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## Dedications

*To Ulysses, my husband and best friend:*

With the utmost gratitude I want to acknowledge my husband for supporting and preparing me during this journey. Thank you for making me laugh every day and for inspiring me to go out and live my dream. I love and cherish you as my husband, my friend, and my business partner. I am very blessed and honored to share my life with you.

*To our children, Rashad and Resey:*

It's been a great joy to experience motherhood, raising both of you has taught me the true definition of unconditional love.

*To our grandchildren, Julian and Legend:*

You are my heart and the reason why I am committed to being successful and leaving a legacy for future generations.

## *Acknowledgments*

I am grateful to God for blessing me with the inspiration and persistence to write this book for the express purpose of transforming young lives and making a positive difference in their world.

This book is in loving memory of my late father Frankie Von Parker. Thank you for your love and discipline that led me to be the person I am today. The love of a Dad like you is the best gift a daughter can have.

I want to thank my mother Mary Parker for being supportive and believing in my dreams. Thank you for all your prayers, loves, and humor. I love you, lady.

## *Introduction*

The mind is a terrible thing to waste.

That's the old saying, isn't it? However I'd just like to adapt it ever so slightly because I want to say that I believe the mind is a *beautiful* thing to waste. That's because we regularly squander our *beautiful* minds on things that then hold us back and drag us down. Being physically confined against your will is one thing - you may have no say in the matter - but appointing your own thoughts as prison warden well, that's something else altogether.

I want to make you think about whether this is happening to you and how, together, we can get you to change your thought patterns into something more positive. As of today, I want to put an end to any self-imposed limitations that exist on your development.

So, are you with me?

It all begins with how we think - how we choose to use our thoughts in a typical day. Reverting back to my opening statement, I want to look at the origins of negative thoughts and the damage they can cause.

Did you know the average person generates 25,000 to 50,000 thoughts per day? In order to positively transform a significant portion of these, we will need to teach you how to train your mind on a moment-by-moment basis. This potent skill will empower you with the ability to transform your life back to a solid positive level.

One of the misconceptions that I'm going to dispel is the idea that you need to make others feel bad in order to make yourself feel good. Bringing others down is all about negativity - boosting your self-esteem and confidence is entirely about being positive and it's that which should interest us.

The good news is that making this change in the way you think is not a complex matter but it will take some dedication and discipline. I'm here to hold your hand and guide you through your transformation into becoming that positive person.

Confined by the Mind delivers authoritative insights into how to eliminate negative thinking and shows you the best way to shake off the negative people in your life. It's a life-changing guide with plenty of powerful advice about improving your mindset; fortifying your weakness, and breaking free of the manipulations of others.

Confined by the Mind also delivers compelling true stories of individuals who have escaped controlling and manipulative predators. Here you'll read the inside scope on smartening up, using your brain for gain and not pain, and how to retain a positive lifestyle in a negative world.

I hope you're ready because this book is a true life-changer!

# **Part One - No Negativity Allowed**

## *Chapter 1 - Admit your Weakness*

Be honest now; are you fed up with being controlled by people who don't give a damn about you? If so, understand this simple statement:

This control stops right here, right now.

Unless you're a convicted and imprisoned criminal, you have not abrogated your entitlement to be free, to utilize your talents, to captivate fresh opportunities and "to boldly go" wherever your mind and heart transport you. Unless the law decrees otherwise, never surrender this core human tenet to someone who would treat you as their prisoner. You were born free so live free.

### **Today is the first day of the rest of your life**

Look around you. How much of what you are is down to what other people expect you to be? How much is about you fulfilling *their* expectations, meeting *their* dreams and complying with *their* preconceptions? These people have told you - explicitly or by implication - that you have no value unless you consistently comply with their persona for you.

You are no puppet, you are no doormat, you are uniquely you. You dance to your own tune and you need no strings to hold you down.

So, where do you begin?

Throw away this third party specification, deafen your ears to the self-criticism that you've been programmed to play in your head when your unwelcome thoughts of independence have threatened the 'Stepford Wifeness' of the status quo. You are what you choose to be, you are the master of your own universe and in charge of your own destiny. Start by redefining yourself and appreciate, above all else, your beautiful mind.

Where is your Achilles Heel?

Even the great Achilles had a weak spot. In his case it was the ankle held by Thetis, his mother, as she dipped him in the River Styx. So, I ask again, where is yours?

Note that having a weak spot does not make you a weak person. Going back to the great Achilles, I wonder how many Trojans learned that lesson the hard way?

Overcoming weakness is a multi-stage process which begins with the admission that you actually have at least one. This admission is a strong thing to do and not weak in any way. Not only that, the implications of self-deceit are manifold and even a simple deception can result in a viral like complication. In more pictorial terms, happiness that arises through the ignoring of a weakness is as genuine as the smile on the face of a manikin.

Don't allow your castle to be built on sand. Your goal must be to develop and possess the inner confidence needed to identify and acknowledge your flaws and imperfections. It's infinitely better to admit a fault than to pretend that everything is just hunky-dory and go and put on that manikin's painted grin.

In extreme cases, it could even kill you if you never seek treatment or talk to someone about your weakness. It's that serious.

### **Per ardua ad astra (through struggle to the stars)**

Having admitted your weaknesses, you need to develop a detailed and consistent strategy for change. While some changes may be a 'simple' matter of stopping doing one thing or religiously doing another, many will be more complex, requiring multiple stage behavior modifications or deep rooted alterations to thought processes and habits. In such cases, you will need to develop a series of gradual steps that will lead you to your chosen goal while 'deprogramming' your mind from a habit that you need to lose.

If the idea of taking such small steps troubles you, remember how one man unforgettably turned a small step into a giant leap for mankind. Humbling, isn't it? Small steps are good if they eventually lead to these giant leaps and they'll do just that if you've got the endurance and belief needed to propel you along the journey.

Empty your mind of all the negativity that has been allowed to take residence there. Stand up for yourself and reject the negative words that have held you back. Your

mind is a powerful and intriguing tool which can be effectively used to satisfy the needs of your inner soul and to strengthen weaknesses.

It's so very easy to get stuck in a rut. That's a direct consequence of one-track thinking and it often comes about when you've had others satisfying their own ends by downplaying your intelligence. Such people are very capable of coveting the talents of others and they think nothing of turning you into a lifeless husk by feeding off the subjugation of your common and cognitive senses.

## **Beauty awaits**

When you are no longer a hostage of others or a slave to a self-destructive and fake habit, when you see only your own potential and what can be achieved with a positive attitude, you will find a wonderful reward awaiting you. You will enter a world of peace and tranquility; a world where you can handle even complex adverse situations with dexterity, and a place that is packed full of possibilities. You will not head off down dead end roads nor will you be lost on twisting detours to nowhere, your highway will stretch ahead of you into the sunshine. It is a thing of very great beauty and you will see it as such.

## **My story - Part 1**

There was a time when I thought my life was over. I found myself in a very dark place, being cruelly manipulated by a misplaced trust in the words of my ex-husband. Through blatant deceit and betrayal, I lost custody of my son despite no court ever having deemed me to be unfit, despite me being in college and having a part-time job and despite me having no criminal record or history of drug taking.

How could this be?

The answer was simple, my natural kindness was perceived as being tantamount to weakness by my husband - the man I thought I could trust to always want to do right by our son.

Going back a little in time in order to give you the fuller picture, I was married at the tender age of 18, straight out of high school and directly after the death of my father. It was the latter event which made me vulnerable enough to marry at much too early an age to the wrong person and for all the wrong reasons.

The whole thing was to take me on a roller-coaster ride through a series of agonizing life-changing events which I could not have imagined possible.

The story begins on September 9th, 1990 with the birth of my first child - a bouncing healthy baby boy. The physical bond between us was unbreakable until one day in August 1992, when my son's father decided he had his own agenda because I had asked him for a divorce. He was against the annulment of our marriage and begged me to stay so we could try and work it out. I refused.

I was happy to negotiate the shared custody details believing that the one thing we still agreed upon was not wanting to leave it to a court to lay down access and visitation rights. We both loved our child and what better way to prove it than to make his needs paramount in all this. With that in mind, we spent ages discussing schedules, living arrangements etc - all for an infant of under 2 years of age.

Having sorted out these details, it was clear that we didn't need two lawyers to argue our mutual causes. I was happy to go along with letting his notary formalize our terms into a binding legal contract. Once this had been done, we both went along to our notary's home office where two copies of the agreement that had been prepared by the lawyer were set out on a desk waiting for our signatures. I read the agreement through, signed it and left - it was that simple.

It wasn't until a few days later that I got some indication of the shenanigans which had taken place around me when a sheriff turned up on my doorstep. He had with him a copy of the legal papers that I'd signed and also a Divorce Decree - this annoyed me because it had been me who had wanted to do the divorcing, not my husband. That said, I was relieved to be divorced but that relief was short-lived when I heard the sheriff's other words "I'm here to pick up your son, ma'm" and, worse still, he had the court orders to back him up.

My toddler had been playing contentedly until then - running through the house and following behind me when I answered the door. I shall never forget how his small hands gripped my leg as he looked up at that bad ass stranger with a badge on bending down to pick him up. Having to witness a small child crying and kicking because a stranger is taking him away must be the most excruciating pain a mother can ever feel. Not only did I feel utterly helpless, I also wanted to kick that sheriff's ass even if he was only doing his job and knew nothing about our situation and the deception that had been perpetrated.

On my own, my immediate thoughts went to trying to establish what the hell had just happened. The sheriff had left me a copy of the papers that I had signed a few days earlier yet they seemed a world apart from what I remembered them as saying. However, they bore my signature and that was all that the sheriff had needed in order to execute his duty.

Under the so-called agreement, I had consented that my ex would be my son's sole managing conservator. In plain English this translates to him having sole custody, leaving me with just the crumbs of visitation rights. Not that it mattered in comparison but, just for good measure, I had apparently agreed to waive any claim on our home and, not only that, actually pay child support to my ex-husband.

I had been manipulated - pure and simple. My ex had used my trust of an assumed mutual dedication to serving our son's best interests to cheat me. The whole notary office thing was staged which is why it had been so slick. I had been terminally guilty of allowing my naïveté to over-ride the warnings that were going off telling me to exercise proper diligence.

I was furious.

To help me get revenge and go some way towards redressing the situation, my mom hired the best attorney in Fort Worth, TX, to defend me. Well, we must have got the right guy because it put the fear into my husband and his worthless shyster lawyer - so much so that they invited me to a private meeting at which we could discuss other options prior to us going on to Family Court. Being suckered once is one thing but

getting caught a second time is just plain insulting to one's intelligence. I wasn't having any of it.

Having come this far with my new lawyer, I made sure to involve him with what was going on and it was his advice that I continue with the proceedings. My main questions centered around how the Family Court system works because I needed to know that first in order to allow me to make an informed decision about how the fight for my son's custody would pan out.

He was good and I learned all about selecting juries, court speculators and possible outcomes as well as the nitty-gritty of how such courts operate.

At the end of it all, and after much deliberation, I made the tough decision not to fight on and drag my son through the terrors of the court system. My mom didn't share my viewpoint and was livid with me for not retaliating against the lies and manipulation that she'd seen me get subjected to. She demanded answers and wanted me to take the guy apart in a courtroom. She wasn't alone with that opinion and I received loads of criticism from people who couldn't get their minds around why someone who'd been on the wrong end of so much pain and suffering could choose to walk away from a fight that they were favorites to win.

The point is that I did what I saw as being the best for my son and, to this very day, I say those words to my challengers. I let my son live with his father and I paid child support of \$164 a month for 16 years - and this is back in the days when it was almost unheard of for a woman to pay maintenance money. In the eyes of the public, only women who had committed some truly shameful act had custody awarded against them.

I didn't resent the amount - it was a mere bagatelle to me - but I did resent the fact that a price had been put on my son's happiness. In my mind, I considered the allowance to be a *minimum* amount and not some carefully calculated figure which would be expected to cover all eventualities. This is why I was always prepared to dip into my purse when he needed things for school or his hobbies. I attended all of his extra-curricular activities and I made a point of being very involved in his upbringing.

I learned a lot from this unhappy period of my life:

- Listen to your inner voice and don't ignore warnings about trusting others too easily or not researching the facts fully
- Be patient and observant in all that you do especially if this involves some legally binding decision
- Being young does not mean you can't make wise decisions because you can - never let anyone tell you otherwise
- Play to your strengths and never let a naysayer grind you down
- Don't waste your time with negative and controlling people - send them packing

Remember, we all have weaknesses - that's what makes us human. Identify yours and adjust your point of view accordingly. Always play to your strengths and never let anyone tell you what you can and can't do with your life.

You are a star so shine!

## *Chapter 2 - Escape the Entrapment*

Do you let others tell you what to do by effectively letting them push you into copying them or following their instructions in order to retain their approbation? You don't need this generous gift, from today you'll be setting your own standards and making your own decisions based on them. No more following along like a sheep on dope. Time to make your own way, be your own person and hold your head up high.

Not only that, be careful of who you choose to call your friends because being lonely does not transform the first person who says 'Hi' into your Best Forever Friend.

Now I want to tell you a rather distasteful story but it's true and it's relevant and that's my justification for using it here. Before I tell it, though, I want to give you a few simple instructions. Ready? Imagine you're with me.

I want you to slip on this blindfold. Don't worry, we aren't going anywhere. When you've done that, please could you get down on your knees and open your mouth. Done it? OK, now please put your tongue out and lick in a circular motion - clockwise or anticlockwise is fine, makes no difference. Now, just hold on a minute because I'd like you to describe the flavor you've just tasted.

Many will say that it's reminiscent of a mixture of salt and mustard. Is that your experience?

Now, remove the blindfold and stand up.

Do you know what I've just had you do? I've had you lick someone's penis. Since he's now disappeared into a bunch of sniggering drunk men, you don't even know whose penis you licked, do you?

What's wrong here is that you blindly followed the instructions of someone you supposedly could trust. I bet you wondered a few times what the heck we were up to but did you stop and find out? No. You just carried on allowing yourself to be used as a plaything.

Now to the true story that I want to tell you.

The 'game' that I've just described to you was thrust upon a female freshman college student on being invited to a college party where hazing, dares and drinking bouts were the expectation. She only agreed to go because she would be one of a group of 'friends' and thus would be both in 'good company' and have the 'safety of numbers' to fall back on.

The instructions I've referred to were given to her by her room-mate - someone with whom she should have been able to establish mutual trust.

From a psychological perspective, one thing worth observing was that there were no incentives - tangible or otherwise - nor were there rules for the 'games'. Thus the only driving force for agreeing to go along with it was peer pressure - the need to feel wanted and accepted by the girl's peers. From the perspective of the girls, they were able to project their own low self-worth onto someone that they perceived to be weak and of 'victim' material.

But that's too nice a way of describing them.

Pretending to befriend someone so that you can then allow them to be vilely degraded in front of inebriated members of the opposite sex is not cool, funny or positive in any way. Better words are sad, pathetic and sick but you can probably think of a few more of your own.

If you're looking for a 'why her?' motive, look no further than the fact that the girl in question came from a wealthy family *and* graduated top of her class in High School *and* came with a full scholarship as a result. Good old fashioned jealousy in other words. It's our old mate 'negative thinking'. From their point of view, rather than try to shine themselves, these other girls would rather tarnish a star so that they didn't look so dim in comparison.

If the psychology intrigues you, it's also worth noting what happened afterwards. The girl was mocked and ridiculed while little to nothing was said about the boy who both exposed himself to a group of people and who also forced his penis on a girl who certainly would have objected had she not been blindfolded.

See the world through the eyes of a realist

- True friends are few and far between therefore don't be so naïve as to believe that everyone you meet is your friend or even friendly
- You have a brain and commonsense so use them
- Employ all of your senses to their fullest to keep on top of who is proving a friend and who is proving themselves otherwise
- When someone shows you that they mean you no good, remove them from your company or minimize your interactions with them with immediate effect

So, what happened after the hazing?

Time was when such an incident would have gone little further than the limits of the small minds present or, in some unfortunate cases, to the campus boundary. It would have been a thankfully rare thing for such an event to have gone beyond that. Nowadays, with mobile phone/cameras and social media, a moment's poor judgment can be witnessed by the world and stay with you forever.

The girl in question had shots of her emailed around the campus and the event became common knowledge. As a result, every class became an endurance test with other students pointing, sniggering, commenting etc. A fortnight later and it had become too much for her to bear so she suddenly dropped out of college, abandoning her scholarship and putting her entire future in jeopardy.

All this from the small-minded nastiness of a few girls who resented someone who had more talent than them. It's also an awful price to pay for trusting the wrong person.

Her family were perplexed as to how such a thing had come to pass but rallied around, finally convincing her to see a therapist with her first session being scheduled for 5 weeks after the party.

Unbeknown to her parents, the girl had even contemplated suicide but wisely had used her brain to explore the full consequences. She thought about the loss of not

just her potential but also of her future children and the pain her parents would endure - something which pushed her back from the edge and towards somehow claiming a positive outcome from a horribly negative experience.

The idea of going to a therapist was embarrassing and difficult to accept but so was the idea that images of her were still being passed around and might be for a long time to come. Nothing could change that - it was out of her control.

The therapist focused on the girl's strengths and talents and discussed with her in detail about where she wanted to go with her life. Throughout the treatment, the counselor used her many positive aspects to allow the girl to address her weaknesses and imperfections and to accept them.

Yes, I'm pleased to report that the story has a happy ending.

Over the next 18 months, the girl moved state, changed her major to Criminal Justice and set up a self-esteem group for young teens. Nowadays she's a regular speaker about self-esteem and the danger of peer pressure at schools around the US. She is also an advocate for teenage girls who are being targeted or who have already been victimized.

She has a strict rule about attending parties - giving them all a categorical 'no thanks' unless they are of an 'elegant', 'networking' or other 'business' nature. She is married, has a small child and is currently thinking of attending law school.

Never underestimate the power of peer pressure and what it takes to overcome it. Our species has strong societal ties and a consequence of having these is that we strive to conform. In most circumstances this is a good thing - primitive humans needed to work together as a team and not consist of a bunch of maverick loners all banging their own drums. Unfortunately, as we've become a more complex species and as those large predators have fallen by the wayside, peer pressure has often become a force for evil.

For example, many 'for the sake of it' war crimes (as opposed to looting and pillaging situations where the gain and motivation is obvious) have been committed by

groups of soldiers, some of whom have felt unable to back out because their colleagues are participating.

If you've ever visited a European World War 2 concentration camp, you may well have seen groups of German schoolchildren being lead around - many of them in floods of tears as they repeatedly ask themselves why and how their grandparents and great grandparents could let it happen. They are in a cleft stick. The school trips are compulsory, to deny the Holocaust is a criminal offense in Germany and the gentle memories, the jolly 8mm family film footage or the recollections of their parents don't marry up with the same monsters who watched (or even actively participated in) their neighbors being hauled away in cattle carts.

The only way you can make sense of this is through accepting just how powerful peer pressure is. With the simplicity afforded by the passage of time, we now brand these people as 'cowards' for not standing up and being counted. It's not quite so easy in practice.

I'm now going to show you how much trust we are prepared to instill into experts even if we've never met them before and know absolutely nothing about them.

In the 1960s, a scientist named Milgram decided to conduct a series of tests on unwitting volunteers. Under the pretext that it was a new form of teaching, the volunteers were 'split' into two halves with one half being the teachers and the other half being the students. The 'teacher' was then required to ask the student a general knowledge question by means of a radio phone to an adjacent room. If the student got the question right, they moved on to the next one. If he or she got it wrong, the teacher was instructed by a 'professor-dude' in a white coat to administer an electric shock.

Each wrong question meant an increased voltage with louder shrieks of pain from the student. Some 'teachers' were understandably troubled but, with the reassurances of the professor, carried on regardless. Shocks were being administered right through into the lethal zone by which point the student was making no noise of any sort.

Several students were 'killed' and many very badly shocked by ordinary members of the public who would never consider doing such a thing in their normal lives.

Of course, the professor and the students were all actors and the electric shocking machinery was just a box that didn't administer anything. It was only a test to see how far people were prepared to go when given orders.

It is oh so easy to be pushed into doing something which you should not do, drowning out that little voice of goodness inside of you which is begging you to walk away.

Whether you choose to believe that voice is your spirit, your soul, your God makes no difference - it's there regardless of your creed or denomination. It's what makes us a higher level of creature and is a gift to be nurtured and cherished. It takes real guts to walk away from copying your friends or from following the instructions of 'a man in a white coat' but you must learn to put that little voice above all else and know that anyone who asks you to deny it is not your friend.

So, here's what I want you to take with you from this chapter.

- You are a decent person with much to offer the world so never let others tarnish your self-respect for their entertainment or self-aggrandizement
- Listen to that little voice and be guided what he or she has to say and remember that those who would drown that voice out are your true enemies even if they want to appear to be friends
- Never follow others as if you are just another sheep - merely because 'everyone else is doing it' does not make it good, right or decent
- Do not let fear of being alienated figure in your train of thought because one day you may be justifiably proud of yourself for being the 'odd one out'
- The expert in the white coat may just be an actor - believe what you know to be true and minimize your risk outside of that

- If the worst does happen and you do make a bad decision, walk away, cut your losses and reflect on how you can transform the negatives into positives

You are a good person so don't let others make you bad.

## *Chapter 3 - Disarm the Negativity*

You know how bulls have rings put through their noses so that they can be more easily lead? Well, I sometimes wonder if there aren't a whole load of my fellow humans who've had one fitted, too. For example, have you ever wondered what possesses:

- Women to want to write romantic letters to serial killers/rapists in their prison cells
- Girls to be impressed by the 'bad-boy leader of the pack' who is on the fast-track for a whole heap of trouble
- Young people to start taking drugs because it's perceived as being cool or a solution to boredom issues

... and so on.

Well, something is leading these people into making lousy decisions and it sure as heck isn't their inner voice of commonsense which must be screaming itself hoarse. What it is, of course, is an underlying low self-esteem, and like any low number, it can come about as a result of 'not enough positives' or 'too many negatives'. It's the latter that I want to look at now.

### **Where the problem starts**

I reckon going through the teenage years is a bit like getting into a rear-engined sports car like a Porsche and then putting the hammer down - hard. When you climbed in the car, it was in a stable condition - it was at rest. In human terms, that's when you're aged maybe ten or eleven and are under the care of your parents whose function it is to watch out for you and to protect you from harm.

As your foot goes down and the speed picks up, things start to become a blur. Worse still, the back of the car suddenly starts to fishtail making it almost impossible to control. That's how I see the years from about thirteen to eighteen. After that (hopefully), the car's wheels possess sufficient traction to balance the engine's power

and the driver will have acquired the expertise needed to take over the smooth operation of their vehicle.

From a parental point of view, leaving a thirteen-year-old to largely fend for themselves is grossly negligent (if not criminally so). Conversely, nannying a nineteen-year-old is 'odd' and likely to create social problems if that young adult is not allowed to properly integrate with his or her peers. It's a tough time to be a parent and it's no easy ride being a teenager in the twenty-first century.

On the up side, everything is possible during these years. You've not yet developed notions of what you can and can't do (or what you should or shouldn't have done) and a world of opportunities is opening before you.

Unfortunately, in a parody of Newton's Law of Motion, for every good thing, there is a bad one and for every positive influence, there is a negative one.

Making every decision pass through your parents is most certainly not a solution (the 'nannying' I spoke of above) but nor is blundering on alone. So what is the right thing to do?

### **Negativity is a true minus**

No-one can prevent some disasters from occurring - irrespective of how hard they try. To go back to the driving analogy, no matter how much experience you have behind the wheel, you can't guarantee that you'll not get broadsided by a drunk-driver. That said, you can reduce the probability of being involved in an accident by not drink-driving yourself. It's this notion of risk management through avoiding certain people and situations that we're going to look at now.

Most of the ways young people are preyed upon or exploited do not stem from 'out of the blue' attacks. They come from the calculated moves of predators or from the negative vibes, words and actions of family members and so-called friends. This section is about minimizing the negativity you will encounter throughout your life from these people.

Don't doubt my words. Negative influencers will sap your energy just like a spider will suck the juices out of a fly caught in its web. They will discourage you when you need to seize an opportunity and encourage you when you should be exercising caution. They will cloud your judgment and dog every major decision that you let them in on and they are past masters at inveigling themselves into the lives of their victims.

Look around you at your parents' generation. Without being judgmental, look at those people who have endless excuses for 'what might have been'.

*"If only I'd taken that job"*

*"I wish I'd learned ..."*

*"If I'd only apologized to ... we might still be together"*

*"I'll do it one day"*

*"There's plenty of time yet"*

... and so on

While genuine personal tragedy may have been the reason why such things never came about (a good reason for not being judgmental), in many cases it's because they were afraid to try - afraid to leave their comfort zone and afraid of what others might think. I'll lay you a bet that most of them will have had 'little friends' who provided the clincher that stopped them from breaking away from the norm.

Listen to me good. Whatever your religious views, you only get one guaranteed life so don't waste it. The story of who you are and what you will be has not been written yet so don't let some hack writer take over this priceless manuscript.

### **Who are negative people?**

A negative person is someone who chooses to expend their own energy countering the positive in others rather than using the same energy to further their own or the collective cause.

Everybody knows them because they exist in every group and it's oh so easy to get caught up with these people. They are experts at manipulation; using your words, behavior, needs, desires, feelings, energy to feed upon and, ultimately, slow you down like the parachute on the back of a dragster. They are the archetypal 'the glass is half empty' people who can see nothing worth having in anything.

## **The energy equation**

A law of the physical universe is that energy can neither be created nor destroyed - it can only move around. In the world of negative people, energy is currency. They covet what you possess and, given half a chance, will suck it from you. Ironically they won't use it themselves, they'll just hoard it away like some old miser and his fortune.

If you surround yourself with negative people, they will suck you dry of all your life's spark and you will become one of those losers that I described at the start of this section. And before you go all politically correct on me, that's the right word - loser - because they have *lost* their energy and their self-esteem. *Squandered* is another word so take your pick.

## **How do you spot a negative person?**

The good thing about negative people is that they are not difficult to spot - not if you keep your eyes open and your thinking head on. Let me explain.

Think of a situation where you and your best friend are chasing jobs. You wish them well and they wish you well because you're both decent people. If you're both chasing the same job, it's perfectly normal for natural competitive urges to kick in and for you to want the best for you. Please note that 'being positive' is not about being altruistic.

If one of you is looking for a job or if you are applying for jobs in different industries, why would you wish your friend anything other than the best? Why would you not encourage them, offer advice (if sought or appropriate) and do all you can to

give them that little extra edge that might make all the difference? No reason at all, is there? That's because you are a decent and positive person.

Now let's look at what a negative person might do in a similar situation. Here are some of the things that they might say:

*"I expect a lot of people will be applying for that job"*

*"It's probably been given to an in-house candidate already"*

*"I might have applied myself but I know what a waste of time these things can be"*

*"Why don't you stay where you are - jobs are hard to find these days so no sense in risking what you've already got, is there?"*

... and so on

We're talking basically anything and everything bar giving you a friendly push. Can you imagine applying for that job if you only knew negative people like this and you'd spoken to them all at length beforehand? It would take a very strong person to thumb their noses and go through with it against all the discouragement.

## **Eliminating the negatives**

If you don't want to be a loser like them, you need to shape up and start making some tough decisions. You are the captain of your ship, the boss of your business and the champion of your cause. It is up to you who you associate with and who you allow to influence your decision-making processes.

How you do this is going to depend upon your character and also that of the naysayers whose company you need to rid yourself of. To help you get going, I'm going to split my suggestions into two categories - active and passive - with the idea that you begin putting some of these policies in place. Remember, this list is not conclusive - it's just a starting point.

In each case, 'X' represents a friend or contact who is renowned for being negative.

## **Passive**

### *The line in the sand*

When talking to X, create a point beyond which you will not go. X is prone to exaggerating the adversity of their situation for dramatic effect. Begin your responses by giving them a moment's sympathy and by all means offer any practical support that might be appropriate. If it becomes obvious that all they really want to do is whinge, you need to get out. Make your excuses and end the conversation.

### *Safety in numbers*

Having to deal with a highly negative person single-handed can really drain your energy levels and fast! By limiting your interactions with them to when you are a member of a small group, you will both share out the negative effect and also provide an opportunity for one member of the group to strike a chord with the individual and bring out a more positive side of that person. You never know - that may be all that it needs.

### *Read between the lines*

Some negative people are plain vindictive - the chips on their shoulders mean that they want to wound others the way that they've been wounded. Chances are that your friends don't really mean you harm - it's just that their clumsy words and actions have that effect. Before you push them aside, try to objectively ascertain what their underlying message was once the negative aspect has been stripped away from their words. You will need to take great care over being able to dispassionately remove yourself from the consequences of absorbing any superficial bitterness or unintended slights in order to get to the core of the matter.

## **Active**

### *Change the subject*

If you've heard enough and you don't want to abandon your friend, forcefully change the subject even if that means talking over the top of them. Try to have a daily displacement subject in mind and don't let them slide the conversation back to their pet

whinge. You've heard their grumble, you've offered practical support, you owe them nothing more so don't give it.

*Reward them from the cookie jar*

It's no good telling someone to 'be less negative' as they'll probably just think you're mad (they're always in denial). What you can do is to take hold of that ring through their nose and lead them into being more positive by rewarding them when they are. Adopt a policy of responding to their negative statements with a terse "Really" or "I see" or just "OK" while replying with genuine enthusiasm to their positive statements. We all like cookies - even metaphorical ones - so sooner or later the penny will drop.

*Control the conversation*

Many people are only negative about certain aspects of their lives. For example, someone in a bad relationship (which they steadfastly refuse to quit) may want to drag you down into their mire every time anything involving romance or domestic life is mentioned. Outside of this, they may be fine. The answer - keep them away from the trigger topics by always having a few lighter diversionary ones in mind. Should these fail, you will need to be able to walk away but that should be a last resort.

**Making it work**

I'm not going to tell you that avoiding the effects of negative people is easy because it isn't, but it *is* going to make a huge difference to your life and this makes it well worth the effort. What I will say is that the more you work at it, the easier it gets and you will soon find that you become quite adept at sidestepping life's numerous 'energy-vampires'.

If you're looking for a role model to help guide you, you could do worse than study a modern day stand-up comedian. Ignore the jokes but watch the way that the comedian directs the audience to consider the most ridiculous and unfunny of articles and situations. He or she takes charge of the dialogue and, in as much as they are interested in anything the audience says or thinks, are only at home to comments and

laughter about their selected topic. Study their body language, their choice of words, what their eyes are doing and you'll get there too.

So, here's the long and short of this chapter for you:

- Negative people will wreck your life if you let them. They may not do it intentionally or even consciously but they will do it. If you do not learn to deal with them, they will drag you down with their own sinking ship.
- The good news is that there are a number of quite simple techniques which you can employ to help you control 'energy-vampires' and to severely limit the damage they can cause.
- Listen to any of your parents' generation bemoaning how they 'didn't take some chance' and I'll lay you a bet that some negative person was a major player in their having folded. Fail to minimize their input on your life now and that'll be you twenty or thirty years hence.
- Worst of all, negative people will drown out your inner voice - the one you should always listen to and the one which has your interests completely at heart.

Negative people are on a direct path to losing. You are a winner so what are you doing mixing with them?

## **Part 2 - Destroy What Hinders You**

## *Chapter 4: Stop Whining & Take A Stand*

There may be some sad times in your life when your body is simply unable to go where you'd like it to go but, even if you find yourself long-term sick, paralyzed or incarcerated, there is still no reason why your mind cannot continue to fly. Listen to Stephen Hawking for a moment and you'll soon realize that a large part of his mental strength stems from his physical handicaps. His mind is as unlimited as his body is restrained. Maybe there's an equation in that which he could reason out one day.

In fact, there is no law anywhere that says your mind is *ever* in part or whole the property of anyone but you. Therefore why do some people effectively let others periodically or habitually control this one thing that is uniquely their own?

In case you hadn't twigged, I'm discussing the domain of bullies - in whatever form they take.

I'm going to begin by narrating my own story which I freely admit is now a little dated in its approach. Afterwards, I'm going to suggest more contemporary ways of dealing with bullies and other such ill-wishers and, I warn you now, I don't preach tolerance.

### **My story - Part 2**

After my family moved across town when I was 10 years old, I had to change schools with all that this entailed - upheaval, loss of friends and a whole dose of being the 'new kid in town'. Worse still, I was short for my age, and if that wasn't enough, my long black hair attracted the interest of the boys and the hatred of the girls.

A few weeks in, I was standing by myself in the playground when someone exclaimed "She's cutting your hair!" I turned and realized from the black hair already lying on the concrete that I was the one on the wrong end of an impromptu trim. I froze although a teacher on playground duty had finally spotted what was going on and rushed me off to the principal's office. He asked me what had happened but I was in a

state of shock and could do little more than repeat what the other girl had said - the one who had warned me in the first place.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the offending girl denied all knowledge of what she'd been accused of but the principal wasn't buying it and he suspended her for two days - something he explained to my mother after she'd been summoned to his office to collect me. I don't know if he thought that was sufficient but it certainly wasn't to my mom. She fired a whole string of pointed questions at him including about how come a student had a pair of scissors in the playground.

If I thought that was the end of it, I was wrong. When she'd finished with the principal, mom rounded on me wanting to know what on earth was up with me allowing myself to be bullied like that. I wasn't even sure what a bully was and I asked her. I'll never forget her reply:

"A bully is someone who will continue to push you around as long as you let them. You've allowed her to think you're weak and I guarantee when you get back to school, she'll bully you all over again."

When we got home, she gave me strict instructions about what to do when the bully returned from suspension.

However, two days later and before I had a chance to put her plan into practice, the bully approached me, tapping me on the shoulder and viciously teasing me about why she'd cut my hair. Acting on mom's instructions, I stared straight into her eyes and punched her as hard as I could - right in the face. After that we fought for a while on the ground before a teacher dragged the two of us off to the principal's office.

This time we were both suspended but it was well worth it.

I shall always take with me a few memories from this event:

- I wasn't bullied any more.
- I remember the shocked look on my bully's face - I'd done the one thing she'd not bargained on me doing.

- Ironically I ended up becoming friends with the bully a few years later in middle school.

Before you go marching off into school or college with this philosophy, remember that this was back in the 70's and my response would be deemed even less acceptable today than it was forty years ago. Not only that, many of your fellow students will be carrying weapons and you've no idea what you might be getting yourself into by such a naked show of retaliation.

What won't have changed though is the boost of confidence that I felt when I stood up to my tormentor - that would be as valid now as it was then.

### **Everyone knows a bully**

I so wish that this statement wasn't true but it is; and, just in case you suffer from the illusion that bullies only exist in playgrounds, you are about to get enlightened. Bullies are everywhere and no doubt have existed since an early human found a particularly warm cave only to be shoved out of the way by someone bigger.

Nowadays we're much more sophisticated and I've created a simple table to show you what I mean. You can choose most any combination of bullying types from the first column to go with any particular media from the second. I'll let the mathematicians among you work out how many possible combinations and permutations that computes to.

Form bullying takes	Medium
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Emotional	Cyber bullying
Physical	Disability bullying
Verbal	Domestic bullying
	Formalized bullying
	Gay bullying
	Legal bullying
	Parental bullying
	Prison bullying
	Racial bullying
	School bullying

I'm not proposing to go into overmuch detail about the specifics of these types of bullying as they all have a certain amount in common vis-à-vis the way in which victims are made to suffer and the psychology which the victims must employ in order to successfully end that suffering.

It's this reasoned line of thought that I want to address now.

**Bullies are no heroes either**

If you recall, in Chapter 1 I said that we all have weakness - it's a fact of life of being human. No object or material we can ever make is going to be perfect, just as we can never be perfect ourselves. That's not to say we shouldn't strive for perfection but let's not fool ourselves along the way - OK?

Am I saying a bully is weak? You bet. Look at my bully - she epitomizes weakness. When I smacked her in the mouth her brain upped and offed for its summer vacation. It simply didn't have the experience to deal with a situation that the rest of us

(unfairly) have to live with - the one that regularly tells us we're not top of the heap. If that's not weakness on the part of a bully, I don't know what is.

## **The consequences of bullying**

Before I go on to look at how to cut the ground out from under the feet of your resident bully, I want to bring home just how serious bullying can be. It can cause everything from poor performance (school, college, work, sport, military service etc) to self-harming and even suicide. It is not some 'character-building horseplay' nor is it 'something we all just have to go through'. It is abuse, it is an unmitigated attack on an innocent person and it can never be justified.

Can I put it any clearer?

None of these statements are likely to impress someone who is bullying you, though. If anything, it's likely to have the opposite effect because, as my mom put it, you are sending them a statement that says you are a ready-made victim.

Let yourself get into the clutches of a bully and your mind will no longer be your own. Once it is in their possession, it will then be used to harm its host and, from there, you will be totally lost. With any luck you'll get yourself back one day but there's no guarantee of this and you may have lost irreplaceable time and opportunity in the interim - as well as becoming permanently damaged goods.

## **The bullying cycle**

If you are to escape the clutches of a bully, there is a cycle that you will have to break:

- Bully preys upon victim
- Victim's self-esteem slips
- Victim becomes more suggestible
- Bully has more fun from victim than expected

- Bully preys upon victim ...

Hoping and praying is not the answer (nor is smacking the bully in the mouth either). No, the answer lies in another direction and is a combination of cerebral and physical.

## **The solution to bullying**

I started this chapter by ordering you to 'stop whinging' and I stand by those tough words. No matter how unfair it is that you are being victimized (and it is vilely unfair), you need to look to yourself to become the catalyst that will end it. The bright side is that, if you get it right, not only will you end this bout of bullying, you will also send a message to others that you are not to be messed with - just like I did all those years ago.

That's the good news. Now here comes the medicine.

I want you to think of a hedgehog or a porcupine - take your pick. These are two relatively soft-bodied animals, but imagine coming upon them as a predator might. Get it wrong and boy won't you know about it. In fact porcupines can shake loose quills over some distance - a fact that many would-be predators can attest to via their painful abscesses and blind eyes.

These two creatures are not unassailable but they are quite literally prickly and that's how you need to be.

In human terms, prickliness is a simple logic problem for a bully (and it does need to be simple - they're rarely the sharpest knives in the drawer). Their thinking process is this:

- I know, I'll bully X
- Wait a minute, X is prickly
- If I bully X, I may end up getting hurt myself
- I don't like getting hurt

- There are a lot of other less prickly people around
- I think I'll give X a miss and find someone less prickly

I want to consider this a six-stage process.

*Marginalize their contact:*

If a bully doesn't have any contact with you, they can't do anything. Depending upon the media of the bullying, this might involve:

- Taking different routes but don't be seen to be steering clear of the bully (as that might be perceived as a victory for them).
- Keeping your eyes open for trouble and taking steps to avoid it before it finds you.
- Blocking cyber bullies and deleting any messages that get through without reading them first.
- Surrounding yourself with friends and well-wishers and just being 'too busy' to have time for your would-be bully.

*Minimize their effect:*

- Don't do anything they tell you to do.
- Try to avoid even acknowledging their presence.
- If you are bullied, give the absolute minimum of reaction and let them know that you are recording all of their actions in a diary which you keep at home.

*Undermine their power:*

- Laugh at their antics and try to have a witty retort when they say something.
- Try to find something ungrammatical, confusing, incorrect or just silly about what they say.

- Tell them 'now isn't convenient' and that you 'have better things to do with your time'.

*Boost your own status:*

- Hold your head up, particularly when the bully is around. At the very least they'll find this disconcerting.
- Work on boosting your own popularity (but make sure it is with genuine people).
- Stand up for others who are being picked on.
- Consider starting up a support group for other victims of bullies. Not only will this boost your own status, it will also make your bully extremely self-conscious.

*Present a tough persona:*

- Always believe you are stronger than them because you are. It takes a very weak person to have to bring others down to make themselves look a little taller.
- If you are being physically threatened, it's no bad thing to start courses in some martial art such as judo, kung fu, wushu etc. In any case, just attending these lessons will boost your self-confidence.
- You are not to be messed with - keep that in mind at all times and let it be clear from the image you put out about yourself.
- Pick up a couple of simple and not-too-obvious retaliatory defenses such as using the momentum of a bully's attack back on them (judo is particularly good for this) or become a dab-hand at dishing out Chinese Burns (painful, simple and deniable).

*Give them a headache to deal with:*

- That's what authority is for. Report them at every opportunity.

- Anyone who uses words like 'sneak', 'tell-tale', 'grass' etc in conjunction with you reporting a bully is no better than them. It takes more guts to do what you're doing than to hide behind clichéd insults like them.
- Remember, safety in numbers. If you can find others who will join you, stand up as a group against the bully. Make it clear that, if there is retribution against any one member of the group, the rest of the group will seek out the bully.

So, here's a summary of this chapter for you:

- It's no good expecting a bully to change - they won't unless you make them. You have all that you need to do this so it's just a case of putting into play the things I've suggested here. Always remember that it is them who are wrong, that it is them who need to alter their habits, and it is them alone who need punishing.
- You must never ever let anyone inside your head and that's exactly what you are doing when you give in to a bully.
- Bullying is a serious crime and the consequences can be horrific. No matter how put-upon you are now, learn to develop a zero-tolerance towards it.

As a final thought on the subject of bullying, I'd like you to watch an old spaghetti western of the 'Man with no name' variety. Our hero may say very few words but the resident bullies are very wary of him as he walks quietly through the town - why? It's because of the way he carries himself, his obvious self-belief and the very clear unspoken message that goes along the lines of "Yes, you could try your games on me but you really don't want to - trust me".

How is he doing this? Because he's telling the world how prickly he is!

## *Chapter 5 - Eliminate the Bloodsuckers*

Fair-weather friends. If there was open trading on the commodities market for these people, they'd constantly be in the 'ten for a penny' listings and that's overvaluing them too. Look closely at any successful person - even if they're just enjoying a short-term success - and you'll see plenty of these parasitic people hanging on to their coattails.

But parasites don't only lurk around successful people, they're to be found around anyone who'll tolerate them being there.

In your own particular case, don't go thinking that merely through the act of identifying them you've rendered them harmless because you haven't. It doesn't work that way because you're only looking at a small part of the big picture. Every friend or contact you make or acquire is an investment in time and effort as you get to know them, find out what makes them tick, listen to their problems and work out ways in which you can help them. At the risk of being cynical, it's like running a business. You have to trade solvently and that means not lavishing care and attention on people who would desert you just as soon as look at you if the boot were on the other foot and you needed them.

Their philosophy (in as much as they have one) is simple - a mixture of 'Success breeds success' and 'A friend in need is to be avoided at all costs'.

In non-mathematical terms, you can't give your true friends the care they deserve if you've already expended it on those who don't merit the time and effort. The consequences of allowing these false friends to knock along with you are manifold and far from trivial.

For example:

- Your true friends will feel resentment that their false counterparts are getting as much of your time and attention as they are.
- You will be too thinly stretched to come to the aid of a real friend when they do finally need you.

- Your resources - financial, emotional, practical - will become exhausted much more quickly than you could ever hope to replenish them.
- Your false friends will have their own agenda and this will certainly not coincide with what is in your best interest.
- You will become full of their toxic views of the world as they stuff your mind with petty prejudices and how everything good and desirable is both worthless and unattainable *for you*.

... and that's just to get you started.

Even when you've identified the parasites, it's not so easy to get rid of them. The problem is that leeches, vampires and other assorted bloodsuckers are expert in attaching themselves to their chosen victims. Their main weapons are a lack of confidence and/or poor judgment in their hosts.

It's how you can rid yourself of these people which I want to address in this chapter, however let's start by defining the sort of people who we do want. That way, it's easier to see who deserves a place on the lifeboat and who doesn't (see anecdote at end of this chapter for deliberate pun).

## **What makes a friend?**

Have you ever stopped and asked yourself this question? If not, you should. No-one can give you an empirical definition because their notion of a friend and yours are quite likely to be different. That's irrelevant - what matters is what you think.

You could say a friend is someone who:

- Will never give up on you
- Can be trusted with your confidences
- Doesn't judge you
- Walks by your side in both the good and the bad times
- Keeps their promises

- Never hides their true feelings or intents
- Won't flatter or mislead you when you need honesty and straightforwardness
- Respects what you believe in and stand for even if that differs significantly from their own viewpoint
- Believes in letting bygones be bygones

Feel free to hack those about until you've got something you agree with. Now apply that to the people who surround you. Some are just acquaintances - that's OK. An acquaintance is someone whom you interact amicably with but, for whatever reason, you don't hit it off well enough with to progress to a higher level of friendship. There's nothing wrong with that. What *is* wrong are those who purport to be your friends but who fall short of your specification and then want to take more than they give.

## **Transient friendships**

Some of your friendships will be for life which is wonderful. Other friendships only exist for relatively short periods and the other party may progress from being an acquaintance to a friend to a negative influence. That may sound particularly sanguine but people do change with situations and you need to move with that particular groove.

Examples where transient friendships might occur are:

- On vacation
- At work
- Attending college
- In hospital

... and so forth.

Merely because these are short-term friendships, it doesn't mean that they're any less valuable or, conversely, that you should let your guard down and tolerate

nonsense you wouldn't otherwise put up with. Decide upon standards and apply them. Your friendship is a valuable asset and one well worth acquiring so make people earn it.

This is so important that I'm going to repeat myself. Your friendship is a prize worth winning and not some bagatelle from the bottom of a cornflakes box.

## **Winning the war on the negative influences**

Your biggest weapon in the war is confidence. Armed with self-belief, you can vaporize any amount of enemy weaponry. This is why we need to bolster your confidence and instill in you a strong sense of self-belief and worth.

I want you to think about all the ways in which you have helped people. Not just big ways but small things - advice, a pat on the back, a word of comfort, a shoulder to cry on - that sort of stuff. You may or may not have thought much to the gesture at the time but you can be certain that the other party appreciated it even (and I'm sorry to say this) if they later proved unworthy of your attentions.

It's quite possible that you're a modest person and find this tough to begin with but please do persevere as it's vital that you realize how much good karma you've built up. Only if you can see yourself for the good and decent person you truly are can you combat the naysayers and hatemongers. Your confidence shall shine like the light of Eärendil (see *Lord of the Rings*) about which Princess Galadriel says "May it be a light for you in dark places, when all other lights go out."

If confidence is the weapon of attack, your inner voice is the weapon of defense. We all have this voice inside of us and although it's usually very quiet, it's also immensely powerful. If you listen to it, it will stop you getting into trouble, protect you from wrongdoers and whisper to you who is your friend and who isn't. Never rush into important decisions. Instead, consult with your inner voice somewhere peaceful. Chances is that you won't need long but those few minutes may well save an inconceivable amount of heartache.

## **Identifying negative people**

Many negative people spend their lives in a permanent grump. Their hangdog faces mirror their dark inner feelings which they will cheerfully (!!!) spread given half a chance. This blackness means that they see bad in everything and cannot perceive a positive side to anything that comes within their sphere of influence. They are cheerless individuals whom you cannot shake from their gloom and despondency no matter what you do.

Other negative people will:

- Question everything you say or do
- Criticize your tastes and choices
- Blame you for their own shortfalls and perceived bad luck
- Revel in the misery of others

For them the glass is perpetually half-empty and they can only remember the things that have gone wrong and never those which have gone right.

Watch out, too, for those who are at the opposite end of the mood range: people who are happy for no obvious reason or who laugh at inappropriate times. Although they may not mean ill, they also constitute a negative influence as you will not be able to rely upon them to give you a balanced and honest view of your undertakings.

## **Dealing with negative influences**

Let's look at some of the ways in which you can deal with negative people. Ultimately you want to minimize the time you spend with them and block their words and opinions from having any effect on your views or actions.

Here are a few ideas that you could put into use:

- Walk away - an obvious choice. Removing yourself from the situation should always be your answer of preference.

- Smile and ignore them - if you can truly ignore their words (which may be quite hurtful), this can work very well. Sooner or later they will give up and move on to other targets.
- Confront them with logic - if they are making outrageous claims or suggesting foolhardy courses of action, fight back by insisting that they provide substantiation or lead the charge, going first, sticking their head in the noose. Chances are that this will scare them off.
- Bring out the amateur psychologist and openly offer sympathy for why they feel the need to impose their depression on the good moods of others. Inquire as to what awful event must have preceded their need to behave as they do.

## **Spot the phony**

The good news is that most phony friends are too wrapped up in their own business, too egocentric, to be devious. They'll reveal themselves through a variety of channels such as:

- Not being interested in your wellbeing
- Ridiculing you in order to improve their own standing (playing to the gallery)
- Absorbing empathy but never supplying any
- Being disloyal, almost on principle
- Not keeping promises or valuing their commitment to you
- Taking when they do not need to take and not giving when they could and should
- Trying to foist their unwholesome prejudices on you by whatever means are at their disposal

When analyzing your potentially phony friends, ask yourself "Would I have behaved like that in their situation?". Your standards are set by that little voice inside of you and we've already discussed about how important it is that you listen carefully to what it has to say. If you allow yourself to be surrounded by phony friends, you allow yourself to be severely limited as to what you can achieve. You will also drain your emotional batteries at a phenomenal rate - something which may have adverse effects on your state of mind.

These people will milk you dry if you let them so don't.

Remember, it is far better to be totally alone than to be surrounded by phony friends. You can never hope to travel your journey in life if you are weighed down with loads of excess baggage.

### **Ridding yourself of haters and phonies**

Once you've made up your mind that someone has to go, put your head down and get on with it. Never look back, never regret what might have been and never let fast talking persuade you otherwise. The devil is glib and will trot out any number of reasons why you should not change the status quo.

At this point your light of lights should be the simple thought that a true friend would be worrying about why you'd felt the need to shed them and not about the consequences to themselves. Let this steady your hand and guide you on your quest.

Do you remember the film, *Titanic*? I'm talking about the recent one starring *Kate Winslet* and *Leonardo DiCaprio* who played the star-crossed lovers, Rose and Jack. Rose is a seventeen year old society girl, groomed for an appropriate aristocratic marriage with one of her own class. During a stolen evening of carefree fun and laughter with Jack, a penniless artist traveling in steerage class, she spots a young girl (from her own social class) being coached in the finer points of table etiquette just as her own mother had put her through years before. It proves to be a turning point for Rose who calls off her engagement to her rich fiancé in favor of true romance with happy-go-lucky Jack.

The act of standing up, rejecting the engagement and publicly declaring her love for Jack stripped away the powers of negotiation which both Rose's mother and her fiancé held over her. Once this hold was gone, she was free to live her life her way and without being compelled to indulge in the unpalatable prejudices which the film depicts with great relish. (In real life, the Titanic disaster was a major contributing factor in the demise of the class system - everything from the way in which the passengers were treated through to the ratio of deaths according to social class and even the way in which the bodies were subsequently stored after having been recovered.)

As you know if you've seen the film, Rose's happiness is short-lived but, despite that, she has a lifetime of knowing that she made the right decision.

Let Rose be your role model and don't let the manipulative skills of others control your thoughts and chance for true happiness. Just as she had to stand up and rail against prejudice and preconceptions, you may have to do likewise. The fact that it's outside of your comfort zone is no reason to quail in fear - stand up and be recognized.

Continuing the Titanic theme for a moment, consider the famous 'loading of the lifeboats' scenes. To assess a friend on whether they would say something to you like "*After you, old chap*" or "*Never did trust these lifeboat contraptions, you have my place*" is a bit harsh. Few friends are that altruistic or heroic however your phony friends will go out of their way to deny you a place or make a case against you having a seat.

In summary, irrespective of what religious views you may hold, you only get one absolutely guaranteed life and you only have one definite 'here and now' so don't waste your time on people who don't appreciate it and who won't, don't or can't reciprocate your loyalty, decency and friendship.

## *Chapter 6 - The Mind Challenge*

Do you sometimes feel like you're speaking a different language to everyone else? Perhaps you feel trapped, depressed, lackluster etc? If this describes you, maybe you're one of the ten percent of American children or teens who are mentally ill. If you're not sure whether you're one of them, the following are the more common symptoms of mental illness:

- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping or constant torpor
- Inexplicable or extreme sadness
- Anxiety attacks
- Reluctance to hang out with your mates
- Delusional episodes
- Sudden mood changes
- A craving for drugs just to 'get by'
- Suicidal feelings or temptation by self-harming

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*There are around 4,000 to 5,000 suicides among young people in the 10 to 24 age group each year.*

### **Recognizing mental illness**

The problem is that our government has developed something of a 'sweep it under the carpet' attitude and this has rubbed off on the general populace. If you don't look, you won't see - right?

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*Approximately four in five of children with mental illness go unidentified and receive no help each year.*

Identifying mental illness is not easy because we all experience mood swings - good days, bad days etc. That's perfectly normal. If you were 'happy, happy, happy' all day, every day, you really probably would be beyond help! On the other hand, being so down that your life is effectively being controlled by an almost tangible mass of gloom and introspection is definitely an indicator that a mental health issue exists.

## **The stigma of mental illness**

Some time back I spoke to a workmate about mental illness and how easy it was for someone to be pushed to the point where they had a nervous breakdown. He pooh-poohed it with the attitude that 'it only happens to weak people'. I couldn't let him get away with that so I took him to task. I happened to know that he'd had an affair behind his now wife's back. It'd only happened the once but it had happened. Even though it was (even then) a very long time ago, I knew that she was definitely not the forgiving kind.

I asked him what would happen if she found out. He looked very dropped upon. "She'd leave me," he replied.

"OK, so your wife's left you. Your kids are disgusted too and they don't want to know you. Your wife now decides that the family home is hers and you're kicked out, a pariah from your family. How are you feeling?"

He swallowed hard. "Not good."

I continued, "You've no home and no family, you take to the bottle for comfort and the next thing you know is that you've lost your job and your car. Have you snapped yet?" I asked. By the look on his face, I knew the answer. He never made another jibe about mental problems again.

The fact is that *all of us* have our breaking point and that it's only a question of *what* will make us break and not *if* we can be made to break. Fortunately most of us can avoid going anywhere near our limits but not everyone is so lucky. There is no stigma in being mentally ill; there is merely ignorance, stupidity and prejudice in how it is perceived.

If you have feelings which you cannot explain or which seem out of step with your peers, you need to seek help immediately. Some things you might check yourself against include:

- Sudden mood swings
- Strong feelings of fear or worry
- Changes in behavior (e.g. becoming more violent, withdrawn, having attitude etc)
- Problems concentrating
- Sharp weight loss (or loss of appetite, nausea etc)
- Desire to cut or self-mutilate
- Temptation to try out drugs or liquor in order to 'get by'

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*Suicide is the third leading cause of death in young people aged from 15 to 24, with more dying at their own hands than from AIDS, birth defects, cancer, heart disease, influenza, lung disease, pneumonia and strokes combined.*

## **Treating mental illness**

The treatment you need will depend upon the nature of the illness and also its severity - in all probability it will be a combination of approaches. For mild cases, a single health provider could be sufficient but for more complex cases you might well require the services of a team of people.

A treatment team might include:

- Family doctor
- Family members
- Nurse
- Pharmacist

- Psychiatrist
- Psychotherapist
- Social worker

... or any combination, thereof.

Sadly medication doesn't cure mental illness but it can go a very long way to alleviating the symptoms. As a result, you will almost certainly be prescribed some form of medication or treatment of which the following are the most common:

**Anti-anxiety medication** - used primarily for panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder but also for the treatment of insomnia and agitation. Long term treatments typically center around the use of antidepressants but you might be prescribed some of the new fast-acting anti-anxiety tablets. Unfortunately the bad news is that they can become addictive if used over a period of time.

**Antidepressants** - used primarily to treat anxiety and depression. If you're feeling anxious, helpless, low in energy, lackluster, hopeless or sad, these tablets may be the right option for you. The good news is that they're not addictive.

**Anti-psychotic medicines** - also known as neuroleptics - are used in the treatment of illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. They can also be combined with antidepressants in the treatment of depression.

**Brain-stimulation treatments** - these are used where the patient (frequently suffering from depression) has already tried out psychotherapy and conventional medications. Brain stimulation treatments cover a range of therapies which include electro-convulsive therapy (electric shock treatment), transcranial magnetic and vagus nerve stimulation plus the new 'deep brain stimulation'.

**Hospitalization** - a stay as an inpatient at a psychiatric hospital or as a resident of a clinic may be necessary if the illness becomes so powerful and pervasive that you are unable to take care of yourself properly or if it is felt that you are in danger of either self-harming or hurting others.

**Mood-stabilizing medications** - tablets such as Lithium Carbonate are taken to stabilize the peaks and crests of illnesses such as bipolar disorder (manic depression). They may be combined with antidepressants in the treatment of more severe depression.

**Psychotherapy** - This is where you get a chance to talk through your issues, your feelings, moods, actions, situations etc. Sometimes one-to-one with a therapist but more often in a group (made up of other sufferers or members of the patient's family as appropriate). In these sessions, each of you will make suggestions, add in your own experiences and so forth. Psychotherapy can last just a few sessions or continue on long-term according to the needs of the patient.

**Substance abuse treatment** - many sufferers of mental illness mistakenly self-medicate with drugs or alcohol which not only causes damage in its own right, but also frequently adversely interferes with the prescribed medication and exacerbates the condition itself. If you are dependent upon other substances, you should seek help quitting.

Whatever treatment your therapist prescribes, it's imperative that you learn about it and if possible take an active role in your treatment. The foregoing is merely a 'starting point'; somewhere that gives you the basic info on what is available and what it entails.

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*Over 50% of all mental illnesses become established before the age of 14. Through poor diagnosis, stigma, prejudice etc, a time lag of decades can exist between the onset and treatment. Untreated disorders become more firmly established and thus more likely to result in recurring outbreaks.*

If you're able to function at a level where you can research these treatments, you should always seek to discuss the proposed ones with your health care provider before entering into the treatment proper. In cases where you feel that your illness will prove too debilitating to make that decision, see if you can find someone (a very close friend

or relative) whom you can nominate to stand in your place. The right word for such a person is a proxy.

## **Coping with mental illness**

If you look at the list of famous people who've had mental illness (see the end of this chapter), you'll quickly catch on that you're in very good company and that whatever you're suffering with can be overcome. That said, trying to do it on your own is almost certainly a non-starter. You need to find help - now! Here are some ways in which you can cope with your issues.

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*Did you know that around half of all students aged 14 and above and who have a mental illness drop out of high school? This is way more than any other disability group.*

### **Find out more**

Knowledge is power and getting the low-down on what ails you is a key element in your finding the road to recovery. The internet will contain endless amounts of material but your doctor or support group will undoubtedly have access to DVD's, publications, posters etc. Don't forget to educate your family and friends, too. They need to understand your illness if they are to help you with it.

### **Join a support group**

Whatever you suffer from a) you won't be the first and b) you needn't be alone. With that in mind, go and join a support group for your specific illness. Either look on the internet or in your local newspapers, libraries, doctors' surgeries or call the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Having like-minded people to talk to can really point you in the right direction.

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*The government throws around \$1bn a year at dealing with the aftermath of suicides and suicide attempts by young people.*

### **Don't go it alone**

A sad consequence of mental illness is self-imposed isolation. This is extremely dangerous and it's vital that you recognize when you're starting to shut yourself off from others. No matter how hard it might be or how little you feel like doing it, keep in touch with your family and friends and be prepared to ask them for help if it ever gets too much.

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*4,000,000 children and teens have a mental disorder which significantly impairs the way in which they function.*

### **Record your thoughts**

Another aspect of mental illness is that it can cause time to warp. Days or weeks can pass without really registering. Avoid this unwelcome consequence by religiously keeping a diary that not only records your feelings and what you did on those days but also notes down ideas for improving or eliminating some of the adverse symptoms.

## **Preventing mental illness**

While there is no prevention for mental illness, you can keep it at bay and reduce its impact by just following a few simple steps.

### **1. Heed the warnings**

Talk to your doctor or therapist about what triggers your illness and what the warning symptoms are. Once you've got that information, draw up a plan or checklist and issue that to your closest friends along with clear instructions about what they are to do if they notice you starting down that path.

### **2. Look after yourself**

A good diet, full nights of sleep and plenty of physical activity will keep you fit and best able to resist the consequences of mental illness. 'Sound in body and mind' may be a bit of an oversell but it *will* make you more robust and less prone to many of the consequences of illness.

### **3. Get checked over regularly**

Your health care provider is there to see that your problems are under control so make sure that you attend regular check-ups with them. No matter how slight you may feel that the symptom is, you should still seek medical assistance. It could be nothing or it could be that you are acquiring something new or it might even be a reaction to medication you're taking. Go and find out!

#### **4. Never turn down offers of help**

If you need help, get it. Leaving mental health conditions untreated can only serve to exacerbate the symptoms so seek assistance from your GP or therapist when it's obvious that you need it.

### **Consequences of untreated mental illness**

If left untreated, mental illness will almost invariably entrench itself, worsening the quality of life for the sufferer and diminishing the functionality of other brain and body components. Depending upon the nature of the illness, ignoring it can lead to bouts of self-destruction or unprovoked attacks on others. With respect to the latter, just look at the rise in the number of Elementary and High School shootings over the last twenty years. Movie theaters and workplaces have also borne witness to multiple random killings.

Did you realize that something approaching 65% of boys and 75% of girls in juvenile detention have one or more mental illnesses? It is officially acceptable to bang up young children aged 8 or above instead of allocating the correct resources to treat them.

That's quite ridiculous. We have the wherewithal to dramatically reduce these percentages by a combination of getting the message out to sufferers "Act now!" while switching funding from containment to cure (either full or partial as the case may be). If you think you may be experiencing indicators that you have a mental health problem, don't delay, either find a specialist or get your GP to refer you.

*Sad fact about mental illness:*

*Less than ten percent of young people who commit suicide DON'T have a mental disorder.*

The fact is that if you don't get help, you risk becoming a sad statistic - suicidal, self-harm, drug addiction, shortened life, depression, schizophrenia, psychopathic tendencies. These and many others are all possible so don't take that chance.

*If you're thinking about harming yourself [get help immediately](#). You can call 911 or the [National Suicide Prevention Line](#) at 1.800.273.TALK (8255).*

Summarizing, mental disorders are extremely common, and if you suffer from it, you are far from alone. Some of the world's most creative people have had one form or another of it so you really are in excellent company.

For example:

- Buzz Aldrin .....depression and alcoholism
- Ludwig van Beethoven.....bipolar disorder
- Marlon Brando .....chronic depression
- Catherine Zeta Jones.....bipolar II disorder
- Mel Gibson .....bipolar disorder
- Brooke Shields .....postpartum depression
- John Nash .....paranoid schizophrenia
- Herschel Walker .....disassociative identity disorder
- Michael Phelps.....attention deficit disorder
- Howard Hughes.....obsessive compulsive disorder
- Paula Deen .....panic attacks and agoraphobia
- Elton John.....substance abuse and bulimia
- Sinead O'Connor.....bipolar disorder
- Kurt Cobain .....attention deficit disorder, bipolar disorder

Angelina Jolie .....depression and self harm  
Charles Darwin .....severe panic disorder  
Halle Berry .....suicide attempt  
Kim Basinger .....panic disorder  
Marilyn Monroe .....clinical depression/suicide  
Princess Diana .....Bulimia nervosa, depression, multiple suicide attempts  
Tom Cruise .....dyslexia  
Whoopi Goldberg .....dyslexia  
Winona Ryder .....clinical depression, anxiety

While we're on the subject of famous people there's a video on YouTube that I'd recommend you to watch. [You can find it on this link](#). Demi Lovato shares her personal story of mental health problems and offers advice for young adults.

Finally, I'd just like to leave you by addressing the basic difference between madness and mental illness. Mental illness is a malady of the mind for which help is always available. Madness is the act of not seeking out that help.

## *Guide for parents*

This book is primarily aimed at empowering young people but since some of the readers of this section might not be able to make their own decisions when mental illness occurs, I've created this short guide for parents and guardians and I'm talking to them now.

I can't hammer in hard enough how important it is for you to be as matter-of-fact as you can about all this. You wouldn't not take your child to hospital when they've had an accident for fear that this might reflect on how dangerous your home is nor worry that a session of sickness and diarrhea reflects badly on your cooking or cleanliness so don't worry what others might think. If you need help, grab it.

### **Is my kid all right?**

Mental illness is extremely common - as many as ten percent of children suffer from it in one form or another. Thus put away any notion of there being a stigma attached to it. The real danger is highlighted by the number of kids whose untreated or partially untreated illness causes them to eventually drop out of school, go to prison or commit suicide. If you think your child is *possibly* suffering from a mental illness, you owe it to both of you to find out for certain.

The problem is that just about all teenagers go through their 'mean and moody' period where more than one syllable can constitute a whole conversation. You need to see past this if you are to diagnose the onset of mental illness. It's the extremes that are the best indicator of there being a problem. For example:

- Obsessing or being unable to focus
- Having insomnia or being permanently in a state of torpor
- Being hyperactive or having no energy
- Inexplicable and over-the-top anger or sadness

... as well as things like hearing voices, taking drugs and wanting to self-harm.

## Why is it so hard to identify mental illness?

This is partially to do with the perceived stigma which dates back to the pre-Victorian era when lunatics were seen as some kind of freak entertainment show. Thankfully we've moved on since then although attitudes still lag a bit. The other part of the problem lies in the natural competitiveness of parents who all strive to produce the 'perfect child'.

*The fact is that no-one's perfect - live with it.*

Not only that, if your kid has mental illness, they desperately need your help and support - most of all at the outset when the temptation is to sweep the symptoms under the carpet and hope that they'll stay out of sight or drift away on the breeze. They'll do neither, of course, and it's very clear that the longer an illness is allowed to get established the more major and longer-lasting the consequences.

Obviously the correct identification is the domain of a professional and I would not presume to offer any substitute for informed and expert advice. What I am trying to give, though, is a simple guide which will hold your hand through the early stages of the treatment process. Once you're started down the path, your health care professional will take over and explain what you need to know and how you can best attend to your child's needs.

## What mental health conditions affect children?

The most common illnesses are:

**Anxiety** - Usually called 'Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)', it may appear in children during periods of high stress such as starting a new school, moving to a new area, experiencing marital break-up etc.

**Behavior** - Hyperactivity and loss of the ability to concentrate could be an indicator of 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)', something which is much more common in boys than girls.

**Depression** - Tends to become apparent in older children (teens) and is increasing in prevalence.

**Eating** - Eating problems such as Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia usually start in the pre-teen and teen years and are much more common in girls than boys.

**Self-harm** - Burning or cutting is often used by children to help them cope with extreme emotional pain. It is not necessarily an indication of suicidal tendencies.

**Stress** - More correctly referred to as 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)', it is typically a consequence of something frightening such as bullying, physical or sexual abuse, sudden death of friends or family or through having endured a disaster.

### **What should I do if I suspect my child has a mental health condition?**

Your immediate obligation is to get your child in front of a professional as quickly as you can after you've confirmed your suspicions that your son or daughter *may* have a mental illness. However, there are other things which you can do to aid the correct diagnosis. For example, you could keep a log of catalytic events which triggered the suspected illness or maintain records when outbreaks occur and what transpires. The quicker the therapist can get to the core of the problem, the quicker your child can commence therapy, whatever that might consist of.

You should also spend the interim time investigating resources and therapists so that you are able to move quickly if required. Find out opening hours, contact numbers, names etc.

Impress upon other members of your family that you are trying to help a sick child and that covering up for them is at best unproductive and, at worst, potentially damaging to their treatment. You must be advised immediately if there is any sign of extreme behavior.

Make it clear to your child that you take their concerns seriously and that 'your door is always open'. Be prepared to give them everything from a simple hug through to bringing out the big parental guns when a major change is needed.

## **How do health care providers diagnose mental illness in children?**

Therapists commonly use a technique called Play Therapy in which the child (aged from a few years right through to late teens) can express their issues in a safe and non-verbal way. It has been shown that play is a highly positive experience for humans given that it raises levels of knowledge, efficacy, expression, creative thinking and exploration. It also reduces stress and boredom and provides the basis for relationship forming.

Play Therapy succeeds because young children may not have the vocabulary to verbalize what is bothering them and older ones, who might have the vocabulary, could well feel embarrassed or hampered. By using inanimate objects, the child can act out their fears in a non-threatening and open manner using the language of play - something that they're fluent in.

Weekly play therapy sessions of 30 to 45 minutes are structured by the therapist although the child is allowed to dictate the pace at which the therapy progresses .

The principal functions of play therapy are to aid children to:

- Act out issues that concern them
- Find new solutions to their problems
- Learn to respect themselves and others
- Express emotions and empathy
- Acquire new social skills

## **How can I help my child cope with mental illness?**

The fact that you might ask this question is a good indicator that you are the kind of parent who will make a positive difference to their child's treatment program. We've already discussed many of the things you can do but here are some things to bear in mind when dealing with children.

- A child is pre-programmed to want to be loved, understood and accepted. These bonds are your greatest weapon in helping to overcome that which is troubling them.
- The reason why your child is being naughty could easily be to do with them feeling scared, hurt or confused about what is happening to them. Do not make the mistake of assuming that they are 'bad'.
- Because of the way that they are, children do not set out to make their parents' lives miserable. If you find that your rules are constantly being broken, it could be that the rules are wrong for the child in their current condition.
- Whatever form of illness your child has, no person worth listening to should seek to pin blame on you for that. The only blame which should ever be apportioned is when a parent deliberately ignores the warning signs or the cries for help.
- Forget anything which your parents or your grandparents may have told you about sparing the rod and spoiling the child. You cannot beat mental illness out of a child.

# **Part Three - Belief Becomes Action**

## *Chapter 7 - Transform Your Thinking*

I'm going to begin this section with a very short science lesson. Do you remember Newton's Laws? His First Law basically says that an object keeps doing what it's doing until something happens to change it. In terms of what makes you tick, this rule translates to:

*"In order to make that desired personal transformation, you need to start thinking differently about yourself."*

The sentiment's obvious when you look at it from this distance but it's dead easy to completely lose sight of when you're close up. With that in mind, I'm going to take you through a three-stage process of transformation which will help you on your way.

Are you ready?

### **Transform your thoughts about yourself**

Have you ever really looked at who you are? I mean looked at yourself objectively and not with a head full of negative ideas that have arisen from prejudice and preconceptions? If you don't love yourself, you can never truly love others and love is the basic fuel that the whole of humanity runs on. By learning to love and feel positive about yourself, there is no limit to what you can accomplish.

I want you now to clear your head of any negativity put there by others and to be prepared to rise above any self-imposed limitations. If you are to achieve that goal of loving who you are - warts and all - here is how you should think about yourself.

You should be able to:

- Forgive yourself when you make transgressions. No-one is perfect and you should treat each error you make as a positive learning experience.
- Forgive others when they transgress against you. This does not involve giving others endless opportunity to abuse your trust (because that devalues your true worth); what it means is accepting that an event has

happened and then putting it behind you by forgiving the perpetrator. Holding on to bad experiences merely boosts their importance and prevents healing.

- Fuel your body with a balanced and healthy diet and don't allow its pollution by toxic substances. Being strong in body will help you to be strong in mind.
- Look after the physical you by engaging in sensible exercise to increase your strength and resilience.
- Live for the moment and don't dwell in the past or worry unduly about the future. Concentrate on taking every genuine opportunity as it is presented to you.
- Once you've made a decision, put your heart and soul into achieving its successful conclusion.
- Avoid limiting yourself (or letting yourself be limited) by constantly looking to expand your horizons through the learning of new skills or through the attaining of knowledge. Increasing your life experiences will give you greater awareness and an enhanced ability to deal with the unexpected.
- Understand that an important part of life is having fun during which time your body, mind and soul can all de-stress and relax. Re-energization is a key element in the rejuvenation process so regularly treat yourself to having time-out to do the things you truly love.
- Sleep peacefully in the knowledge that you are a good and worthwhile member of the human race, and although not perfect by any means, are in the process of striving to be so.

I mentioned that little voice inside of you. Listen carefully as it responds to the above imperatives and note where you need to improve. Do not be overly-harsh on yourself as no-one can hope to achieve 100% success; they can merely aspire to it.

Remember that by building a foundation of self-respect and self-appreciation, you are perfectly placed to then apply those qualities to your projects and interactions with others.

### **Knowing the difference between being alone and being lonely**

It's far too easy to start hanging out with the wrong crowd all because you're worried about feeling lonely. The problem is the price to be paid in such cases is much too high. The situations such people will draw you into will ultimately damage your capacity to respect yourself and this creates a downward spiral as you then crave their approbation (in lieu of your own). Meanwhile, your psyche is getting further corrupted by their negative deeds and attitudes.

The act of being alone occurs when a person was surrounded by negative influences and has since entered on a course of action which has removed them. In such a case, being alone is a desirable state. Being lonely is the condition of needing the company of others, however this need must be perpetually kept in check lest it attracts naysayers and time vampires.

If you have your self-belief and your inner voice for company, you need never be truly lonely.

### **Play to your strengths**

We're all a mixture of strengths and weaknesses so don't worry about your weak points. Instead, always put your best foot forward by promoting your strong points while gradually working on resolving your weaknesses. The successes that you will create from this stance will boost the way others perceive you and also your feelings about yourself.

### **Set your standards**

There are always those who will try to judge you and although you can't prevent this, you can learn to ignore them. See the humor in the crass stupidity of their comments - for example, let's imagine they were discussing how many job interviews you had applied for. One way or another, you would have been guilty of applying for

too many and not focusing enough, not applying for enough and thus not taking your chances, or having 'left it late' (if you'd been successful). In other words, you couldn't have won whatever the outcome.

That's why you need to set your own standards and goals and ignore those set by others for you.

## **Transform who you associate with**

"Birds of a feather flock together"

It's true though, isn't it? Spend a day observing the small and large groups of people that you come across (in real life or on television). I'll bet that you find that they are of a type such that you'll see:

- Groups of business people
- Groups of military personnel
- Groups of criminals
- Groups of parents
- Groups of gang-bangers

etc

The point is that we are social animals with definite pack tendencies. Look at any documentary about primates or go to the zoo and you will see how natural it is for a group of animals to work together. Separate one and put it into solitary confinement and it will pine terribly no matter how comfortable its surroundings might be.

We also like to feel that someone is in control - that's the pack part. The presence of a strong alpha male is reassuring in case the group is attacked or needs to make a difficult decision.

It's no surprise, therefore, when a vulnerable young person gets caught up in a group of 'undesirables'. Low self-esteem and a preconception of what they're destined to be can quickly lead them into a group of like-minded people whose collective

negative attitude most likely exceeds the sum of the negative attitudes of its members. The young person has 'arrived' and transitions from a state of being lonely to a state of 'belonging'.

But at what price?

If this is you, the price you've agreed with the devil for being cool and accepted is that your future has been sold. You do what the group (or the leader) says you should do, you act the way the group acts lest you fall out of favor, and you do not criticize other group members for acting in a way that your little voice says is wrong.

That's a *really* big price, isn't it?

The good news is that, unlike in supernatural films, this devil doesn't have a contract in blood with you and the only chains holding you are the ones you've created and placed there yourself. It's time to break free.

### **Breaking free**

Having made the decision to break free of the clutches of the group which has adopted you/you have adopted, it's necessary to start implementing those changes which will take you from where you are now to where you want to be in the very near future.

Here are a few ideas for how you can achieve this.

**Hang out in new places** - Mooching around the same old places means hanging out with the same old faces. You need to expand your horizons and set sail for new locations. Yes, you'll make mistakes along the way but that's part of the fun of living. As you home in on different spots that work for you, you'll start to make new friends and acquaintances, leaving many of the old ones behind.

**Be independent** - You are your own boss and you should decide what you do and don't want to do. Don't look to a group leader to make the decisions, make your own! Any of your old group who had your interests at heart will approve of your newly declared state of independence. If not, time to say 'goodbye'.

**Find new interests** - Brainstorm the things that you've always wanted to do and see which ones are within your grasp. Joining new clubs and societies or taking up new hobbies or sports will bring you into contact with likeminded people. You've immediately got something in common so see where it leads!

**Organize your own group** - This is a great way of breaking out if you have the time, knowledge and contacts to bring it to fruition. Examples of this might include starting a sports team, directing a play or setting up a society. The group could be centered on leisure or it could be commercial or it could be public interest - it doesn't matter.

**Take charge of your destiny** - There's only one person on the whole planet suitably qualified and motivated to carry out this vital job and that's you. Never subcontract the directing of your future to others as they cannot and will not have your best interests at heart. Break away from any individual or group who wants you under their control.

Although a clean break is usually the best solution, it may be that you need to wean yourself off your old crowd gradually. Whichever is best for you is OK but make sure that you make the commitment and don't allow yourself to be propelled back because next time you'll find the exit slope even slipperier.

By meeting new people you broaden your mind and open your heart to new ideas and concepts. This will both enrich your life and provide you with the guidance systems that will aid you to navigate away from bad influences and drains on your spirit. Take the opportunity and be ambitious and broad-minded in the diversity of the new people you mix with. Seek out people of different races, beliefs, viewpoints and challenge yourself - the little voice will thank you.

No matter how strong the attraction, life is too short to allow your mind to be devalued by people who don't appreciate you.

## **Transform your environment**

Have you ever considered how the choice of location has a big influence on the way in which a film is perceived? Can you imagine something like Lord of the Rings being set with an urban background or putting the Die Hard series in a country village? They just wouldn't work, would they?

This is why it's essential that you pay careful consideration to the backdrop you live your life against. While work may mean that relocating is difficult (nothing is ever impossible), you can still make a major difference by opening your mind to new ideas. Getting out there and mixing with new people in new situations is a hugely positive experience and will make you a happier and more confident person.

Here are some ideas for how you might make a major transformation to your environment:

**Change where you socialize** - Do you go to a specific bar or night club? If so, try one in a different neighborhood. If you don't like it, ask yourself why. Is it you? Should you change and adapt? Set yourself the goal of mixing with people you'd not normally mix with.

**Change your romantic life (if appropriate, of course)** - If you're single, don't look to meet partners in bars, try online dating, speed-dating, joining new clubs etc. If you're in a relationship, talk to your partner about new places to eat out or visit.

**Change how you spend your time** - If I said to you to take up a new hobby, would your answer be that you've no time? How many hours a week do you spend watching television, playing computer games, sitting in bars or just hanging out? These are all unfulfilling pastimes and do nothing towards spiritual development. Cut that time by half and you'll have more than enough hours to invest in something that will have lasting beneficial effects on your psyche.

**Change your mental fuel** - Instead of being fed by television (which is tantamount to inactivity), invest some time in reading books. With the advent of cheap or even free e-books and the applications which run on tablets or Kindle viewers, you

can have a whole library in your jacket pocket. Force yourself to select new genres (especially those which are creative or uplifting) which challenge your ideas and expand your horizons. Unlike watching television, reading is much more beneficial because it's more cognitively active and can be much more participatory.

**Change the way you live** - Most of us have far too much clutter and, while I'm not advocating an uncontrolled Feng Shui session, many of the trappings which surround you are either restricting your movement or anchoring you to a way of life which you desperately need to change. Get rid of anything and everything that you've not used or looked at in the last 12 months (with a few minor exceptions). Sell it, give it away or dump it - that's up to you but free your living space and free yourself.

**Change your home** - I'm not suggesting anything as drastic as moving house but what about a bit of judicious redecorating? If you live with dark and somber colors, change them for pastels which will both brighten the rooms and your moods. If the property is rented, try placing a bunch of flowers on the dining table or putting up a few cheerful pictures.

**Change the way you eat** - If you put contaminated fuel in your automobile, it will either refuse to run or do so under extreme protest. Look at your diet. Is it balanced? Are you getting enough vitamins, fiber, protein etc? If you've a taste for fast food, cut down on it in favor of natural foodstuffs and you'll be amazed at how much energy you get by way of a bonus. You might find you save some cash, too.

Your environment is what you make it. The more uplifting it is, the more your spirit will soar and your vision will clear.

### **My story - Part 3**

I'm now remarried - happily so, I'm pleased to say.

Going back a few years, I was in the market for employment. This is the story of how I took a Minimum Wage job and gradually transitioned from there to where I am now, running a million-dollar Texas-based organization that provides services at over 30 different children's facilities, and healthy and nutritional meals for over 6,500 children.

\* \* \*

Yippee! I thought to myself. I've got a job! I was incredibly excited at the prospect that someone wanted and trusted me to work for them. I'd been unemployed for 2 months and my savings had taken a severe battering. The lady on the phone telling me that my application as a Teaching Assistant had been successful then went on to explain to me that the pay was only \$6.75 an hour and the smile instantly disappeared from my face to be replaced with a deep frown.

What was this ... (insert expletives of your choice here)? How could it only pay \$6.75? All that responsibility and what do I get at the end of the month? I was both livid and desperate - the desperation won through but only just and not without a struggle.

I was all set to quit before induction but the deciding factor came from my husband, Ulysses. I'd erroneously anticipated that he would smooth my ruffled feathers with a "Don't worry, there are other jobs which will pay you what you're worth" and a reassuring hug. I couldn't have been more wrong.

"Does the company offer benefits to all of its employees?" he asked.

With my best sad face, I replied, looking at the literature I had from them, "Yes, they offer free health insurance, dental insurance, sick pay, sick leave, paid vacations, holiday pay, disability benefits, a retirement plan and funding for child development education," I replied

He then went on to point out that although I, personally, was not too well placed for disposable income, as a couple, we didn't have financial worries. Ulysses' main argument was, of course, that I'd jumped in with both feet and missed the fact that the remuneration for the job was the whole package and not just \$6.75 an hour times the number of hours I worked.

This was a pivotal and transformational moment in the development of my thought processes and perfectly explains the way I view things these days. As he pointed out, there were many positives and just one negative.

I took the job, and was glad I did. Without it, we would have had to self-fund the cost of two vital surgeries and I'd never have received my Child Disability Allowance. Not only that, Headstart, my employer, gave me an opportunity to acquire lots of valuable experience and knowledge as I rose up the ladder with them. However, after five years, it was time to break out and set up my own business and that's what I did.

I am now CEO of Apples and Oranges Corp which is a non-profit corporation that assists organized child-care programs with nutritional services and provides high quality enrichment services to less fortunate kids.

By the way, if I've whetted your appetite for the full story, don't worry because the book will be out soon!

### **On the subject of transformational thinking ...**

I've just been re-reading Chapter 16 of *It's Your Time* by Joel Osteen, a bestselling author and also pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. His message is that we should all seize the opportunities that are there if we look for them. The book is structured around four pillars; Faith, Restoration, Belief in Yourself and Lifting Others and uses Biblical examples to illustrate his points. As he says, 'God has given you everything you need to change your life, and you must use that power to strive beyond your limits'.

Joel's book helped propel me out of my comfort zone into unfamiliar territory which proved to be one of the best decisions I've ever made. I like to believe that I'm no quitter and would rather fail than not have tried. I'd be honored if people said that about me when I'm gone.

### **In conclusion**

In this chapter, we've looked at how vitally important it is to develop a new mindset - a positive one which will lead you into new territories and expand the way in which you feel about yourself and about others. If you've followed the advice in the

preceding chapters, you should be ready to start implementing the transformational process I've outlined here.

The difference between 'letting some light into your life' and 'living with darkness' cannot be overstated. One will nourish your spirit and make you soar, the other will set you on a series of self-destructive battles as you declare war against yourself. This is what I believe.

Not only that, I reckon that it's a case of 'what-you-think-is-what-you-get'.

Trust that little voice and don't let others define who you are or what you can do. Take the chances that life presents and never be guilty of wondering "What if I'd ...?"

## *Chapter 8 - Empower Your Core*

Are you hungry? I am. I'm always ravenous for new information to feed my mind with because I know it will get me moving and grooving in a fresh direction. You see, I reckon that the act of believing in your potential for progress and self-fulfillment is a big step in actually achieving this goal. It's all about attitude because it's that which will open the window on your soul and infuse it with self-belief.

In this chapter, I want to look at how this can take place.

Now that you've mastered the understanding of how a transformation can be brought about, I want to move on and investigate how a new and confident you can be created - phoenix-style. We will see how you can build and fuel an engine which will power you onwards and upwards, away from negative influences and into a world of 'can-do'.

### **Excuse me?**

You know how it is when you want to get dressed up for an important job interview? It's no good fooling yourself that the missing jacket button won't show - if it's missing, you need to replace it because otherwise you send out the message that you can't be bothered. Don't justify your inaction with a reassurance that you've not got the time, or that you'll be able to sit a certain way in front of the interviewer because you're only kidding yourself.

Some people go through the whole of life with that attitude.

This is what a friend told me a while back. It's stayed with me and now I want to share it with you.

She said people who use excuses to justify their failures are much more likely to become 'repeat offenders' in the failure stakes. In other words, failure breeds failure just as success breeds success. I thought long and hard about that statement and I decided that this was not something I wished to be known for so, henceforth, I decided that I

would neither dole out excuses for my own shortfalls nor be in the market for listening to excuses from others.

We all know someone (probably a number of people) who have a thousand-and-one reasons why they can't do something. Their standard response is always one of sidestepping rather than grasping the nettle. Favorite phrases include:

- "If only ..."
- "It's because ..."
- "I would have but ..."
- "It's not my fault ..."

... and so on.

How do you view these people? I'll bet you don't:

- Respect them
- Trust them
- Believe them
- Want to associate with them

In other words, it's certainly not how you'd like people to view you. The truth is, the people who make an excuse and then expect others to rush to hug them with cries of 'Poor you', 'It couldn't be helped' and 'You did your best' are on a one-way trip to a whole wide world of loneliness.

You don't have to make a big fuss about not making excuses. It can be as low key as you like.

Let's look at another case for a moment as it'll show you what I mean about just how refreshing it is when someone accepts responsibility. Imagine you've bought an appliance from a shop and are returning it because it doesn't work properly. Obviously, before they do anything, the store needs to inspect the item to see that it's not been mistreated or taken apart - that's only fair.

### **Scenario 1**

You: *"I'd like to return this please. It doesn't work."*

Manager: *"It would have worked OK here. We don't sell sub-standard items."*

### **Scenario 2**

You: *"I'd like to return this please. It doesn't work."*

Manager: *"We won't replace it if you've tampered with it."*

### **Scenario 3**

You: *"I'd like to return this please. It doesn't work."*

Manager: *"I'm really sorry you've had problems. Let's see what we can do to remedy that."*

I'm sure you can think up other scenarios. Now answer these questions about each of the above from your perspective after the manager's initial response:

- *What's my blood pressure like compared to when I entered the store?*
- *How much do I trust the manager?*
- *Assuming I do get the matter resolved, how likely am I to return to this store?*

Frightening, isn't it? Yet the third scenario doesn't concede anything tangible to the customer (the manager still has all their options open to refuse a refund or replacement if they've good cause to) but their response doesn't seek to impose excuses. It also offers empathy to the customer. This is what I used to hammer into my staff when they were dealing with an unhappy client.

Now apply this same reasoning to the way you conduct yourself. By empathizing and by not making excuses, you aren't being weak, you're being decent, upright, trustworthy and strong.

## Don't defend the indefensible

Another thing I used to do at work was to operate a very strict policy of refusing to defend the indefensible. For example, let's return to our shop scenario once more.

### Scenario 1

You: *"You can see the cable's frayed and old. No wonder it doesn't work."*

Manager: *"Have you got kids? Have they been playing with it? It looks like that to me."*

### Scenario 2

You: *"You can see the cable's frayed and old. No wonder it doesn't work."*

Manager: *"You probably left it in the sunshine. Looks like fair wear and tear to me."*

### Scenario 3

You: *"You can see the cable's frayed and old. No wonder it doesn't work."*

Manager: *"That's no good, is it? Let me replace it with one that we can check together first. How's that?"*

Now I want you to answer some questions for me:

- *How likely are you to return to the store?*
- *How much of the manager's time was going to be taken up (speaking relatively across the three scenarios)*
- *How much respect would you have for the manager as a human being?*

If you go away and discuss the experience with your friends, what would you say? Suppose you then hear that the Scenario 3 manager had sent a different customer off with a flea in their ear, what would you think then? Chances are you would reckon he or she had a good reason for turning the customer away.

That's the point.

There will be numerous occasions in life when you are being asked to justify or explain something which you know only happened through a moment's carelessness. If your instant reaction to such a criticism is to deny, deny, deny, you will merely acquire a reputation as being untrustworthy and slippery. On the other hand, if you freely admit where you've been wrong and then do your best to put things right *plus* fight tooth and claw when you've been accused of something of which you are innocent, you will be seen as being tough but fair. Not only that, the very act of being prepared to fight when the cause is just, sends out a very clear message. Next time you say "No, that's not correct" the belief that you've got a point will already be out there. Your words will have iron in them.

## **Fueling the purpose**

In this section we need to look at how we can empower your core so that you are ready to seek out and receive a lifetime of information which will delight your soul, satisfy your heart and take you to a new level of being. Specifically, I want to examine three skills which I'd like you to work on acquiring.

### **Self-reflection**

Self-reflection is the art of examining your life with all the obstacles removed. It's much like how a psychiatrist might work as they encourage you to explore what is holding you back. Once you've identified and quantified a problem, it's much easier to figure out a solution.

Gradually clearing your mind in this way is both extremely healthy and beneficial. While some of the issues which come to light may not be comfortable or easy to deal with, the alternative (i.e. ignoring them) is a pollution of the inner you - a violation of your core and a stifling of that little voice inside.

### **Getting ready for self-reflection**

It's no good doing this if you are likely to be disturbed or distracted so choose a time that is most likely to be yours. Switch off your mobile, find a comfortable chair and

reduce the lighting (if appropriate). Have a glass of water nearby (so that you don't have to get up midway) and a pen and paper.

### **Asking the right questions**

Get in the mood by asking yourself a few basic questions about how the period between this session and the last one has gone. Once you've got rolling, introduce the 'biggie', the question that's really been bugging you but be careful about how you phrase it. I say this because it's very easy to get bogged down in the 3P's - Preconception, Panic and Paralysis. That's what you risk if you go about things the wrong way.

Let me show you what I mean.

*"Why do I have problems learning the new system at work?"*

*"How can I make learning about the new system at work easier?"*

The first question is negative in its approach and expects the answer *"I don't know. Please feel sorry for me."* This is neither helpful nor going to happen when you are self-reflecting. The second question is positive and upbeat. It expects the answer *"Um, what if you ...?"* It also focuses directly on the issue at hand and seeks neither pity nor comforting.

I'm not saying you should never begin a question with 'Why' but learn to be judicious with its usage. 'Why' works best when you've already begun the solution process and need to focus in on a small detail.

This 'Why-How' question is key to a successful session so learn to implement it.

### **You only kid yourself**

If you've not gathered, self-reflecting in the way I'm proposing is a very active process. As a result, it needs to be free of extraneous nonsense (the How-Why question) and built on solid foundations. This is the next stage of the process I'm teaching you - the need to be completely honest with yourself.

I bet if I asked you about whether you'd cheat yourself, you'd deny it. The thing is that we lie to ourselves all the time. In the session, though, you need to be 100% honest, 100% of the time. Things won't go away because you choose not to see them or because you've 'shape-shifted' them into something more manageable.

### **The writing's on the page**

You've probably filled several pages with your thoughts and potential solutions to the 'How' questions - that's good. Go and get yourself a coffee, take a break, get some fresh air and then come back to what you've written.

Now take the first major question that you've postulated. You've probably jotted down one or more solutions. That's good but there's no reason why one of them is necessarily the best solution. It's very important now that you analyze what you've got and see if you can make it work. Maybe you might need to apply a different and temporary solution before implementing the principal one. Even if there is no principal decision by taking the first step down the road, you may well find that the optimum one reveals itself to you.

### **Be decisive**

Your solutions will only work if you make the decision to put them into usage. Once you've gone through all of your questions and come up with the optimum answers, it's time to bring them into play. Not only that, the act of being decisive is a highly desirable quality and one which will make you attractive to similar-minded positive thinking individuals.

### **Self-Value**

Your self-worth is the currency by which you trade with others therefore it's vital that your economy is strong and thriving. What this translates to is not:

- Belittling your value, putting yourself down in some misguided notion of modesty and joking about your lack of talent (or the talents you do have).

- Bragging about your successes, clearly exaggerating your abilities and attempting to climb on the back of others.

If you do the first, you will be seen as weak, pathetic and just part of the scenery. You are not being humble, you are just denying your capabilities and removing the color from your character.

If you do the second, you come across as egotistical and arrogant. You are not being confident, you are making yourself into a caricature that will offend all except those who seek advantage from your self-imposed blindness.

There is an optimum condition. It's one in which you celebrate the skills you possess and which make you a valuable member of society. Your uniqueness is in the way in which you think and feel. You will seek only to be equal with others - neither better nor worse.

I won't lie to you and say that getting the optimum self-value is easy but it is very worthwhile. If you've been putting yourself down for a long time, it's going to be tough to break out of that vicious circle:

**Low self-esteem = Minimal ambition = Underachievement = Low self-esteem**

However it *is* worth doing and once you've done it, you'll never look back.

I'm now going to discuss how you can build your self-worth. Hang on to your hat!

### **Love yourself**

This has nothing to do with the 'Mirror, mirror on the wall' routine. It is entirely associated with:

- Being your own best friend - treat yourself the same way that you would treat others
- Not prejudicing how you see yourself with judgments of how others view you

### **Have a little faith**

Life is always chucking toughies at you - situations that are difficult to handle through their complexity, implications, ethics etc. These can be circumstances in which someone has to lose out no matter what. One thing that really winds me up are the people who get off on criticizing my decisions and then (when asked "*What would you do, then?*") respond with "*I wouldn't want to be in that position*".

If you allow others to make decisions for you (no matter how tough those decisions might be), two things happen:

- Firstly, your self-worth nose-dives because a) you are being submissive to a third party and b) who is to say that the decisions made by the third party will be either correct or tolerable?
- Secondly, you become addicted to the psychological crutch that the third party is offering you. The day may well come when that other person has other fish to fry and you will be abandoned when you most need them.

### **Beauty is in the eye of the beholder**

Do you remember those tests at school where you handed your work to a classmate who then marked it with great brutality or leniency depending upon the status of your friendship? Assessing your self-worth based on the opinions of others is a bit like that. It's oh so easy to let others decide your future - career, interests, friends, partners etc - but it's not healthy. Ironically these self-same people probably let others decide for them and you'll go on to do the same to your children if you don't break the cycle.

It's quite possible that these people's own damaged self-expectations will (either consciously or subconsciously) seek to impose a similarly flawed outlook on you.

There are two types of people who might offer you advice. Here's what you should do:

- **Don't listen to** those who have wrecked their own lives through the making of poor choices. Next thing you know, you'll be a carbon copy of them.

- **Do listen to** those who are happy with who they are and who are justifiably confident that their own decisions have been up to scratch. Get them to teach you well.

### **Image is everything (well, nearly)**

Have you seen the games that psychiatrists play with photos of strangers? Which one is the good guy? Which one would you trust etc? How can you answer these questions when all you know about the people is their photographic image (which may well have been manipulated and don't start me on that one). The point is that we *are* judged on our image no matter how unfair that might be. The good news is that you can control this to a large extent without having to endure plastic surgery, I might add.

There are simple things that you can do to aid your image:

- Hold your head up
- Smile (no matter what you feel inside)
- Always greet people
- Dress comfortably and in clean and smart clothes
- Attend to your 'toilette' (keep clean and presentable)

### **You matter**

Take time out every day to just affirm that you are someone of value who matters and who has something worthwhile to contribute to the world. Say to yourself that you are lovable and capable of giving love.

Although it may be tough to do so, take responsibility for your actions and never attempt to palm off your errors or shortfalls on others. The knowledge that your words 'contain iron' will stimulate an immense feeling of well-being. While the more despicable elements of society will sneer at you for your integrity, there will be many good and decent people who will respect you for your straightforwardness. Whose approbation do you prefer?

### **Don't play the blame game**

Blaming people is easy. It means you don't need to examine the root cause of a problem and that results in you carrying on getting into the same fixes and never progressing. If you never progress, you'll never develop and that devalues your self-worth. Blaming yourself is no answer - the world doesn't need your ritual disembowelment.

When a problem occurs, investigate it, find a solution and do all that you can to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Get known as a man/woman of action and not as a finger-pointer.

### **Do your own thing**

Some people give themselves lifelong migraines by attempting to make everyone happy. This is clearly an impossibility yet they still go on trying, probably getting more and more desperate, depressed or disillusioned (maybe all three). Accept the fact that some people won't approve of what you do or when you do it - that's OK.

The world needs diversity and balance, not seven-and-a-bit-billion carbon copies (there's a thought for a scary Sci-Fi book). If you've followed the doctrine of being a decent person, celebrate that diversity and ignore the critics.

### **Don't miss out**

Carpe diem! Seize the day! The more you interact with others and the more accessible you become, the more opportunities will present themselves. Appraise each possibility as it comes to you and always remember the original L'Oréal advertising slogan "*Because I'm worth it*". Never be guilty of passing an opportunity by simply because you feel it's too good for you or that you wouldn't do it justice.

Of course, not all opportunities are to be taken but all are to be considered. If you ever find yourself being hard-sold something which has a bad smell about it, use words like 'Interesting', 'Really?' and 'Cool'. None of them commit you to anything but they save you from being confrontational. Finally, the old adage "If it seems too good to be true it probably is" is well worth remembering.

### **We're all 'just a'**

Have you ever heard a snob saying 'Oh, they're just a ...'. That's a totally disgusting thing to say and terminally stupid to boot. We're all 'just a ...' when it comes down to it. The idea that you can assess a person's worth by the salary they receive or the job they do is flawed beyond belief.

For example. You're stranded on an island - who is more valuable:

- A doctor or a judge?
- A carpenter or an accountant?
- A nurse or a lawyer?
- A cook or a food critic?
- A comedian or a TV newsreader?

... and so on

Value is a subjective commodity. It's just the same as asking the value of a bottle of water. If you had all of your money with you, how much would you pay for a bottle if you were a) in a big supermarket or b) lost in a desert?

Value (in job terms) is a function of its benefits (see my story in the last chapter) and the free time it gives you. A job may well pay three times as much as you currently get but is it worth it if it takes up all of your spare time or is likely to destroy your marriage?

If you are a worthwhile member of society that is enough. Look anyone and everyone in the eye in the full knowledge that they are no better nor worse than you. After all, they're just a ...

### **Time flies**

But how do you use that free time? If you want to earn Brownie Points, doing charitable or voluntary work should make you feel good about yourself but not if it's at the expense of sleep or your relationships. That won't do. Giving too much time to others could be a sign of not valuing your own time highly enough. Be critical of those

hours which you don't spend on your main employment or with your family/hobbies. Are you donating time to friends who take but never give?

Life is a balance and you must strike it right. Accept that allocating your time is an important task and one which may take a while to get exactly right. By doing that you will achieve the optimum value for your precious moments.

### **Monitor your self-worth**

As I've said, you are a work in progress. Only by keeping an eye on the effect of the changes you make will you get to that ideal of being a self-confident individual who knows they are; productive and efficient, lovable and loving, inspired and inspirational, valuable and valued.

Yes, I'm aware that the road will not be smooth. There will be potholes to fall into, there will be gangs who will try to hijack you and there will be scary moments when you want to question all that has been achieved. Have faith, have confidence and believe in yourself at all times.

This is not rhetoric, this is reality. You *can* do this, I know you can.

### **Self-accomplishment**

If self-value is your life's journey, self-accomplishments are the milestones you acknowledge along the way. They can relate to absolutely anything and there is no reason why any two people need ever agree on what could be deemed worthy of being labeled a self-accomplishment.

Taken literally, it means something that you have achieved by yourself but it should not rule out the act of managing, organizing, directing a team of people to a mutual goal. For example, you might be in charge of scenery changes for a successful Christmas pantomime. It doesn't matter that you didn't appear in the production, the pantomime was a success as was your contribution. Therefore the self-accomplishment element would be the 'having successfully managed the scenery' as opposed to 'having been in the panto'.

## **Setting the standard**

One of the main stumbling blocks which people run up against when evaluating self-accomplishments is how their efforts are moderated. For example, is it good enough to say "*I think I did that rather well*" or do you need someone else to comment "*Well done, old chap*"? It begs some questions, doesn't it?

For example, how do you determine the yardstick by which you are assessed?

You might think that this is easy when it relates to something as clinically precise as an exam but even that's not the case. We all recognize that some educational establishments are tougher than others and that some decisions about how well you've done are almost entirely subjective.

For achievements which don't have such a precise assessment system, it's even more difficult. What may be an achievement for you might be dead easy for one of your mates and nigh on impossible for me. The point is, of course, that *you* decide what is a desirable level of attainment and *you* assess yourself against that. Don't be too harsh, though. Not quite achieving a goal gives you room for ambition.

## **It's celebration time**

Nobody likes big-heads. The "*Have I told you about how I ...?*" and, no matter what answer you give, they then proceed to regale you with an anecdote that you've probably heard countless times before. We used to have a few people like that on the fringes of our group and our response was to wind them up with comments like "*Really?*" and "*Wow. You did all that?*" so that they got a fresh wind and added to their boasts. Meanwhile (and unbeknown to them) one of our group would stand behind them sniffing the air and silently declaring that they had detected the pong of BS.

That's what being a boaster gets you.

What you *must do* is to quietly celebrate your successes. Unless prompted, you don't need to talk about these with others - just take a moment and go somewhere peaceful that will allow you the opportunity to smile inwardly and to give yourself a big congratulatory hug.

Celebrating your successes in this way is vital. Each time you do it, you inoculate yourself with the perfect antidote for negativity.

### **A real winner doesn't need a loser**

Self-accomplishments are about achieving the goals that you set. They're nothing to do with competing with other people. It may well be that your goal is to come first but note that the achievement is 'coming first' and not 'beating everyone else'. The difference may appear to be subtle but it's very much there.

If you set your targets as 'beating others', this is a negative attitude that will sooner or later cause you hurt when you fail to beat someone or they beat you.

A self-accomplishment is what it says - something you, yourself, accomplish.

### **Third party approbation**

While some achievements clearly do require the assessment by a third party (such as passing an examination or being accepted for admission somewhere), that is not the same as approbation. You cannot say "*I am an approved driver*" for example (if the accomplishment was passing your driving test) but you can say "*I am a qualified driver*". There is a world of difference between the two statements.

Now you see the difference between 'qualification' and 'approbation', you can understand why waiting for others to recognize your achievements is a negative and pointless exercise. While some will drown you with their praise, others will deliberately withhold it knowing that they are depriving you of the recognition you both deserve and need.

Never be beholden to others for this. Set your own targets and decide when you've hit them.

### **Flattery will get you nowhere**

It's essential that achievements are assessed objectively (as far as that is possible) by yourself and are not dependent upon the recognition of others. It has long been established that the wanton issuing of praise is counter-productive. Praise is not synonymous with encouragement and studies of children whose parents have muddled

the two show that their kids have their sense of values badly damaged. Net result, they end up in a lot of hot water.

Thus, you should not require the admiration of others to acknowledge your self-accomplishments. You need to sit back and listen to your little voice say "Well done". That's praise, indeed.

### **It's a record**

Keep a log of your self-accomplishments - a brief outline along with the date *plus* a note of how you might like to progress from there. This is a private diary and not to be shown to others as doing so will a) make you look like a braggart and b) transform the act of accomplishment into one of competition.

When you find yourself experiencing a dark moment, get this logbook out and look at how far you've come. Your mood may make you want to deride these accomplishments but don't let it - that's just the voice of negativity speaking, a vicious creature fed by the jealousy of others.

### **Empowerment to the people!**

Feeling good about your life, the things that you do and how you do them, the fact that you are a productive and worthwhile individual - all of these things are key contributing factors to empowering you.

If you weren't in that position to begin with, in this chapter we've looked at how you can be transformed into someone who believes in themselves and their abilities. Assuming that you've put that advice in motion, you should be beginning to feel much more confident about yourself.

I sometimes wonder where most of us lost that essential ability to have self-confidence and belief. My suspicion is that it is drummed out of us during our formative years when we have our parents' (and teachers') expectations instilled in us along with the set goals which we are required to achieve. It's enough to discourage anyone.

Empowering yourself is the act of taking control of your life and giving it your own personal brand. I think that Jerry Herman's song "*I am what I am*" from *La cage aux Folles* puts it across in a way that I can't improve upon:

*I am what I am*

*I don't want praise, I don't want pity*

*I bang my own drum*

*Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty*

The point is that the singer has identified and empowered themselves. While people who enjoy what he or she does are welcome, the comments of those who don't like it are dismissed. It's a very powerful song and highly relevant to what we've been looking at here so do look up the full lyrics if you have a moment.

To empower yourself means allowing yourself to take control of your life in your own way. If there were a remote control with your name on it, how would you operate and treat that remote control? Empowerment is all about accepting the fact that (even if you don't feel it right now) you are radiant and powerful. Most of all, you are unique.

# Chapter 9 - Transition into your Mission

If you imagine your mind as a house, the issues of other people would constitute lodgers. Some of those will be bona-fide problems of close friends whom you are helping but the others are ones that have grabbed hold of you as you passed and which are now feeding off you. That makes them sound like a tick which sits patiently on a blade of grass until something warm-blooded brushes against it.

It's high time to serve an eviction order to those parasites!

I'm not joking. These demonic creatures will drain your essence by stealing your attention and distracting your consciousness so get with the garlic and the silver bullets and dispatch these vampires back to Oblivion. Your mind is a sacred area and not a haven for soul-eaters.

So, get that spring-cleaning done and come with me as we look at your mission. Don't worry, this message won't self-destruct in five seconds and it's not 'impossible' either!

One word before we begin looking at your life mission, I hope you've gathered from the tone I'm taking that, despite the severity of what we're doing, I intend us to have fun as we go. That's F-U-N, fun. Living your life should not be like enduring some tedious job - you're worth far more than that - besides which, it's entirely the wrong attitude.

## **Your mission in life**

There are nearly 8 billion people on this planet and goodness knows how many billions have already gone before. Do you know what 8 billion even looks like? If you had 100 dollar bills to the tune of \$8bn, you could create 5 stacks, each a mile high. Just think what Air Traffic Control would have to say about that!

The point is, despite this mind-bogglingly high number, you are *still* unique. No-one is identical to you - even if you've got an identical twin, you are *still* unique. With that in mind, although your mission may be similar to those of others, how you tackle it will be entirely specific to you.

## **Choosing a mission**

We need a mission because, without that, we are a ship without a rudder. No matter how good the captain and the navigator, we're only going to end up sailing in circles, lost as effectively as if we'd created our very own Bermuda Triangle.

Another use of mission statements occurs in companies who use it to define their corporate objectives and send a message to every employee and customer about how they wish to be perceived. It's the yardstick by which they must then live.

If this all sounds difficult, don't worry as it isn't. In any case, I'm going to talk you through it. When it comes down to it, it doesn't matter what the mission statement is as long as it's worthwhile because the goodness and decency of your goal will nourish the inner you and develop your spirit along the way. It's also a statement of who you really are.

You remember I mentioned 'uniqueness'? We must celebrate that uniqueness in the selection and attainment of our mission. That's why I can't tell you what to choose but I can give you some serious guidance which I believe will see you nicely on your way.

## **How to write a mission statement**

A mission statement is (typically) one-sentence in length with a very specific reference to what you want to achieve. It's there to help guide you with decisions about actions, priorities, and responsibility.

To give you an idea, here are some of the top companies' and non-profits' mission statements:

**American Heart Association:** To build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

**Amnesty International:** To undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of human rights.

**Facebook:** To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.

**Google:** To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

**Microsoft:** To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential.

**National Wildlife Federation:** Inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

**Oxfam:** To create lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and social injustice.

**Save the Children:** To inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

Never mind if you agree or disagree with any or all of them, do you see how powerful these are? It's the message that the boardroom sends out to all its employees, customers, subcontractors and suppliers. Likewise, with you, it's what your spirit will tell your limbs to do, your mouth to say and your mind to think. It will also determine how others perceive you and may even end up being your epitaph.

Notice how there's no hyperbole in these statements so keep that out of what you say about yourself. For example, let's say that you want to declare that you are going to be a good person (far too simplistic).

**Good example:** I shall seek at all times to be a decent and honest human being in all my dealings, be they with friend or stranger.

**Bad example:** I'm going to be the nicest person who ever lived.

The bad one's a truly laudable mission but a) who is to say that you are the 'nicest' person, b) what does 'nicest' really mean and c) the nicest person of all time - really? Not only that, no-one is ever going to believe it.

The other problem is that the 'good' example is self-imposed and does not seek third party approbation to verify that it has taken place. The 'bad' example means little unless many other people agree.

Decide what is important to you but remember that this is for life and not just to see you through a phase of your existence. Here are some ideas about what you might want to think about:

- Helping others less fortunate
- Being honest and transparent in your dealings
- Never raising the first hand
- Always seeking to acquire new skills and knowledge
- Learning to love and be loved
- Using your talents and skills for the good of all
- Being blind to prejudices and accepting people for what they are

... and so on.

Many will say that it's foolish to give and not expect in return. They are the fools. If you follow the mantra of 'doing good where you are able to', you will receive far more than you give in terms of nourishment for your spirit, life-defining experiences and the making of new friends. Not only that, you will become a more emotionally mature and attractive person who will find that they have a magnetic influence on other decent people.

In other words, it's a pretty good deal so don't ask me why I run a non-profit for disadvantaged kids, will you?

Irrespective of what mission statement you choose, the worst thing you can do is to have no direction to your existence because that can easily lead to a wasted life.

Where is your heart calling you to go? What are your natural talents (and don't you dare be falsely modest)? Put it all in the melting pot, come up with your mission statement and let it be the light that guides you in your darkest moments.

## **Adapting to life**

As you have already discovered, if life is likened to a race, it would not be a simple sprint to the line. I'd also hope that it doesn't feel like a marathon, either - something which just goes on and on, mile after mile. Some people might argue that it's a bit like a steeplechase with its hurdles and water jump. I tend to think it's a cross-country which takes us through picturesque scenery peppered with unforeseeable obstacles of all shapes and sizes.

That's the point. There will be obstacles along the way and you will need to deal with them. How you cope is up to you but hopefully this book will have given you some ideas for how to formulate a response which will transform even a seemingly negative event into a positive learning experience.

Some adaptations will tend to just occur. We are conditioned to believe that some physical characteristics are 'beautiful' yet when love strikes, we quite correctly overlook the imperfections and blemishes in favor of the person within. Likewise, some are born into wealth and others into poverty. We cut our cloth accordingly and aspire to improve our situation.

Even pain has its flipside. Experiments have shown that those who endure great physical hurt come out the other side with a higher tolerance to pain.

How often has it been said that 'Variety is the spice of life'? Imagine something as simple as your favorite food. How frequently would you like it served up? Once a month, once a week, every day? If you had to eat your favorite meal every single day of your life, I guarantee you'd soon get to fantasizing about something very different! Note how this doesn't apply to other species - they're often quite happy with the same meal over and over. Food is food and that's enough for them to know.

This is why I want you to embrace those changes and adaptations which life will undoubtedly thrust upon you and it's also why I don't want you getting depressed when the race you're running ceases to resemble a comfortable jog along a perfectly groomed athletics track.

## **Living the mission**

Every one of us was placed on Earth to carry out our own unique mission. Make sure the reflection of your mission mirrors your natural given talent and when the opportunity arises, live up to your promise. Allow yourself to be rightfully proud when someone says that you are a 'man/woman of their word'.

The mission you choose should harmonize with Mankind, complementing the striving of our species to fulfill its own role as the caretaker of our beautiful planet and others which we shall undoubtedly go on to colonize. This is hardwired into all of us and it is the distant call of your heart that must be answered if you are to flourish.

Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to go out there and nourish your spirit by being a good person. Your actions will define you and thus should create ripples far and wide. It is this by which you shall be known.

# Your Journey

I see our lives as journeys. For some of us, they may be long while, sadly, for others they may be relatively short. Whichever it is, we need to believe that we have chosen our paths wisely.

We don't always get to pick the style in which we travel but we can have a say in the places we visit and the stops we make. It is this freedom to choose which sets us apart from the other species on our planet and defines us as sentient beings with an inner spirit.

Where will our journey take us? To a large extent, we are masters of our own destiny. We can choose whether to travel into the light or into the darkness, we can specify whether we go far or stay near and we can decide whether to be the driver or the ticket collector. Everything is possible in our vehicle.

Sadly the pace of modern life means that the view from our window is often a blur and this means that we can easily miss important stops - ones that would enhance and enrich our existence. It's vitally important to make the time to pull over for a while and explore places which lighten our hearts and spirit.

And what of your fellow travelers? Did you pick them, did they choose you or was it just serendipity that determined who was in your group? We all share common destinations but our routes do not necessarily coincide. Not only that, it is better to travel alone than to have a coach full of negative influences. You say who comes with you and if people misbehave, drop them off sharpish. Never suffer in silence and never accept the unacceptable.

Remember, this is your journey and you are a VIP.