been permanently etched into my memory. After she completed her perfect vault with a flawless landing, the look on her face was unforgettable. As she raised her arms in triumph, she knew that she had competed a perfect vault, and she could not have been perfect without having first imagined and visualized the vault as she meant to complete it.

Visualization is no stranger to most world-class and professional athletes. Charles Garfield, in his classic book, *Peak Performance*, puts it this way: "All peak performers I have interviewed report that they use some form of mental rehearsal in both training and competition. However, most have come upon this skill either by chance, or trial and error, rather than formal training."³⁰

Of course, visualization is not limited to sports. Garfield also found that, although they often didn't know that there was a label for what they did, high achievers in business used mental rehearsal. "Peak performers develop powerful mental images of the behavior that will lead to the desired results. They see in their mind's eye the result they want and the actions leading to it. They visualize, not as a substitute for thorough preparation and hard work, but as an indispensable adjunct."³¹

Consider, for example, the following true story. About a hundred years ago, a small firm called the Computing-

³⁰ Charles Garfield (1984). *Peak Performance*. New York: Warner Books, p. 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

Tabulating-Recording Company got its start making punch cards for the government's 1890 Census. Thirty-four years later, in 1924, the still tiny company found itself in the middle of a sales slump so severe that there were even rumors the company was about to go under. However, the firm's founder decided to stay in business and change the company's name, even though people who heard the newly selected name often thought he was arrogant or crazy. But the man, Thomas Watson, was a visualizer, and he had already envisioned what International Business Machine would look like years later as a huge, mature, truly international business. As everyone now knows, his once-failing firm, IBM, has become a multinational corporate giant.

Until very recently, visualization has been the most neglected and undeveloped ability of the brain. Unfortunately, many people still wrongly think that the imagination is some sort of fuzzy, metaphysical, unscientific, untrustworthy slave of the unconscious. This view is not true. Rather, the truth is quite the opposite, and it is this:

Whatever is real was first imagined.

Take a look around you at all of the inventions and devices and machines in our world. How do you suppose they came into physical existence if not through the pathways of the human imagination? Every one of these things, every man-made object in this world, first started as a picture in someone's head! In fact, all scientists and inventors make extensive use of visualization, whether or not they call it visualization. Einstein, for example, insisted that most of his ideas first came to him as visual pictures, not as numbers or words, and he often engaged in what he called "thought experiments." Indeed, his famous General Theory of Relativity was, in part, due to one of those thought experiments in which he imagined what it would be like to ride on the end of a beam of light. Einstein, the paradigm of the man of intelligence, once wrote: "Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

Today, everyday people, not just famous athletes, great inventors, and trained psychologists, are learning to use visualization to improve both their performance and

the quality of their lives. Nevertheless, too many people still don't know that they have an imagination, or they don't realize how much they can do with it. Others use visualization only in a reflexive manner, imagining punishments for their enemies or dire diseases invading their bodies.

You are about to learn how much these people miss and how miraculously active, MVP-oriented visualization can change your life for the better. It is one thing to define and discuss the power of visualization; it is quite another thing to actually experience it.

You must **do** the following exercises for them to be effective!

Exercise Element 30

Visualization Appetizer

First, a tasty warm-up exercise to whet your appetite, so to speak.

Imagine going to your favorite restaurant and ordering your favorite meal. Close your eyes and imagine the waiter bringing that meal to your table, course by course. Slowly see each of your favorite foods, and smell them as they are placed on the table in front of you. Then taste each in your mind. Revel in the sensual experience of eating this meal; really let go and enjoy your imaginary meal.

In the last chapter, you learned how to script your goals in order to make them easier to visualize. In the remainder of this chapter, you will learn how to use visualization to create powerful images of success, improve sports or other types of performance, improve memory, re-program traumatic events in your life, and improve and maintain your health.

This process of visualization does take time and patience, and you should not expect to become master visualizers overnight. The most important thing to

remember is that you should strive to make imagination and visualization a regular part of your life. Do not be discouraged if immediate success is not evident with visualization. Fortunately, visualization is such a powerful process that even limited success with it can frequently overcome years of negative programming. Following are seven guidelines for visualization. None of these should strain anyone's resources, but you should follow them as carefully as possible. As with any learned skill, the more your practice, the better you will get at it.

Visualization Guidelines

Take your visualization practice seriously. The development of your imagination will require some work.

Practice every day, especially at first. The more frequently you practice visualization, the quicker you'll get what you want. Devoting even five to ten minutes a day to visualization will reap you rich rewards.

Make certain your goals for visualization are realistic and under your control. As powerful as visualization is, it is not magic! Although you might

wish you were 6'10" so that you could play center for the New York Knicks, if you're an adult who is only 5'10", no amount of visualization is going to work.

Before starting any visualization practice, make certain you are relaxed. Your brain is most receptive to new learning, including visualization, when you are relaxed.

If, at first, your imagination is not as clear or sensory-rich as you would like, do not worry. Stay with your daily practice, and clearness and richness will come with time. Many people find that taking a deep breath and holding it for a count of six automatically makes their images clearer. Others find that looking up at about a 20° angle helps.

If you find yourself distracted or imagining negative outcomes, don't get upset; rather, gently allow your focus to return to the desired result.

Finally, your mental rehearsal should involve movement. Many beginning visualizers tend to create "still pictures" or "slides" of specific actions. The research, however, is very clear: the best results come when you visualize entire actions

(beginning, middle, end) and see those actions as a video or movie rather than static still pictures.

Many people who are auditory or kinesthetic learners have trouble with visualization at first. The following simple exercises will give you valuable practice with making visual pictures.

Do not skip these exercises!

These skills are absolutely necessary to learning visualization, and they are well worth your time and effort. If you are not already a strong visual learner, you might need to devote several weeks to the practice exercises. Do not hurry over these; do each at least several times, even if they seem to be a bit repetitious.

Exercise Element 31

Remembering

Remember some person who was especially meaningful to you. As his or her face comes into mind, explore it in detail. Really focus in on the features, details, and expression of the face and on the form of the body. Do you see the images in color or in black and white? Are the images clear or fuzzy? Big or small? Close or far away?

Repeat the above exercise, substituting an especially meaningful situation for the person.

Recall the situation in as much sensory detail as possible, including colors, smells, tastes, textures, people present, conversations, and emotions. Do you see the scene as a picture, slide, movie, or video? Again, are the images clear or fuzzy, in color or black and white, big or small, close or far away?

Repeat the above exercise with an object that was especially meaningful to you. Visualize what it looks like, how it feels to the touch, how heavy it is, its coloration, or any other pertinent details.

Exercise Element 32 Mental Snapshots

Take some picture or object that you admire, and study it for one minute. Then close your eyes and try to recall as many details of what picture or object as you can. Repeat this several times with the same picture, striving to remember more completely each time.

Think of your very best friend or lover. With your eyes closed, focus on their face, body, or other notable features. Try to imagine every detail, as if you were trying to form a complete photograph, a mental snapshot, in your mind. Pay attention to the person's characteristic facial expressions and body language, as if you were practicing to be a mimic of the person.

Think back to a house in which you grew up for at least part of your childhood. Picture the house or apartment as you approach it from outside. Go up to the door and enter it, exploring each room of the house carefully, recalling each room's layout, color, and furnishings. Then mentally walk out of the house & explore the neighborhood.

Exercise Element 33 Visualizing the Future

Think of your future, ten years from today.

Visualize exactly how you would like your life to be in financial, spiritual, interpersonal, vocational, and health aspects. Imagine the best possible future for yourself, in light of your MVP.

Point of View

An important consideration in visualization is your vantage point, your perspective.

You can either watch yourself from outside your own body, like a spectator at a public event (dissociated); or you can step into the picture and experience it from the inside, looking at the experience through your own eyes (associated). The difference between dissociated and associated is critical because we react differently to the two perspectives, as the following exercise demonstrates.

Exercise Element 34

Re-Viewing Bad Memories

Think of an unpleasant or traumatic memory. First, re-experience that memory by imagining that you are sitting in a movie theater watching the unpleasant event on the screen, as a spectator (dissociated). Then, actually step into the memory and relive the experience as if you were there again (associated).

For most people, the associated experience is much more intense, and you may feel some resistance in doing it. Obviously, dissociating from an unpleasant memory or trauma usually makes the experience less intense and easier to handle emotionally and psychologically.

This suggests a strategy: when first dealing with a traumatic memory, a feared upcoming event, or even when reflecting back on some criticism you received, it is normally much easier to view first from a dissociated position.

Later, when you are more comfortable, you can imagine yourself reliving the event in an associated mode.

It is also worth noting that, for most people, visualizing your ideal self-image, or your goals is much more motivating when done in the dissociated mode because we tend to be more drawn by dissociated images. If the image is associated, we are already there, and this situation is not as motivating.

Experiencing things in the dissociated or associated mode is not the only way to increase or decrease the intensity of what you are imagining--there are some other important variables. If you wish to intensify an experience, you can consciously attempt to make the scene larger, closer, brighter, more colorful, clearer, or associated. In the case of sound, you can hear things louder, faster, or at a higher pitch.

All of these can make the experience more intense.

On the other hand, if you wish to make an experience less intense, consciously try to make the scene smaller, further away, dimmer, less colorful, fuzzier, or dissociated. In the case of sound, make it softer, slower, or hear it at a soothing pace.

In the following exercise, the object is to play with the flexibility of your consciousness and to practice your visualization skills, perhaps as a musician while warming up might practice scales.

It is vital that you actually experience these changes for yourself.

Exercise Element 35 Playing with Intensities

Think of an unpleasant memory from your life.

Close your eyes and first try to make that experience more intense by experimenting with each of the intensifying modes just discussed.

When you have finished, experiment with making the same experience less intense, by trying each of the de-intensifying modes just discussed.

As you are doing Exercise Element 34, keep track of which mode is most powerful for you, for this is very useful information about yourself. For example, for some people making a picture bigger automatically makes the picture brighter and more colorful. For other people, color, clearness, or loudness does the same thing. We will refer to your most powerful mode as your

"driver mode" because it seems to automatically control other modes as well.

Unfortunately, most humans tend to take their best experiences and make them less intense by making them less colorful, or fuzzier, or moving them far away. Then we take our worst experiences, and we make them more intense by making them louder, brighter, bigger, or more colorful. What a terrific strategy for insuring that our lives will be miserable and unhappy!

Visualization in Sports

Today, most sports psychologists would argue that as much as 60 to 90 percent of success in sports is due to mental training!

Of course, this is not to say that visualization is a secret "silver bullet" long sought by athletes. Athletic excellence still involves (and always will) the learning and practice of physical skills, and a degree of individual talent. But beyond the necessary physical preparation, mental practice can give the professional and amateur athlete alike an added edge.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that sports is like an activity in that visualization can help improve your skill.

Exactly why visualization works so well in sports is being studied, but a couple of points are clear. First, as discussed earlier, all of us (including athletes) create mental pictures prior to a performance. For many of us, however, because of anxiety, fear of failure, and past experience, our mental pictures tend to be negative, and these hurt us rather than help us. According to Garfield:

We overcome or eliminate faulty visualization when we create, and repeatedly practice, visualizations of the proper execution of a movement. Proper mental rehearsal is really nothing more than learning to use your mental capacities in a positive way, effectively choosing, rather than leaving to chance, the neurological patterns that will guide your movements...A single correct image is worth more than tons of verbiage, which overloads and restricts the performer's mind.³²

Second, research by Jacobson, Kolonay, and others indicates that mental practice actually results in small, but measurable, biochemical changes in the muscles that you visualize moving. As Kolonay noted: "Muscles

³² Garfield, p. 81.

actually performed the exact motions imagined." According to Garfield, mental practice results in "neuromuscular templates," ideal mental pictures, of how to move, and these eventually result in quite real, improved performance.

Recall the study discussed earlier about how mental practice improved certain basketball skills. A similarly interesting study was conducted in 1985 by Woolfolk, Parish,

and Murphy who investigated the effects of different visualizations on the ability to putt a golf ball. Thirty college students were randomly assigned to one of three groups: Positive visualization ("imagine the ball rolling right into the cup"); Negative visualization ("imagine the ball rolling right toward the cup, but at the last second narrowly missing"); and a Control group (given no visualization). The subjects in each group tried ten putts a day for six consecutive days. At the end of the experiment, the control group improved 10 percent; the positive visualizers improved 30 percent; and the negative visualizers declined 21 percent in accuracy. Thus, there was a total difference of 51 percent between the positive and negative visualizers!

The above results would certainly not surprise Jack Nicklaus, a practiced visualizer for over thirty years, and widely recognized as the greatest golfer who ever lived. In his book, *Golf My Way*, he describes how he uses mental practice.

I never hit a shot without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. It's like a color movie. First I see the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes and I 'see' the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behavior on landing. Then there's a short of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality.³³

There are essentially three basic ways that you can use visualization in sports (or any other endeavor). In one type, **mission or goal visualization**, you imagine already having achieved the desired outcome. In other words, what would you see, hear, and feel if your outcome became a reality? In the second type, **mental rehearsal**, you mentally practice the steps necessary to

³³ Jack Nicklaus (1974) *Golf My Way*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

achieve your outcome. The third type, **corrective visualization**, involves the use of imagination to mentally correct mistakes as soon as possible after making them.

To illustrate how a normal, recreational athlete can use each of these techniques, I will use a personal example. I play in a competitive co-ed volleyball league; in the division in which I play, the average age of the male players is approximately 30. However, the average male age on our team is about 50. One of the reasons that we have remained competitive in that division (we even won it once) is our use of mental practice. Following is the ten minute routine that I personally use before each game. This is a routine that can successfully be used by you in whatever sports or activities you participate. However, like all of these suggestions, you must go through the complete process if it is to be effective.

I sit in an easy chair in a quiet room and quickly go through my relaxation routine. I then engage in two kinds of **mission/goal visualization**. I first imagine what it would be like to again win the division. I see the final triumphant point scored, hear the cheers of my teammates, and accept the congratulations of the

opposing team. Then I think about a specific goal for that night's competition. For example, I imagine how many games it will take to win (we play the best three out of five) and what our winning score in each game will be.

Next, I mentally practice each of the specific volleyball skills needed to win the game. For example, I **mentally rehearse** all of the game's skills several times: serving, bumping, setting, spiking, and blocking. As I mentally rehearse each skill, I see my movements flowing, as if I am watching a movie or a videotape. For several of the skills above, I also have a model--someone else who performs that skill very well. I first see him doing the skill, and then I picture myself doing it in the same way.

When I make a mistake during the competition, I immediately use **corrective visualization**. If, for example, I miss a serve, I quickly close my eyes and mentally correct the error.

Memory Improvement

Another important use of visualization is in the improvement of memory. It is common for people to report that visualization tripled or quadrupled memory recall. For others, who really take the time to develop these skills, the results are more astounding. I have

known failing or D students, for example, who have become B and even A students by simply learning how to use their imagination.

You should use both your right and left brain capacities, for both logical/analytical capacities (controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain) and emotional/intuitive capacities (controlled by the right hemisphere of the brain) are necessary for a balanced existence.

Below is a list of the characteristics of both hemispheres of the brain.

Brain Hemispheres	
Left Brain Activities	Right Brain Activities
Logical Reasoning	Emotional
Analytical	Intuitive
Problem Solving	Spontaneous
Linear Thinking	Creative
Words	Symbols
Math	Visual Images
Reading	Dreams
Writing	Art/Music
Language	Non-Verbal
Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions

Unfortunately, most of us are products of an educational system that strongly favors the left hemisphere of the brain. For instance, many of us have been taught to learn only by reading, by hearing a lecture, or by rote memorization. While the left hemisphere of our brain plays an important role in learning, magical things begins to happen when we use

the right hemisphere as well. If you think, for example, about your most persistent (and perhaps traumatic) memories, chances are those memories activate both sides of your brain at once. You saw, heard, and felt something so intensely that the memory stays with you. In other words, the real secret to an improved memory is to get as many senses as possible involved in your learning (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste), and to do that as intensely as possible (using imagination, association, fantasy, and stories).

Mnemonics

Try to answer the following two questions.

- (1) What are the names of the Great Lakes?
- (2) When and where was the Magna Carta signed?

Since it may have been a long time since your last geography or history course, you may have trouble remembering, even though you likely learned both facts sometime during your schooling. However, by using mnemonic devices, one of the tricks to improve memory, you can forever remember the answer to both of these questions.

A mnemonic device simply involves taking what we want to learn and associating it with something simpler that is already in our memory bank. For example, when

trying to remember the Great Lakes, you might first have to ask yourself, "How many are there?" before trying to recall each name. With a little imagination, however, you could have taken the first letter of each of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior) and formed a word: HOMES. Now simply recall HOMES and you'll never again forget the five Great Lakes. This technique, though amazingly simple, is tremendously effective.

In the case of the Magna Carta, you might imagine the following. In merry olde England, long before daily newspapers needed to be taken to recycling centers, people in cities got most of their news from large billboards posted in the central square of a town.

With that in mind, picture people going to the central billboard where there is a large notice that declares:



Picture people running to sign the Magna Carta to get their free lunch and, as they do so, they look at the clock on the wall which reads 12:15. Even years from now, if you want to remember where and when the Magna Carta was signed, you'll never forget that the place was England, and the date was 1215!

All you need to do is take the few seconds necessary to use your imagination and to activate the right side of your brain in a compelling way, for imagination has one major advantage over using simple pictures: **you can be creative.** Your mind has the capacity for incredible fantasy. **You can do anything in your mind.**

Furthermore, you tend to pay greater attention to those things in your life that are out of the ordinary, and you can use that particular characteristic of your mind to your advantage. **Indeed, the more illogical,**

**ridiculous, out of proportion, exaggerated, or active
your imagery is, the better you will remember.**

Thus, you can make your mental pictures huge, exaggerate their number, make them colorful, make them move, or put things together in an illogical way, and you will recall what you want to more easily.

Exercise Element 36 Visual Linking System

Quickly read the following items, then see how many you can write down from memory: bottle, ceiling, telephone pole, roses tire, tree, elephant, street, dishes, and vacuum cleaner.

Using a visual linking system, you can easily remember this seemingly unrelated list of items.

Have a friend read the following paragraph to you.

Simply close your eyes and form the mental pictures given below. Trust the experience--you are in for a surprise!

Picture yourself holding a bottle. You let go of that bottle and, much to your amazement, rather than dropping to the floor, it floats to the ceiling. Picture the bottle floating to the ceiling. Ceiling and telephone pole. Imagine a miniature, four-foot-long, telephone pole hanging upside down from the ceiling. Just let that image form in your head.

Telephone pole and roses. Now picture a long string of wild red roses attached to the telephone pole. One end of the roses is attached to the pole, the other end is flapping in the breeze. Roses and

a tire. Now picture the end of the roses that is not attached to the telephone pole being wrapped around a tire. The tire is a huge, ten foot in diameter, farm tire: picture it. Tire and a tree. Now imagine the farm tire swinging back and forth in the breeze. Its arc gets longer and longer with each swing, until finally the tire hits a tree. See some of the branches of the tree breaking off as the tire hits it. Tree and elephant. Picture a pink elephant with its trunk wrapped around the base of the tree. It's trying to pull the tree out of the ground. Elephant and street. See the back legs of the elephant standing in a beautiful tree-lined street. Street and dishes. Now imagine these huge dishes bounding down the street toward you, one going right over the top of your head. Dishes and vacuum cleaner. Pulling the huge dishes down the street is a giant vacuum cleaner which sucks each of them up as they reach the end of the street. Now open your eyes.

If you are like most people, you can now correctly and quickly remember each of the ten items, literally forwards and backwards. **Try it.** You can come back

to this list a week or a month from now and still remember 90 percent of the items.

Another practical use of mnemonic devices is for recalling names, since many people have trouble remembering names, especially when they are first introduced to others. If you learn to do the following, I guarantee that your memory of names will dramatically improve.

Exercise Element 37 Remembering Names

The first step is to mentally set the stage, to prepare yourself. For example, if the hostess at a party is walking toward you with her husband, a fellow you have never met, say to yourself, "I'm about to be introduced to someone, and I will remember his name." Then the trick is to get your three major senses involved immediately (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic). If she introduces her husband as "John," for example, do these three things in quick succession:

- (1)** picture the word JOHN printed on the person's forehead in red magic marker (visual);
- (2)** then reach out and shake his hand (kinesthetic);
- and **(3)** as you are shaking his hand, say, "It's nice to meet you John" (auditory). If you think this is too simple to work, try it: this technique works.

Another memory trick involves remembering simple items, especially in situations where there is limited time. For example, maybe on the way to work you recall that you need to pick up a loaf of bread and some milk on the way home. Remembering may be really difficult because you now have all day to forget, and since you are driving, you can't really stop, write yourself a note, and post it in the car.

But you can do something similar to that in your mind. Simply pick one location somewhere in or on your car, mentally picture what you want to remember (in an exaggerated fashion) in or on that location, and then always mentally check that same location whenever you get into the car.

For instance, the location that I chose is the left front fender of my car. In this situation, I would quickly picture a huge loaf of bread and an immense container of milk on that fender. With very little effort, I am now in the habit of always checking the left front fender when I get into my car to "see" what is there. So tonight, on the way home from work when I mentally check that fender, I know I will "see" the loaf of bread and the milk. All I have done is use visualization and the power of my imagination to remember in order to save an additional trip to the grocery store, perhaps giving myself additional time to relax or enjoy myself.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

The earlier material in this chapter dealing with association and dissociation, increasing or decreasing sensory intensity, and remembering names comes from a relatively new branch of psychology called neuro-linguistic programming (NLP, for short).

NLP was originally the brainchild of Richard Bandler and John Griner who, in the early 1970s, combined their computer programming and linguistic skills to develop a new model of how to produce change in humans.

Neuro refers to the physiological processes associated with internal pictures, sounds, and feelings. Linguistic refers to the language associated with those internal experiences. Programming refers to the fact that we have choices, that once we come to understand our own (or others) internal maps, we can choose to change them or reprogram them and thus **change the way we experience the world.**

NLP is best thought of as a model of excellence, in that it has provided a model for successful therapists, salespeople, communicators, goal setters, marriages, for ordinary people who want to become extraordinarily empowered. NLP seeks to understand how people do

what they do rather than focusing on their reasons for doing those things. It teaches people to change how they process those experiences internally. NLP is a kind of human "software" that can be used to organize your experiences in more productive ways.

In my twenty plus years as a counselor, teacher, and empowerment facilitator, I have yet to find a more powerful, yet elegant, change model than NLP.

Following are two examples of NLP exercises. The first exercise is called the New Behavior Generator, and it is an excellent way to model new behavior.

Exercise Element 38 New Behavior Generator

Decide on the new behavior(s) that you want to learn.

Pick as a model someone who does the desired behavior well.

Watch, listen, and sense how the model does the desired behavior.

Convert that learning into a mental videotape.

Substitute your own image and/or voice for the model's.

Step into the video and experience it through your own senses.

Think of a future situation where you will use your new behavior.

Play that future situation through in your mind as a video.

The second NLP exercise, the Mistake Changer, involves learning from our mistakes.

All of us make mistakes in our lives, and there is much we can learn from these mistakes if we view them less defensively. The steps involved in the Mistake Changer are simple.

Exercise Element 39 Mistake Changer

Imagine yourself alone in a theater, watching a movie of the mistake that you made. Make the movie far enough away so that you feel totally detached and objective. In the case of severe trauma, you might imagine yourself in the balcony; see yourself below watching the movie.

View the entire event carefully and objectively. Observe yourself and the other person(s) involved.

Ask, as you watch with detachment, "what am I learning?" In the case of trauma, ask "is there anything I now know, or have learned since the event that would have helped me cope better with the situation?"

4. Explore how you can use this new knowledge now or in the future.

One of the great benefits of this exercise is that if you ever encounter the same troubling situation again, you will have thought about and practiced a more resourceful way of dealing with it.

Healing Visualization

Visualization can assist in healing, much more so than you might imagine in your wildest guesses.

Although I have long been interested in the use of visualization as an aid to healing, there was also a part of me that was skeptical. While I had used visualization successfully for just about everything else, until a couple of years ago I had not been presented with the opportunity to apply visualization to my state of health.

I was hiking with my sons, Mark and Chris in New York's Adirondack Mountains when I slipped off a rock face and severely injured my right ankle. By the time my sons helped me traverse the seven miles out of the mountains, it was after dark and I was physically, and emotionally drained. Although the ankle hurt a good deal, I decided to wait until the next morning to have the ankle x-rayed.

That night, before I fell asleep, a strange thing happened. A voice in my head pointedly asked, "Ryan, why don't you practice what you preach? Why don't

you design a visualization to aid in healing your ankle?" That night, and every night for a couple of months to follow, I visualized that ankle healing; I saw nurturing, cleansing blood flowing to the ankle, and I visualized myself walking, running, and playing volleyball perfectly normally.

That isn't to say I avoided my measure of pain. The next day in Lake Placid, I was simply told (after x-rays) that the ankle was broken, and it was put into a cast. I was given my x-rays and instructed to consult with an orthopedic specialist when I returned home. Five days later, when I was finally able to see the specialist, I was told for the first time how severely injured my ankle was: I had broken my ankle on both sides, cracked the bottom bone of my leg, and had also incurred severe ligament damage. The specialist also informed me that he wanted me in his office the following Monday for an operation.

My reaction to that news was so dramatic, he agreed, "just on the off-chance that something has changed in the past five days," to x-ray the ankle again. Fifteen minutes later he returned, shaking his head. "Mr. Ryan," he began tentatively, "I have been an orthopedic surgeon for 20 years, and I have never seen an ankle

heal like yours has in five days." It took some effort, but I avoided falling off the examination table in astonishment. And I gained new respect for the power of imagination.

In short, I didn't need the operation, was out of the cast in 5 1/2 weeks, and was running and playing volleyball again within four months. The doctor had told me I would be in a cast for at least twelve weeks, and I should not expect to play volleyball again for almost a year!

We now know that relaxation and visualization can trigger both the release of endorphins (the body's natural painkillers), and can also positively stimulate the body's immune system. While this may sound like new, "cutting edge" treatment, the use of "mind-body" techniques in medicine has a very long history. Indeed, it has only been in the last century that our culture has forgotten that the mind can have powerful positive and negative influences on our physiology. In essence, visualization techniques are no more than a way of reestablishing contact between our mind and our body. Today, we have a new branch of science, called psychoneuro-immunology, which deals with the effect of the mind on the body. Although many researchers

have contributed to this new science, Carl and Stephanie Simonton, of the Simonton Institute in Texas, were among the pioneers of this new science. Carl is a radiation oncologist; Stephanie is a psychotherapist. In studying the use of biofeedback principles, they began to wonder out loud that, if the mental image of a tropical beach could raise the temperature in our hands, was it possible to devise some imagery that could help destroy cancer cells and also strengthen the patient's immune system?

Although this suggestion was considered totally outrageous by most people in the medical community in the early 1970s, the Simontons proved that the answer to the question was "yes!" They simply encouraged their cancer patients to enter a relaxed state and then picture, in living color, their white cells as polar bears or "pacmen" gobbling up the cancerous cells.

In one study of 159 patients with medically incurable cancer who were exposed to the Simontons' treatment methods, 22 percent went into a complete remission, 20 percent reduced the size of their tumor, and 27 percent stabilized their cancer. Furthermore, even

those patients who died lived nearly twice as long as the control group.³⁴

Also consider the work of Bernie Siegel, author of *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*, who is a surgeon at the Yale--New Haven Hospital and an assistant professor of surgery at Yale Medical School. Although surgery is a highly specialized left brain activity, Dr. Siegel uses relaxation, imagery, and soothing music with his patients. His other tools include hugs, a box of crayons (with which he asks patients to draw a picture of their illness), and teaching his patients to love. **He now believes that surviving cancer has as much to do with mental attitude as it does with the extent of the disease.**³⁵

³⁴ Carl and Stephanie Simonton (1984). *Getting Well Again*. New York: Bantam, pp. 12-13.

³⁵ Bernie Siegel, M.D. (1986). *Love, Medicine & Miracles*. New York: Harper & Row.

While it is important to note that relaxation and imagery are not substitutes for more standard medical treatment, a mind trained in positive visualization can be a potent healing force. Scientific, controlled tests have demonstrated the positive effects of imagination on all kinds of medical problems from warts to severe burns to cancer. Following are some steps to aid in your own healing process.

Exercise Element 40

Healing Visualization Process

Learn enough about your illness, and the body part(s) affected, particularly how that part of the body functions normally, to help you visualize what needs to be cured or healed. It is also important not to get caught in obsessive thinking about your illness or injury, for that kind of thinking is bound to be counterproductive. Ask your doctor for a simple explanation and/or sketch of the part(s) affected.

Get relaxed, using one of the techniques learned earlier or by listening to soothing music.

White blood cells are your first line of defense against illness and injury. Make them a part of your visualization. Imagine the illness or injury site getting better, seeing your white blood cells as pacmen (or as polar bears or as a vast, healing army) eating the diseased cells.

See both your white cells and any medical treatment you may be receiving as ridding the body of illness or injury. As vividly as you can, imagine yourself getting better. Picture the illness fading

into nothingness or the injury site being cleared of all trace of injury.

See yourself as totally free of your illness/injury and able to function normally.

Thank your superconscious, your inner self, your soul, or God for its continued assistance in the healing process.

You have now been introduced to one of the most powerful master skills, one that is practiced by virtually all consistently empowered people. These people know that one of the abilities that separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom is the ability to think about and visualize our future. Visualization allows your future to have a shaping impact on your present, freeing you from old, outdated scripts.

In the final chapter, you will learn how to maintain and expand your empowerment level.

V How Do I Maintain and Expand My Gains?

In this chapter, you will learn how to maintain and expand your empowerment gains by

- (I) applying the principle of Pareto's Law to your life;
- (II) learning the last master skill: Positive Expectation.

Dealing with the "Old You"

Consistent, long-term personal empowerment obviously requires a decision to change as well as the time, skills, knowledge, and practice to effect those changes. But this is still not quite enough: empowerment also requires constant work to sustain gains and to expand upon previous gains.

For many people, the "old you" will exert tremendous pressure to return to familiar, unproductive attitudes and behaviors. A degree of resistance is inevitable in most of us, for the power of our personal history is often strong. Nor is the object of empowerment to deny that we have been subject to our past training and disempowering beliefs. Rather, the point of empowerment is the knowledge that it is within our power to choose not to let our past dominate our

present and our future. That takes staying power and conviction. By this point, you should have a good grip on the conviction that you are in charge of your life, and now you will learn how to encourage the necessary persistence to keep from backsliding.

But if the principles and skills of empowerment are astonishingly simple, why is it so difficult for people to change, even when that change is sincerely wanted? How many people, for example, have started on a program to lose weight, only to find themselves back to their old weight six months later? Of course, the answer to that question is complicated, but some of it can be explained by the concept of **comfort zones** that govern much of our behavior. **These comfort zones lead us to fear change, and to become addicted to what is familiar.**

In order to understand why we can intend something, work toward and reach a goal, and yet fail to maintain or add to our gains, we need to understand two related principles: **the "Comfort Zone" and the "Familiarity Principle."**

The Comfort Zone

The term "comfort zone" means behavior within predictable, comfortable, normative, habituated, boundaries, behavior that might be referred to as on "automatic pilot." The original work on the comfort zone was done at IBM during the 1950s where it was found that even IBM's high-powered sales force fluctuated between very predictable upper and lower limits. That is, most of their sales personnel would not fall below a certain level of performance. If they did, bosses and colleagues would get angry, and usually the person would be distressed by his/her own performance. In other words, there as a **fear of failure** operating to motivate the person to return to their comfort zone.

However, those sales personnel at the other extreme, the ones who had substantially surpassed their sales goals, often ran into another problem. The researchers found that, with the best sales people, now success was often as uncomfortable as failure. Why would achieving the American dream of success be uncomfortable? What seemed to be operating was a **fear of success**. The sudden success generated fears about whether the person would be able to maintain the increased level of success, whether others would

expect the new level of success to be maintained, whether the success would somehow change relationships with friends and colleagues, even whether success might necessitate a move.

Obviously, powerful forces operate to keep us in our comfort zones, and you need to be aware of these forces as you embark on your course of self-change. The biological urge to survive may certainly contribute to a resistance to what an individual views as "taking chances," and our childhood programming undoubtedly contributes to the creation of our comfort zone. Simply be aware that there will be some resistance and that such resistance is absolutely normal. Then consciously choose to go beyond the old borders of your comfort zone.

The strength of your personal commitment, and the techniques you have learned in this book, will be the deciding factors in your overcoming normal resistance, in allowing you to break out of the prison cell of your comfort zone and to assert full control of your life.

The Familiarity Principle

The Familiarity Principle holds that we usually do what is familiar, not necessarily what is most beneficial for us or others.

Tom Rusk, author of *Mind Traps*, has extended the definition of comfort zone with his concept of the "Familiarity Mind Trap." Mind traps are self-defeating attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that keep us stuck in familiar ruts. According to Rusk, "Familiarity traps are attempts to stay the way you are. Even if you are filled with self-doubt, you will be afraid to change because if you do, you will lose your familiar identity. It's terrifying to know who you are."³⁶ Rusk believes that the familiarity principle has even more power than the pleasure principle; although we may consciously prefer comfort to pain, the familiarity principle usually wins out. As Rusk says, "We usually do what is familiar, not what is more comfortable or beneficial."³⁷

³⁶ Tom Rusk (1988). *Mind Traps*. Los Angeles: Price, Stein, and Sloan, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

What is the primary culprit in getting us to follow the familiarity principle?

"Self-doubt and other mind traps dull intelligence. They rob you of your ability to be rational about yourself. No matter how smart you may be about anything else, self-doubt causes you to be stupid about yourself."³⁸

The myth is that our comfort zone keeps negative things from happening to us. In fact, the opposite is true: the familiarity principle and the comfort zone keep us from getting what we want from life.

One of the things we know about consistently empowered people from any walk of life is that they have developed the ability to tolerate the anxiety and fear associated with change. They consciously choose to expand their comfort zone whenever possible.

They seem to be guided by the motto:

Feel the fear and do it anyway!

If you can learn to do this, a strange and powerful thing begins to happen. If you give yourself enough time, what started as unfamiliar and uncomfortable

³⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

eventually becomes a part of your comfort zone. When that happens, you then have the comfort zone working for you rather than against you.

For instance, I have a colleague who started running in his late thirties, primarily to lose weight. At first, he hated running and had to force himself to do it five times a week. But he was determined to keep at it, and eventually he came to love running. Now, ten years later, he runs almost every day, and has run in many marathons. What started out as a chore has become a part of his comfort zone, so that now, if he goes without running for a few days, he feels uncomfortable! He now has his comfort zone working for him rather than against him.

All self-growth requires acting, talking, and being seen as someone different than you have been. If you desire change, you must be willing to tolerate the discomfort of change. As Rusk and others have pointed out, change is impossible without deliberate and stilted efforts at first. You may feel anxious, awkward, artificial, and downright uncomfortable at first. But stick with it, for your empowerment gains will richly reward your time and effort.

Impatience is our worst enemy with our personal growth efforts. Some people are more than willing to suffer the discomfort of learning a new sport or job-related skill; yet, these same people will give up after a few days of effort in the area of personal growth. In order to really know something, it must become a part of your thinking, feeling, and behavior.

The 21-Day Rule

A very consistent finding is the so-called 21-Day Rule. Whenever you attempt to change a habit, or to acquire a new one, give yourself a minimum of three weeks before you expect to see significant results. Sometimes you will be pleasantly surprised, and the change will begin to happen in less time. However, the 21-Day Rule will serve you well. Adopt it now.

In other words, you must be patient enough to make it a habit.

Failure

It is impossible to become truly empowered without modifying what most of us have been taught about failure. Consistently empowered people get

themselves to act, and when their actions don't work they change them. Thus, paradoxically, the more empowered you become, the more mistakes you will make. The trick is to banish the word failure from your vocabulary. **Treat your "failures" as mistakes from which you learn, and treat the "problems" that such mistakes sometimes bring as challenges to be mastered.**

Indeed, empowered people have a unique way of looking at what others call failure, as illustrated by this oft-quoted story about Thomas Edison. Even after Edison had a patent on the electric light bulb, he could not find a filament material that would not burn out quickly. It took him over 10,000 experiments before he finally succeeded in finding one. When Edison had tried over 7,000 unsuccessful experiments on the filament, he was interviewed by a reporter who asked Edison how he could persist in the face of 7,000 failures. Edison's reply, typical of very empowered people, was simple: "Young man, I have not failed 7,000 times. I have learned 7,000 ways that the electric light bulb won't work!" Thomas Edison had more "failures" and lost more money than any other inventor in history; however, he also was the greatest inventor of all time with 1,097 patents to his name.

Becoming a "Life Athlete"

Again, to quote Tom Rusk, "You can't stay the same if you change how you act. If you're willing to keep playing the awkward, unfamiliar role, your mistakes will decrease, the floundering of transition will disappear and you'll become who you've been trying to be." Once your self-concept begins to change for the better, it is difficult to behave or to be treated poorly for long. "The familiarity principle now begins to work on your behalf in stead of against you. You can no longer stand to act or be treated with disrespect without becoming uncomfortable and taking remedial action."³⁹

What you are learning in this process is how to be a "life athlete," a person who wants to play the game of life with as much mastery as possible.

If we study professional, world-class, Olympic, or even serious amateur athletes, we discover a very interesting phenomenon. They spend over 90 percent of their time preparing and only about 5-10 percent of their time playing. For most of us, however, in terms of the game of life, those figures are reversed. Most of us spend less than 5 percent of our time exercising our

³⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

empowerment muscles. Even if you have never participated in athletics in your life, and never intend to do so in the future, you can become a "Life Athlete" who plays the game of life extremely well. Thus, life's game, like any other, has principles and rules, the first one of which is vitally important.

**The master players in life's game
know it is a game.**

Do not forget what every child inherently knows: games are best played for the fun of them, even if they are quite serious games, and those players who successfully integrate the concept of fun with the idea that one needs to learn from one's mistakes, do best. While it is not generally regarded as "adult" to have "fun" playing life's game, it is worthwhile to question attitudes that disempower us by making life too serious a matter to enjoy.

Acting Effectively

As the following writers each say in their own way, effective action is the difference between empowerment and disempowerment.

"The difference between a dream and a pipe dream is the act of doing. The pipe dreamer will fantasize, the dreamer will act." (Carol Coleman, *Late Bloomers*).

Often we get caught in the mental trap of seeing enormously successful people and thinking they are where they are because they have some special gift. Yet a closer look shows that the greatest gift that extraordinarily successful people have over the average person is their ability to take action." (Anthony Robbins, *Unlimited Power*).⁴⁰

"It is my opinion that at the moment of your death, you will not be as sorry for the things that you have done as you will for the things that you wanted to do but you never did." (Robert Anthony, *Total Self-confidence*).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Anthony Robbins (1986). *Unlimited Power*. New York: Fawcett-Columbine, p. 7.

⁴¹ Robert Anthony (1979). *Total Self-confidence*. New York: Berkeley Books, p. 116.

Pareto's Law

Almost one hundred years ago, an Italian sociologist and economist, Vilfredo Pareto, came up with a principle called **Pareto's Law or the 80/20 rule**. This law or rule has been applied to many situations, from sales to empowerment, and it can make an enormous difference in the lives of those who truly understand and use it. The "law" states that:

Pareto's Law

Only 20% of what we do produces 80% of our results; conversely, 80% of what we do produces 20% of our results.

The secret of success is to stay focused on the 20% of our lives that matters and devote more of our time and skills to that 20%. Again, you already know what matters in your life by the work you have completed on roles, mission, vision, purpose, and goals. By devoting more of your time and effort to the 20% that truly matters, you gain tremendous **leverage** in your life: every one percent improvement in effectiveness

produces five percent more desired results! That's the power of Pareto's Law.

The Great Eight

In my experience, there are a select few skills which are truly effective in maintaining and expanding on empowerment gains when practiced on a daily or weekly basis. I have distilled the many possible approaches into eight activities which, if they become habitual, will make an enormous difference in your life. Much like throwing a rock into a pond, the ripple effect will generate a tremendous increase in your personal circles of influence. I call these activities the "Great Eight."

Morning Questions/Pep Talk/Mirror Messages

Even though there are twenty-four hours in a day, I don't believe that all time is created equal. I am convinced that what happens to us during both the first and last ten minutes of each day is inordinately important. An athlete would not dream of starting a physical activity without first stretching and warming up. Similarly, we need to psychologically stretch and warm up each morning before starting our day. Following is the psychological warm-up that I use every morning.

Exercise Element 41 Wake-up Stretch

Set your alarm clock for five minutes before you actually need to get out of bed. Or, better, eliminate the need for alarm clocks by learning to auto-suggest a wake-up time when you go to bed at night. In any case, it is important to wake up gently, without feeling rushed. Before you get out of bed, ask (and answer) these three questions:

What do I have to be thankful for?

What do I have to look forward to today?

What can I do today to move me closer to my MVP and my goals?

If you wake up in the morning and ask question like "Oh God, another day: why me, Lord?" the supercomputer will spend the rest of the day validating those questions. But the opposite is also possible. If you ask questions like, "What do I have to look forward to today?" the supercomputer will make every attempt to validate that question.

So the choice is really yours: you can either program your supercomputer with garbage, or program it with empowering thoughts and questions.

Exercise Element 42

Morning Pep Talk/Mirror Talk

This technique is simple, yet so very powerful, if you try it for even one week, I bet you will see results. Within the first fifteen minutes each morning, put yourself in front of a mirror. Your morning Pep-Talk should be very brief (10-15 seconds), should have some humor in it, and should be positive. You should also make certain that you establish unbroken eye contact with yourself in the mirror.

A sample morning Pep-Talk might go something like this: "Good morning, you good-looking devil! This is going to be a fabulous day, and I'm going to make the most of it! I am really looking forward to _____ today. "I'll be unbeatable!"

Another idea is to use a water-soluble pen to write an inspirational or motivational word, sentence, or short quote on your mirror. This kind of "mirror talk" is a surprisingly powerful method to program your supercomputer in a positive way.

Daily Monitoring of Self-Talk

The second high leverage activity involves the daily monitoring of our self-talk. As previously discussed, we talk to ourselves so often each day that it is easy to put our self-talk on "automatic pilot" and not pay much conscious attention to it. This is a great mistake. We need to constantly monitor our self-talk and, when necessary to stop and reframe any that is negative. As also discussed earlier, another worthwhile technique is to actually read or listen to positive self-talk, affirmations, each day.

Expanding Your Circle of Influence

Stephen Covey, in his landmark book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, introduces a marvelous concept: the **Circle of Influence**. Because we only have so much time and energy to expend each day, we can either spend most of the time expanding what Covey calls the Circle of Influence or, conversely, we expand our **Circle of Concern**. Reactive, unempowered people spend a great deal of time on their Circle of Concern. They tend to focus on problems rather than on solutions, on what isn't working in their lives rather than what is. All of us have a Circle of Influence, consisting of family, friends, co-workers, our boss or employees, our customers/clients, and our

community. If, each day, you make a genuine attempt to expand your Circle of Influence, your life will be profoundly changed. You can expand your Circle of Influence in several ways, including the following:

Ways to Expand Your Circle of Influence

By keeping promises to ourselves and others.

By being loyal to people, even when those people are not in our presence, and even if they are not entirely loyal to us.

By doing what Ken Blanchard calls, "Catching People Doing Something Right." That is, by genuinely praising and thanking people.

By being a part of the solution, not part of the problem.

By having the courage to ask.

By going the extra mile at work or in your important relationships.

By really listening to people, especially when you are tempted to be reactive.

By apologizing quickly and non-defensively when we make a mistake.

In going through this list, you might want to honestly locate the points in which you are weakest. Regard these as your immediate challenges, and put extra effort into improving your performance rating in those

categories. For instance, if you tend to be angrily reactive in your relationships, concentrate on going the extra mile (point 6) and on really listening to people (point 7), giving it at least the full effort of the 21-day rule.

Daily Visualization of Your MVP and Goals

Since you have already written your Mission, Vision, or Purpose statement, and have set some short, medium, and long-term goals, what you now need to do is to constantly keep your MVP and goals in your conscious awareness and to do so in a way that is compelling. The best way to do this is to daily visualize, in sensory rich detail, your MVP and goals. This does not need to be a time-consuming process: with a little practice, visualization of your MVP and goals will take only a few minutes.

When you do your visualization is a matter of personal choice and convenience. I like to arrive at work a few minutes early, and I use that time for visualization. Others add the visualization to their morning questions/pep-talk routine. Still others do it just before falling asleep at night. **The real trick is to get into the habit of doing it every day.** There is no need to become compulsive about this (or anything), in that, if

you skip a day now and then, it will still be an effective technique. But until it does become a true habit, try to do your visualizing every day.

Daily Solo

The fifth high leverage activity is one that I refer to as the "Daily Solo." Put simply, it is important for each of us to take sometime on a daily basis to be by ourselves and to engage in reflective activities. Depending on my schedule, I like to take a minimum of about 15 minutes to a maximum of about one hour for my Daily Solo.

How exactly you utilize this time is open to experimentation and personal preference. Here are some possibilities:

Possible Daily Solos

Listen to relaxing music.

Complete a relaxation routine.

Read inspirational literature.

Listen to an inspirational or education self-help tape.

Do aerobic exercise such as walking, jogging, swimming, skating or cross-country skiing.

Sit quietly somewhere in nature.

Take a long, warm bath.

Although at first you may struggle to find time for your Daily Solo, it is a habit that will deeply enrich your life. The important thing is to take time to be peacefully with yourself and to feel, think, and/or experience your connectedness to others, to the world, and to your spirit.

Nightly Review

The sixth high leverage habit is that of the Nightly Review. I stated earlier that not all time is created equal. Just as the first fifteen minutes of each day are important, so are the final 10-15 minutes before you fall

asleep. I frame my nightly review around several questions.

Exercise Element 43

Nightly Review Questions

What went well for me today? It is important that we learn to celebrate our "victories" each day. And don't just think about what went well for you; make it into a big, colorful, bright movie or video in your head. As discussed earlier, when we make mental pictures bigger, brighter, or more colorful, they become more intense and effective for us. In the case of our victories, we want to make them intense and memorable.

What mistakes did I make today/what went wrong today? Play a mental movie in your head of the entire scene as it happened. Many people ask themselves such a question each night, and the answers often keep them from falling asleep! The trick is to ask an additional question, number 3 below.

What could I have done differently? Then take the mistake or distressing part out of your mental movie, and consciously insert what you could have done differently to come out with a better result.

Remember, you control the mental movies in your head. Just as a TV or movie producer edits their work, so can you. A great benefit of this technique is that, should you encounter a similar situation again, you will have mentally prepared and practiced a new and more productive response.

As previously stated, the time immediately before you fall asleep is also particularly appropriate for visualizing your MVP and your goals.

Dreams, too, can provide you with programming possibilities that should not be overlooked. Even if you seldom remember your dreams, with a little practice, you can get your superconscious working for you while you sleep for what I call "superconscious problem solving." If you have struggled consciously with a problem without success, turn that problem over to your superconscious before you fall asleep. Often, you will wake up with a satisfactory solution. Or try the following simple dream/sleep programming, and you may be astonished at the results.

Exercise Element 44

Simple Dream Programming

Choose an issue or question that you really want to solve.

Go over the issue in your mind or in your journal, asking the following questions:

Am I really ready to solve this problem or challenge?

What are the alternative solutions to this problem/challenge?

Why won't one of these solutions do?

What would I have to give up (e.g., sympathy, martyrdom, dependency) if the problems/challenge is resolved?

How would things be different if the problem or challenge were resolved?

Think of a one sentence question or request that expresses your deepest and clearest desire to resolve this question. An example of such a sentence might be "Help me understand my relationship to X"; or "should I change jobs?"

When you awake in the morning (or in the middle of the night), have journal and pen handy to record any dreams or impressions immediately upon waking. Include any feelings, thoughts, images, or details you recall from your dreams.

Weekly 80/20 List

Once a week (Sunday night works for me), make an 80/20 list for the coming week. As discussed earlier, Pareto's Law says that 80% of our results come from 20% of our activities. An 80/20 list is a way to keep you focused on the 20% that really matters. Remember, concentrate on the 20% of your life that will give you 80% of the results.

Exercise Element 45

80/20 List

Personal

Goals: I choose to focus on (see, hear, feel)
the following goals this week:

B. Actions: I choose to take these specific
actions toward my goal this week:

Life-long Education: I choose to read, listen to,
learn, continue, or watch the following this week:

D. Comfort Zone Expansion: I choose to do, or experiment with, the following g uncomfortable or unfamiliar activities this week:

Relationships: I choose to do the following this week to strengthen my important relationships at at home, with friends, at school or at work:

Physical: I choose the following specific action steps this week in terms of improving my diet, stress control and exercise schedule:

Vocational/Educational: I choose to engage in the following activities to make me a better employee, employer, or student this week:

Spiritual:I choose to focus on or complete the following spiritual activities this week:

Take some time at the end of each week to review your progress for that week. Experiment with the 80/20 List for even one month, and you will be delighted with the results: you will become more productive.

TEN Teams

"TEN is an acronym for "The Empowering Network."

TEN Teams have also been referred to as Dream Teams or Success Teams. A TEN Team is probably different from any other group with which you have ever been associated. The expressed purpose of a TEN Team is to help each member achieve their MVP, dreams, and goals. **Once you have shared your goal(s) with your team, their job is not to let you off the hook.**

TEN Teams use the power of group peer pressure in a positive rather than a negative way and, in my opinion, the TEN Team concept has been, until recently, the missing ingredient in human empowerment.

TEN Teams will keep you moving forward, step-by-step, until your goal(s) become a reality. **If you truly want to change, TEN Teams are as powerful and exciting a tool for empowerment as any currently known technique.**

There are some excellent books available that explain the Team concept in more detail, including *Teamworks* by Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb.⁴²

TEN Teams can be any small group of people (five to seven is ideal) who have a burning desire to achieve their MVP and goals. Because they have a very specific, goal-directed mission, the most successful TEN Team do not function as group therapy, as an encounter group, or as a social group. Rather, their purpose is to keep each other on track to accomplish their goals and MVP.

TEN Teams can consist of family members, friends, associates, work teams, or strangers who happen, for instance, to be sitting together at an empowerment seminar. Leadership roles, frequency of meetings, and meeting format are issues which are handled differently by individual groups. **Some of the most successful groups have a floating leader, meet once or twice a month, and have very specific guidelines and time limitations for each participant.**

⁴² Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb (1989). *Teamworks*. New York: Warner Books.

However, typically, each member is allotted 15 to 30 minutes to present their TEN Team report, and the process is often as follows:

TEN Team Process

Report on any progress toward your goal since the last meeting.

Tell where you feel stuck or need help.

Engage in brainstorming, networking, and group skill sharing.

Discuss what each person hopes to accomplish before the next meeting.

II. The Master Skill of Positive Expectation

Positive expectation, also known as Positive Mental Attitude (PMA), has the longest history of any of the master skills of empowerment. Indeed, until the past twenty years or so, it was the only empowerment skill discussed in any detail. Many people at least understand that a positive mental attitude is helpful and others have been practicing positive expectation as an empowerment skill for years.

Positive Expectation is the pivotal master skill of empowerment. Because there has already been so much written about the importance of positive expectation, in the following pages I summarize the essentials of PMA, offering you a kind of "refresher course."

The power of PMA can be expressed in a simple, yet profound statement:

**The world in which you live is
almost always a perfect mirror
of your expectations**

Positive expectation does not always work in precisely the way we hope it will. But I guarantee one thing:

positive thinking always works better than negative thinking. As Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can't, you're right!"

We now have a great deal of anecdotal and scientific evidence that supports the fact that our expectations not only affect how we see reality, but help create that reality. Positive expectation has been shown to pay dividends in sports, health, job success, and longevity.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Modern-day psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated that the power of expectation alone can influence the behavior of self and of others. This phenomenon is now called self-fulfilling prophecy: we often become what we prophesize we will become.

One of the earliest researchers to study self-fulfilling prophecy was Robert Rosenthal. In one study, he told graduate students conducting experiments with rats that certain rats were very smart and would run a maze quite rapidly. He told the students that other rats were stupid and would do poorly. In reality, there were no significant differences of intelligence in any of the rats. Yet when the results of the maze runs were timed, the "bright" rats performed significantly better than the supposedly "stupid" rats!

Rosenthal and Jacobson also conducted the classic study on teacher expectations. They administered a non-verbal intelligence test to eighteen elementary school classrooms in California. Teachers were told that the test would predict which children were ready to bloom intellectually. In fact, the test was a fake, and Rosenthal simply randomly selected 20 percent and labeled those as "intellectual bloomers." Teachers were told that they could expect "remarkable gains" from those children during the coming year. When all the children were tested eight months later, those children the teachers thought were bright showed a measurable improvement in IQ scores.⁴³

Or consider this often repeated psychological experiment done with money. A group of students is randomly divided into Group A and Group B. An impartial assistant is isolated in a separate room and he/she does not hear the directions to either group, nor does he/she know the purpose of the study. The experimenter explains to the students in Group A: "I'm going to send each of you into a room, one at a time, with one member of Group B. You are just to walk

⁴³ Robert Rosenthal (1973). "The Pygmalion Effect Lives." *Psychology Today*, September.

casually around the room and not speak to each other. After about two minutes, a third person will enter the room. She also will not speak to you, nor are you to speak to her. After a few more minutes, this third person will walk up to you and hand you a quarter. At that point the experiment is over, and you should leave the room."

The same directions are then given to Group B in another room except, at the end, the amount of money has changed: "after a few minutes, the third person will walk up to you and give you a dollar."

The impartial assistant is told: "You are to go into this room over and over again. Each time there will be two other people present. You are not to speak to them, nor will they speak to you. After a few minutes of causally walking around the room, you are to give one person a quarter, the other a dollar bill." Even though the impartial assistant didn't know who was in Group A or B, didn't know the purpose of the experiment, and received no verbal clues, in about 80 percent of trials the members of Group A got the quarter and the members of Group B received a dollar.

Expectations and Health

There is a new branch of medicine called psychoneuroimmunology which studies and applies the relationship between the nervous system, the mind, and the immune system. Psychoneuroimmunology has demonstrated that relaxation, visualization, self-talk, and expectations all have a powerful effect on our immune system and on our health.

A positive outlook and expectation about life appears to promote the natural killer cell activity that fights disease, including cancer. "It doesn't seem to be so much whether one is exposed to stress or not, but how people react to stress that matters," according to Dr. Ronald Herberman, director of the Pittsburgh Cancer Institute. The Simontons, who have done some pioneering work with cancer patients, agree. They believe that everyone participates in their own illness to some degree through their beliefs, feelings, and attitudes toward life, as well as in physiological ways such as diet and exercise.

According to the Simontons, "an illness is not purely a physical problem but rather a problem of the whole person, that ... includes not only body but mind and emotions. We believe that emotional and mental states play a significant role both in susceptibility to disease,

including cancer, and in recovery from all diseases."⁴⁴

The Simontons point out that cancer is often an indication of problems elsewhere in the person's life, and that the person responds to these problems with a deep sense of hopelessness, of giving up.

Both the Simontons and Dr. Bernie Siegel have found that a positive attitude toward cancer treatment is a better predictor of response to treatment than the severity of the disease. In other words, patients with severe disease but a positive attitude do better than patients with a less severe disease but a negative attitude.

Furthermore, researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that cancer patients who showed an angry defiance toward their cancer, a "fighting spirit," lived longer than so-called "good" patients who were passive. Dr. Sandra Levey, of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, in a longitudinal study of 36 women with advanced breast cancer, found that the only psychological factor associated with long-term survival in these patients was a sense of joy with life.

⁴⁴ Stephanie and Carl Simonton (1980). *Getting Well Again*. New York: Bantam, p. 10.

She also found that test evidence of joy was a better predictor of survival than the number of sites of metastasis once the cancer spread.

It is also enlightening to look at the long history of the placebo effect in medicine. A placebo is something that has no medical benefits in and of itself. The placebo is helpful to the patient only because someone creates a positive expectation about the results. For example, if a patient is told that a sugar pill is, in fact, some new wonder drug, the patient often gets better. It's not that the sugar pill had any conventional medical benefits; the patient merely expected that it would, and so it did for them.

The Simontons, in their book *Getting Well Again*, describe several examples of the placebo effect. In one study at Harvard University, some post-surgery patients were given morphine for their pain. Others were given a placebo that they thought was morphine. Surprisingly, 52 percent of the patients who received morphine reported relief from pain, and 40 percent given the placebo also reported pain relief. In other

words, the placebo was almost as effective as the morphine.⁴⁵

In another group, of ulcer patients, one subgroup was told by a doctor that they would receive a new drug that would undoubtedly produce relief. The second subgroup was told by nurses that they would receive a new experimental drug, but that little was known about its effects. Although the same drug was then administered to both groups, 70 percent of the patients in group one showed significant improvement; only 25 percent in group two showed improvement.⁴⁶

We have other evidence that your attitude can literally kill you. As a part of a longitudinal study begun at Harvard University in 1961, students were given a psychological test that measured attitude. On the basis of that test, students were placed into one of three groups: those that had a positive outlook on life, those that had a negative outlook, and those whose attitudes toward life were neutral (neither markedly positive or negative). Using the neutral group as a control, and factoring out variables such as diet, accidents, and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

cigarette smoking, what the researchers found is thought provoking. During the 25-year study period, only two students with a positive outlook on life died prematurely; however, eighteen of the students with a negative outlook on life died prematurely! Another way of looking at this is that you are nine times more likely to die prematurely with a negative outlook on life.

The human mind can also be used to maintain vibrant health through visualizations. The trick is to visualize health rather than concentrate on disease, for you will best attain vibrant health by concentrating on vibrant health. In this regard, worry is to be avoided to whatever extent possible, for energy put into worrying tends to counteract whatever positive visualizations you attempt.

The Competitive Edge

When I was in high school in the 1950s, it was a common belief in the sports world that the four-minute mile barrier would never be broken. There were all kinds of theories about why this was true. Humans had too much upper body mass, too much wind resistance, etc. However, Roger Bannister, who didn't believe all the theories, fully expected to run a sub-four-minute mile, and in 1954, he became the first person to do that. Astonishingly, within a year, 37 other people also broke the four-minute mile barrier; within two years, nearly 300 had. In that two-year period, there had been no new training method, diet, or new running shoes. Only people's attitudes and expectations had changed.

Then there is the case of a Soviet weight lifter, an athlete who had lifted 499 pounds on several occasions but had never lifted 500 pounds. It seems likely that, if you can lift 499 pounds, you can lift 500, but this man had a real mental block about that extra sixteen ounces. So, in preparation for the 1975 European championships, his trainers tricked him. They put 501 pounds on the bar but told him it was only 498 pounds. Since he had lifted that weight on many occasions, he easily lifted the 501 pounds. When the trainers told him what they had done, the man's expectations

immediately changed, and he routinely began to lift 500 plus pounds.

It is not just in sports that the competitive edge of positive expectations can play a crucial role. In 1983, for example, Cox did a survey of "Fortune 500" executives, leaders of America's largest corporations. Cox asked these high-powered executives what they thought was the single most important variable that contributed to their success; 94 percent responded that it was a positive attitude or expectation of success.

Your mind creates your universe. Once you believe that something is true, you will collect facts to support your beliefs, and what ends up happening is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, we return to the central premise of this chapter: the world is almost always a perfect mirror of your expectations.

A loving person lives in a loving world; a hostile person lives in a hostile world; an empowered person lives in an empowering world. It is easier to blame him, her, them, or it for our problems. This is not easy for many people to accept. But we must accept responsibility for our own lives if we are to become truly empowered.

A Few Last Reminders
Expect the best to happen.

You can always choose how to react to experiences internally. To change your attitude or expectancy, change your thoughts. Your life is the result of your inner beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes not the result of some outside force.

Much of what we are fearful of, or negative about, is based on outdated childhood scripts which may have been appropriate once, but are not appropriate now.

Become a "Life-Athlete"; actively challenge your "comfort zone"; remember you usually do what is familiar, not what is necessarily beneficial to you.

All personal empowerment at first requires that you think, talk, and act as someone different than you have been.

There is no such thing as failure--there are only mistakes to be learned from. Become less reactive and problem-centered; become more proactive and solution-oriented. Look at "problems" as opportunities.

Use what you learned about relaxation to overcome stress and to re-program the supercomputer in your

brain to better attain your MVP and goals.

Actively challenge your cognitive distortions and mind-traps. Learn how to overcome your self-defeating beliefs. Get in the habit of talking to yourself positively all day long.

Take the time to discover what your mission, vision, and purpose in life are. They are powerful attitude changers.

Use visualization to tone down or eliminate past negative events or trauma. At least once a day, mentally picture the "new you" that you want to become, and review your goals for the future.

To become more positive and optimistic, associate with positive and optimistic people. Remember, misery loves miserable company, and you don't want to be miserable.

A woman related to me that, when she was a child, she was often told a children's story that had been in her family for several generations. The gist of this story was that, if you said "Rabbit, Rabbit" to yourself the first morning of each new month, more good things would happen to you that month than bad. Moreover, as a child, she had decided that if saying, "Rabbit, Rabbit" to

herself the first morning of each month worked, it would be much better if she did that same thing every morning. Even though this woman is now in her late thirties and has an advanced degree in psychology, she still says "Rabbit, Rabbit" to herself each morning. Even though she intellectually knows that there is nothing magical about the words "Rabbit, Rabbit," she believed and expected the words were magical as a child, and her expectations eventually became a reality. So if, as we create our own realities, our paths should cross in the future, if you say to me, "Rabbit, Rabbit," I know good things will happen for each of us that day.

"Rabbit, Rabbit!!"

As the comedienne Joan Rivers used to say: “Can we talk?”

You’ll remember that our original agreement was that if I gave you two free downloadable books you, in turn, would consider purchasing a new “home-study” course that I have developed called *The Journey*. Let me tell you about *The Journey* now.

Does everyone seem to have a life but you?

You see them on shows like *Oprah*, read about them in magazines like *Success*, and hear them on infomercials - people who have transformed their lives. People who have learned to control their thoughts, emotions, actions, and have overcome self-defeating beliefs. People who have discovered (or re-discovered) their “spirit”, mission, purpose, or life calling, and have learned to set goals accordingly. People who have the courage to live their dreams.

And you wonder - “Could that be me?” The short answer is yes, absolutely!

What if there was a self-study course that you could work through in the privacy of your own home. A course

designed by a former therapist and Professor of Psychology with over 30 years of experience. A course written in an engaging narrative (story) style to hold your interest. A course with principles and real-life techniques that have already proven helpful to thousands of people (just like you).

Imagine a course so real that it was almost like sitting behind one-way glass and watching over 30 hours of actual therapy/coaching sessions. A course with 5 built-in Workbooks-- so that you can put the information to work in your life. What would you be willing to pay for such an experience?

What if you could “test drive” the course by going to the internet (www.missionpossible101.com) and downloading, absolutely free, the first 4 chapters of the book.

What if you had the solemn promise of the author to donate 10% of the profits from the book to charity.

What if you could buy a hard copy of the whole course for the ridiculously low price of \$39.95 (that’s

less than the average cost of one hour of therapy or coaching!); or download a digital version of the course for even a greater value of \$19.95. Interested?

[Click here to order](#)

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