

**SO LIFE
SUCKS.**

Get Over It!



Ron Hurak

**So Life Sucks.
Get Over It!**

You're Just One Decision Away From Changing Your Life.

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Introduction

Now, before you delete this course, hear me out. I'm not saying that to be cruel. I'm saying it because I know what it feels like to be stuck, miserable, and convinced that the universe is dealing everyone else better cards. I've lived in that headspace. I've had those nights lying awake staring at the ceiling, wondering why happiness always seems to skip my door.

*Ok so your life sucks! **Get over it!*** I understand all about having an unhappy life. Even better than understanding, I know. I've been there done that, and I still own both T-shirts.

For many people their life doesn't suck. They are happy, at peace with themselves and enjoying their life to the fullest. Here's what I've learned: some people really do seem at peace. They laugh easily.

They're grateful even when life isn't perfect. They make the best of situations that would leave most of us curled up in frustration. You look at them and think, *what do they have that I don't?*

That's the question, isn't it? And the more important follow-up is: *How do I get it?*

Why This Course Exists

The purpose of this course is simple: to show you how to move from the back of the line to the front, or better yet, to create your own line entirely so you're always first in it. You don't have to wait for happiness to tap you on the shoulder. You can go out and grab it.

I'm not here to sell you snake oil. There's no "one weird trick," no twelve-step formula, and no magical thinking required. What I'm offering you are the practical tools, habits, and mindsets that turned my own life around. They aren't complicated in fact; some are almost embarrassingly simple but simple doesn't mean easy.

Over the years, people have told me: *"You should really write this down. Share it. Someone needs to hear it."* For the longest time, I resisted. Who would care about my story? Then it hit me if even one idea in this course helps someone shift their perspective, break a cycle, or find a spark of hope, then it's worth it.

What to Expect

This course isn't a memoir, though you'll get glimpses of my journey. My background matters, not because it's unique, but because it proves something universal: if I can build a happy life from where I started, so can you.

Each section is short and to the point. I've learned that if a concept doesn't hit you right away, no amount of extra paragraphs will magically make it click. That's why I've kept it lean. Some chapters will resonate deeply; others might not fit your situation right now. That's okay. Skip ahead, circle back later, or dog-ear the parts that speak to you. This course is designed to be used, not admired on the website.

I'll share lessons I had to learn the hard way about mindset, resilience, relationships, money, and most importantly, the pursuit of happiness itself. I'll also give you practical assignments, because theory alone won't get you anywhere. Happiness is built through action, not daydreaming.

A Promise to You

Here's what I can promise:

- I won't waste your time with fluff or jargon.
- I won't preach to you from some pedestal.
- I *will* tell you the truth, even when it stings a little.
- I *will* give you real tools you can start using immediately.

Because no matter where you are today whether you're in a dead-end job, a toxic relationship, drowning in debt, or just quietly dissatisfied with life change is possible. And it may not be as far away as you think.

So, let's get started. But before I show you the *how*, I need to show you the *where*. Specifically, where I began and why you should believe me when I say that no matter how much your life sucks right now, it can change.

So, what special gift did they get, that many other people have not....maybe that includes you?

How come they get to stand in the short line, and you always seem to be at the very end of the long one?

Answering these two questions is my goal for this book. I want to share some ideas with you so that you can stand at the front of the line, and the line will be a line you created for yourself and one where you are always right up front. *I want you to be happy!*

This book is a simple guide that compiles some of the best tips I have received through the years from an assortment of fellow souls I was privileged enough to meet as I journeyed through my life. These are good ideas that I want to pass on to as many people as I can so that they may find the same value in them as I did.

Over the years, many people have suggested I write down these bright ideas, affirmations and philosophies for living, to share them with others. I have always resisted any notion that my approach to living would be of any interest to someone other than myself. But hey, I am a happy guy so here goes!

My sincere wish is that there is a tidbit of wisdom within these pages that might produce the tipping point for helping you with improving your life. I can only hope that the simplified, no B.S. list of ideas within this book -- *will help you to unsuck your life!*

01

HOW MY LIFE BEGAN

Chapter 1 – How My Life Began

I came into this world in Winnipeg, Manitoba, post-World War Two, a city known for its frozen winters, endless prairie winds, and, for me, a rough beginning. For the purposes of this message, which I hope to deliver to you, it is not important to describe my living conditions in the first fourteen years of my life in any great detail. But I do want to add a little perspective, so a brief review of my early beginnings will tie my message together, that no matter what your circumstances are or where, you can turn any negative situation into a positive one!

My mother was an orphan who escaped the brutality of the orphanage system. She was bounced around from place to place, never really belonging anywhere. At sixteen, desperate to escape, she did what so many young girls in her situation did back then: she got married. The problem was, she married a man who wasn't ready to be a husband, let alone a father. He was still a boy himself, angry, unsettled, and dragging around baggage he didn't know how to carry.

Four kids later, I showed up, number three in the lineup. By then, my father was gone. Walked out. Vanished. I was too young to remember him, and he died before I ever got the chance. At the time, I didn't realize the hole that left in my life. Looking back, maybe it was a blessing for both of us. And although I didn't until many years later in my life, I thank him for bringing me into this world.

The Odds Were Against Us

The late '40s and early '50s were brutal years for a single mother with four young kids. Today, if you're struggling, there are at least some safety nets.

Back then? Almost nothing. Social programs were rare, and when they did exist, they came with shame and judgment attached.

My mother understood what the life of an orphaned child was like in those days. Unless you have been living in complete solitude, you've probably heard the horrifying stories of abuse children of that time had to endure by the very people running the institutions.

I was too young to understand why my mother, single and alone, decided to keep her four children and not put us up for adoption. It was many years later and only after she passed away, that I finally figured it out. She never spoke about it with me while she was alive.

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Besides her tenacity, my mother, possessed the gift of sewing. Women in the 40's and 50's rarely had jobs of social significance. With little formal school, her only option was to use her few gifts to earn a living and support her four kids.

That needle and thread kept us in clothes, kept food on the table (just enough), and kept us together. Once again, I was too young to understand the hardship she decided to take on and handle this way.

Here's the thing: she could have given up. She could have sent us to orphanages like the one that raised her. No one would have blamed her. But she didn't. She refused to let the system swallow us up.

My mother was a hard worker, but regardless of how hard she worked, we were beyond poor. Paying for rent and buying food for four kids was a constant balancing act. We moved around a lot.

I didn't understand her decision until many years later, after she was gone. Now, I see it clearly: it was her way of breaking the cycle. Her way of protecting us from the same system that failed her.

It really would have been so much easier for her to just drop us off at an orphanage and be on her way. But that wasn't the decision she was going to make and as I mentioned, I never fully realized her motivation until after she died. So, although it's a little late I want to say, "Thanks Mom

I Grew Up in Poverty.

Let's just say, my earlier life was on the extreme side of tough. There I was, just a baby with a very young mother. She had four young children and was abandoned by her husband at a time when society cared very little for those who found themselves in this plight. Little did I know that my early life was not going to be a bowl of cherries and instead, would suck.

When I say we were poor, I don't mean the kind of "we'll have to skip the vacation this year" poor. I mean real, coal dust, under your fingernails, potato soup for dinner poor.

Winnipeg winters are no joke with temperatures minus 20, 30 or sometimes colder. If we couldn't afford coal or wood, we wore our coats indoors and went to bed fully dressed. Survival was a daily reality.

My mother didn't have parents to teach her how to be a parent. In fact, her only experience raising children was to be 'harsh' with us, and I am being kind with my choice of words. Harsh was how she was raised and her parental 'do's and don'ts' were limited and skewed.

Raising four boys is no piece of cake, regardless of one's social status. I am truly amazed I survived. In fact, my oldest brother did not survive and sadly, he took his life when he was just a young man. Since he was the oldest, I think he took the worst of it. His life was not the kind you would even wish for your enemies.

School: A New Battleground

My mother enrolled me in school a year earlier than I was qualified to attend. She needed a way to lessen her parental duties so she could work more hours. I don't know how she did it, but she did manage to fool the system, and I was in school way before I should have been.

Being one year younger than the rest of the class doesn't seem like a big deal, but the difference between age four and age five is a full 20%.

Early school was a very challenging time for me. I was small for my age to begin with and being younger than everyone else meant tough days ahead. Bullying, in the intercity schools that included teens that were still in grade four or five, only made the situation worse.

I had security issues and in constant fear, which made growing up and learning very difficult, at best. Teachers spent most of their time trying to keep order in the classroom, which meant real teaching was often third or fourth on their list of priorities. Needless to say, I found everything about school tough. Learning came slow. Confidence came slower.

Bullying for me was everywhere I happened to be either at school, at home, or with my two older brothers. My mother worked long hours so she was rarely home and so I was left alone to fend for myself, or sometimes I was in the care of my two bullying brothers. My life sucked.

A New Father - A New Problem

This pattern continued throughout my entire life in school. When I was around twelve or thirteen, my mother decided to marry again. I am sure that she was running out of parental patience, money and probably everything else, and she thought 'a husband' would provide stability for her life.

Made sense! A man in her life meant more income and someone to help raise the kids. Unfortunately, the kind of men my mother attracted, all came with a suitcase of issues, and it was certainly the case with this choice to remarry.

He was uneducated, a victim of World War II and from what I could tell, a hard worker. It was shortly after they were married that another pregnancy came along and yet another child to care for. I have a sister now. My mother's new husband, my new stepfather, was from Europe and his customs and behaviors reflected 'old world' Europe, where wives were obedient and the children, too.

Harsh punishment for any misbehavior was the common practice in this man's life. So now I have a new bully in my life. It turns out he was a mean drunk, as well! His frustrations didn't stay bottled up. We caught the blast.

Today, I am convinced that he is a good person but that suitcase of issues he dragged around earlier in my life, that was controlling his every behavior. In most cases, that behavior was anything but kind, and especially to four kids that were not his own.

On My Own at Fourteen

Life as a teenager was unbearable for me. The bullying, the fear, the loneliness, and then with all the hormones flowing through my body, I was a complete train wreck. At fourteen years old I had a chance to leave home by living with my older brother, thinking maybe I'd find relief there. I didn't.

This was before he ended all his issues by taking his life. By then he was in his twenties, married and had a family of his own. His parenting skills were pretty much what he had learned as a kid.

Anger and abuse ran in the family like a twisted inheritance. I was 'out of there' after only a few months. I packed up and left. And just like that, I was on my own. No school, No diploma. No skills. No plan.

No Place to Go

I was scared, fourteen, and my future prospects were not looking good. My first job was delivering papers. I could also shine shoes or shovel snow in the winter. I slept in flophouses that were often filled with addicts of every kind. The Salvation Army was always a place for a meal if I didn't mind attending a church service first. I wasn't much into God or religion, but the food was worth the hour, listening to a sermon that didn't make any sense to me.

I thought if there was a God, he had surely forgotten about me. He must've lost my address.

I realized that my current life and the conditions I lived in were not going to take me very far, and if I wasn't careful, I would end up like the addicts I shared space in rooming houses. When I say I realized or understood this about my current situation in life, it was more like a subconscious realization rather than a real conscious awareness. What's important is that I knew, something had to change or else.

A Spark in the Dark

Here's the truth: I was drifting toward a dead end. Maybe even literally. When you're that young, that broke, and that hopeless, the future doesn't look like a blank canvas. It looks like a brick wall.

I started to consider just ending it all, but in truth I was too much of a coward. Besides, I was pretty much moving in that direction anyway and it was just a matter of time when I would end up dead or in jail or both. Sounded familiar!

I do believe I was at the lowest point of my life and had to reach up to touch bottom. Desperate would be an accurate description of my state of mind. Although I never much believed in God or any kind of spirituality, in my desperation and tears I looked up at the sky and ask for help. I didn't really know what number to call for heaven.

I think you 'get the picture' of how I started my life. If we were playing poker, you could say, "I was dealt a pretty lousy hand for the start of my life." I had every reason to be angry and to blame everyone and everything for my 'lot in life'. In truth, I did that for quite some time.

But even in those darkest nights, there was a tiny spark inside me, the faintest whisper that maybe things didn't have to stay this way. I didn't know what "better" looked like, and I sure didn't know how to get there, but I knew one thing: I didn't want to end up another cautionary tale.

That spark, fragile as it was, kept me moving. It didn't solve my problems, but it stopped me from giving up. And eventually, it led me to decisions that would change everything.

In those early years, life didn't just suck. It was survival, plain and simple. But survival, I would later learn, was only the first step.

02

FAST FORWARD
FROM THEN TO
NOW

Chapter 2 – Fast Forward: From Then to Now

If you had told that younger me, that fourteen-year-old kid the one shoveling snow to buy a cup of coffee, sleeping in flop houses or on park benches, and wondering if God had misplaced him that one day he'd be here, he never would've believed you. But here I am. Today, I'm in my mid 70's, and my life looks completely different.

I've been married to the same incredible woman, Kay, for over fifty years. She's my wife, my best friend, my business partner, my sound board, and my favorite person to sit on the porch with at the end of the day. We've built a life together that's equal parts partnership and adventure. We are truly blessed to have found each other!

Building Something from Nothing

Kay has been my business partner for as long as we have been together. We started in real estate working for Kay's father. I was young, ambitious and too much for her father to handle. Within a few years Kay and I started our own real estate company. It was just Kay and me.

We were one of the first husband and wife real estate teams in our area. It was a great time and even though we were doing pretty well selling real estate, I wanted something else. In the late 70's the personal computer phenomenon was emerging and I wanted in!

So, in the late seventies, Kay and I started a very small software technology company that created some software for the real estate industry. Over forty-five plus years later, our little tech company has been very successful. It provides us with a fantastic lifestyle. We have achieved many of our life goals.

For decades, Kay and I poured our energy into building a software technology company. We didn't inherit it, we didn't stumble onto it, and no one handed us a manual. We built it from scratch, brick by brick.

We made plenty of mistakes. We lost money, lost sleep, and sometimes nearly lost our minds. But we learned. Every stumble became a steppingstone. Every failure pointed us toward a better way.

Over time, those lessons added up. The business became not just successful, but sustainable. It gave us the freedom to stop worrying about survival and start designing the kind of life we wanted to live.

And here's something important: success didn't make us different people. It didn't erase the past. What it did was give us choices the ability to steer our own ship instead of being tossed around by the waves.

Living Life on Our Terms

These days, my life is full in the best possible ways. I play golf, love playing the guitar and we travel when the mood strikes. Kay and I have worked hard to create a lifestyle we love, and now we get to enjoy it. But don't get me wrong, this isn't about bragging. It's about contrast.

The question you might be asking is, "How did I get from where I started out in life to where I am today?" The *most important question* is, especially if you feel your life sucks now, "How can you get to a new place where it doesn't suck?" How can you be happy?

How Did I Do It?

Getting to a new place that doesn't suck is the objective of this course. I want to share with you the many life lessons I have learned along my earlier treacherous life journey. I want to share how you can have joy, peace, love and happiness, too. I am confident saying that, "you can be happy too," because if I can achieve happiness with my start on this planet, then anyone can and that includes you!

I think it's important to mention that I know that the concepts, ideas, thoughts, or suggestions I share among these pages are not new, or exclusive to me in any way. My hope is that through my unique perspective, these tried-and-true strategies and philosophies will somehow ring true and valuable for you 'right now', even if you have heard some or all of them before.

Before we get started there is another thing I would like to make clear. This course is not a ten, eleven or twelve step program to happiness or recovery from a life that sucks. The ideas in this course are not in any particular order. Also worth mentioning is that the strategies and other ideas included within these videos work together really well.

No one section has more value than any other. Like an orchestra with its many instruments, all are important but when used together they create beautiful music!

Synergistic would be a good way to describe the various video chapters of the course. Please simply review them and use them, as you like. It is possible that some of these ideas might not seem valuable to you. Or maybe you have already heard or read something similar. I'd like to remind you of this; a good idea is always worth revisiting!

In the unlikely event you find that something in this course is not striking a chord with you, move on to the next chapter. Perhaps revisit that particular video at a later time or if you prefer, just skip it altogether.

As I mentioned earlier, I have tried to keep all of the video chapters short and to the point. I hope you will enjoy reading from here.

How did I get from there from the chaos, poverty, and survival mode to here? And if your life feels stuck, small, or miserable, the better question is:

How do you get to where you want to be?

That's The Purpose of This Course

That's why this course exists. To show you that it's possible not just for me, but for you.

I'm not here to sell you a miracle cure or a ten-step program. Life doesn't work like that. What I'm sharing are the simple truths, the proven strategies, and the mindset shifts that carried me from hopelessness to happiness.

These are practical, usable tools you can start applying today. They don't require a degree, a guru, or a pile of money. All they require is your willingness to try.

And here's the promise: they work. I know because I'm living proof.

"Success isn't about luck. It's about building, step by step, with the tools you have until one day you realize you've created a life you love."

03

HAPPINESS: THE REAL GOAL

Chapter 3 – Happiness: The True Goal

If there's a "holy grail" in life, it's happiness. Not the polished, Instagram-filtered version. I mean real happiness, the kind where you can look in the mirror, be comfortable in your own skin, and feel at peace with who you are and the life you're living.

I've met plenty of people who, on the surface, seemed to have everything. Big houses. Fancy cars. A string of promotions or impressive titles. Picture-perfect family photos on Christmas cards. From the outside, you'd think they had it all figured out. But when you peel back the curtain, many of them are miserable.

And here's the hard truth: material things don't create happiness. Neither do new relationships, promotions, or fifteen minutes of fame. Those things can be fun. They can bring excitement or even pride. But if you chase them because you believe they'll fill a hole in your heart, you will eventually discover they can't.

You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can always start from where you are and change the ending.

The Happiness Trap

Society trains us to chase the wrong finish line. We're told get the degree, land the job, buy the house, drive the car, marry the perfect partner, and then you'll be happy.

So, we ran harder. Faster. Desperate to keep up.

But the finish line always moves. You get the promotion, but suddenly there's a bigger one. You buy the car, but someone else drives something flashier. You find the relationship, but life throws challenges at it.

When happiness is always tied to the next thing, you never catch it. You are forever reaching, never arriving.

Many people who seem to "have it all" end up discovering this the hard way. They appear successful in the world, yet their lives feel like a train wreck. They privately carry misery, emptiness, or constant dissatisfaction.

"What's up with that?" you might ask. Simple: they were chasing the icing before baking the cake.

The Real Source

True happiness doesn't come from the outside in. It comes from the inside out.

When you learn to quiet the noise, practice gratitude, and love yourself as you are, while still choosing to grow, happiness begins to take root. It's not a destination. It's not something you stumble upon like treasure in the sand.

Happiness is a daily choice, a practice.

And once you develop it, something amazing happens: the "stuff" becomes more enjoyable but less important. You stop needing it to validate you. You can appreciate it without being owned by it.

You realize that money can elevate your enjoyment of certain things, but it cannot create the inner joy itself. That comes only from within.

A Personal Lesson

I had to learn this lesson the hard way.

Years after Kay and I built our software company into something real; we reached a point where we could afford things I never imagined as a kid. We had a nice house. The cars. The freedom to travel. By every external measure, we had “made it.”

Yet I remember one particular evening, sitting in my office after a big financial win, feeling empty.

On paper, I had everything the younger version of me thought he wanted. But something was missing.

It took time to recognize what it was: gratitude.

I had been so focused on the next milestone on climbing, building, achieving that I hadn't paused to appreciate how far I'd come. I hadn't given myself permission to breathe in the journey.

When I started practicing gratitude when I began saying to myself each day, “I'm lucky to have this life. I'm grateful to Kay. I'm thankful for my health. I'm proud of how far I've come”, something shifted.

The house hasn't changed. The cars didn't change. My bank account didn't magically change overnight.

But I changed.

Happiness stopped being something "out there" and became something right here.

Cake and Icing

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy nice things like anyone else. A good meal, a comfortable home, the ability to travel. But I eventually learned that those things are the *icing*, not the cake.

The cake is inner peace. The cake is self-acceptance. The cake is gratitude. The cake is waking up in the morning glad to be alive, regardless of what's parked in your driveway or how many likes you got on social media.

Without the cake, the icing looks good but doesn't satisfy. With the cake, the icing becomes a bonus, not the source of your identity.

Why So Many People Remain Unhappy

Happiness is a simple word, a simple idea, yet incredibly elusive for many people. And here's the irony: it doesn't have to be. People often chase the wrong things believing that achieving them will make them happy. But once they get what they believed would finally "do it," they discover the same emptiness they had before.

Some even become unhappier than they were before.

Why? Because they sacrificed years of their lives chasing an illusion, only to realize they're still not at peace with themselves. Material success without inner happiness is artificial happiness. It fades quickly.

Where Real Happiness Comes From

Real happiness originates from within you, from honesty with yourself, from gratitude, from self-respect, from peace with your past and hope for your future.

When you build happiness from the inside, all the material things you have suddenly become far more enjoyable, while at the same time becoming far less important. You realize their value without confusing them as the source of your joy.

Your Question to Carry Forward

As you move through this course, I want you to keep one question front and center:

What does happiness mean to *me*? Not to your neighbor. Not to your boss. Not to the people scrolling past your life online. To you. Because until you define happiness for yourself, you'll be chasing someone else's version, and that road always ends in frustration.

Happiness isn't something you find at the end of the road. It's the way you choose to walk the road itself.

04

YOU CAN'T GET
THERE FROM
HERE

Chapter 4 – You Can't Get There from Here

There's a saying often pinned on Einstein, that insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results. Whether Einstein actually said it or not doesn't matter, what matters is that it's true. If nothing changes, nothing changes.

And here's the kicker, we are, right now, exactly where the sum of our past choices has landed us, whether we made those choices consciously or by default. That's not easy to face, especially if you're not happy with where you are, but it is the starting line. Until you recognize your role in where you've ended up, you'll never take ownership of where you're going.

Insanity is often described the same way, continuing to do the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Without changing something, anything, everything stays the same, period.

I once heard someone say, we are, at any point in our lives, exactly where we want to be. If that wasn't true, we would be somewhere else. Our choices, or our lack of choices, along with our decisions, lead us to where we are now and eventually to where we end up. For many people, where they end up isn't where they truly want to be.

The really important point is this, unless you are aware of the consequences of the choices you make, or the decisions you don't make, you are living without direction. Lost people are rarely happy. What did I mention earlier? You can't get there from here, especially when you're lost.

Living without a destination causes life to become a rerun. Every day begins to look like the one before. Get up, go to work, come home, numb yourself with TV or scrolling, go to bed, repeat. Do this long enough and a year isn't really three hundred and sixty-five new days; it's the same day lived three hundred and sixty-five times.

Multiply that by your age and you may suddenly realize you've been running the same loop for years. A new day, the same way, in the same place, with no change is the recipe for unhappiness.

It's like heading out on a journey without deciding on a final destination. Because you haven't chosen where you want to go, you never truly know when you've arrived. Each day starts without a clear idea of what you want or where you want to go. For some people, this amounts to years of going nowhere. And for some of you reading this, I know you understand exactly what I'm talking about.

Think about your GPS, if you punch in no destination, where do you end up? Nowhere. You just circle the same blocks, burning gas and wasting time. Life works exactly the same way. Without a clear picture of where you want to go, you drift, you stall, you feel frustrated because deep down you know you are capable of more, but you don't know what "more" looks like.

The good news is that you don't need to have the whole map figured out. You just need direction, a north star, a sense of what happiness looks like for you. Every happy life needs to reach a station or destination every so often throughout the journey. Do the math, how old are you now and how many years have you been living the same day over and over again?

A key ingredient in being happy is having a destination for your life. You want a destination in mind for each day and a vision for the full journey. What does happiness mean to you? If you're not sure, ask yourself, where do I want to go?

And remember, it's not about a new pair of shoes or the latest electronic gizmo. Think outside the box. Imagine instead where you would truly like to go and who you want to be. Be bold, be daring, and see for yourself what can really happen.

There was a time in my twenties when I had no destination at all. I was working hard, hustling in every direction, but going nowhere. At the end of the week, I was exhausted but had nothing to show for it. One night it hit me, I wasn't living, I was simply surviving on autopilot. I had no target, no vision of what happiness looked like for me, so how could I possibly be moving toward it?

That uncomfortable realization forced me to stop drifting and start steering. I didn't figure everything out instantly, but I stopped being a passenger in my own life. And that changed everything.

Here's the deal, happiness requires direction. You can't stumble into it by accident. You need to know where you're headed and why. And no, the answer isn't a new gadget, a shopping trip, or another dopamine hit from social media. It starts with asking yourself the powerful question, what does happiness look like for me? Not the Hallmark version, not what your friends or family expect of you, not the social media "likes" you want.

When you define it clearly, whether it's freedom, love, peace of mind, contribution, expression, or something else entirely, you can begin making daily choices that point you in that direction.

Because the truth is simple, you can't get to where you want to go if you don't know where there is.

If you don't define your destination, don't be surprised when you never arrive.

Reflection Exercise - Define Your North Star

Take five quiet minutes right now, no phone, no TV, no distractions. Grab a notebook or open a blank page on your computer and answer these three questions honestly,

If nothing in my life changed and I lived the next ten years exactly as I am today, how would I feel?

When I picture myself truly happy, what does that life look like in detail? Who is there? What am I doing? How do I feel waking up each day?

What is one small step I could take this week that would point me closer to that version of happiness?

Write it down. Don't overthink it. Don't edit yourself. Just be honest. This is your north star. It isn't about perfection, it's about direction.

05

POWER OF
CHOICES

Chapter 5 – The Power of Choices

Here's the truth, no matter where you are in life right now, whether you're flying high, stuck in neutral, or buried in a hole you dug yourself, you have the power to change it. That power lives in your choices.

It may sound simple, but think about it, every turning point in history, every breakthrough invention, every revolution, every personal transformation began with a single decision. Sometimes those decisions shook the world, sometimes they reshaped only one person's life, but they always mattered.

One man made one decision and an entire region changed. Your choices may not launch revolutions, although who knows, but the principle stands, the decisions you make, even the small ones, have the power to change everything.

A decision itself happens in an instant. Yes or no. Do it or don't. The moment takes a fraction of a second. The lead-up can take days, weeks, months or even years of circling, overthinking and second-guessing, but the actual decision, the final moment of choosing, is lightning fast.

Some of the best choices I have ever made came in those flashes, moments when I trusted my gut, stopped analyzing and simply said, "yes, let's go." These decisions were not always perfect, but they moved me forward, and that forward motion created opportunities I never would have seen if I had kept hesitating.

Decisive people tend to be happier people, not because they always choose correctly, but because they trust themselves to handle the results, whatever those results may be.

Confidence is not about knowing the outcome in advance, confidence is believing in your ability to adapt, to recover and to adjust course if things do not go as planned. When you trust yourself to handle whatever comes, decision-making stops being terrifying and becomes liberating.

Here is something people forget, not making a choice is still a choice. It is a choice to stay the same, to remain stuck and to hand over control of your life to circumstances, other people or simple inertia. And if you are unhappy with your life, that is a terrible choice. Every day you wake up with opportunities to shift your path. Some are big, some are small, but they are always there. The power of choice is always in your hands, whether you use it or not.

Looking back, I can see moments where a single decision changed everything for me. Deciding to leave a toxic environment at fourteen rather than stay stuck. Deciding to start a business when the safe path would have been to keep a job. Deciding to marry Kay, the single best decision of my life. None of these choices came with guarantees, but each one shaped the path forward and opened doors I never knew existed. You will never know what is on the other side of a choice until you make it.

Indecision is the thief of opportunity, one choice, even a small one, can start the momentum that changes everything. Once you move, momentum takes over and that is when change begins. No matter what your current position in life may be, you have the power to change it in any way you want.

History is filled with stories of people who have changed the world, often after making a single choice. They rarely knew in advance the true power of the decision they were about to make.

A decade or so ago, the people of Tunisia and Egypt brought down governments that had ruled for more than thirty years. How do you think that kind of world change began?

It began when one poor merchant in Tunisia made a single heartbreaking decision after authorities seized his meager shop. In protest of the unfair and miserable conditions of his life, he chose to set himself on fire. That one decision created a shockwave that ignited revolution across the Arab world. His sacrifice set entire nations on new paths to change. Time and history will determine the final outcome, but the point remains, one person, one choice, can influence millions. I truly hope his sacrifice leads to better lives for those he died for.

Decisions are powerful tools guided by the choices we make. Decisions help us achieve happiness. Making decisions allows us to take steps forward. People who tend to make quick, confident choices, decisive people, are often happier. They do not spend endless time thinking about their options, they make a choice and move.

How long does it take to make a final decision? A minute, an hour, a week, a month? Most often, it takes only a fraction of a second. Think about the last important decision you made. I am not referring to the time it took to gather information or to think about it, I am referring to the exact moment you finally said yes or no. That moment took only an instant. Some people take years to finally decide, because they are not ready to make a choice, but once they are, the decision itself happens in the blink of an eye.

Important decisions do not need to take years or months or even days. Sometimes snap decisions are the best ones because they come from a place of self-belief.

When you know you can handle the results, you make decisions more confidently and you live with your choices more peacefully. To be happier, learn to believe in yourself and in your ability to live with your choices. When you trust that, you will make more decisions believing in the results.

Reflection Exercise - One Choice You Have Been Avoiding

Take ten minutes to think about a decision you have been putting off. It may be a conversation you have avoided, a job change you fear, a health habit you keep postponing. Grab a notebook and answer these questions,

1. What is one decision I have been avoiding that, if made, could improve my life?
2. What is the worst thing that could happen if I made this decision and how would I handle it?
3. What is the best thing that could happen if I made this decision?

Now, circle the decision. Commit to taking one concrete step toward it this week. It does not have to be huge, only enough to shift you from thinking into doing.

06

THERE'S NO
SUCH THING AS
FAILURE

Chapter 6 - There's No Such Thing as Failure

Why do so many people avoid big decisions? It is not because they do not know what they want, deep down, I believe most of us have a sense of the direction we would like to go.

The real reason is fear. Fear of making the wrong choice, fear of looking foolish, fear of being judged, fear of trying and failing. Too many people are afraid to make important decisions. They are afraid of making the wrong choice and the consequences of that decision. Unfortunately, lots of people are afraid of what others might think of them.

But here is my take, there is no such thing as failure. I want to suggest instead that all decisions you make bring about only one thing, results.

Every decision simply produces a result. Some results meet expectations, some do not. Sometimes the result is what you wanted, sometimes it is not. But either way you walk away with something valuable. Experience, clarity or a lesson you did not have before.

All of our decisions make us smarter than we were before making them. I would argue that it is only through repeated decision making, where some results meet expectations and others do not that we eventually succeed in whatever we seek from life. Constant decision making also seems to be an important ingredient in happy people. Failure is not final, it is feedback.

The Fear That Freezes Us

Think about how much of life is wasted avoiding choices because of the possibility of failure. We stall, procrastinate and hesitate, convincing ourselves that waiting will magically deliver the perfect option. They worry about what if their decision turns out to be wrong. Turns out to be less than what was expected or even worse, perceived as failure. Not only to themselves but to others around them.

Failure is a powerful reason to stay put and live the same day year after year. I am not recommending this strategy for you.

Waiting does not protect us. It only guarantees stagnation, and stagnation rarely feels like happiness. It feels like being stuck in mud! You are technically not falling backward, but you are not going anywhere either. When we avoid making decisions it almost always leads to unhappiness,

This is because we cannot be happy as people without feeling good about our decisions and their results. Making decisions is the fuel that moves us forward. It is how we take our next steps. Decisions are how we get there from here.

I have been there, paralyzed by what ifs. What if I choose wrong, what if it all blows up, what if people laugh at me. But here is what I learned. The pain of staying stuck is almost always worse than the pain of trying and coming up short.

The Illusion of Other People's Opinions

Now let us talk about the second fear, what will people think?

This one holds more people back than almost anything else. We imagine a peanut gallery watching our every move, waiting to criticize if we slip. They become this vague crowd of other people whose opinions we treat as if they are life and death.

Okay, so back to being afraid of what other people might think, say or do if you make a decision that does not quite work out the way you planned. Who are all of these other people, what do they really mean to you, like, really mean to you? If you suddenly passed away, would they attend your funeral? Probably not. Are all of those other people perfect people or demigods? Do they score ten out of ten with every decision they make? Probably not.

Here is the truth, most people are not thinking about you nearly as much as you think they are, and the ones who are, you need to ask yourself, do they love me, do they support me, do they genuinely care about my wellbeing?

If the answer is no, why give their opinion any power?

If you think about it for a few moments, I believe you will realize that the people who do love you, do care about you and do wish you well in all your endeavors will support you no matter what positive decisions you make.

All the other people outside your exclusive group of family and real friends are not important. What they think does not matter. It was once said, "what people think of me is none of my business."

Let me put it another way, why would you be concerned about what others think, say or do as it relates to you and your decisions, when the truth is they probably do not care about you, your family or your well-being.

The people who truly matter will stand by you even if things do not go according to plan, everyone else, they do not count.

So please, be bold, be decisive, be happy. Do not let others keep you away from living your life the way you want to live it.

My Own "Failures"

Looking back, I can point to dozens of things that did not go the way I hoped. Business ideas that fizzled, investments that tanked, decisions that cost me time, money or pride. At the time, each one stung, some even kept me awake at night.

But now, I would not erase them even if I could. Why? Because each so called failure shaped me, each one taught me something I needed to know, each one toughened me up for the next challenge. If I had avoided those risks to protect myself from failing, I would have protected myself right out of growth.

Flip the Script

So instead of asking, what if I fail. Start asking, what will I learn. Instead of fearing what people will think, ask, who actually matters to me? Instead of avoiding decisions, ask, what is the cost of staying stuck?

When you flip the script, failure stops being an end and starts being a steppingstone. Failure does not exist, there are only results, and the lessons they leave behind.

Reflection Exercise - Redefine "Failure"

Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions, write down your answers, do not just think about them.

What is one failure from my past that, in hindsight, actually taught me something valuable?

What is one decision I am currently avoiding because I am afraid of failing?

If I knew failure did not exist, only results, what choice would I make right now?

Remember, stagnation is the real failure, action, even imperfect action, is progress.

07

DON'T QUIT

Chapter 7 – Don't Quit

You've probably heard the story of the guy who tried to create a new soda. His first attempt? He called it "1Up." It flopped. So, he tried again with "2Up." Then "3Up." He kept going, 4Up, 5Up, 6Up. Nothing worked.

Frustrated and defeated, he quit. He sold the formula for pennies. The buyer made a few tweaks and launched it under a new name: "7Up."

The rest is history.

Now, whether or not every detail of that story is true doesn't really matter. What matters is the lesson: you never know how close you are to success. Your next attempt could be the one that works. If you quit too soon, you'll never find out.

The 2 Up Decisions

Over the years, I've had my share of what I like to call "2Up decisions." Times where I gave something my best shot and it didn't work out. Ideas that fell flat. Business plans that didn't pan out. Investments that fizzled.

Do they sting? Absolutely. But here's the difference: I don't call them failures. I call them tuition. The price I paid to learn something I couldn't have learned any other way.

And when I look back, those "2Up decisions" were never wasted. They pushed me closer to the "7Up moments", the ones that changed everything.

The Power of Persistence

Here's the truth: success often isn't about being the smartest, the fastest, or even the most talented. It's about staying in the game long enough to see it through.

Most people quit too soon. They quit right before the breakthrough. Right before the door swings open. Right before the idea finally clicks.

Think about it: Thomas Edison made over **1,000 attempts** before inventing a working light bulb. Imagine if he had stopped at 100. Or 500. Or 999. The world would be a darker place, literally.

Persistence doesn't mean banging your head against the same wall forever. It means adjusting, learning, adapting, but *continuing*.

A Personal Reminder

In my own life, there were countless times when Kay and I could have walked away from our business. There were months when the bills outweighed the income, when the stress nearly broke us, when quitting seemed like the easiest option in the world. But we did not quit. We kept going. We made adjustments.

We learned new strategies. Eventually, we found traction. Staying the course, even when it was brutally hard, built the life we enjoy today. Winners are not quitters and quitters are not winners!

I laugh them off, I learn from the choices I made, and I move forward with a new sense of understanding to use on my next decision. To summarize, failure doesn't exist because only the results are real. Some decisions and the subsequent actions we take because of a decision bring about the expected result. Some do not. But all decisions bring results. All results, regardless of whether or not they were expected, are the building blocks to our personal success and happiness.

I want to share with you a great poem that was written many years ago by an unknown author. I memorized it when I was young and I can still recite it from memory today:

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,

When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,

When the funds are low and the debts are high,

And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,

Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

When care is pressing you down a bit,

Life is queer with its twists and turns,

As every one of us sometimes learns,

And many a failure turns about,

Don't give up though the pace seems slow,

When he might have won had he stuck it out.

You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than,

It seems to a faint and faltering man,

Often the struggler has given up,

When he might have captured the

victor's cup,

And he learned too late when the night slipped down,

How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out,

The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,

And you never can tell how close you are,

It may be near when it seems so far,

So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,

Those last words? They're everything. **Don't you quit.** It's when things seem worse that you must not quit.

The Choice to Keep Going

So, here's the message: persistence is a choice. You don't need to know exactly when success will come. You just need to decide that quitting isn't the option.

Because here's the truth: your next attempt might be the one.

"Rest if you must. Rethink if you need to. But don't you quit."

Reflection Exercise - Your 2 Up Decisions

What's one area of my life where I've been tempted to quit?

What's one "2 Up decision" from my past that taught me something useful, even if it didn't feel like it at the time?

If I knew my next attempt could be the breakthrough, what would I try again?

Write it down. Remind yourself: the difference between those who succeed and those who don't is often just this, the ones who succeed didn't quit.

08

LEADERS MAKE
DECISIONS

Chapter 8 – Leaders Make Decisions

In my experience, only about 20% of people are true decision-makers. The other 80%? They just follow. They wait for direction. And often, they complain about the very decisions those leaders make.

Here's the problem: people who avoid making decisions are usually less happy with their lives. Why? Because they've handed the wheel over to someone else. They're passengers on a bus they didn't choose, headed for a destination they didn't pick.

And then they wonder why they feel stuck.

The Simple Truth About Leadership

Here's some good news: leaders are in demand everywhere. Every industry, every community, every corner of life. The world is starving for people who are willing to step up, make a call, and take responsibility.

But here's something even better: leadership isn't about titles. It isn't about corner offices or big salaries.

Leadership is about making decisions and owning the results.

Leading Doesn't Mean "In Charge"

We often confuse leadership with authority. Being "the boss." Giving orders. Calling the shots. But real leadership doesn't require a title. You can lead from any position, at any level, in any setting.

Think about the coworker who steps up during a crisis and calmly finds a solution. The family member who takes responsibility when no one else will. The friend who organizes the group instead of waiting around for someone else to do it.

That's leadership.

It's not about power. It's about responsibility.

The Happiness Connection

Here's something most people don't realize, decisiveness and happiness are connected.

When you make decisions, you're steering your own ship. You're choosing your course, even if it means navigating rough waters. That sense of agency, of control, is what fuels confidence, resilience, and yes, happiness.

When you avoid decisions, you're outsourcing your life. You're letting someone else decide where you go, what you do, and who you become. And that's a recipe for resentment.

A Personal Example

When Kay and I first started our business, there were countless moments where we had to step up and make tough calls. Should we invest in this new product? Should we hire this person? Should we risk taking on more debt to grow?

There was no roadmap. No one was going to decide for us. We had to.

Were we always right? No. But making those decisions, and owning them, is exactly what shaped our business and our lives. If we had waited for someone else to take the lead, we'd still be waiting.

The Leader's Mindset

Being a leader doesn't mean you never doubt yourself. It doesn't mean you always get it right.

It means you choose. You decide. You act. And you take responsibility.

Leaders don't wait for perfect conditions. They move forward with the information they have, trusting that they'll adapt as they go. That's what separates them from the 80% who sit back, criticize, and let others do the heavy lifting.

"Leadership isn't about power. It's about responsibility. Anyone can step up and lead — from anywhere."

My *unofficial* estimate is that only about one out of five or roughly 20% of all people are real decision makers. The other 80% are the people who are following the leaders who are most often, and you probably guessed it, the decision makers.

Followers are the people usually complaining about the decisions the leaders make. The sad thing about it is that too many people are unhappy with their lives, and mostly because they don't make enough decisions of their own.

These followers are also the same people who find it hard to make choices, and they are almost always dissatisfied with their lot in life.

Another observation I have made throughout my life is that there are too many people 'in charge' and not enough people who are in charge are really 'leading' anyone. I am positive you may know of many so-called managers, executives, or public figures that are anything but 'real' leaders. They often tend to be unhappy people.

We know how 'misery loves company' and so when *unhappy leaders* are in charge, they often do their best, whether they know it or not, to make sure those around them are unhappy, too. Just because someone is 'in charge' it doesn't necessarily mean they are a good, responsible leader.

There is a positive side to this note, regardless of the state of the economy where you live, employers everywhere are always looking for natural leaders. Employers make it their business to look for the people who are good decision makers.

Employers want to find the leaders and put them 'in charge' and there's not as much competition in the 20% group where they tend to find their best employees.

If you like, you can lead yourself to a good job by recognizing how this works. There are many great reasons for achieving inner happiness including financial rewards. The material rewards don't necessarily make you happy, but they can increase your enjoyment of life. It's up to you to decide whether you want to be a leader or a follower in life.

My suggestion is to start today by making a firm decision, that *decision-making is easy*. Make a choice, just decide, and it's highly possible you will become a natural leader, too!

Reflection Exercise - Lead From Where You Are

Take a few minutes and answer these questions:

1. Where in my life am I waiting for someone else to make the call? (Work, relationships, finances, health?)
2. What decision could I make this week that would move me from "passenger" to "driver"?
3. What's one small way I can lead, right where I am, without needing a title or permission?

Remember: you don't need to be in charge to be a leader. You just need to decide.

09

WHAT'S REAL
AND WHAT'S
MAKE BELIEF

Chapter 9 – What's Real and What's Make-Belief?

Ever seen a hypnotist at work? With just a few words, they can make a grown adult cluck like a chicken or believe they are swimming through an imaginary pool. To the person under hypnosis, the experience feels completely real. A skilled hypnotist can quickly program almost anyone to believe almost anything. As the audience laughs and howls at the unsuspecting participant, the person on stage behaves exactly like a chicken, elbows flapping and clucking without hesitation.

This raises an interesting question, are they just pretending, or do they actually believe they are a chicken? The answer is simple, the mind is powerful, programmable and capable of believing whatever it is repeatedly told.

From the moment you were born, your brain has been recording everything. Some experts believe programming even starts before birth. In early childhood, your mind records language, crawling, walking, social interactions and thousands of other behaviors. Your eyes act like a camera, and your mind becomes the screen. Everything you encounter is recorded and stored, forming your "master program." As you grow, this program keeps expanding. Your environment influences it; your parents influence it and every adult in your life contributes to the recordings that become your default beliefs.

The challenge is that at a young age, you have no experience to recognize what is real or useful. You simply believe in the adults around you because they are big, powerful and authoritative. That is how beliefs like Santa Claus, the tooth fairy and countless "truths" enter your mind without question.

This is where the real problem begins. Much of what you believe today is not truly yours. It is inherited. Hand-me-down programming from parents, caregivers, teachers, society and sometimes complete strangers. Some of those programs are helpful, some are outdated and some should have been thrown away decades ago, yet they continue to run on repeat in the background of your mind.

Think back to some of the messages you were taught growing up:

- “Don’t talk to strangers,” great advice for a six-year-old, but not helpful if you want to succeed in sales or build meaningful relationships,
- “Children should be seen and not heard,” maybe it kept classrooms quiet, but it also teaches adults to stay silent in meetings, in relationships and in moments when speaking up could change everything,
- “Money doesn’t grow on trees,” true in one sense, yet repeated enough times it creates a scarcity mindset that convinces you abundance is impossible.

Your mind recorded all of these programs long before you had the ability to question them. Tens of thousands of pieces of programming, installed before age five or six, continue to influence your decisions, your confidence and your happiness. Because the mind does not distinguish between real and make-belief, anything repeated with emotion becomes “truth.”

That is the kicker. Your brain does not care whether a belief is true, it only cares whether you repeat it often enough. If you believe you are powerless, your actions will reflect that belief and your results will confirm it. If you believe you are capable of great things, you will begin acting like a capable person and life will deliver different results.

Your thoughts do not simply reflect your reality, they create it.

Take Oprah, she grew up facing poverty, abuse and discrimination. By all logical reasoning, the programming she inherited should have kept her small. Yet she chose new beliefs, new thoughts and a new vision for her future. She reprogrammed her mind and built an extraordinary life. Her success was not just talent, it was belief.

This leads to a powerful question, are your beliefs really yours, or are you living out someone else's programming? Have you been programmed to believe you are stuck in a rut that you cannot escape? Remember, the only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth. Have you been programmed to believe you are just a chicken, powerless to change your life?

Programming becomes especially harmful when it comes from "unauthorized" or "unqualified" programmers. Parents, though well-intentioned, often pass on their own fears, traumas and outdated mindsets. Child abusers often come from abused childhoods because they simply repeat the programming they were given. Faulty programming gets passed down, generation after generation, unless someone decides to break the cycle.

Many people carry programming that no longer serves them. Try finishing these old saying that certainly were added to your program.

Children should be seen and ...

Don't speak unless you are ...

Don't talk to ...

Wear clean underwear in case you get into an ...

These programs are ancient relics that continue influencing behavior today. Some people fail to succeed because they were programmed to believe they never will. Others believe decisions are too difficult to make, so they avoid choices entirely. Some cling to the belief, "I'll believe it when I see it," never realizing that the more powerful truth is, "You will see it when you believe it."

For many people, unhappiness comes from running outdated programs written by other people. If you believe your life sucks, if you feel stuck, unhappy or at war with yourself, it is likely because you are replaying old programs that never belonged to you in the first place. This is why self-evaluation matters so much. Some do it alone, others get help from trained professionals, but the purpose is the same, identify the programs running your life and choose new ones.

The beautiful part is that the mind is rewritable. You can challenge beliefs, question them, replace them and install new programming that supports who you want to become. You can believe in new possibilities even before they show up in your reality.

As the saying goes, "What you can conceive and believe, you can achieve." It is worth writing that down and taping it to your mirror, so it becomes part of your new daily programming. I did exactly that, and it changed my life.

It is important to understand that your mind does not differentiate between what is real and what is imagined. If you believe in something deeply, it becomes your reality. This works both ways. You can believe you are a victim of circumstances and make that belief true.

Or you can believe you are powerful, capable and destined for something greater, and that belief will also come true. There are countless stories of people who began life with the odds stacked against them and still moved mountains.

Your mind is yours to control. It will believe whatever you repeatedly tell it. Your thoughts, actions and behaviors reflect what you believe, not where you currently are. When you think into the future and imagine what is possible, you can begin moving in that direction regardless of your current circumstances.

I know this firsthand. My mother often told me I was the son of a loser and nobody and that I would end up just like him. That was the programming I received. But at some point, I made the decision to reprogram myself. I chose new beliefs, even before I had proof that they could come true. I changed my program, and you can change yours.

The challenge for many people is believing in the power of belief. They wish and hope, but they do not fully believe. Wishing is about wanting, believing is about knowing. Someone once said, "If you want something badly enough, get off your knees praying for it and make it happen." You can decide to adopt new programming in an instant. All it takes is a definite decision and the commitment to reinforce it. Your results will always rise or fall to the level of your beliefs.

Now is the time to hit reboot. Upgrade your mental software. Create new programs based on who you want to become, not who you were taught to be.

Reflection Exercise - Upgrade Your Mental Software

Take ten minutes and complete this exercise,

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

1. Identify outdated beliefs

Write down three beliefs you carry that may be holding you back. Examples,

- "I'm not good with money."
- "I always screw things up."
- "People like me don't succeed."

2. Replace with empowering beliefs

For each outdated belief, write a new belief that opens doors instead of closing them. Examples,

- "I can learn how to manage money."
- "I have failed before, but I always bounce back."
- "I am capable and worthy of success."

3. Repetition equals reprogramming

Repeat your new beliefs daily, whether out loud, on paper or silently in your mind. The more often you reinforce them, the faster they replace the old programming.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

10

KIDS

Chapter 10 – Kids

If you are a parent, teacher, coach or caregiver, let me break it to you gently, you are a programmer. Kids are sponges. Their eyes are cameras, and their minds are screens, and everything gets recorded.

They watch you far more closely than you imagine. They listen when you think they are not paying attention. Every word, every tone, every reaction, every sigh, every smile, every moment of stress or joy gets installed like software running quietly in the background.

The younger children are, the more they believe without question. That is a massive responsibility.

Kids begin absorbing programs long before they can talk. They imitate your gestures, copy your facial expressions and absorb the emotional temperature of the home without anyone explaining a thing. They learn what love looks like, what stress looks like, what conflict looks like and what truth looks like by watching you. Their worldview is built from the behavior they witness long before they ever understand the meaning behind your words.

The Invisible Programming We Pass On

Think about how many of your own beliefs, habits and quirks you can trace back to something your parents, teachers or early influencers said or modeled for you,

- A parent who constantly complained about money may have installed your scarcity mindset,

- A teacher who once said you were not good at math may have planted a belief that limited you for decades,
- A coach who believed in you may have installed confidence you still carry today,
- A caregiver who showed kindness may have taught you compassion without ever using the word,
- A relative who lived in fear may have unknowingly programmed you to avoid risk.

None of these old programs came with filters. As a child, they went straight in. And unless you have consciously evaluated and overwritten them, many are still running your life today.

The Weight of Your Words

Kids may not remember every lecture, but they remember how you made them feel. A careless, "You will never be good at that," can echo for years. A frustrated, "Why are you always like this," can become part of a child's identity. On the other side of that coin, a simple, "I am proud of you," or "You can do this," can ignite confidence that carries a child through challenges far beyond their current world.

Words do not bounce off kids, they sink in. Some sink deep. And they stay.

What You Install Lasts a Lifetime

If you instill positivity, confidence, curiosity, resilience and kindness, you hand kids a head start in life. If you pass down bitterness, fear, anger, insecurity or blame, you hand them your old baggage. Unless they learn later to reprogram themselves, they will carry the same struggles you fought.

You are not just raising children, you are raising future adults, future leaders, future parents and future decision makers. The programs you install today will echo for generations.

You Don't Have to Be Perfect

Here is the good news, your job is not to raise perfect kids because perfect does not exist. Your job is to model progress, not perfection. To show them what resilience looks like when life knocks you down. To show them humility when you are wrong. To show them how to apologize. To demonstrate what kindness looks like toward strangers and people you disagree with. To model gratitude, responsibility and perseverance.

Kids do not need flawless adults. They need authentic ones.

A Personal Note

I have seen this programming effect firsthand. Growing up in difficult circumstances, I inherited plenty of negative programming, scarcity, fear, insecurity, doubt. I heard many messages that shaped me in ways I did not understand until years later. I can still hear my mother telling me that I was the son of a loser and a nobody and would end up just like him. It took years to deprogram that message.

But along the way, other people instilled "belief" into me. They planted seeds of possibility. Those tiny moments mattered, they stuck and they helped me begin reprogramming myself into the man I eventually became. That is the power you hold in a child's life, a single word or a single act of encouragement can shift their entire trajectory.

Kids Are Always Watching

Never forget, kids learn far more from what you do than from what you say.

- They learn how to handle stress by watching how you handle stress,
- They learn how to treat others by watching how you treat others,
- They learn whether life is something to fear or embrace by watching how you live it,
- They learn how to speak to themselves by listening to how you speak to them.

You may not realize it, but kids are constantly scanning the adults around them for clues about the world. They are looking for instructions on what to believe about success, failure, money, relationships, possibility and even themselves.

The Big Responsibility

If you are a parent, caregiver or in any position that influences children, you are in the perfect position to install positive mental programs. The younger the child, the more open they are to believing that the programs you offer them are true. They will remember the beliefs you install for a lifetime. Their future happiness is influenced heavily by the messages they receive now.

Positive programs give children the right messages for a long and happy life.

Encouraging curiosity installs courage.

Praising effort installs a growth mindset. Teaching responsibility installs character.

Showing love installs security. Teaching gratitude installs happiness.

Negative programs do the opposite. Kids who grow up hearing they are not good enough often grow into adults who do not believe they deserve success. Kids who grow up around anger often internalize that the world is unsafe. Kids who grow up around judgment often become adults who judge others and themselves harshly.

This is why your role is so important. You are not just managing behavior, you are shaping identity.

The Emotional Mirror

Research in child development shows that children mirror the emotional states of their parents and caregivers. A child raised in a tense home often becomes anxious without understanding why. A child raised in a home full of anger often becomes reactive. A child raised around calm adults often becomes emotionally balanced.

Your emotional health becomes their emotional foundation. That means working on yourself is not selfish, it is responsible parenting. A healed adult often raises a healthier child.

The Confidence Blueprint

Children do not build confidence from success itself, they build it from witnessing themselves try, stumble, get back up and succeed eventually. When adults jump in too quickly to fix things, kids lose opportunities to build resilience.

Confidence is not taught with lectures, it is built through experience and reinforced through your reactions. When adults point out effort instead of perfection, kids learn that trying matters more than being right.

A Future Beyond You

Every child you influence carries your fingerprints into the world. They will touch others the way you touched them. They will pass down the emotional DNA you helped program into them. When you speak life into a child, the benefits extend long past the moment. When you speak doubt into a child, the consequences echo longer than you realize.

“Children may not remember everything you say, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

Reflection Exercise - Check Your Programming

Take five minutes to reflect on this,

1. What programs did I inherit from my parents, teachers or caregivers, both good and bad,
2. Which of those programs am I unconsciously passing on to the next generation,
3. What is one new belief, habit or value I want to intentionally instill in the kids I influence,

Write your answers down and commit to modeling them. Kids believe what you demonstrate far more than what you instruct.

11

READING ABOUT OTHERS

Chapter 11 - Read About Others

Ever look at someone and think, "Wow, they have really made it"! I know I have many times in my life. It is easy to look at people who stand out and assume they were somehow gifted a special path. Here is the reality, nobody gets there without effort. Success never arrives gift wrapped. It always follows work. In fact, the only place where that word reward comes before the word work, is in the dictionary.

Everyone, in one way or another, obtains success in life through effort and by working. Achieving happiness requires effort too. Almost all worthwhile things require a passionate effort to earn them. A passionate effort is the kind of effort built on strong belief and commitment. It requires total belief in your ability to achieve something you want. Nothing truly worthwhile comes to us or happens in our lives without some form of effort. There is no way around it, hard work makes all the difference in the world.

One of the fastest ways to learn what success really takes is to read about others who inspire you. Biographies and autobiographies are like treasure maps filled with lessons about perseverance, failure, resilience and breakthroughs. They pull back the curtain on what looks like overnight success and reveal the years, sometimes decades, of struggle that built the foundation underneath it.

With the world we live in today, you do not even need to track down dusty library books. With a quick Google search, you can explore the world of those you feel have achieved what you are striving for in your life. Interviews, articles, videos and full life stories are available in seconds.

Wisdom that once took years to compile is now at your fingertips. It is like going to school by reading about other people, except the tuition is a lot cheaper and the lessons are often much more real.

Learning from Struggle, Not Just Success

When you read about the struggles of people you admire, something powerful happens, you realize they were not handed success, they fought for it. They faced setbacks, rejection and moments of doubt, just like you.

Oprah was told she did not have a future in television. Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor who said he lacked imagination. Colonel Sanders was rejected more than a thousand times before someone finally agreed to franchise his chicken recipe.

When you absorb stories like these, you start to see that obstacles are not the end of the road, they are part of the road. That realization is motivating, because if they could keep going through their storms, so can you.

In many cases, you will discover that the people you admire most did not even have what you have right now. They started from tougher circumstances, with fewer resources and less support, yet still found a way forward.

Reading about their journey is a powerful way to reprogram your mind. It supports your new beliefs and illustrates that you are not the only one who has had to work for what they wanted in life.

The Power of Patterns

Here is another benefit, the more life stories you read, the more patterns you begin to see. Successful people do not all follow the same path, but they do share common traits, grit, vision, persistence, a willingness to keep moving forward when most people would quit, a habit of learning, a tolerance for uncomfortable growth and a refusal to let failure be the final chapter.

As you study their lives, you begin to see these patterns again and again. You notice how they think about setbacks, how they talk to themselves, how they make decisions, how they manage their time. The more you study their lives, the more you start to adopt some of those traits yourself, often without even realizing it.

Success leaves clues. If you want to get ahead, study the trail others have left behind, then start paving your own.

Choosing Who to Read

You can learn from almost anyone, but it helps to be intentional. Choose people who genuinely inspire you, not just people who are famous. They might be historical figures, business leaders, artists, athletes, scientists, spiritual teachers or even someone in your personal life who has shown courage and character. Look for people whose values resonate with you.

It is also useful to read a mix of stories, not just people who end up rich or famous. Read about people who served others, who overcame addiction, who rebuilt their lives after major loss, who stayed kind in a harsh world.

This reminds you that success is not just about money or status, it is about character, contribution and inner peace. A word of caution, the goal of reading about others is not to compare yourself and feel small, it is to learn from them and feel empowered. You are not supposed to become a copy of them; you are supposed to become a better version of you.

Write Your Own Story

Here is a challenge, do not just read about others, begin writing your own story.

An autobiography of your life so far might surprise you. When you put your experiences on paper, you start to see patterns you have been living without noticing. You recognize how old programming shaped your choices. You spot moments when you could have quit but did not. You see proof of your own resilience written in black and white.

With pen and paper, or a keyboard, start with what you remember about your early life. Then write your way forward to where you are today. You might remind yourself of a few old master programs in your thinking that need erasing and would be worth replacing. Reviewing your own story helps you first, and maybe someday, it will help lots of other people too.

It is possible that one day someone will be Googling you or reading your autobiography to learn how you did it. Right now, that might sound farfetched, but every great story begins with an ordinary person who decided to keep writing their next chapter instead of stopping on the page they were handed.

When you write your story, you also gain clarity about the chapters that have not been written yet. You begin to ask, what do I want for the next five or ten chapters of my life to say, what kind of person do I want to be remembered as, what do I want people to learn from my journey. That kind of reflection does not just build insight, it builds direction.

Reading as Mental Reprogramming

Earlier, we talked about mental programs and beliefs that get installed when you are young. Reading about other people's lives is one of the most powerful ways to overwrite those old programs. If you grew up believing that people like you do not succeed, and then you read ten stories of people like you who did, your belief system starts to crack open.

If you grew up around constant complaining about money, and then you read the story of someone who changed their financial future through focus, learning and discipline, you begin to see that your story can change too. Biographies and autobiographies are not just entertainment; they are examples of what is possible and living proof that different choices create different results.

Reflection Exercise - Study and Write

1. Start a short autobiography of your own. Write just one page about the biggest challenge you have faced so far and how you overcame it, or how you are working through it now. See what patterns or lessons emerge.

2. Make a list of three people you admire. They could be historical figures, business leaders, artists, athletes or someone in your personal life.
3. Spend time this week learning about their stories. What struggles did they face, what decisions shaped their path, what beliefs kept them going, what can you take from their journey into your own life,

The point is not to compare yourself to others. The point is to learn from them and to see that you are already writing a story worth telling. When you do the work, when you keep turning the pages of your own life with intention, you are not just reading about success, you are slowly becoming the person someone else might one day read about.

12

BLAME AND ENTITLEMENT

Chapter 12 – Blame and Entitlement

As a teenager, I thought the world owed me something. I blamed everyone. My mother, my absent father, my stepfather, my teachers, the system. If I was struggling, it had to be someone else's fault. And since it was "their fault," I figured it was their responsibility to fix it.

And where did that mindset get me? Nowhere. Worse than nowhere, it got me deeper into the hole I was already in.

The Poison of Entitlement

Entitlement is poison. It whispers, "You deserve happiness, success, love and respect automatically. You should not have to earn it. It should just show up." But life simply does not work that way.

When the rewards do not arrive on schedule, entitlement turns toxic. You get angry. You get jealous of people who have what you want. You get bitter. And bitterness never attracts solutions, it repels them.

Entitlement is quicksand for your happiness. The more you indulge it, the deeper you sink.

Blame and Entitlement, The Deadly Duo

Blame and entitlement almost always travel together. Blame says, "This is not my fault."

Entitlement says, "Therefore someone else should fix it."

And then what happens? You wait. You wait for someone else to change. Someone else to rescue you. Someone else to hand you the life you want. Spoiler alert, they will not.

No one is coming. Not the government, not your boss, not your family, not your ex. Even if they did step in, you would not feel fulfilled because deep down you would know you did not earn the change yourself.

My Turning Point

When I was fourteen, I had enough of living under a harsh, abusive stepfather. I left home thinking freedom would solve everything. Instead, I ended up bouncing between temporary places and cheap flop houses, surrounded by addicts and people barely hanging on. I worked odd jobs and survived some days thanks only to Salvation Army meals after sermons I did not want to hear.

And yet, even then, I kept blaming. If my father had not left, if my stepfather had been different, if teachers had cared, if life had been fair.

Then one night, sitting on a street corner, hungry, exhausted and lost, something hit me. All the blaming in the world was not going to change where I was. No one was coming to rescue me. If I wanted out, the responsibility was mine.

That realization did not magically fix my life, but it lit a spark. I stopped digging and started climbing. I was terrified and had no idea where to begin, but I knew that if I did not change, I might not survive.

Everything Has Value

Here is a truth I have learned after many years, everything that has happened in your life has value, even the hard parts. My rough childhood was painful, but looking back, I would not trade those experiences. They gave me things money cannot buy, gratitude, perseverance, perspective. They strengthened me and helped me develop empathy for others who struggle.

Without those lessons, I would not be who I am today. Your hardships are not punishments, they are teachers.

The Lesson Inside the Struggle

If you are struggling right now, it is easy to fall into the trap of blame and entitlement and think, "This is not fair. Why me?"

Instead of asking "Why me?" try asking "What is the lesson here?" You might not recognize the meaning immediately. Sometimes it takes years. But eventually, the purpose becomes clear. Once you start looking for the lesson, you stop sinking and start climbing.

Blame or Ownership, You Choose

At the end of the day, you have two choices.

1. Keep blaming and stay stuck, or
2. Take ownership and move forward.

Ownership does not mean everything is your fault, it means your life is your responsibility. Once you accept that, you take back your power. Blame hands your power to someone else. Ownership places it back in your hands.

The Hole You Dig Yourself Into

One of life's most vital rules is this, when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. Far too many people keep digging deeper. Entitlement thinking convinces you that you deserve everything automatically, and when life does not deliver, negative emotions grow.

Hate, jealousy, resentment and anger flourish in people who believe life owes them something. Blaming keeps the shovel in your hands. If this sounds like you, please stop digging.

The truth is that 98 percent of the time, the correction required in your life must be handled by you. No one else can climb for you.

Where the Programming Begins

How does someone break the cycle of entitlement and blame? It often starts by asking, "Where did the programming begin?"

We are not born with entitlement or blame, although genetics may pass down certain traits. But our beliefs are learned. We are programmed by our environment, our caregivers, our experiences and the messages we absorbed as children. These early programs follow us into adulthood, shaping how we respond to setbacks.

Somewhere along the way, entitlement sneaks in. The belief forms that the world owes you a life of ease and that achievements should simply appear because you wish for them. But life rarely rewards that mindset. When desires go unmet, bitterness grows and the hole gets deeper.

Some people can climb out of the hole alone, while others need someone to lower a ladder. Regardless of the depth of the hole, the first step is to look in the mirror and ask, "How is this way of thinking working for me so far?"

Everything Happens for a Reason

There is an idea I have come to believe deeply, everything happens for a reason, and what happens is good. It may not feel good at the time, and you might wonder, "Why would I want this experience?" But hidden beneath every hardship is a lesson, a strength, a new beginning.

My early childhood and teenage life made me grateful, grounded and appreciative of everything I have now. Those challenges shaped the man I became. If I had to do it all again, even the hard parts, I would sign up again in a heartbeat.

If you are going through something painful right now, believe that there is a purpose in it. Look for the positive. Millions of people have endured difficulty and emerged stronger, happier and more fulfilled because of it. They stopped digging. They committed to climbing. You can too.

The Psychology of Ownership

Modern psychology confirms what I learned through lived experience. People who embrace ownership live happier and more empowered lives.

Ownership strengthens resilience, improves mental health and helps you bounce back faster after setbacks. Blame weakens you because it places your power in someone else's hands. Ownership strengthens you because it returns control to where it belongs, inside you.

You cannot change your past, but you can change how you interpret it and what you build from it.

Entitlement in Today's Culture

We live in a world where entitlement is everywhere. Social media has fueled the illusion that success is instant, happiness is deserved and struggle is unnecessary. People want the reward without effort, the trophy without training and the applause without showing up.

But life has not changed. Hard work still matters. Character still matters. Ownership still matters. Happiness is not something you receive, it is something you build.

Gratitude as the Cure

Gratitude is one of the strongest antidotes to entitlement. You cannot feel grateful and entitled at the same time.

Gratitude reminds you that life has already given you something, even if it is not everything you want yet. Gratitude fuels humility, responsibility and appreciation. Entitlement fuels bitterness. If you want to break the entitlement cycle, start with gratitude.

Reflection Exercise - From Blame to Ownership

Take a few minutes and write honestly,

1. Who or what have I been blaming for where I am right now,
2. What has entitlement led me to expect that I have not earned,
3. What is one area of my life where I can take ownership today instead of waiting for someone else to fix it,

Write it down. No one else has to see it. Then choose one change this week that moves you from blame to ownership.

Because the truth is simple, you cannot climb out of a hole by digging deeper. And the first rule when you find yourself in a hole is always the same, stop digging.

13

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

Chapter 13 – Getting What You Want

The easiest way to get what you want is simple, find someone who needs what you can offer and make an exchange.

That is the formula. Find a need, fill it. It does not matter if it is something small, like shoveling a neighbor's snow, or something life-changing, like inventing the next iPhone.

Every successful business, every breakthrough product and every major opportunity began with one question, "How can I solve a problem for someone else?"

People do not get paid for want, they get paid for value. They do not get noticed for wishing, they get noticed for contributing. Life reflects back what you put into it, and people gravitate toward those who serve rather than those who take.

The Paperclip Story

One of my favorite examples is Kyle MacDonald, the guy who started with a single red paperclip and traded it, step by step, until he owned a house. He did not leap from a paperclip to a mansion.

He simply found people who valued what he had more than he did, and he traded up. One small exchange became another, and eventually he ended up with a home.

That story is not about luck. It is about understanding the exchange principle, if you want something, start with what you already have and look for someone who values it.

The Exchange Principle

Getting what you want always comes down to exchange.

If you want money, offer value.

If you want opportunity, offer solutions.

If you want trust, offer honesty.

If you want love, offer love first.

You cannot demand these things or sit around waiting for them to show up. You exchange for them by giving what you hope to receive. This principle applies to nearly everything of value in life.

The Emotional Exchange

This principle is not just about material things. It applies just as strongly to the intangibles, love, friendship, respect, joy. You cannot force them, you cannot demand them, and you cannot sit back entitled, expecting them to arrive. You get them by giving them.

If you want more happiness in your life, try making someone else happy first. Smile at someone. Offer help. Pay a compliment. Show kindness. The return always comes back, often multiplied.

Remember, you cannot give what you do not have. Unhappy people unintentionally spread unhappiness. Happy people naturally spread joy. If your life sucks, chances are the atmosphere around you is not great either. Want to change it? Start by giving away the very things you wish you had.

A Personal Lesson

When Kay and I were building our business, we had more mistakes than victories in the early years. We were not the smartest and we did not have the most money. But we did have one advantage, we were willing to serve.

We listened. We paid attention to frustrations. We built solutions people needed. The more we focused on what our clients required, the more our business grew. The more value we created for others, the more success flows back to us.

That simple shift, focusing less on what we wanted and more on what others needed, changed everything.

The Secret to Getting What You Want

Here is the real secret, the fastest way to get what you want is to stop obsessing over yourself and start focusing on others. Find the need, fill it. The formula is simple, but most people will not do it.

They wait. They complain. They envy. They compare. Meanwhile, the people who are serving others are busy trading their red paperclips for houses.

Service that has value to others is the fastest path to getting what you want. Not necessarily happiness, but certainly the material things that make life easier. You pay for things you value. Other people will pay for what you offer when it carries value.

The Entrepreneur's Prayer

Every successful entrepreneur knows this truth, and many whisper a version of the same prayer, "Please grant me the ability and opportunity to serve others."

Because service is where every product and every business begins. If you want to create something new, just ask yourself, "What need can I fill?"

It Is Never Too Late to Create Something New

If you think it is too late to come up with an idea, think again. Many products and services did not exist fifteen or twenty years ago. Gaming exploded. Social media was barely a concept. Email was used by only a small portion of the population. Smartphones, apps, iPads, streaming, ride sharing, home delivery groceries, none of these were everyday realities.

At the time these now enormous ideas were created, they were unproven, untested and in some cases laughed at. But their inventors all had one thing in common, they asked the question, "How can I fill a need?"

There is an old story about a senior government official who wrote to the President of the United States in 1899, declaring that every possible invention had already been created and that the Patent Office should close. History has proven how absurd that idea was. Tens of thousands of patents have been filed since then, and innovation continues to accelerate. Needs never end, which means opportunities never end.

Giving the Intangibles

Things like friendship, love, joy and even happiness can be acquired by giving them away. But you cannot give what you do not have. If you want joy, you must offer joy. If you want love, you must express love. If you want kindness, you must practice kindness.

The practice of exchanging non-material things is just as real as the exchange of money or goods. If you want your life to improve, start giving away what you want more of.

Think of the classic story "A Christmas Carol," where one man's decision to give changed everything about his life. Giving changes you first, and then it changes the world around you.

The Law of Reciprocity

Psychologists call this the law of reciprocity. Humans are wired to return what is given to them. Give trust and most people will return it. Give respect and it usually comes back. Give bitterness and conflict, and that will return too.

You shape the environment around you by what you offer. That is why giving is the fastest path to receiving.

Small Exchanges Lead to Big Wins

Most people wait for huge opportunities. But the truth is that life changes through small exchanges.

A tiny act of service. A small act of kindness. Solving one tiny problem for someone else. These small wins compound overtime into enormous results.

Kyle MacDonald did not jump from paperclip to mansion; he followed a series of tiny exchanges. Your life will grow the same way.

Reflection Exercise - What Are You Giving?

1. Write down one thing you want more of in your life right now, money, love, respect, happiness or opportunity.
2. Ask yourself, what am I giving that aligns with this? Am I creating value, or am I waiting to receive?
3. Identify one small action you can take this week to give what you want. If you want encouragement, encourage someone else. If you want opportunity, help someone solve a problem. If you want more love, give love freely.

Because the truth is this, life is less about what you get and more about what you give. And the more you give, the more you will always get in return.

14

BEING
EMPLOYED

Chapter 14 – Being Employed

The concept of getting what you want in life, of offering value and filling needs, is not limited to self-employed entrepreneurs. It applies just as strongly to employees, workers, professionals and anyone who earns a paycheck.

Employers everywhere are searching for leaders, the 20 percent who step up, make decisions, take responsibility and rise above the crowd. These are the people who do not just show up for a paycheck, they show up with purpose.

Plenty of executives, CEOs and business owners started in the mailroom, on the factory floor, or sweeping up at night. They were not born leaders. They became leaders because they were willing to do what others avoided. They took initiative. They made themselves indispensable. They were part of the 20 percent who refused to blend in.

Standing Out in a Sea of Average

Here is the truth, most people only do enough to get by. They coast. They avoid risk. They wait for direction. Then they wonder why they never get noticed, promoted or rewarded. This is the 80 percent group, and almost everyone knows what it feels like to be surrounded by people who are just doing the minimum.

But the 20 percent?

They do not wait to be told. They look for ways to add value. They do not complain about problems, they solve them. They arrive ready to contribute, not ready to survive. And because of that, they rise faster and go further.

This does not mean sacrificing your entire life for your job. It means showing up differently. It means asking yourself simple questions each day such as, "How can I make things better today?" or "How can I help this place run smoother?" Small actions compound into big opportunities.

If You Do Not Love It, Leave It

Let us be honest, not every job will light you up inside. Maybe you are clocking in somewhere that drains your energy. Maybe you feel stuck, unappreciated, undervalued or invisible. The worst thing you can do is stay there for the next 20 years. Life is far too short to spend one third of it miserable.

You have two choices:

1. Find a way to love what you do, shift your perspective, look for opportunities to grow, improve and serve. Sometimes the job does not change, but you do.
2. Build a path toward something new, use your current job as a steppingstone, develop skills, save money and quietly prepare for your next move.

The point is simple, do not settle. You deserve more than waking up every morning dreading where you are headed.

The Hours Add Up

The average person spends about 90,000 hours of their life working. That is roughly one third of your time on earth. So, ask yourself, do you really want to spend 90,000 hours feeling bored, bitter or burned out? Or do you want those hours to contribute to something meaningful?

Your job is not just where you earn a living, it is where you spend your life. Make those hours worth something.

A Personal Note

When I was younger, I worked a string of odd jobs just to survive, paper routes, shining shoes, shoveling snow. None of these were glamorous. None were dream jobs. But each one taught me something important.

I learned the value of hard work.

I learned how to deal with people.

I learned responsibility.

More than anything, I learned what I did not want for my future.

Those lessons became the foundation on which I eventually built a successful business. No experience is wasted unless you waste it by refusing to learn from it.

The 20 Percent Advantage

Remember the 20 percent versus 80 percent idea about leaders and followers. Employers are always looking for the people who want to break free from the 80 percent crowd. There are endless stories of employees who started in small roles and climbed all the way to senior positions. If you believe it cannot be done, then yes, your goose is already cooked.

Conceive, believe and achieve. What do you really have to lose? Only the things that are currently wrong with your life. Go for the job or the career that can make you happiest, and believe it is possible.

Ask yourself a tough question, "How is my current approach working out for me?" You must imagine a better future, or you will simply exist with what you have. A default life is a life that happens to you, not one you consciously build. Do the things others avoid. Let yourself be noticed. It is not only okay, it is necessary.

Step up, and just as importantly, find the courage to stay stepped up.

The Mindset of an Indispensable Employee

Employees who rise quickly tend to think like owners. They take care of things without being asked. They protect the company's reputation. They look for ways to improve systems, reduce waste, increase value. They do not say, "That is not my job." They say, "How can I help?"

When you think like an owner, opportunities come to you. Supervisors notice. Leaders notice. Customers notice. Your reputation grows long before your title does.

The Power of Skill Building

Skills are the currency of employment. The more skills you acquire, the more opportunities you unlock. Every job you have is a classroom. Every task you take on teaches you something.

If you want to become one of the 20 percent, become obsessed with learning. Learn how to communicate, how to lead, how to solve problems, how to use new tools, how to understand people. Skills compound just like money does. The more you build, the more valuable you become.

Reflection Exercise - Your Work and Your Worth

1. Do I genuinely enjoy my current job? Why or why not?
2. Am I showing up as part of the 20 percent who lead, or the 80 percent who coast?
3. If I do not love my work, what is one concrete step I can take this month to either improve it or move toward something better?

Write it down. Be honest. Your job is not just where you earn money. It is where you spend your time, energy, creativity and effort. Make sure it is worth it.

15

NEGATIVE
THINKING

Chapter 15 – Negative Thinking

If negative thinking made things better, then we would all go out and take a course on it. Better yet, negative people would be happy. But they are not. Negative thinking NEVER helps.

It NEVER makes things better. There is nothing positive about negative thinking. Negative thinking is the shovel that digs the hole deeper and deeper with every negative thought and every negative habit. Ditch the shovel.

That message is simple, but it is one of the hardest lessons for people to accept. We have been conditioned to believe that worrying, complaining or expecting the worst somehow protects us. It does not. Negative thinking drains you, weakens you and sabotages your progress long before life ever has a chance to challenge you. It is an invisible enemy that lives inside your own mind.

Why Negative Thinking Is So Dangerous

Negative thinking does not stay in your head, it spreads. It affects your energy, your decisions, your relationships and your ability to take action. A negative thought rarely travels alone. It invites a mental storm that leaves you stuck, discouraged and afraid to move.

Your mind believes what you feed it. Feed it negativity and it will show you all the reasons life is hard. Feed it possibility and it will show you the steps you can take next. Your thoughts become your lens, and once the lens is dirty, everything you look at becomes distorted. Don't always believe what you think!

The Illusion of "Realistic Thinking"

Some people like to disguise their negativity by calling it "realistic thinking." They say, "I am just being practical," when in truth they are rehearsing failure in advance. Realistic thinking is fine, but negative thinking is not realism. It is pessimism pretending to be wisdom.

Here is the truth, some of the greatest breakthroughs in history came from people who refused to think negatively. They dared to imagine something better. Negative thinking kills creativity, courage and hope long before the world ever has a chance to.

What Negative Thinking Really Costs You

Negative thinking costs you opportunities, because no one acts boldly when they expect things to go wrong. It costs you relationships, because negativity pushes people away.

It costs you happiness, because it rewires your brain to search for problems instead of possibilities. It costs you time, energy and peace of mind.

Worst of all, negative thinking convinces you that nothing will change, so you stop trying. And the moment you stop trying, life stops giving. Deep hole!

You Would Not Drink Poison on Purpose

Think of negativity like drinking poison a drop at a time. You would never do it intentionally, but many people do it mentally every single day. Every negative thought is another drop.

Eventually, the poison takes hold, and you cannot remember the last time you felt hopeful or excited about anything. If someone handed you a bottle labeled "Negativity," you would throw it away. So, throw away the thoughts that come from that same bottle.

Positive Thinking Is Not Delusion

Being positive does not mean ignoring difficulties or pretending everything is perfect. It means choosing a mindset that gives you strength instead of weakness. Positive thinking creates solutions. Negative thinking creates excuses. Positive thinking builds momentum. Negative thinking builds walls. Positive thinking opens doors. Negative thinking slams them shut.

Replace the Shovel

If negative thinking digs the hole, then positive thinking is the ladder. When you shift your thinking, you stop making the hole deeper and begin climbing out. Even a small positive thought is the first rung of that ladder.

You do not need to feel positive all day. You just need to interrupt the negative patterns that have been directing your life. One interruption, one shift, one new thought at a time, and your entire direction can change.

A Personal Reminder

Every major shift in my own life began the moment I stopped feeding negative thoughts and started believing that things could get better. That tiny shift has power.

It creates momentum. It directs your focus away from what is wrong and toward what is possible. Your mind listens to you. Make sure the message you send it is one you want to live with. If you think you can, you have a chance. When you think you can't, you've already lost.

Your Mind Is Programmable

Negative thinking is usually old programming, beliefs installed long before you knew you had a choice. The good news is that your mind can be reprogrammed. You can overwrite the old negative scripts with new empowering ones. Your thoughts are habits. And like any habit, they can be changed with awareness and repetition.

Protect Your Mental Environment

Just as a garden cannot grow in contaminated soil, your mind cannot flourish in an environment filled with negativity. Be mindful of what you expose yourself to. The people you spend time with. The media you consume. The conversations you participate in. Negativity is contagious. So is positivity. Choose wisely.

Reflection Exercise - Replace the Negative Shovel

1. Write down three negative thoughts you catch yourself repeating often.
2. Next to each one, write a positive replacement thought that lifts you instead of limits you.
3. For the next week, each time a negative thought appears, consciously replace it with the new one.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

Negative thinking never makes life better. Not once. Not ever. Ditch the shovel, climb the ladder and watch how your world changes. You will be amazed at how quickly the ladder appears when you stop digging the hole.

16

COMPARING YOURSELF WITH OTHERS

Chapter 16 – Comparing Yourself with Others

One of the quickest ways to suck the joy out of life is comparing yourself to others.

"If I could just have what they have, I would be happy."

"If I looked like that, I would be happy."

"If I could live like them, I would be happy."

Sound familiar? Most of us have said a version of these lines at some point in our lives. But here is the truth, the only thing you can do better than anyone else in the world is be yourself. You are unique, one of a kind. The mold was broken when you were born, so why waste your time trying to be a copy of someone else?

The Comparison Trap

The problem with comparing yourself to others is that it is based on incomplete information. You are comparing your behind the scenes with someone else's highlight reel. Social media amplifies this illusion. You see vacations, new cars, smiling families, perfect meals and curated snapshots.

What you do not see are the arguments, the debt, the moments of doubt, the loneliness or the insecurities they hide. For all you know, the very person you envy may be looking at you thinking, "If only I had what they have." Envy flows in both directions more often than you realize.

Lessons from a Song

Back in the 1960s, Eric Burdon and The Animals recorded a song called "No Self Pity." A few lines have always stuck with me:

"No matter how low you are, there is always somebody lower,
No matter how fine you are, there is always somebody finer,
No matter how dumb you are, there is always somebody dumber,
No matter how bad you are, there is someone there to forgive you,
No matter how ugly you are, there is no such thing as ugly."

The message is simple, comparing yourself to others is pointless. There will always be someone with more and someone with less, someone better at something and someone worse at something. It never ends. The comparison ladder has no top and no bottom. Climbing it only exhausts you.

You Are an Inspiration Too

I see this all the time. People feel they must compete with others to be happy. You hear it in their language, "If I could just be like so and so, I would be happy." But here is something most people forget, someone you are looking at with envy could be looking at you with admiration. We inspire each other far more than we realize.

You are not meant to be a copy. You are meant to be yourself. And somewhere out there, someone might be wishing they had your resilience, your humor, your story, your spirit or the things you take for granted.

The Antidote, Gratitude

The cure for comparison is gratitude. Instead of staring at what others have, look at what is already in your life. If you can breathe, walk, see, hear or simply wake up above ground, you already have so much to be thankful for. Gratitude multiplies. The more you notice, the more you realize how rich you already are.

When people ask how I am, I often say, "I am above ground, what a great day," and I mean it. The moment you open your eyes each morning, that alone is a reason for joy. Many cannot say the same.

A Personal Note

In my younger years, I wasted time comparing myself to those who seemed smarter, richer or luckier. It never made me happier. What made me happier was shifting my focus to my own path, my wife, my business, my health and my passions. That is where joy lives, not in wishing for someone else's life but in building and appreciating your own.

The list of things you have going for you is enormous. You breathe; many cannot. You walk; many cannot. You talk; many cannot. You hear, many cannot. You see, many cannot. Gratitude is the soil in which happiness grows.

Imagine beginning each day with the attitude, "I am above ground, what a great day." Your entire outlook shifts immediately. You feel lighter, calmer and more aware of the blessings that surround you. Gratitude turns ordinary moments into gifts, and it turns envy into appreciation.

Why Comparison Hurts

Researchers have found that comparison activates the same parts of the brain that process pain. That is why comparison feels heavy, draining and emotionally sharp. It creates the illusion that you are "less than" someone else. But here is the truth, comparison is not about them, it is about how you see yourself.

When you strengthen your identity, clarify your values and appreciate your own journey, comparison loses its power. The more grounded you become in who you are, the less interested you are in who others are trying to be.

Focus on Your Path

Think of life like a long mountain trail. You cannot walk your path while staring at someone else's trail. Your trip. You slow down. You lose direction. The person climbing a different mountain has their own storms, their own terrain and their own view.

What matters is the mountain in front of you, not the mountain beside you.

Success becomes more meaningful when you measure it against your growth, not someone else's accomplishments. Replace "Where are they?" with "How far have I come?" Replace "Why don't I have what they have?" with "What can I create with what I have right now?"

Why Gratitude Works

Gratitude pulls your attention inward, toward the abundance already in your life. It grounds you in reality, not illusion. Gratitude rewrites the mental script that comparison tries to control. It shifts your mindset from scarcity to abundance, from envy to appreciation, from wishing to working.

Every time comparison creeps in, gratitude pushes it out.

Reflection Exercise - Trade Comparison for Gratitude

1. Write down three areas where you often compare yourself to others, looks, money, career, relationships or anything else.
2. For each area, write down three things you are grateful for in your own life right now.
3. Practice noticing when comparison creeps in. Instead of asking, "Why do they have that and I do not?" ask, "What can I appreciate about what I already have?"

The only life you will ever live is yours. Why waste it wishing for someone else's?

17

HAPPINESS
WITH OTHERS

Chapter 17 – Happiness with Others

Relationships can be the greatest source of happiness, or the deepest pit of misery. Few things influence your daily mood, mindset, and even your physical health more than the people you spend time with. Whom you surround yourself with matters more than most people ever realize.

The Ripple Effect of People

If you spend most of your time with negative, bitter, or toxic people, how long do you think you can stay positive? Their attitude rubs off on you. Their negativity becomes the background noise of your life. On the other hand, being around happy, supportive, optimistic people makes everything lighter. Their energy is contagious too, but in a good way. Suddenly, problems feel manageable, hope feels natural, and life feels brighter.

We become like the people we spend most time with. That is not philosophy, it is neuroscience. Your brain literally mirrors the emotions, language, and behaviors of the people around you. Spend time with complainers, and you will complain more. Spend time with dreamers and doers, and you will raise your own game.

Choose Your Company Carefully

The lesson is simple but powerful, choose your company carefully.

Ask yourself, Do the people around me lift me up or drag me down? Do they challenge me to grow or encourage me to shrink? Do they add joy to my life or drain it?

Guard your energy like your life depends on it, because in many ways, it does. The people around you act like thermostats, not thermometers. They do not just reflect the emotional temperature, they influence it. Spend time with people who warm your soul, not freeze it.

Walking Away Is Okay

Many people need to hear this; it is okay to walk away from relationships that drain life out of you. That does not mean you stop loving people. It does not mean you hold grudges or wish them to be ill. It simply means you refuse to let their negativity dictate your life. Sometimes the healthiest choice is not to fight or fix, it is to step back.

You are responsible for your energy. You do not owe constant access to people who bring nothing but chaos. Give yourself permission to prioritize peace.

A Personal Note

Throughout my life, I have had seasons where I surrounded myself with the wrong people, people who fueled negativity, tore others down, or believed life was nothing but struggle. When I stayed in that environment, my own outlook darkened.

It was not until I chose to spend time with optimistic, motivated, and supportive people that my life began to shift upward. Their encouragement did not just make me feel good; it inspired me. It reminded me of what was possible. That is the power of your circle. It shapes your perspective more than you realize.

The Happiness Multiplier

Happiness multiplies when it is shared. When you are around people who celebrate your wins, encourage your dreams, and stand beside you during tough times, life feels richer. And when you are that person for others, you amplify your own happiness.

“Show me your friends, and I will show you your future” is not just an old saying, it is a roadmap. The people closest to you influence your habits, your choices, your confidence, and ultimately your direction in life.

Why Some People Attract Others

Have you ever walked into a room filled with people? A living room, a bar, a meeting, a social event, whatever the setting, you will notice something interesting. There is almost always a cluster of people gathered around one or two individuals, laughing, talking, enjoying themselves. And then there are others standing on the edges, disconnected and unsure.

Why does that happen?

It comes down to simple but powerful behaviors. Here are some of my tips for building happy, healthy relationships:

Treat people exactly the way you want to be treated.

This is the Golden Rule. You only get what you give. This is the Law of Reciprocity. Be kind and people will be kind. Treat people with respect and they usually return it. If someone does not, politely move on.

People who consistently behave that way are often what I call Group One people, and they are not worth your energy.

Do not take yourself too seriously.

No one else does. Everyone carries their own beliefs, opinions, and priorities. Trying to force your ideas on others is no more effective than them trying to force theirs on you. Relax, be open, and do not let ego run the show.

Smile when you communicate.

Most communication is non-verbal. People pay more attention to your energy than your words. A sincere smile softens conversations, lowers tension, and signals that you are approachable. Remember, you can be right or you can have a relationship.

Compromise is essential. Nobody likes a know-it-all, not even you. Winning every argument is a lonely victory. Say something nice. Genuine compliments open doors. They do not have to be grand. "Love your smile," or "How was your weekend?" can build connection quickly.

Learn to tell jokes

Humor is a bridge between people. It relaxes the room, builds comfort, and makes others enjoy your company. One good joke is plenty. Keep it appropriate.

Stop saying "I can't."

When people tell me they cannot give compliments or tell jokes or smile more, they are right only because they believe they are right.

Replace "I can't" with "I will learn," and watch how quickly your confidence grows. Take baby steps. You do not need to be a comedian or a motivational speaker. Just be warm, interested, and genuine.

The Emotional Environment

The emotional tone of the people around you influences your physical health more than most people realize. Studies show that being surrounded by negativity can increase stress hormones, weaken your immune system, and even shorten your lifespan. Happiness is not just emotional, it is biological. Your emotional environment matters as much as the air you breathe.

You Teach People How to Treat You

In every relationship, you set the tone. By what you tolerate. By what you reward. By the boundaries you enforce. If someone constantly brings negativity and you keep allowing it, you unintentionally teach them that it is acceptable. Healthy relationships require healthy limits.

Reflection Exercise - Your Happiness Circle

Take ten minutes to reflect on the relationships in your life.

1. List the people you spend the most time with, at least five names.
2. Label each one, Do they lift me up, drain me, inspire me, or discourage me?
3. Decide your next step, Spend more time with the lifters. Set boundaries with the drainers. Step away when necessary, from relationships that constantly pull you down.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

Remember, happiness is not built in isolation. It is shaped by the people you choose to let into your circle. Choose wisely.

18

MORE ON
SMILING

Chapter 18 – More on Smiling

Want to change the direction of your day instantly? Smile. It sounds almost too simple, like a slogan on a motivational poster, but science backs it up. When you smile, even if you do not feel like it, your body responds. Your brain releases dopamine and endorphins. Stress hormones drop. Your muscles relax. Your heart rate settles. And just like that, your mood begins to shift.

Smiling Changes You

Smiling is not just an outward gesture, it is a message to your brain that says, “We are okay. Life is not as bad as it feels.” Your body influences your emotions more than most people realize. That is why posture matters. That is why breathing matters. That is why smiling, even a forced smile at first, can trick your brain into adjusting how you feel.

Try it the next time you are in a funk. Stand up, shoulders back, smile. It may feel awkward for a second but give it a moment. You will feel the shift.

Smiling Changes Others

Think about the last time a stranger smiled at you. Did you frown back? Probably not. Smiles are contagious. They are tiny gifts you give to others without saying a word. A genuine smile disarms tension. It puts people at ease. It builds trust. In business, it can open doors. In relationships, it can heal wounds. In day-to-day interactions, it can brighten someone else's mood in ways you may never fully realize.

Sometimes a simple smile at a cashier, a waiter, or a tired coworker is the only kindness they will receive that day. Do not underestimate the impact.

Smiling Is Free

The best part about smiling is that it costs nothing. No membership. No tools. No excuses. You can do it anytime, anywhere, and the return on investment is tremendous. Even if people do not smile back, you have still done your part. You have chosen to project positivity instead of negativity. You have chosen to be the spark instead of the shadow.

A Personal Note

I have lost count of how many times smiling has shifted the tone of a difficult day for me. In business meetings, on airplanes, in grocery store lines, a simple smile has opened conversations, softened tension, and reminded me, and others, that life does not have to be as heavy as we make it. It does not solve every problem, but it softens the edges of almost all of them.

What Your Face Reveals

Nothing shows more about your emotional state than your facial expressions. We read people this way constantly. Years ago, I enjoyed a TV series called "Lye to Me," which focused on micro-expressions, the tiny involuntary twitches, squints, or movements that reveal inner thoughts. Professional poker players call these tells. NLP practitioners use them to understand the connection between physical expression and emotional state.

This raises an interesting question, if your negative emotions can influence your physical expression, can the reverse be true? If you smile, even without a reason to smile, does the physical act influence your emotional state?

Try it right now. Smile, even a small one. Feel the difference? I do.

Body Language Speaks Too

Our body language tells the world what we are feeling. Folded arms can communicate defensiveness or withdrawal. Avoiding eye contact can suggest insecurity or discomfort. A relaxed, open posture invites connection. None of this requires you to be a scientist to understand, just observant.

A smile, even a subtle one, signals openness, warmth, and approachability. Your smile is a social invitation that says, "It is safe to connect with me."

A Smile Makes the World Respond to You

Charlie Chaplin understood the power of smiling when he wrote his famous song "Smile," encouraging people to smile even through heartache. He understood that smiling lifts the spirit, even when life feels difficult.

I practice smiling throughout my day, while walking, driving, golfing, shopping, or just moving from one place to another. I smile when I am alone. And almost every time I make eye contact with someone, they smile back, even people driving past me in their cars. Sometimes they even greet me with, "Hello, how are you?" One sincere smile creates a ripple of positivity wherever it goes.

It might sound strange, but smiling is a wonderful way to move through life. It certainly beats looking grumpy.

The Social Power of a Smile

People gravitate toward warm, friendly faces. A smile makes you more approachable, more trustworthy, and more memorable. In personal relationships, smiles strengthen bonds. In professional environments, smiles smooth communication and build rapport. In moments of tension, a smile can act as emotional first aid, lowering defenses and opening the door to cooperation.

A smile is your built-in relationship tool, communication tool, and happiness tool.

Smiling as a Habit

Smiling can become a habit, just like any other positive behavior. The more you practice it, the more automatic it becomes. Soon, you are not forcing it, you are simply experiencing more moments worth smiling about. Your brain becomes trained to look for positivity, and you naturally start seeing more of it. Smiling is not pretending life is perfect. It is choosing to lean toward the light instead of the dark.

The Physiology of Joy

Scientists have discovered that when you smile, even intentionally, your vagus nerve is activated, which lowers stress, slows your heart rate, and signals your body to relax. This is why smiling can interrupt spirals of anxiety or frustration. It is not imaginary, it is biological. Your biology is always listening to your behavior.

Smiling Builds Confidence

A smile sends a message to your subconscious that you are capable of handling whatever comes your way. It quietly boosts confidence. When you smile in challenging moments, you are telling yourself, "I've got this," even before you believe it. Confidence grows from small signals repeated often.

The Practice of Smiling

Practice smiling intentionally: Smile at cashiers. Smile at waiters. Smile at coworkers. Smile at neighbors. Smile at strangers. Smile at yourself in the mirror every morning. Not everyone will smile back. Some will. Either way, you have made the world lighter for them and yourself. "A smile is the fastest way to change your mood and someone else's."

Reflection Exercise - Smile More

For the next seven days, challenge yourself to smile more often intentionally.

1. Morning Mirror. Start your day by smiling at yourself in the mirror, even if you do not feel like it.
2. Daily Interactions. Pick at least three moments each day to smile at someone, a coworker, a stranger, a friend, a cashier.
3. Evening Reflection. At night, write down how people responded. Did anyone smile back? Did it change the way you felt?

Notice how something so small can ripple outward in ways you did not expect.

19

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

Chapter 19 – Awkward Conversations

There is one situation most people dread, standing in a room full of strangers with nothing to say. The silence feels heavy. Your palms get sweaty. You wonder if you look awkward, if people notice, if you should have stayed home. Sound familiar?

You are not alone. Social anxiety in new situations is one of the most common fears people struggle with. But here is the secret, you do not need to be the funniest, smartest, or most interesting person in the room. You only need one simple skill, ask questions.

Why Questions Work

People love to talk about themselves. Studies show that sharing your own experiences lights up the same reward centers in the brain as food or money. When you let someone talk about themselves, you are giving them a gift, and they walk away liking you more because you made them feel heard.

Instead of scrambling for clever lines or personal stories, take the pressure off yourself, shift the spotlight to the other person.

Easy Conversation Starters

You do not need groundbreaking openers. Simple is effective. Try these:

- "How are you?"
- "What do you do?"
- "Where are you from originally?"
- "What do you enjoy doing outside of work?"

- “How did you get into that line of work?”
- “What has been the best part of your week so far?”

Basic questions work because people relax when they talk about themselves. And when they relax, you do too.

The Pressure's Off

When you focus on asking questions, the pressure shifts away from trying to impress. You stop worrying about whether you sound interesting enough. Your job becomes simple: just listen.

People rarely remember what you said in a conversation, but they always remember how you made them feel. If you make them feel valued, they will walk away believing you are a great conversationalist, even if you barely spoke about yourself.

When the Conversation Fizzles

If things go quiet, do not panic. Just ask another question or reflect back something they said.

Example:

- They say, “I just moved here.”
- You say, “Oh really? From where? How are you settling in so far?”

You do not need an impressive response, curiosity is enough.

The Real Goal

The goal of any conversation is not to impress people; it is to connect with them. It is not about proving you are interested, it is about showing them that they are interesting. When you do that, conversations stop feeling awkward and start feeling natural.

As the saying goes, "If you want to be interesting, be interested."

A Personal Note

Early in my career, networking events terrified me. I would walk into a room full of strangers and instantly feel like the odd one out. I thought I had to impress people with stories about myself. I was wrong.

The moment I learned to flip it, to ask instead of tell, everything changed. Conversations flowed, connections were easier, and ironically, people started seeing me as more confident, not less.

It's Hard to Be Happy Alone

It is difficult to be happy when you feel isolated. To avoid that lonely feeling, you need the ability to communicate well with others, whether family, friends, coworkers, or strangers.

That means knowing how to navigate conversations, especially when communication starts to break down and people begin taking sides or "drawing lines in the sand." That is where communication tools become invaluable.

The Magic Words

Here is a powerful way to reset a tense or difficult conversation. Pause politely and say:

"I could use your help."

These five words can stop an argument in its tracks. When you say them sincerely, you instantly communicate that you are not interested in fighting and that you respect the other person enough to seek their perspective.

A small variation works just as well:

"I think I'm confused, can you please help me out?"

These phrases disarm the other person and allow both of you to reset emotionally.

Why This Works

Questions force the other person to think. They must pause, process, and compose a response. That interruption shifts their mind away from anger or defensiveness and toward cooperation. This is why interviews, interrogations, and courtroom questioning work so effectively, questions redirect thought.

But remember, the key is to stay calm. A shouted question is still a shout. Take a breath before you speak.

Another Powerful Phrase

When communication breaks down, try this:

"Can you tell me how this helps us get where we both want to go?"

This question pulls the conversation away from emotional chaos and refocuses both people on the goal. It places you on the same side of the problem, not opposite sides of an argument.

Watch How the Pros Do It

If you want to see this technique in action, watch interviews on television, especially when guests are uncooperative. Notice how professional interviewers calmly reframe questions, redirect energy, and maintain control. A well-timed question can completely shift the tone of a conversation.

Becoming a Better Communicator

My hope is not that you become a lawyer interrogating everyone you meet, but rather that you learn to use questions to maintain calm, productive communication. Another helpful variation of the original phrase is:

"I think I'm beginning to see your point, but I'm a little confused. Can you help me understand?"

This communicates cooperation, humility, and openness, all of which calm heated situations quickly.

Remember, "You can be right, or you can have good relationships." Choose wisely. Not every argument is worth winning. Many are not even worth having. Choose connection over combat.

The Human Fear of Silence

One of the biggest reasons conversations feel awkward is that people panic when silence appears. But silence is neutral. It does not mean you are being judged. It does not mean you said something wrong. It simply means the other person is thinking.

Learning to tolerate silence for a moment or two makes you appear more confident. Let pauses happen. Conversations breathe in those spaces.

The Power of Listening

Most people listen to reply, not to understand. If you become the person who truly listens, people will feel magnetically drawn to you. Listening is one of the rarest and most valuable social skills.

Lean in. Nod. Make eye contact. Let people finish their thoughts. Ask follow-up questions. This alone will make you unforgettable.

Your Body Speaks Before You Do

Open posture, a relaxed stance, hands visible, and a warm expression will make conversations smoother before you even open your mouth. People read your body before they hear your words. In other words, your presence speaks first.

Reflection Exercise - Your Conversation Toolkit

1. Think of the next social situation where you might feel awkward, a work event, a family gathering, a community meeting, or a networking event.
2. Write down three go-to questions you can keep in your back pocket.
3. Practice using them once this week, even in small moments like talking to a cashier or neighbor.

Notice what happens when you stop worrying about yourself and start focusing on others. You may be surprised at how easy connection becomes.

20

MORE
COMMUNICATIONS
SKILLS

Chapter 20 – More Communication Skills

Communication is the glue of relationships. Friendships, marriages, families, and workplaces rise or fall on how well people communicate. Yet one of the biggest mistakes people make is assuming others can read their minds.

The Mind-Reading Myth

We sometimes think, “If they really cared, they would know what I need,” or “I should not have to say it, they should just get it.” But the truth is simple, people are not mind-readers. Not your spouse, not your kids, not your coworkers, and not your friends. If you do not express what you want, need, or feel, you cannot expect others to guess correctly. When they do not, frustration builds and misunderstandings multiply.

Silence Creates Distance

A lot of pain in relationships does not come from betrayal or cruelty. It comes from silence. Instead of speaking up, people assume. They guess. They quietly stew, hoping the other person will magically figure it out. Over time that silence grows into resentment, and eventually it explodes over something small that was never the real issue. The cure is simple, say the thing.

Silence is not neutral, it is a form of communication too, but it often sends the wrong message, usually one the other person misinterprets. And when people interpret silence through their own fears or insecurities, trouble follows.

Speak Up, Respectfully

If you want something, say it. If something bothers you, express it clearly but respectfully. And if you appreciate someone, do not keep it to yourself, tell them. Words are powerful. They can tear down or build up. They can close hearts or open doors. Use them wisely and generously.

Think about how uplifted you feel when someone simply says, "Thank you, I appreciate you." Now think of the times you have felt that about someone but never said it. Those were missed opportunities to strengthen connection. Do not let silence rob you of relationships that could be deeper and happier.

A Personal Note

Early in my marriage and career, I sometimes assumed people should "just know" what I wanted or how I felt. When they did not, I would become frustrated or disappointed. Everything changed when I learned to communicate honestly and directly, without games or guesswork.

When I began saying what I meant, kindly and clearly, my relationships strengthened. Conflicts resolved faster. Trust grew. People appreciated knowing where I stood and no longer had to interpret hints or decode silence. Clear communication is a gift you give yourself and others.

The Rule of Thumb

Here is my rule of thumb for good communication,

- Do not expect people to read your mind,

- Do not bottle things up until you explode,
- Do speak up honestly,
- Do express appreciation often.

Unspoken expectations become premeditated resentments. Speak the words, even when they feel uncomfortable. You will always be better off for it.

Understanding the "Delivery"

Communication is not just about the words you speak. It is also about your delivery, the way you speak, the tone, the volume, the facial expressions, and your body language. Words are passengers riding on the vehicle of your delivery.

Your tone matters, soft or harsh. Your attitude matters, comforting or threatening. Volume matters, yelling creates defensiveness while calmness creates safety. Facial expressions matter, a smile opens doors while a frown closes them. Body language matters too, pointing fingers or crossing arms sends a clear message the other person may interpret as hostility or withdrawal.

We often hear the phrase, "It wasn't what they said but how they said it." That is the delivery. Politicians are judged more for delivery than for content. The same is true in homes, friendships, workplaces, and relationships.

Setting Up Your Message

Sometimes the best way to ensure your message is received correctly is to "set it up" with what I call a preamble. This does not need to happen in every conversation, only when the message is important or sensitive.

Before delivering your point, create a safe environment. Smile gently, soften your tone, slow your pace, relax your arms, and choose a non-threatening posture. Then begin with something like:

- “The work you’ve done seems quite good, but I need some help understanding your approach.”
- “I may be misunderstanding something, can you help me out?”
- “I’m not trying to argue, I just want to understand better.”

These setups soften communication, reduce defensiveness, and open the line for true understanding.

Asking Questions, Your Secret Weapon

When communication becomes tense or heated, use a question to reset the conversation:

“I could use your help.”

“Can you help me understand?”

“How does this help us get where we both want to go?”

Questions interrupt emotional momentum. They force the listener to think rather than react. This mental shift defuses tension. Skilled interviewers, mediators, and negotiators use this technique constantly because it works.

Always remember to remain calm when asking. A calm question is powerful. A shouted question is just shouting.

Everyone Has a Filter

Every person you interact with is filtering your words through their own beliefs, fears, insecurities, and past experiences. You might think your message is crystal clear, but it arrives distorted on the other side. That is why people misunderstand each other so often.

Great communicators understand this and take responsibility not just for the message but also for how it is delivered. If you want connection instead of conflict, think not only about what you say but how the other person will hear it.

Happy People Communicate Well

It is my observation that great communicators are often very happy people. They build bridges easily. People want to be around them. They rarely end up alone or misunderstood for long. Unhappy people, on the other hand, often struggle with communication. They avoid tough conversations, bottled up emotions, and are repeatedly misunderstood.

Which person do you want to be? Better communication is a direct path to more happiness.

Listen for the Truth Behind the Words

When people speak, they often express emotions more than facts. Listening for the feeling behind the words helps you respond with empathy instead of defensiveness. The greatest communicators listen for meaning, not just language.

Timing Matters

A message delivered at the wrong time can create the wrong result. Choosing the right moment is part of communication. Do not bring up a sensitive issue when someone is exhausted, distracted, emotional, or stressed. Wait until both of you can engage with clarity and calm.

Clarity Is Kindness

Clarity prevents confusion. Vagueness breeds frustration. Clear communication is not harsh, it is kind. It removes guessing, eliminates assumptions, and strengthens trust. People always appreciate knowing where they stand.

Reflection Exercise - Say the Thing

1. Think of one thing you have been keeping to yourself, a need, frustration, or appreciation.
2. Write it down. How can you say it clearly and respectfully?
3. Commit to sharing it with the person this week.

Notice what happens when you stop waiting for mind-reading and start communicating directly. Chances are that the relationship will grow stronger, healthier, and lighter.

21

ART OF
LISTENING

Chapter 21 – The Art of Listening

Here is a truth most people do not like to admit, most of us do not really listen. We wait. We wait for our turn to speak. We half-hear the other person's words while rehearsing what we are going to say next. And people can tell.

Real listening is rare. Rare because it requires presence, patience, and humility. Rare because our world is noisy, distracted, and constantly demanding our attention. Rare because listening feels passive, even though it is one of the most powerful active skills we can develop.

Yet when you become a truly good listener, your relationships transform. Your communication improves. Your confidence grows. And the people around you begin to feel something they may not have felt in years, heard, valued, respected.

What Real Listening Looks Like

Real listening is not about politely waiting until it is your turn to talk. Real listening means giving someone your full attention. It means setting aside distractions, shutting down the inner monologue, and actually tuning in.

When you truly listen, something powerful happens, people feel heard. They feel valued. And that experience deepens relationships faster than almost anything else.

Think about the last time you felt someone really listened to you, not just nodded along, but truly heard you. It felt good, didn't it? It made you respect that person. It made you trust them. It made you feel understood. That is the gift you give when you practice listening.

Why Listening Is Rare

We live in a noisy world. Phones buzz. Notifications ding. Attention spans shrink. Everyone wants to be heard, but few want to slow down and hear.

And our brains do not always help.

Humans speak at an average of around 100 words per minute. But the mind can process 250 to 300 words per minute. That gap leaves space for mental wandering, daydreaming, assumptions, or mentally drafting our reply before the other person has even finished a sentence.

Sometimes we stop listening because we think we already know where the conversation is going, and we assume we understand before the person finishes speaking. News flash, most of us are not psychic. When we fill in the blanks on our own, we are almost always wrong.

Other times we drift off because our mind takes micro-breaks, thinking about chores or plans or worries completely unrelated to the discussion. These little lapses cause big misunderstandings.

Listening requires effort, but the payoff is enormous.

A Simple Practice

Here is a simple habit to practice, the next time someone is speaking to you, pause before you answer. Do not jump in. Let their words land. Breathe. Give them the space to finish completely.

That pause shows respect. It signals that you were not just waiting for your turn. And often, it helps you hear something you might have missed if you were busy planning your reply.

Listening Builds Connection

Listening is one of the simplest gifts you can give another human being. And yet it is one of the most powerful.

- In business, good listening skills helps you understand what people really need, and that can be the key to solving problems and creating opportunities.
- In friendships, listening communicates care, not because you fix anything, but because you are present.
- In marriage or family, listening builds trust. It says, "Your voice matters to me. Your feelings matter to me."

Sometimes the greatest act of love is not offering advice, it is being quiet long enough to let someone pour out what is on their heart.

Listening versus Hearing

Part of good communication includes listening to what others are actually saying. Hearing and listening are two separate activities. We can all hear someone talking, but sometimes we realize we are not really listening.

The difference between a great communicator and one who is only average is the ability to focus long enough to truly understand the message being delivered. That means listening to the words, but also the pauses, facial expressions, tone, and body language.

We communicate with our entire being, not just with words.

Why Misunderstandings Happen

Because the mind processes information so quickly, listeners often take mental breaks. During these breaks, we drift into assumptions, daydreams, or premature conclusions.

When this happens, communication deteriorates quickly. A misunderstanding is usually just seconds away. And once misunderstandings sets in, a good outcome becomes rare. Even when we hear someone's words, it does not always mean we understand their message. This is where focus becomes essential. The best communicators use their mental processing speed advantage to stay engaged rather than drift off.

Good listeners analyze the words, the tone, the energy, the body language. They use the extra thinking speed to better understand, not to craft their rebuttal.

The Power of Feeling Understood

People do not just want to be heard; they want to be understood. When you listen well, you give others a sense of acceptance. Acceptance increases confidence. Confidence increases happiness. And happiness leads to stronger, more fulfilling relationships.

On the other hand, poor listeners often deal with rejection. Not because people dislike them personally, but because people feel unheard or dismissed. And rejection sucks. Listening prevents unnecessary conflict and strengthens human connection.

A Personal Note

I work on my listening skills constantly. I am better now than when I was younger, but I still catch myself drifting. My one simple trick? When my mind starts racing, I silently tell myself, "Shut up and listen." It works.

The people who influenced me most were not always the best speakers, they were the best listeners. They made me feel like my words mattered. That is the kind of person I want to be, and that is the kind of person the world needs more of.

The Law of Reciprocity

Listening aligns with one of the biggest laws of life, You get back what you give out. If you want others to listen to you, start by listening to them.

People are drawn to those who make them feel seen and heard. When you practice good listening, acceptance rises, trust increases, and relationships become smoother. Poor listeners often wonder why people avoid talking to them. Great listeners never have that problem.

Listening Is Leadership

People follow listeners. Leaders who listen earn respect, loyalty, and honesty. Leaders who ignore or interrupt them create fear and frustration. Listening is not a soft skill; it is a power skill.

Listening Reduces Conflict

Most arguments are not about the issue; they are about one or both people feeling unheard. If you can listen deeply, emotions settle, clarity rises, and conflict becomes easier to resolve.

Listening Makes You More Likable

People naturally gravitate toward those who make them feel interesting. Listening does exactly that. Be the person who listens, and you will never be lonely.

Reflection Exercise - Practice the Pause

1. Think of one person in your life who deserves your full attention this week.
2. The next time you speak with them, put away distractions. Look them in the eye. Really listen.
3. Before you answer, pause. Let their words settle. Notice how it feels and notice how they respond.

Listening might be simple, but it is also transformational. Start practicing the art of listening, and you will see your relationships, your communication, and your life grow richer.

22

RELATIONSHIPS
GROUP ONE VS.
GROUP TWO

Chapter 22 – Relationships, Group One versus Group Two

Over the years, I have noticed that relationships usually fall into two categories.

Group One, people who drag you down. They criticize, complain, and drain your energy. They magnify problems, minimize your progress, and leave you feeling smaller than when you arrived.

These are the people who bring stress, friction, and emotional weight into your life. It really is that simple. Every relationship you have lives in one of those two groups.

Group Two, people who uplift you. They encourage you, support you, and bring out your best. They celebrate your wins, listen when you need to vent, and remind you of your worth when you forget. These people inspire optimism, growth, and resilience.

The Catch

Here is the catch, you get to choose who you spend your time with. Of course, you cannot avoid every Group One person. Some may be family, coworkers, or neighbors. But you can limit your exposure, set boundaries, and protect your peace.

More importantly, you can intentionally seek out Group Two people, the ones who make life lighter, who build instead of break, who push you forward rather than hold you back. The choice is yours.

The Compound Effect of People

Think of it like this, you are the average of the five people you spend most time with. Their attitudes, habits, and outlooks rub off on you more than you realize. Spend most of your time with complainers and you will complain more.

Spend your time with dreamers and achievers and your thinking expands. People are contagious, so make sure you're catching the right stuff.

Your "Mental Suitcase" and Theirs

Libraries are filled with books about relationships, but here is the simple truth, everyone is carrying a mental suitcase packed with years of programming, issues, beliefs, and emotional habits.

These "programs" were handed to us the moment we arrived in this world, shaped by parents, teachers, siblings, neighbors, culture, and environment. Nobody escapes without some baggage.

And because everyone is navigating life through their own lens, they behave in ways that make sense to them, even if it does not always make sense to you.

One key to being happy is learning to get along with other people even when their values, biases, and beliefs differ from your own. Doing this helps you avoid being sucked into someone else's unhappiness, because misery loves company, and Group One people love to gather a crowd.

Which Group Are You In?

Chances are, you already know people in both groups. The question worth asking is, "Which group do I fall into?" Your answer matters, because the way others experience you affects your confidence, your relationships, and your happiness.

If you act from Group Two behaviors, you will attract more Group Two connections. If you act like a Group One person, you will repel the people who could help you grow. And when you meet someone new, it takes only a few minutes to notice which group they are likely to fall into. This is not about judging them; it is about knowing how to communicate.

Why Communication and Listening Matter

This is where the previous chapters come into play. Relationships do not thrive simply because someone belongs to Group Two. They thrive because communication and listening elevate the connection.

- Communicate openly with Group Two people. Tell them you value them.
- Listen deeply. Listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give another person.
- Express gratitude instead of assuming they know how you feel.

When both sides feel heard, appreciated, and understood, the relationship becomes resilient, meaningful, and energizing. When dealing with Group One people, communication matters even more. Setting boundaries, remaining calm, and maintaining your own positive adult posture helps prevent their emotional storms from sucking you in.

A Personal Note

Looking back, I can clearly see how the people around me shaped the direction of my life. When I surrounded myself with Group One, the negative, bitter, toxic crowd, my outlook darkened. I absorbed their mindset because I was swimming in their emotional atmosphere.

But when I chose to spend time with people who saw possibilities instead of limitation, people who encouraged instead of criticized, my life began to shift upward. Their energy lifted me. Their optimism inspired change. That is the power of Group Two people, they make climbing easier.

Choosing Your Circle Wisely

You cannot always control who crosses your path. But you can control who gets your time, your trust, and your emotional energy.

Choose Group Two. Limit Group One. Protect your peace. It is one of the greatest decisions you will ever make for your happiness.

"You cannot choose the family you were born into. But you can choose the family you build around you."

You Teach People How to Treat You

Your boundaries, your responses, and your expectations teach others how to interact with you. Group Two people will appreciate clarity. Group One people may resist it, but the resistance reveals even more about which group they are in.

Energy Doesn't Lie

Pay attention to how you feel around people. Your nervous system often knows before your mind does. If you consistently feel tense, drained, or defensive around someone, that is a sign. Conversely, if you feel lighter, hopeful, and more like yourself around someone else, that is also a sign. Trust it.

Reflection Exercise - Who's in Your Circle?

1. Make two lists, Group Two (uplifters) and Group One (drainers).
2. For each Group Two individual, write one way you can strengthen that relationship this month, a thank-you, a phone call, an invitation to spend time together.
3. For each Group One person, decide, can I limit my exposure? Can I set boundaries? Can I shift their influence in my life?

Your circle shapes your happiness. Guard it carefully.

23

WHO ARE WE -
REALLY?

Chapter 23 – Who Are We - Really?

We live in a world obsessed with labels. We define ourselves by our job title, by the role we play in our family, by the possessions we own, and sometimes even by the mistakes we have made.

Ask someone, "Who are you?" and most people will answer with something like, "I am an accountant," or "I am a mom," or "I am divorced."

But here is the deeper question, who are you, really? What is left when you strip away the labels?

The Problem with Labels

Labels are not always bad. They help us organize the world. They give us shortcuts to describe what we do and how we fit into society. But they can also trap us.

If you define yourself only by what you do, what happens when you lose the job. If you define yourself only by a role in the family, what happens when that role changes. If you define yourself by your failures, what happens when you want to grow. Labels can become cages. They box you in and convince you that this is all you are, that your story is finished, that change is impossible.

More Than What You Do or Own

The truth is this, you are more than what you do. You are more than what you own. You are more than your past experiences. At your core, you are a human being with potential, creativity, and the ability to grow. You are capable of change. You are capable of surprising yourself.

If you have been defining yourself by what you lack, or by the mistakes you have made, it is time to reframe. You are not your past. You are not your failures. You are possibility.

A Personal Note

For a long time, I defined myself by my struggles. I believed I was the kid from a broken home, the one who would never measure up. Later, I defined myself by work, by success, by the business I built. When things were going well, I felt important. When they were not, I felt like nothing. None of those labels told the whole story.

Eventually, I realized something liberating, I got to decide who I am. Not the past, not the labels, not other people. Just me. And the same is true for you.

The Power of Identity

Here is why this matters, the way you see yourself sets the ceiling for what you will attempt.

If you believe you are broken, you will act broken.

If you believe you are powerless, you will act powerless.

If you believe you are capable, resilient, and creative, you will start living that way.

Identity shapes action. Action shapes results. Results reinforce identity. It becomes a loop. Break the cycle of negative labels and you break free to create a different story.

Rewriting the Story

So, who are you, really. You are not just your job. You are not just your family role. You are not just your past.

You are a living, breathing story that is still being written. And the pen is in your hand. Now let us go a little deeper into how this identity actually works.

Who We Are and What We Are

I believe each of us has two aspects that blend into what we often call our "personality." You can think of it like an atom. In the center is the nucleus, the who-we-are, or your inner self. Orbiting around it are the protons and neutrons, your what-we-are, your outer self. Let us start with the outer self, because that is usually easier to see.

The "What-We-Are" Outer Self

The what-we-are part of us is made up of our roles and our skills.

Roles include things like,

- parent
- spouse or partner
- sibling
- child
- co-worker
- friend

Skills include things like,

- being a communicator
- being an employee or leader
- being a musician, artist, or athlete
- being a problem solver or caregiver

These examples are important. They are how the world often sees us. They make up our persona, the outer self we present to others. But they are not the deepest part of us.

The "Who-We-Are" Inner Self

The who-we-are part is our inner self. This is where our beliefs, values, and core programming live. Your inner self is the sum of all the messages, experiences, praises, criticisms, hurts, and encouragements you have collected throughout your life. It includes everything you learned in your relationships as a child and as an adult, what you learned from being a parent, a spouse, a friend, an employee, and so on.

This inner programming affects not only your sense of self, but also every relationship and role you carry out. It colors the way you act as a parent, a partner, a co-worker, and a friend. It influences the confidence behind your skills, the way you handle stress, and how you respond to challenges.

When the inner self is wounded, fearful, angry, or filled with blame and entitlement, it shows up everywhere. It affects your what-we-are, your outer self. When the inner self is grounded, confident, grateful, and hopeful, that also shows up everywhere, in positive, powerful ways.

A Simple Scale - One to Ten

Imagine a simple measuring scale where one is the lowest and ten is the highest. On this scale we are not measuring how much money you have, how many degrees you hold, or how impressive your résumé looks. We are measuring how healthy and peaceful your inner self is, your sense of who-you-are.

How do you think someone who measures a one or a two on that inner self scale will show up in their roles as a parent, co-worker, sibling, or friend. What about someone who measures an eight or a nine on the same scale. The more unresolved issues a person drags around, the lower the inner score tends to be. That usually shows up as:

- lack of self-confidence
- anger
- fear
- blaming others
- a belief in entitlement
- constant defensiveness

All of that spill into their relationships and into their skills. They may still function, but their happiness is low and the people around them feel it. On the other hand, people with a higher inner score tend to be:

- more at peace with themselves
- more emotionally stable
- more generous
- more able to give love and receive it
- more confident but not arrogant

They carry their inner stability into everything they do.

Group One and Group Two Revisited

Earlier, we talked about two kinds of people in relationships, Group One and Group Two. Let us link that idea to the inner self scale.

- Group One people are the ones who score lower on the inner self scale. They carry a lot of unresolved negative programming, and they either do not see it or are not willing to work on it yet. They tend to be takers. They struggle to reciprocate. They may be angry, fearful, jealous, blaming, or entitled. These people are often unhappy and easy to spot once you know what to look for.
- Group Two people are the ones who score higher on the inner self scale. They are reasonably comfortable with who-they-are. They still have issues, just like everyone, but they are aware of them and are working on them. They tend to be givers, not takers, and they rarely look for recognition or reward for their generosity. These are often the uplifters, encouragers, and positive influences in your life.

It is important to understand that Group One people are not "bad" people, they are just stuck in old programming. But they are rarely at peace, and they often drag others into their turmoil. Group Two people are usually much happier. Group One people rarely are.

You might want to read that again and gently ask yourself, "Which group do I mostly live in right now?"

You Cannot Give What You Do Not Have

Here is a hard but hopeful truth.

If you do not have inner peace, it is very hard to bring peace into your relationships.

If you do not have love for yourself, it is difficult to give authentic love to others.

If you do not have happiness within, you cannot consistently create it for someone else.

You cannot give what you do not possess.

Angry, fearful, and unconfident people will rarely find deep or lasting joy, love, and happiness until they begin doing the inner work. They are easily rejected by others and often feel alone and lost. If that sounds familiar, it might be time for some honest decisions about yourself or about the people you allow close to you.

The good news is this, moving from Group One to Group Two is absolutely possible, and it begins with a decision.

Choosing to Reprogram Who You Are

If you feel your inner self score is low, you are not doomed. You are not stuck. You are not broken beyond repair.

You can choose to:

- challenge old beliefs that say "I am not good enough" or "I always fail"
- replace negative labels with new statements of growth and possibility
- learn new skills in communication, gratitude, and emotional regulation

- surround yourself with more Group Two people who model healthier ways of living

By reprogramming your mind with more empowering beliefs and habits, you raise your inner score. When that happens, your roles and relationships improve. You become a better parent, spouse, friend, partner, and co-worker. You feel more confident and much less trapped by old labels.

You start to live more from who-you-are instead of being limited by what-you-have-been told you are.

Knowing about Group One and Group Two and understanding the difference between who-we-are and what-we-are, can help you be much happier, because your life will not suck in the same way ever again. That is more good news.

Reflection Exercise - Stripping the Labels

1. Write down three labels you have used to define yourself, positive or negative. Examples, "I am a single parent." "I am not good with money." "I am successful at work."
2. Ask yourself, do these labels tell the whole truth about me, or are they just parts of the story.
3. For each label, replace it with a statement of possibility. Examples, "I am a parent learning how to thrive."
"I can grow in my financial skills."
"I am more than my work."

Keep these new statements visible. Repeat them daily. Let them remind you that you are not your labels. You are your possibilities. You are potential in motion.

24

TEAMS AND
COLLABORATION

Chapter 24 – Teams and Collaboration

I have been in business long enough to know this: no one succeeds alone.

Behind every so-called “self-made” success story is a team. Mentors who gave advice, partners who shared the risk, employees who carried the load, friends who offered encouragement, and family members who provided support. Even if you cannot always see them, they are there.

The Myth of the Lone Hero

We love the story of the lone hero, the person who fights against all odds, overcomes every obstacle alone, and emerges victorious. It is inspiring, dramatic, and emotionally satisfying.

But it is not real life.

In the real world, every significant accomplishment is a team effort. Steve Jobs had Wozniak. Oprah had mentors who believed in her long before the cameras did. Athletes have coaches, trainers, and teammates. Leaders have advisors and supporters.

Trying to do everything yourself does not make you strong, it makes you limited.

Why Collaboration Matters

Collaboration multiplies strengths and covers weaknesses. Where you fall short, someone else shines. Where you lack perspective, someone else sees clearly. Where you lack energy, someone else can pick up the slack.

Collaboration creates synergy, where the combined efforts produce results far greater than the sum of the individual parts. It also sparks creativity, since different people see the same problem from different angles. And it provides accountability, because a strong team will not let you quit when things get tough.

Doing everything alone is admirable in theory, but it is almost always a road to exhaustion, frustration, and burnout.

Happiness and Connection

The happiest people are rarely the ones going through life as lone wolves. They are the ones who build and nurture teams, not just in business but in friendships and families.

Think about it.

Success is sweeter when it is shared.

Victories feel bigger when celebrated together.

Struggles feel lighter when you are not carrying the weight alone.

Life was never meant to be a solo mission. Even nature tells us this, geese fly in formation to reduce wind resistance. Wolves travel in packs. Bees operate as a unified colony. Progress is a group activity.

A Personal Note

When Kay and I built our company, we quickly realized we could not do it all. We needed people with different skills, fresh ideas, and energy in areas where ours ran low. At first, asking for help felt uncomfortable, almost like admitting defeat. But once we embraced it, everything changed.

Our business grew faster. Our stress decreased. We built not just a company, but a community. That is when it hit me, success is never truly “mine.” It is ours.

And the same is true for you.

Building Your Team

You do not need a corporation to have a team. Your “team” can be:

- a circle of encouraging friends
- a mentor who challenges you
- a supportive spouse or partner
- a family who has your back
- colleagues who collaborate instead of compete

Your team is anyone who lifts you higher, helps you grow, and shares the journey with you. “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Teams in Everyday Life

Many of the world's greatest accomplishments have been achieved by teams working together to solve a problem or create something new. In just about every autobiography I have read, the successful person praised the people who stood by them, supported them, and contributed to their achievements.

People talk endlessly about teamwork, but teamwork is not limited to the office. It happens at home, in the community, in friendships, and in social groups.

The family itself is often our Team One. Most of us collaborate with others every day, whether we realize it or not.

Structure Matters

A team works when it is properly structured. If you research the making of the IBM PC, you will find an excellent example of a strong, high-performing team.

In my own small business, I view the people I am privileged to work with as my team. My management style is more horizontal than vertical. Everyone has a role to play. Everyone contributes to the outcome.

To describe this approach, I often use the example of a canoe.

The Canoe Analogy

A canoe is an interesting vehicle because each person in it is equally responsible for keeping it upright, stable, moving forward, and heading in the right direction.

No one wants to be the person who tips over the canoe.

Everyone must paddle. Everyone shares the responsibility of steering. No one can simply sit back while the others do all the work.

If even one person stops paddling effectively, the entire canoe slows down, drifts off course, or becomes unstable. The rest of the team must work harder to compensate.

Even as the company owner, I am part of the canoe team. My efforts must match everyone else's. My only additional responsibility is to set the destination.

In large organizations, this strategy may be harder to use top-to-bottom, but smaller departments and divisions can function in a canoe-style structure remarkably well.

The Three Cs of Teamwork

“So, what makes a team work?” I use a simple strategy called the Three Cs.

Collaboration, Cooperation, and Communication.

Collaboration, listening to ideas

To collaborate means to listen, really listen, without judgment or criticism. It means hearing everyone's ideas and staying positive about their contributions. Good collaboration makes people feel valued.

Cooperation - coming together

Cooperation is “coming together” and choosing, as a team, which ideas serve the best. It means no one person dominates decisions. Everyone has a voice. Everyone buys in.

Communication - staying together

Communication means “stay together.” It includes ongoing discussions, updates, reviewing objectives, adjusting strategies, and ensuring the team stays aligned.

Good communication prevents hidden agendas, power struggles, and misunderstandings. It keeps the canoe steady.

Group One and Group Two Within Teams

Earlier in the course, I described Group One and Group Two people. These distinctions apply to teams as well.

- Group One individuals, the takers, reactors, and negative critics, can harm a team if not managed carefully.
- Group Two individuals, the givers, collaborators, and positive contributors, help teams thrive.

On a strong team, no one gets all the credit. The victory belongs to the group. This is why spotting Group One and Group Two people quickly can help you understand how to communicate and how to set expectations. Working as a team is not the place for egos, superiority, or hidden agendas.

A Final Thought on Teams

It would be wonderful if everyone in the world embraced the Three Cs. Imagine what life would look like if we all collaborated, cooperated, and communicated with clarity and goodwill.

Teams succeed when individuals choose to rise above ego and work together for a shared goal. When you surround yourself with the right people, you do not just succeed, you become happier. Teams are not just about achieving goals. They are about belonging, connection, and meaning.

Life does not suck nearly as much when you are not paddling upstream alone.

Reflection Exercise - Build Your Team

1. Make a list of the five people who influence you most. Are they helping you move forward or holding you back.
2. Identify one area of your life where you need more support, work, health, relationships, or personal growth. Who could you invite into your team to strengthen that area.
3. Commit to investing in your existing team. Send a thank-you, offer support, or spend meaningful time together.

Remember, no one succeeds alone. Build a team that will walk with you and watch how far you can go.

25

FRIENDSHIP

Chapter 25 – Friendship

Friendship is one of the true treasures of life.

Real friends are not just there when things are going well. They are the ones who show up in the storm. They check in when you have gone quiet. They listen without judgment. They remind you of your worth when you have forgotten it yourself. Anyone can stand beside you in the sunshine. A true friend holds the umbrella in the rain.

The Reciprocity of Friendship

Friendship is never one-sided. If you want great friends, be a great friend. That means giving as much as you receive, sometimes more. It means showing up when it is inconvenient, not just when it is easy. It means listening even when you do not have answers, celebrating their wins without envy, and sitting with them in their losses without needing to fix everything.

Friendship is reciprocity. It is a two-way street paved with trust, loyalty, honesty, and care. When both sides give freely, the relationship becomes richer and deeper over time.

Why Friendship Matters

In a world that can feel disconnected and rushed, friendships are anchors. They keep us grounded, balanced, sane, and emotionally supported. Studies show that people with strong friendships are healthier, handle stress better, recover from setbacks faster, live longer, and are happier overall.

Why? Because human beings are wired for connection. We are not built to handle life alone. There is comfort in knowing someone has your back no matter what you are going through.

One Solid Friend Is Enough

Here is the truth: one solid friendship is worth more than a hundred shallow connections. You do not need a massive circle. You do not need thousands of followers or a long contact list. What you need is a handful of genuine people who you can call at 2 a.m. and know they will answer.

Nurture those relationships. Invest time in them. Water them like a garden. Friendships that are cared for grow stronger. Friendships neglected wither away.

A Personal Note

I have had my share of acquaintances, people who drifted in and out of my life. But the friendships that lasted, the ones I still treasure today, were built on honesty, trust, understanding, and loyalty. These friends walked with me through victories and defeats. They did not always have answers, but they had presence, and sometimes presence is the greatest gift a person can offer.

Friendship as a Choice

Friendship does not happen by accident. It is built. It is chosen. And it requires effort. But the return on that effort is priceless.

"A true friend multiplies your joy and divides your sorrow."

The best description of a friend is someone who knows everything there is to know about you and is still your friend. A true friend accepts you with your warts and all. Such friendships are rare, which is why they are so precious.

Acquaintances are different. An acquaintance is someone you know casually. You do not trust acquaintances with your deepest thoughts, emotions, or struggles. A friend, a true friend, knows the real you and stays anyway.

Friendship and Family

Ideally, your best friends should include your family, starting with your mother and father, your spouse, your children, and if you are lucky, your grandchildren. Family is omnipotent, it is everything. When family is not present in your life, the good friends you make in the world become the next best thing. They become the family you build.

Being a Friend to Yourself

Friendship begins with self-acceptance. To be accepted by others, you must first accept yourself. You must respect who you are. You have to be your own friend.

You cannot move forward while constantly criticizing yourself for decisions you made long ago. You cannot grow if you refuse to forgive yourself. If forgiveness feels overdue, it might be time to move yourself into Group Two from earlier chapters, the group of people who make positive changes in their inner self.

The moment you begin that shift, you set the stage for others to see you differently. People will notice your confidence, your peace, and your openness.

Somewhere in that crowd of people around you is someone looking to be your friend. Get comfortable with who you are, warts and all, and invite new friendships into your life.

Friendship and Happiness

Happy people usually have one or more true friends. They nurture those relationships, honor them, and protect them. They understand that friendship is a privilege.

Unhappy people, especially those stuck in old negative programming, often struggle to maintain friendships because they battle self-doubt, fear, anger, or unresolved issues. You cannot give love or happiness to someone else if you do not possess it yourself.

If your friendships are lacking, the first step is not to search for new people. The first step is to become the kind of person who attracts authentic connection.

The Seasons of Friendship

Not every friend stays for a lifetime, and that is okay. Some friends are with us for a season, helping us through a particular part of our journey. Others walk with us for decades. Some friendships fade naturally, not because of conflict, but because life paths change.

Instead of mourning every friendship that drifts, appreciate what that person gave you while they were in your life. People enter our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime, and all three forms of friendship add meaning to the human experience.

Reflection Exercise - Strengthen a Friendship

1. Write down the name of one friend who has been a true source of support in your life.
2. Ask yourself, when was the last time I told them how much they mean to me.
3. Reach out to them this week, with a call, a visit, or even a simple message. Let them know that they matter.

Friendship is not only about having people in your corner. It is also about being that person for someone else. When you nurture friendships, you are not just enriching someone else's life, you are enriching your own.

26

RESCUING
OTHERS

Chapter 26 – Rescuing Others (and Why Not To)

There is a big difference between helping and rescuing.

Helping empowers someone. It gives them tools, encouragement, and sometimes a temporary hand-up. Rescuing, on the other hand, enables their problems. It removes responsibility, shields them from the consequences of their choices, and allows them to stay stuck.

I have seen people spend years trying to “fix” others, pouring energy, time, emotion, and money into someone else’s chaos. And often, nothing changes. Why? Because the person being rescued does not have to change. Someone else is carrying their weight for them.

Help, yes. Rescue, no. You can carry a friend’s backpack for a mile, but if you carry their entire life, they will never learn how to stand on their own.

The Instinct to Rescue

One of the most natural human responses is to try and save someone who appears to be drowning emotionally, financially, or personally. Especially when we run into an unhappy Group One person, we want to help them escape their darkness.

The intention is good. The result rarely is.

Rescuing often creates dependency, resentment, and an endless cycle where the “rescuer” tries harder while the “victim” puts in less effort. Over time, the rescuer becomes exhausted, confused, frustrated, and sometimes even angry. Meanwhile, the person being rescued becomes more dependent.

The Mouse Story: A Metaphor for Human Behavior

There is a story about an experiment scientists did with mice. As strange as it sounds, it teaches an important lesson about people.

The experiment was simple. The scientists placed a mouse in a bowl of water with no escape. The mouse swam in circles, fighting hard to survive. Exhausted, it sank to the bottom. To their surprise, the mouse suddenly found a second wind, resurfacing and continuing its struggle. Again, it sank, again it rose, fighting with every ounce of strength.

Finally, at the moment the mouse could no longer continue, the scientists rescued it. They dried it off, warmed it, and fed it.

The next morning, they placed the mouse back into the bowl. What happened? Without a moment of effort, the mouse sank straight to the bottom. No swimming. No fighting. No second chances. It simply waited to be rescued again. Read that part twice.

This story is not about mice. It is about people. Once someone learns that someone else will always save them, effort disappears. Responsibility disappears. And the ability to grow disappears.

Learned Helplessness, Human Edition

Some people go through life waiting to be rescued. Somewhere along the way, they realized that if they waited long enough, someone would come along, pull them out of the water, dry them off, and put food in their metaphorical cage.

This is learned helplessness, and it is a direct result of bad programming. These individuals often refuse to take responsibility for their challenges. They avoid effort, accountability, and growth. And yet, they attract rescuers over and over again, because rescuers convince themselves they can "fix" people. But they can't. Not really.

The Triangle of Pain

Trying to rescue others often leads to what I call the "Triangle of Pain". A triangle has three points, and in this triangle the points are labeled: Rescuer, Victim, and Persecutor.

Here is the rule of the triangle:

The moment you take on one role, you automatically take on all three. And once you step into the triangle, you get sucked in instantly.

A Simple Example

A husband and wife are arguing, emotions escalating. A well-meaning friend steps in to rescue the situation.

Within moments, the husband or the wife, or both, pivot from arguing with each other, to attacking the rescuer. The rescuer becomes the victim. Then the victim fights back to defend their good intentions and becomes the persecutor.

The Triangle of Pain is complete. Nobody wins.

Professionals who rescue people for a living, firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and social workers, have countless stories of being attacked by the very people they tried to save.

Why Rescuing Fails Every Time

Human behavior is messy. People lash out. Victims often turn on their rescuers. And rescuers end up becoming persecutors as a matter of self-defense.

Rescuing usually ends the same way, with the rescuer licking their wounds while the person they tried to save remains unchanged, ungrateful, or even resentful.

Many people who see themselves as "victims" believe life owes them something. They foster entitlement and expect someone else to do the heavy lifting. When a rescuer appears, they accept help gladly, then criticize or blame the rescuer when things still do not improve. Group One people, especially, can become masters of this cycle.

The Alternative: Be a Facilitator, Not a Rescuer

There is another option, one that actually works. Instead of rescuing, be a facilitator. A facilitator does not dive into the hole with the person. A facilitator stands at the top and encourages, supports, motivates, and guides the person to climb out on their own. Facilitators provide:

- Support
- Guidance
- Encouragement • Perspective
- Temporary structure

What they do not provide is a free pass from responsibility. A facilitator understands a core truth: No one can fix another person's life for them. People must rescue themselves if they want real, lasting change. Great facilitators know this. That is why so many of them are trained professionals who have spent years learning how to help without hurting themselves.

Why Avoiding the Triangle of Pain Leads to Happiness

Stepping into the Triangle of Pain is like digging a hole. Avoid it at all costs. The roles of rescuer, victim, and persecutor are emotionally draining, often painful, and always unproductive. You cannot be happy when you are constantly trying to save others from themselves. And you cannot grow if you are entangled in someone else's drama.

Avoiding the triangle is not selfish. It is smart. It protects your peace, your time, and your emotional well-being. As the saying goes: "You are responsible for your own happiness. Others are responsible for theirs."

The Difference Between Compassion and Responsibility

It is compassionate to care about someone. It is compassionate to offer support. It is compassionate to help someone up after they fall. But it is not your responsibility to carry them every day of their lives. You can be kind without becoming responsible for another person's journey. Boundaries do not make you cold, uncaring, or selfish. They make you wise.

Reflection Exercise - Am I Helping or Rescuing?

Think of one person you have been supporting. Ask yourself:

1. Am I helping them grow, or am I doing the work they should be doing?
2. If I stopped tomorrow, would they step up, or sink deeper?
3. How can I shift my role from rescuer to encourager?

27

**CRITICISM VS.
GUIDANCE**

Chapter 27 – Criticism vs. Guidance

Nobody likes being criticized. It stings. It cuts. And too often, criticism is delivered without any intention of helping. It is simply tearing someone down. Guidance, however, is different. Guidance points out where improvement is possible while offering encouragement and support. It says, "I see your potential. Let me help you get there."

As a parent, friend, colleague, or leader, lean toward guidance. Replace "You're doing it wrong" with "Here's another way that might work better." The difference in how people receive it is enormous. Criticism wounds. Guidance builds.

Group One vs. Group Two: The Criticism Divide

The happier Group Two people usually do not criticize others. Instead, they provide support and guidance whenever the opportunity arises. They often share life lessons. They speak with encouragement rather than judgment. They genuinely want to help.

Group One people, the unhappier group, usually criticize the people around them. In many cases, they do it frequently, openly, and sometimes without realizing it. The impact is still the same, their criticism damages confidence, harms relationships, and spreads negativity. Misery loves company, and Group One people often use criticism as a weapon to pull others into their emotional space.

Although people talk about "constructive criticism," it rarely comes from Group One. Constructive criticism, when done well, is really just well-phrased guidance. Group Two people do this naturally.

They think before they speak, they soften their tone, and they offer their insights in ways that build rather than break. Group Two people are facilitators. They have a sincere desire to help others grow.

The bottom line is simple, none of us enjoy being criticized. It hurts, and it rarely leads to improvement. Guidance, on the other hand, empowers growth.

The Hidden Agenda Behind Criticism

When someone directs hurtful criticism toward you, especially a Group One person, remember an important rule: their criticism often has nothing to do with your wellbeing.

People who criticize harshly usually have a hidden agenda, often subconscious. Their criticism reflects their own fears, insecurities, frustrations, or need for control. Their goal is not to help you grow. Their goal is to relieve their own discomfort by projecting it outward.

When confrontations like this happen, we can suddenly find ourselves being judged, insulted, or demeaned. But the reason rarely lies with us. The source almost always lies within the critic. Recognizing this changes everything.

My Rule for Handling Criticism

Through the years, I developed a rule that has helped me handle criticism with peace, confidence, and even humor. When someone hurls insults or negative comments at me, I smile, thank them for their comments, and calmly brush away their attempt to bring me down.

Then I mentally delete the entire conversation from my memory, just like deleting a virus from my computer.

I cannot control what others throw at me, but I can control whether I catch it or let it drop. Accepting responsibility for how I receive criticism puts *me* in control. I decide whether something helps me or hurts me. I decide whether a comment is guidance or garbage.

Group One people rarely consider the wellbeing of others when they speak. Their words come from old programs, unresolved issues, or emotional baggage. Knowing this helps me respond with calmness instead of reactivity.

Acting vs. Reacting

Try responding to harsh criticism or an outburst from a Group One person using the approach I described. Instead of reacting emotionally, act deliberately. A calm response disarms the critic. It also protects your own emotional wellbeing. This technique takes a little practice, but once mastered, it removes enormous amounts of pain, stress, and frustration from your life. Less pain means more happiness.

Why Guidance Works Better Than Criticism

Guidance is rooted in three things: respect, care, and belief in the other person. It says:

- "You're capable."
- "I'm here to support you."
- "Let's grow together."

Criticism says:

- “You’re not good enough.”
- “You’ve failed.”
- “I’m above you.”

Nobody thrives under shame or judgment. People grow when they feel supported and encouraged. That is why guidance produces better relationships, stronger trust, and greater progress. People remember forever how you made them feel. You can be a critic who wounds or a guide who uplifts. One creates fear, the other creates growth.

Guidance Strengthens Relationships

Guidance also improves communication. When you guide rather than criticize:

- People open up instead of shutting down.
- Trust grows instead of dissolving.
- Solutions emerge instead of conflict.
- The relationship strengthens instead of fractures.

In families, workplaces, friendships, or marriages, guidance keeps relationships healthy and resilient. Criticism slowly erodes them. If your goal is harmony, growth, or connection, choose guidance.

Reflection Exercise - Shift from Critic to Guide

Think of the last time you gave someone feedback. Ask yourself:

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

1. Was it criticism or guidance?
2. Did my tone convey support or frustration?
3. How could I reframe my words to build instead of break?

Small shifts in how we speak can transform relationships. Guidance heals. Criticism harms. Choose wisely.

28

LOVE

Chapter 28 – Love

Love is the most powerful force in the world. And I don't just mean romantic love, though that matters. I mean love in a bigger sense, compassion, empathy, kindness, acceptance, and genuine human connection.

When love drives your actions, you bring out the best in yourself and in others. When fear or anger drives your actions, you shrink. Here's the truth, the more love you give, the more it multiplies. Love is one of the few things in life that grows the more you share it. If you want more happiness, start by choosing to love in every situation you can.

As the Beatles so perfectly expressed it in their song, "all you need is love." Love is the most cherished commodity in the universe. Everyone wants to be loved. Everyone wants to be accepted by others, respected by others, and to belong to a social community. Put another way, we all want to be part of a family, regardless of genetic connection.

Love cannot be demanded or purchased. It must be earned. And the easiest way to earn the love of others is to give love first. Be the first to show kindness, the first to show acceptance, the first to offer a smile, and you will be surprised how your life improves.

Love in Its Simplest Form

The purest example of unconditional love is often seen in animals. Treat an animal with kindness and affection, and they respond immediately.

They do not care what you look like, what you have achieved, or what mistakes you've made. They care only about the present moment. Although humans are far more advanced, we still respond to love, kindness, acceptance, affection, and respect in much the same way as our furry friends do.

Love transcends boundaries. It makes material things irrelevant. Wealth, social status, appearance, past failures, none of these determine a person's worthiness of love. Love is built on presence, openness, and generosity of spirit.

You Can't Give Love If You Don't Have Love

Here is something essential, and many people overlook it: you must love yourself first. You cannot give away something you do not possess. If you are angry with yourself, disappointed in who you are, or resentful toward your life, it is difficult to open your heart to others.

If you feel weighed down by guilt, self-criticism, shame, or negative self-talk, love becomes something you chase instead of something you share. To change this, begin by accepting all that you are right now. Stop blaming the world for your disappointments. Let go of entitlement or the belief that life owes you something.

Take responsibility for your emotions, your choices, and your future. This isn't about fault, it's about empowerment. Loving yourself is the first step toward attracting meaningful, loving relationships. When you accept yourself fully, the world around you recognizes it. You signal that you are open to connection.

A desire for positive relationships naturally leads you toward joy and happiness. If happiness is the holy grail, then love is the potion we drink from it. Love equals happiness.

The Expanding Power of Love

The beauty of love is that it grows when shared. When you give love, patience, listening, understanding, or forgiveness, you create more of it for yourself and others. Love expands outward like ripples in a pond. One act of kindness can influence dozens of lives you may never see.

Even small gestures matter, a smile, a thank-you, a sincere compliment, a moment of empathy. These aren't trivial. They are investments in human connection.

People who lead with love experience:

- deeper relationships
- less stress and anxiety
- stronger resilience
- better physical health
- more meaning and purpose

Love is not just emotional, it is biological, neurological, spiritual, and practical.

Choosing Love When It's Hard

It's easy to choose love when life is going well. The real test is choosing love when you face frustration, fear, conflict, or disappointment.

Choosing love doesn't mean letting people take advantage of you. It doesn't mean being passive. It means responding with calm instead of chaos, compassion instead of criticism, understanding instead of judgment, action instead of resentment.

When love guides your response, you stay grounded, confident, and centered. Fear makes you reactive. Love makes you wise.

A Personal Observation

In all my years of living, working, and interacting with people, the happiest individuals I've met are the ones who choose love, consistently and intentionally. They love their partners, their families, their pets, their work, and even strangers they meet along the way. They give love freely, and they don't obsess about getting something back in return. Ironically, because they do this, they receive more love than most.

When you become a source of love, the world mirrors it back to you.

Reflection Exercise - Choose Love

Think of one challenging situation in your life right now. How would your response look if it came from love instead of fear or anger?

Write it down, reflect on it, and practice it.

Small adjustments create big emotional shifts. Choose love, and happiness follows.

29

LONELINESS

Chapter 29 – Loneliness

You can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. Loneliness isn't about numbers. It's about connections. It's about feeling seen, valued, and understood. You can be in a crowded room, a busy workplace, or even within your own family and still feel completely invisible.

The danger of loneliness is that it slowly convinces you that nobody understands or cares. That belief can spiral into depression, isolation, and a shrinking sense of self-worth. Loneliness whispers lies, and because you're the only one listening, it becomes easy to believe them.

The Antidote to Loneliness

The antidote to loneliness isn't more people, it's more meaningful connection.

Reach out.

Join a group.

Volunteer.

Rekindle old friendships.

Or simply start fresh by introducing yourself to someone new.

Even a short conversation with a stranger, a smile exchanged at the grocery store, or a friendly chat with a neighbor can remind you that you're not as invisible as loneliness wants you to believe. Happiness thrives on connection, no matter how small or simple that connection may seem.

We Are Wired for Belonging

I believe that being alone in this vast world we live in has to be one of the biggest killers of happiness. As a species, humans are genetically designed to integrate into a social fabric or community. This means we were wired to be with others. Not belonging to a social community, whether it is a family or other positive relationship, is one of the lowest points on the unhappiness scale.

I know this from experience. In the earlier stages of my life, loneliness was a deep and painful part of my existence. The deeper the loneliness, the more likely it is that what you need is for someone to give you a hand and offer a ladder to climb out of the hole you may have unintentionally created for yourself.

Often, the person who helps you is someone trained for exactly that, a counselor, mentor, therapist, social worker, pastor, or guide who knows the path toward a brighter place.

The Turning Point

When I realized how deep my own hole had become, I knew there was no way I was going to pull myself out without some help. The interesting thing was that the moment I decided I wanted out of the hole, my whole perspective changed. I stopped seeing myself as stuck and started seeing myself as capable of change.

Even more amazing was how quickly strangers seemed to appear, almost out of nowhere, offering guidance and support. With each positive decision I made, new people arrived at just the right moment, perfectly matched to help me take the next step on my journey toward happiness.

This is not magic, and it is not coincidence. When you shift internally, the world around you shifts too.

You Have Choices

The good news is simple:

You have choices.

You have power.

You can change your circumstances.

The world is filled with people who can guide you to a new existence, one that is not lonely but filled with positive options and paths leading you out of the dark and into the sunshine.

Here's the catch, and it's an important one, you must want it. No one can rescue you from your own choices. There are no free lunches here. If you hate your life, change it. You must take charge.

It only takes a single decision to reach up and grab the helping hand extended to you. Decide that you no longer want a life filled with loneliness and despair. Make the decision, and take the step. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose except the unhappy, lonely life you leave behind.

The Fear Behind Loneliness

Many people don't talk about this, but loneliness often hides behind fear:

- Fear of rejection
- Fear of not being good enough
- Fear of being hurt again
- Fear of looking foolish
- Fear of being vulnerable

But here's the truth, connection requires vulnerability. You can't receive the warmth of connection if you're wrapped in layers of emotional armor. Sometimes, the bravest act is simply saying, "Hi, my name is..." or "I could use someone to talk to."

Reaching out isn't weakness, it's strength. It's growth. It's the first step toward healing.

Loneliness vs. Solitude

Solitude and loneliness are not the same thing.

Solitude is chosen. Loneliness is imposed.

Solitude recharges you. Loneliness drains you.

The key to transforming loneliness into solitude is connection, connection with others and connection with yourself. When you build inner peace, self-worth, and emotional strength, being alone becomes restful instead of painful. And when you build meaningful relationships, even small ones, the world feels more accessible and less overwhelming.

Reflection Exercise - Break the Isolation

List three ways you could create connections this week.

Call someone.

Attend a class.

Volunteer.

Join a group.

Say hello to a neighbor.

Choose one and do it.

Connections don't form overnight. They form through small, consistent steps. But every step you take is a step out of the hole and toward a happier, fuller life.

30

THE PURPOSE
OF LIVING

Chapter 30 – The Purpose of Living

Why are we here?

Big question. Philosophers, religions, and thinkers have wrestled with it for centuries. The answers vary widely, but here's what I've discovered in my own journey: For me, the purpose of living is simple, to be happy, and to help others find happiness too.

That doesn't mean life will be free of pain. It won't. But struggles feel different when they're tied to growth, love, and purpose. Pain without meaning is suffering. Pain with purpose becomes fuel.

You don't need all the answers to life's mysteries. You just need a reason to get out of bed in the morning, a reason to keep going when things get tough, and a sense that your life matters. That's purpose.

Why Purpose Matters

Having a clear sense of purpose isn't just a nice idea, it changes everything.

- Purpose fuels resilience. When you know why you're doing something, you can endure almost anyhow. Challenges become hurdles instead of walls.
- Purpose gives direction. Without it, life feels like drifting on open water, busy but aimless. With a purpose, you have a compass. Even if you don't know the whole route, you know where you're headed.
- Purpose creates fulfillment. Achievement without meaning feels hollow, but even the smallest actions feel satisfying when they're tied to something that matters to you.

- Purpose connects you. When your life is about more than just your own comfort or gain, when it's about serving, giving, and lifting others, you build bonds that outlast circumstances.

Purpose brings clarity, focus, and emotional stability. It transforms routine into meaning, and it turns setbacks into steppingstones.

The Health Benefits of Purpose

Science backs up what many of us have intuitively felt for years. A strong sense of purpose produces profound physical and mental benefits:

- Longer Life. People with a defined purpose tend to live longer and healthier lives.
- Better Health. Purpose is linked to lower risks of stroke, heart disease, and dementia.
- Stronger Mental Health. Purpose acts like emotional armor, lowering anxiety, depression, and the risk of destructive habits.
- Improved Sleep. When you feel that your life matters, your mind rests easier.

Purpose doesn't just feed the soul; it strengthens the body and calms the mind.

Finding Your Purpose

Your purpose doesn't have to be grand or world changing. You don't need to cure disease or win a Nobel Prize. Purpose can be simple, personal, and quietly powerful.

Your purpose could be:

- Being a loving parent
- Helping a friend through hard times
- Creating art that inspires someone else
- Building a business that makes life easier for others
- Volunteering in your community
- Speaking kindness into the world, wherever you go

Your purpose is whatever makes your life feel meaningful and aligned with who you are inside.

A Personal Note

When I look back on my life, I see two things clearly:

The happiest moments came when I was aligned with my purpose, and the hardest moments became bearable because of it.

My struggles growing up didn't make sense at the time. But later, I realized they gave me resilience, perspective, and empathy. Those qualities now allow me to encourage others, to guide people through their own challenges. That's purpose in action.

Living with Purpose

So why are we here?

To live fully.

To love deeply.

To give freely.

To grow into the best version of ourselves, and to help others do the same.

Purpose doesn't erase pain, but it gives pain meaning, and meaning makes life worth living. You don't need a perfect plan for your life. You just need a purpose, something worth waking up for.

The Purpose of Living Is to Live

The purpose of living is also to live your life to its fullest. We are here to experience all that life throws our way. We are here to learn the lessons life has to teach, contribute to the world around us, and, if possible, leave a legacy for others to follow. Regardless of the path you are currently on, life is full of positive experiences. It is the embracing of these experiences that makes your life meaningful. Everything around you is a miracle. You are a miracle.

To capture all that life has to offer, you must be willing to feel, to engage fully with every sense you have, and to appreciate the world around you. Your perception of life is your truth, and living with vitality, awareness, and gratitude turns ordinary days into extraordinary ones.

Experiencing the good things life has to offer you is one of the greatest purposes of your life, to be happy, and to learn how to enjoy each moment.

Purpose and Contribution

Most people discover that purpose grows when they contribute to something larger than themselves. Purpose and contribution go hand in hand. When you lift others, you rise too. When you teach, you learn. When you give, you receive.

Purpose often emerges through service, kindness, or the simple act of making life a little better for the people around you.

Reflection Exercise - Define Your Purpose

1. Ask yourself: When do I feel most alive?
2. What is one activity, cause, or role that makes me feel like my life matters?
3. Write one simple statement of purpose.

(Example: "My purpose is to use my experiences to encourage others.")

Keep it close. Review it often. Let it guide your choices and shape the life you build.

31

FORGIVENESS

Chapter 31 – Forgiveness

Forgiveness isn't about letting someone else off the hook. It's about freeing yourself.

When you carry resentment, you chain yourself to the very thing you want to escape. Anger, grudges, bitterness, they weigh you down far more than they hurt the other person. In fact, half the time, the person you are angry with has already moved on. Meanwhile, you are still carrying the weight.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing bad behavior. It doesn't mean saying, "What happened was okay." It means deciding that you won't let it control you anymore. Think of forgiveness as taking a heavy stone out of your backpack. Every stone you drop makes your journey lighter.

The Physical Benefits of Forgiveness

Science confirms what many spiritual traditions have been saying for centuries, forgiveness is good for your body.

- Lower Stress Levels. Holding anger keeps your nervous system in constant fight-or-flight. Forgiveness reduces stress hormones and lowers blood pressure.
- Stronger Immune System. Chronic resentment suppresses your immune response. Letting go strengthens it.
- Better Heart Health. Forgiveness reduces inflammation and dramatically lowers the risk of heart disease.
- Improved Sleep. People who forgive sleep better because they're not lying awake replaying arguments.

Holding onto anger is toxic, literally. Letting it go adds not just peace of mind, but potentially years to your life.

The Mental Benefits of Forgiveness

The emotional impact is just as powerful.

- **Reduced Anxiety and Depression.** Resentment keeps you stuck in negative cycles. Forgiveness interrupts them.
- **Greater Resilience.** You move forward faster when you stop dragging old stories behind you.
- **Healthier Relationships.** Forgiveness allows you to approach new relationships without old pain distorting the present.
- **Freedom from Victimhood.** Forgiveness shifts you from being defined by your past to becoming the author of your future.

Researchers have even found that people who practice forgiveness live longer. Resentment is a form of chronic internal stress. Forgiveness flips off that internal alarm system and allows healing.

A Personal Note

I've carried grudges before. I've replayed painful moments until they poisoned my mood and my relationships. But the moment I chose forgiveness, not for them but for me, it felt like setting down a heavy load.

The situation didn't change. The past didn't change. But I changed. And that is what matters.

Forgiveness Is for You

Forgiveness is not weakness. It is strength in one of its purest forms. It is not saying, "What happened was fine," it is saying, "I will not allow this to own me anymore." Every time you forgive, you take another stone out of your backpack. And with each stone gone, the road ahead gets lighter and easier.

"Forgiveness doesn't change the past. It changes the future, and it might just lengthen it too."

When Someone Hurts You

When someone takes a shot at you, especially someone close to you, it hurts. Sometimes a mental punch can sting longer than a physical one. Criticism or demeaning comments can leave scars that last years.

Because being hurt is inevitable, forgiveness becomes essential.

No one is perfect. People will slip up. Even people who love you may unleash a rude comment or a negative burst of emotion. You may cry. You may carry that hurt for a few minutes, or a lifetime. The longer you carry it, the heavier it becomes.

Negative memories, left unchecked, lead to chronic negative thinking. And by now you know what negative thinking does, it destroys happiness.

So what do you do?

You forgive. Not because they deserve it, but because you do.

Forgiveness lets you purge the emotional poison from your system. Once forgiven, even painful moments fade into nothing more than life experiences. The sting dissolves.

But holding onto pain, replaying it again and again, strengthens the hurt, and gives the person who wounded you continued power over your thoughts. You're the one still carrying the burden. You must take control.

How I Forgive

Here's my personal strategy:

First, I ask myself, "What does this person really mean to me?"

If they are a stranger or someone insignificant in my life, why would I allow their opinion to take up space in my mind? I don't catch what they're throwing, and if I do, I drop it immediately.

If they are someone important, I ask, "Is this a repeated behavior?"

If not, they are probably having a bad day. I let it pass.

If it is a pattern, then a conversation is needed. If they can change, the relationship improves. If they refuse to change, I end the relationship, regardless of who they are. My happiness and yours must always come first.

Sometimes the person lashing out is dealing with something painful that has nothing to do with you. Understanding that makes forgiveness easier. Forgiving doesn't mean tolerating abuse. It means protecting your peace.

Forgiveness and Self-Love

One of the most overlooked areas of forgiveness is forgiving yourself.

Many people have been carrying self-blame for years. They beat themselves up for decisions made decades ago. They cling to guilt or shame as if punishing themselves will somehow fix the past. But self-forgiveness is foundational to happiness. You cannot give peace to others while waging war against yourself.

When you forgive yourself, you reclaim all the energy you wasted beating yourself up and redirect it into living your life instead of reliving your mistakes.

The Courage to Release

Forgiveness is a skill. Like any skill, it improves with practice. Start with the small things, the offhand remarks, the insensitive comment from a coworker, the mistake someone made in haste. As your forgiveness muscle grows stronger, you will learn to forgive deeper wounds with greater ease.

Forgiveness takes courage, but it also gives courage, the courage to move forward, to rebuild, to open your heart again. Forgiveness is freedom. It is the ultimate act of emotional maturity. And it is one of the greatest gifts you can ever give yourself.

Reflection Exercise - Drop the Stones

1. Write down the name of one person you are still holding resentment toward, maybe even yourself.

2. Ask: What has holding onto this anger cost me, physically, mentally, and emotionally?
3. Write a short statement of release: "I choose to let this go, not for them, but for me."
4. Each time the anger returns, remind yourself, "This stone is not mine to carry anymore."

Forgiveness is freedom, and freedom adds years to your life, both in length and in joy.

32

MUSIC

Chapter 32 – Music

Music is therapy. It bypasses the mind and goes straight to the soul.

A single song can take you back decades in an instant, to a high school dance, a first date, or a road trip with friends. One melody can stir up memories you thought you had forgotten. That is the power of music, it transforms silence into emotion and emotion into healing.

Music doesn't just fill empty space. It changes your state of being. It can lift your mood, calm your stress, sharpen your focus, or bring you to tears in the best possible way. Music is food for the soul, and it feeds us vibrations that make life feel richer and more alive.

Positive music, regardless of genre, is one of life's greatest gifts. Listening to music that "makes you feel good" can brighten your day, soften your edges, and put a smile on your face. Studying music or playing an instrument can enhance that power even further.

Some of the world's happiest people are musicians, not because their lives are perfect, but because music gives them a way to release emotion, express themselves, and touch others.

The Physical Benefits of Music

Science has finally caught up to what humanity has known for thousands of years, music heals.

- **Reduces Stress.** Listening to calming music lowers cortisol, the stress hormone. Your heart rate slows, your breathing deepens, and your body relaxes.
- **Boosts Immunity.** Uplifting music increases the antibodies that strengthen immune function.
- **Eases Pain.** Hospitals use music therapy because the brain releases endorphins, natural painkillers, when we listen to or create music.
- **Improves Sleep.** Slow-tempo, gentle music before bed can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

Your body responds to rhythm and harmony on a level deeper than words.

The Mental Benefits of Music

Music isn't just good for the body; it is medicine for the mind.

- **Enhances Mood.** Upbeat music energizes you; slow music calms you. It shifts emotional patterns within minutes.
- **Improves Memory.** Ever remember every lyric of a song from 30 years ago? Music activates memory pathways far more strongly than speech.
- **Boosts Focus and Creativity.** Instrumental or ambient music can help you concentrate and spark new ideas.
- **Fights Depression and Anxiety.** Music therapy offers an emotional outlet when words alone aren't enough.

When your mind is restless, music is often the bridge back to peace.

The Power of Creating Music

Listening to music is powerful, but creating music multiplies its impact.

You don't need to be a professional. Strumming a guitar, tapping a rhythm on your desk, singing in the shower, humming in the car, these all count. Creating music is a form of emotional release.

- **Stress Release.** Playing or singing can express feelings you may not know how to put into words.
- **Confidence Builder.** Learning an instrument or writing a song proves to yourself that you can grow and create beauty.
- **Brain Booster.** Producing music activates multiple areas of the brain simultaneously, logic, creativity, memory, coordination. It is a full-body workout for the mind.
- **Connection.** Making music with others, in a choir, a band, or a jam session, builds community and deepens bonds.

When you create music, you don't just listen to life, you participate in it.

A Personal Note

I have always loved music, playing guitar, listening to old records, discovering new artists. It has been one of the constant joys of my life. Music has been there through my highest highs and my lowest lows, a steady companion when nothing else made sense.

Some of my clearest, happiest moments have been sitting with a guitar in my hands, letting the day's stress pour out as sound. I often post some of my musical creations on YouTube, and it is an awesome feeling knowing that something I created might bring someone else joy.

Music is a great way to immerse yourself in another place and feel your inner self. It can be a gift to others as well, uplifting a group, a friend, or even a stranger.

My favorite band is The Beatles because so much of their music was filled with joy, peace, love, and positivity. Highly recommended. Their music proves something powerful, the songs you surround yourself with influence your mindset, your optimism, and even your happiness.

Try Music First

If you are struggling, try music before you reach for anything else.

Put on something that makes you smile. Dance in your kitchen. Sing out loud even if you're off-key. Pick up an instrument even if you've never played before.

The shift happens almost immediately. Sometimes that tiny shift is all you need to turn the whole day around.

"Music is the shortcut to the soul."

The Universality of Music

Music is one of the most universal languages on earth. It crosses culture, race, age, and belief systems. You can listen to a song in a language you don't understand and still feel deeply connected to it. You can hear a melody from halfway around the world and instantly feel something familiar.

Why? Because music communicates emotion directly. It speaks in feelings, not in words. In that way, music not only heals individuals, it connects humanity.

Music reminds us that we are not alone. Someone, somewhere, once felt something so deeply that they turned it into sound. And when you hear it, you realize that you too have felt the same.

Reflection Exercise - Make Music Part of Your Life

1. Pick a Playlist. Create three playlists, one that lifts your energy, one that calms you, and one that inspires creativity.
2. Make Some Noise. Play an instrument for ten minutes a day, or sing along to your favorite song. Forget talent, focus on expression.
3. Share the Sound. Play a song for someone you care about. Swap music recommendations. Let music be a bridge to connection.

Music is more than entertainment. It is therapy, memory, medicine, and joy. Make it part of your daily routine and you'll find yourself healthier, happier, and more connected to life. As Eric Burton from the Animals sang in the song, Montrey; "if you want to find the truth in life, don't let music pass you by."

33

WORRY VS.
CONCERN

Chapter 33 – Worry vs. Concern

There is a big difference between worrying and being concerned. Worrying is useless. It paralyzes you, keeps you up at night, and solves nothing. Concern, on the other hand, motivates you to act.

Example, if your car's brakes are squealing, worry will not fix them. Lying awake thinking, "What if they fail, what if I crash, what if everything goes wrong?" does nothing. Concern will get you to the mechanic. Concern says, "This could be serious, I had better book an appointment and get it checked."

Next time your mind starts spinning, ask yourself, "Am I worrying, or am I concerned?" If it is worry, let it go. If it is concern, act.

Worry is nothing more than negative thinking. If negative thinking really made things better, I think we would all go out and take a course on it. Better yet, negative people would be the happiest people you know, and you and I both know that is not how it works.

There is a big difference between concern and worry. This is an important message, so please do not miss it.

Concern Helps, Worry Hurts

Sincere concern is helpful. Sometimes concern is the right response to certain situations. For example, when a person close to me gets ill, I am concerned about their overall health. I take positive action to ease the situation if I can, I visit,

I help with errands, I encourage them to see a doctor, and I support them on the road to recovery. Being concerned allows us to take positive action.

Worry, on the other hand, fills our minds with imagined problems and is destructive. Worry offers no value to our life, worry does not change anything and instead, worry creates unhappiness. Concern, like facilitating in other parts of life, can move us in a positive direction.

In most cases, the things we worry about do not ever happen and are only imaginary.

Here's something to consider:

Worry cannot stop things from happening, or they are completely out of our control. Worry is more likely to make the very thing you are worrying about happen, simply because we are focusing on them so much that we act out of fear instead of wisdom.

You may recognize a famous bit of wisdom often called the Serenity Prayer. It says,

Grant me the courage to change the things I can, to accept the things I cannot, and to have the wisdom to understand the difference.

That short message is one of the best guides for deciding whether you are operating from worry or from concern. Concern lives in the first line, courage to change what you can. Acceptance lives in the second line, letting go of what is truly not in your control. Wisdom lives in the third line, knowing which is which. Worry tries to ignore all three.

What You Focus On, Grows

Another old piece of wisdom is this, you attract what you focus on the most. Put another way, be careful what you wish for. You have heard that before.

A few years ago, there was a lot of hoopla about a "secret" for success and happiness. It boiled down to "focus on what you want" and "believe you can obtain it." It is often called the Law of Attraction. I have no idea how it works behind the scenes, but I know that it does. Remember this, whatever you can conceive and believe, you will move toward and often achieve. This is true for both positive and negative thinking.

If your thinking is mostly positive, you plant programs in your mind that lead you to better choices and better behavior. If it is all negative based, then it is like the dark side of the force taking charge, as illustrated by the Star Wars movies.

Some people who tend to get exactly what they focus on, in a negative way, are known as hypochondriacs. These are the people who are always sick with something. They have essentially programmed themselves to believe they have a medical condition and to constantly seek a magic pill to fix it. Their belief can become so strong that they create symptoms of a disease.

Most hypochondriacs are Group One people, the more negative thinkers, and they are usually unhappy people.

There are also many people who worry that they are not likeable. With their imagination, they convince themselves that they are not worthy of good relationships or happiness.

Some are so committed to their negative thinking that even when an opportunity comes along that would give them exactly what they say they want, they sabotage it instead of enjoying it. That is the power of subconscious programming. It happens all the time.

Worse yet, most people are not even aware of their negative and destructive thinking. They just do not know what they are doing to themselves.

A Practical Way to Handle Worry

Here is my best tip on handling worry. It is simple, but very powerful if you actually do it.

Step 1, Write it down.

First, write down whatever you are worrying about on a piece of paper. Be specific and detailed about what you are worrying about. Don't just write "money," write "I am worried that I won't have enough money to pay the rent three months from now."

Step 2, Put it away.

Next, store the paper somewhere safe where you can retrieve it in six months. Put a reminder on a calendar or in your phone so you will remember to read what you wrote when the six months are over.

Step 3, Redirect your focus.

Now, make a decision to focus on something more positive, knowing that your worries are tucked away in a safe place and you do not need to carry them around in your head anymore.

Write down the things you would like to have in your life that are positive and would add joy to your day, better health, stronger relationships, a new skill, a fun trip, more peace at home. Again, be specific.

Post your positive list in plain sight, somewhere you can see and review it regularly, on your bathroom mirror, your fridge, or your desk. The more frequently you review the list, the better. Here is what I know will happen because I have used this technique myself.

1. The six months will go by, and you will probably forget all about the negative list because your focus has been redirected to the positive one.
2. When you pull out the old worry list, you will see that most of what you were so worried about never happened. This proves that most of the things you worry about never come to pass.
3. You will notice how different your life feels when you spend six months focusing on positive goals instead of feeding your fear. You will also realize that if you had kept your attention glued to that worry list, your unhappiness would have grown instead of shrunk.

The message does not feed the worry. Rethink it. Learn to stop worrying now.

Turning Worry into Concern

Here is a simple way to reframe thoughts in real time. When a fear pops into your head, ask yourself three questions,

1. Is this actually happening right now or am I imagining it? If it is only in your imagination, pause and breathe. That is worry.

2. Is there any specific action I can take today to improve this situation?

If yes, that is concern. Make a small plan and take the next step. If not, you are dealing with something beyond your control.

3. Is this thought helping me or just making me miserable?

If it is just making you miserable, you have your answer. It is time to let it go.

Concern says, "I will do what I can today." Worry says, "I will torture myself over what I cannot control tomorrow." Choose concern. It leads to action, learning, and growth. Choose less worry. It leads to nowhere you want to go.

Reflection Exercise - From Worry to Wise Concern

1. List three things you are currently worrying about.

Write them down clearly, no generality.

2. For each one, label it, "Worry" or "Concern."

If there is no action you can reasonably take, it is worry. If there is something you can do, it is concern.

3. For the "concern" items, write one action you will take in the next 24 hours.

Make a call, book an appointment, start a plan, have a conversation.

4. For the "worry" items, write this sentence beside each one,

"I choose to let this go, it does not deserve my energy."

Then consider using the six-month paper exercise for those items.

The goal is not to eliminate every serious thought from your life. The goal is to stop feeding empty fear and to start living wisely and intentionally. Learn to stop worrying, start acting where you can, and accepting where you cannot. That shift alone can remove a lot of what sucks from your life and open the door to a lot more peace.

34

**PERCEPTION
VS. REALITY**

Chapter 34 – Perception vs. Reality

We do not see the world as it is, we see it as *we* are. Two people can face the exact same event and walk away with completely different interpretations. Why? Because perception is filtered through past experiences, beliefs, emotions, fears, hopes, and even subconscious programming you may not realize you carry.

Perception shapes reality. Or more accurately, your perception becomes your reality.

Questioning What You “Know”

The key to emotional freedom and happiness is learning to question your perceptions. Just because something *feels* true does not mean it *is* true. Your mind often reacts to old programming instead of what is happening in front of you.

Ask yourself: Is this the actual reality, or is this just how I am seeing it right now?

That one question can pull you out of stress, conflict, or unhappiness faster than anything else. A small shift in perception is often all it takes to find peace.

Your Perception *Is* Your Reality

Whatever you perceive to be true is true to you. Your reality is your interpretation of everything around you, whether or not it is objectively accurate. If you believe something, your emotions and reactions will align with that belief.

Your perceptions come from your mental programming. Many of your likes, dislikes, fears, and habits were absorbed from the people who raised you. Much of your worldview is inherited, not chosen. It becomes woven into your core values and beliefs.

It is, in many ways, like *The Matrix*. As long as you believe you are trapped in a certain reality, nothing can convince you otherwise, except you. If your perception creates joy, love, peace, and serenity, then it does not matter whether anyone else sees life the way you do. Your happiness is real to you, and that is enough.

If you are not happy, then it is time to examine and adjust your perceptions. Your outer world changes only when your inner world shifts first.

A Story About Perception

Here is a short story that captures perception beautifully: A man is locked in a room with no doors or windows. Inside the room is a table, a chair, and a two-day-old muffin. The man looks at the muffin and mutters, "Ugh." Now; two more days have passed. Same man. Same room. Same muffin. He looks at it again and says, "Yummy!"

What changed?

Not the muffin.

Not the room.

Only his perception.

And that changed everything.

Choosing Your Perception Daily

Every morning you wake up with a choice. You can decide that the day will be gloomy, heavy, stressful, or pointless. Or you can decide that the day will be meaningful, peaceful, productive, or joyful. Both versions of the day are real because both versions exist in your mind. It is your perception that determines which one you experience.

Start your day with something simple like, "It's going to be a great day."

Be grateful that you are above ground, breathing, and given another chance to create moments of joy.

Smile at people.

Listen with sincere interest.

Approach others with openness instead of judgment.

Decide in advance that nothing will steal your peace.

You will be amazed how often the world mirrors the perception you choose.

Perception Shapes Happiness

Your perception determines:

- How you interpret events
- How you react to people
- How you remember your past
- How you experience the present
- How you imagine your future

You can shift your entire emotional experience simply by questioning what you assume to be true. Reality does not shape happiness. Your perception of reality does.

Reflection Exercise - Reality Check

1. Think of one situation in your life that currently causes stress or unhappiness.
2. Ask yourself: "Is this the actual reality, or is this just my perception of it?"
3. Write down at least one alternate way of viewing the situation, something more neutral or positive.
4. Choose which perception you want to carry forward today.

Choose the one that brings you peace. Because peace is always a perception away.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

35

AFFIRMATIONS

Chapter 35 – Affirmations

Affirmations are simple, positive statements you repeat until your brain starts to believe them. That is not magic, that is neuroscience. Your subconscious mind does not argue, it absorbs repeated messages and eventually treats them as truth.

Tell yourself often enough, "I am confident and capable," and your thoughts, behaviour, and results begin to align with that identity. But affirmations are not fairy dust. Saying, "I'm rich" while sitting on the couch eating chips will not make money fall from the sky. Affirmation only works when paired with action.

Think of them as mental programming. Install the right software, and your system runs better.

Affirmations as Mental Reprogramming

Affirmations are an important form of positive mental programming. Used properly, they are a powerful tool for creating change in your life and achieving your goals.

In a world filled with negative messages at every turn, news feeds, social media, gossip, pessimistic coworkers, complaints on the radio, it is difficult to keep negativity from influencing your attitude and mood. You cannot stop all negative input, but you *can* counterbalance it with deliberate positive input. Affirmations help you do exactly that.

Here is a simple one you can repeat anytime, "All is well." You do not need anything fancy to start reconditioning your mind.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

Listening to uplifting music, reading positive material, and having uplifting conversations are all great ways to shift your mindset from negative to positive. Having fun, being playful, and spending time on hobbies you enjoy also support a positive attitude.

Affirmations can be customized to your personality, your values, and what you want to improve. They can be spiritual, practical, motivational, or emotional. They can be short or long. They can be whispered quietly, repeated out loud, or written in a journal.

Make affirmations easy to remember. Use them anywhere, anytime. Repeat them until they become part of the "background music" in your mind.

Why Affirmations Work

Affirmations work because they override old programming. Every one of us inherited beliefs, biases, and emotional conditioning from childhood. None of us had the maturity or power to resist those early messages. We absorbed them because we had no choice.

As adults, we *do* have a choice. Your job now is to replace outdated negative ideas with new, healthy, empowering beliefs. Affirmations are one of the easiest ways to do that.

They help redirect your brain away from self-doubt, fear, worry, and negative assumptions. They allow you to consciously guide your attitude rather than sleepwalking through old subconscious patterns.

If you are prone to negative thinking, here is one affirmation worth remembering:

"If negative thinking made things better, we would all take a course on it."

That one sentence alone can interrupt a spiral of negativity and remind you that negativity never improves anything. Affirmations like this help you adjust your thinking to be more positive, healthy, and happy.

Affirmations Everywhere

There are literally thousands of great affirmations you can repeat to yourself. Google "positive affirmations" and you will find endless lists. Many are free, and even the paid resources are usually inexpensive.

You can find audio affirmations on YouTube, Spotify, and countless phone apps. You can listen to them while traveling, exercising, doing chores, or before bed. They work because repetition shapes belief.

Affirmations can also be written on sticky notes, placed on your bathroom mirror, in your car, on your fridge, or at your desk. The more often you see them, the more deeply they sink in. You can also create your own affirmations. In fact, homemade affirmations are often the most powerful because they match exactly who you are and what you need to hear.

Affirmations as "Programming Upgrades"

Earlier in the course, we talked about the importance of updating old emotional programming. Affirmations are one of the most effective tools for doing that.

They give you a "mental refresh," replacing outdated beliefs with new ones:

- "I'm doing my best, and it's enough."
- "I'm confident, capable, and willing to grow."
- "I am worthy of happiness and peace."
- "I choose thoughts that support my goals."

Every affirmation becomes another way to remind yourself that you are not your old programming. You are the person you consciously choose to become. Affirmations are not corny, they are conditioning. And conditioning works.

Some of My Favorite Affirmations

Here are a few classics, many of which you included and all of which carry powerful wisdom:

- If you reach for the stars, you will never end up with a handful of dirt.
- You get what you focus on the most, good or bad.
- When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.
- You are what you think. (Biblical version, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.")
- You get what you expect to get.
- You are, at this moment, the sum total of all your thoughts and decisions.
- If you do not like where you are, change your thinking.
- You are right now, exactly where you want to be. If this were not true, you would be somewhere else.
- People who believe they can; do. Those who believe they can't; are already beaten.
- The Law of Reciprocity, whatever you give, you receive.
- The Golden Rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The list of possible affirmations is endless. Better yet, you can customize any affirmation to fit your unique personality and needs.

Affirmations in Daily Life

Affirmations work best when they become part of your daily routine. For example:

- Use them in the morning to set your mood.
- Repeat them during stressful situations.
- Say them before a meeting, workout, or challenge.
- Whisper them before sleep to calm your mind.

Affirmations are like mental vitamins. You do not take vitamins once and expect lifelong health. You take them regularly because they support your system.

Affirmations do the same for your mind.

With consistency, your thoughts become more supportive, your actions more aligned, and your life more intentionally shaped.

Reflection Exercise - Strengthen Your Inner Voice

1. Write down five negative thoughts you catch yourself repeating. (Examples: "I'm not good enough," "I always mess things up," "Nothing works out for me.")
2. Rewrite each one into a positive affirmation. (Example: "I am learning, growing, and improving every day.")
3. Choose two affirmations to repeat three times a day for the next week, morning, midday, and before bed.
4. Notice how your mood, energy, and self-talk shift.

Affirmations are not magic, they are practice.

They help you build the mindset you need to live the life you want.

And yes, they work. They just do.

36

LAUGHTER

Chapter 36 – Laughter

Laughter really is the best medicine. It reduces stress, boosts your immune system, and instantly improves your mood. Ever had a belly laugh so hard it left you wiping away tears? You probably felt lighter afterward, even if your problems were still there. That is the magic of laughter, it doesn't erase the challenges of life, but it makes them easier to carry.

Don't take life so seriously that you forget to laugh. Watch a comedy, spend time with a funny friend, or learn to laugh at yourself. If you can laugh, you can cope.

One of the most powerful medicines for curing unhappiness is a good laugh. Science has been studying the power of laughter for quite some time, and the conclusions are unanimous. Laughter and a good sense of humor create positive and natural reactions in your body that can reduce stress, prevent many diseases like cardiovascular issues, speed healing, and improve your immune system.

A good laugh releases endorphins, the "feel-good" chemicals your body dispenses naturally. Endorphins reduce pain, calm anxiety, and create a pleasant sense of well-being. A strong laugh can even promote relationship bonding, ease tension between people, and disarm conflict before it grows into something larger.

Author Dr. Norman Cousins was a huge believer in the power of laughter. His work showed how humor, joy, and positive emotions can contribute to physical healing. I highly recommend researching his story and reading some of his books, especially if you want to understand just how deeply laughter influences the body and mind.

Laughter is also contagious. If you see a group of people howling with laughter, you are almost instantly pulled into the moment. Even if you don't know what they are laughing about, you feel the energy. At the very least, watching others laugh will put a huge smile on your face. So, learn to laugh. First, laugh at yourself. Life is a lot brighter when you stop treating every mistake like a disaster. Remember this: Don't take yourself too seriously because no one else does.

Also, learn to laugh at the things that cause you worry or stress. This doesn't mean ignoring problems, it simply means not letting them control you. Humor can shrink something that feels overwhelming into something manageable. Add smiling to the mix and watch what happens. Happiness blossoms.

Laughter is more than entertainment. It is a form of emotional resilience, a way of reminding yourself that no matter what life throws at you, joy is still available. A single moment of laughter can shift your mindset, relax your body, and reconnect you with life's simple pleasures.

Reflection Exercise - Invite More Laughter

1. Think of three things that always make you laugh, a show, a person, a memory, a silly video, anything.
2. Put at least one of those things into your schedule this week.
3. Practice laughing at yourself once today. When something goes wrong, try responding with humor instead of stress.
4. Notice how your body and mood shift when you choose laughter over tension.

Laughter is not just good for you, it is essential. Make room for it, invite it often, and let it lift your life in ways nothing else can.

37

**LYING TO
YOURSELF**

Chapter 37 – Lying to Yourself

The easiest person to fool is yourself. We tell ourselves lies to feel better in the short term, lies that soothe us for a moment but sabotage us in the long run. Remember, don't always believe what you think.

We whisper things like,

- "It's not my fault,"
- "I'll start tomorrow,"
- "I'm fine,"

Even when deep down we know these statements aren't true.

These little lies seem harmless, but they keep us stuck. If you don't face the truth, you can't change it. Self-deception is like putting a bandage on a broken leg, it covers the problem but does absolutely nothing to fix it.

Being honest with yourself may sting at first, but it's the only way forward. Self-deception keeps you spinning in circles, trapped in old habits, repeating old pain. Truth clears the path. Truth says, "Here is where you really are, and here is what needs to happen next."

The biggest lie you will ever tell is the lie you tell yourself. You know the one; the silent thought that says, "I am not worthy of happiness."

That lie, more than any other, kills potential. It convinces people to shrink, settle, and silence their dreams before they even begin.

Hey, if you want to lie, then lie down each night and tell yourself the opposite. Tell yourself, "I am special, unique, and worthy of all of the wonderful gifts that life has to offer." Say it until your subconscious listens. Say it until you begin to believe that your life matters, because it does.

Be honest about life in every way, and most importantly, be honest about your own life too. Honesty is not about judgment; it is about awareness. It is about seeing yourself clearly so you can grow, evolve, and step into the happiness you deserve.

When you stop lying to yourself, everything changes.

- You stop making excuses and start making progress.
- You recognize your patterns instead of denying them.
- You take responsibility for your happiness instead of waiting for life to magically improve.

Self-honesty doesn't weaken you; it strengthens you. It gives you power. It gives you freedom. And it gives you a foundation for real, lasting happiness.

Sometimes the truth hurts but lies will destroy you slowly. The truth, even when uncomfortable, will set you free.

Reflection Exercise - Truth Over Comfort

1. Write down one area of your life where you've been lying to yourself, big or small.
2. Ask yourself: What is the real truth behind this lie?

3. Write a positive truth-based affirmation to replace the old story.
4. Read it aloud daily for one week, letting honesty guide you toward change.

Honesty with yourself is the beginning of wisdom, healing, and happiness. Stop lying inward, start living outward.

38

EXPECTATIONS

Chapter 38 – Expectations

Expectations are tricky. They can lift you up, or they can drag you into disappointment. One of the biggest sources of unhappiness comes from expecting people to think like us, act like us, or respond the way we would. When they don't, conflict follows. If you expect people to act a certain way, you will often be let down. You can never control others. You can only control yourself.

The healthiest expectation is this, expect yourself to do your best, and let go of expecting anything in return from others. Less disappointment, more peace.

Most uncomfortable relationships can be avoided by setting up clear expectations in advance. Even when conflict has already crept in, expectations can be re-defined, adjusted, and aligned so the relationship can have a new beginning.

It is incredibly rare for two or more people to have the same assumptions, the same definitions, or the same level of expectations, whether in personal or professional relationships. Unless expectations are spoken aloud, clarified, and mutually agreed upon, things eventually go wrong. Doing anything less invites misunderstanding, resentment, and ultimately unhappiness.

I have observed that if you do not set expectations with others, they will set them for you. Then, almost inevitably, you will be expected to do something very different from what you originally imagined, and conflict will follow. When you let others define expectations, they tend to be less realistic and often less fair.

Another powerful observation is this, if you have not set your own expectations for yourself, it becomes very difficult to be at peace with yourself or with anyone else. People with unclear expectations drift. People with clear expectations rise.

Reach for the stars and you will never end up with a handful of dirt. Leo Burnett said that, and he was right. You can never aim too high when it comes to believing in yourself.

Unfortunately, many people set low expectations for everything, everyone, and themselves. The world is crowded with people who avoid responsibility and allow others to dictate what their life should look like. It is easier to blame parents, teachers, employers, spouses, and friends than to define your own path.

But a few people, mostly leaders, about 20 percent of the population, take full ownership of their expectations. They make their own destiny. They choose for themselves. They live the idea that "Whatever you conceive and believe, you will achieve." These people are happier because they understand that rewards are the result of effort, perseverance, and positive beliefs.

You can be one of those people. Happiness grows one positive expectation at a time. When you expect more from yourself, you rise. When you expect the world to hand you something, you fall.

And when you stop expecting others to behave a certain way, you free yourself from unnecessary suffering. Expectations will always shape your experience, so choose them wisely.

Reflection Exercise, Reset Your Expectations

1. Write down one expectation you have of others that constantly leads to frustration.

2. Ask yourself honestly, "Is this expectation fair, or is it something I cannot control?"
3. Write a new expectation focused solely on your own actions, not anyone else's.
4. Review your new expectation for one week and observe how your relationships shift when you stop expecting and start understanding.

Clear expectations create peace, confidence, and happiness. And the most important expectations you set are the ones you set for yourself.

39

STRESS

Chapter 39 – Stress

Stress is part of life. No one escapes it. The real issue isn't stress itself, it is how we handle it. Too many people let stress control them. They bottle it up until it explodes, or they try to numb it with distractions or unhealthy habits. Neither works. Stress ignored becomes stress amplified.

A healthier approach is simple: acknowledge it, face it, and take action. Exercise, talk things out, meditate, breathe, go for a walk, listen to music, or simply allow yourself to pause. Small things make a big difference.

Think of stress like wind. Handled correctly, it pushes you forward. Handled poorly, it knocks you down. Here is the funny thing about stress: you cannot buy it, catch it from someone else, or ask someone to hand you theirs. Stress is a self-induced mental condition. It is not a “real thing” at all, at least not in the physical sense.

Stress usually appears because of unrealistic expectations, negative thinking, or demands we place on ourselves and others. Even though stress is imaginary in one sense, it has very real consequences. Today it is one of the biggest creators of unhappiness. Life isn't one big party that goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But we don't need to allow stress to dominate our happiness or destroy our peace. If you are stressed out, you can change it.

Start by eliminating unrealistic expectations in the areas you can control. This might include your expectations about your own performance, your expectations of others, your desire for too many material things, or deadlines that simply cannot be met. You must be realistic with yourself, not unrealistic.

If you aren't realistic about your life, who will be?

Blame and entitlement also fuel stress. Both were discussed earlier, and both can drain your energy, your joy, and your motivation. Remember, your expectations must be managed by you. You are in control of your thoughts, your choices, and your life. You set your standards. You create your goals. You determine the timelines you will live by.

This is not to say that life should be easy or free of challenges. It is important to stretch yourself, aim high, and create a meaningful life that fills you with pride. But whatever you work on must have a realistic chance of success in the timeframe you've set. Unrealistic goals generate unnecessary stress. Realistic goals generate momentum.

Some stress, the positive kind, is actually good for you. A sense of urgency can be motivating and can inspire creativity, productivity, and growth. But when positive stress crosses the line into negativity, pressure, or unrealistic demands, it becomes destructive. This is when you must step back, re-evaluate your circumstances, learn from the results, readjust your compass, and give yourself a break.

Learning to reduce stress will make you happier. Period.

Libraries are filled with books on stress, but the solution is simpler than most people realize: awareness, adjustment, and action. Decide right now that you will live a life with less stress and ultimately a stress-free life. Begin making the necessary adjustments to support that decision. You can do it. You deserve to do it.

Stress may be a part of life, but suffering under it does not have to be.

Reflection Exercise - Stress Reset

Identify One Stressor

Write down one thing that consistently creates stress in your life.

Ask: Is This Under My Control?

If the answer is yes, adjust your expectations or your actions. If no, let it go.

Choose One Healthy Response

Exercise, breathe deeply, listen to music, talk to someone, or take a short break.

Repeat Daily

Reducing stress is a habit, not a one-time fix.

Choose to stress less. Choose peace. Choose happiness.

40

COPING

Chapter 40 – Coping (When Life Happens)

Life will always throw curveballs. Nobody gets a pass. The key is not avoiding hardship, challenges, or unexpected events. The key is learning how to cope. Some people crumble under pressure. Others adapt, grow, and even thrive. The difference is not luck, genetics, or privilege. The difference is mindset.

To suggest that enjoying a happy life is as simple as smiling all day long and repeating positive affirmations would be misleading. We are meant to live and experience life with all of its joy and all of its challenges. It is easy to be happy when things go our way.

But when life takes an unexpected turn, when the plans fall apart, or when pain or loss knocks at the door, coping becomes the most important skill you have.

Coping is not ignoring problems. It is not pretending everything is fine when it is not. Coping is the ability to remain grounded, think clearly, take responsibility, and hold on to hope even when life is difficult. It is your emotional survival toolkit.

I believe learning to cope with life's ups and downs should be a mandatory class in every school throughout the world. Imagine if children were taught early what challenges are, why they happen, and how to respond.

They would grow into adults who know how to navigate and conquer the roadblocks and obstacles that everyone faces. They would become healthier and happier as they journey forward in life.

So how does one go about learning how to cope?

Living

First, remember that living is about being alive, and alive means experiencing everything that life brings. No matter how catastrophic something feels in the moment, this truth remains: this too shall pass. You must believe in your ability to face whatever comes. You must believe in yourself.

Believing

It is also important to believe that, even though it may seem improbable at the time, everything that happens can lead to something meaningful. Challenges teach you. Pain stretches you. Loss softens your heart. Struggle reveals your strength.

Believing in a higher order of things and having faith in something greater than yourself provides enormous comfort. It does not matter what name you give it, God, the universe, fate, or simply the natural order of life. Faith in something bigger than you eases suffering and strengthens resilience.

Some people will say this view is too optimistic or "Pollyanna-ish." They will remind you that life really sucks sometimes. They are right. Life does suck sometimes. But ask yourself this: How does negative thinking make anything better? How does withdrawing, sinking into self-pity, or spiraling into depression create a path forward?

Negative thinking has never solved a problem. Coping does.

Being Positive

Life is meant to be experienced fully, the ups and the downs. You will face problems, setbacks, disappointments, and heartbreak. But you can still believe in yourself and trust that you are surrounded by people who care about you. Even people who do not know you personally want to see you succeed. When life becomes too heavy to carry alone, reach out. Ask for help. People want to help. That is why they are there.

Ask yourself a simple question when you are overwhelmed: Will this matter a year from now? Five years from now? Most of the time, the answer is no. Problems shrink when you zoom out. And even the ones that truly matter can be handled one small step at a time.

Asking

Asking for help is one of the most powerful coping tools you have. Not because you are weak, but because you are wise. You are not supposed to carry every burden alone. Humans were designed for community, friendship, and connection.

There are people waiting in the wings, ready to support you when you genuinely need it. Ask, reach, communicate. Strength is not found in isolation. It is found in connection.

The Four Core Elements of Coping

Across all the ideas in this chapter, coping boils down to four essential elements:

Living, Believing, Being Positive, and Asking

When you practice these four elements, life's obstacles shift from being roadblocks to being steppingstones.

The Perspective Shift

Remember the powerful lyric from Eric Burton's *No Self Pity*, "No matter how low you are, there is always somebody lower." That quote is not meant to diminish your pain. It is meant to remind you that perspective shapes everything.

If you want to stop feeling sorry for yourself, visit the children's ward of a hospital. You will walk out with a renewed sense of gratitude and the realization that your problems, while real and painful, are not insurmountable.

There are millions of people who would give almost anything to be where you are, challenges and all.

The Mindset of Coping

Coping is not a natural reflex for all people. Some crumble, some freeze, some panic. Others adjust, learn, and grow. But coping can be learned by anyone.

Coping is:

- choosing responses instead of reacting blindly
- seeing beyond the moment
- believing in your ability to get through anything

- refusing to let fear choose your next step
- leaning on others when needed
- understanding that you are stronger than you think

You cannot always control what happens, but you can always control how you respond. That is the essence of coping, and it is the difference between staying stuck and moving forward.

Reflection Exercise - Building Your Coping Muscle

Identify one challenge you are facing right now.

Ask: Will this matter in one year? Five years?

Choose one positive action you can take today, even a small one.

Ask someone for support or advice if you need it. Rewrite the situation from the perspective of "this too shall pass."

Coping is not about perfection. It is about resilience, perspective, strength, and belief. When life happens, you can handle it. And with practice, you will handle it even better.

41

DOING
SOMETHING
NICE

Chapter 41- Doing Something Nice

Want to feel better instantly? Do something nice for someone else.

It does not have to be big or dramatic. Hold a door. Pay a compliment. Let someone into your lane in traffic. Buy a coffee for the person behind you. Send a text that simply says, "Thinking about you."

Small kindnesses ripple out in ways you may never see. And the bonus, they lift you as much as they lift the other person. Generosity is a happiness multiplier.

If you want to stop feeling sorry for yourself, take a visit to the children's ward at your local hospital and you will quickly realize, "You ain't got no real problems!"

We have all heard the expression "Pay It Forward," especially after the movie was released in October 2000. Nothing is more satisfying to our inner joy than doing something nice for someone else. This feeling is even more intense when the "something" you do is totally unexpected by the receiver of your kindness.

Even better, your joy is often enhanced when your act of kindness happens anonymously. No credit from others is required for you to feel the glow from just being nice. Kindness, by the way, is a characteristic of the happier Group Two people.

The Power of Simple Kindness

Your kindness does not have to involve money. It can be as simple as

- a sincere smile
- holding a door open
- giving a genuine compliment
- sending a short encouraging message
- listening to someone who needs to talk

These things seem small, but they are not small to the people who receive them. And they are certainly not small to how you feel inside. Want to be happier, more often? Be nice to other people, especially to people you do not know, and whenever it is totally unexpected.

A Restaurant, Three Ladies, and a Lesson for My Grandkids

Here is one of my favorite real life "Pay It Forward" stories.

I often dine out, and sometimes I see an opportunity to pick up the bill for someone else in the restaurant. It is usually someone I sense is having a special occasion, or it looks like dining out is something they only do once in a while. Typically, it might be a young family in their late teens, maybe with a baby in a stroller, or a group of young people celebrating a birthday. If I see them counting their change to make sure, they have enough to pay the bill, that is a pretty good clue I have an opportunity to "Pay It Forward."

On one occasion, I was with my family at a Chinese buffet. My two grandchildren were in their early teens. When we finished eating, I headed to the restroom while the others waited in the reception area. When I rejoined them, my grandchildren pointed out three ladies sitting on a bench in the lounge.

From their ages, they appeared to be three generations, a grandmother, her daughter, and her granddaughter. The daughter was in tears.

My grandchildren told me that while I was gone, the restaurant owner had called the police on the three ladies because the credit card they used would not accept the charges for their meal. It turned out the grandmother had received the card in the mail, had no real understanding of what it involved, had not properly authorized it, and as a consequence it was now a useless piece of plastic.

In her excitement about receiving the card, she decided to treat her daughter and granddaughter to a dinner out at a nice Chinese buffet, just like we were doing. Now they were embarrassed, afraid, and stuck.

Perfect scenario to "Pay It Forward."

I went to the owner at the reception desk and asked about the problem. His explanation was, "This happens all of the time." I was puzzled as to how calling the police would resolve anything, so I asked how much the unpaid bill was. It was trivial. So, I paid the bill and, at the same time, resolved the conflict.

The owner was surprised but took my money. The three ladies, especially the grandmother and her daughter, started crying even more, only now from relief and gratitude. My grandchildren had a "huh?" look on their faces. The whole incident took only a minute or two, and then we left to go to the car.

Here is the best part. First, I felt like a million bucks. My grandchildren, curious and slightly confused, asked me why I would do such a thing. So, I asked them a question instead.

“Who do you think got the bigger bang of joy from my little act of kindness, them or me?”

Of course, they thought it was the three ladies in trouble. But no, it was not. I explained the joy I was feeling at that very moment and how I was actually the biggest winner. They saw the huge grin on my face and knew I was being sincere. They watched, in real time, how simply being nice can fill you with happiness. The greatest part of this story did not end that day.

Some years later, my grandson, now in his early twenties, had his own opportunity to be nice in a similar way. He paid someone else's bill. Within seconds, he felt the same rush of joy that comes from doing something kind and unexpected for someone else. He could not wait to call and tell me what he had done and how great it made him feel.

That is the ripple effect of kindness. It does not just help the receiver. It models something powerful for everyone watching.

A Lost Ticket, a Hundred Dollars, and First Class

Here is another story where I greatly benefited from a simple act of kindness. I tell it not to brag, although there is a little of that in the story, but because it beautifully illustrates the Law of Reciprocity, getting back what you give out, and the Golden Rule.

I was in Las Vegas for a convention, back in the days when cell phones were not common. I needed to call my office before my flight, so I headed to a small bank of public phones near our gate. There were long lines on each phone. I chose the shortest line and waited patiently.

I noticed a young girl, maybe fifteen years old, using the phone in front of me. She was crying her eyes out. From what I overheard, she was explaining to her dad that she had lost her ticket home. She had no money, and the airline was not sympathetic. That familiar "Pay It Forward" feeling tapped me on the shoulder.

When she paused in her conversation, I gently interrupted and asked, "What is the cost of the connecting ticket home?" It turned out to be only seventy-five dollars. I took a hundred dollar bill from my wallet and my business card, handed them to her, and said that when she got home, her dad could send me a check if he wished.

She was ecstatic and clearly relieved. She told her dad the problem was solved, and they ended the call. After many thank you's, she went on her way. I was feeling pretty good, glowing in the moment from this small act of kindness. But again, the story got even better.

As I stepped up to use the now vacant phone, a flight attendant tapped me on the shoulder. She told me how moved she was by what she had just seen and asked what flight I was on.

It turned out she was working that same flight. She asked to see my ticket. When I handed it to her, she said, "If I have ever seen a reason to upgrade someone to first class, this is it."

I did not think my act of generosity was such a big deal. I was just hoping the young lady's dad would do the honorable thing and send my hundred dollars back. The flight attendant did not agree with my modest view. She walked off with my ticket to arrange the upgrade.

I finished my call and went back to my wife at the gate, excited to tell her what had happened and that we might, just might, be flying first class, something we absolutely could not afford in those days. I could see the flight attendant at the counter working with the gate agent and was hoping there would be room in first class.

Then, much to my surprise, the young lady I had helped walked back over to me with a huge smile on her face. She told me her original connecting ticket had been stapled to the ticket stub from her first leg of the journey. She had found it and no longer needed my hundred dollars. She handed it back to me with another round of thanks.

My first thought was, "Well, there goes the first-class upgrade. The deal is off."

I went over to tell the flight attendant what had happened and that she did not need to go through with the upgrade now that I had my money back. Her response was, "Like hell the deal is off."

Then she added, "You did not know you were going to get your money back. You helped her anyway. The deal stands. And by the way, here are your tickets for your first-class seats."

Wow. How cool was that?

It got even better. When the flight attendant told the rest of the crew what had happened, my wife and I were treated like royalty for the entire trip home. That is the Law of Reciprocity in action. You give, and often, in ways you do not expect and cannot predict, you receive.

Why Kindness Feels So Good

I may have indulged myself a little with these stories, but I am smiling again just remembering what happened. There is a reason kindness feels so good.

- It takes your focus off your own problems.
- It reminds you that you have something to give.
- It shows you that you can make a difference, even in a small way.
- It strengthens your confidence in your own goodness.

Kindness is one of the fastest ways to shift your emotional state from helplessness to empowerment, from sadness to gratitude, from isolation to connection. If you want proof that your life matters, do something kind for someone else and watch what happens inside you.

Everyday Ways to "Pay It Forward"

You do not need to wait for big dramatic moments. You can build a lifestyle of kindness with simple habits:

- Compliment someone's smile, effort, or attitude
- Let someone go ahead of you in line
- Write a thank you note to a teacher, nurse, or co-worker
- Leave a larger tip than usual when someone clearly gave their best
- Check in on a neighbor who lives alone
- Help someone carry bags or navigate the door
- Donate something useful, not just what you want to get rid of

None of these will make the evening news. But they will make a difference to the people you touch. And they will absolutely make a difference to you.

The Real Secret

Here is the real secret to doing something nice. You might think the biggest benefit goes to the person you help, the stranger in the restaurant, the young girl at the airport, the neighbor, or the friend. But most of the time, the person who benefits most is you.

You get the joy.

You get the warmth.

You get the inner smile that says, "I like the person I am becoming."

Want to be happy? Then be nice to other people, especially to those you do not know and whenever it is totally unexpected. Your kindness does not have to include money. It can be as simple as a smile, holding a door open, or giving a compliment.

It works every time. And more importantly, you will feel great.

Reflection Exercise - Practice a Small Act of Kindness

1. Think of one simple act of kindness you can do in the next 24 hours, for a stranger, a friend, or a family member.
2. Do it without expecting anything in return and, if possible, without needing any recognition.
3. Afterward, pause and notice how you feel inside.

Repeat often. Kindness is one of the most reliable shortcuts to happiness you will ever find.

42

SPIRITUALITY

Chapter 42, Spirituality

Spirituality means different things to different people. For some, it is religion. For others, it is a sense of connection to nature, the universe, humanity, or simply something greater than themselves. The point is not *what* you believe. The point is believing in *something*. A sense of higher purpose grounds you when life gets rough and humbles you when life is good. Find what spirituality means to you and let it steady your steps.

I have yet to meet anyone who is truly at peace and happy with the person they are without also believing in some form of higher order that is greater than mankind. I am told there are happy atheists out there, I've just never met, heard, or read about one. And to be clear, I am not talking about organized religion, I am talking simply about spirituality. Another way of saying it would be to have faith.

Faith - Not Labels

I remember seeing a movie many years ago called *Oh God* with George Burns playing the role of God. The singer John Denver played an average guy selected by God to deliver a message to the world that people could be doing a better job at being human.

Of course, no one believes him. To prove he is a fraud, religious leaders around the world assemble a list of questions for him to ask God the next time they meet. The questions are written in Sanskrit, an ancient language he doesn't understand, so he cannot cheat.

When God reviews the list, the first question is, "Which religion is the closest to the real path of God?"

George Burns, as God, responds, "I am not much into religion, I am more into faith."

That one line has stayed with me ever since. It describes spirituality better than anything I have ever heard. Faith. Trust. Humility. Gratitude. These are the qualities that shape a spiritual life, not labels, denominations, or doctrines.

A Higher Order, Whatever You Choose to Call It

Believing in something greater than yourself, whether you call it God, Spirit, the Universe, a Higher Power, Source Energy, or simply the mystery of life, is one of the common traits I see in truly happy people.

Spirituality can be as simple as a deep, grateful breath first thing in the morning. "I am above ground, and it is going to be a great day. Thank you."

It does not need formal structure or rituals, unless those bring you comfort. For many, spirituality is quiet, private, personal. Others find connection through organized religion, community gatherings, or shared practices like meditation or prayer. There is no right or wrong path.

And honestly, I do not think God—by whatever name you choose—cares which way you connect. What matters is that you *do* connect.

The Atheist Who Said, "Thank God I'm an Atheist!"

Once, I heard an atheist say something that made me laugh out loud. He was in a heated debate with a very religious person who cited scripture and gave passionate arguments trying to convert him. After listening patiently for quite some time, the atheist finally leaned back, took a deep breath, and said:

"Thank God I'm an atheist!"

That statement alone proves something important. Even people who reject religion often still lean into something beyond logic, even humorously. Whether they admit it or not, they often live by faith in some form, faith in people, in science, in reason, in justice, or simply in life unfolding.

Church, Heart, and Soul

I go to church every day, but not the kind with pews and hymn books. The church I attend is in my heart, my mind, and my soul. It is the place where I try to practice gratitude, humility, kindness, and compassion.

I do my best to live the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and to be grateful for the blessings I have in my life.

Being spiritual can be experienced:

- with a group of like-minded people
- within an organized faith or tradition
- outdoors in nature
- in quiet moments alone

- in meditation, prayer, or reflection
- or simply by living with gratitude
- through acts of kindness

It is not where you go that makes you spiritual. It is how you live.

Why Spirituality Matters for Happiness

Spirituality gives you several gifts that are invaluable for happiness:

1. A sense of belonging

Feeling connected to something larger than yourself shrinks your worries and expands your perspective.

2. A sense of purpose

Spirituality often inspires people to live with clearer intentions, deeper values, and more meaning.

3. Strength during hardship

Faith—whatever form it takes—helps people weather storms, loss, grief, and uncertainty with more resilience.

4. Humility during success

A spiritual mindset keeps you grounded when things go well and reminds you to stay grateful, not arrogant.

5. Peace of mind

There is a comfort that comes from believing life has an order, a flow, or a purpose beyond what you can see.

Finding Your Own Path

There is no universal spiritual roadmap. You get to choose the version that fits you. What matters is finding something that helps you grow and anchors your heart.

You might explore:

- gratitude journaling
- prayer or meditation
- reading uplifting books
- attending spiritual gatherings
- getting out into nature
- studying philosophy
- talking with spiritual mentors
- volunteering or helping others

Spirituality is a lifelong journey, not a destination.

A Simple Spiritual Practice

Here is one small, powerful way to invite spirituality into your daily life:

Each morning, say something grateful aloud, even if it is just one sentence:

“I am alive, I am grateful, and today is going to be a good day.”

Then take one slow breath with intention. Do this every day and notice how your mindset, your stress level, and your sense of connection begin to shift.

Final Thoughts

Spirituality is not about rules, labels, or belonging to the “right group.” It is about connection, meaning, gratitude, and humility. It is about believing in something greater than yourself that gives your life shape, comfort, and purpose.

Whatever name you use and whatever path you follow is perfectly fine. What matters is having faith in something that helps you become the best, happiest, and most grounded version of yourself.

Your spirit is your compass. Keep it celebrated, keep it grateful, and keep it open.

43

BALANCE

Chapter 43, Balance

Life is about balance, the steady, ongoing adjustment between effort and ease, seriousness and fun, giving and receiving, ambition and rest. Too much of anything throws you off. Work too hard and you burn out. Play too much and you drift. Eat too much and you suffer. Deny yourself too much and you wither. Happiness lives in the middle ground. Balance does not mean perfection every day, it means adjusting as you go, like a tightrope walker leaning left and right but still moving forward.

Regardless of how much passion you have for any one thing, doing too much of one single thing leads to less-than-positive results. Life wants to be balanced. I am not sure how many areas make up a well-balanced life, but here are the five I keep in mind and rely on:

1. Health, Body, and Mind
2. Family
3. Spirituality
4. Work
5. Play

These are not ranked in order of importance, because all five work together. When one collapses, the others feel it.

The Cost of Imbalance

How many times have you seen someone who reached unbelievable heights in one area of life, only to discover their life *totally sucked* in another? Think of the famous golfer who appeared to have a perfect life, yet his personal world fell apart with infidelity and dishonesty.

Or the incredibly talented, handsome actor who had the number one comedy show on television, only to throw it away to satisfy addictions and self-destruction. Or the legendary singer, songwriter, and performer with the silver glove who spiraled into bizarre medications and tragic choices driven by inner demons.

The list goes on, but the point is clear. When one area of life becomes so inflated that it crushes the others, the imbalance eventually leads to unhappiness. Success without stability collapses. Achievement without health empties out. Fame without grounding destroys from the inside.

The Wisdom of the Dying

I once read a remarkable book written by a doctor who worked with dying patients. He spent years studying people who had only a short time left to live, hoping to understand what truly matters when life is close to its end. In his entire career, he never once heard a dying person say:

"I wish I had spent more time at the office."

"I wish I had made more money."

Not once.

What they *did* say, consistently, was:

"I wish I had spent more time with the people I love."

"I wish I had taken better care of myself."

"I wish I had enjoyed life more instead of rushing through it."

"I wish I had lived true to myself."

These are the revelations that only surface when everything unnecessary falls away and only the truth remains.

Here's My Advice

If you do not take care of your health, then every other achievement becomes hollow. Money can bring enjoyment, but it cannot buy happiness. If you do not have close family relationships, then your greatest triumphs will not fill the emptiness you feel inside.

If you do not have faith in something greater than mankind and materialism, you miss the chance to experience the serenity, joy, peace, love, and deeper happiness that spirituality brings. If all you do is work, you miss out on the real rewards of life. If you do not take time to play and have fun, you will never enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Stay balanced and live happy.

The Five Pillars of a Balanced Life

Let's look at the five essential areas more closely.

1. Health, Body, and Mind

This is the foundation of everything. Without physical and mental well-being, nothing else holds up. Eat well, sleep deeply, move your body, challenge your mind, and protect your emotional health. Your body is the vehicle that carries you through life, and your mind is the driver. If either breaks down, the journey stops.

2. Family

Your family, whether biological or chosen, forms your emotional backbone. Success feels empty when it has no one to share it with. Invest in relationships. Make time for conversations, celebrations, forgiveness, and memories. These are the real treasures of life.

3. Spirituality

Whether you follow a religion, meditate, reflect, or simply feel connected to something greater than yourself, spirituality anchors you. It gives you faith when life is shaky and humility when life is smooth. It centers your heart and clarifies your purpose.

4. Work

Work gives you meaning, challenge, contribution, and financial stability. It is healthy and rewarding to pursue excellence. Just remember that work is only *one* dimension of a full life. Success should never come at the expense of everything else.

5. Play

Yes, adults need play too. Laughter, hobbies, fun, games, creativity, travel, relaxation, and pure joy. Play renews your energy, lifts your spirits, and reminds you that life is not only meant to be accomplished, but *enjoyed*.

Why Balance Matters

Think of a wheel. If one spoke breaks, the wheel wobbles. If several break, the wheel collapses entirely. Balance is not a luxury. It is a requirement for mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

Balanced people are:

- Happier
- More resilient
- More productive
- More creative
- Healthier
- Better friends and partners
- More fulfilled

Balance does not mean dividing your life into perfect 20 percent slices. It means adjusting as needed, being honest with yourself, and choosing priorities consciously instead of drifting into extremes.

A Simple Exercise for Realignment

Try this today:

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate each of the five areas:

Health, Family, Spirituality, Work, and Play.

Whichever area scores the lowest is the one quietly asking for your attention. Then ask yourself:

“What is one small thing I can do this week to improve this area?”

Not a big leap, just a small shift. Balance is built by adjustments, not overhauls.

Final Thoughts

Life is a dance between effort and ease, ambition and rest, giving and receiving, seriousness and joy. When one part of life grows too large, the others shrink. Happiness cannot survive in extremes. It flourishes in balance.

- Tend to your health
- Nurture your family
- Honor your spirit
- Be proud of your work
- Make time to play

Stay balanced and live happy.

44

**GOALS AND
VISIONS**

Chapter 44 - Goals and Visions

Without goals, you drift. Without vision, even goals lose meaning. A goal is specific, I want to run a 10K marathon. A vision is bigger, I want to live a healthy, active life.

Goals give you checkpoints. Vision gives you direction. Together, they keep you moving when the road gets tough. Write them down, review them often, celebrate progress, and do not be afraid to adjust along the way. Goals and visions are guides, not shackles.

Why I Prefer Visions

I am not excited about the word - goals. It has been used so often that it has become a turn off for me. Words like objective, target, endgame, and quota are also not high on my list of words to describe a future outcome. I like the word vision. The word vision inspires a higher value and worthiness. It suggests a lofty quest, one that requires passion and commitment which in turn creates an environment for sound decision making and action.

Decision making and the actions motivated by a conscious effort to move forward create results, and results are the key to learning, growing and succeeding at whatever you wish to achieve. Results make you happy, big ones or little ones. When we are focused on results, we get results, and when we get results, we are all happier.

So here is how I see it, vision is the big picture, what kind of life you want to live, who you want to become. Goals are the small pieces that help that vision come to life. You do not have to love the word goals, but you do need some clear steps beneath your vision.

People without visions are like the proverbial boat without a rudder. They drift from one place to another without any direction or purpose. Most are really unhappy people.

Drifting Without Direction

Having no direction or purpose in one's life is like going on a trip without knowing the final destination. How do you know when you have arrived, how do you know what to say yes to or no to if you have no idea where you are going.

A vision gives your life context. It answers questions like:

- What kind of person do I want to be
- What kind of relationships do I want to have
- How do I want to feel physically, emotionally, spiritually
- What kind of contribution do I want to make

When you can answer questions like these, the daily decisions become easier. You have a compass instead of a blindfold.

The Trap of Magical Thinking

Too many people set out to create a vision by only visualizing the obtainment of whatever it is they are trying to achieve. They post a picture of the material object on a wall or write down the final result they want in their life. Then they think or believe that magically, somehow, what they want will suddenly appear or just happen.

It does not happen that way. Trust me, I know.

I am not suggesting that visualization is not a worthwhile part of an overall plan for obtaining that which you desire. Visualization is a powerful mental tool and a positive weapon that can defeat many obstacles or roadblocks. It is one of the reasons why I like to think in terms of my vision rather than goals when pursuing achievement.

However, visions and pictures on the fridge must be backed up with something practical, a daily action plan.

Vision Needs Action

To really be successful in acquiring what you seek, you need to keep a daily action plan. You must also act, do not stop reading here. Your action plan will be based on reachable activities that will give you daily successes and confirm that your plan is working.

Think of what you want to achieve as a journey rather than as just a destination. A journey has a start, a series of stopovers, and a final arrival. Here is an example.

A Vision of Better Health

Let us say you want to start living a healthier lifestyle. You may want to:

- Exercise a little bit more
- Eat healthier foods
- Eliminate some bad habits that negatively impact your good health
- Shed a pound or two
- Reduce stress
- Simply be happier

How can you successfully achieve this new vision of yourself.

First, realize that your vision will not happen just because you wish it, visualize it, or look at it in a picture on the refrigerator. The picture is there to remind you of your desire and to act, not to do the work for you.

Most success stories, no matter what the people were working to achieve, took a great deal of time and effort to accomplish. Most overnight success stories took years. That is the reality. Rome was not built in a day, and neither is building a new you.

Begin by creating a daily action plan that includes realistic activities that will not only ensure your eventual success but also provide the positive feedback you need to show you that you are making progress.

Your vision must have a starting point. Write out a list of the things you would like to change and make the decision, really decide, I am going to do this. Get passionate about your new you. Then decide what your success will look like when you arrive at the destination you are seeking. The more detailed you imagine it, the better.

Success might look like this:

- Eating only one meal a week with meat
- Eating the appropriate number of servings of fruits and vegetables each day
- Walking a mile each day
- Reducing the intake of alcohol
- Getting regular checkups with your doctor
- Having more energy and sleeping better
- Creating a better and more balanced life

These become the building blocks of your daily plan, things you know you can realistically achieve each day.

Small Steps - Realistic Changes

The same logic applies to exercise. Maybe you:

- Park your car two blocks farther away to get extra walking
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator when possible
- Walk for ten minutes after dinner three times a week, then build from there

These are reachable activities that create daily wins. Each win is a tiny vote for your new identity and your new vision.

Your Roadmap and Daily Log

To stay on track, you need a roadmap. Your roadmap can be a simple daily checklist of what you want to achieve that day. Each day of the week can be slightly different to give you variety and make it easier to stay committed to your vision.

You can also include small rewards for your weekly efforts. Maybe it is a special dessert, a movie night, a new book, or an hour of guilt free relaxation. The rule is simple; I only get the reward if I succeed in achieving my weekly plan.

Creating a daily activity log and checking things off is a powerful way to build your roadmap. It is also a great way to confirm that you are on track. You can literally see that you are achieving parts of whatever it is you are trying to achieve. This will:

- Keeps your motivation alive
- Maintains the passion you had when you first started
- Proves to you that change is actually happening

There are plenty of books, computer software programs, and smartphone apps that can help you create your plan and map out a roadmap for success. You do not need anything fancy though. A handwritten list on a small piece of paper, a fresh one every day, is often enough to itemize your little visions for the day.

The key to achieving what you want is to have daily activities planned in advance that allow you to arrive at your final destination over a realistic period of time.

Get yourself a list of what you want and remind yourself each day what you need to do. Learn to plan your life day by day in your own way, and you will be able to do whatever you want with a much greater chance of success.

Vision, Goals, and Flexibility

- Vision is the big picture, who you are becoming
- Goals are the specific milestones that mark your progress
- Daily actions are the small steps that move you forward today

Your daily actions could then be as simple as reading ten pages tonight, or going for a walk instead of scrolling on your phone.

The important thing, your goals and daily actions serve your vision. They are not there to beat you up or make you feel like a failure. They are there to guide you, and they can be adjusted as your life changes.

Plan Your Work - Work Your Plan

Most overnight success stories took years. They made one decision, one action, one small improvement at a time. So, stay realistic. You might:

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

- Work with others who are looking to achieve similar outcomes
- Share your vision with someone you trust to help you stay accountable
- Review your plan weekly and adjust what is not working

Then stay passionate and determined about achieving your ideas and visions. Plan your work and work your plan.

Think about it for a minute, what are your visions for the future. Not just what you want to own or where you want to live, but who you want to become. When you are clear on that, and you back it up with daily action, you stop drifting and start living on purpose.

45

GUIDANCE

Chapter 45 - Guidance

Nobody gets through life alone. We all need guidance from time to time.

Sometimes it comes from mentors, sometimes from friends, sometimes from a book or course, and sometimes from complete strangers who show up at the exact moment we need them.

Guidance is one of the great gifts of being human, a reminder that we are not meant to figure out everything on our own. The key is being open to it. Too many people suffer because they think they already have all the answers, or because they believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

In reality, wisdom often comes from listening, observing, and learning from the experiences of others. Those who are willing to learn grow faster, suffer less, and move through life with far more confidence and clarity. Seek guidance. Accept it. And when the time comes, pass it on.

The Gremlins We All Carry

As you might have imagined from the story of my early years, I had quite a few nasty gremlins floating around in my head. Early childhood programming, painful memories, and beliefs that were stuffed into my mind before I even knew how to question them. There is no doubt in my mind that without the guidance I received from people willing to give me a helping hand, my life story would be very different.

Some of my life tutors were professional behavioral specialists who were highly skilled in nasty gremlin removal. Fighting and removing my early childhood programming was not something I could do on my own. I had dug myself a pretty deep hole, and I needed help climbing out.

Most people do too, even if they never admit it. Every one of us carries inner gremlins, old fears, toxic beliefs, past hurts, insecurities, voices from the past telling us we are not good enough. Those gremlins do not disappear just because we pretend that they are not there. They shrink when we expose them to light, share them with others, and get the guidance we need.

Why Guidance Matters

If you have come this far in reviewing this course, then I know you are searching for something better, perhaps new tools, new hope, or a new way of looking at yourself and your life. You want more peace, more joy, more love, more happiness. And the good news is, it is absolutely possible. But you do not need to take that journey alone.

Some guidance comes naturally from the people in your life. Well-meaning individuals like family members and friends can play a big role in helping you move forward. Their love, support, and encouragement matter.

However, it is also possible maybe even likely that your unique situation may require something more. Professional help. Mentors. Therapists. Coaches. Counselors. People who are trained to help you untangle the deeper knots that may be holding you back.

There is no shame in this. In fact, it is one of the wisest choices you can make. If your car breaks down, you go to a mechanic. If your tooth hurts, you go to a dentist. If your mind or heart is hurting, why wouldn't you go to someone who understands how to help.

Letting Someone In

Getting guidance can feel strange or even embarrassing at first. It may feel vulnerable to let someone see your pain, your fears, or your doubts. But believe me when I tell you this, you are not alone with your nasty inner gremlins. We all have them. We all carry them. And sooner or later we must face them, release them, or send them packing.

Guidance makes that process faster, easier, and far less painful than trying to do it alone. A wise guide can give you:

- A clearer perspective
- Tools you never knew existed
- Encouragement when you feel lost
- Accountability when you drift
- Compassion when you need it most
- A roadmap when your own feels blurry

Guidance is not about dependence. It is about empowerment. It is about learning how to finally take command of your own life.

Wisdom Passed Forward

The wonderful thing about receiving guidance is that eventually you become a source of guidance yourself. Not because you think you are better than anyone else, but because you have walked the path, learned the lessons, and survived the storms.

You begin to recognize people who are struggling in the same way you once struggled. And when the time feels right, you offer a word, a hand, a moment of compassion. This is not accidental. It is how humanity survives and grows. We lift each other. And the more you lift others, the more you rise.

You Deserve Help

Happiness is too important to ignore every possible avenue that leads to it. If you need guidance, get it. If you need help, ask for it. If you need support, reach out. You are not weak for doing so. You are wise.

Life brings many challenges, but it also brings many helpers. There are good people in your world who will be there for you every step of the way. Let them. You are not meant to travel this road alone.

Guidance is not a crutch; it is a gift. Use it, embrace it, and someday, become it for someone else.

46

BE HAPPY

Chapter 46 - Be Happy

Happiness isn't a destination; it's a choice you make daily.

It is not about waiting until everything is perfect. If you wait for that, you will wait forever. Life will always contain some chaos, some unfinished business, some unanswered questions.

Happiness is about finding joy in the middle of the mess, smiling even when things are not ideal, and deciding that you will not let circumstances control your spirit. Do not postpone happiness. Practice it, right now.

You Are Stronger Than You Think

Most of us are fortunate to be reasonably healthy, and I make a broad assumption that you live in a free society where you are able to live without fear of oppression by your government. If this is true for you, you already have more going for you than many people on this planet. You have the capacity to take on all kinds of challenges.

There is one thing you must realize for yourself and do. You must know that you have the power to defeat any roadblock that stands between you and a richer, happier life. I was once asked, "When would you like to face life's challenges, when you are strong and capable or weak and defenseless?" That is a serious question.

Life tends to deal people with a hand they are generally capable of playing. I am not suggesting it is always easy or always fair, but I have observed that where one ends up in life has very little to do with where one started, or even with where you are right now.

Sure, life sucks from time to time. But you still have a choice. You can make better decisions. You can set a new path. You can change.

Reprogramming Your Thinking

You can learn from the results of your past decisions. You can start down a new path by realizing that your thinking may be the result of earlier programming, and you have the power to reprogram yourself. I like to think of it as rebooting your mental computer.

If this feels hard, try this simple exercise:

1. What do you like about you?

Make a list. Be honest and generous.

2. What do you not like about you?

Make another list. Be honest, but not cruel.

Then keep the things you like and make a decision to change the things you do not. It really can be that simple when you know, deep down, that change is possible. The decision itself does not take years; it takes a second. Living it out will take time and action, but the turning point happens in a moment.

Gratitude, Kindness, and Letting Go of the Shovel

Smile, be grateful for all of the gifts you do have. Live the Golden Rule and your relationships will blossom everywhere. Look for opportunities to be nice. Laugh as much as you can. Laugh every day and all day long when it is appropriate to laugh out loud.

Entitlement thinking is nothing more than a hole in the ground, a rut you or someone you know is stuck in. Trying to blame someone else only makes the hole deeper. Remember, the only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth of the hole.

Negativity is the mental shovel people use to dig those holes. Toss the shovel. Take a stand and be positive in your own mind and reject the negativity of anyone else. One more time, if negative thinking made anything better, we would all go out and take a course on it.

Work for your rewards. Enjoy the things you have but understand that things will not bring you inner peace and happiness. Only by accepting yourself for who you are and who you want to become, can you bring inner joy, love, peace, and happiness into your life. Let go of your unhappy self and create a happy self instead. Only you can do it.

Getting Comfortable in Your Own Skin

Get comfortable in your own skin, warts and all. Change the things you can, accept those you cannot, and learn to understand the difference.

Thank the people who have brought you this far in your life, even if where you are right now is not where you want to be in the future. Chances are the people you might be blaming for your current situation were actually doing the best they could with the programming inside their own heads. They, too, have their gremlins. They may be stuck in Group One thinking without even knowing it. Craft your way into Group Two, and you will be a much happier person.

Relationships and the Three Cs

Relationships with your family, friends, and co-workers have a huge impact on your happiness. Improve your communication skills. Learn to listen. Be open to compromise.

Remember the three Cs,
Collaboration, Cooperation, and Communication.

You can be right all the time, or you can have good relationships. Pick one. I have found that the loneliest and most unhappy people are often those who insist on always being right. They live in Group One.

Resign from Group One. This is one time where quitting is absolutely okay, so go for it.

What Does Happiness Look Like to You?

Ask yourself, "What does happiness mean to me?" and "What does it actually look like?" Describe it. Write it down. Post it where you can see it. Have a destination you are headed toward, otherwise you will go nowhere at all.

Enjoy and work for your visions. Be aware of where you are and use your inner GPS to check and recheck that you are on the path you want for yourself.

When you take things off the happiness list, when you stop believing that more money, more stuff, or more status will solve everything, some obvious reasons appear for why genuinely happy people are happy.

So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

1. They are healthier than many and grateful for their good health. Their family and friends are often healthier and grateful too.
2. They have positive relationships and are grateful for those relationships, especially with their family and close friends.
3. They serve others by offering valuable goods or services and are grateful for the skills, talents, and intelligence they possess that allow them to do so.
4. They do not believe in entitlement, and they do not blame others for their place in life.
5. They take responsibility for themselves. They are confident in their ability to take on life's challenges and ready to accept the results of their decisions as lessons.
6. They are grateful for the gifts they have been given and approach each day looking for ways to serve others.

Happy people are givers, not takers. They often light up a room when they enter it. People enjoy being around them. They are nice people. They press on when challenged. They do not quit easily.

They follow only those who will help them move in the direction they truly want to go. They believe that happiness is theirs for the taking.

Some even create a course, to share what they have learned so others can benefit. I am doing exactly that, with the sincere hope that in some small way it makes a difference, even if it is only for one single person.

My Story - Your Possibility

My life started out a little on the rough side. I am sure there are many who have had it much worse than I did. But I am convinced there was a good reason for such a start. Everything happens for a good reason, even though at the time we usually ask, "Why on earth would I ever want to be having this terribly unpleasant experience?"

My past has taken me on a fantastic journey where I was able to learn some amazing lessons that turned my life around and allowed me the privilege of living a life filled with love, joy, peace, and happiness. I am deeply thankful for the many people who guided and supported me just when I needed them most.

It is curious how, as soon as I decided to make a positive change in my life, these wonderful people seemed to appear out of nowhere. I call them my angels. I am convinced that is how life works.

Make a decision, change something you do not like about your life, and other people will appear to guide and support you. Do not rule out leaning on a professional behavior specialist if that is what you need. Reaching out for help is not weakness, it is wisdom.

So regardless of your start in life or where you are right now, as hard as it might be to believe this in this very moment, you can be happy, or at least much happier. You just have to believe it is possible and start making positive decisions to get yourself there.

So yes, sometimes life sucks, get over it, and move toward happiness anyway.

Start Now

Happiness is not a prize you receive at the end of a perfect life. It is a way of walking through an imperfect one. It is a practice. A mindset. A thousand small choices repeated over and over again.

You can choose gratitude over resentment.

You can choose responsibility over blame.

You can choose kindness over bitterness.

You can choose growth over self-pity.

And you can choose happiness, even while you are still working on yourself and your life.

To quote Bobby McFerrin from his popular song in 1988, "Don't worry, be happy."

Start right now.



So Life Sucks. Get Over It!

Throughout his career, Ron has embraced a simple but powerful philosophy: when complexity confounds you, build the tools that help others rise above it. His work has helped countless real estate professionals save time, reduce errors, and focus on what they do best serving their clients. Beyond software, Ron is an engaging communicator and educator, sharing insights through his YouTube channel and industry events where he demystifies technology and encourages brokers to think bigger. Ron Hurak's life story is not just about technology — it's about confronting challenge with curiosity, embracing change when others hesitate, and build

Ron Hurak