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Healthy Self-Esteem

Engage in six vital practices.

by Nathaniel Branden

ON WHAT DOES HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM DEPEND? Your genetic inheritance is part of the story. You may be born with certain inherent differences that may make it easier or harder to attain healthy self-esteem—differences of energy, resilience, or disposition to enjoy life.

Certainly your upbringing also plays a powerful role. One way to have good self-esteem is to have parents who have good self-esteem and who model it. If you have parents who raise you with love and respect, who allow you to experience consistent and benevolent acceptance, who give you the supporting structure of reasonable rules and appropriate expectations, who do not assail you with contradictions, who do not resort to ridicule, humiliation, or physical abuse as means of controlling you, who project that they believe in your competence and goodness—you have a decent chance of internalizing their attitudes and acquiring healthy self-esteem.

But this result is not inevitable. Clearly, certain people are raised superbly by these standards and yet are insecure, self-doubting adults. And other people emerge from appalling backgrounds, raised by adults who did everything wrong, and yet they do well in school, form stable and satisfying relationships, have a powerful sense of their own value and dignity, and have high self-esteem.

While we may not know all the factors that influence self-esteem, we know much about certain *volitional practices* that can raise or lower it. Indeed, your self-esteem is largely a product of six such internal practices.

Six Practices of Self-Esteem

You strengthen your self-esteem to the extent that you integrate these six practices:

1. Living consciously. The extent to which you honor sight over blindness determines your self-efficacy and self-respect. You can't feel competent while wandering around in a self-induced mental fog. If you try to exist unthinkingly, or to evade discomforting facts, your sense of worthiness suffers. So, many

times a day, you must choose to live consciously. Gradually, you establish a reputation with yourself—a sense of the kind of person you are, depending on the choices you make, the degree of rationality and integrity you exhibit. Living consciously entails being in the moment, without losing the wider context; reaching out toward relevant facts; noticing and confronting your impulse to avoid or deny painful or

threatening realities; knowing where you are relative to your goals and projects; knowing if your actions are aligned with your purposes; receiving feedback and adjusting your course when necessary; and seeking to expand awareness—make learning and growth a way of life.

2. Self-acceptance. This entails commitment to the value of your person. You accept—without denial or evasion—that you think what you think, feel what you feel, have done what you've done, and are what you are. You refuse to regard any part of yourself—your body, fears, thoughts, actions, or dreams—as alien, as "not me." Self-acceptance is to experience rather than to disown whatever may be the facts of your being; to refuse to be in an adver-

INSIDE

TOM GILLIAM <i>Food and Fitness Facts</i>3	GAY LYNN WILLIAMSON-GRIGAS <i>Are You Trigger-Proof?</i>8	KIM SNIDER <i>Financial Literacy</i>12
ERIC ADLER <i>Break Out</i>4	MARGARET PAUL <i>Your Love Choice</i>8	JIM COLLINS <i>Good to Great</i>13
LESLIE VAN ROMER <i>Lose Weight</i>4	MAX IZENBERG <i>Success this New Year</i>9	BYRON KATIE <i>Effective Activism</i>14
ELDON TAYLOR <i>Your Inner Genie</i>5	PAT HEYDLAUFF <i>Flip Your Thinking</i>10	JOAN C. CURTIS <i>Please, Just Listen!</i>14
JOSEPH CARDILLO <i>Music on Your Mind</i>6	SUZANN RYE <i>Your Mistakes</i>10	SHARON S. ESONIS <i>Stop Thinking Like a Victim</i>15
JOE CALA <i>Bumble Bee Attitude</i>6	ERIC TYSON <i>Taxing Time</i>11	ASHA PRAVER <i>Make Holidays Holy</i>16
PATT LIND-KYLE <i>Emotional Fitness</i>7	MARC LESSER <i>Doing Less Creates More</i>12	CHARLES AND ELIZABETH SCHMITZ <i>True Love</i>16

serial relationship to yourself; to say of any emotion or behavior, "This is an expression of me—not necessarily an expression I like or admire—at the time it occurred." It is the virtue of realism—of respect for reality—applied to the self. If you are confronted with a mistake you've made, in accepting that it is yours, you are free to learn from it and do better in the future. Self-acceptance is the precondition of change and growth.

3. Self-responsibility. To feel competent to live and worthy of happiness, you need to experience a sense of control over your life. This requires that you take responsibility for your actions, goals, choices, achievements, and the level of consciousness you bring to your work and relationships. You are responsible for how you relate with other people, how you prioritize your time, how well you communicate, how happy you are, for the values by which you live, for raising your self-esteem. To the degree that you evade responsibility for your life, you wound your self-esteem.

4. Self-assertiveness. This means appropriate self-expression—to put your thoughts, convictions, values, and feelings into reality. Its opposite is *surrender to timidity*, consigning yourself to a *perpetual underground* where all that you are lies hidden or still-born—to avoid confrontation with someone whose values differ from yours, or to please, placate, or manipulate someone in order to *belong*. Self-assertion is not belligerence—it is simply standing up for yourself, to be who you are openly, to treat yourself with respect, refusing to fake your person to be liked. To practice self-assertiveness is to live authentically, speak and act from your innermost convictions and feelings—as a way of life—to bring your aspirations into reality, to pursue your values and stand by them, to confront rather than evade the challenges of life and to strive for mastery.

5. Living purposefully. *Purpose* is the essence of the life process, as all living action is goal-directed. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. Through your purposes, you organize your behavior, giving it focus and direction. To live without purpose is to live at the mercy of chance—the chance event, phone call, encounter—because you have no standard by which to judge what is or is not worth doing. Outside forces bounce you along. You take no initiative to set a course—your orientation is reactive, not proactive. To live purposefully is to live productively—making yourself competent to life by translating your thought into reality, setting your goals and working to achieve them, seeking work that requires and expresses the full use of your intelligence, and cultivating a capacity for self-discipline—the ability to organize your behavior and

use your powers to attain your goals. The root of your self-esteem is not your achievements but internally generated practices that enable you to achieve all self-esteem virtues.

6. Integrity. As you develop your values and standards, personal integrity assumes more importance. Integrity is the integration of ideals, convictions, standards, beliefs—and behavior. When your behavior is congruent with your professed values, when ideals and practice match, you have integrity. When you behave in ways that conflict with your judgment of what is appropriate, you lose face in your own eyes. You respect yourself less. If the behavior becomes habitual, you trust yourself less or cease to trust yourself at all. When a breach of integrity wounds your self-esteem, only the practice of integrity can heal it. Personal integrity entails such questions as: Am I honest, reliable, and trustworthy? Do I keep promises? Do I do the things I say I admire, and do I avoid the things I say are despicable? If you act against what you regard as right, your actions clash with your expressed values. Hypocrisy is self-invalidating. A default on integrity undermines you and contaminates your sense of self. It damages you as no external rebuke or rejection can. You may try to evade hypocrisy, insisting that "everyone does it," and yet you launch an assault on your self-respect—and your relationships with others tend to mirror your relationship to yourself.

Behaviors that generate good self-esteem are also expressions of good self-esteem. Hence, the more you live with integrity, the more you enjoy good self-esteem; and the more you enjoy good self-esteem, the more natural it feels to live with integrity.

These six practices are the roots of self-efficacy and self-respect. To the extent that you fail to develop authentic self-esteem, you suffer some degree of anxiety, insecurity, and self-doubt—and since this is painful, you are motivated to evade it, deny your fears, rationalize your behavior, and fake self-esteem. For example, instead of seeking self-esteem through responsibility and integrity, you may seek it through popularity, prestige, acquisitions, and exploits. What you desire can't be purchased with counterfeit currency. Self-esteem resides in the core of your being—it's what you think and feel about yourself. To attain "success" without attaining positive self-esteem is to be condemned to feeling like an imposter anxiously awaiting exposure. To liberate yourself from preoccupation with the opinions of others, learn to think for yourself. PE



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ACTION: Build your self-esteem.

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Food and Fitness Facts

Bust myths to manage your weight.



by Tom Gilliam

YOU MAY FEEL LESS IN CONTROL of your destiny today, but you *can* control your body weight. Now is the time to get fit, lose any extra pounds, and develop habits to keep your weight at a healthful level.

Because you live in a diet-obsessed, quick-fix society, you have absorbed some myths and misinformation that hinder your fitness goals. To succeed, you need to debunk 11 myths:

Myth 1: Weight loss is all about the cardio. If you believe cardio exercise alone will burn off the pounds, you might hit the treadmill every day for two months—only to be disappointed when the scale doesn't budge. You won't see results until you add strength training to your exercise plan because muscle burns more calories than fat in *protein metabolism*. The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn each day. Lifting weights also prevents you from losing muscle. So, keep the cardio but add the strength training to burn the fat and calories you desire.

Myth 2: Salads are the best choice for healthy eating. A salad full of fresh vegetables can be packed with healthy vitamins and minerals, but depending on what else you add, it can be loaded with calories. For most people, cheese, croutons, and dressings are a must, but often these accessories are high in fat and calories; in fact, because of extras, some salads can contain more calories than a hamburger. So, if you can't stick to the vegetables and a light dressing, you might choose a small burger and an order of fruit or a baked potato.

Myth 3: Vegetarian = Healthy. When you hear *vegetarian*, you assume it's healthful. But many vegetarian options replace meat with flavor boosters like mayo, cheese and dressings, causing the calorie count to soar. Be wary of the ingredients in vegetarian dishes.

Myth 4: Reduced fat means low in fat. Before you assume that *reduced* fat equals *low* fat, consider the food's original fat content. Per the FDA, for a label to claim a food has *reduced fat* content, it must contain 25 percent less of the nutrient than the regular product. If an item contains 10 grams of fat, it need only reduce its fat content to 7.5 grams

to qualify. So, it has less fat, but it's only marginally more healthful—and still contains more fat than you need.

Myth 5: Fresh is better than frozen. With more products being marketed as *organic* and *fresh*, you might assume that fresh foods are naturally better for you. However, for so-called *fresh food* to get to stores, it often has to travel long distances; and fresh fruits and vegetables can lose some of their nutritional value. Fruits and vegetables that are flash frozen (or canned) immediately after harvest maintain their nutritional value. As a bonus, frozen and canned goods can be less expensive when they are out of season, helping you to stay healthier year-round. If you prefer fresh fruits and veggies, buy locally grown

produce when possible. Garden-grown foods have better flavor, and time between picking and eating is cut.

Myth 6: All fat is bad for you. True, you want to avoid saturated fats, such as those found in fried foods, sweets, and full-cream dairy products; however, if you avoid all fat all the time, your body will miss out on nutrition that it needs to function properly. Of course, you should never overindulge, but you do need healthy fats in your diet to be on the top of your fitness game. Great options include moderate servings of nuts, seeds, and fish.

Myth 7: If you exercise, you need to consume a sports drink. Sports drinks are great if you engage in long (more than two hours) exercise routines or work in hot and humid climate. These drinks have electrolytes that are critical for normal body functions, but these electrolytes can be obtained from your daily diet—and sports drinks contain calories. So unless you are exercising in extreme conditions or for an extended time, stick with water—you'll get

all the hydration and no added calories.

Myth 8: You should work out as much as possible. The more you exercise, the better—right? Not so. Weight lifting should be done only three days a week because strength training breaks down muscle. The day off between workouts enables the muscle to rebuild. Also, too much cardio exercise can cause excess wear and tear on your tendons and joints, lower back, and shoulders. Give your body time to recover. Take a day off once or twice a week. If you abuse your body, you won't achieve the results you seek. When you plan workouts for the week, get 30 minutes of moderate activity five days *plus* strength training.

Myth 9: Stretching before exercising is critical. Stretching after a workout can be beneficial and improve results. However, many people mistakenly assume that stretching *before* a workout is good as well. Such stretching does not increase your range of motion. Warm-up activities like running in place and jumping jacks are better pre-workout exercises. They get your blood flowing and heart pumping. Save the stretching for after your workout.

Myth 10: Weight is the best indicator that your efforts are working. Weighing yourself daily is critical to a weight-loss program, but taking your waist measurement is just as vital. A tape measure can tell you what progress you're making. You can step on a scale and wonder why your weight isn't going down even though your clothes feel loose. Here's why. When you exercise, two things happen: 1) you gain muscle mass, and 2) you lose fat weight. The *increase in muscle mass offsets the loss of fat*; so the scale stays the same but you have an improved waistline. This might occur for six months, and then the increase in muscle mass plateaus but your fat loss continues—and is reflected on the scale.

Myth 11: If you're sick, you can get better by sweating it out. Hitting the gym and trying to sweat out your illness is not a cure-all. It may even slow recovery. Odds are you won't benefit from your illness workout since performance will likely be subpar. So, when you're sick, take a break from exercising. Allowing your body to recover will quicken your response to the illness.

Successful weight management is about rejecting the myths and making wise choices daily to eat the right foods and get the right exercise. **PE**

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ACTION: Make healthy choices this year.

Break Out

Take small steps.



by Eric Adler

YOU MAY WONDER WHY your life doesn't get better. You go along, day in and day out, just hoping to become happier, more successful, and more satisfied.

The answer is simple: Your life doesn't get better because you don't get better.

Consider this: Who you are and how well you do today is the result of your present personality. If you want to feel more satisfied or successful in your life and work, you need to advance your personality. However, this isn't easy. It is challenging—but greatly rewarding.

Comfort in the Zone

Everything you know is your comfort zone. You can divide this zone into four parts: geographical, mental, activity-related, and personal.

When you are at home, you're within your geographical comfort zone (GCZ). If you're in a place where you've never been, you are outside of your GCZ. If friends surround you, you are within your personal comfort zone (PCZ); if strangers surround you, you're outside your PCZ. If you do something you've done for decades, you are within your activity-related comfort zone (ARCZ); if you do something brand new, you are outside your ARCZ. If you think about something you are familiar with, like job tasks you do daily, you are within your mental comfort zone (MCZ); but if you think like you have never done before, you're outside your MCZ.

Where do you prefer to be—within your comfort zone, or outside of it? You likely feel more comfortable within your comfort zone. Why? You are born with an innate, primary instinct that continues to control your life, yet it is no longer necessary to your survival: *Never leave your comfort zone, because that's your safe place. Danger impends when you leave your comfort zone.* This is why most people stay within their comfort zones, desiring more of the same and wishing for better. Because you already know everything within your comfort zone, personality development is only possible if you step outside of it.

Now, how can you step outside your comfort zone? Let's look at the four parts of the comfort zone: geographical, mental, activity-related, and personal. First,

never leave all parts at once; at least one part should remain familiar to you. You either need to be familiar with the action, the people you are with, the content, or the place you are in. Staying familiar with one part of your comfort zone will provide you with support and security to develop yourself in other areas.

Take small steps. Taking big steps can be counterproductive. If you try to break out all at once, you'll regress—and may give up. You get highly motivated, but soon, motivation turns into frustration and resignation: *I can't do it; I've tried, but it just isn't working out.* The only way to succeed in this transition is to take small steps and make the new activity, new place, new people, or new way of thinking your habit. These things then belong to your comfort zone, enabling you to take the next small step.

Stay consistent—never go back. Once you take a small step outside your comfort zone, never go back to your old one. Stay consistent—no matter how unnatural you feel. Do this until you know and feel comfortable with everything.

Start now. Here's an easy exercise: From now on, try to smile every time—when you answer the phone, pass people on the street, read your e-mails, or exercise! Initially, your smile may seem fake, but one day, your smile will become natural. You won't notice it anymore. And, many people will smile back!

Follow these steps, and your personality will grow and develop as your comfort zone expands. **PE**

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ACTION: Break out of your comfort zone.

Lose Weight

Try 7 simple strategies.



by Leslie Van Romer

IF YOUR WEIGHT HAS CREPT up, try seven strategies:

1. Create a simple plan—one that's doable and sensible. Fresh fruits and vegetables offer the most nutrition for the calorie buck. Translation: weight loss and health gain! Stop centering your meals on meats, white breads, boxed cereals, milk, pasta, salty snacks, or cheeses.

2. Follow three simple rules:

- Add and fill up on best-for-you foods first—fresh fruits and vegetables. Add whole-plant foods: whole grains (brown rice, barley, couscous) and legumes (kidney beans, black beans, lentils).
- Stop eating when your brain tells you you're full—before your stomach begs for mercy. The more fresh fruits and vegetables you eat to satisfy your hunger drive, the more in tune you'll be with your brain's signals.
- Wiggle or build flexibility into your program. This is all about *progress*, not *perfection*. When you can control your choice of food, make wise choices. When you eat out, entertain, travel, or celebrate, eat what you want.

3. Add fruity breakfasts. Fresh fruits are the fastest fast foods. They're quick to eat, travel well, and offer no-fuss, no-time preparation. Munch an apple, banana, grapes, or plum any time. Think

“fruit break” instead of “coffee break.”

4. Create simple Ziploc lunches. This saves you calories, time, and money. Fill a Ziploc bag with lettuces, spinach, and sprouts; or with chopped vegetables like cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, onions, red cabbage, zucchini, cauliflower, and broccoli. Bring along an avocado, fresh lemon, and balsamic vinegar to make a great salad dressing.

5. Make simple eat-in-order dinners. Eat dinner in order: first, a salad; second, steamed vegetables of choice; followed by a denser, filling vegetable like potatoes, yams or winter squash, topped with mashed avocado and diced tomatoes, sautéed-in-water vegetables, or fresh salsa. Instead of a potato or yam, add whole brown rice or legumes. After eating these courses, stop eating if you are full. If not, eat more vegetables. Then when you choose the pasta or chicken, you'll eat less of these foods.

6. Pack healthy snacks. When you feel hungry, choose healthy, weight-wise snacks, like fresh fruit, cut-up carrots, celery, cucumbers, or unsalted nuts and seeds. Keep these snacks handy and eat them first.

7. Watch your beverages! Just one glass of red wine plus one skim-milk latte a day add up to 2,310 extra calories a week! Don't drown yourself in liquid calories! Choose the beverage that adds no calories, alcohol, caffeine, or sugar to your body—water!

This year take care of your body. **PE**

Leslie Van Romer is a chiropractic doctor, expert in weight loss, diet and nutrition, and author of Getting into Your Pants. Visit www.gettingintoyourpants.com or call 1-888-375-3754.

ACTION: Lose desired weight this year.

Your Inner Genie

It is creating what you want.



by Eldon Taylor

IMAGINE THAT WITHIN YOU IS a genie, a creation machine capable of bringing you anything you desired—good and bad.

Imagine that you are unaware of this genie or that you disbelieve it. Perhaps you think that *the genie within* is just some superstitious mumbo-jumbo.

We're all familiar with such phrases as "the power of the mind," "mind over matter," and "the mind-body connection." We've heard of spontaneous healings and achieving or creating the life of our dreams. Most of us have even experienced some of this, in limited ways. The book and movie *The Secret* contain no real secrets, but they retell in new ways the inner mystical teachings of all ages. *The Secret* informs us that our mind is a genie of sorts; for whatever it holds in sufficient detail, it can attract or create—and these two words are actually interchangeable in this context.

Perhaps, you create a vision board and print out affirmations that you paste everywhere so you'd see them. You begin visualizing all the things you want to attract and even start down the road of daily meditation. Alas, nothing wonderful happens.

Unfortunately, that's the experience of most people who tune in to the idea of

the genie within. Some, however, find a different result. They manifest their home, a special relationship, or the like. Why do some people achieve this?

The mind is that genie—it's the doorway to the manifestation process, yet its role is often misunderstood. It's an entry point, a doorway, not the manifestation tool per se. The mind provides the pictures, not the feeling. It organizes your activity to build a vision board, post the affirmations, and so forth. It invests some learned belief (expectation) in the process. Actually, the mind's highest role is inhibition.

The Human Mind

Wired in you are survival instincts that respond to primitive and sometimes rather gross stimuli. Often, stim-

uli that you claim as reprehensible are nevertheless processed subconsciously in ways that drive you toward seeking more of the same. Those mechanisms respond to fight and flight, taboo images, socially fearful rejections, and similar stimuli in a mechanical way.

The brain is a marvel of evolution, and one of its most splendid developments is the cerebral cortex. The cortex or gray matter is the largest part of the brain. Within the cortex, inhibitory power resides. The cortex is the brake.

Cortical power inhibits impulses that aren't in your best interest or the result of your best intentions. The cortex shuts off the television when the content is violent, suggestive of disease and illness, or contains garbage.

Your mind is like a large trash container—you can put anything into it. And like a dumpster, it's difficult to clean. Dumpsters don't tip over easily; cleaning one requires climbing inside, perhaps with a garden hose, a bucket

of hot water, cleaning products, brushes—what a tedious and nasty job!

When you come into the world, your mind is not a blank slate. Certain predispositions and even some types of knowledge (cell memory and more) are already written in your mind when you make your first inhalation. Still, the content of your mind

that's acquired after birth is the start of what you shall eventually hold as both your identity, knowledge, and beliefs.

The Law of Attraction

You've likely heard of the three components of the *Law of Attraction*—ask, believe, and receive. This sounds easy until you question the degree of your belief. I divide belief into three components that must be activated in the proper sequence to manifest using the inner genie: 1) the emotional input that's passionate and convinced; 2) the confidence/mental element that can truly visualize something and then let it go, knowing it will happen; and 3) the spiritual sincerity that realizes at the deepest level of your being that you're a gift from the Creator. Knowing

that, you release your vision, for you believe this or something better, according to the highest good of all concerned. Anything that would distract from thinking, feeling, and knowing these three components will sabotage your efforts at manifesting your desires.

Now, we see why some people first manifest their desires, only to lose their treasures and find themselves worse off than they were before; some fail to manifest at all; and others seem to manifest the opposite of what they're seeking.

With this under your belt, you might ask, Why do most people seem handicapped by the inability to use *the genie within* and create a reality they deserve?

The *Dumpster analogy* is the first clue to answering this question. The garbage some hold in their minds would frighten us if it were visible to the public eye.

The mind is both ignition and brake. First thing in the morning, I open my eyes and begin talking to myself. My thoughts may recognize a dream or immediately turn to the new day's itinerary. The mind goes immediately to delivering the inner world of thoughts, beliefs, ambitions, goals, and so forth. That constant stream of consciousness—self-talk—informs us of our mood, attitudes, likes, dislikes, and so much more. It's this stream of consciousness that reflects the contents of our "Dumpster."

I believe this inner genie exists, and has been creating all along. In fact, the worse your life might seem, the higher the probability that the genie is working hard at fulfilling your every fear (emotion), thought (expectation), and spiritual insight ("life sucks, and then you die"). It's in precisely this way that your hopes and ambitions are slain. Thus, your mind has turned into the slayer.

I like to imagine a world full of joy, peace, balance, and harmony. That's difficult to do when nature seems so callous. How do we truly find peace, balance, and harmony? How do we gain spiritual sincerity and merge this with the right balance of mental and emotional stuff to manifest a world full of peace, balance, and harmony?

For some, manifestation is about cars, pools, houses, riches, and the gratification of other sensual desires. For the spiritually sincere, manifestation is first about peace, balance, and harmony and then about health and happiness.

You have a purpose for being here. And when you manifest your purpose, you enlighten yourself and the world. PE

Eldon Taylor is the CEO of Progressive Awareness Research and author of Mind Programming and Choices and Illusions. Visit www.progressiveawareness.org.

ACTION: *Employ your inner genie.*

Music on Your Mind

Improve your focus using song.



by Joseph Cardillo

YOU'VE LIKELY AWAKENED IN the morning and scrambled to put on a *special song*, one that vaults you into the right mood. You know what you want to hear when you are mellow, elated, sad, happy, or stressed. When people come together—for weddings, funerals, graduations, war, sport, worship, romance, recreation, entertainment—music is there.

Why do we listen to music as much as we do and what happens in our brain when we are enjoying what we hear? And, is there a way to use our favorite compositions as a guidance mechanism to facilitate our goals?

Music affects nearly every part of the brain—exerting influence over much of your life and involving feelings, emotions, memories, blood chemistry, and habits. These five elements guide your attention during the day. They incline you to focus on positiveness or negativity, goal or obstacle, and generate motivation, confidence, self-esteem, stress or contentment.

Your brain is hardwired to make decisions on where to focus attention. This *executive attention* mechanism, when employed, has the power to synchronize information with your goals, be they related to work, family, health, academics, athletics or spirituality.

Listening to music you enjoy sets off a cascade of self-produced brain drugs into your bloodstream, creating a feel-good mood that sounds from Mozart to Coltrane, or the Rolling Stones to Green Day engender. This feel-good, endocrine cocktail is the work of your brain's self-generated de-stressors—hormones like *dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin*. Known as the reward drug, *dopamine* generates a euphoric feeling, heightening motivation, joy and focus, whereas *serotonin* helps maintain attentional arousal and alleviate dys-organized mindsets, depression, and mood and sleep disorders. *Oxytocin* facilitates parental bonding with children, lowers blood pressure and heart rates, de-stresses, and generates feelings of calmness and happiness.

You may feel the effects of these hormones in milliseconds. This is why your brain finds such extreme pleasure in say the first chop of George Harrison's guitar in *A Hard Day's Night* or Stephen

Stills' chiming acoustic in *Suite Judy Blue Eyes*. Before you think, you already feel the benefits of positive blood chemistry, emotions, and memories—and the goodness you feel grows as your favorite song progresses. By the time this positiveness tidal-waves to your brain's cognitive center, your attention is guided toward positive thoughts, habits, and behaviors, not dysfunctional ones.

A colleague who plays *Christmas carols* for Alzheimer sufferers told me that some patients can't remember their own names or his, and yet all he has to do is play a few bars of *White Christmas* and some can remember most of the melody—and lyrics. Such memory is triggered by the brain's emotional center—from music the patients enjoyed at key times in life. Motor, math, and other life-skill functions are encoded with memory—

reason to use music to rehabilitate people who've suffered brain damage.

Music is powerful medicine. It can make you feel good upon demand. It keeps your mind in flow, changes your blood chemistry, motivates you, mines good memories—cascading more pleasure deep in your cells and fueling your life with much sweetness and light.

I encourage you to luxuriate in your favorite songs. Try playing them before you jog or attend a meeting, phone call, or get together. If logistics won't cooperate, sing one to yourself or listen to it in your mind. Fill yourself with this clean, accessible, positive energy. Use it to keep your mind and body happy. **PE**

Joseph Cardillo is the best-selling author of Can I Have Your Attention? and contributes to Psychology Today. Visit www.josephcardillo.com.

ACTION: Use music to cultivate your mind.

MENTAL • ATTITUDE

Bumble Bee Attitude

Don't waste your time worrying.



by Joe Cala

ENGINEERS WILL TELL YOU that there is no possible way the bumblebee can fly.

His wingspan isn't broad enough, he is too heavy, and his body build makes flight impossible. Fortunately, the bee doesn't understand aeronautics, and so he just goes along and flies anyway!

Decide to have a *bumblebee attitude*—and just fly anyway! Fight to be the best you that you can be! Despise the fear of failure and rejection and live your life to the max! Don't listen to nay-sayers, critics, or bad news.

"Success means doing the best you can with what you have," says Zig Ziglar. "It is the doing, not the getting; the trying, not the triumph. It is a personal standard, reaching for the highest in you, being all you can be."

Do Your Best Today!

When you do *the best you can*, where you are, with what you have now, you live in success! So, don't hold back and save the best for later. Don't wait for a reunion, special occasion, big event, specific job, or VIP before you show what you know and can do. *Do your best in your field every day.*

Rather than focus on *things you don't have*, focus on the *things you do have*. You may think you need more equipment, programs, incentives, training,

intelligence, or money to be your best. Such resources may add value to your life and help you become your best, but if you're not maximizing what abilities and resources you have now, you won't when you get more, either. Use what you have now. Sharpen your skills, and master your craft! *Practice doing your best*—and when game time comes, *you'll perform your best.*

"Don't be afraid to give your best to hard jobs," said Dale Carnegie. "Every time you conquer one, you become stronger. If you do the little jobs well, the big ones take care of themselves."

Give your best in every matter, small and large, and you will experience the best each matter has to offer.

Give your best now! Don't wait until later or tomorrow. Start where *you* are now. Don't let circumstances, people or excuses hold you back from giving your best. If it's in your power to do it now, don't wait until tomorrow.

Don't Wait To Tomorrow!

Today is a gift—that's why it's called *the present*. Open up your today with enthusiasm. You are alive today. Today, you can make a change. Don't worry about *tomorrow*. Worry paralyzes you. So, don't worry about things you can change—because you can change them. And don't worry about things you can't change—because you can't change them. Share your best with the world today, with a *bumblebee attitude*, and don't worry about tomorrow! **PE**

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ACTION: Cultivate the bumblebee attitude.

Emotional Fitness

Try rewiring your brain!



by Patt Lind-Kyle

THINKING POSITIVELY CAN restore your mental and emotional health. Your brain can be sculpted by pure mental activity. For example, the size of the brain's motor cortex will increase if you simply imagine yourself practicing the piano, even if your fingers don't touch a keyboard. You can change the way you react to a situation by practicing a new ideal response. When you generate new thoughts, you change neuronal pathways in your brain and release the hold of old emotional patterns. That enables you to feel, think, and behave differently. You can alleviate depression, anxiety, and stress by changing how you think.

Your mind and brain are naturally wired to give you peace and happiness.

Happiness is your birthright. Life isn't meant to be one struggle after another. You were designed to be happy—all of the time! So why aren't you? You are driven by the desire to *be special, be liked, and be the best* (the Buddha classified these desires as a form of suffering, because they produce stress, tension, and discontentment). You are wired for what will make you happy, and what you really want is *not* success and fame—it is peace, kindness, and happiness. Fulfillment does not come from attaining your desires in the outer world, but from embracing your inner self—the real source of your greater identity and peace of mind. You need to be comfortable with yourself as you are—not as how society tells you to be. You achieve this by attaining brain synchrony via meditative mind training. With practice, you can release yourself from your negative thinking, focus on what doesn't work in your life, and then change it.

Mental training enables you to find your flow. Have you ever had a day when you were mentally focused, engaged, and immersed in what you were doing? Perhaps you even felt that the people with whom you needed to connect simply showed up exactly when you needed them. This *flow* moves in the direction of the prefrontal lobes, the area of self-awareness that gathers meaning. Flow merges action with acute awareness. It is usually accompanied by a sense of being alive and joyful. In flow, your

brain functions and neural networks are working together optimally.

Unfortunately, your experience of flow can easily be disrupted. Often, your thoughts, emotions, and actions are stuck in patterns that perpetuate stress and poor health. With training, though, you can identify and remove the thoughts and reactions that cause stress. You can maximize your ability to be aware and peaceful. When information is moving through your brain optimally, you'll have flexible responses, be rational in thinking, self-aware and reflective in thought, intentional in communication, and positive in attitude.

Meditative mind training grows and rewires the brain. The mental focus that meditation requires activates your brain

circuitry, promotes tissue growth, and results in awareness and self-knowledge, enabling you to regulate your emotions and respond to difficulties with ease.

Four mental tools can help you:

- **Intention.** The brain thrives on direction and purpose. When you give yourself intentional directions, you give each level of your brain a specific focus to explore how that "frequency" functions. For example, you might set your intention on having emotional awareness. *Intention is about "what."*
- **Attention.** Attention is where you place your focus. When teamed with intention, it enables you to establish a field of awareness and sustain your mind in a single-focused manner. Since concentration can bring balance and stability, attention is a stress-reducing tool. *Attention is about "where."*
- **Receptivity.** The mind blocks what it does not wish to acknowledge. By embracing what is in your mind, you become more sensitive to what is happening in each moment. Your responses will be more flexible because past

thoughts and automatic influences will be disrupted. *Receptivity is about "when."*

- **Awareness.** Awareness helps you distinguish between *perceptions* of what is happening and what is *actually* happening. It comes from being attentive, and keeps you from getting lost in random thoughts. When aware, you're open to meaning, purpose, and hope, and can penetrate the "me-focus" that veils your mind. *Awareness is about "how."*

With training, you can reprogram what blocks the mind's flow and move rapidly to a higher state of synchrony.

Get in touch with your emotions.

Nobody likes to feel pain, sadness, or anxiety. It seems only natural to avoid these unpleasant feelings by ignoring them or pushing them aside. However, resisting what you're thinking and feeling *isn't* natural—and it limits yourself in areas in which you want to improve.

Many human behaviors are emotion-driven. Repressed painful experiences are stored in your subconscious and in your body, and when a situation evokes an emotional memory, your behavior is affected. When destructive and disturbing emotional reactions are triggered, you behave in the same old way. You might find a fulfilling life elusive because low self-confidence and poor self-image influence your reactions.

You can reprogram your brain through self-reflection, mind training, awareness and persistence. You can identify self-defeating beliefs that are linked to memory and stored in your subconscious mind. Acknowledge the fears and behaviors those beliefs have caused, and then address your negative and painful feelings. I call it *Facing, Embracing, and Erasing*. You might say to yourself, "I am uncertain, but capable." Confronting feelings and putting them into words alleviates distress, enables you to be more receptive to your needs, and makes you more flexible.

Find your Home Base. When you develop *focused inner and outer awareness*, you break through the restrictive me-focused mindset and become open to what's occurring in the moment. You'll feel a new freedom and find a place that feels like home—where you are free and comfortable, in flow with your life's direction. Learning how to train your mind can lead you to your ideal life. You'll recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary. Your brain will operate in synchrony, and you'll create the life you want to live! PE

Patt Lind-Kyle is therapist, speaker, trainer, consultant, and author of *Heal Your Mind, Rewire Your Brain* (Energy Psychology Press). Visit www.healrewireyourbrain.com.

ACTION: Find your home base.

Are You Trigger-Proof?

Hold on to your power and peace.



by Gay Lynn
Williamson-Grigas

HOLDING ON TO YOUR power is like holding a TV remote control. When people push your buttons, you might be giving them power over you, over your “programming.” You won’t realize how often you do this, and when it happens you may get mad about it, or feel frustrated, discouraged, and disempowered.

You can learn to hold on to your power. When you have your buttons pushed, you need to regain your remote control and learn you have the power to change your channels. If you lose your cool or confidence by giving someone your remote, learn to get your power back.

Inside you resides your center of internal power and authority—your internal command center where you have personal authority over yourself. From this place, you can use your power to influence people around you. No matter what someone may do or say, you retain your strength and power.

When you are challenged to hold on to your power, you may feel defensive and frustrated, take offense, and think: “I feel like his target and punching bag.” “I feel that I just have to take it.” “Is something wrong with me?”

You may feel justified in lashing back at someone with words or actions that only make the relationships tenser and more guarded. You may get more aggravated and locked in your stuff—not seeing the other person’s point of view. You might obsess about the relationship instead of doing your work. You might put your resume out to other positions. But without learning to hold on to your power, you are destined to only keep repeating the same mistake.

If you do not have a firm place of power established within yourself, you may experience powerlessness—one of the most uncomfortable and horrible sensations you can experience. To you, it may feel as though another person grabs your power or takes something of significance and value away from you. You do not realize you are participating in letting them take your power from you. You may need to learn how to hold on to your remote control and not let other people take your power away from you and push your buttons.

Some people in positions of authority

enjoy triggering you. They may try to make a power grab from you in order to feel more power. You can’t change them—you can only change yourself.

You tend to see the world and your work through your unique lens of perception, your personal glasses, which influence how you perceive everything.

You can learn how to get your needs met while meeting the needs of others.

You can hold on to your power and communicate clearly how you see a situation. This style is free from the judgments and evaluations that cloud or taint your communications.

Describe the situation using I phrases: “I see . . .” “I feel . . .” “I want . . .” or “I’d like . . .” You take responsibility for your perception, which may differ from the perception of the other person.

Think of how you might do this:

“Son, I see you like to debate decisions and engage me in an argument. I feel exhausted and frustrated by these debates. I want to suggest an alternative. I’d like to give written recommendations first so I have a chance to share my ideas; once you’ve read them, we can discuss how we could both make improvements.”

Your son could say “no”; but if you never ask, your needs will never be met.

Hold on to your power and peace of mind. Holding on to your power will improve all your relationships. By doing a little self exploration and self-empowerment, you can discover when you are most vulnerable and learn how to hold on to your power and peace of mind. **PE**

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ACTION: Hold on to your power and peace.

EMOTIONAL • LOVE

Your Love Choice

Getting love, or being loving.



by Margaret Paul

INVITE YOU TO THINK ABOUT your real intention when it comes to love: Is it most important to you to *get someone to love you*—to get love—or is it more important to you to *be a loving person*—to give love to yourself and others?

Daily, you have one of these two intentions. Your choice determines your experience of love.

Getting Love

In this mode, you move into relationships *to be loved*. If you were not loved fully as a child and your parents did not role model loving relationships, you likely believe that *getting love* will make you feel best about yourself. So, you look for someone who you feel really values you rather than learning how to see and value yourself. You believe that the only way you’ll feel lovable is when someone loves you.

If the partner you pick is also looking to *get love*, you’ll both want *control* over getting that love. Soon you feel disappointed that your *control tactics*—giving gifts and compliments, acting superior, getting judgmental, being demanding or angry—don’t work. You decide that you either chose the wrong partner and move on, or you try harder to control—convincing, explaining, debating, arguing, talking things out. But if you

are not first giving love to yourself, you will be disappointed and feel unloved.

Being Loving

When you take responsibility for loving yourself—for defining your worth, taking loving care of yourself, and filling yourself with love—you seek a relationship to share your love with another. You see relationships as learning opportunities to further develop your ability to love yourself and others. Relationships become opportunities to grow, play, share, and love, rather than to get love, security, and validation.

When your intent is to *be loving*, you don’t see relationships as having to meet your needs. Real love doesn’t need anything from the other person. Real love is giving caring, compassion, and understanding for the joy of loving, not with an agenda to get love back. Until you take full, 100 percent responsibility for your feelings of pain, joy, worth, and security, you’ll likely look for someone to take away your pain and make you feel safe, worthy, and secure. No one, other than yourself, can do this for you.

When you make another *responsible for your feelings*, you abandon yourself—and that’s the cause of your pain and low self worth. Once you decide to *be loving* rather than to *get love*, you’ll seek to learn how to be loving to yourself and share your love with others. You are the only one who can consistently bring yourself the love you need. **PE**

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is a best-selling author of eight books and co-creator of the Inner Bonding healing process. Visit www.innerbonding.com.

ACTION: Give yourself the love you need.

Success this New Year

Give up the bad habits for good!



by Max Izenberg

BEING HUMAN, WE ARE ALL creatures of habit. Of course, not all habits are bad; successful people generally have good habits. You may envy the office receptionist with her impeccable time management and multi-tasking skills, or the manager who not only handles a busy workload but also lends a helping hand to her team—and makes it all look easy. You may look up to these role models.

As you form your New Year's resolutions, you begin to visualize a new person—an improved model over last year. However, while you have good intentions, how can you keep these promises and throw away the bad habits? The key is to make the promises more of a possibility instead of a one-time pledge. As Mark Twain said, "Giving up smoking is easy—I've done it hundreds of times." And as Somerset Maugham wrote: "Good habits are so much easier to give up than bad ones."

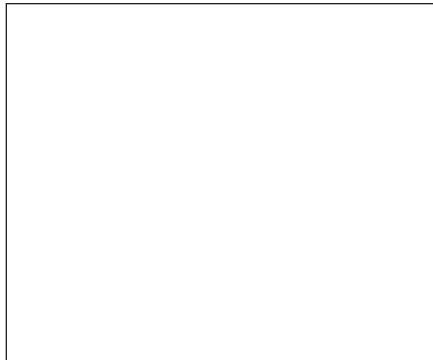
The good news is that it can be done. I experienced my own transformation and lifestyle change 10 years ago. Today, I am slim, fit, and energized—without prescription pills and medications.

Correct Six Bad Habits

If you're guilty of committing these six bad habits, follow my tips to get back on the path to personal progress:

- **Tardiness.** Are you guilty of showing up to the office, appointments, or meetings a few minutes late? This habit can hamper your career, so put an end to it. How? Little changes here and there can make it less of a challenge! For example, move the time on your clocks forward by five or 10 minutes, or place a note on your mirror that says, "I will show up on time!" These tips will mentally prepare you to arrive on time and serve as daily motivators. Also, make your morning routine easier and more efficient. Eat a quick breakfast at home or set your coffeemaker instead of stopping at the coffee shop. You can select your clothes the night before to shave a few minutes from your routine. If overcoming tardiness seems overwhelming, try one change first and master it. Then add a few others; soon you'll be known for showing up early!

- **Overeating.** Do you snack on bad-for-you foods? This unhealthy habit can lead to some sneaky pounds on your frame. It can be even worse if you have to travel for work and eat out. However, if you want to drop those love handles, start by visualizing yourself a few pounds lighter. Buy yourself an amazing work outfit, but buy it a size or two smaller. Then, hang it next to your mirror so you see it each day as you get ready for work. Imagine how great you will look and how your colleagues, friends, and relatives will see you in a different and slimmer light. Then put it into action by bringing lunch to work a few days each week, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Bringing a pedometer to work can



help keep you on the right track to achieving that image. Soon you'll work off those few pounds and become the vision you've been thinking about.

- **Discourtesy.** Do you talk loudly on the phone or wear too much cologne—to the point you irritate co-workers? If your bad habit is discourtesy, become aware of others' thoughts and respect how they feel. If you play your music too loudly or wear too much perfume, establish a new reputation. Step out of your world so you can understand how others see you. Then, take steps to repair your image, whether it's taking your personal calls outside during a break or easing up on the fragrance. It's hard to recognize your bad habits and realize the effect they have on others. Once you do and take courteous steps, congratulate and reward yourself!

- **Smoking.** Is your bad habit *unhealthy* and *unpopular* with your loved ones and colleagues? If you're the only smoker in your office, then you likely know how it feels. Make this your year

to quit, and share your decision with your officemates for increased success. Give them the actual date you plan to quit, and chances are they will help hold you accountable. In fact, their support may help you create a successful and clean break from smoking! Sharing your goals with a supportive community (including friends and family) is an effective way to end those toxic habits.

- **Procrastination.** Are you the person who waits until the last possible minute to finish your projects? Do you make everyone wait on pins and needles to see if your work will arrive on time? Unfortunately, procrastinating won't lead you far on your career path. So, replace that bad habit with a good one! Manage your time instead of letting it manage you. Use both electronic calendars/reminders and paper calendars to keep you on track. Do you need to look at one day at a time, a week or month at a time to stay focused? Choose what works for you. If you are easily distracted by other projects, e-mails and conference calls, schedule a block of time to focus on one project—and only that one project. You can even ask a trusted colleague to hold you accountable for your deadlines. Utilize a system that works for you, and eventually your procrastination habit will disappear.

- **Being a "Yes" man or woman.** Are you the colleague everyone turns to when they need help? While this can be a good thing, it can also suggest that people are taking advantage of your "just-can't-say-no" nature. In fact, you may be overwhelmed by all the projects and committees you've taken on. Now is the time to break that habit and create a goal that works. If you feel guilty about saying "no," try this exercise: look into the mirror and practice saying it. Get comfortable with saying the word. Then, prioritize your goals. If you say "yes" to every project, you won't have time for your own responsibilities. Make a list of the important projects and activities, then prioritize the rest. Start saying "no" to those that do not make it into your top five list.

Breaking bad habits usually takes about 30 days, so be resolute during the first month. Realize that beyond New Year, it's up to you to stay accountable for your actions—no matter what time of year you make your promises. In the quest for self-improvement, don't let your bad habits block your success! **PE**

Max Izenberg helps people create healthier lifestyles, a speaker and author of *Reaching for 100*. Visit www.MaxLiving.ms or call 1-888-240-4495.

ACTION: Develop one success habit in 2010.

Flip Your Thinking

Five ways to be an asset.



by Pat Heydlauff

ARE YOU AN ASSET OR LIABILITY at work? No matter who you are or what your job description is, you've probably thought "Am I the next to go?" You don't have to be so worried about losing your job, if you flip your thinking.

Start thinking about how to improve the long-term survival of your business. This thinking isn't just top-down or bottom-up—it needs to be inside-out.

Your business can't afford to lose its market share or dip into operating capital because there will be no resources left for marketing, advertising, and hiring when the economy rebounds. Thus, you need to think survival, reduce expenses, and look for ways to change for the better without any negative financial impact on existing capital.

Do whatever it takes to help your business survive, because, if you are an asset, you will survive as part of the team. In a downturn, it's no longer business as usual. It's about thinking in a new way so that everyone wins. If the company wins, you win by receiving an income and supporting yourself and your family. If the company loses, you and your associates may become that liability the company can no longer afford instead of an asset that is essential for helping the company survive.

Five Things You Can Do

Here are five things you can do to make yourself an asset:

1. Eliminate energy drainers and organize so you can find anything you need at a moment's notice. Time is money. You'll save time and money by using fewer resources and being productive.

2. Upgrade your thinking. It's not just about you—it's about *all* of you surviving. Flip your thinking to "we" mode not "them versus us" mode. We're all in this together. It's not about you surviving but rather the company surviving so all of you can make it through the downturn and take part in the upturn whether it's six or 16 months from now.

3. Focus on the most important things you have to accomplish in a day and do them first. Put aside the instant messaging, texting, and Twittering for after hours. Get rid of all the personal pictures and items on your desk and

walls. They all serve to distract you from the job at hand. If you must multitask, stay focused on the big picture and what will help you help the company survive. Focusing makes you more efficient, effective, and valuable.

4. Think teamwork! It isn't management *versus* everyone else or one department *versus* another. It's about getting the job done in a timely fashion and helping each other. It's about cutting many costs in many ways. Encourage and motivate each other. Think like a champion football team, or the swimming team that helped Michael Phelps win his eighth Olympic Gold Medal. Your Gold Medal is the survival of the company you work for and the survival of your job because you're an asset.

5. Do something creative to get the right side of your brain working. The

right side of the brain helps you create new ideas and solve problems. You are an asset when you find ways to solve problems, improve survivability, and increase market share. Such breakthrough thinking comes through creativity. Right brain activities include playing an instrument, writing, painting, sculpting, quiet walks in nature, or meditation. If you're at your desk, take a minute to do creative visualization. Close your eyes and mentally visit a place you love—remembering to breathe deeply.

You are either a liability and expense or an asset and a growth grower. To be on the asset side, think "we!" **PE**

Pat Heydlauff is president of Energy Design and a consultant, speaker, and author of Feng Shui: So Easy a Child Can Do It. Visit www.Energy-by-Design.com or call 561-799-3443.

ACTION: *Be an indispensable asset at work.*

Your Mistakes

They can be good for you.



by Suzann Rye

HAVE YOU EVER MADE A mistake and wished that you hadn't? Of course you have! We all have. Well, you've had such regrets for the last time!

Part of your life purpose is to learn from mistakes and so-called failures.

Learn to decode them, turn poison into medicine, and perceive obstacles, problems, and failures as exciting challenges and opportunities for growth.

If you were to say *I made an experience* instead of *I made a mistake* every time you experienced "failure" in your life, you'd then automatically

look at yourself and those mistakes and failures in a different light. Failure is a matter of perception.

Mistakes are good for you. They point out things that you need to look at. They remind you not to fall asleep behind the wheel. They lead you further along the road to becoming better at what you do so that you can go on to teach others, which is a great gift.

Mistakes can inspire and encourage you to keep moving and progressing.

Nobody is perfect—we all make mistakes, no matter how smart, well trained, or experienced. When we do, we feel terrible and stupid, and think that we're alone in making mistakes, and so we tend to put ourselves down.

Don't beat yourself up. Recognize the experience for what it is—a loud wake-up call! Consider what happened and why. Constructively evaluate yourself. Take responsibility, learn, and move on. Learning and progressing are exciting. So, be grateful for a chance to learn something. Is it uncomfortable at the time? Sure. So cringe, if you must, then laugh, dust yourself off, and move on. Don't be too hard on yourself.

Life is all about choices. No matter what choices you make, you'll make mistakes. Those tell you about yourself—your needs, passions, and place in the world. Relish those choices and lessons. Be grateful daily for the wisdom they represent. It's yours for the keeping and sharing.

Allow yourself to dream and think big, dare something worthy, make many mistakes along the way—and fill up your knowledge box! Each time you make a mistake, you make a deposit in your

bank account. Your knowledge expands and grows; and the more you give out, the more you get back. Your wealth grows even more—and it starts with a few mistakes!

Mistakes can turn out to be blessings in disguise. So, next time you make a mistake, smile and be happy—you made a huge deposit. Think how rich you are and how much more you can afford to share with others.

Indeed, mistakes are good for you—they make you who you are and often account for your most valuable treasures of wisdom and knowledge. **PE**

Suzann Rye is a speaker, author, and expert on voice and performance training. Visit www.suzannrye.com.

ACTION: *Learn from your mistakes.*

Taxing Time

Keep more money.



by Eric Tyson

INCOURAGE YOU TO CRAFT A tax strategy to save more of your money so that this year, when you have your W-2 in hand, tax season won't be all bad news. Even if you're not expecting a fat refund, the looming presence of April 15 can inspire you to make changes that will keep more of your cash out of the clutches of the IRS—now and in the future.

You may have had a tough year—many Americans have faced job losses, pay cuts, foreclosures, and constricting budgets—and now, here comes Uncle Sam with his hand out! But a smart tax strategy can help you *keep more money in your pocket* now when you need it most. It will enable you to cross “taxes” off of your list of worries and help you put some money back in your pocket.

Here are six tips:

1. Revisit your withholdings. Do you dread April 15 because it means you have to cut a big check to pay your tax bill? Or maybe you have to skimp and save during the year but then get a big tax refund when you turn in your taxes? Either way, you need to adjust your withholdings. You can do so by filling out a Form W-4—one of many forms you filled out on your first day at your job and likely haven't thought about since—and turning it into your employer. You'll see an adjustment in how much you bring home on your paycheck within a month. If you or your spouse has recently lost a job, changing your withholdings might put some extra money in your pocket—especially if one of you has been withholding too much. Be sure that your withholding matches your tax liability. Adjusting your withholding just so you get more out of a paycheck isn't a good idea if you're not prepared to pay the bigger tax when your taxes come due.

2. Be a fast filer. You receive your W-2 form in January and hold on to it until you file in April. Or, you can file now and have refund money within a few weeks. Thanks to e-filing, there is no reason to wait until April 15. If you e-file either by using a website or DIY taxes computer software, you can set up your refund so that it is direct deposited into your bank account, usually in

about 10 days—great news for cash-strapped people who are making the most of every penny now. The flipside, of course, is that if you know you are going to have to write a check to the IRS, you might as well wait as long as possible to file, because you can hold on to the money just a little longer.

3. Review the stimulus package or new laws looking for beneficial tax credits. You might receive a \$500 or \$1,000 payroll tax credit. Just be sure that you spend it wisely. It's easy to look at one-time stimulus checks as *free money* and spend the cash on something you want rather than need. You are likely better off rolling the money into your IRA or using it to make a safe, long-term investment. In this way you can make that check go much further than a new flat-screen TV.

4. Invest in your home. Home ownership has always yielded tax benefits for smart, sensible buyers. The stimulus package sweetened the pot with a tax credit of \$7,500 to first-time home-

owners or those who haven't owned a home in the last three years. I would never recommend that anyone purchase a home for tax benefits only; I feel that if you're financially and emotionally ready to buy a home, now is the time. It's also a good time to make home improvements. Home loan rates, property prices, and mortgage rates are low, and your interest on mortgage payments is tax deductible. Getting a tax credit is just icing on the cake.

5. Fund your retirement. When you funnel your savings dollars into retirement accounts, such as a 401(k), 403(b), SEP-IRA, Keogh, or IRA, you can earn substantial upfront tax breaks on your contributions. You might even consider investing your tax refund check there. And please, don't let worries about the stock market's ups and downs dissuade you from making smart, long-term investments now.

6. Investigate itemizing. If you've looked at itemizing your taxes as too much trouble in the past, now is the

year to start. You might be surprised what a difference spending a little more time on your tax return can make. The IRS gives you two methods of determining your total deductions; you can pick the method that leads to the largest total deductions—and the lowest tax bill. But sometimes the choice isn't so clear, so be prepared to do some figuring. *Taking the standard deduction* usually makes sense if you have a simple financial life—a regular paycheck, a rented apartment, and no large expenses, such as medical bills, moving expenses, or loss due to theft or catastrophe. *Itemizing deductions* on your tax return is more of a hassle, but if you can tally up more than the standard deductions, itemizing saves you money. Schedule A of your 1040 is the page summing up your itemized deductions, but you won't know whether you have enough itemized deductions unless you examine this schedule.

7. Invest in your health. Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) help you keep thousands of dollars away from Uncle Sam every year, save money for a rainy day, and reduce your taxes. An HSA savings account, which is paired with a high-deductible health plan, empowers you to save on a tax-free basis toward current or future unreimbursed medical expenses. If you get sick and haven't met your deductible, the funds in your HSA can be used to pay it off. Once the deductible is paid, your insurance plan will cover subsequent medical costs under your policy, but your HSA can still be used to pay for your co-pays and any non-covered healthcare expenses.

Single people can contribute \$3,000 to an HSA and families can contribute \$5,950. That means, depending on your status, you can reduce your taxable income by \$3,000 or \$5,950 in a given year. If you have your tax refund deposited into your IRA, but would like to deposit some of the money into your HSA, you can now choose to have your refund split between as many as three accounts. It's a great way to make the U.S. tax system work for you.

In this economy, don't send any more than necessary to Uncle Sam. Doing all you can during tax season to hold on to more of your money will help you manage some of the anxiety you're feeling as you try to make ends meet. Any tiny, money-saving step that helps you feel more in control is one worth taking. **PE**

Eric Tyson, MBA, is author of five national bestsellers, including Personal Finance For Dummies (Wiley) and Investing For Dummies. He is coauthor with Margaret Atkins Munro and David J. Silverman of Taxes 2009 For Dummies (Wiley). Visit www.ericityson.com.

ACTION: Keep more of your money this year.

Doing Less Creates More

Meaning, satisfaction, and results.



by Marc Lesser

YOU CAN EASILY FALL INTO the trap of *busyness*—going from one thing to another—from demands at home to demands at work to emails to exercise to relationships—without stopping, reflecting, or recharging. You become like a carpenter who doesn't stop to sharpen his tools. So, the tools become dull; more effort is needed; and less is accomplished. You think you must move faster and work harder.

Truth is, you are both carpenter and tools, since you are responsible for keeping the blade (yourself) honed. Busyness dulls the blade, resulting in unnecessary and ineffectual effort, and convinces you that you lack the time to keep sharp. The day's deadlines make you believe you don't even have 10 minutes to reflect or do the very things that you most want, or things that would make your efforts easier and more effective. You become accustomed to using a dull tool, and may not notice how much extra effort you're exerting for diminishing returns.

Unlike a carpenter, you don't need to do anything extra to return to your original state of sharpness and full-functioning. You only need to *do less of what gets in the way*. You usually become over-busy for laudable reasons—you are earning money, pursuing your dreams, being responsible, assisting your family members or colleagues, and seeking happiness and freedom. Having a lot to do, being active, is not innately bad. But this becomes over-the-top busyness when it makes you feel depleted.

Power of Sabbath

When my two children were young, we made a *weekly day of doing less* a part of our family ritual. We borrowed some ideas from the Jewish Sabbath as well as Buddhist Day of Mindfulness practices. At the heart of our day, we had three simple rules: 1) no spending money; 2) no watching television; 3) do something together as a family. These guidelines produced impressive results in the quality of those 24 hours. What a relief to not buy anything, not have the television on, and spend time simply enjoying each other's presence. My wife and I talked more with our children; we read books, told stories, played games, went for walks, and shared meals. The biggest benefit of this structured break was that, for a day,

the pace of our lives slowed down and our family connections increased.

At the end, we observed the Jewish tradition of looking for the first three stars to become visible on Saturday evening. It was exciting for the four of us to stand on our deck together, as the sun faded.

Instituting rest and simplicity is not a magic wand for perfection. There were occasional disagreements, grumpiness, and boredom. But our imperfections often emerge as the most endearing parts of ourselves, and those "Sabbath" days stand out as building blocks and great memories for our growing family. You can create a regular Sabbath or retreat in your life whether you live by yourself, with others, or with a family of any size.

You're born with all the wisdom, playfulness, and imagination you need. You just need reminders that you have all

you need—just let go of distractions, fears, and busyness. Let yourself think, feel, and live that way. Embodying and acting from this place results in greater composure and effectiveness.

Once a day, try these practices:

- Create a "Sabbath" for yourself and observe some simple rules, such as no spending money, no TV, doing something as a family or enriching activity.
- Think this thought: *I am perfect just as I am*. Try writing and speaking it.
- Ask yourself: *What is one project I want to accomplish? What are next steps?*

By bringing your habits into greater awareness and challenging assumptions, you can produce surprising results. **PE**

Marc Lesser is CEO of ZBA Assoc. and author of *Less: Accomplishing More by Doing Less* (New World Library). Visit www.doingless.net or call 1-800-972-6657.

ACTION: Create more by doing less.

Financial Literacy

Survive the financial crisis.



by Kim Snider

IN MANY FAMILIES, BALANCING the bank account is an activity that is ignored.

It's even harder for families who know they make less money than they owe in bills at the end of the month, but ignoring the bankbook or spreadsheet won't make the bills go away. If you think of your household as a business, with revenue and payables instead of paychecks and bills, you might start using business principles to bring your personal finances issues into focus.

If you are struggling to get out from under the financial crunch, I invite you to become your family's Chief Financial Officer, instilling the principles of fiscal responsibility and management.

Follow four easy steps:

Plan prudently. Whether you pay bills online or by check, you can easily see what you owe in bills every month. Gather the paperwork into one stack, or create a computer file that details all your regular monthly expenditures. Combine it with your pay stubs and records of any other income. Now, you have a clear picture of your revenue and payables. You also have due dates for those bills, so you can match your cash flow (when you get paid) with when bills are due. Now, plan what you'll pay and when you'll pay it. If

you review your expenses weekly, you'll always know where your money is and where it's going.

Save prodigiously. Saving money always gets delayed. But saving is more than creating a stockpile of cash for a rainy day—it's about weathering the drizzles that come monthly in the form of unexpected car repairs, medical bills, home repairs, clothes for kids. If you can put away even \$10 a week, it can save you if you need a car repair the same week you buy holiday gifts.

Invest wisely. Take advantage of any employer-sponsored retirement plans and 401K plans by allowing them to *deduct the maximum amount from your paychecks*. If employers match that money, you save twice the amount for retirement. Plus, the more you save up front, the more you'll benefit from the magic of compounded interest. The few dollars in cash flow you sacrifice now (pre-tax dollars) will be worth it when you see your retirement balance grow later.

Manage risk. Your biggest risk is the loss of your regular income. Most families who are in trouble today aren't in crisis because of natural disaster or catastrophic illness, but because someone in the household lost a job. You can hedge that risk by keeping your job skills current and competitive, and by having disability insurance.

When you manage your finances, your life runs much smoother. **PE**

Kim Snider is president of Snider Advisors, investment advisor, speaker, host of Financial Success Coaching, and author of *How to Be the Family CFO*. Visit www.kimsnider.com.

ACTION: Start managing your money.

Good to Great

Serve by being selective.



by Jim Collins

DURING MY FIRST YEAR ON the Stanford faculty in 1988, I sought out professor John Gardner for guidance on how I might become a better teacher. Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and author of the classic text *Self-Renewal*, stung me with a comment that changed my life.

"It occurs to me, Jim, that you spend too much time trying to be interesting," he said. "Why don't you invest more time being interested."

I don't know if this article will prove interesting, but I do know that it results from my growing interest in social sectors. It is simply not good enough to focus solely on having a great business sector. If we only have great companies, we will merely have a prosperous society, not a great one. Economic growth and power are the means, not the definition, of a great nation.

We must reject the idea that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become *more like a business*. Most businesses fall between mediocre and good. Few are great. When you compare great companies with good ones, many widely practiced business norms turn out to correlate with mediocrity, not greatness. So, why would we want to import the practices of mediocrity into the social sectors?

I shared this perspective with some business CEOs and offended nearly everyone. A hand shot up from David Weekley, a thoughtful CEO—a man who built a very successful company and who now spends nearly half his time working with the social sectors. "Do you have evidence to support your point?" he demanded. "In my work with nonprofits, I find that they're in desperate need of greater discipline—disciplined planning, people, governance, and allocation of resources."

"What makes you think that's a business concept?" I replied. "Most businesses also have a desperate need for greater discipline—disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and take disciplined action. A culture of discipline is not a principle of business—it is a principle of greatness."

Later, at dinner, I asked him: "If you

had taken a different path in life and become, say, a church leader, university president, nonprofit leader, hospital CEO, or school superintendent, would you have been any less disciplined? Any less likely to practice enlightened leadership, or put less energy into getting the right people on the bus, or less demanding of results?" He replied, "No."

That's when it dawned on me: we need a new language. The critical distinction is not between *business and social*, but between *great and good*. We need to reject the naïve imposition of the "language of business" on the social sectors, and instead jointly embrace a *language of greatness*.

The pivot point in *Good to Great* is the *Hedgehog Concept*—to attain piercing clarity about how to produce the best long-term results, and then exercise the discipline to say *No thank you* to opportunities that fail the *hedgehog test*. Good-to-great companies reflect deep understanding of three intersecting circles: 1) what you are deeply pas-

sionate about, 2) what you can be the best in the world at, and 3) what best drives your economic engine.

Social sector leaders find the *Hedgehog Concept* helpful, but many rebel against the third circle, the economic engine. I found this puzzling. Sure, making money is not the point, but you still need to have an economic engine to fulfill your mission.

Then I had a conversation with John Morgan, a pastor of 30 years. "We're a congregation of misfits," said Morgan, "and I found the idea of a unifying Hedgehog Concept to be very helpful. We're passionate about trying to rebuild this community, and we can be the best in our region at creating a generation of transformational leaders that reflects the full diversity of the community. That is our *Hedgehog Concept*."

And what about the *economic engine*? "Oh, we had to change that circle," he said. "It makes no sense in a church."

"How can it not make sense," I pressed. "Don't you need to fund your work?"

"Well, there are two problems. First,

we face a cultural problem of talking about money in a religious setting, coming from a tradition that says love of money is the root of all evil."

"But money is also the root of paying the light and phone bills," I said.

"True," said Morgan, "but you've got to keep in mind the deep discomfort of talking explicitly about money in some church settings. And, we rely on much more than money to keep this place going. How do we get enough resources of all types—not just money to pay the bills, but also time, emotional commitment, hands, hearts, and minds?"

Morgan put his finger on a basic difference between the business and social sectors. The third circle of the *Hedgehog Concept* shifts from being an economic engine to a resource engine. The critical question is not *How much money do we make?* but *How can we develop a sustainable resource engine to deliver superior performance relative to our mission?*

I do not mean to discount systemic factors facing the social sectors. They must be addressed. Still, we can find pockets of greatness in nearly every difficult environment. Every institution has its unique set of irrational and difficult constraints, yet some make a leap while others facing the same environmental challenges do not. Greatness is not a function of circumstance—it is largely a matter of *choice* and *discipline*.

Business executives can more easily fire people and use money to buy talent. Most social sector leaders, on the other hand, must rely on people underpaid relative to the private sector or, in the case of volunteers, paid not at all. Yet the key variable is not how (or how much) you pay, but who you have on the bus. Companies that fail to become great place greater emphasis on using incentives to "motivate" otherwise unmotivated or undisciplined people.

Great companies and service firms focus on getting and hanging on to the right people—those who are productively neurotic, self-motivated and self-disciplined, who wake up every day, compulsively driven to do the best they can because it is part of their DNA. In the social sectors, when big incentives (or compensation at all, in the case of volunteers) are not possible, the *First Who* principle becomes even more important. Lack of resources is no excuse for lack of rigor—it makes selectivity all the more vital. **PE**

Jim Collins is the best-selling author of Good to Great. This article is adapted from Good to Great and the Social Sectors: Why Business Thinking Is Not the Answer. Visit www.jimcollins.com.

ACTION: Be selective in who you serve with.

Effective Activism

Yes, you can change the world.



by Byron Katie

AS YOUR MIND CHANGES, your world changes. A clear mind heals everything that needs to be healed and sees that, in a sense, the world is perfect just as it is.

Does this mean that you don't need to get involved in politics or social action? No. Disengagement is separation. If a person came to you and said, "I'm suffering. Please help me," would you say, "You're perfect just the way you are" and turn away? No, you naturally respond to people and animals in need.

I'd travel to the ends of the earth for the sake of one person who is suffering. The desperate one, the hopeless one, is an unenlightened cell of my own body. It's my own body—the *body of the world is my body*. How can I say *no* when that person asks for help? I'd be saying *no* to myself. So I say *yes* and I go, if I can. It's a privilege. It's more: it's self-love.

When I meet someone who's suffering, I don't say, "There's no problem." I've been trapped in the torture chamber of the mind. I hear what he thinks he needs, I hear his sadness or despair, and I'm available. That's full activism. In the presence of someone who doesn't see a problem, the problem falls away.

People ask me, "How can you listen to problems, day after day? Doesn't it drain your energy?" No, it doesn't. I see that my stressful thoughts—thoughts that may look like a poisonous snake—are actually a rope. I could stand over that rope for years and not be frightened.

If you have a problem with people or with the state of the world, I invite you to question your thoughts, and do it for the love of truth, not to save the world. Turn it around: *save your own world*. Isn't that why you want to save the world in the first place—so you can be happy? Skip the middleman, and be happy! In this turnaround, you remain active, but there's no fear, no internal war. So it ceases to be war trying to teach peace. War can't teach peace. Only peace can.

I don't try to change the world—the world changes by itself, and I'm a part of the change. I'm a lover of what is. When asked for help, I say *yes*. I inquire, and they begin to end *their suffering*.

I stand in my own truth and don't presume to know what's best for the planet. Knowing that the world is per-

fect doesn't mean that you withdraw or stop doing what you know is right for you to do. If, for example, you're concerned about the environment, please get the facts and help us. And if you talk to us clearly, without an agenda, we can hear you, since you're on our level. You're not talking to us from a superior, I-know position. If you know that we're all doing the best we can, *you can be the most powerful activist on the planet.*

Love is the power. The only way to be an effective activist is to give the facts, to tell your experience honestly, and to love without condition. You can't convince the world of anything if you are full of self-righteousness and presume to know what's best for the planet.

SERVICE • LISTENING

Please, Just Listen!

It's a service to self and others.



by Joan C. Curtis

YOU MAY THINK THAT YOU are a great listener, and yet be guilty of "listening" but not hearing? You may even fake listening and reply with a response or solution designed to shut the person up.

When a person presents a problem, you tend to offer a solution, but solution-driven responses are not *listening*. You can't solve a problem if you have not heard it. Besides, what makes you think you have the perfect solution?

Try three listening tips:

1. When your head is busy thinking up solutions, stop and ask yourself, what is this person's voice telling me?

Does she sound angry, sad, disappointed? What facial expressions do you see?

2. If someone asks you, "What should I do?" be careful! Rather than answer, say, "You've described a *tough challenge*. Tell me what you've tried?" or "I wonder what the real problem is. Before I jump in with ideas, tell me what's really going on?" or "How about we brainstorm together some possible ideas."

3. People don't always tell you things so you'll solve their problems—sometimes they simply want you to listen and be there for them. Be sure the person wants to hear an idea, suggestion, or view before you share it. Ask permission: "I have an idea. I may be off base, but would you like me to share it?" Or "May I make a suggestion?"

Not listening can destroy a relation-

ship. So, when someone asks, *Do you have a minute?* give the gift of listening.

When you attack a person for destroying the atmosphere, however valid your facts, do you think that he'll be open to what you say? You're threatening him, and the facts can get lost, because you're coming from fear and righteous anger. **Violence teaches only violence.** When you clean up your mental environment, you can then clean up the physical one. If you do that genuinely, without anger or violence in your heart, without pointing at entities as the enemy, people begin to notice. You begin to listen and notice that *change through peace* is possible. It has to begin with one person. Be the one. **PE**

Byron Katie is the author of *Who Would You Be Without Your Story?* Visit www.thework.com.

ACTION: Serve by being an effective activist.

ship. So, when someone asks, *Do you have a minute?* give the gift of listening.

Listen with Heart, Not Head

If you struggle with listening, your head is likely getting in the way. You grapple with ways to communicate your message—how to best say what you want to say. The real question is: What is the other person saying?

Listening with your heart requires a *different kind of listening*. Take five steps:

1. Focus on the other person. What emotions do you hear? How does the voice sound? Sad, angry?

2. Don't take what the person says personally. Get out of the way of the message. Ask what he or she means.

Ask open, probing questions.

3. Get next to the other person. Listen for where the person is. If your son is hurting, feel the hurt with him. Don't try and fix the hurt. If your teenage daughter is angry at you, feel her anger rather than defend yourself.

4. Use your intuition to hear the messages behind the words.

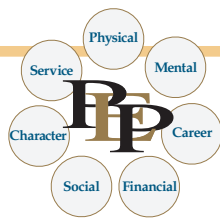
If you feel something inside, you're probably listening with your heart. Take a risk and share what you are feeling inside: "I sense that you're afraid of your boss."

5. Use metaphors to explain your intuition or the other person's feeling. Put what you feel into a visual image: "As you talk, I get this image of a deep well. Tell me how that works for you?"

Practice listening with your heart. The next time you feel frustrated with your communication, get out of the way and let your heart take over. **PE**

Joan Curtis is CEO for *Total Communications Coach* and author of *Managing Sticky Situations at Work*. Visit www.TotalCommunicationsCoach.com.

ACTION: Practice listening with your heart.



GOAL GETTERS



In Miami Beach, we have hurricanes, and yet residents remain calm. We

are used to the fire drills. We know that dark clouds can appear out of nowhere and deliver a torrential downpour. We also know that after two hours, the skies can open up and turn into a wonderful, sunlit day. Such is life. Sometimes storms wreak havoc, and things don't work out as you hope. It's how you cope with, respond to, and rebound from adversity that makes all the difference. Happy people handle adversity much like the residents of Miami handle storms and hurricanes: *they take it in stride and appreciate how it can shake things up for the better.* When you practice happiness from the inside out, adversity reveals hidden strengths, weeds out some relationships, cultivates those that remain, and clarifies what's important in your life.

You are never stronger and clearer about what you want than when you experience extreme adversity. Adversity uncovers *hidden strength* by forcing you to rise to the occasion. You stop looking for happiness and strength in other places and see that everything you need is inside you. ***Trials and tribulations provide opportunities for character expression.*** Adversity is a catalyst for developing character.

—Robert Mack, www.happinessfromtheinsideout.com



I want you to have faith because faith can help you through recession, adversity, and tribulation.

Faith delivers strength in troubled times. I have faced tough times, being raised in a family with 10 sisters and brothers, having an employer cheat me out of money, being accused falsely of criminal activity, and suffering an accident that had me bouncing from doctor to doctor. Through it all, I held fast to my belief in God and was rewarded with happiness and joy. When you face adversity and hopelessness, I assure you that hope is not gone. Hope, the best of things in dark times, can be delivered to you through faith.

I'm living proof that faith works.

Those who suffer can be brought closer to God as a result of their suffering. When you see goodness in someone, you see God. Forgiveness is a key component to a life of faith and redemption, even amid all wrong-doing. You can't get into heaven with hate in your heart. When you turn down the hate and exercise love, you can overcome.

—Joel George, www.signsandvisions.com



Daily motion exercise can make you feel younger.

Mobility is the body's anti-aging agent. When you bathe each joint in nutritive lubricative flow, you revitalize endogenous energy—an energy independent of outside sources. Mobility removes aches and pains (the body's last attempt to communicate that injury is imminent). It halts and reverses accelerated aging; hence, mobility is the elixir of life—an innate *fountain of youth*.

Mobility heals. Without moving each joint every day, you accelerate aging. Mobility takes only 12 minutes a day for 100 percent medical benefits—mobility also boosts your energy. So, move it or lose it. If you move daily, you age, but you don't grow old. Mobility can heal injuries, restore the body's natural healing conduits, abolish chronic pain, and enhance *performance* and longevity.

—Scott Sonnon, www.YourPainFreeMobility.com



You're here to learn particular lessons. For instance, I've worried all of my life about everything. Today,

I worry much less because I learned that worry doesn't work—if it did, I'd be thin and rich. Worry gives us an illusion of control. We think that by worrying, *we're doing something about it*; if we let go, *we'll lose control*.

To stop worry from getting the best of you, breathe deeply while thinking: "It is safe for me to let go, love and trust." Remind yourself of what's true, who you are, and why you love yourself. *Love* and *trust* are sources of power. Take a walk and get into your senses. In such presence, no worry can survive for long.

—Anastasia Netri, *Certified Life Coach*

PersonalCOACH



Stop Thinking Like a Victim
Self-pity blocks joy and confidence.
by Sharon S. Esonis

CASTING YOURSELF IN THE ROLE OF VICTIM IN your inner world and public persona is a straight shot to pain, disappointment, and ineffectiveness. This misguided approach marginalizes your ability to live a fruitful, powerful, and rewarding existence. It restricts your options, blocks your ability to make your goals and dreams come true, and weakens your confidence. Believing you are a victim and acting like one can damage your relationships. People who immerse themselves in the victim role aren't much fun to be around!

Martin Seligman explains that *victimology* (blaming your problems on other people and circumstances) is directly related to *learned helplessness*—wherein you do not believe that your actions matter in terms of how things turn out. The victim role is a form of self-pity. Scottish philosopher Dr. Megan Reik notes: "There are few human emotions as warm, comforting and enveloping as self-pity. And yet nothing is more corrosive and destructive. Turn away from it and move on."

If you are caught in the self-pity trap, extricating yourself might be one of the healthiest changes you'll ever make. It is your right and your responsibility, to decide if the victim role serves you or imprisons you. I see the victim role as a form of *psychological paralysis*.

No matter who or what has *done you wrong*, it won't bring you psychological health and self-confidence to espouse the victim mentality. By definition, a victim is one who has been injured, destroyed, tricked, duped, or given a raw deal; and even if you have experienced something devastating or patently unfair, this approach is not a viable solution.

Victims are often poisoned by resentment of others and self-denigration. If you've been seriously abused and can't get past your injuries, seek professional help. This can be tough territory to go alone. Otherwise, get past it by looking at it from the power point. Power comes from letting these things go.

Counter faulty thoughts and expectations with an empowering, non-reactive discourse. Identify instances in thinking and imagery in which you ordain yourself a dreaded victim. Use distraction techniques, such as thought stopping, to reduce the frequency, intensity, and duration of your misguided thinking. Develop visual imagery and a dialogue in which you're powerful, brave, and successful. **PE**

Sharon S. Esonis, Ph.D., is a Positive Psychology Coach, and author of *It's Your Little Red Wagon*. PositivePathLifeCoaching.com.

ACTION: Counter your negative self-talk.

Make Holidays Holy

Experience light, love, and bliss.



by Asha Praver

THE WORD *HOLIDAY* EVOLVED from the words *holy day*. *Holiday* is about vacation and escape. *Holy Day* connotes worship.

Holidays are so fraught with uncertainty that you may not feel like celebrating. Perhaps instead of trying to make holidays “jolly,” try to make them “holy.” Not that the two are antithetical! It is a question, rather, of where you think your happiness comes from. In a culture of increasing wealth and consumption, your definition of happiness may have become hopelessly entangled with buying and owning material things.

Still, such intangibles as love, honor, peace, family, and friendship rank high on the *happiness scale*—far above things.

So, shall you be dragged kicking and screaming away from your materialistic habits, or shall you embrace—with courage and enthusiasm—a new possibility?

To make your holidays more “Holy days,” consider these five keys:

1. Embrace the idea of God. Sadly, the word *God* in English has no specific meaning. Many so-called “atheists” are not atheists: they believe in the expansive potential of life. What they reject is other people’s *definitions* of God. God is not a dogma or creed. *God is an experience of our own bliss nature.* The Sanskrit word *Satchidanandam* refers to an ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new joy. Let that be the holiness you strive for.

2. Give God a chance to speak to you. Allow quiet to enter your life. You may have become addicted to the constant stimulation of sound and images. Sudden silence, especially if you’ve known nothing but din, isn’t pleasant at first. But, after a time, you will come to crave it! Start small. Make it a Holy Day experiment: enjoy five minutes of silence in the morning, 10 minutes at night, gradually expanding the time. If you can’t be alone with your thoughts, use the time to read scripture or other uplifting books, or read stories, fables, or poetry with your family, perhaps with a Holy Day theme, that reminds you of higher realities.

3. Spend time outside, every day. Take your children with you. Especially, take them out at night. Look at the sky. Examine the stars. Notice the phases of the moon. Find a patch of nature—forest, ocean, park, lawn, tree, rosebush, potted palm. Spend time with this creation of

nature. Look at it carefully, press your face up against it, close your eyes and examine it with your fingers. Lie next to it. Feel the earth, stare at the sky, and watch and feel your breath come in and go out. The rhythm of the seasons is reflected in your breath. Consider how vast the world is and experience the *holiness*.

4. Create uplifting family experiences. Let part of each Holy Day be a celebration of higher realities or higher potentials. Go to a religious service that *inspires* you (or create your own). Tell those who come that you’re going to make an altar together. Ask each one, including children, to bring something of beauty or inspiration to put on the altar—photo of a holy person, poem, picture of a loved one, art, writing, leaf, rock, or flower. Ask each one to explain why it is mean-

ingful. Ask each also to bring something to read, or play, or sing that is inspiring to them. Or you can tell a personal experience that has led to *deeper understanding* or *greater love*. Sit in a circle, creating the altar in the center, piece by piece.

5. Let there be Light. Most Holy Days relate to Light. Christmas has the Star of Bethlehem, both Jewish Hanukkah and Hindu Diwali are called the Festival of Light. Winter Solstice marks the passing of the darkest day and return of Light. It isn’t about what you call the Holy Day—it is how you experience it. Keep Light uppermost in your celebration. PE

Asha Praver is a lecturer, teacher, counselor, Spiritual Co-Director of the Ananda Palo Alto Community, and author of Swami Kriyananda as We Have Known Him. Visit www.anandapaloalto.org.

ACTION: Make holidays more holy days.

True Love Beyond Cinderella.



by Charles
and Elizabeth
Schmitz

CINDERELLA IS A WONDERFUL STORY. IT does, indeed, warm and inspire the heart. Love is always inspiring! But, it is an idealized version of falling in love that rarely approximates the reality or the truth of what love really means—of what love might mean for a lifetime.

When young women hear the Cinderella story, they want to believe that their Prince Charming will sweep in with the wind. And, every young man wants to find his Cinderella—someone to put the glass slipper on. Many people look for this fairy-tale version of love, but *idealized love* and *real love* are not the same.

A dashing young man or a lovely young lady often sweep each other off their feet. You may have experienced this. The spine tingles, the heart races, the face flushes, and the lips tremble. Love has feelings—and *is* a feeling!

Being *in love* is easy, just like the Cinderella story—but *making love* last takes hard work. You have to do the simple things every day of your loving relationship. Simple things matter in relationships! *Successful* love and marriage (healthy and happy relationships) are an accumulation of doing simple things.

Here is where Cinderella comes in. Falling in love at the stroke of mid-

night is easy. Putting on the glass slipper isn’t all that hard either. Yes, the beginning of love is easy, but the *sustaining of love* is the difficult part.

When you fall in love, you need to understand that *being in love* is the easy part—*staying in love* takes hard work. Hence, your greatest challenge is to recognize that when you fall in love, Cinderella style, you are only the beginning of love—not the end.

The Cinderella version of *love ever after* rarely happens. Even when you are in love, life is not always easy, fair, just, and beautiful. The *reality of love* and the *Cinderella story or style of love* are not the same!

Yes, love is grand. Falling in love and being in love are wonderful places to be. But, to *fall in love* and *be in love*

is just the creation of an emotional attachment, it’s the rational connection between two people who choose to love each other for life!

True love is about doing the simple things that make love last for a lifetime. Blinding yourself to the true meaning

of love—fooling yourself into thinking that momentary love is real love—is to make the mistake that leads to an end of many marriages and relationships.

Being truly in love is not a temporary thing! Letting your emotions dictate your actions when it comes to love and marriage is a mistake. True love comes with time. It’s not a Cinderella short story—it is a story of commitment for true love transcends time. PE

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ACTION: Experience true love.