

Don't Gamble on Life
Improvement...
Until You Shift the Odds!



Second Edition

Kevin E. Eastman

Don't Gamble on Life Improvement... Until You Shift the Odds!

2nd Edition

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*For family, friends, and fraternity:
Who continue to challenge my way of thinking.*

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, *'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?'* Actually, who are you *not* to be?”

~Marianne Williamson, 1992

THE LAYOUT

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1. “Why Should I Pay Attention to This Guy?”

“*Thank you*” is the only sentiment that begins to express my appreciation for you opening this book. With literally *thousands* of choices for reading material available, I’m grateful that this time, you chose mine. It makes no difference whether you bought the book, borrowed it, found it, or had it gifted to you. I’m overjoyed you’re taking time to read the thoughts of a man from Oakland, California who believes he has beneficial information to share.

Why I chose writing a book as my sharing method is simple. This book is written for the person who feels like their dreams of success and happiness have been dashed, because of the obstacles they’re encountering. It’s also written for the people who have influence in those people’s lives. I’ve been in both positions. I’ve personally failed, as well as seen people fail in ways they shouldn’t be failing, and believe some of the lessons I’ve learned can remedy that. Too often, the person doesn’t see the forest because they’re blinded by the trees, and from my vantage point, there hasn’t been a lot of “common sense” assistance available... until *now!*

Several motivating factors contributed to this book, and a number of them will be discussed in the coming pages. However, in my opinion, none of these factors is more powerful than the feeling of overcoming an obstacle. What

you're about to read is my journey to life transformation – a combination of my interpretation of a number of obstacles I've faced, and many of the powerful, often uncomfortable lessons I've had to learn to overcome these obstacles.

To get the intended effect of this book, I suggest clearing your mind of what you believe, or have been taught, and simply reading it. It can be easy to pigeon-hole a book designed to assist with improving your life, and approach it with a closed or defensive mindset. Been there, done that, and it's exactly why this book is written the way it is.

First, a word of caution: *Buckle your seat belt, because you are in for a wild ride!* I'm about to challenge your way of thinking on a variety of topics, using some very *unconventional* methods! If you have what is considered “thin skin,” it may be a good idea to keep a helmet and some armor nearby. Your world is about to be upended, and your emotions put through the wringer! I know, because my emotions were put through the wringer while I was writing it. Joy, sadness, anger, and surprise – they're all in here, and then some.

At the beginning of almost every non-fiction book, the author strives to establish themselves as a competent authority, aiming to create a bond of trust with the reader, and get them excited about reading the rest of the book. I'll continue that practice, with some great advice I received: *“You never know from whom, or where inspiration will come from.”*

I'm certain a degree of skepticism arises when you're introduced to a book written by a first-time, relatively unknown author. It doesn't help matters when the author

makes a claim like, “*This book can assist you with improving your life.*” Don’t worry if you’re skeptical, at the moment. I’d be skeptical as well, and take no offense with anyone who may be. In fact, two questions probably come to mind: “*Who is this guy?*” and “*Why should I pay attention to him?*”

Both questions are valid, and my answer to the first one will be displayed throughout the book. “*Who is this guy?*” Well, I’ve experienced the overwhelming majority of the obstacles you’re going to read in this book. I’ve encountered, and found effective ways to overcome them. The chapter titles did *not* come about, by accident! They were selected to chronicle the transformation of a person from “*was*” to “*am.*”

Who *was* I? I *was* “that” person. I was that person who needed to find out who I was. I was that person who stayed within my comfort zone, because a fear of winning. I was that person who viewed the glass as half-empty, instead of half-full. That person who dealt with hate, and endured multiple failed relationships? That was me, too! I was also that person who’d fallen victim to peer pressure too many times to count. For a long time, I had the deep longing for validation. So, life experience has taught me a thing or two about how to get over obstacles. It forced me to become who I *am.*

My answer to the second question, however, may shock some folks: “*You don’t!*” There’s no law that says you have to pay attention to anything I’ve written in this book. You have complete freedom to choose who you pay attention to, and who you ignore. With that said, I believe you should consider paying attention to what I’ve written, for a few reasons.

I spent more than 20 years in the U.S. Air Force. The majority of my career was in two particular positions where interpersonal communication was a necessity: drill instructor, and recruiter at the high school, college, and post-graduate levels. In doing these jobs, as well as in my personal life, I've interacted with, and observed *thousands* of people, worn many different hats, and assumed a variety of roles.

Like many people, my life has been, and continues to be full of peaks and valleys. I've been beaten up, beaten down, and at times, completely *broken!* It's an ongoing battle. At my lowest point, life had beaten me so badly, I felt like I was nothing. My self-esteem was in the gutter, depression, failed relationships, dismal finances, etc. I was convinced the world had turned against me, and I was my only line of defense.

Thankfully, in addition to those horrible beat-downs, I received a surplus of helpful information from some great sources. From that, and learning how to get out of my own way, I was able to uncover a number of methods that have helped me decode many of life's most challenging situations. The intent of this book is to explain a few, so you can use them, if you are like I was – tired of the direction your life has been going. Through a lot of adversity I've learned, "*A hand up is better than a handout,*" and the effects *last* longer!

It is imperative that I point out, and you understand, I'm an *extremely* calculated thinker. There's *always* a method to my madness. I'm simplistic in my thought process – logical and methodical in my approach to resolving issues. In my mind, there is no value in unnecessarily complicating things.

Additionally, I don't want to give the impression that the book was written with the intent of talking down to, insulting, ridiculing, or being condescending to anyone. I don't appreciate anyone doing that to me, and I certainly don't want to do that to anyone.

When a person begins reading a book designed for "improvement," there's a tendency to look for scientific explanations of the content. While I have no problems with science, and need to make that clear, in many cases (at least from my experience), plain-old common sense is as, if not *more* effective, and from a common sense perspective is how I've written this book. The idea is to get you into the habit of looking for simplicity in situations. Why? The simpler things are made to appear, the easier they are to understand.

A person may genuinely want to improve, but for whatever reason, will approach a book like this with their guard up. It's usually not done maliciously. It's instinct. Protecting one's self is human nature, but protection with extremism can be a potentially damaging behavioral pattern that needs to be broken, if the person *does* want to improve.

I stated a couple of pages ago that you'd be reading a lot of personal experiences. I decided to take this approach because I want to illustrate how the topics I've included can overwhelm you if you allow them to, and can do it, very quickly. Using my first-hand experience as examples will show you a person who has faced, and overcome a lot of adversity. Displaying my own vulnerability should also

minimize, or possibly eliminate many of the biases and defenses an apprehensive reader may not realize are there.

A basic fundamental in communicating effectively is relatability. Communicators need to be able to reach people on common ground, and take it from there. I believe I can relate to most people, thanks to being afforded the privilege of growing up in the so-called “hood,” serving in the Air Force, and attending college. These experiences have allowed me to meet, and interact with people from all walks of life, ethnicities, orientations, economic, and social statuses.

I’ve learned if you carry yourself with confidence and act like you have some sense, your appearance, education, social, or economic status won’t be much of a factor. Your communication skills will make the difference. I have no problem conversing with *anybody*, about any *subject*, at any time. I am as comfortable talking with a homeless person as I am with a company CEO, and I have successfully done both.

I’ll begin with a rhetorical, yet thought-provoking question: If you’re not satisfied with some aspect of your life, and someone told you they might be able to help you turn it 180 degrees from where it currently is, wouldn’t you owe it to yourself to at least listen to what they have to say? If you’d listen, you’re on the track I want you to be on. If you listened, but ultimately didn’t follow their suggestions, the only thing lost (albeit valuable) is time. But, what if the information they provide makes things start making sense? Would you still consider that time lost? Of course not, and that’s my point! You have everything to gain if the information helps you.

Maybe *these* reasons are enough for you to consider paying attention to at least *some* of the things written in this book.

Conversely, if you aren't satisfied with your life, but say you *wouldn't* listen... *why not?!* What's the alternative? Stay where you're *not* satisfied? Here's some tough truth, and good luck trying to choke this down: "*If you're not currently satisfied with your life, your plan thus far... hasn't worked!*" Therefore, any alternatives to *your* plan should at least be entertained. You can decide later if the alternatives are stupid or not. "*When the possible ain't working, you must take a shot at the impossible!*" Only then, can you truly say you've tried everything!

Before we get too far along, I want to ensure a few things are clear. This way, you have a thorough understanding of what to expect, and you can't say you weren't warned. You're about to embark on a journey unlike any you've been on. You're headed inside my head (Lord help you!), where you'll be exposed to my ideas, theories, and opinions on a variety of topics I believe contribute most to the chaos we encounter in our lives. You'll agree with some of my ideas, disagree with others. Some of them may sound strange if you've never experienced what I'm describing, but each one has been included with the intent of depicting fairly common situations, from my sometimes very *uncommon* perspective.

This book isn't one size fits all, but it was written with a specific purpose. I'm not crazy enough to believe every topic will apply to every reader. With books like this, there's a tendency with readers, to skip to a topic that interests them, or, as they read, they'll feel the information doesn't apply.

The chapters are *not* intended to be stand-alone, but building blocks from one to the next. I urge you to read this book at least once from beginning to end, without skipping around. Otherwise, you may skip some information you actually *need!*

If you opened this book with the expectation of it being the “stereotypical” self-development book, filled with a bunch of scientific theories, or terminology that belongs in an Ivy League University lecture hall, I have some bad news: “*This ain’t that book!*” You won’t find any \$500 words in here, and it’s by design. Even the best information is useless, if the person on the receiving end doesn’t understand it. So, I made the effort to ensure what I’ve written is easily understandable.

Whether you *agree* with the information or not is a different story. You’ll be reading a lot of content in this book, and I’m intelligent enough to realize, getting every reader to agree with everything is impossible. I have no doubt, you’ll wholeheartedly disagree with some of the things I say, and that’s okay. However, I have a much more reasonable goal in mind: getting each reader to agree with at least *one* thing. As the old adage says, “*Rome wasn’t built in a day.*”

You should prepare yourself, because some of the book’s chapters and descriptions are quite lengthy. I hope you weren’t expecting a book chocked full of CliffsNotes®. I promise I’m not trying to lull you to sleep, with long sections and descriptions. I just *despise* being misinterpreted. Having to go back and clarify something I felt was initially clear has taught me how profound effective communication really is.

I won't be doing you any favors, if you're an impatient reader. *Despite* our society's inherent desire for instant gratification, or to "*get to the point,*" many of life's most valuable lessons can't be summed up with one-liners. Speed doesn't always translate to effectiveness.

With each topic discussed, I'll be providing facts, logic, reason, and rationale to support my ideas. This should minimize the chance of misinterpretation, and maximize the idea's effectiveness. I chose this methodology, because one of the harshest, yet unforgettable lessons my parents ever taught me was: "*It's impossible to argue with facts without looking stupid.*"

You may have already noticed, but many words, phrases, and ideas will be emphasized through the use of exclamations, italics, underlining, and repeating. This is also by design. I may not be physically reading the book for you, where you can hear the voice inflections. Therefore, I must rely on other methods of getting messages across effectively.

At first glance, the repeated things will look like a mistake, but I assure you, it was *intentional*. This is because I wholeheartedly believe in the law of repetition. The more you see or hear something, the greater chance you'll remember it. The more you practice something, the better you *should* become at it. That's how our brains work.

Much of the content in this book is example-based, so it may be tempting at times to wonder, "*Is he talking about me?*" I'll put your mind at ease, right away – I'm not! What you'll be reading is a fusion of many lives (including mine), but none... I repeat *none* of it is intended as a personal attack on

anybody, in any way. I don't operate that way, so you can *relax*. Besides, the *only* reason that question would be asked, is you have an idea you may be *guilty* of what's being discussed!

"Nothing is offensive, until it hits a nerve." Words, symbols, and gestures are harmless, until a conscience assigns *meaning* to them. The last thing I ever want to be is offensive, but there is a lot of information crammed into this book, and *"it ain't all nice!"* The topics aren't sugar-coated, and there may be times when the information in a chapter punches you in the mouth, real hard. Sadly, getting punched in the mouth real hard is the only way some people start paying attention.

Nerves will be hit – I guarantee it! However, one thing that will *not* be said at the end of this book is, *"He's lying!"* I'm confident in saying that, because you'll either know, or have seen someone who fits every description I've included. If you can't think of anyone who fits a particular description, it's probably because *you* fit it! I was taught to never apologize for telling the truth, and I'm not about to *start*.

A certain tone is necessary in order for this book to be effective. Therefore, getting through this first chapter will be one of the toughest challenges for some readers. My challenge to *every* reader is if you come across something that gets you riled up, keep reading! I'm well aware that you won't agree with everything I say, but I hope my explanation of those things puts them into at least a *reasonable* context, and quells any initial anger. In case this doesn't happen, the thing to remember is my intent is to get your mind moving, and assist you with progression – *not* to ruffle your feathers.

The idea of improvement can be frightening for many people, due to what may be prompting the *need* to improve. A person may uncover things about themselves they were unaware of, or be forced to acknowledge things they've chosen to ignore, with the latter being the worst of the two.

People become uneasy, possibly overwhelmed, once they realize what's required of them to correct a newly-discovered deficiency. I've been in *that* position, before. One of the lowest feelings I've experienced was having to listen to someone tell me about myself, then, having to look in the mirror and begrudgingly *admit* they were spot-on!

Being forced to eat that big ol' slice of humble pie worked wonders for me. So a person getting angry may not be a bad thing. I say that, because an angry person takes action, and action is an essential element to achieving success. You'll never reach a goal by standing in one spot, talking about how good things would be, "*if only...*" It requires action. You can't begin the process of improving, if you're unable, or remain *unwilling* to admit a problem exists.

"Improvement always starts with an idea, but is advanced or defeated by an attitude." This book will provide plenty of ideas. What you'll have to do is provide the decision to whether you want to use any of these ideas, to create and execute a plan to make adjustments to your life (the attitude).

Some extremely ugly truths need to be, and *will be* exposed. Many of them may be tough to read, especially if you unexpectedly discover that you're the culprit of one of them. However, I feel it's important that they be uncovered,

no matter how ugly they are, because denial has never made an issue disappear... *ever!* The issue only festers, and with continued ignoring, can boil over. Then, you'll be trying to resolve the issue using extreme actions fueled by panic, which isn't, nor has ever *been* an effective combination.

You also need to be aware that there are a handful of "colorful" words sprinkled here and there throughout the book. I'm mentioning it now, so you aren't shocked when you come across them. I limited them as much as possible, because using them excessively would undermine the messages, but they *are* there. I included them because for some people, the colorful word will be the thing that makes a message or idea stick. Call me crazy, but I believe the *message* is more important than the *method of delivery*.

I want to make sure another thought is firmly planted in your head: *nothing* I've written in this book should be viewed as a substitute for *professional medical assistance*. This isn't a medical journal, and isn't intended to be. I'll be providing *practical* alternatives, which should help most people, but if something doesn't feel right, and you don't feel you can fix it yourself, seek out the assistance of a licensed professional... period! That's why they exist, and they're good at their job.

At the same time, I don't believe you should go running to a medical professional every time you feel you can't handle a situation. Taking nothing away from professional medical assistance, because quite frankly, some people need it, but in my opinion, many issues can be resolved, and dare I say *prevented*, if you looked within yourself, first. The information

I'm providing to you in this book may save you a lot of time, and possibly save you some embarrassment. It certainly beats paying someone *your* money, to lie on their couch and have them listen to you talk about your feelings.

If you're satisfied with your life the way it is, it's possible that you may feel reading beyond this chapter will be of little benefit to you. I beg to differ! Why? Life may be great as it is, but I don't think many people would argue that it can always be better. Furthermore, you may indeed be satisfied with your life, but I will guarantee, someone you know is *not* as satisfied with *their* life as you are with yours!

So, if you *are* satisfied with your life, there's nothing wrong with paying it forward. Gift this book to someone you believe *would* benefit from it, and encourage them to read it. You may be able to open a dialogue that helps them get back on track. However, my preference is for *you* to read it, first – just in case *my* definition of “satisfied” differs from yours.

On the other hand, if you feel like I felt at one point, like your life is an endless cycle of disappointments and missteps, you have the right book in your hands. I do suggest approaching the topics with an open mind. You must also be willing to adjust your thinking if you discover it's flawed, because you may uncover an obstacle blocking your path to success and happiness that *shocks the hell out of you!*

As I stated earlier, improvement can be painful, due to what you may find is necessary in order to achieve it. This is because what may be necessary is making a decision, or taking an action you don't necessarily *like* doing, or even *want* to do,

but unless you *do* it, the situation isn't going to change! One of my absolute favorite sayings goes, "*Change nothing... and nothing changes.*"

Should you pay attention to me? I sincerely hope you do. I've provided you with a few reasons why I think you should, but it's a decision you'll have to make. I mentioned earlier that I've experienced and overcome the majority of the obstacles you'll be reading about. So, I'm *well-versed* in dealing with them. If my information and experience helps you overcome even one of the obstacles you've been facing, it's a win-win, but you must remember this: if you decide to take the ride, strap in, because it's going to get bumpy at times. You may discover you're not the person you *think* you are!

You'll need to get comfortable with the possibility of being made *uncomfortable*, because some of the things you read in this book might make you feel that way. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. The book may lead you to some uncomfortable places you weren't intending to go, but personal growth is a wonderful by-product of discomfort. There's also the possibility that my suggestions will sound unfamiliar to you, or conflict with your sense of normalcy. The anticipation of this can be unnerving for some people, and for them, the risk will seem high. However, the reward on the *flip side* of the risk is an improved life!

If the possibility of the reward is intriguing to you, layer on some thick skin, put on your big boy (or big girl) pants, strap in tight, and try to hang on! I wonder if *that* was enough to convince you to keep reading?!

2. Finding You, and Why Things Are the Way They Are

Well, *that's* a relief! You decided to continue reading. I can't tell you how encouraging that is. It means: 1) the first chapter didn't bore you to death, 2) there's a chance you see potential value in the coming pages, and 3) you didn't flip out when you read what you should be prepared for. Your curiosity was piqued enough to make you wonder how I'm going to frame the included topics. Initial objective: *complete*.

Alright, the preliminaries are complete. It's time to get to work on a plan for an improved you. The first thing I want to tackle is the meaning behind the book's title. You may be wondering what are the "odds" I'm talking about, how they can be unfavorable, and why would you want to shift them?

The title is of course, a metaphor. I chose it to illustrate a philosophy I believe in, and employ in my own life: *Life unfolds the way it does, as a result of the decisions you make*. The philosophy will become clearer as you progress through the book, and read my recounts of many of the decisions I've made, which haven't always turned out well.

A paraphrased quote often attributed to physicist Albert Einstein states, "*We can't solve a problem with the same thinking used to create it.*" If something you've tried has gone wrong in the past, and you want to try it again, but want a different result, a shift must take place in order to achieve the different result. This is where your mindset (the odds) comes in.

Shifting your mindset can completely change a situation's outcome. Hence, the metaphoric phrase, "*shift the odds.*"

I've discovered that one of the best ways to right a ship headed in the wrong direction, is through gaining a thorough understanding of whom, and where you are. This provides you with a starting point, or foundation to build from.

Here's the challenge: obtaining this understanding requires *emphatic* self-honesty. For many people, this isn't the easiest task. For them, telling whopping lies when things aren't going right is the preferred method of operation. The lies sound, and make them feel better, so they keep telling them. I've heard people say: "*Sometimes, it's easier to live the lie.*" Don't be fooled by this for a second – it's nonsense!

The most dangerous lie you can tell is a lie to yourself. That lie goes from dangerous to destructive, when you *believe* it! If you can't be honest with yourself, you're creating an unnecessary obstacle at the *beginning* of a possible turnaround, and risk impeding your own progress! Let that marinate.

One of the most notorious lies I've heard used when things don't go right is, "*I don't care.*" This is such a juvenile response! I almost have to laugh every time I hear someone using it. How do you *not* care if things don't go right for you? Ideally, you don't want things to go *wrong*. So, regardless of what you try to convince yourself... yes, you *do* care!

While you're digesting that, here's another one: *Where you are is exactly where you're supposed to be.* I'd make a note of this, because you'll see it, again. When you do, you should

have a better understanding, but it'll require the open mind I mentioned earlier. Sadly, many people have something called an "ego" that interferes with them *having* the open mind. Perhaps the information in this book can chop some of those larger egos down to a manageable (and healthy) size.

As a whole, society needs a behavioral upgrade. Several critical interactive aspects have been damaged, and conflicts have often been the result. Many of the conflicts can be attributed to a miscommunication or misinterpretation. For example, a person reacts to something they've heard. The problem is... what they heard is not what they *thought* they heard, because what they thought they heard is not what was *said!* Read that again, if you need to.

Open communication, and some possibly unsettling conversations are the things needed to resolve the issues. Judging by the way many situations have unfolded, people aren't too keen on having these conversations with *each other* to resolve them. They'd rather avoid or ignore them, and hope they resolve themselves. The problem is this rarely, if ever happens. If having these conversations with another person makes you uncomfortable, try having them with yourself. You can at least build confidence, by talking with someone you're familiar with.

For communication to happen between people, it must first happen within each person. Contrary to many opinions, change *does* occur one person at a time, but before outward change can occur, the person's mindset must be transformed. This poses another challenge, because along with ego, are

powerful ideals that have been in your head a while. Your upbringing, morals, and beliefs are all part of your makeup. They significantly impact your self-view, and can generate some major obstacles you'll need to conquer.

I'm not implying that these things be disregarded. You are 100% right to have, and stick to your beliefs... until you try to *force* those beliefs on another person, and *condemn* them if they don't freely accept *your* beliefs! If this occurs, what you've become is judgmental... which is 100% *wrong!*

Who says what *you* believe is correct? More importantly, why would you insist on intruding on another person's freedom to think for themselves? Has it ever occurred to you that *you* could have it wrong? It isn't that far-fetched, contrary to what you've led yourself to believe.

This is why I've repeatedly suggested approaching these topics with an open mind. You may find out that an idea or belief you've held onto is actually flawed. If so, you'll be faced with a dilemma. The more inflexible you are with your beliefs, the narrower your mindset is. Depending on *how* narrow, the already difficult task of improving becomes *more* difficult.

When I was conducting my research for this book, I was stunned to learn just how intertwined these success-depriving subjects really are. Sometimes, they're connected so seamlessly, people don't notice the intersection. I hope your mind is blown as much as mine was, when you discover how many hindrances may be hampering your success and happiness, while functioning and *misleading* you, under the guise of appearing as "a few."

You certainly don't have to, but it may help if you jot down some notes as you're reading. The notes will save you from searching through the entire book to find something you want to recall. Here's a suggestion to get you started.

Write the word *balance* on a sheet of paper. You need to become acquainted with this word, because it's a vital part of the journey to success and happiness. I discuss it in-depth in a later chapter, but for now, you only need an introduction. You'll read about its relevance later, and it'll make a world of difference if my explanation of it makes sense.

The topics I've included are to show how they will create an imbalance if a person isn't careful. This imbalance is what creates many of the obstacles we face. As you continue reading, you'll see how I unwittingly created an imbalance in my life, and the uphill battle I endured to correct my blunder.

If each person makes necessary *individual* adjustments, society would collectively be affected, and naturally get better without us constantly trying to force square pegs into round holes. For this to occur, you must determine if an aspect of your life needs an adjustment, because you may not know it does. This requires uncovering the person you truly are.

What are your likes and dislikes? What makes you behave the way you do? Why do you react the way you do in certain situations? Why do some things bother you a lot, and other things not bother you, at all? Would you be able to recognize if your plan wasn't working, and it's time to change it? Are you *willing* to do what's necessary to change it? These are rhetorical questions, but you need answers to them.

One of the most poignant lessons I've learned is: *a person's reputation or legacy (how they're viewed or remembered) isn't defined by their actions. It's defined by their actions that make the biggest impact on the people they've interacted with.* The impact may be positive or negative, but it isn't controlled by the person performing the action. It's controlled by the perception of the person on the *receiving* end of the action.

When a label is attached to your behavior, the scales get tipped, and everything is off-balance. This may not be to your advantage. Historian Will Durant said, "*We are what we repeatedly do.*" Putting this into context, if you're a loud-mouthed jerk the majority of the time, *how* and *why* would someone see you as anything *other* than a loud-mouthed jerk?!

Of course this is all for naught, if you don't *mind* being known as a loud-mouthed jerk. My guess is most people wouldn't feel comfortable being perceived in that manner, if emphatic self-honesty is in place. Therefore, if being branded as a loud-mouthed jerk (which is an extreme) makes you uneasy, the behavior exhibited to counter the branding must be just as extreme. Balance is the key. Just so you know... there are *many* more references to balance following this one.

I mentioned perception, because everyone's perception is unique. This means a single occurrence witnessed by several people can have a variety of effects. It will depend on how the person processes the occurrence in their head.

Under the umbrella of uniqueness is a variety of reasons situations spur their respective reactions. Your character traits govern your perception. Once you understand how they

work, you should begin not only to see who and where you are, but why things that have gone wrong, *have* gone wrong.

As far back as I can remember, I've been willing to go "against the grain." I prefer marching to the beat of my own drum, and refuse to allow a person's prejudices, perception, stereotypes, or even popular opinion define who I am, or dictate my behavior. If a person has a problem with me... *they* have the problem! I don't have a problem with me. I've had no choice but to accept who I am, and for that reason alone, I've learned to perform actions that make *me* comfortable.

For example, many people lean to Mickey or Minnie Mouse as their favorite Disney character. I prefer Goofy. Most times, I'll eat my vegetables *before* diving into my steak and potatoes, and my French fries *before* my hamburger. This method of thinking has helped me push through a number of barriers to get where I am. I refuse to let adversity, or widely-accepted practices deter me from something I want, but I didn't always have this philosophy. It took a lot of work.

Now, while I'm on my journey, I want to assist as many people as I can with making sense of the chaos that may be wreaking havoc on their lives. I know first-hand what living this way feels like, and will be the first to tell you, it's not a good place to reside. The only person who can tell you what it feels like to get back up is somebody who's been knocked down, and I'll admit... life knocked me down *many* times!

Figuring out if your life needs an adjustment is a tall order. It'll depend on if you've developed two traits: *diversity* and *flexibility*. You need the ability to adapt to a situation, and

come out better than you were before you encountered it. You must learn to overcome obstacles without letting them consume you into oblivion. In the Air Force, I had to adapt my behavior and actions to many situations I found myself in. Why? The mission needed to be accomplished, regardless of the size, difficulty, or number of obstacles in the way.

For this book, I'm defining diversity as the ability to extract knowledge and experience from a variety of sources. This is an important skill to have, because you're exposed to a lot more than you realize. For example, if you've only learned one way to accomplish a task, your scope is extremely limited. You may know *how* to accomplish the task, but may *not* how to accomplish the task *efficiently*. There are times when there is only one correct way of completing a task, but there may be several methods of completing the task that "correct" way.

Flexibility means being able to go with the flow. You're prepared for the unexpected, but you don't have a meltdown if things don't go as you planned. For the tightly-wound person who hasn't learned how to relax, this is difficult to do. Perhaps the way they were raised, or some traumatic life event has made them the way they are, but the impulses to instantly react in a situation must be effectively controlled.

Obstacles will be encountered on the journey to success and happiness. You may as well accept them as part of the process. The best thing for you in combatting them is preparedness. Unexpected obstacles should be respected, but not feared. They can be overcome as easily as the obstacles you can see coming.

I've had the fortune of interacting with many different types of people – everyone from the stuffed-shirted conservative who doesn't say much, to the free-spirited, obnoxious loudmouth who says *too* much. A trait I've been blessed with (or cursed with, depending on your outlook) is the ability to observe a lot and process it, quickly. It doesn't take me long to draw a conclusion, and decide on a course of action. I don't like agonizing over decisions.

However, my experience doesn't lead me to believe I'm better than *anyone*. I do *not* consider myself “superior.” I never have, and never *will* accept that adjective about myself. “Superior” people usually don't communicate well with others, and I enjoy talking to, and interacting with people. So being categorized as superior doesn't work for me. At times, I've been told I talk *too* much (which I emphatically dispute), but I wouldn't be the person I am, if I were any other way.

Speaking of superior, there is a select group of people who actually believe they *are*. I'm referring to arrogant people, who think no one is on their level. In my opinion, they miss out on knowing some incredible people, because of their attitude. I almost feel sorry for them... *almost!*

I've come to a realization that arrogant people choose to live in a world created entirely in their head. I'd make a note of the “*in their head*” concept as well, because you'll see it again, once or twice. Well... you'll see it *way* more than that!

To me, arrogance is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. It's a mask for insecurity. In fact, I believe the more arrogant a person is, the more *insecure* they probably are.

From my observation, there are several characteristics displayed by the majority of, if not *all* arrogant people. Most notably, they'll usually do more talking than listening; they're normally louder talkers, too. They'll crudely talk over people, in an attempt to keep the focus on their preferred topic. Lastly, arrogant people love talking about themselves. Why wouldn't they? It's the one topic they believe they know best. I wonder if in fact, they *do* know themselves best? The content contained in *this* book may provide them with a different perspective on that theory.

Generally, these characteristics are displayed because the arrogant person doesn't want other people to have an opportunity to challenge, or question their way of thinking. Well, why not? They may be forced to realize they're not as good as they thought they were, or even worse... their way of thinking may be flawed. Arrogant people normally don't handle being proven wrong very well, so drastic preventative measures are taken on their part to combat this.

In efforts to stay on their preferred course, they build figurative walls around themselves and assemble their inner circle with people who don't, or refuse to challenge them. This protects the ego, which is extremely fragile in most arrogant people. They're comfortable living this way because it feels safe. Metaphorically, it's a self-imposed exile. The issue is they don't realize they're doing it – or maybe they do.

Here's a statement very few people will argue with: *"If it looks, walks, and sounds like a duck, you can call it a chicken until you are blue in the face... it's a damned duck!"* What's worse is the

more you continue to try to *call* it a chicken, the *dumber* you're going to sound to those who know it's a duck! Arrogant people tend to think that if they repeat things, or use long-winded explanations for what they're saying (or believe), people (themselves included) will eventually accept them as fact. The problem is, what people believe and what's actually true, can and often *does* differ.

Repeating incorrect information using aggressive, long, drawn-out statements won't make it correct. This applies to repeating it loudly, as well. If you're wrong, speaking long and loudly doesn't make you *right*. It makes you wrong, long, and *loud*! Consequently, if you're wrong, long, and loud enough times, and do nothing to adjust your behavior, people will eventually add "stupid" to that description. Then... you're wrong, long, loud... and *stupid*! How many people will want you around them, once *those* adjectives have been attached? I could be wrong, but I'm guessing there won't be many.

The point I'm making is there are some surprising explanations for a person not achieving success or happiness. I'm going to be outlining a behavioral pattern throughout the book, but I'm intentionally concealing the punchline, for now. By providing different examples, you should be able to figure it out well before I'm ready to reveal it.

What I *will* say is the person you are, and how you react to the presented circumstances are the reasons you're in the position you're in, whether they're favorable, or unfavorable. They correspond to the thoughts in your head. Only you know the true answers to whom and where you are. As you're

reading, you may develop a different perspective on one, or both of them. You may realize you haven't been doing things you *should* have been doing, or you *have* been doing things you *shouldn't* have. This is likely why you're not in your so-called "ideal" position, and why things are the way they are.

Need further assistance in figuring out who you are? Ask someone you trust to describe you, as *they* see you! Sounds easy, but here's the hard part: *tell them you will not interrupt them under any circumstances* until they say, "I'm done."

Now, if you ask, you'd better be prepared for any and all responses! It isn't always easy listening to someone tell you about *you*, because you may not like what you hear. This will make it tough to accept, and even tougher to agree with. Truthfully, whether you like it or not, agree or disagree is irrelevant. The question is, "*Can you accept what they tell you, and make adjustments to your behavior, if what they're saying is accurate?*"

An interesting note about communication: It doesn't matter what *you meant*. What matters is how what you meant is *perceived*. This includes your actions as well as your personality. You may see yourself one way, but others perceive you quite differently. You need to understand that your actions and behavior communicate a distinct message, but the message's interpretation is determined, once again, by the perception of the person on the *receiving* end. Think about your most frequent actions and behavior. What could they be saying?

Here's another valuable lesson I've learned: "*Knowledge always comes from an outside entity, but behavior always originates in your head. The key is figuring out which one is pulling the train!*"