



Evoke Your Full Potential in Leadership and Life Volume 2

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Introduction

After writing more than [70 newsletters](#) since my last eBook in 2018, I have combined many of them into this new eBook that is organized by these categories: Communication and Feedback, Decision Making and Problem Solving, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Improving Relationships, Resilience, Well Being, and Miscellaneous. Each newsletter can again be easily found by title and quickly accessed by clicking on the page link. All sources referenced are hyperlinked throughout this eBook and in the Sources section for easy access as well. (All Amazon links in this eBook are paid affiliate links.) My intention is for this eBook to be another convenient and useful resource for enhancing your leadership and living a better life.

Contents

Communication and Feedback

Influence Others by Being a Better Listener	3
A Better Way to Give Feedback	5
Complaining (and Listening to it) is Shrinking Your Brain	7
Set Expectations to Reduce Frustrations	9
How to Set Boundaries with Others	11

Decision Making and Problem Solving

A Better Approach to Problem Solving	13
Better to Ask Than Assume	14
How to Make Better Decisions	15
Are Biases Impairing Your Decision Making?	17
Overcoming Unconscious Bias	18
What is Essential?	20

Emotional Intelligence

Managing Your Response When Triggered	21
Empathy Increases Influence and Strengthens Relationships	23
Thrive by Using Your Emotional Quotient (EQ)	24
Help Your Kids Cultivate Emotional Intelligence	26
When is Anger Constructive?	28
Why Emotional Agility Is So Important	30
Letting Go of Past Painful Events	31
How to Instantly Shift Your Mood	33
Are You Following Your Internal Compass?	34
How to Break Old Habits and Make New Ones Stick	36

Leadership

The Epitome of Great Leadership	38
What Got You Here Won't Get You There	40
Our Future is Bright with These Leaders	41
Leading With Emotional Courage	43

Are You Checking in Enough?	<u>44</u>
Building Human Connection in a Virtual World	<u>46</u>
Help Others Become More Self-Reliant and Less Dependent on You	<u>48</u>
Why Aren't You Delegating More?	<u>50</u>
Hire, Develop, and Retain the Right People	<u>52</u>

Improving Relationships

Influence vs. Manipulation	<u>53</u>
How to Increase Trust with Others	<u>55</u>
A Better Approach for Dealing with Conflict	<u>57</u>
You Can Change Other People	<u>59</u>
The Strength of Unity	<u>61</u>

Resilience

How to Stop Worrying	<u>62</u>
How to Prepare for the Unknown	<u>64</u>
How to Prevent Burnout	<u>66</u>
Increase Your Resilience and Performance	<u>68</u>
How to Rise Strong from Failure, Disappointment, and Setbacks	<u>70</u>
What Resilience Looks Like in Practice	<u>72</u>
Feel and Become More Confident	<u>73</u>

Well Being

How to Increase Your Energy Capacity	<u>75</u>
Ten Ways to Increase Your Happiness	<u>77</u>
The Secrets to Happiness and Well-Being	<u>80</u>
The Power of Presence	<u>82</u>
Decrease Negativity and Increase Positivity	<u>84</u>
Change Your Life By Changing Your Self-Talk	<u>86</u>
Whose Business Are You In?	<u>88</u>
Live With Fewer Regrets	<u>89</u>
Live, Love, and Matter More	<u>90</u>

Miscellaneous

Increase Your Telework Productivity	<u>91</u>
Free Yourself from Drama	<u>93</u>
How to Recognize a Cry for Help	<u>95</u>
Your Subconscious Mind Can Create Miracles	<u>99</u>
A Tribute to My Dog Dexter	<u>100</u>
Healing with Henley	<u>101</u>

About the Author [102](#)

Sources [103](#)

Influence Others by Being a Better Listener



Do you want to be more influential? One of the best ways to build trust and influence others is to actively listen to them. It makes people feel respected and understood. It also makes them more open to what you have to say. You can't influence anyone if they won't listen to you, and the best way to get someone to listen to you is to listen to them first. This is Dr. Stephen Covey's Habit 5: Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

Listening fully is simple in concept, but often difficult in practice. That's because there are several blocks that get in the way of our ability to listen according to [*4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication*](#) by Benito C. Leal, III, which are listed below.

Blocks to effective listening:

- **Mind Reading** – Thinking you already know what they are thinking and saying without really listening to them.
- **Rehearsing** – Thinking of how you will respond instead of fully listening.
- **Filtering/Selective Listening** – Hearing only what you want to hear instead of what they are actually saying.
- **Daydreaming** – Thinking of other things while someone is talking to you.
- **Advising** – Jumping in with your unsolicited suggestions or solutions to their problem.
- **Judging** – Analyzing, critiquing, and contesting what the speaker is saying.
- **Condescending – The One Upper** – Overriding what the other person is saying. (*"That's nothing. Wait until you hear what happened to ME!"*)

I had a situation in early 2022 where I was trying to explain my concern over a medical test with my doctor, and she failed miserably at listening. She listened just long enough to hear my concern and then proceeded to give me all the reasons why my concern was illegitimate. This did not make my concern go away. Instead, it made me consider finding another doctor. That's how important listening is.

The proper response would have been to first clarify her understanding of my concern to show that she actually listened and cared by saying, "So you are concerned

about...?" Then she could have asked, "Would it be helpful if I gave you some information that might help alleviate your concern?" Lastly, she could have asked, "What would alleviate your concern or how would you like to proceed?" This would have been listening with the intent to learn and understand rather than the intent to reply. Below are some tips for active listening from the Ken Blanchard Companies' **Manager Essential Skills** training course.

Active listening tips:

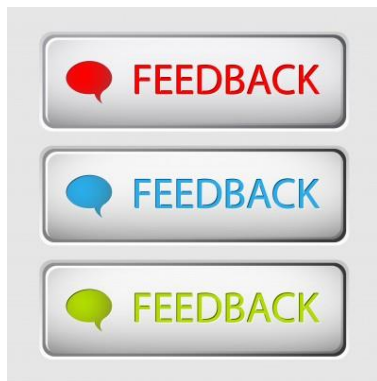
- Reflect on the importance of the other person and the relationship.
- Listen with a mindset that others have valuable information to share.
- Clear your mind of other thoughts and distractions.
- Set aside preconceptions. Avoid making assumptions.
- Resist the urge to plan how you will respond.
- Be present and focused.
- Respond so the other person feels heard, understood, and valued.

When you actively listen to others and make them feel understood, you increase your influence exponentially. Good listeners are perceived as friendly, likeable, and trustworthy. We are drawn to these people and are more willing to listen to them. It takes effort and preparation to listen effectively. It is one of the most difficult skills to master, but probably the most important skill you could ever have.

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." — Dr. Stephen R. Covey

"The psychological equivalent of air is to feel understood." – Dr. Steven R. Covey

A Better Way to Give Feedback



Giving feedback to others can be difficult and uncomfortable, especially if they haven't asked for it. When done poorly, it can trigger the fight or flight response and damage relationships. However, there is a way to give feedback that is non-threatening and helps to build the relationship between the person giving the feedback and the one receiving it.

This method was used during my leadership coaching certification program at Georgetown University. It's very intimidating to be observed and critiqued by expert coaches, but this technique allowed us (new coaches) to hear the feedback without becoming defensive or shutting down our learning. This method works well when someone is learning something new, working toward mastery, or just completed a task, project, presentation, leading a meeting, etc.

Step 1 – Let the other person **SELF-ASSESS** first. Ask...

- "How do you think that went?"
- "What went well?" or "What did you do that worked well?"
- "What would you do differently next time?"

Step 2 – Next, share your **OBSERVATION** of the **BEHAVIOR**. Say...

- "Here's what I saw that went well..." (Be very specific.) (Coaching example: *"You built rapport in the beginning by asking how she was doing and asking what she would like to focus on for the coaching session. You also asked 'What outcome would you like to have? What insights have you gained from this experience? and What next step would you like to take?' These are some very powerful questions."*)
- "Here's what else I saw..." (Coaching example: *"When she presented the challenge with her boss, you made a suggestion right away."*)
- "What do you make of that?" or "What was going on for you?"
- "What could you have done instead?" or "What might you try next time?"
- "Could I offer a suggestion?" (Coaching example: *"You might try asking what ideas she has for handling the situation, or how she feels about approaching her boss with it."*)

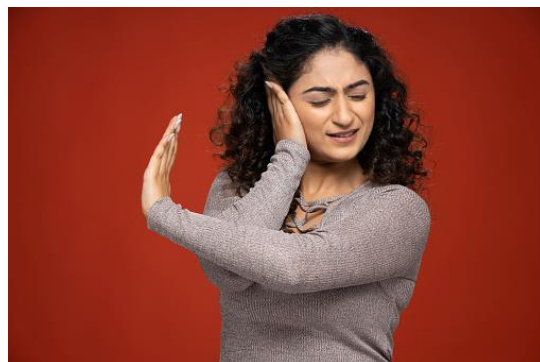
This technique empowers others to identify what they did well and how they could improve before hearing it from you. Many times, they will say what you planned to tell

them, so there's no need to say it again. In that case, you could simply say, *"That's what I saw too. I like your idea for improvement. I'm sure you will do even better next time."* This leaves them uplifted and motivated to try again and keep improving instead of feeling defeated or self-conscious of making a mistake.

"Survival-based learning limits risk taking and agility." – Marcia Reynolds

Complaining (and Listening to it) is Shrinking Your Brain

Do you have people in your life who like to complain? Are you guilty of complaining? Most of us are. According to an article by Meghan Overdeep in *Southern Living*, "The average person complains between 15 and 30 times a day." It goes on to say that "Research from Stanford University has shown that complaining, or even being complained to, for 30 minutes or more can physically damage the brain, specifically the area critical to problem solving and intelligent thought." Oh no! What now?



Here are some ways to break the destructive habit of complaining.

1. Start paying attention to your thoughts and what you say to yourself. How much is negative? Once you are consciously aware, you have the power to stop negative thoughts in their tracks. It starts with awareness.
2. Stop yourself when you hear yourself complaining. Simply say, "Stop it."
3. Now ask yourself some thought provoking questions such as, "Can I change it? What can I do? Will thinking about it make it better?"
4. Take action to change it if you can. If not, let it go and think about something more positive.

Here are some ways to get others to stop complaining to you.

1. Start paying attention to complaining and negativity. How much is negative? Once you are consciously aware, you have the power to take action. It starts with awareness.
2. When you notice that someone is complaining to you, instead of jumping on the bandwagon, ask them some thought provoking questions such as, "Can you change it? What can you do? Do you want to think through some options together? Will focusing on it make it better?"
3. If their complaining involves gossiping about another person, you can simply say, "I'd rather not."
4. It may take a couple of times of doing this, but eventually they will get the hint that you are not interested in engaging in their negative dialogue and stop complaining to you. You can, however, help them think through actions they can take to make it better if you want to engage in a positive problem-solving dialogue.

5. If that doesn't work, you can be more direct and simply state that you aren't interested in engaging in complaining and negative dialogue because it shrinks your brain. However, you would be happy to help them think through actions they can take to make it better. That may give them pause to think.

I hope that you will use this information to stop complaining and get others to stop complaining to you. When we are more positive, we are more powerful and creative. We also realize what we can do to take action and let go of the negative thoughts and words that aren't serving us.

"If you realized how powerful your thoughts are, you would never think a negative thought." – Peace Pilgrim

"Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny." – Mahatma Gandhi

Set Expectations to Reduce Frustrations

Most frustrations are due to unmet expectations. You believe you will be promoted, and someone else gets the job. You plan to celebrate the holidays with family members, and they make arrangements to be out of town. You assume you will be in and out of a medical appointment quickly, and you end up there for two hours. In all of these situations, you expect the circumstances to be different than what they actually are.



One thing you can do to increase the likelihood that your expectations will be met is to communicate them to others upfront. You can't get angry with your spouse for not loading the dishwasher if you never made this request.

Here are some guidelines for setting expectations effectively.

1. **Ask for what you want and be clear.** (*"Will you please load the dishwasher as soon as we are finished with dinner and put all of the dishes away as soon as they are finished drying?"*)
2. **Clarify understanding.** (*"Just to be sure I communicated effectively; can you articulate your understanding of what I am asking for?"*)
3. **Ask for agreement.** (*"Will you please do this for me?"*)
4. **Negotiate if agreement is not granted.** (*"What are you willing to do to help with dinner clean up?"*)
5. **Finalize and clarify agreement.** (*"So, you agree to clear the table, load the dishwasher, and put the dishes away before you go to bed?"*)

Sometimes, you may have communicated your expectations, and yet they still aren't met. In these cases, you can communicate this and ask about it. (*"I thought we agreed that... What happened?"*)

Lastly, there may be situations where you expect people to behave according to your standards and how you would respond in certain situations, which is not what happens. (Example: Your son or daughter wants to get married and work full time after graduating high school instead of going to college.) In these cases, you are better off changing your expectations, or not having expectations of others at all.

People do the best they can and what makes sense to them based upon their beliefs, needs, experiences, values, circumstances, etc. In Brene Brown's book *Rising Strong*,

she asks her husband, a pediatrician, if he believes that people are doing the best they can. He says, *"I don't know. I really don't. All I know is that my life is better when I assume that people are doing their best. It keeps me out of judgment and lets me focus on what is, and not what should or could be."*

Derek Harvey's equation succinctly describes this entire concept:

Expectation - Observation = Frustration. I developed a different equation that shows this concept in a more positive way: **Reality + Acceptance = Serenity.**

Whenever I become frustrated by situations or other people, I remind myself of both equations. We can choose serenity over frustration by accepting what is instead of expecting it to be different.

"It's not the problem that causes our suffering; it's our thinking about the problem." – Byron Katie

"I am a lover of what is, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality." – Byron Katie

How to Set Boundaries with Others



Why don't we set clear boundaries with our team members, friends, and family? Because it's difficult and uncomfortable and we want people to like us. We don't want to disappoint others, so instead we push aside our own wants and needs in the name of being nice. This happens when we don't speak up when other people do things that we don't like, or we say, "Yes" when we really mean "No."

In the video [Brene Brown on Boundaries](#), she says when we let people get away with things that are not okay, we are resentful and hateful. She also says that the most compassionate people have clear boundaries. Setting boundaries means telling people what is okay and not okay with us. This is the **BIG** question she lives by: "What **boundaries** need to be in place for me to stay in my **integrity** and make the most **generous** assumptions about you?"

I once heard a long time ago that we are better off not doing something that we don't want to do (or not going along with something that we disagree with) just to please others because we become resentful and take it out on them later. Whereas when we set a boundary and say, "No" we may feel guilty, but we become much kinder and more generous to the other person to make up for it.

When someone asks us to do something, we don't have to automatically say, "Yes." There are always four possible responses available to us according to the book [Leadership and The Art of Conversation](#) by Kim H. Krisco:

1. Yes = Agreement
2. No = Disagreement
3. Renegotiate = Counteroffer (*"Here's what I'm willing to do..."*)
4. Commit to commit = Defer an answer until a specific time in the future. (*"Let me check my schedule and get back to you this afternoon."*)

People learn what we are willing to put up with by what we tolerate from them. Saying nothing sends the message that it's okay with us. Here are some ways to set boundaries with other people and be clear about what is okay and not okay, rather than expecting them to read our minds or hoping they will get the hint.

- ***This is okay with me... This is not okay with me...*** (*"It's okay that you have a couple of drinks at my party. It's not okay for you to get sloppy drunk."*)
- ***I have a policy about...*** (*"I have a policy about responding to email/texts/phone calls after 6:00 pm. I don't do it unless it's an emergency in order to spend quality time with my family."*)
- ***Please don't...*** (*"Please don't call me by that nickname. I don't like it."*)

- ***I don't like it when...*** ("I don't like it when people barge into my office and interrupt me when I'm working without asking if it's a good time first.")
- ***Can you please...?*** ("Can you please come back at 2:00 pm? I'm in the middle of an urgent task that's due in an hour.")
- ***That's not funny.*** ("That's not funny. I don't like those types of jokes." or "Putting people down is not funny to me.")

By setting clear boundaries, we honor our wants, needs, and values and stay true to ourselves while being compassionate and generous to others. This preserves our integrity and our relationships with other people.

"Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others." – Brene Brown

"Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They're compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment." – Brene Brown

"When we fail to set boundaries and hold people accountable, we feel used and mistreated. This is why we sometimes attack who they are, which is far more hurtful than addressing a behavior or a choice." – Brene Brown

A Better Approach to Problem-Solving



Most of us are really good at problem solving. We identify a problem, look for the cause, identify possible solutions, implement the best option, and then determine if the problem disappears. If not, we start over. This approach is focused on fixing what's wrong, but not on optimizing what's right. When we look for problems to solve, that's what we will find. This keeps us stuck in negativity, constantly searching for problems to eliminate rather than becoming our best selves. This is surviving, not thriving.

Appreciative Inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, takes a different approach. It looks at the best outcomes we want to create instead of problems we want to eliminate. It focuses on success and what works, rather than failure and what doesn't work. An example would be to focus on getting in the best shape of your life instead of focusing on being over-weight. Below are the four steps to their process using this example.

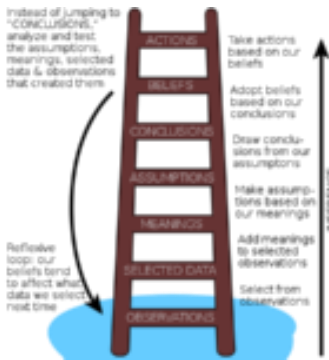
1. **Discovery – The best of what is** – When have I been in my best shape and felt the healthiest? What factors contributed to this? Specifically, what did I do that contributed to this? What did others do that contributed to this?
2. **Dream – What might be?** – What might I be able to do if I were in the best shape of my life? How would I feel physically, emotionally, and mentally? How would I look? What type of clothes would I wear?
3. **Design – What should be the ideal?** – What should my ideal weight/body mass/measurements be to look and feel my best?
4. **Destiny – What will be?** – What will I do to look and feel my best? What will I eat, how much, and how often? What type of exercise will I engage in, how much, and how often? What else will I do to achieve this ideal state?

This approach creates the opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes rather than just solving a specific problem. You can use appreciative inquiry with your team, family members, and friends simply by flipping a negative problem (Example: destructive conflict) into a positive outcome (Example: good communication and mutual respect) that they would like to have, and then asking the types of questions above. This opens the heart and mind to greater possibilities and achieving our best. May you discover, dream, and design your destiny.

"We need to discover the root causes of success rather than the root causes of failure." – David Cooperrider

"What we see depends mainly on what we look for." – John Lubbock

Better to Ask Than Assume



We all tend to make quick judgments with limited information in this fast-paced day and age. It's both necessary and dangerous. According to Timothy Wilson, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, we are faced with around 11 million pieces of information at any given moment. Because the human brain can only process about 40 bits of information at a time, it creates shortcuts and uses past knowledge to make assumptions. Unfortunately, our assumptions are often wrong.

I often refer to the ladder of inference, developed by Chris Argyris, in my leadership training courses. This ladder shows several rungs, starting at the bottom where we make observations from our experiences and then climb upward. At the next rung, we select data from what we observed. Then we add our own meanings to the data based upon our past history. From there, we make some assumptions, draw conclusions, and adopt some beliefs. Finally, at the very top rung of the ladder, we take action based on our beliefs from our made-up assumptions and conclusions.

It's so easy to make assumptions that we fully believe to be true without ever checking them out. (Examples: *"My boss doesn't like me because she doesn't make an effort to talk to me or give me feedback. My co-worker is incompetent because he didn't respond to my email. My friend's new boyfriend is untrustworthy because he resembles my ex."*) Many times, these beliefs lead us to distance ourselves from the people we jump to conclusions about rather than checking out our assumptions.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help climb back down the ladder of inference.

- ***What proof do I have that this belief is true?***
- ***What other possibilities could explain this?***
- ***What could I ask to check my assumptions?***

We need to remind ourselves that our judgments are not always correct. We need to check our assumptions and ask questions. It's always better to ask than to assume, especially when a relationship is at stake.

"Don't believe everything you think." – Byron Katie

"Don't make assumptions. Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want." – Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

How to Make Better Decisions



Every decision we make is based in emotion. We decide to do/not to do something to avoid negative outcomes/emotions (failure, ridicule, embarrassment, shame, etc.) or to experience positive outcomes/emotions (accomplishment, pride, joy, pleasure, connection, etc.). Because of this, it's important to insert some rational thinking into our decision-making process, so our emotions don't get the best of us.

The Decision Style Profile (DSP)® focuses on five factors that impact decision quality and acceptance.

- **Clarity** – Is the decision maker clear about the nature of the problem? Has the problem been clearly framed?
- **Information** – Does the decision maker have all the information needed to make a good decision?
- **Commitment** – Is commitment a critical factor for successful implementation of the decision?
- **Alignment** – Is there goal agreement and alignment among those that have a stake in the decision and outcome?
- **Time** – Is there a degree of urgency around the decision? What are the opportunity costs (time and effort) of involving others in the decision-making process?

The Decision Style Profile (DSP)® also looks at five decision-making styles, each with varying degrees of involving others in the process. Each style is appropriate in different situations.

- **Directing** – Decision makers rely completely on their own judgment and make the decision autonomously without involving others. This style is appropriate when you have all the information needed to make a good decision, don't need others' commitment, and when time is short.
- **Fact-Finding** – Decision makers identify specific information they need to make the decision and gather that information from key sources or experts, without involving them in the decision-making process. This style is appropriate when you don't have all the information needed to make a good decision, don't need others' commitment, and when time is short.

- **Investigating** – Decision makers share the problem with key stakeholders and solicit their input and suggestions but reserve the right to make the final decision. This style is appropriate when you don't have all the information needed to make a good decision, do not need commitment from all stakeholders for successful implementation, and when time allows.
- **Collaborating** – Decision makers share the problem with all stakeholders and solicit their input and suggestions. All ideas are heard and discussed together as a group to avoid confusion, but the decision maker reserves the right to make the final decision. This style is appropriate when you don't have all the information needed to make a good decision, others' commitment for successful implementation is important, and when time allows for gathering input from all stakeholders.
- **Teaming** – Decision makers share the problem with key stakeholders and solicit their input and suggestions. These key stakeholders share equally in the decision-making process, and a consensus decision is reached among all key stakeholders. This style is appropriate when you don't have all the information needed to make a good decision, others' commitment for successful implementation is critical, and when time allows for a group consensus decision to be made.

I hope that you can use this information to improve your decision making. Involving the right people can ensure you have all the information and commitment needed for successful implementation of your decision.

"Be decisive. Right or wrong... make a decision. The road of life is paved with flat squirrels who couldn't make a decision." – Anonymous

"Decisiveness is a characteristic of high-performing men and women. Almost any decision is better than no decision at all." – Brian Tracy

Are Biases Impairing Your Decision Making?

We like to think that our decisions are rational and unbiased. Unfortunately, our decisions are not free from bias due to the enormous amount of information that we face at any given moment. Because of this, our brains must develop mental shortcuts (assumptions or rules of thumb) based on past knowledge to make decisions more quickly.



Without these shortcuts, we would become paralyzed by the complexity of the information and decisions we face. Although necessary, sometimes these shortcuts result in judgmental errors. I will share four biases that tend to impair our decision making most often, using the example of hiring a job candidate.

- **Confirmation Bias** – The tendency to look for information that supports your beliefs and opinions and ignore information that goes against them. (For example, if you prefer a certain job candidate, you may focus on their positive qualities and ignore their negative qualities.)
- **Group Think** – Dismissing your own opinion in favor of the group's opinion. (For example, going along with the group majority on interview panels, even if you disagree with panel's candidate selection.)
- **Sunk Cost** – Allowing a sunk cost (investment that has already been spent) to distort your judgment toward continuing a course of action. (For example, retaining a new hire that is not performing/not working out because you have already invested in recruiting and training him/her, and you don't want to lose/give up on your investment.)
- **Impression Management** – Escalating your commitment to a decision to manage the impression of others (save face). (For example, retaining a new hire that is not performing/not working out because you don't want to admit that you made a poor hiring decision.)

We can't make these biases completely go away, but awareness is the first step. We can acknowledge that we have biases, and then slow down our decision making and check our assumptions. In doing so, hopefully we will make better decisions.

"We see the world, not as it is, but as we are – or, as we are conditioned to see it." –
Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Overcoming Unconscious Bias

Unconscious Bias



Unconscious bias is uniquely different from overt racism or discrimination because it happens without our knowledge of it. It is simply a tendency to make associations and have an inclination for or against a person or a group without conscious awareness of it. It comes from our subconscious programming since childhood and is the result of our minds creating mental shortcuts based on past knowledge to make

assumptions and decisions.

According to Timothy Wilson, Professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, we are faced with about 11 million pieces of information at any given moment, and the brain can only process about 40 bits of information at a time. Therefore, shortcuts are necessary. The trouble is that sometimes our assumptions and associations are WRONG.

According to the article *The Real Effects of Unconscious Bias in the Workplace* posted by UNC Executive Development, "Biases can be based on skin color, gender, age, height, weight, introversion vs. extroversion, marital and parental status, disability status, foreign accents, college attended, and more. If you can name it, there is probably an unconscious bias for it." Although there are upwards of a hundred or more different biases that affect our decisions, I will only focus on three that are very prevalent.

The first is the **perception bias**. This is the tendency to form stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups (based on any of the categories mentioned above) that make it impossible to be objective about members of those groups. This bias clouds our judgment and causes us to mistakenly put labels on people.

The second bias is the **affinity or similarity bias** which says that we have an unconscious tendency to favor people who are similar to us. This can be based on appearance, personality, background or even religious, political, professional, educational, or other types of affiliation. Because we are much more comfortable around people who are similar to us and less comfortable around people who are different from us, we tend to surround ourselves with people who are most like us. In the workplace, this translates into hiring and giving opportunities to people who are like us, which is to the detriment of those who are different from us.

The last bias that I will focus on is the **confirmation bias**. This is the tendency to look for information that supports our beliefs and opinions and ignore information that goes against them. This bias further perpetuates the other two biases. Not only do we have beliefs about certain groups of people that are different from us and favor people

who are like us, we then look for data that supports this and ignore data that goes against it.

The first step in overcoming these biases is to be aware that we have them. Everyone has unconscious biases. It doesn't make us bad people. It makes us HUMAN. We can't make these biases completely go away, but we can acknowledge that we have them, and then slow down our decision making and check our assumptions.

Here are some ways to do this.

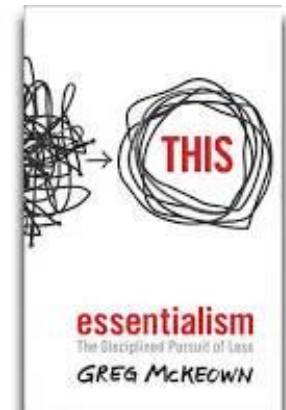
- Make a conscious effort to look for data that not only supports your beliefs and opinions, but that also goes against them.
- Be open to different possibilities and ask yourself if you would handle the situation the same way if the other person was more or less like you.
- Expose yourself to people who are different from you in terms of appearance, affiliation, background, beliefs, etc.
- Seek to understand and find something to appreciate about these differences.
- Think about situations where you are most likely to be affected by unconscious bias and know your triggers. Do certain types of people or circumstances trigger you to be biased?
- Do one thing differently. Ask for someone's perspective that you wouldn't normally ask, watch a movie or read a book about people who are different from you, or frequent a small business whose owner is from another culture.

Although we have many differences as people, we all want the same things as a human race: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and a better world for our children.

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." – Henry Ford

What is Essential?

Many of us are stretched too thin and constantly in motion without real satisfaction or results. I think the book [Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less](#) by Greg McKeown said it best, "What if society encouraged us to reject what has been accurately described as doing things we detest, to buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like."



[Essentialism](#) talks about how we have bought into the myth that we can have it all and do it all. We really can't. We can do anything, but not everything. Time is a finite resource, and we can only do so much in the 24 hours available to us each day. We must make trade-offs. We can either do this intentionally based upon what is most meaningful and important to us, or we can allow others' agendas to control our lives. To do this effectively, the book provides a three-step process to determine what we should take on and pursue and what we should let go of.

1. **Explore and Evaluate** – Ask yourself, "Will this activity or effort make the highest possible contribution towards my goal." (*You must first be clear on your personal and professional goals to answer this question.*) What are the key few that really matter? Most do not if you really take the time to evaluate them.
2. **Eliminate** – After you identify which activities and efforts make the highest contribution, you must actively eliminate those that don't. Instead of asking yourself what you will take on, ask yourself what you will say "No" to. Whenever you fail to say "No" to something that is non-essential, you say "Yes" by default. This robs you of your ability to focus on what is really essential.
3. **Execute** – Have a system that makes executing your intentions as effortless as possible. You can do this by preparing for anything that can go wrong and having a contingency plan, and by adding 50% to your time estimate of how long something should take.

[Essentialism](#) provides specific details on implementing each of these three steps. My hope is that we identify what is really essential and what we can really do without. And then live our lives more intentionally on-purpose rather than being on auto-pilot. Regardless of what is happening around us, we always have the ability to choose our attitude, our beliefs, our feelings, and our actions.

"If it isn't a clear yes, then it's a clear no." – Greg McKeown, Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less

Managing Your Response When Triggered



High-stress situations, irritating people, and inflammatory remarks can trigger fear, frustration, or anger in us because they are perceived as threats. The fight or flight response kicks in as a survival mechanism. The logical part of our brain shuts down, emotions take over, and cortisol and adrenaline course throughout our bodies, giving us the energy needed to defend ourselves. However, fighting back in the workplace or with family members, may not be the

most productive course of action.

As a leadership coach, I help leaders increase their emotional intelligence by becoming more aware of what triggers them, the emotions these triggers cause, and how to manage these emotions in their interactions with others.

Here are some steps you can take when you get triggered.

1. **Notice when you are triggered.** What is your physiological response to triggers? Do you get a knot in your stomach? Does your head feel like it's going to explode? Does your face get hot and beet red? This is your signal that you have been triggered. Once you have awareness, you can control your response.
2. **Take some deep breaths.** You can utilize square breathing to oxygenate your brain and off-set the stress response. Do this by breathing in for 4 counts, holding it for 4 counts, breathing out for 4 counts, holding it for 4 counts and repeating this for a few cycles until you notice your heart rate and blood pressure lower. This will help you think more logically instead of allowing the emotional part of your brain to be in control.
3. **Ask yourself some questions to engage the logical part of your brain.**
"What am I feeling? What is making me so upset? What am I getting out of being so worked up over this? How much energy do I want to give to this? What would be a better use of my energy? Is this something I can control or do anything about? What are my options? What do I want to do about this?"

Here are some steps to take if you get triggered by a person who has set you off or verbally attacked you.

4. **Take a break and disengage if you can.** You can say, *"I need a break. I can't talk about this right now because I'm just defending myself."* Take a walk if you can, and follow steps 2 & 3 above. Physical activity and deep breathing are the best ways to complete the stress cycle. (See [How to Prevent Burnout](#).) Come back to the person to discuss it later when you are in a better emotional state

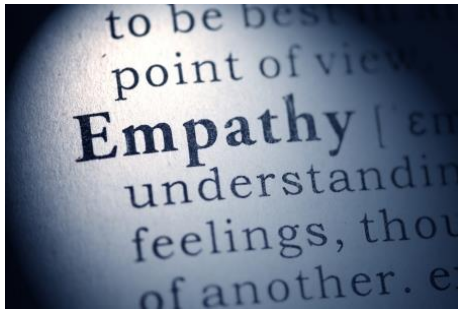
using steps 5-9 below. (If you can't disengage, follow step 2, and then proceed to steps 5-9 below.)

5. **Ask the other person a question.** This will buy you some time before responding and prevent you from saying something you may later regret. Ask, *"What do you mean by that? Help me understand what you mean."*
6. **Actively listen to their explanation.** Seek first to understand before responding. Ask more clarifying questions if you need more information to better understand. Stay focused and be open to what they are saying. Listen to understand rather than to reply.
7. **Show that you understand.** Once you feel like you understand where they are coming from, reflect back what you think you heard and how you think they feel. Say, *"You feel... [frustrated] about...[being ignored]."*
8. **Legitimize.** This is not saying that they are right or that you agree with them. It is just showing that you can understand how they would feel that way. Say, *"I would probably feel that way too if that's how it looked to me."*
9. **Agree on a path forward.** Ask, *"What do you need in order to move forward? Here's what I need from you... Can we both agree to this?"* (If you can't agree to the requests made, what are you both willing to do and agree to going forward?)

Even though it is human nature and part of our biology to fight back and defend ourselves when we are triggered, it is not our best option when relationships are at stake. We always have the ability to pause, breathe, reflect, and choose our response instead of just reacting on impulse. It takes a great amount of self-awareness and self-management (emotional intelligence), but we can learn to do this with practice. It is in our best interest to manage our response to triggers. Our health, emotional well-being, careers, and relationships depend on it.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." – Viktor Frankl

Empathy Increases Influence and Strengthens Relationships



Do you want to influence others? Do you want to strengthen your personal and professional relationships? Demonstrating empathy is one of the best ways to build connection and trust. It makes people feel cared about and understood. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and see things from their perspective. It's demonstrated when others believe that you understand and care about what they are experiencing emotionally.

According to Don Brown and Bill Hawkins in their book [*Bring Out the Best in Every Employee*](#), empathy is directly connected to how engaged employees become in performing for their leaders. According to their research, nothing is more central to employees' discretionary effort (going the extra mile because they want to) than empathy.

Recently, one of my clients demonstrated empathy beautifully. He had to be the one to tell his peers about an unpopular directive that must be followed. Many of them were angry and frustrated, voicing their complaints to him, even though he was only the messenger with no authority change it. He could have chosen to say, "There's nothing I can do. We must follow this guidance." Instead, he asked them, "What are your concerns?" Then he listened and empathized with their frustration. By showing he cared and understood, they were able to move forward. He strengthened their relationship by demonstrating empathy rather than damaging it by showing apathy.

When you actively listen to others and make them feel heard and understood, you increase your influence exponentially. Empathic listeners are perceived as friendly, likeable, and trustworthy. We are drawn to these people and are more willing to reciprocate to them in their time of need.

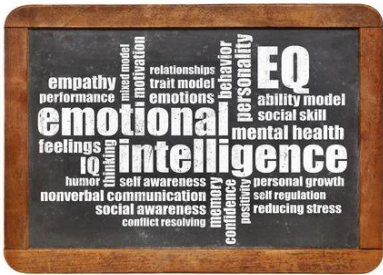
It takes effort and courage to listen and be able to see things through someone else's eyes. However, empathy is the mark of truly great leaders and one of the best traits we could have. I think we could all use a little more empathy. If we all worked to increase our capacity for empathy, our world would be a better place.

"Empathy is connecting with the emotion that someone is experiencing, not the event or the circumstance." – Brené Brown

"In order to empathize with someone's experience, you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be." – Brené Brown

"Empathy is connecting with people, so we know we're not alone when we're in struggle." – Brené Brown

Thrive by Using Your Emotional Quotient



Why should you care about your emotional quotient (EQ)? EQ affects your performance, relationships, happiness and well-being, ability to handle stress, and how much money you make. According to TalentSmart, Inc. "People with high EQ earn \$29,000 more annually than their low EQ counterparts."

EQ involves four skills, which can be continually developed and improved. Unlike IQ, which is set, there is no cap on the amount of EQ that you can develop over the course of your lifetime. Below are the four skills in the EQ model according to [*Emotional Intelligence 2.0*](#).

EQ skills:

- **Self-awareness** – Understanding what you're feeling and why.
- **Self-management** – Managing your emotions and reactions.
- **Social awareness** – Understanding what others are feeling and why (picking up on others' emotions and having empathy for them).
- **Relationship management** – Using awareness of your own and others' emotions to manage interactions effectively.

High EQ is having the awareness and self-control to respond thoughtfully and deliberately to make interactions and relationships run more smoothly, rather than just reacting out of anger, frustration, or excitement. Below are some ways to practice using your EQ skills with family and friends.

Practicing EQ skills:

- **Self-awareness** – Tune in to how you are feeling around certain people and engaging in different activities. *Which people and situations bring you more happiness or frustration than others? What is causing you to feel that way?*
- **Self-management** – Notice your impulse to react to people and situations that trigger you. Once you understand what you are feeling and why, you can determine how you want to respond. *What is this feeling really about? What are your options? Which option will lead to the most positive result? How will you respond to get that result?*
- **Social awareness** – Become an observer and try to pick up on others' emotions based on their tone of voice and body language, especially the people that you find difficult. Try to see the situation from their perspective. *How do*

you think they are feeling? What is causing them to feel that way? How would you feel if you were in their shoes? How can you express your understanding of how they are feeling?

- **Relationship management** – Use what you have observed about your own and others' emotions to determine how you can interact more effectively with people who trigger you. *Knowing how you and they are feeling, what can you say or do to make the situation better?*

May you continue to build your EQ muscles to improve your relationships, performance, and overall well-being, so you thrive personally and professionally.

"EQ is so critical to success that it accounts for 58% of performance in all types of jobs." – Travis Bradberry & Jean Greaves, Emotional Intelligence 2.0

"Out-of-control emotions can make smart people stupid."– Daniel Goleman

Help Your Kids Cultivate Emotional Intelligence



Research has shown that emotional intelligence (managing yourself) is twice as important as cognitive ability (IQ) or technical skills to your success in life and work. You can be the smartest kid in college, but if you can't get yourself up and out of bed to go take the test in class, it doesn't matter.

Unfortunately, most traditional educational systems in the U.S. don't teach kids how to manage their emotions, have empathy for others, or deal with conflict effectively. So kids must rely on their parents to learn these critical skills.

According to emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman, the two most important indicators of how successful kids will be in college are **independence** and **impulse control**. Can they stand on their own away from home without mom and dad there to assist? Can they resist the impulse to party and instead study for the exam?

Here are some tips to help your kids develop independence early on.

- Stop doing things for them as soon as they can do it for themselves. Make them responsible for chores, making their bed each morning ([Navy Seal Admiral speech on the reasons for making your bed](#)), getting themselves up and ready for school, packing their own lunch, etc. Give them increased responsibility with each passing year.
- Give them opportunities to do age-appropriate tasks/projects on their own without help or guidance from you.
- Let them fail and figure out what to do. Ask them what they learned and what they would do differently next time.
- When they come to you with a problem, instead of solving it for them or telling them what to do, ask *"What are some possible solutions? What could be the result of each option? Which solution do you think is best based on the possible outcomes?"*

Here are some tips to help your kids manage impulses early on.

- When they get angry, ask them what they are feeling and why. Let them know that it's okay to be angry, but not to act out in anger. Ask them to take some deep breaths, get a drink of water, or take a walk in order to calm down. Once they calm down, ask them what they would like to do about whatever was making them angry, and talk through some possible options and consequences.

- When they see a toy and want it immediately, instead of just buying it for them, tell them to wait until their birthday or a holiday, or after they complete a chore or get a good grade.
- Teach them how to set goals and break them down into milestones. Celebrate their success in reaching each milestone along the way toward achieving the overall goal.
- Teach them to save money for a big-ticket item they'd like to have, and have them buy it themselves, or tell them you will pay for half once they save half of the money to buy the item.

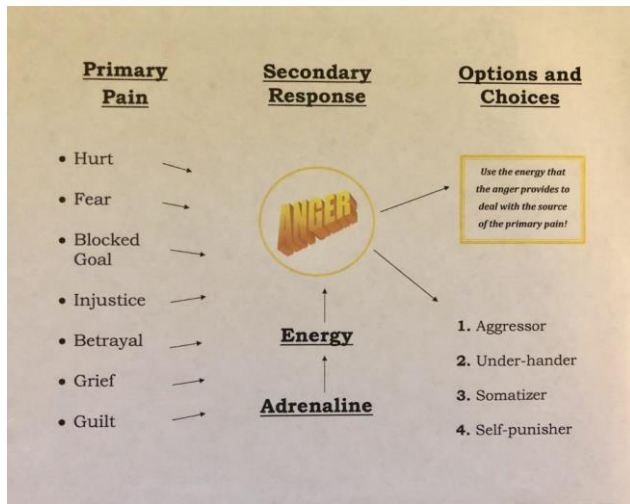
These tips may seem obvious, but it's hard for many parents to let go. Parents often think they are doing their kids a favor by doing things for them or protecting them in some cases. Instead, they aren't giving their kids the opportunity to develop independence, impulse control, and ultimately self-esteem.

Give your kids the gift of self-confidence by allowing them (or making them) do things for themselves. There's nothing like the feeling of knowing that you did something all on your own. This will help prepare them for success in college and life beyond.

"If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far." – Daniel Goleman

"In a high-IQ job pool, soft skills like discipline, drive and empathy mark those who emerge as outstanding." – Daniel Goleman

When is Anger Constructive?



In this age of fast-pace, high-demand, and growing-workload, we are all stretched more than ever before. We have shorter fuses, less patience, and more frustration both at work and at home. As a leadership coach, I help leaders become more aware of what triggers them, the emotions these triggers elicit, and ways to constructively manage these emotions in their daily interactions.

These are key elements of emotional intelligence, which research has shown to be a better predictor of success at work and in

life than cognitive ability (IQ). According to the Center for Creative Leadership, "75% of derailed careers are for reasons related to emotional competencies, including inability to handle interpersonal problems." In my experience, what gets leaders into trouble in the workplace is how they respond and treat other people when under stress, not a lack of technical capability or cognitive ability.

Most of the time, we are on autopilot. We go about our day without much conscious thought to how we are feeling or how this affects our behavior and performance. When we are in high-stress situations or situations that trigger anger in us, we usually react automatically without thinking. The fight or flight response kicks in, and the logical part of our brain shuts down, so we have difficulty thinking critically. The emotional part of our brain takes over, and we react based on emotions of fear, frustration, or anger. Cortisol and adrenaline course throughout our bodies, giving us the energy needed to take action – either fight or flee as a survival mechanism. Because of this, anger is a very powerful and energy-producing emotion. Anger must be harnessed appropriately, or it could cause great harm.

Therapist [Luann Adams](#) brilliantly simplified the complexity of anger in the diagram above. She says that anger is not a primary emotion. It's actually a secondary response to a primary pain of hurt (physical or emotional), fear, a blocked goal, injustice, betrayal, grief, or guilt. The healthy and constructive way to deal with anger is to use the energy that the anger provides to deal with the source of primary pain. We can do this by asking, "What am I feeling? What is it about? What is the primary pain? What are my options? What do I want to do about this?", and then respond accordingly with purposeful intention.

Movements against injustice throughout history are great examples of constructive uses of anger. Incredibly positive change can happen when anger is channeled appropriately toward the source of primary pain. Unhealthy ways to deal with anger are to become: 1) an aggressor (lash out at others); 2) an under-hander (passive aggressive); 3) a somatizer (swallow the anger and push it down, resulting in health

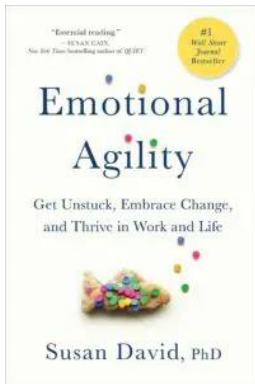
issues); or 4) a self-punisher (beat yourself up for feeling angry). In each of these unhealthy four roles, the behaviors are destructive and do not address the source of primary pain. Therefore, the source of the anger is left unresolved.

I absolutely love this anger diagram because it shows that even though anger is a physiologically powerful and energy-producing emotion, we still have the ability to pause, breathe, reflect, and choose our response instead of just reacting on impulse. It takes a great amount of self-awareness and self-management (emotional intelligence), but we can learn to do this with practice. Our health, emotional well-being, careers, and relationships depend on it.

Please note: My work and expertise are coaching and training leaders and technical experts to increase their emotional intelligence. If you have leaders or technical experts who are struggling with interpersonal relationships, please act now before they derail their careers. [Contact me to find out how I can help before it's too late.](#)

"Every human has four endowments – self awareness, conscience, independent will, and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom...The power to choose, to respond, and to change." – Dr. Stephen Covey

Why Emotional Agility is So Important



When I was working through the grief over my dog's passing in 2022, Susan David's book [*Emotional Agility*](#) was tremendously helpful. She talks about three different ways we can handle emotions.

The first is **bottling**, where we push our emotions down, trying to ignore them and get on with it. The problem with bottling is that suppressed emotions cause health problems. If you get stuck in an unexpressed negative emotion and don't move through it, it stays in your body and causes physical problems and disease. In addition, these buried emotions eventually resurface usually with surprising intensity and at inappropriate times.

The second is **brooding**, where we stew in misery, reliving the painful emotions over and over. Brooding involves ruminating where we get stuck in a negative emotion loop rather than moving through it. Brooding holds us back from living fully in the present moment and keeps us stuck in the past.

The third is **emotional agility**, where we are present and have an open heart to our emotions, noticing what comes up in a curious and accepting manner. Emotional agility was key for me when working through my grief. When I felt sad about my loss (usually several times throughout the day), I just let myself feel it, and then let it pass rather than pushing it away or stewing in it.

Susan David also talks about the importance of writing to help express what we are feeling, learn from it, and move forward. The idea is to get the thoughts out of our heads and onto a page, so we can step out of the experience and gain some perspective on it. This was very helpful to me as well. Writing not only about the experience of loss, but also about all the memories of Dexter that I wanted to hold onto reduced my fear of forgetting something about him. Since I created a journal of these memories, along with saved pictures and videos, his memory lives on, so there was no need to expend energy ruminating.

Being aware of our emotions, accepting them, feeling them fully, and consciously choosing our response to them makes us better able to handle life's ups and downs and builds our resilience. My hope is that we can all strengthen our emotional agility and increase our resilience to live our lives more fully.

"Discomfort is the price of admission to a meaningful life." – Susan David, PhD

"Emotions are data; they are not directives." – Susan David, PhD

Letting Go of Past Painful Events



Are you holding on to past emotional events and having trouble letting go of these painful feelings? It's human nature to relive past experiences in your head, but it's not productive. Harvard Psychologist Susan David calls this "brooding" in her book [*Emotional Agility*](#). She defines brooding as "stewing in misery, endlessly stirring the pot, obsessing over a hurt, a perceived failure, a shortcoming or an anxiety." Brooding holds you back from living fully in the present moment and keeps you stuck in the past.

James Pennebaker, professor at the University of Texas, developed a writing exercise to help express what you are feeling, learn from it and move forward. The idea is to get the thoughts out of your head and onto a page, so you can step out of your experience and gain some perspective on it. The steps are below.

1. **Set a timer for 20 minutes.**
2. **Begin writing on paper or typing on your computer about your emotional experiences from the past.**
3. **Don't worry about grammar, punctuation, etc.**
4. **Just go where your mind takes you without any judgment.**
5. **Write only for yourself and not for someone else to read.**
6. **Do this for a several days.**
7. **Then throw it away, burn it, or delete it from your computer.**

Pennebaker's research has shown that writing about painful past experiences helped people process their experiences and emotions, gain a new perspective, learn from it, and move into meaningful action. This is having emotional agility or resilience. People who are aware of their emotions, accept them, feel them fully, and consciously choose their response to them are better able to handle life's ups and downs.

I used a similar process to let go of my experience of divorce in 2013. I knew that reliving feelings of anger and bitterness would only rob me of my future happiness. I didn't want to waste another minute of my life thinking about something that I could not change. This made all the difference.

Allowing myself to feel my emotions during the experience without judgment and understanding the lessons I was supposed to learn from it, freed me to move forward. It made room for a new relationship to come into my life. Now I have the best husband and partner I could ever ask for. This would not have happened if I held onto the past. May you free yourself from past pain by letting it go and living each new day fully in the present moment.

******Disclaimer: This is not a substitute for therapy. If you need help getting over past traumas, seek the help of a licensed professional.***

"When we show up fully, with awareness and acceptance, even the worst demons usually back down. Simply." – Susan David, PhD – Emotional Agility

"Heroism is the triumph of spirit over circumstance." – Neil A. Stroul, PhD

How to Instantly Shift Your Mood



If you find it difficult to remain positive, optimistic, and happy during challenging times, you are not alone. However, it is important not to succumb to negativity and let it drag you down. Negativity affects our energy level, mood, and health. Scientific research has proven that negative emotions actually change our blood chemistry and cause disease. ([*The Healing Field: Exploring Energy and Consciousness*](#) explains this phenomenon and ways to reverse it.)

We need all the positive reserves available to us to overcome stress and difficulties. So, it's critical to fuel ourselves with as much positive energy as we can and avoid negative energy whenever possible. We can do this by noticing when we are experiencing stress, anger, fear, or any negative emotion. Then switch our focus to something that makes us feel good such as a loved one or a favorite memory – anything that creates a sense of peace, love, or gratitude within us. By doing this, we undo the harmful effects of the negative feelings that we experience.

Music is a great tool to instantly shift our mood and focus without exerting any effort. I listen to uplifting music while getting ready each morning to ensure that I start my day in a positive emotional state. Below is my most recent list of top 10 songs (not in any particular order) that automatically put me in a good mood and positive mindset. (Click on the songs below to listen for free. Enjoy!)

1. [On Our Way](#) – MercyMe, Sam Wesley
2. [New Day](#) – Danny Gokey
3. [Feel It](#) – TobyMac
4. [September](#) – Tauren Wells
5. [The Reason](#) – Unspoken
6. [Changed](#) – Jordan Feliz
7. [Come Alive](#) – Years and Years, Jesse Glynne
8. [Speak Life](#) – TobyMac
9. [Miracle](#) – Tauren Wells
10. [Even Then](#) – Micah Tyler

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything." – Plato

"Music is the universal language of mankind." – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Music is the tool to express life – and all that makes a difference." – Herbie Hancock

Are You Following Your Internal Compass?



Did you know that you have an internal compass that tells you what direction to move toward? It also tells you what's really important to you. Your emotions are this compass, and you have access to it at any time. Unfortunately, most people do not understand what their emotions are telling them, especially if they are unwanted feelings. Instead, they try to numb them or push them down, or they may artificially create negative emotions through rumination. All three of these activities cause your internal compass to function improperly.

When you experience joy, love, happiness, peace, or bliss in the present moment, it is a signal that you are on course and moving toward what gives your life meaning and purpose. When you experience anger, dislike, fear, or dread in the present moment, it is a signal that you are off course and moving in the wrong direction.

Strong emotions are also signals that something is really important to you. However, when you ruminate by replaying negative events over and over in your head that either cause you to worry about the future or regret the past, you are messing up your compass's calibration. Those events are only in your mind and aren't happening right now, but your brain doesn't know the difference. So, you feel all the negative emotions and experience all the physiological sensations from the hormones that your body produces as if it were actually happening now. This throws your compass off track. It can't tell what's real and what's made up in your mind.

When you push down difficult emotions, you are ignoring what your internal compass is trying to tell you. When you try to numb hard emotions with alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or excessive eating, exercising, shopping, TV, gambling, etc. your internal compass can't function properly. Brene Brown says that "We can't selectively numb emotion. When we numb the hard feelings, like vulnerability, grief, shame, fear, and disappointment, we also numb joy, gratitude, and happiness. We numb everything. Then we become miserable, looking for meaning and purpose. So then we numb even more, and it becomes a vicious cycle." Eventually our internal compass stops working.

The good news is that you can always re-calibrate your internal compass and get it functioning effectively again. All you have to do is allow yourself to feel whatever emotions you are experiencing in the present moment and be curious about them. Ask, "What am I feeling? What is causing me to feel this way? What is this telling me? What do I want to do about it?"

Unless you are experiencing trauma right at this second, everything is okay right now in this moment. Therefore, when you focus only on the present moment, you will naturally experience happiness, peace, and serenity. May you activate and follow your

internal compass to live your life on purpose and find all the meaning, joy, and happiness you were meant to experience.

*****Disclaimer: This is not a substitute for therapy. If you need help getting through a trauma, seek the help of a licensed professional.**

"Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." – Brene Brown

"The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it. It's our fear of the dark that casts our joy into the shadows." – Brene Brown

How to Break Old Habits and Make New Ones Stick



As a coach, I regularly help leaders with breaking old habits and developing new ones that will serve them better. The first step in changing any behavior is to determine why you want to change it. Change is hard because it requires energy and effort. Therefore, you need a substantial reason for the change, or you won't put forth the effort it takes to make it happen.

A couple of questions I ask my clients to help them find a deeper reason are, "What type of leader/person do you want to be?" and "How do you want to be remembered?" If you constantly tell yourself, "I am a leader/person who... listens to others... is calm under pressure... gives more praise than criticism, etc.", you are more likely to act in ways that are consistent with this belief.

Once you have identified the behavior you want to change and your deeper reason for changing it, the next step is to identify what you will do instead. It's much easier to stop old habits when you replace the behavior you want to change with a new one. If you want to stop interrupting, then you must replace it with active listening. This means focusing your full attention on others when they are speaking and having a mindset of seeking to understand others rather than simply making your point heard.

In the book [Atomic Habits](#), James Clear gives several tips for breaking old habits and starting new ones, which are briefly described below. For an extensive explanation on all ways to effectively cement new behaviors, I highly recommend getting the book. (The book is hyperlinked here: [Atomic Habits](#). You can also download his cheat sheet here: atomichabits.com/cheatsheet.)

Break Old Habits – Example: Stop eating junk food.

- **Make it invisible (cue)** – Example: Don't keep junk food out where you will see it. Keep it hidden or put up in a high cabinet where you won't see it.
- **Make it unattractive (craving)** – Example: Remind yourself that "Healthy/fit people don't eat junk food," and highlight the costs of eating poorly.
- **Make it difficult (response)** – Example: Don't buy junk food in the first place, so it's not in your house. If you must leave your house to get junk food, then you're less likely to eat it.
- **Make it unsatisfying (reward)** – Example: Get an accountability partner that will watch your behavior or that you must tell how many times you ate junk food during the week. Better yet, agree to pay this person some amount of money each time you eat junk food.

Create New Habits – Example: Eat healthy snacks instead.

- **Make it obvious (cue)** – Example: Keep healthy snacks out where you will see them.
- **Make it attractive (craving)** – Example: Pair something you enjoy with eating healthy such as listening to your favorite song. Remind yourself that you are a healthy person that eats healthy food and highlight the benefits of eating well.
- **Make it easy (response)** – Example: Cut up fruits and vegetables ahead of time and package them in baggies so they are easily accessible and easy to take on the go.
- **Make it satisfying (reward)** – Example: Give yourself a reward when you eat healthy snacks such as watching your favorite TV show. You can also track your healthy eating on a chart or use a habit tracker app. Then buy yourself a reward at the end of the week if you achieve your weekly goal.

Hopefully this information will help you stop old habits and create ones. I can tell you from experience that unless you are truly motivated to change your behavior because of a deeper reason for it, the change won't stick. You must have the right mindset to make lasting change.

All our behaviors are driven by our beliefs. Start by examining your beliefs and determining the type of person or example you want to be and the type of life you want to live. Once you change your beliefs, your behavior will follow.

"We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing." – Henry Cloud

"The self-image is the key to human personality and human behavior. Change the self-image and you change the personality and the behavior." – Maxwell Maltz

The Epitome of Great Leadership



Major General Brian Cummings (retired) is without a doubt the best leader I have ever encountered during my 25-year career in leadership development and organization development. He is the shining example of what I teach in my leadership training courses and what we read about in books on leadership. He is the type of leader that soldiers willingly follow into battle, and even some civilians as well because he inspires that kind of faith, trust, and commitment.

He addressed many of the cohorts of up-and-coming civilian leaders that I worked with at the U.S. Army TACOM Program Executive Office for Ground Combat Vehicles (PEO GCS) by sharing his 14 leadership attributes that he lives by. He doesn't just talk about these attributes, he demonstrates them every day in all his actions, and he evaluates himself according to them daily. These attributes describe him perfectly, and they are what these cohorts learned, talked about, and practiced throughout the Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) program. I want to share them with you because they are not only attributes of a great leader, but they are also values to live by for a purposeful life and for being a truly good person.

1. Truly **love** your people. Be kind and pleasant. Give people hope and let them know what they do is important.
2. **Humility** begins and ends with four magical words, "It's not about you!"
3. **Care**. If you truly care about someone, you will want them to do well.
4. **Passion** about your people and mission. It matters so much you're willing to suffer to go the extra mile.
5. **Selflessness**. Put your team's goal ahead of your personal needs.
6. **Authenticity**. If your people have faith in you, they will follow you the person, not the rank.
7. **Self-awareness**. It's not what you are going to do. It's who you are going to BE.
8. **Faithfulness** to your people and yourself.
9. **Character**. What do you do when no one is looking?
10. **Vulnerability** is sign of STRENGTH, not weakness.

11. **Forgiveness.** Negative feelings cloud your memory and crowd your heart.
12. **Encouragement.** "I believe in you."
13. **Empathy.** It's more than an expression of sympathy or kindness towards someone. It's a deeper sense of understanding and a more heartfelt connection to the feelings and emotions of others.
14. **Generosity.** Give back and reward the people you serve.

I have only known MG Cummings since 2019, but I've never met anyone like him, especially at his rank in the military. I'm incredibly inspired and moved by his genuine care and concern for people – all people. During his time as Program Executive Officer (PEO), he made it a point to have up-and-coming leaders individually shadow him for a period of a couple of weeks, which was life changing for them. During that time, they attended all his meetings, ate lunch with him, traveled with him, and got to see what it's really like to be a leader at the Senior Officer level. He built relationships with these folks, got to know them personally, and continues to maintain these relationships to this day.

As Program Executive Officer, he also took the time to personally respond to emails regardless of who they were from, he remembered people's names and the details of what was important to them, and he sent weekly emails of encouragement to the workforce during Covid-19. He even made hospital visits when someone at any level in his organization was there.

It's no wonder that the PEO GCS workforce absolutely loved (and continues to love) this amazing man as a leader and as a person. He made an enormously positive impact on the people in his organization and the TACOM community during his time as Program Executive Officer. I can only imagine the magnitude of his impact and the lives he touched during his 35-year career in the Army. I'm tremendously proud and honored to have known him and to have supported PEO GCS under his leadership.

*****Disclaimer: This does not constitute endorsement of Evoke Potential, LLC by MG Brian Cummings (retired) or Program Executive Office Ground Combat Systems (PEO GCS).**

"Legacy is not leaving something for people. It's leaving something in people." – Peter Strople

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." – Dr. Maya Angelou

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." – John Quincy Adams

What Got You Here Won't Get You There



In 2020, I coached a very talented engineer, leader, contract manager, mother, and all-around super star, Nina Batie, Senior Associate at Booz Allen Hamilton (formerly Lead Associate). To advance her career to the next level, she took the initiative to hire me as her coach to identify and overcome blind spots. Since I am a former Booz Allen employee, I understand her world in that consulting environment, which Nina felt was important.

We started our coaching engagement with some self-assessments and a 360-degree feedback assessment, so Nina could better understand her style and preferences in how she works, communicates, makes decisions, manages conflict, and interacts with others. We also identified her strengths, areas of development, and blind spots in how she is perceived by others. Nina identified early on that two areas would be most important for her to focus on during the coaching to advance to the next level and be more effective in her current position. First, Nina needed to delegate more. Second, she needed to communicate more effectively.

After identifying these coaching goals, I helped Nina pinpoint the actions she needed to take on a regular basis to achieve them. She identified several very effective actions, which she implemented weekly. However, what made a transformational shift in Nina was discovering and changing her thoughts and beliefs around delegating and communicating. Shifting her beliefs in these areas has made all the difference for her. She now believes that she can't do it all by herself, nor should she. She also demonstrates very effective delegation, by clearly communicating and clarifying her expectations with team members. In addition, she learned that asking for help and communicating early on about potential problems are expected and viewed as strengths at Booz Allen.

In our final review with her supervisors, they were thoroughly impressed with Nina's success and how much she had grown as a leader within a year. She gained a greater understanding of her path to next-level promotion, which she achieved since our coaching engagement ended. More importantly, she transformed into a new person who is re-energized to realize her full potential. It was truly an honor and a joy to work with Nina, and I continue to look forward to seeing what she does next.

"What got you here, won't get you there." – Marshall Goldsmith

"Great leaders encourage leadership development by openly developing themselves." – Marshall Goldsmith

"Change is not a one-way street. It involves two parties: the person who is changing and the people who notice it." – Marshall Goldsmith

Our Future is Bright with These Leaders

I am incredibly positive and confident in our future after working with the 2019 cohort of 16 amazing emerging leaders during a 10-month Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) program at the U.S. Army TACOM Program Executive Office for Ground Combat Systems (PEO GCS). This program was a combination of classroom training, group coaching, and individual coaching.



I am so impressed with this group's self-awareness, emotional courage, application of what they have learned both at work and in their personal lives, and transformation in how they interact and communicate with others. During our final session, each group of four participants presented a final project of what they learned from the program. Below is a list of some of their take-aways.

10 Leadership Key Take-aways:

1. **Self-awareness is critical to great leadership.** Leaders must understand their own preferences, strengths, and blind spots to manage themselves and their interactions with others.
2. **Teaming is a must.** Leaders must get work done through others. It's important to understand team members' preferences, communication styles, and drivers to develop a high-performing team.
3. **Listen to understand.** Listening is a fundamental leadership skill. Active listening is the pathway to understanding and empathy. Team members do more and give more of themselves when they feel heard, understood, and cared about. What people want more than anything is to be treated with respect.
4. **Follow the Platinum Rule.** Spend time with team members to learn about their preferences and what's important to them. Use this information to treat them the way they want to be treated instead of how you want to be treated.
5. **Check your assumptions.** Everyone makes quick judgments with limited information in our faced-paced environments. It's necessary, and it's dangerous. Sometimes judgements are wrong. It's always better to ask than to assume, especially when a relationship is at stake.
6. **Clear communication is critical.** Set clear expectations upfront and gain agreement from team members. Agreement provides the pathway to personal accountability. It also makes giving feedback much easier later.

7. **Feedback is difficult and necessary.** It takes emotional courage to be direct, set boundaries, and give tough feedback. It's better to bite the bullet and have these conversations early on to address issues while they are still small. The longer you wait, the bigger they become, resulting in more difficult and uncomfortable conversations down the road. You also risk losing credibility if you wait too long to address issues.
8. **Leaders must relinquish control.** The job of a leader is not to do all the work themselves. They must delegate and set clear expectations that allow team members to achieve results in their own way. There are many right ways to accomplish tasks and goals.
9. **You can't control your environment, but you can control your response.** You may have challenging people on your team or an unsupportive boss, but it does not prevent you from managing yourself and choosing your response. When you know better, you have a responsibility to do better, regardless of what's going on around you.
10. **Leadership is a life-long journey.** Leadership can continually be improved upon. There is never a point where a leader or a human being can say, "I've made it! Now I'm done learning and improving." It's been said before that if you aren't growing, you're dying.

It was truly an honor and my greatest professional joy to work with all these incredible leaders. I wish them every success and happiness. I know that we are in good hands with their leadership. I am thrilled that they will be developing and setting the example for the next generation of leaders. Our future is so bright that we need to wear shades.

"A leader is a person you will follow to a place you would not go by yourself." – Joel Barker

"Become the kind of leader that people would follow voluntarily, even if you had no title or position." – Brian Tracy

Leading with Emotional Courage



I continue to be amazed and impressed by the up-and-coming leaders in the Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) program at the U.S. Army TACOM Program Executive Office for Ground Combat Systems (PEO GCS). The 2020 cohort of awesome leaders presented a final project of what they learned from the program. I was blown away by their creativity, courage, vulnerability, and sense of humor. Some of their biggest take-aways had to do with emotional courage.

Throughout this program, every one of these leaders was willing to push beyond their comfort zone. Early on, they made the switch from an in-person program to a completely virtual learning experience without complaint. They demonstrated their courage through self-disclosure with the other group members, having difficult conversations that made them uncomfortable, and even acting outside of their normal personalities and preferences in skits for their final project.

I truly believe they took to heart Peter Bregman's quote from his book [*Leading with Emotional Courage*](#), "If you are willing to feel everything, you can do anything." What stops most people from doing uncomfortable things and having tough conversations is feeling vulnerable. We know what to do and what we want to say in many cases, but we lack the emotional courage to put ourselves out there. We don't want to experience negative emotions such as fear, rejection, embarrassment, or humiliation, so we don't take a chance. Brene Brown defines vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure, and she says it's our most accurate measure of courage because of this. When we see vulnerability in others, we view it as courage, but ironically, we view showing our own vulnerability as weakness, which is a myth. Vulnerability is always a strength and never a weakness.

I view these leaders as being incredibly courageous because they were willing to make themselves vulnerable throughout this program. They were willing to "[*Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*](#)" (Susan Jeffers), and I believe they will continue to "[*Dare Greatly*](#)" (Brene Brown) throughout the rest of their careers and lives.

It was truly an honor and a total joy to work with all these incredible leaders. I wish them every success and happiness. I am thrilled that they will be developing and setting the example for the next generation of leaders, and I can't wait to see what's next for them.

"Daring greatly means the courage to be vulnerable. It means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you're feeling. To have the hard conversations." – Brene Brown

"You can choose courage, or you can choose comfort. You cannot have both." – Brene Brown

Are You Checking in Enough?



Many people have been working virtually since 2020. For many, the workday extends well into the evening hours due to distractions at home and no clear boundaries on when the workday ends. The virtual environment is especially difficult for extraverts and people living alone who may find working from home very isolating. Because of this, supervisors must be more vigilant than ever to regularly check in with employees to see how they are doing.

Below are some questions that supervisors should ask team members on a weekly basis, and then actively listen and show empathy. **You don't have to solve their problems.** Demonstrating that you care and understand ([empathy](#)) and offering your support if they need it is often enough.

- **How are you doing? How's your family doing?**
- **What has been the most difficult thing you experienced in the last week? What can I do?**
- **What has been the best thing you experienced in the last week?**
- **What concerns or challenges are you facing right now?**
- **What would be the most helpful to you right now?**
- **What does effective support from me look like?**

When you combine the effects of limited activities and minimal social interaction with seasonal depression (seasonal affective disorder – SAD) that affects as much as 10-20% of the population, it's a recipe for disaster. If you suspect that an employee is experiencing depression, please provide them with your organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) information if you have one, or suggest they seek the help of a professional counselor.

According to [WedMD](#), this is what to do if you think someone is suicidal.

- Don't be afraid to ask if he or she is depressed or thinking about suicide.
- Ask if he or she is seeing a therapist or taking medication.
- Rather than trying to talk the person out of suicide, let him or her know that depression is temporary and treatable.
- In some cases, the person just needs to know that someone cares and is looking for the chance to talk about his or her feelings. You can then encourage the person to seek professional help.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Dial 988 or Call 1-800-273-8255

Below are [10 Ways to Combat Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\)](#) according to the article from Genomind. Please use this information to help yourself and share with others who may suffer from seasonal depression, or who may live alone and be isolated.

1. **Know the signs and symptoms** – mainly feeling sad or less energized during the winter months.
2. **Exercise regularly** to activate “feel good” chemicals in the brain.
3. **Stay connected** even if you can’t be with others in person. Use Facetime, Zoom, or the phone to talk to friends and loved ones on a regular basis.
4. **Get enough sunlight.** If that’s not possible, then take a vitamin D supplement.
5. **Try light therapy** using a [SAD lamp](#) or light therapy box.
6. **Eliminate unhealthy habits** such as excessive drinking or overeating.
7. **Write it out.** Keep a gratitude journal of what you are thankful for in your life to keep things in perspective.
8. **Meditate** to calm your mind and focus your attention away from negative thoughts.
9. **Take a vacation** to a sunny location if you can.
10. **Get professional help.** A counselor can help you find coping strategies and be a great source of emotional support.

It’s especially important for leaders to take care of themselves. It’s a big responsibility to have others count on you, and it can be emotionally draining to listen to employees share their problems and concerns. As a coach, I must take good care of myself not only mentally, but physically and emotionally so I can be there for others. There is a reason they say on every airplane flight to first put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.

*****Disclaimer: This is not a substitute for therapy. If you need help, seek the counsel of a licensed professional.**

“No matter how dark the moment, love and hope are always possible.” – George Chakiris

“Be strong because things will get better. It may be stormy now, but it can’t rain forever.” – Unknown

Building Human Connection in a Virtual World



Although most people don't miss the commute to work while working virtually, many are working longer hours, while being far-less productive. This is due to non-stop meetings and constant interruptions that are making it difficult to get work done and extending the workday long into the evenings. The virtual environment has made work more task-focused and less relationship-focused. When this happens, people start to feel less appreciated, less connected, and less engaged in their work.

The workplace is our biggest social network outside of our families. And all relationships that are important to us must be nurtured regularly. In the virtual environment, we are missing key opportunities for real human connection with our co-workers, such as informal conversations in the hallway and networking in the break room.

So how can we build connection to drive engagement in the virtual world? In the book [*Making Work Human*](#) by Eric Mosley and Derek Irvine, they offer three principles for connecting with coworkers in a meaningful way.

1. **THANKING** is gratitude turned into action. Express genuine gratitude for someone's work effort or helpful behavior. When people feel appreciated, their performance increases. This is just as effective, if not more effective when it comes from peers rather than just the boss.
2. **TALKING** is open and deep dialogue between people and among teams. Encourage one another toward meeting common goals. Use positive conversations to solve problems, share ideas, and see new perspectives. Positive feedback helps people learn and continuously improve and inspires them to do their best.
3. **CELEBRATING** is how we share what matters most to us and our common purpose. Recognizing accomplishments, especially those that are shared, builds connection and comradery. Taking the time to show our humanity by acknowledging milestones, affirming our common values, and showing common concern for one another brings us closer together.

These three principles can be put into action both in the virtual environment and in the office. Human-centered workplaces will continue to thrive and out-perform organizations that do not practice these principles. People want to work where they feel a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection. It keeps them engaged and drives them to do their best work.

"After years of happiness research, one thing has proved fundamental – the importance of our connections with other people." – International Day of Happiness

"Social isolation is as potent a cause of early death as smoking; and the epidemic of loneliness is twice as deadly as obesity. We could change this in a day if we all reached out and made at least one positive connection." – International Day of Happiness

Help Others Become More Self-Reliant and Less Dependent on You

What happens when we keep solving other people's problems? We create dependency and stifle their growth and innovation. Our employees and family members get lazy, stop developing their own solutions, and come to rely on us for answers and advice. Instead of telling others what to do, effective leaders ask thought-provoking questions to get them to think through possible options and next steps. These coaching skills move people away from dependency and toward self-reliance.



Many people believe they need to have all the answers and should provide solutions when asked. However, the most successful leaders know that they can accomplish more and get better results by enlisting others to develop solutions rather than solving all the problems on their own. This only happens when you teach people to become self-reliant by asking questions that get them to think for themselves rather than telling them what they should do.

The Ken Blanchard Companies' training course ***Coaching Essentials*** provides a four-step coaching process and essential skills to develop others' self-reliance and help them move forward in solving their own challenges.

The four steps in the coaching process are:

1. **Connect** – Build trust and a positive relationship with the other person.
2. **Focus** – Identify the topics and goals of the conversation.
3. **Activate** – Collaborate to jointly develop an action plan.
4. **Review** – Ask the other person to clarify next steps and what they will be accountable for.

The Essential Skills to use throughout the coaching process are:

- **Listen to Learn** – Actively listen by being focused and fully present.
- **Inquire for Insight** – Ask open-ended questions (What? and How?) to draw out ideas from the other person. (*What is most important to you about this? What are some options? What could be the impacts of each option? What is the next step you could take?*)
- **Tell Your Truth** – Be brave, honest, and respectful in sharing relevant information to give feedback and help the other person move forward.

- **Express Confidence** – Highlight the other person's skills and successes and offer encouragement to build self-assurance and enthusiasm.

Great leaders help people develop, grow, and become more innovative by drawing out their ideas. When you promote self-discovery in others, they have ownership of the solution and are more accountable for implementing it.

"The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people." – Ken Blanchard

Why Aren't You Delegating More?



Delegation is a common topic with many of my clients. Why do so many leaders hold on to tasks that others could do? Responses I typically hear are: 1) It takes longer to teach someone than to just do it myself. 2) They won't do it my way or to my standard. 3) My team members already have enough to do. 4) I like doing these tasks even though others could do them.

My question to each of these responses are: 1) What is the impact of not teaching them? 2) How will they learn to do it to your standard if you don't teach them? 3) How do you know for sure they have enough to do and don't want to take on more responsibility? 4) What is the impact of doing things that others could be doing?

I often ask my clients, "If you are doing it all yourself, then why do you need a team?" When leaders don't delegate, they become overloaded and overwhelmed, and team members don't learn how to take on more responsibility, so they don't grow. By delegating, it helps everyone. There is an upfront investment in time to teach others, but the whole team benefits from the payoff.

I've also found that when leaders delegate, and team members don't meet their expectations, many will re-do the task themselves rather than asking team members to correct it. What message does this send? How would you feel if you completed a task, and your work was tossed aside and re-done? This is worse than not delegating at all. It hurts morale and stifles learning and engagement. Delegating effectively requires **BOTH** setting clear expectations upfront **AND** following up to let them know what was done well and what needs to be corrected. Otherwise, you are setting them up for failure and disappointment.

When setting expectations, below are some key items to provide to your team members to help ensure they will meet your standard in successfully completing the task/project. They can't read your mind, and they can't reach the target unless they know what it is.

- Introduce the task/project. Why is this task/project important?
- Link the task/project to the person's strengths, interests, and capabilities.
- What is the desired outcome/result?
- How will success be determined and measured?
- What role/responsibility do they have?
- What resources are available to them?
- What should they do if they need help/get stuck?
- How will they be held accountable for results?
- Clarify next steps and plan check-ins. (How often will you check in with them or should they check in with you to track progress?)

- Check for understanding. (*"Just to be sure I communicated effectively; can you articulate your understanding of what I am asking for?"*)
- Express CONFIDENCE in the person's ability.
- Say, *"Thank you for taking on this task/project."*

Below are some tips when following up to give feedback on what was done well and what needs to be corrected on the delegated task/project, so team members can learn and improve while staying motivated and engaged.

1. **Introduce the conversation.** (*"When you have five minutes, I need to talk with you about the briefing charts you turned in."*)
2. **State your intention and empathize.** (*"I know you worked hard and spent a lot of time on them and want them to be correct."*)
3. **Describe what the person did well/correctly on the task.** (*"The intro and summary look great. They clearly spell out the intent of the briefing and the main points you want to get across."*)
4. **Describe what needs to be done differently/corrected on the task. Be specific.** (*"Some of the tables in the middle of the briefing need a little work. They are a bit confusing for someone who is not involved in this project."* – Be specific about what needs to be corrected.)
5. **Check for understanding. Ask them to repeat what they heard.** (*"Just to be sure I communicated clearly; can you articulate your understanding of what I'm asking you to do?"*)
6. **Offer support/help.** (*"What support do you need to get these revisions completed before the briefing takes place?"*)
7. **Set the expectation for follow up.** (*"Let's follow up tomorrow after you have re-worked these tables."*)
8. **Say, "Thank you."** (*"Thank you for your work on this."*)

Delegating is one of the most important skills of an effective leader. It helps your team members develop their skills and take on more responsibility, so you can focus on the tasks that only you can do as the leader. If you remain the only person who can do your job, then that is where you will stay. Instead, grow your team members to take your place, so you can continue to advance your career and move up.

"Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do." – Jessica Jackley

"If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate." – John C. Maxwell

Hire, Develop, and Retain the Right People



If you are not using assessments in your recruiting process and employee development program, you are missing out. I have used many different assessments for leadership and team development for over 25 years, but the

AcuMax Index is the first one I've found that can be completed within five minutes with such a high degree of accuracy and provides such an incredible amount of information.

It offers information on natural wiring drivers, primary motivators, communication style, learning style, best work environment, sales style, management style and much more. It's a great management tool for leaders because it will tell you how to best motivate an employee and how to effectively set expectations and give feedback according to the individual's wiring drivers. It will even tell you if an employee is energized or de-energized and ways to re-engage them in their work environment.

It's also the only assessment I've come across that I would recommend for recruiting and hiring due to its statistical validity and EEOC compliance. Candidates may have the right skills and experiences, but it's difficult to know if they will be a good fit your company culture. In addition, many candidates will exaggerate experience and skills on their resume and can talk their way through an interview by saying all the right things. Some will even list friends and relatives as references.

So how can you know for sure that a candidate is the right fit for your job opening and your work environment? By using the AcuMax Index, you can create the ideal position profile and hire the right fit for that position. It increases your chances of hiring and retaining the right candidate from 40% to 80%. It also helps you create powerfully effective job advertisements by identifying words that are appealing to your ideal candidate. It even provides suggested interview questions based on the ideal position profile. Hiring mistakes are very costly, and AcuMax can prevent your company from losing a lot of money on hiring the wrong candidates.

The AcuMax Index will not only give your business an edge in recruiting, but it will also help you retain these coveted rock stars once you find them. It's challenging enough to find stellar employees, but you must also be able to retain them and keep them performing at their best for your business to thrive. AcuMax is not only a robust recruiting and hiring tool, but also a highly effective management tool that will help leaders ensure that high-value employees stay motivated and engaged in their work and continue to perform at their best. I can't say enough about this awesome assessment tool. [If you would like to learn more and take the AcuMax Index for FREE, please contact me.](#)

"As a business owner or manager, you know that hiring the wrong person is the most costly mistake you can make." – Brian Tracy

Influence vs. Manipulation



There are many ways to influence people. Some are sincere and well-intentioned, and others are more sinister in nature. Can you tell the difference? Do you know when you are being influenced vs. manipulated? I would argue that in many cases, you do not because it is frequently done subconsciously by the media and advertising.

We believe that all our choices are conscious, but in reality, most of our behavior is unconscious. According to Eric Kandel, a neuroscientist at Columbia University who received a Nobel Prize for his work on memory, 80-90% of the mind works unconsciously, meaning without our awareness. Most of the time we are on autopilot as we go about our day, engaging in our regular routines and habits. Part of our routine may include watching TV, listening to the news, or engaging in social media, where we see and hear messages that get into our subconscious minds without our awareness.

Much of what we see and hear on TV and in the media (social included) is aimed at convincing us to buy something, adopt certain beliefs, or engage in specific types of behavior. This is done through several methods that usually fall below our radar, so we are not consciously aware of it. These sneaky tactics include using specific words to evoke emotion; appealing to our needs for safety, health, financial security, and social affiliation; creating a false sense of scarcity (Hurry! Supplies are limited!); inciting fear; exaggerating benefits/outcomes; omitting truths; and even making false claims. You may even see reciprocity in ads, where you are offered something for free, so that in turn, you make a purchase. Have you ever fallen for any of these? I know I have. This is manipulation, where it serves the other party and their own purposes more than it benefits you. This breeds distrust.

True influence comes from the influencer having an intention of serving your best interest more than their own. This builds trust. As a coach, I regularly influence leaders in a way that best serves their needs and interests. One way I do this is by first listening to them – really listening to understand their circumstances, perspective, beliefs, needs, and emotions. Then I share what I think I heard, and ask if I have it right, so they feel respected and understood. Lastly, I ask if they would be open to another possibility/observation/perspective. I have found that people tend to be more open to new ideas and possibilities once they feel heard and understood.

You can practice this to build relationships and become more influential in your personal and professional life. However, you must genuinely have the other person's best interest at heart and really be willing to see things from their perspective, or else it will backfire on you and break trust. If you have selfish motives and only go through the motions to try to get what you want, people will see right through it. You will be perceived as insincere and manipulative.

I hope that you will become more consciously aware of the types of language and tactics used by the media and advertising, so you can avoid being manipulated. May you practice the art of influence to build trusting relationships in your personal and professional life. There is no better way to influence others than by being trustworthy.

"Be selective about your external influences. Your multi-dimensional brain is influenced by everything you see, hear, read, smell, touch, feel or say." – Brian Tracy

"Because everything we say and do is the length and shadow of our own souls, our influence is determined by the quality of our being." – Dale Turner

"It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled." – Mark Twain

How to Increase Trust with Others

Trust is what makes or breaks relationships both at work and at home. It's impossible to have strong relationships, effective communication, and smooth interactions without trust. When trust is high, teamwork is effective, productivity increases, and morale is greater. When trust is low, conflicts arise, performance declines, and relationships suffer.



I teach Ken Blanchard's course ***Building Trust*** which provides their ABCD model of the four elements of trust, specific actions for building trustworthiness, and a three-step process for rebuilding trust once it has been broken.

Blanchard's **ABCD Building Trust Model** includes these four key elements:

- **Able** – This is demonstrating competence. Being **able** means having expertise, a track record of results, and effective planning, problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- **Believable** – This is acting with integrity. Being **believable** means being honest, acting on personal and organizational values, and demonstrating fairness.
- **Connected** – This is caring about others. Being **connected** means demonstrating kindness, concern, and compassion for others ([empathy](#)), listening, sharing information, and building rapport with others.
- **Dependable** – This is honoring commitments. Being **dependable** means keeping promises, meeting deadlines, being accountable, and being responsive to others' needs.

All four elements must be present to have high trust. Think about your most important relationships at work and at home. Are you falling short in any of these areas with any of your key relationships? If so, you may need to work at re-building trust. This can be done by using Blanchard's three-step process: **Acknowledge**, **Apologize** and **Act**.

- **Acknowledge** – Assess which elements of trust (ABCD) were broken, admit your mistakes, invite feedback, and listen with empathy.
- **Apologize** – Say you're sorry, ask for a fresh start, and share your hopes for rebuilding the relationship.
- **Act** – Identify what actions you will take, agree on how you will move forward, and set a time to check-in on progress.

Trust goes both ways. Has someone eroded your trust in them? Blanchard has an eight-step process for holding this conversation as well.

- **Step 1 – Share your hopes for the conversation.** (*"My hope is that we have an open dialogue around what breaks trust and how we can build trust going forward."*)
- **Step 2 – Ask the other person to share their hopes for the conversation as well as feedback on their trust with you.** (*"What is your hope for this conversation? When have you experienced low trust with me? What was the impact?"*)
- **Step 3 – Actively listen without becoming defensive.**
- **Step 4 – Clarify your understanding of what they've shared with you.** (*"Let me make sure I understand..."*)
- **Step 5 – Share your feedback on your trust with them.** (*"I experience low trust when... The impact on our relationship is..."*)
- **Step 6 – Make requests of each other to rebuild trust.** (*"What can we both do going forward to rebuild trust between us?"*)
- **Step 7 – Confirm a plan for rebuilding trust going forward.** (*"Let's recap what we're committing to... When can we follow up?"*)
- **Step 8 – Revisit the hopes you both had for the conversation and determine if they were met.**

It can be very difficult to repair and re-build trust once it's been broken. However, having an open dialogue using these steps and then taking action in the appropriate trust elements are the keys to moving forward. It takes courage to hold a conversation with someone after you have eroded their trust or they have eroded yours, but it is necessary to rebuild trust and restore the relationship. May we all become more trustworthy by finding ways to demonstrate our ability, integrity, goodwill, and dependability every day.

"Create the kind of self you will be happy to live with all your life." – Golda Meir

"Your actions speak so loudly; I cannot hear what you are saying." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships." – Dr. Stephen Covey

A Better Approach for Dealing with Conflict



Most of us have a habitual “go-to” response when dealing with conflict. This knee-jerk reaction may work sometimes, but not in every situation. That’s because no single approach works for all conflicts. However, there is a best approach for every different circumstance. Different situations call for different methods. So how do you know which method to use?

I teach the five different modes of dealing with conflict according to the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument™ (TKI) in my

Effective Conflict Management course.

1. **Competing** – I win. / You lose.
2. **Accommodating** – You win. / I lose.
3. **Avoiding** – No one wins. Ignore the conflict.
4. **Compromising** – I win some. / You win some. Split the difference.
5. **Collaborating** – We both win.

Many people view conflict as negative, involving an emotional battle. This does not have to be the case. A conflict simply means that my needs or concerns differ from yours. When this happens, I must decide the best way to handle this based on five key factors:

1. **How important is the issue?** If it’s vitally important to me and only moderately or not very important to you, then competing may be my best option. If it’s really important to you as well, then collaborating may be best. If it’s moderately important to both of us, then we may want to compromise and find a middle ground. If it’s not important to me, but really important to you, then I may want to accommodate to meet your needs. If it’s not important to either of us, then we may choose to avoid it and let it go. If emotions are high, I may also choose to avoid it until things cool down, and then select another method.
2. **How important is the relationship?** If it’s really important, and the issue is also really important to me, then collaborating is the best option. If the relationship is important and the issue is much more important to you than it is to me, then accommodating is best to use. If the relationship is unimportant to me, then I may choose to use either avoiding, competing or compromising, depending on how important the issue is to me.
3. **How much time do we have?** If we have lots of time and the outcome is important, then collaborating is best. If there is not enough time to collaborate on critical issues, then I may choose to use competing. If we have little time, and the outcome is less important than the relationship, then accommodating is best. If there is little time and the outcome is not critical, then compromising

may be best. If I need to buy some time, then avoiding is a good initial option. Then I may choose a more active approach later.

4. **How serious is the issue?** If it's serious as it relates to safety and ethics, then competing is the best option to use. Collaborating also works well for serious issues where commitment and buy-in are important. If it's moderately serious, then compromising may work best. If it's not serious, then avoiding or accommodating may be used depending on the other related factors above.
5. **How complex is the issue?** In complex issues, it's best to use collaborating so we can gain new insight and ideas to solve these challenges. For simple issues, the other modes can be used based on the above factors involved.

Many people believe that collaborating is always the best option to use because it creates a win-win. However, you can see from the factors above, it's best in some situations, but not all. Because collaborating requires time, effort, creativity, and energy, the outcome must be important enough or large enough to merit the amount of work involved.

No single conflict mode is best for all situations; nor is one conflict mode better or worse than the others. It depends on the situation. By asking yourself these questions about the factors involved, you can consciously choose the best approach for different conflict situations rather than using your "go-to" response out of habit.

If you would like more information about my conflict management training course, or if you would like to take the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument™ (TKI) to understand your conflict style and order of preference in using the five different conflict modes, please contact me at Melissa.Kessler@EvokePotential.com.

"Conflict is neither good nor bad. Properly managed, it is absolutely vital." – Kenneth
Kaye

"If you avoid conflict to keep the peace, you start a war inside yourself." – Cheryl
Richardson

You Can Change Other People

Peter Bregman's book [*You Can Change Other People*](#) is a great resource for managers, parents, coaches and anyone who likes helping others grow and develop. I can only provide a very simplified overview, so I highly recommend reading the book for an in-depth explanation and examples of conversations using his four-step process.



He says that "people don't resist change – they resist being changed." People change when they choose to change. All the advice in the world and sharing of our experiences will not cause them to change. We tend to give advice because we are trying to be helpful, but others only hear it as criticism. It shuts them down and makes them resist our solutions.

There are four traits necessary for people to change. As leaders, parents, and coaches, we can help others cultivate and develop these traits.

1. **Ownership** – People must own the solution to be fully committed to implementing it. They will only own it if it's their solution, not ours. They must have input into a solution to be able to own it. No involvement; no commitment.
2. **Independent Capability** – People take ownership when they have thought strategically about the problem to find a workable solution. Giving them the solution removes the ability to learn and experience the pride that comes from finding their own solution.
3. **Emotional Courage** – Most people won't do things that make them feel uncomfortable. So even if a person has identified a solution, they won't implement it without emotional courage. Emotional courage is feeling the discomfort and doing it anyway.
4. **Future-proofing** – This is resilience or having the ability to bounce back from setbacks. We want them to not only solve the current problem, but also be able to solve each new problem that comes their way. Struggling through a problem and successfully resolving it makes people stronger and more confident when faced with a new challenge. Handing them the solution makes them dependent instead of resilient.

This is the four-step process to help people change.

1. **Shift from critic to ally.** Instead of giving advice, become a thinking partner and get their permission to have the conversation. Do this by 1) empathizing with their situation ("*That sounds tough.*"); 2) expressing confidence in their

ability (*"I know you can handle this."*); 3) offering to think it through with them (*"Let's think this through together."*)

2. **Identify an energizing outcome.** Instead of focusing on the problem, ask them what outcome they would like to have instead. Ensure the outcome is positive, clear, and meaningful. (*"What outcome are you looking for? What would it look like? What would that give you? Why is that important to you?"*)
3. **Find the hidden opportunity.** Remember, you are working together to find the solution. 1) Take a detailed look at the problem (*"What is currently happening now? What happened next? What did you/they say/do specifically?"*); 2) create a comprehensive list of tried solutions (*"What have you tried? What happened when you tried that? What else have you tried?"*); 3) find the upside of the problem (*"How can you use the problem to achieve your desired outcome? Is there anything positive or useful about this problem?"*)
4. **Create a level-10 plan.** 1) Identify options (*"What might you try? What else could you try? What other options can you think of?"*); 2) choose the path forward (*"What do you want to do that would be energizing? What might you say/do? What would you do next?"*); 3) commit to the plan (*"What exactly are you going to do and by when? What is your first step? When will you do that? How confident are you that you will do this on a scale of 1 to 10? If it's not a 10 – What's getting in the way? What would make it a 10?"*)

You will probably want to follow up with them later to find out what they did and how it turned out. Remember to be supportive and non-judgmental. If it didn't turn out as hoped, or they have a new challenge as a result, you can return to the four-step process by asking if they would like to think it through.

Please keep in mind that this summary is over-simplified. There are many different directions that these conversations could take. The book goes into detail about how to handle many different situations that could arise during these conversations. If you are serious about truly helping people own their solutions and become more resilient problem solvers, I would strongly encourage you to read the book. Here is the link to the book on Amazon: [*You Can Change Other People.*](#)

"If you are willing to feel everything, you can do anything." – Peter Bregman

"Advice is like castor oil – easy enough to give, but dreadful uneasy to take." – Josh Billings

The Strength of Unity



As of 2021, the level of division, discord and hostility in our country has intensified to a level I have never seen in my lifetime. This makes me very sad and greatly concerns me because it is not serving our humanity. I know of many people who are no longer speaking to family members and

friends because they have opposing views.

It seems that we are being divided and pitted against each other in terms of black vs. white, male vs. female, LGBTQ vs. straight, Republican vs. Democrat, and vaccinated vs. unvaccinated. It may feel like it's "us" vs. "them," especially if you have been criticized or discriminated against; however, we are all in this together as a nation and as a human race. United we stand. Divided we fall TOGETHER.

Our commonalities outweigh our differences. When it comes down to it, we all want the same things: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and a better world for our children. Our differences have made our country a great melting pot of diversity – our greatest strength. This is a pivotal point in our history. We have two choices before us. We can either buy into this narrative of divisiveness, or we can choose to come together instead. The way we come together is through compassion, understanding and conversation. When people lash out in anger, it is usually because they are in fear or pain. Instead of retaliating and feeding into this anger, we can choose to be compassionate by being willing to listen and see things from their perspective – starting a conversation. Not everyone has the same beliefs and views as you do, but that doesn't make them inherently wrong or bad.

Most people have good intentions and do the best they can with the tendencies and beliefs they have. Our beliefs drive our actions, and our actions drive our results and ultimately our reality. Therefore, if you believe someone is a jerk because they hold an opposing view from yours, this will inform your actions and the reality of divisiveness you experience. However, if you instead choose to believe that someone can hold a different view without threatening your perspective, your actions will be more compassionate and result in a reality of mutually respectful conversation.

We also judge ourselves on our intentions, but we judge others by their behaviors because that is what we see without knowing their intentions. By assuming others have good intentions and do what makes sense to them, we will be more at peace.

We always have the power to choose our response and to be kind regardless of our circumstances. May we choose kindness and compassion and come together in our humanity through conversations. This is an opportunity to discover who we are and who we choose to be by our responses.

"Peace is not absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means."
– Ronald Reagan

How to Stop Worrying

Worry is a useless emotion because it doesn't help or change anything. It is a complete waste of time and energy. Worrying does not prevent negative events from happening, nor does it result in positive outcomes. Instead, it creates deadly symptoms and health problems such as:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Digestive issues
- Memory loss and damaged brain cells
- Increased abdominal fat
- Other diseases, such as cancer



I have spent much of my life worrying about things that never happened and situations I have absolutely no control over. However, I have gotten much better at stopping this bad habit since 2013. I have come to realize that it is not only a complete waste of time, but it is a harmful way to expend my energy. How have I been able to do this?

Here are some tips that I use and share with my clients.

1. Notice when you are worrying.
2. Ask yourself if you have some control or influence over the situation.
3. If you have some control or influence, then take action to do something about it. Action changes our focus and reduces fear.
4. If you don't have any control or influence over it, remind yourself that worrying will do no good, and say the Serenity Prayer. (See the quote below.)
5. Argue with yourself by asking what proof you have that this negative event will happen.
6. Identify alternative possibilities besides the negative outcome you think may happen.
7. Realize that the negative outcome you imagine is only one possibility and probably has a low probability of occurring.
8. Put your thoughts and energy on something that brings you positive emotions: someone you love, a favorite memory, etc. Focus on that feeling for 15-20 seconds, while visualizing breathing through your heart.

By taking these steps whenever you catch yourself worrying needlessly, it will undo the negative effects of stress and worry and put you in a better state of mind. Soon it will become a positive habit that prevents harmful stress symptoms and makes you feel much happier. It will also make you feel more in control of yourself even though many things are beyond our control.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." – Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr

How to Prepare for the Unknown



Like many people, I took an extended vacation at home over the holidays in 2020. Besides responding to a couple of emails, I did nothing work-related. Instead, I binge-watched several Netflix series, ate too much, and slept way more than usual. Even the 9-10 hours of sleep I was getting didn't seem like enough. I felt totally exhausted and feared something might be wrong with me until I listened to Brene Brown's podcast [*Unlocking Us – The Queen's Gambit, Revisiting FFTs and Resting Our Tired Brains*](#), which explained why all the resulting changes from Covid-19 took such a toll on my energy level.

Brene had experts explain the psychology and physiology behind what we endured throughout 2020, which were situations we had never experienced in our lifetime – something she calls FFTs (F'ing First Times). In essence, our brains were completely exhausted from trying to make sense and certainty out of all the chaos and uncertainty. In addition, we were in near isolation for many months. As social beings who crave connection, this can negatively impact our mental health.

Whenever we are faced with an FFT, she suggests these five steps to help us navigate it successfully.

1. **Name it.** "I'm in an FFT right now, and that's why this is so hard."
2. **Try to develop perspective.** "This is not permanent. I have evidence that I've made it through other FFTs before."
3. **Reality check expectations.** "It's not going to be perfect the first time."
4. **Build in rest and recovery time.** Sleep is the best thing you can do for your brain.
5. **Get and stay in fit FFT condition.** This is different for everyone. Figure out what this means for you. It could be exercise, meditation, prayer, time alone, connection with others, etc.

Remain hopeful and positive, while managing your expectations. Some things may never go back to the way they were prior to Covid-19. Heed the sage advice and wisdom of Dr. Robert Anthony. He says to never fear what comes next in life. Fear itself is usually far worse than what we are afraid of because of the anguish our rumination causes. Instead, view life as an adventure to be experienced rather than a predictable existence to be controlled. Enjoy life and all its uncertainties the same way you would a new Netflix series. Not knowing what comes next is what makes them both so thrilling and fun.

"History is the study of surprises." – Edward T. O'Donnell

"We're living history surprise after surprise after surprise...Uncertainty is chronic. Instability is permanent. Disruption is common. And we can neither predict nor govern events. There will be no new normal. There will only be a continuous series of not normal episodes, defined prediction and unforeseen by most of us until they happen."

– Jim Collins

How to Prevent Burnout

According to the book [*Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*](#) by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski, one of the biggest causes of burnout is emotional exhaustion. Exhaustion happens when we get stuck in an emotion. Emotions are like tunnels. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. If you go all the way through them, you get to the light at the end.



Stress involves negative emotions: fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, or dread. Stress is a neurological and physiological response to a stressor; it's a full body experience. It involves the release of neurochemicals in our brains and the production of stress hormones that course throughout our bodies. If you get stuck in one of these negative emotions and don't move through it to complete the stress cycle, it stays in your body and causes physical problems and disease. This stress response causes 90% of illnesses and diseases because people aren't completing the stress cycle.

Removing all stressors from our lives is not only unrealistic; it's not enough. We must find a way to complete the stress cycle and release these negative emotions to prevent burnout and health problems. We can't control all the stressors that may come into our lives, but we can control our ability to complete the stress cycle, which increases our resilience.

Here are seven ways to complete the stress cycle and prevent burnout from their book.

1. **Physical activity** – This is the best strategy for completing the stress cycle. Any movement of your body is effective.
2. **Breathing** – Deep breathing is also very effective. It lowers your heart rate and blood pressure.
3. **Positive social interaction** – As human beings, we are wired for human connection. Social interaction sends us a signal that the world is a safe place.
4. **Laughter** – The real belly laughs where you can't control it is the most effective, not the posed laughter.
5. **Affection** – A 20-second hug from a loved one can do wonders. It has been shown to produce oxytocin (the feel-good hormone), lower blood pressure and heart rate, and improve mood.

6. **Big Ol' Cry** – Crying may not change or resolve the stressor, but it is very effective at helping you complete the stress cycle. Crying is a huge emotional release that gets you unstuck.
7. **Creative Expression** – Any type of creative expression: painting, music, writing, dancing, etc. encourages big emotions. It draws out our emotions and channels them in a productive way.

They go on to say that you'll know when you've completed the stress cycle once you experience a shift in mood, mental state, or physical tension, and your thoughts relax. I hope you will use one or more of these strategies to release negative emotions and complete the stress cycle to prevent burnout and stay healthy emotionally, mentally, and physically.

You can listen to their podcast here: [*Burnout and How to Complete the Stress Cycle*](#)

You can purchase their book here: [*Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*](#)

"Take your broken heart and make it into art." – Carrie Fisher

"Stress is not bad for you; being stuck is bad for you." – Emily and Amelia Nagoski

"Wellness is the freedom to move fluidly through the cycles of being human. Wellness is thus not a state of being; it is a state of action." – Emily and Amelia Nagoski

Increase Your Resilience and Performance



The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) hosted a teleclass on resilience and brain science in 2016 which showed the negative effects of stress on our brains and performance. On the upside, we can be trained to change our brains and learn to become more resilient through brain practices.

They provided information on several resilience behaviors to help counteract the negative effects of stress, which I teach in my **Conquer Stress** workshop. One behavior has been shown to be the single most important factor in increasing resilience, performance, and overall health – **sleep**.

Most of us need 7-8 hours of sleep to perform at our best; some need more and some need less. Most of us are not getting the amount of sleep that we require each night due to stress, exposure to “screen time” too close to bedtime, and mental rumination. Sleep deprivation negatively affects our concentration, reaction time, memory, motivation, decision-making, creativity, and emotional regulation. According to Stanley Coren of the University of British Columbia, **“We lose one IQ point for every hour of sleep we lose, and those points can only be replenished through sleep.”**

One way to get more sleep is a concept that CCL presented as “smart sleep” – getting just 20 more minutes of sleep. This can be done by going to sleep 10 minutes earlier and sleeping 10 minutes later, or by taking short naps in the afternoon. Even 10-12 minutes of quiet time is beneficial. If we got 20 more minutes of sleep just 3 times per week, that would equal an additional 52 hours of sleep a year.

According to Andrew J.K. Phillips of Brigham and Women’s Hospital, “Going to sleep and waking up at approximately the same time is as important as the number of hours one sleeps.” Michael Grandner of the University of Arizona says that “Sleep is a part of a larger system of biological rhythms that regulate everything from brain function to muscle repair. The more variable your sleep schedule, the more these systems are not working optimally together.”

Here are some tips for better sleep.

- Drink earlier. Stop drinking all fluids, especially alcohol, at least two hours before going to bed. Alcohol is the #1 sleep aid. It helps you fall asleep, but negatively impacts the quality of your sleep.
- Eat earlier. Stop eating at least an hour before going to bed.

- Institute bedtime rituals. Start winding down an hour before going to sleep by taking a bath, reading a book, or doing some meditation/relaxation exercises. Our brains like consistency and predictability.
- Turn off electronic devices (phones, PCs, tablets, TVs, etc.) an hour before going to sleep.
- Lavender contributes to sleep. [Here are 50 ways to use lavender.](#)
- Dim the lights in your house 2-3 hours before going to bed. Make your bedroom as dark as possible by covering up displays (clocks) or wear a mask to bed. The lights tell your brain that it's time to wake up which prohibits restful sleep.
- Don't consume caffeine after noon.
- Exercise earlier, at least 3-4 hours before going to bed.
- Use a fan, white noise machine, or ear plugs to drown out noise.
- Stop smoking.
- Keep your children and pets out of your bed.
- Have the right type of mattress for your body type.
- Use caution with sleeping pills. They can prevent sound sleep, become habit-forming, and cause other side effects.
- See your doctor for causes of sleeplessness lasting more than a month such medical conditions or medications.

"Whether you realize it or not, how you sleep each night probably has a bigger impact on your life than what you decide to eat, how much money you make, or where you live." – David K. Randall, [*Dreamland: Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep*](#)

How to Rise Strong from Failure, Disappointment, and Setbacks



In Brene Brown's book [Rising Strong](#), she talks about what gives people the strength to get back up and try again after falling down. This resiliency comes from the ability to feel and acknowledge the hurt rather than acting on it and inflicting pain on others.

The normal reaction is to look for someone or something to blame, lash out at others, and pretend not be hurt. She says "We act out and shut down

instead of reaching out... People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability and tell the truth about their stories are the real bad asses."

Step 1: Emotional Self-Awareness

The first step is emotional self-awareness, which she calls the **Reckoning**. We must become aware that something has been triggered in us and be curious about what that emotion is, and why we are feeling this way. We can do this by pausing, taking some deep breaths, and asking ourselves, "What is going on for me? What am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? What is setting me off?"

Many times, what we may notice before we can put a name to the emotion are physical sensations, thoughts, and urges, since these are all interconnected. In an episode of [Young Sheldon](#), Sheldon tells his Meemaw while riding in the backseat of her car, "I'm having an emotion I'm unfamiliar with. My face is hot. I have a knot in my stomach, and I'm resisting the urge to kick your seat right now." She then helps him sort out what emotion he is feeling and why, using the process of elimination. Turns out, it was jealousy.

Self-awareness is key because if we know when we are hooked emotionally and why, then we are less likely to take it out on other people at home and at work. Our natural tendency is to offload hurt and pain instead of feeling it. We can also notice when we have been hooked if we start engaging in compulsive behaviors to avoid feeling our pain such as overeating, excessive drinking, exercising, shopping, TV, rumination, etc. The best leaders I've coached are keenly aware of their emotions and triggers and are very adept at managing their emotions and their interactions with others ([emotional intelligence](#)).

Step 2: Identify What's Real and What We're Making Up

The next step is to sort out what really happened and what we are making up. She calls this phase the **Rumble: Owning our story**. Often when we are triggered, we make up the worst possible stories about ourselves and others such as "I'm a complete failure. She can't stand me or my work. I blew it and I'll never get another opportunity like this again," etc. Our brains are wired to try to make sense of things

very quickly as a survival mechanism. However, our stories are often based on assumptions rather than facts.

To discover the truth, we must ask, "What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation, about the other people in my story, and about myself?" Sometimes, we can sort this out on our own, but often times we may need the help of someone we fully trust, who accepts us with all of our imperfections. This is someone who can help us realize that we aren't a complete failure. We may have messed up, but we can own up to it, make amends, dust ourselves off, and try again. It's getting to the point of being able to say, "I messed up, and I'm sorry. I want to make this right, so how do we fix it and move forward?" instead of blaming others. It takes a great amount of courage and vulnerability to look inward rather than outward and admit mistakes, another trait of great leaders.

Step 3: Regular Practice

Once this process becomes our regular practice, we have then moved into the last phase which she calls the **Revolution**. This process requires high emotional intelligence. The good news is that emotional intelligence, like the [Rising Strong](#) process, involves skills that can be learned, practiced, and continually improved. May we all learn and practice the [Rising Strong](#) process to become our best whole-hearted selves with the courage to dare to fall, and then rise strong.

[Please contact me if you are interested in learning about my resiliency coaching and training programs.](#)

"The most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our inherent worthiness. We must reclaim the truth about our lovability, divinity, and creativity." – Brene Brown

"There is no greater threat to the critics and cynics and fearmongers than those of us who are willing to fall because we have learned how to rise." – Brene Brown

What Resilience Looks Like in Practice



In 2020, my dear friend and colleague of 20 years, Terry Gonda was fired from St. John Fisher Chapel as their music director because she is married to a woman – something that has never been a secret. The Archdiocese of Detroit (AOD) terminated her employment under their morality clause. Terry led their music program for 36 years, and she has been married unofficially to her wife Kirsti Reeve for 19 years and legally for 11 years. Terry's response to this injustice is one of the greatest demonstrations of love and grace I have witnessed in a long time. We can all learn from her example.

Terry is one of the most kind and forgiving people I know, and her response shows just how authentic and resilient she is as a leader and a Christian. She doesn't just talk about love and kindness; she lives it, regardless of her circumstances. In Terry's words, "My heart just hurts because I have an outpouring of love for them. I love them. I believe that they believe they're doing the right thing – they're trying to protect the church." In fact, Terry made sure that people knew that harassing the church with phone calls and other unkind acts of aggression was not standing with her. She said, "Yelling just creates walls, and walls have no ears."

Terry handled this situation just as I would expect, by being her true self and being peacefully relentless. I don't know many people who would have the inner strength to do this, especially considering all she has done for her church for more than three decades. Her service goes far beyond creating music. She served in ministries to mentor youth, save lives, bring people to deeper faith, and help many remain Catholic.

I'm sharing her story because it's truly a beautiful example that we can all learn from. Regardless of what is going on around us or injustices that we may experience, we always have the ability to choose kindness, love, and grace. We are in control of our actions, and how we respond says everything about who we are. It is during the darkest times that we show our true selves. Do we choose to be the light that continues to shine, or do we succumb to the darkness by perpetuating hatred and intolerance? Terry consistently chooses to be the light, and I hope we all can do the same.

Terry's story was featured on the local news, the [Detroit Free Press](#), and [The New York Times](#). (You can read the full story and watch her formal response by clicking on these links.)

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." – Mahatma Gandhi

Feel and Become More Confident



We all know that we communicate and influence others through our body language. But did you know that we also influence and communicate subconsciously to ourselves through our own body language? In a TED talk by Amy Cuddy, she talks about how [*Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are.*](#)

When your body language is closed and constricted it communicates self-protection and lacking self-confidence both to yourself and to others. (*Examples are crossing your arms, slouching, or putting your hand on your chin/face.*) Whereas when your body language is open and expanded, it communicates strength and confidence to others and to yourself. (*Examples are standing with your arms straight up in the air, sitting back with your arms crossed behind your head, or standing with your hands on your hips.*)

Obviously, you don't want to pose like Wonder Woman or a winning athlete in the middle of a business meeting. However, practicing these power poses for two minutes in private before going into a stressful situation (giving a presentation, holding a tough conversation, going to a job interview, etc.) will actually cause you to feel and appear more confident. This is an easy technique that anyone can use to feel and come across as more self-assured and poised. Fake it until you make it really works.

Here are some more tips to increase your self-confidence.

- Develop a list of past successes, strengths, positive attributes, praise, accolades, etc. and refer to this list whenever you doubt yourself or face a daunting challenge.
- In times of self-doubt and uncertainty, talk with others who support, believe in you, and reaffirm your strengths and positive qualities.
- Think about situations where you are the strongest and most powerful. (Examples: managing projects, working out at the gym, coaching a baseball team, etc.) Remember that you are this strong and powerful person. (Use visualization and positive affirmations.)
- Set some short-term, attainable goals and work toward achieving them. Remember to reflect on, celebrate, and reward your progress.
- Learn a new skill such as dancing, painting, a foreign language, or playing an instrument. Be sure to acknowledge each step of your development.

- Do something that scares you or makes you nervous. (Examples: speak at a conference, attend a networking event, hold a difficult conversation, etc.) Reward yourself for following through on a difficult and challenging task.
- Find a mentor or a coach to help you work to build your self-confidence and hold yourself accountable for taking action.

Many people mistakenly believe they must stop being afraid of something before they can do it, when in fact the opposite is true. Once you do something that scares you, you will not be as afraid of it, and your self-confidence will go up. This courage will transfer over to new things that you have never done before. We fear what we think we can't handle. Once we prove to ourselves that we can handle it, our fear diminishes, and our self-confidence rises.

"Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway." – Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.

"Each time we face our fear, we gain strength, courage and confidence in the doing."
– Theodore Roosevelt

How to Increase Your Energy Capacity



Most of the leaders I coach are overworked and pushing harder than ever. Stress is inevitable in these VUCA times (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous), but it's also not the problem. The problem is that most of us run at full throttle for extended periods of time without sufficient recovery. We don't build in time to re-energize and re-charge our batteries.

According to [*The Power of Full Engagement*](#) by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, athletes spend about 90% of their time training and only 10% of their time performing. In the business world, we do just the opposite, spending 10% or less of our time on training and building capacity. Athletes increase their capacity and endurance by stressing their muscles to the limit, and then spending adequate time in recovery. The average person is under-stressed physically, engaging in physical exercise less than three hours per week, but over-stressed mentally and emotionally.

Resilience is really a combination of endurance and recovery. Without either, we can't go the distance or overcome obstacles and setbacks. Energy capacity is required to maximize our performance, bounce back from stress and hardship, and be fully engaged in our work and lives. As human beings, we have four sources of energy to draw upon: 1) physical (the most fundamental), 2) emotional, 3) mental, and 4) spiritual. It is rare to find a person who has optimized their energy and performance in all four areas, meaning they are "physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused, and spiritually aligned." Most of us struggle to optimize in just one or two of these areas.

I invite you to look at where you can build in rituals for recovery, renewal, and endurance to increase your resilience and energy capacity. Some examples are below.

Physical

- Eat healthy. (Minimize processed foods, sugar, unhealthy fats, sodas, etc.)
- [Get enough sleep \(7-8 hours each night\)](#). – (Click on the link for tips to get better sleep.)
- Drink plenty of water (6-10 glasses each day).
- Exercise regularly (cardio, strength training, and stretching).
- Eliminate tobacco and alcohol.

Emotional

- [Develop emotional self-awareness](#) (how you are feeling and why).
- [Practice regulating emotions](#) (emotional self-management).
- [Develop empathy for others](#).
- [Engage in laughter as much as possible](#).

- Nurture interpersonal relationships. Connect socially by using FaceTime, Zoom, phone, text, email, social media, etc. to stay connected to family, friends, and colleagues when you can't be there in-person.
- [Practice daily gratitude.](#)

Mental

- Monitor and limit the amount of news and media you take in.
- Engage in meditation or [deep \(4-7-8\) breathing exercises.](#)
- [Practice being present.](#)
- Practice visualization. (Picture your happy place or a positive outcome.)
- [Engage in positive self-talk \(affirmations\).](#)
- [Stop mental rumination.](#)

Spiritual

- Reflect on what matters most to you. (What are your real priorities both now and long term? What are your values?)
- Find meaning and purpose in your work.
- Do what you are passionate about.
- [Find ways to serve others.](#) (Find ways to volunteer in your community.)
- Engage in activities that bring you joy and fulfillment.

May you take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to become more fully engaged with renewed energy, focus, and resilience.

"Energy is simply the capacity to do work. Our most fundamental need as human beings is to spend and recover energy." – Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, The Power of Full Engagement

"The longer, more continuously, and later at night you work, the less efficient and more mistake-prone you become." – Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, The Power of Full Engagement

"We grow at all levels by expending energy beyond our normal limits, and then recovering." – Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, The Power of Full Engagement

Ten Ways to Increase Your Happiness



Many people believe that happiness is external – something to be achieved or acquired. They think, “I’ll be happy when... I get that promotion, I move into the new house, I find the perfect partner, etc.” However, it’s not what happens around you or to you that creates happiness, but rather what happens within you. Happiness is an internal process. You are in control of a large portion of your happiness.

In the book [*The How of Happiness*](#), Sonja Lyubomirsky says that only 10% of our overall happiness comes from our life circumstances such as our income, health, type of job, marital status, etc. Our genetically determined happiness set point makes up about 50% of our overall happiness and cannot be changed. Some people have higher or lower set points than others. People who have lower than average happiness set points may suffer from [*chronic depression*](#). The good news is that we can control 40% of our overall happiness level through intentional activity – behaviors of our choosing. I work to increase these behaviors during difficult times because I know it takes conscious effort to boost my mood and happiness level.

Here are ten ways you can increase your happiness right now through intentional activities.

1. **Practice gratitude.** I mention gratitude a lot because it is so critical to improving health and increasing happiness. Research has shown that gratitude is the quickest and most effective feeling for shifting you into a positive emotional state, and even more effective for creating flow than any relaxation or breathing technique. You can read the [*Secret to Happiness and Well-Being*](#) for ways to practice gratitude.
2. **Avoid rumination.** Most of our stress is caused by mental rumination. This is when you think about something negative over and over, usually fears about the future or regrets about the past. Rumination serves no purpose other than to rob you of your current happiness. Ask yourself, “Will thinking about this make it better?” The answer will always be no because negative thoughts never make a situation better.
3. **Focus on the present.** One of the best ways to avoid rumination is to practice presence. When we ruminate, we are in our heads thinking about the past or the future instead of being present in the moment. It’s not what’s happening now that creates negative emotions, but rather our thoughts about it. For tips on practicing presence, read the [*Power of Presence*](#).
4. **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** There will always be people who have more (money, success, good looks, etc.) than you, so comparison is a game

that cannot be won. Comparison only serves to lower your self-image and self-acceptance. The book [Emotional Agility](#) by Susan David talks about a study that showed those who spent the least amount of time comparing themselves to others reported the least amount of self-blame, guilt, and regret.

5. **Practice kindness.** It is just as helpful, if not more helpful, to the person showing kindness as it is to the person receiving kindness. Even observing acts of kindness has beneficial effects. So, smile at strangers, write thank-you notes or pay for the coffee of the person in line behind you, and you'll be amazed at how good you feel.
6. **Nurture social relationships.** Social connection is essential for resilience and a fulfilling life. People who have strong social connections are less likely to show symptoms of illness. So, take time to reach out to people and nurture the relationships that matter most to you. You'll be glad that you did.
7. **Learn to forgive.** Holding on to past hurts or betrayals only serve to hurt you, not the person you are holding a grudge against. It's like lugging around a heavy bag of rocks. Why not just let it go? You'll feel much lighter. If you struggle to let it go, read [Letting Go of Past Painful Events](#).
8. **Increase flow experiences.** We've all experienced being in the "flow" where we get absorbed in an activity, are fully present and engaged, and are unaware of time. It could be through a hobby like painting, playing a musical instrument, engaging in an extreme sport, or whatever it is for you. The more time you spend being in "flow," the happier you will be.
9. **Work toward a goal.** There's nothing like the challenge of striving toward a goal and working to better yourself. Goals give us something to aim for and look forward to. However, don't let the achievement of the goal overshadow your enjoyment of the process on the way to the finish line. Enjoy each step of the journey and be sure to reward each milestone accomplishment. It will make it that much more satisfying and rewarding.
10. **Take care of yourself.** We are multi-dimensional human beings consisting of mind, body, emotion, and spirit – and they are all connected. When you neglect any of these areas, it affects the others. When you take care of yourself physically, you feel better mentally and emotionally. [How to Increase Your Energy Capacity](#) talks about ways to care for yourself in all four areas.

As an added happiness boost, you might also try activities like reading helpful books and articles, listening to inspiring podcasts, watching motivational TED talks, listening to uplifting music, and watching movies and TV shows that are positive instead of those that depict violence to help you foster a positive emotional state.

Every morning, I listen to music or podcasts that put me in a good mood to ensure that I start my day off right. Read [How to Instantly Shift Your Mood](#) for my playlist. I

realize that I am in control of my mood regardless of what is happening around me, or what side of the bed I wake up on. May you choose to engage in activities that will increase your happiness and live each day to the fullest.

"For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Secrets to Happiness and Well Being

The secrets to happiness, well-being, and resilience are **LOVE, GRATITUDE**, and **PRESENCE**. Love and gratitude are the most powerful emotions there are. Since 2013, I have intentionally practiced presence and expressing love and gratitude to completely transform my life. I went from being at the lowest point in my life in 2013 to living the best year of my life in 2014 and each year thereafter.



As Tony Robbins mentioned in his morning ritual video [Gratitude is the Antidote](#), it's impossible to feel grateful and angry or fearful at the same time. According to [Dare to Lead](#) by Brene Brown, the one thing that people who can fully lean into joy have in common is that they practice gratitude. Gratitude is an actual practice. Happiness is the result of practicing gratitude, and not the other way around.

Here are five ways to practice gratitude.

1. Start and end each day by thinking about all the things you are grateful to have in your life – everything from big wins to the simple things we take for granted like the ability to use our five senses. There is no greater recipe for happiness and success than expressing gratitude.
2. Write down five new things you are grateful for each day in a journal.
3. Review and reflect on what you have written in your gratitude journal and share it with others.
4. Tell someone who made a positive impact on you why you are grateful for him/her. Watch this video on an [Experiment in Gratitude](#).
5. Write thank you notes to tell people why you are grateful to have them in your life.

Here are ten things I am most grateful for. I invite you to make your list and share it with those you are grateful to have in your life.

1. My faith above all else – This is what fuels my resilience and keeps me going, especially during setbacks and times of uncertainty and darkness.
2. My health – Without it, I can't experience and enjoy what life has to offer, and I can't help others. We must take care of ourselves first, so we can be there for others.

3. My loved ones – My husband Jerry who changed my life for the better in every way and is the best partner I could ever have; my parents who made me the person I am; and my family and friends who have given me their friendship, love, and support.
4. My dogs – They have taught me how to love unconditionally and are a constant source of joy, love, and laughter every day.
5. My clients – I have the greatest clients I could ever ask for. They give meaning and purpose to my life's work and teach me something every day.
6. My business – It is the vehicle for living my life's purpose by helping others grow and develop, and the means to financially contribute to our household.
7. My marbles – Without my mental faculties, I could not perform the work I do and get the most out of life.
8. My capacity for learning and growing – This ensures that I continue to evolve in my work and as a human being. Tony Robbins and others have said, *"If we are not growing, we are dying."*
9. My capacity for love and gratitude – They are the most powerful emotions we can experience. They are the reason for our human existence, and they fuel our connection to spirit.
10. My ability to control my thoughts and emotions. We can't control situations that may happen in our lives, but we can always control our THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS and RESPONSES to what happens.

I wish you good health and much happiness throughout the rest of this year and beyond. May you live each day with love, gratitude, and presence.

"I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness – it's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude." – Brene Brown

"When you are grateful, fear disappears and abundance appears." – Tony Robbins

The Power of Presence



Presence or paying attention is essential to high performance, resilience, happiness, and overall well-being. Although it's very simple in concept, it's very difficult in practice. This is because as human beings, we are constantly thinking in our heads instead of giving our full attention to what's right in front of us at this very moment. Many of us are also more focused on achieving the end result than enjoying the process of getting there. You can see how present you are in your daily life by completing the [Mindful Attention Awareness Scale \(MAAS\)](#).

The only time we can experience anything or take any action is **NOW**. We can't do something yesterday or tomorrow. We can only do it in the present moment. Therefore, our only point of power is **NOW**. When we trade the present moment for something that's over or not here yet, we miss out on fully experiencing life, and we give up our power. When we think about the past, we experience sadness, longing, or regret. When we think about the future, we experience worry, fear, or anxiety. When we focus on the present moment, we experience happiness, peace, and serenity.

In the book [A New Earth](#), Eckhart Tolle says that we can begin to be more present by consciously noticing what we are experiencing through our five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. (*Thinking is not one of them.*) We can also become more aware of what we are thinking about and remind ourselves that these are just thoughts. We do not need to be preoccupied with our opinions, worries, regrets, or to-do lists. It's not what's happening **NOW** that creates negative emotions, but rather our thoughts about it.

Here are ten tips for cultivating presence from the book [Bring Out the Best in Every Employee](#) by Don Brown and Bill Hawkins.

1. **Breathe one count in, two counts out.** Focus on your breathing instead of your thoughts.
2. **Audit your continuous partial attention (CPA).** What are your distractors that cause your mind to wander?
3. **Dedicate time and attention to those you are with.** Declare that you are trying to be more present with others.
4. **Disconnect from technology.** Designate technology-free zones and technology-free times.

5. **Narrow the scope of your intentions.** Focus on one thing at a time with your full attention instead of trying to multi-task.
6. **Notice the impact you have.** Noticing is paying attention. Pay attention to your ability to be present with others.
7. **Reboot your RAM.** Go for a short walk, get a cup of tea, take a few deep breaths – whatever it takes for you to reboot and focus again.
8. **Substitute a new route or routine.** Changing any habit can heighten awareness, and that's halfway to being present. Routines dull our awareness. Change your route, your breakfast, or your customary dress code.
9. **Silence the auditory interruptions.** Your auditory interrupters may be the television at home, the radio in the car, or the sound of the engines on the airplane. Take steps to find a short, quiet respite from the noise.
10. **Condition your physical being.** Rest, diet, and exercise play more of a part in your ability to effectively interact with others than you might imagine. The less we care for ourselves, the less we can care for others.

NOW is the only time we have. If we live for outcomes at the expense of the present journey, then we ultimately miss out on living our lives in the moment and experiencing the gifts that each new day brings. May we all experience life more fully with heightened awareness and presence for better performance, resilience, happiness, and well-being. May we use the power of **NOW** to make each moment count.

"Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life." – Eckhart Tolle

Decrease Negativity and Increase Positivity



Media outlets are constantly bombarding us with bad news, which can add to our stress. These alarming messages and images, most of which we have no control over, negatively affect our energy level and mood. Scientific research has proven that negative emotions actually change our blood chemistry and cause disease. ([*The Healing Field: Exploring Energy and Consciousness*](#) explains this phenomenon and ways to reverse it.) Because of this, I stopped watching the news in 2013.

It's critical to fuel ourselves with as much positive energy as we can and avoid negative energy whenever possible to overcome stress and difficulties. We must train ourselves to shift our focus when we start expending energy on negative emotions. You can do this by noticing when you are experiencing stress, anger, fear, or any negative emotion. Then switch your focus to something that creates a sense of peace, love, and gratitude within you, such as a loved one or a favorite memory. Do this while visualizing breathing through your heart for at least 15 seconds.

The [Heartmath Institute](#) has proven that this will put you in a calm state and lower your heart rate. By doing this periodically throughout the day (for a cumulative total of 10 minutes) whenever you feel stressed or worried, you undo the harmful effects of the negative feelings that you experience.

Here are more tips from the book [Positivity](#) by Barbara L. Fredrickson, PhD.

Decrease Negativity:

- **Dispute negative thinking** – Check your negative thoughts against reality by looking at the facts.
- **Break the grip of rumination** – Become aware of when you are stuck in a cycle of rehashing negative thoughts and emotions that lead you nowhere good (needless negativity). Engage in a positive activity (exercise, meditation, yoga, etc.) that takes your mind off your troubles and lifts your emotions.
- **Become more mindful** – Pay attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. With practice, you can learn to observe the contents of your mind calmly, in a non-reactive way.
- **Assess your media diet** – Pay close attention to how you feel during and after taking in media. How could you alter your media diet to cut out needless negativity?

Increase Positivity:

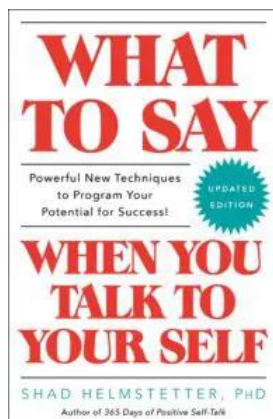
- **Find positive meaning** – When you reframe unpleasant circumstances in a positive way, you boost the odds that positive emotions, like hope, will flow forth.
- **Savor goodness** – Willfully generate, intensify, and prolong your heartfelt enjoyment of good events by slowing down and taking the time to appreciate all the good aspects of them.
- **Count your blessings** – Recast aspects of your daily life that seem mundane or hidden from view as gifts to be cherished, such as appreciating how others have been kind to you.
- **Express kindness** – Choose a particular day to step up your kindness to a much higher level to get a boost of positivity.

Focus on what you can control: your thoughts, emotions, and actions. Don't waste your energy and damage your health by worrying about the things that you can't control or change.

"Life always gives us exactly the teacher we need at every moment." – Charlotte Joko Beck

"Survival is the second law of life. The first is that we are all one." – Joseph Campbell

Change Your Life by Changing Your Self-Talk



Our brains are like computers, storing and acting on the programs that we have received since birth. Unfortunately, about 77% of these programs are negative. According to Shad Helmstetter, PhD, author of [What to Say When You Talk to Yourself](#) and [Negative Self-Talk & How to Change It](#), if we grew up in relatively positive environments, most of us have been given approximately 148,000 negative messages during the first 18 years of our lives.

Our brains act on the strongest programs – those that were repeated over and over, either by others or by what we say to ourselves. Many of those programs are still with us today because we keep reinforcing negative beliefs through our own self-talk. Our thoughts and beliefs drive our feelings, which drive our actions, which ultimately determine the results we get. If you're not happy with what you have in your life, then it's time to change your self-talk and your programming. Negative self-talk is a habit that can be changed.

Most of us are negative by nature. It's a built-in survival mechanism to be on the lookout for negative threats before focusing on the positive. In addition, most of us are paid to solve problems, that's why the organizations we work in exist. So, our focus tends to be on what's wrong rather than what's right. Therefore, we must exert some energy and effort to change our negative self-talk, but it can be done. Below are some ways to do it. The books mentioned above give very detailed instructions for each of these methods.

1. Start paying attention to what you say to yourself. Whenever you notice a negative thought, change it to a positive one. It doesn't matter if you really believe it or not. The part of your brain that stores the message does not evaluate it. It just stores it and acts on it. Repetition is key. For example, if you tell yourself, "I'm always late for everything." Change it to, "I always have enough time to get where I want to go, and I always get there on time."
2. Start off each day with a positive conversation with yourself. While you are in the shower, you can speak to yourself and answer yourself about the type of day you would like to have. For example, I could say, "Melissa, you are going to have a great day today." I could respond by saying, "Yes, today I am going to have a great day. I am prepared for my client meetings, and I am excited to have these conversations. And I know I'm going to have great results." And I could continue from there.
3. Start off each day by listening to positive messages recorded in your own voice that you want to program in your brain. This could be changing your beliefs about certain relationships, achieving certain goals, losing weight, managing

stress, etc. You can record new beliefs that you would like to have that would yield different actions and better results.

4. Start off each day by listening to positive recorded messages that Shad Helmstetter has developed with proven results in his [Self-Talk Plus programs](#). These programs include financial success, health & fitness, weight loss, relationships, career advancement, restful sleep, stop smoking, and more.

I'm sharing this with you because I am living proof that it works. I have used positive self-talk for many years to achieve success and completely transform my life as of 2014. I have reached nearly every goal that I ever set for myself through deliberate positive self-talk, visioning, and being in a positive emotional state as much as possible. May you make this your best year yet by changing your self-talk, which will change your actions, and ultimately the results you get in life.

"Your self-talk, right now, is a replay of the programs you have that are the strongest." – Shad Helmstetter, PhD

"It is because the brain stores – and wires in – repeated messages, that you end up believing things about you that you tell yourself most often." – Shad Helmstetter, PhD

"Because of its neuroplasticity, your brain is designed to continually rewire itself throughout your lifetime." – Shad Helmstetter, PhD

Whose Business Are You In?

Are you someone who takes on too much and tries to solve other people's problems? Do you feel responsible for your employees, friends, or family members, wanting to save them from mistakes, failures, heartaches, pain, and suffering? This is common for many people. However, this can be very emotionally draining and take a huge toll on your energy.



As a coach with many clients who all have different challenges, I could easily fall into the trap of feeling responsible for "saving" them. However, that would disempower them and completely deplete me. Everyone is responsible for their own life choices and the resulting consequences. My job as a coach is to empower them to solve their own challenges by helping them think through their options, so they can make the best choices for themselves. [You Can Change Other People](#) explains how to do this.

[Byron Katie](#) has a great question to help us stay focused on ourselves, our responsibilities, and our choices instead of other people's. That question is, "Whose business am I in?" There are only three options: 1) mine, 2) yours, and 3) God's. For example, if an earthquake happens, it's God's business. If your neighbor has an ugly lawn, it's your neighbor's business. If you are angry about your neighbor's ugly lawn, that's your business.

How much time and energy do you spend in someone else's business? What is the impact of doing that? For me, it just leads to frustration, stress, and misery. What would be a better use of your time and energy? For me, it would be better spent focusing on myself and my own responsibilities, challenges, and choices.

May we all do better at staying in our own business and giving ourselves and others a little more grace. I think we could all use a little less judgment and little more compassion.

"Would you rather be right or be free?" – Byron Katie

"The way to truly help someone is for me to not get immersed in their suffering." – Byron Katie

Live with Fewer Regrets



At the end of each year, many of us reflect on what we did and what we accomplished. Did we do all the things we planned to do? Did we spend our time on our highest priorities? Did we live our values each day? Whenever I conduct this yearly evaluation, I try not to beat myself up if I fall short, and I try not to have a lot of regrets. We've been told not to regret the past because it's over and robs us of the opportunity to live

in the present moment.

Brene Brown offers a different perspective. In her book [*Rising Strong*](#), she talks about regret being a function of empathy, meaning if we had the opportunity to do it over again, we'd do things differently. She says, "To live without regret is to believe you have nothing to learn, no amends to make, and no opportunity to be braver with your life... I believe that what we regret most are our failures of courage, whether it's the courage to be kinder, to show up, to say how we feel, to set boundaries, to be good to ourselves. For that reason, regret can be the birthplace of empathy."

In a keynote speech by Dr. Marshall Goldsmith in 2016, he said to visualize ourselves at 95 years old, and he asked, "What would that 95-year-old person say to the current you right now? Follow your dreams now. Life is short; have fun now. We always regret the risks that we fail to take. And do whatever you can to help people because the 95-year-old you will be proud that you did."

If you have regrets about what you did or didn't do this year, missed opportunities, not speaking up, not living in the present, putting everyone else ahead of yourself, being impatient with others, or lacking compassion, let them be lessons of what you will choose to do differently going forward. Have compassion for yourself in this reflection and realize that each regret is an opportunity to learn, grow, and do better. Identify what you would do differently if faced with the same situation again, commit that action to memory, and then stop re-living past mistakes in your mind and in your life. Make a vow to live more courageously by being truer to yourself and demonstrating your values.

The beauty of life is that each day is a chance to begin anew. We have the opportunity to be our best selves with each new day. May we all increase our empathy and live with fewer regrets.

"Regrets about not taking chances have made me braver. Regrets about shaming or blaming people I care about have made me more thoughtful. Sometimes the most uncomfortable learning is the most powerful." – Brene Brown

"Regret is one of the most powerful emotional reminders that change and growth are necessary." – Brene Brown

Live, Love, and Matter More

The past few years have been difficult for many of us. May this year bring us all a renewed sense of hope and peace. Rather than making a new year's resolution, I am setting an intention to embody high-performance coach Brendon Burchard's slogan to "**live, love and matter**" more this year and beyond.



To **live** fully, we must be present. I have wasted much of my life worrying about the future or regretting things that happened in the past instead of enjoying what I am experiencing in the present moment. The only time we can experience anything or take any action is **NOW**. We can't do something yesterday or tomorrow; we can only do it in the present moment. Since 2013, I have gotten much better at being present, but I want to continually improve so I can live even more fully. For tips on improving your ability to be present, read the [Power of Presence](#).

Love is the most powerful emotion there is. It raises our vibration, puts us in a positive emotional state, and undoes the harmful effects of the negative feelings that we experience. It's also what makes life meaningful. Without someone or something to love, not much else matters. For tips on practicing gratitude, which elicits feelings of love, read the [Secrets to Happiness and Well-Being](#).

We all **matter**. We all have a purpose in life and a reason for being here **NOW**. We don't always think about the impact we have on others, but our words and deeds matter. I plan to be more intentional in what I say and do. I want to impact others in a positive way and have them walk away feeling better after interacting with me.

Brendon Burchard says that at the end of our lives, we will all ask ourselves, "*Did I live? Did I love? Did I matter?*" I want to be able to emphatically answer **YES** to all three of these questions, since this is really what matters most in life. May we all keep these questions in mind and live more intentionally going forward.

"What we do with what we have tends to be far more important than what we have in the first place." – Brendon Burchard

"Gratitude is the golden frame through which we see the meaning of life." – Brendon Burchard

"You have a clean slate every day you wake up. You have a chance every single morning to make that change and be the person you want to be." – Brendon Burchard

Increase Your Telework Productivity



Many people have been working from home since 2020. In my conversations with clients, it seems as though introverts enjoy this more than extroverts who may find it isolating and draining. Below are some tips to increase your telework productivity and better support your team if you lead others. *(Please see hyper-links below for tips on engaging in these activities.)*

For everyone:

- Maintain a daily routine. Wake up at the same time as a usual workday. Shower and get dressed rather than working in pajamas all day.
- [Set boundaries](#). Keep places where you do work and don't do work separate. Maintain normal working hours, and don't check emails outside of regular business hours.
- Look ahead at your schedule and reach out to others in advance for what you may need to accomplish tasks.
- Focus on what you can do and accomplish. [Focus on what you can control and influence and let go of what you can't.](#)
- Stay in contact with people (co-workers, friends and family) via email, phone, text, Zoom, etc.
- Download files and do most of your work off of your organization's VPN for better efficiency.
- Take a walk outside in the middle of the day to refresh and re-energize.
- Use your usual commute time for something other than sleeping in, such as reading, exercising, spending time with your family, etc.
- [Monitor and limit the amount of media \(news, social media, etc.\) you take in.](#)
- Have a contingency plan. What will you do if you or a family member gets sick?
- [Take care of yourself physically](#). Eat healthy, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, exercise, take vitamins, etc.

- [Take care of yourself mentally and emotionally](#). Utilize deep breathing, practice gratitude, and engage in mindfulness (be present to what you are doing).
- Take time to reflect. Consider what matters most to you and how to make the best use of your time. [What are your real priorities both now and long term?](#)
- Look for the silver lining. What positives are coming out of working from home? (Examples: more time with family, exercising more, learning to use new technology, etc.)

For leaders:

- [Check in more often](#). Reach out to your team members at least once per day whether via email, text, phone call, video conference, or team meeting.
- Hold virtual team meetings at least once per week so everyone has a chance to connect and ask for what they may need to be more productive.
- Ask team members individually how they are doing, not just with tasks, but personally. Ask, *"What are some of your anxieties and challenges? What can I do to help? What do you need from me to perform at your best given these circumstances?"*
- [Demonstrate empathy for the difficulties that many are going through](#). Working from home is especially challenging for people with young children. They are trying to balance their workload with supervising and/or home schooling their children. Try to put yourself in their shoes.
- [Clearly communicate your expectations](#). If you are responding to emails outside of normal business hours because that's what works for you, be sure to communicate that you do not expect your team members to do the same.
- Provide more encouragement, support, and praise than you normally do.
- Look for ways to be more innovative and collaborative. What processes can be streamlined or eliminated given the new environment?

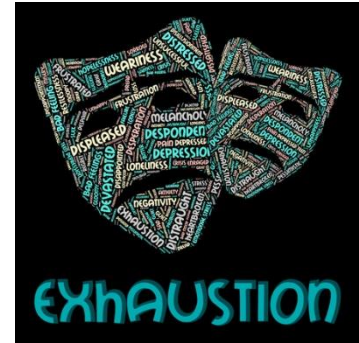
May we all continue to take care of ourselves and use the opportunity to work from home to be more productive and innovative. I wish you good health, happiness, and resilience. May we become stronger and more connected than ever before.

"It's not always that we need to do more, but rather that we need to focus on less." –
Nathan W. Morris

"Productivity is being able to do things that you were never able to do before." –
Franz Kafka

Free Yourself from Drama

Do you find yourself spending time with people who are difficult to be around due to work or family obligations? This can be very draining and lead to drama. Here are some tips for keeping your sanity and reducing stress and drama during your interactions and activities with these folks.



1. **Lower your expectations or have none at all.** Most of our frustrations come from unmet expectations. Don't expect things to be perfect, and don't expect people to behave according to your standards. Things go wrong, and people will be who they are.
2. **Don't make assumptions.** We often assume the worst by misinterpreting others' actions. We also assume that people will do things the way that we would. We are usually wrong in both cases. Ask, clarify, and make requests rather than making assumptions.
3. **Choose your battles or choose not to battle at all.** Tensions can be high with those that we find difficult. It may be tempting to lash out in the heat of the moment, but this can ruin relationships and the day's events.
4. **Choose being happy over being right.** Getting upset over what someone else says or does negatively affects you. Trying to prove that you are right will drain your energy and strain relationships. Instead remember that others are entitled to their opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives, which may be different from yours.
5. **Set an intention for your state of being.** Think about how you want to behave and feel while visiting/working with family/co-workers you find challenging. Then act accordingly. You have control over your actions and feelings regardless of the situation. Be the person you want to be, and don't let others take away your joy.
6. **Remind yourself of what's most important.** While making preparations for events with family or interactions at work, keep in mind what's most important to you rather than getting consumed and stressed by it.
7. **Ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?"** Remind yourself of the reason that you are doing something. Is it because you really want to and because it will bring you or others joy, or is it out of obligation, to impress others, or because you are expecting something in return? The former will cause happiness, while the latter will cause resentment. Put your energy and effort into the right things for the right reasons.

8. **Stop ruminating.** We cause a lot of our own stress by replaying negative situations over and over in our minds, or obsessively worrying about bad things that haven't happened yet. Get out of your head and into the present moment.
9. **Be present.** The only time we have is right now in this moment. The past is over, and the future is not here yet. Be present to what you are doing and experiencing through your five senses in this moment instead of thinking in your mind. Be here now and pay attention to what's right in front of you.
10. **Be grateful.** Gratitude is the gateway to happiness, resilience, and well-being. Focus on what you have to be grateful for instead of what you don't have or what's not going right. What you focus on expands, so pay more attention to the positive than the negative. There is a lot to be grateful for if you start noticing. Gratitude causes happiness, and not the other way around. If you want to be happy, then choose to be grateful.

My hope is that these tips will help you feel more in control in situations/with people that you find difficult, and that you are able to act in ways that you will be proud to look back on for years to come.

"Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse." – Henry Van Dyke

"I am thankful for all difficult people in my life; they have shown me exactly who I do not want to be. Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend." – Melody Beattie

How to Recognize a Cry for Help



Too often we hear about a suicide in Hollywood or in our own communities. I do not claim to be an expert on this topic, but I'd like to share some resources so we can all become more aware, and possibly prevent this type of tragedy from happening within our families, workplaces, schools, or circles of friends.

Speaking from my own experience, I can tell you that it may not be easy to tell if someone is at risk of committing suicide. When I was going through a year-long divorce proceeding from my 17-year marriage in 2013, I contemplated suicide. It was the absolute lowest point in my life. During that time, I had many thoughts that were very irrational due to extreme stress, unspeakable betrayal, overwhelming loss and disconnection, shattered self-esteem, and fear of the unknown. I told no one about my suicidal thoughts, and no one suspected it. I am an extremely strong person, so everyone assumed that I would be fine and could handle it. I also never let on to anyone, not even my therapist, about how depressed I really was. If I can come close to that point, then anyone can.

I can honestly say that what prevented me from taking my own life were my dogs. I couldn't leave them behind without someone who would care for them and love them the way I did. I just could not selfishly do that to them. From what I know, having something beyond ourselves is what keeps us going whether that be kids or dogs, a significant other, a calling to help others, or a higher purpose yet to be fulfilled. I know this was true for me and was what kept me going during the darkest time in my life. If you are experiencing a devastating circumstance in your life, please know that the intensity of the pain you are feeling now will lessen over time.

[*The How of Happiness*](#) by Sonja Lyubomirsky says that only 10% of our overall happiness comes from our life circumstances such as our income, health, type of job, marital status, etc. Our genetically determined happiness set point makes up about 50% of our overall happiness and cannot be changed. Some people have higher or lower set points than others. People who have lower than average happiness set points may suffer from chronic depression. [If you are experiencing temporary or chronic depression, please seek the help of a medical professional and/or therapist, as depression is very treatable.](#)

The good news is that we can control 40% of our overall happiness level through intentional activity – behaviors of our choosing. This is what helped me through the worst time in my life. I made a conscious effort to engage in activities that would elevate my mood, including listening to [Dr. Robert Anthony's](#) audio programs [Mastering Your Inner Game](#) and [The Secret of Deliberate Creation](#) on a daily basis. I truly believe his programs saved my life. By listening to them daily, I renewed my hope, regained my faith, strengthened my spirit, and changed my entire perspective on life. ([The How of Happiness](#) gives many more examples of intentional activities that

increase happiness levels.) I also spent as much time as I could around other people because I knew that isolation would only contribute to my loneliness and depression.

According to [WedMD](#), these are the warning signs of someone who is at risk of committing suicide.

- **Excessive sadness or moodiness** – Long-lasting sadness, mood swings, and unexpected rage.
- **Hopelessness** – Feeling a deep sense of hopelessness about the future, with little expectation that circumstances can improve.
- **Sleep problems.**
- **Sudden calmness** – Suddenly becoming calm after a period of depression or moodiness can be a sign that the person has made a decision to end his or her life.
- **Withdrawal** – Choosing to be alone and avoiding friends or social activities also are possible [symptoms of depression](#), a leading cause of suicide. This includes the loss of interest or pleasure in activities the person previously enjoyed.
- **Changes in personality and/or appearance** – A person who is considering suicide might exhibit a change in attitude or behavior, such as speaking or moving with unusual speed or slowness. In addition, the person might suddenly become less concerned about his or her personal appearance.
- **Dangerous or self-harmful behavior** – Potentially dangerous behavior, such as reckless driving, engaging in unsafe sex, and increased use of drugs and/or alcohol might indicate that the person no longer values his or her life.
- **Recent trauma or life crisis** – A major life crises might trigger a suicide attempt. Crises include the death of a loved one or pet, divorce or break-up of a relationship, diagnosis of a major illness, loss of a job, or serious financial problems.
- **Making preparations** – Often, a person considering suicide will begin to put his or her personal business in order. This might include visiting friends and family members, giving away personal possessions, making a will, and cleaning up his or her room or home. Some people will write a note before committing suicide. Some will buy a firearm or other means like poison.
- **Threatening suicide** – From 50% to 75% of those considering suicide will give someone – a friend or relative – a warning sign. However, not everyone who is considering suicide will say so, and not everyone who threatens suicide will follow through with it. Every threat of suicide should be taken seriously.

According to [WebMD](#), "Suicide rates are highest in teens, young adults, and the elderly. White men over the age of 65 have the highest rate of suicide. Although women are three times as likely to attempt suicide, men are far more likely to complete the act."

Suicide risk is also higher in these groups:

- Older people who have lost a spouse through death or divorce
- People who have attempted suicide in the past
- People with a family history of suicide
- People with a friend or co-worker who committed suicide
- People with a history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- People who are unmarried, unskilled, or unemployed
- People with long-term pain or a disabling or terminal illness
- People who are prone to violent or impulsive behavior
- People who have recently been released from a psychiatric hospitalization (This often is a very frightening period of transition.)
- People in certain professions, such as police officers and health care providers who work with terminally ill patients
- People with substance abuse problems

I would also add to this list, members of the Armed Forces who served in combat or have comrades who died in combat or committed suicide.

According to [WedMD](#), this is what to do if you think someone is suicidal.

- Don't be afraid to ask if he or she is depressed or thinking about suicide.
- Ask if he or she is seeing a therapist or taking medication.
- Rather than trying to talk the person out of suicide, let him or her know that depression is temporary and treatable.
- In some cases, the person just needs to know that someone cares and is looking for the chance to talk about his or her feelings. You can then encourage the person to seek professional help.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Dial 988 or Call 1-800-273-8255

I hope this information helps someone who is considering suicide and saves even just one life. Please know that there is always someone you can reach out to, whether it's a friend, relative, teacher, minister, therapist, coach, medical professional, or a crisis hotline. Please share this information with anyone that you think it may help.

Since 2014, I have deliberately created the life I have always wanted, instead of just letting life happen to me. This includes owning my own business where I get to do the work I love and make a positive impact on other people every day and finding the perfect partner to share the rest of my life with. If I had ended my life in 2013, I

would not be living the amazing life I have now, nor would I be the person that I have become and am proud to be today. Out of the pain and hardship of our struggles, comes the beauty of strength, growth, and transformation. There is always light after the darkness, and sometimes it's even brighter than we could have ever imagined.

"No matter how dark the moment, love and hope are always possible." – George Chakiris

"Be strong because things will get better. It may be stormy now, but it can't rain forever." – Unknown

Your Subconscious Mind Can Create Miracles



I often talk about the power of positivity and the subconscious mind because they helped me transform my life. In December 2021, I used my subconscious mind to create my own medical miracle. In early November 2021, I had my annual mammogram. A week later my results showed an abnormality which required further testing – another mammogram and an ultrasound. Being the skeptic that I am, I verified their results by doing a self-exam a few days later

and found the small mass.

I shared this information with my good friend Tina, who is an ultrasound technician and an amazingly gifted healer. She reminded me of the power of our thoughts – what we think about, we bring about. Therefore, I should not spend any time in fear and instead say the following mantra whenever I started thinking about my upcoming tests, *"Fibrous breasts can hide or misrepresent tissue. I am deeply grateful that is all that it is. I AM PERFECT HEALTH."* She also suggested that I listen to [Wayne Dyer's I Am That meditation](#) every night before going to bed. While listening, I would imagine breathing in and receiving from God *"I am perfect health,"* and then exhaling and sending back to God *"I am perfect health."* I listened to this meditation every night and some mornings for three weeks until my scheduled tests. I also repeated the mantra several times a day during those three weeks.

When I went for my mammogram and ultrasound, neither technician could find the mass. The radiologist requested two more mammogram pictures from a different view to ensure nothing was accidentally missed. Those pictures confirmed there was no longer a mass. When I got home, I did another self-exam to verify their findings once again. The mass I felt three weeks earlier was completely gone. I can't express the enormity of gratitude I felt and continue to feel for my health, my friend Tina, and God.

I hope that you will use this information to create your own healing miracles and share it others. Our minds and prayers are extremely powerful tools that our Creator has given us. We just need to know how to use them appropriately and control our thoughts rather than letting fearful thoughts control us.

"Our intention creates our reality." – Dr. Wayne Dyer

"What we think determines what happens to us, so if we want to change our lives, we need to stretch our minds." – Dr. Wayne Dyer

"You'll see it when you believe it." – Dr. Wayne Dyer

A Tribute to My Dog Dexter



On August 26, 2022, we had to say goodbye to our dog Dexter and let him cross over the rainbow bridge. He was my best little buddy for almost 13 years, always by my side through good times and bad. He was such a gift and a blessing. He taught me how to love unconditionally and helped me through the hardest time in my life in 2013 by just being there.

Dexter taught me the power of love. Through him, I learned that it only matters that we love someone regardless of whether they love us in return. (Although he showed me every day in many ways how much he loved me.) Love is the most powerful emotion there is and having him to love got me through the worst time in my life. He also taught me the importance of being present. Dogs don't think about tomorrow or yesterday. They only live in the moment. I cherished every moment I had with him because I knew there would never be enough.

Dexter was a real little stinker as a puppy. He had a huge personality, and boy was he full of mischief. He grew up to be the sweetest and most loyal companion I could ever ask for. He was mama's boy from the first day I brought him home. He was my shadow, following me everywhere I went, always wanting to be near me, and constantly wanting all my attention. Although my heart aches, it's worth all the love and joy he brought into my life for so many years. There will never be another one like him.

Dexter died peacefully in my arms with my husband Jerry by my side, knowing that we were there with him, and that he was not alone. He knew he was deeply loved and cared for. I told him I would never leave him, and I kept my promise to the very end. His mama never left his side. Instead, he had to leave us and cross over the rainbow bridge. He gave me the gift of peace knowing that I did right by him, and I will forever be grateful.

Rest in peace Dexter, my sweet baby boy (10/20/2009 – 8/26/2022). You will forever be in my heart. No words can express how much you've meant to me. I will always love you more than you will ever know.

"A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself." – Josh Billings

"My sunshine doesn't come from the skies; it comes from the love in my dog's eyes."
– Author Unknown

"A dog wags his tail with his heart." – Martin Buxbaum

Healing with Henley



The year 2022 was full of ups and downs for us. We had to say goodbye to our dog Dexter in August, and in December, we welcomed a new puppy into our home. His name is Henley, and he's a Yorkie Poo. He was nine weeks old when we got him. I fell in love with him after only a few days. It has been such a joy to watch him explore new things and experience every day as a new adventure.

I am amazed by what he learned in just a few short days. He learned how to use the ramp to get up and down from the couch and climb all the way up the carpeted stairs from the basement after being in our house for only two days. I did not train him to do these things. He figured them out all on his own.

Henley is full of energy and keeps me on my toes. He is helping me heal from losing Dexter and reminds me that it's always better to have loved and experience loss than to never have loved at all. I look forward to our future with Henley and all the memories that we will make together.

I wish you abundant joy and happiness. May your hope, health, healing, peace, and prosperity increase with each passing day and each new year.

"Holding on is believing that there's only a past; letting go is knowing that there's a future." – Daphne Rose Kingma

"And suddenly you know: it's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings." – Meister Eckhart

About the Author



Melissa Kessler is a leadership coach, trainer, facilitator, consultant, speaker, and author. Since 2012, she has been the President and owner of Evoke Potential, LLC, a certified Woman Owned Small Business. Melissa has over 25 years of experience training, consulting, and coaching leaders within industry and government. She holds a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) accreditation from the International Coach Federation (ICF) and received her leadership coaching certificate from Georgetown University. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Behavior Management and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, both from Western Michigan University.

Melissa has coached over 200 leaders at all organizational levels resulting in the achievement of their personal and professional goals including promotion to the next level of leadership. She also provides [leadership training courses](#), team building sessions, and consulting services to increase effectiveness and productivity, improve communication, and reduce conflict within teams. She is certified to administer a number of [assessments](#) for leadership and team development. Some of her training courses include Effective Conflict Management, Giving Effective Feedback, Enhancing Emotional Intelligence, Increasing Influence, Building Trust, Coaching Essentials, Effective Decision Making, and Team Leadership.

Melissa believes that [coaching](#) is fundamental to the growth and development of outstanding leaders and ultimately top-notch organizations. Her passion is partnering with business owners and managers to develop their smartest technically competent experts into strong influential leaders. Her greatest strengths include seeing and drawing out the best in her clients, inspiring them to take focused action, and expanding their emotional intelligence to transform from technical experts into exceptional leaders.

Melissa is a native of Michigan and currently resides there with her husband and two dogs. She is a member of the International Coach Federation (ICF), ICF Michigan Charter Chapter, and ICF Los Angeles Charter Chapter. She also served as a mentor with Winning Futures for two years.

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