

# **TYRANTS OF SELF-CONCEPT: RULING THE RULERS**

By

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## About the Author

**Social psychologist, scientist, writer, businessman, and outdoorsman are but a few of the roles Terry Rich Hartley enjoys. Dr. Hartley holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a doctorate in social psychology. He has won numerous first-place journalism awards from the New York State Associated Press Association, and has been senior editor for an international publisher of self-concept educational material. Dr. Hartley has published research papers in prestigious science journals, including *Hypertension*, *The International Journal of Psychophysiology*, and *The Journal of Clinical Hypertension*. He is a member of MENSA, the high-IQ society. Dr. Hartley promotes personal growth through self-concept development, as represented in this book. He and his wife Shirley live in Idaho.**

## PREFACE

This book's purpose is to demonstrate that the mass of men and women do not have to spend their lives limited by the critical voices of mental spectators—those little tyrants rattling around inside their heads, telling them second by second how to fight their battles, what they can and cannot do, what they must and must not do. **TYRANTS OF SELF CONCEPT: RULING THE RULERS**, exposes gender-loaded beliefs and other social fallacies for what they are—truisms—and informs, then challenges readers to discover how the truisms influence their self-concepts, the totality of their thoughts and feelings about themselves. Readers learn how their mental spectators have become internalized through socialization. Importantly, readers discover the adaptive and beneficial processes of examining the formation of beliefs that lead to negative self-concepts.

Self-awareness, critical thinking, and effective action lie at the heart of this novel approach to self-concept development that spans the self-help and relationship genres. Readers not only learn social skills, but they actually practice techniques for ruling their mental spectators. Composite characters with common personal and relationship problems guide the readers through workshops that are designed to enable them to actively shape their relationships, and, thus, to take control of their own lives.

The social psychological concepts of this book are grounded in time-honored tradition and empiricism, while the book itself is written at a general-interest level. This book is founded on the principle that people need to sense control over their lives. From this principle, each chapter provides a stepping stone for readers to progressively take greater, more active roles in their relationships with both real and mental spectators. By becoming confident communicators and negotiators they come to be shapers of their relationships and of their own lives.

## Chapter 1

### SELF-CONCEPT AND THE MENTAL SPECTATORS

He drinks because she nags, he thinks  
She nags because he drinks, she thinks  
While neither will admit what's true  
That he's a sot and she's a shrew.  
—Ogden Nash

#### The Arena: Victor or Vanquished?

Like it or not, we are all gladiators. We go to sleep and wake up in a social arena from which there is no escape. Challenge upon challenge confronts us, walls restrain us, and a mob of spectators mocks, sneers or cheers us. Each and every day brings new battles whether we want them or not and whether we're up to them or not. Life forces us to face one skirmish upon another—no choice in that. What we can choose, though, is which kind of gladiator to be, victor or vanquished. Both people in Ogden Nash's poem, cited above, are obviously vanquished, victims of their own perceptions. The woman views herself as a victim of "his" drunken idiocy. He, on the other hand, sees himself as a casualty of "her" harping, which has driven him into alcoholic escapism. The poet, however, appears untouched by it all, viewing both characters as agents of their own misery. He drinks because he's a sot; she nags because she's a shrew. End of story. But, is it?

Viewed through her eyes, she's struggling under the domination of an unenlightened, sexist, USDA grade-Z, male chauvinist pig who comes home in the wee hours, bangs doors, bumps into walls, flops into bed, belches the National Anthem, then exudes rancid odors throughout the night while snoring like an Oklahoma thunderstorm. She's drudging eight to five at a job in which porcine males with half her talent earn more, and she's facing the added burden of taking on far more home duties than her ne'er-do-well spouse. She cooks, cleans, mops and scrubs. The kids are her responsibility. Has the jerk ever seen them board a school bus? She has to yowl and nag just to pry him from his beer-swilling buddies long enough to start the lawn mower. He doesn't understand what she's going through and never will. How can someone who communicates with grunts and snorts ever understand anything? He trashes, she cleans, he's the prince of lies, she's the paragon of virtue, he's gross, she's groomed. Things are tough all over, but especially for the woman. "Poor me," she thinks, "poor me."

He, though, struggles to stay afloat on a storm-tossed sea of social change. His job sucks, and he can't find a better one. Why look? Women are "given" the good jobs. So are freeloaders who wear convenient minority labels. And, god forbid, women minorities get it all. Men—real ones like him—built this world and now they get the respect of road kill. One social culture after another feeds on them. If it's not losing a job in the name of political correctness, then it's being told to behave with sensitivity, a cheesy buzzword for surrendering manhood. And at home he's nothing but a target for her scolding. He needs her needling, whining rebukes like he needs a sandpaper jock-

strap. No appreciation, no respect. It's better to carouse, drink, belch and play darts. "Poor me," he thinks, "poor me."

So who really is the victim here? They both are. Their self-concepts—the totality of their thoughts and feelings about themselves—are frightfully negative. They are victims of their own perspectives. Like all of us, each is in the arena of never ending battles. Both are in the continuous company of mental spectators—those little tyrants rattling around inside their heads, telling them second by second how to fight their battles, what they can and cannot do, what they must and must not do. The tyrants applaud and they hiss, they encourage and they discourage. Like spectators in a Roman arena, their thumbs go up and their thumbs go down. Mercilessly, they tell you if you're a victor or a vanquished. And their power over your self-concept can't be overestimated. After all, they represent every person, every social custom, and every cultural truism that you are ever exposed to. Sure, in your everyday activities you encounter real-life spectators, people who judge you. But, once each spectator is out of sight, if you've taken his or her judgments seriously, that person becomes a mental spectator—one living in your mind. The mental spectator is the memory of the overheard mother or the aunt saying, "I hope you marry someone rich because you're not going far on brains." It's the echo of the father or the coach growling, "You've got a back problem—no spine." It's the image of friends mocking you for expressing other than a group opinion. And think of all the TV ads ringing in your head, telling you what to wear, what to drive, how to look, what to swallow and when.

The mental spectator is your memory of the model on the magazine cover insinuating that if your physical proportions are not equivalent to hers, then you're a blubber butt or a flat-chested geek. Use her product to look the way you "should" look. It's also the flaming feminist demanding that you become an assertive, obnoxious bitch, or the shouting male radio host taunting you to be a two fisted, chest thumper who defends the old standards when men were men and women were better seen than heard. It's the demagogue of any leaning—left to right—prodding you to march in lock step with the "correct" gender, social, or religious battalion. It's the preacher, the banker, and the busybody. It can even be your god, your guardian angel, or your conscience. It's all these figures—and more—collectively placing demands on you, demands so conflicting that their impossibility leaves you with a down and dirty self-concept. You view yourself as a chump. In the great cathedral of life, you are a garbage disposal.

#### Quiet Desperation, the Deadly Opponent

Millions come to accept a negative self-concept as their personal reality. Psychologists' offices are packed with them. But so are bars, business offices, and homes. The problem is so entrenched that it was noted long ago by the naturalist philosopher Henry David Thoreau when he ventured that most people "lead lives of quiet desperation". With so many people living this way the question becomes, is this the way I have to live? Fortunately, the answer is not unless you want to.

And the reason you don't have to live a life of quiet desperation is because once you identify your mental spectators — and your interaction with them — you can move beyond vanquished and into the role of victor, a gladiator who rules your spectators in every battle. Muhammad Ali was a gladiator who broke the mold of quiet combatant. For years, prizefighters concentrated on their opponents and never acknowledged the spectators except at the beginning a fight while being introduced. To the contrary, Ali treated the audience as part of the fight itself, waving them on, shouting

at them, using them to intimidate his opponent and energize himself at the same time. In Zaire, Africa, when he fought George Foreman for the heavyweight championship of the world, he incited spectators to chant, “Ali, Ali, boom ayah”, meaning “Ali, Ali, kill him.” Likewise, you need to rule your mental spectators the way he ruled his outer ones.

Here's how it works: Your *thoughts*, your *feelings*, and your *behaviors* are so securely linked that any activity in one influences the other two. If you are a slave to even a single mental spectator who gives you thumbs down when you try to improve yourself, then you will give up on your quest for self-improvement. Your self-concept will remain in the gutter. For example, say that you decide to improve your vocabulary. Such an improvement will help you understand complicated issues and will also give you confidence to talk more professionally at work. This increased confidence would naturally make you feel better about yourself and also enhance your job opportunities. So you study a vocabulary book, and you learn new words and terms. But when you try to use one around another person, your mental spectator laughs and tells you that you sound phony, “like ignorant trash trying to sound smart.” Instead of controlling your mental spectator, you collapse in a heap, a vanquished gladiator. Your opponent—self-doubt—made one threatening gesture and down you went. You caved in. The dream of self-improvement died. Worst of all, you added strength to your mental spectators because they thrive on your each and every loss. Unlike Ali, who used spectators for strength, you let them use you. And now you’re the one who is bloodied.

What has happened to you is that negative thoughts (your ridiculing spectator) caused you to revert from the new, improved behavior (speaking more intelligently) back to an old behavior (speaking as you always have), and you feel like pond scum. And you’re going to keep feeling like pond scum until you wake up and realize that you can rule those mental spectators. Ruling them will change the negative thoughts that are keeping you down. Self-doubt didn’t beat you by itself and it can’t keep you down by itself. It needed the help of your own mental spectators, and you can learn to rule them. I’m going to show you how.

The remaining chapters of this book will guide you on your quest to rule by improving your self-concept. And no, you don’t need to swing a sword or toss a spear. As I said, you are a gladiator in the *social arena*—you have no choice—but you’ll become a smart one, one who learns how to win those spectators to your side, who becomes adept at getting a grip on life and becoming the person you most want to be. What it takes are eight steps for getting command, eight steps you can apply to most any situation you want altered. Critical thinking is crucial to each step. You’ll learn to think in situations to which you now merely react. You will learn who your mental spectators are, how you can deal with them, and how to battle your way to a better, more fulfilling life. You will read about other people with similar problems to yours and how they worked their way through those problems. Because I would never violate the confidence of a friend or self-concept student, the characters I use as examples in this book are actually composites of several people. However their problems and solutions are real.

The characters you will read about share something in common: none of them are “sick” in the clinical sense; none are insane or even abnormal. They’re simply people stuck in self-destructive patterns. Because of their negative self-concepts they’re not likely to change those patterns without some kind of help. Professional counseling offers one path to achieve that. Taking command of their own lives by learning to rule their relationships with mental spectators offers another path. But few

people know how to take command once they are stuck in a self-destructive pattern. They try one thing and then another. Then, with several failures under their belt, they give up and accept their dispiriting fate without recognizing why they failed. But the reason is clear: they let their mental spectators rule them. They had no one to coach them in the arena. That's where I come in. My goal is to coach you, to show you how to deal with those spectators; your task is to take command of your life.

### Take Command and Gain Freedom

Bookstores are brimming with self-help books, so you're probably wondering what this book has to offer that others don't. The answer is that my approach is not just a variation of other books; it is *fundamentally* different. Look in any bookstore and you'll find two types of self-help literature. One type of book will say that your problems are internal, that all your difficulties are the product of forces within you—whether you know it or not. By changing your attitude, the world—or at least your view of it—also will change. This view comes primarily from the field of psychology, which tends to treat persons from an individualistic perspective. That is, each person is a somewhat isolated “thing” filled with thoughts, emotions, and all sorts of hidden psychic forces.

The second type of book looks to society and culture as the shaping forces. Here, you are led to believe that social injustices are at the root of your problems. Becoming socially conscious and politically active will help you change things in the world for the better. Then, you personally will profit from the changed social conditions. This view grew from the field of sociology. Contrary to the psychological perspective, this view is inclined to treat individuals as parts of groups, as cogs on the great gears of society.

As a social psychologist, I do not see the two perspectives as necessarily in opposition. To the contrary, I believe both bodies of knowledge can become complementary elements of a greater whole. All that's needed is some glue to bond them together. And, social psychology is that glue. I will help you recognize the powerful influences in your life: your society and culture, the many small groups of which you are part, certain individuals, and, most importantly, the mental spectators you have created from them. Then, and only then, can you fully go to work on taking command of your life and mastering your self-concept.

I'll coach you through the eight steps for taking command of your life; your task is to do the work. Now, let's look at the steps.

### **Eight Steps to Taking Command of Your Life**

#### 1. Define What Ails You

Ask, what's my problem? Am I a jealous weasel, troubled that others have what I want? Am I ticked off most of the time? Am I sad and whiney? Anxiety ridden? Moody? All of the above? Without this step, you're doomed. Healing relies on it. It will take personal courage, but you won't get results without identifying what ails you.

2. Discover the Effects  
Ask, how are my problems affecting my life? Am I a lousy parent, a friendless dork, a backstabber, a slut, a drunk, a junkie? Am I none of the above, but someone who is less than I could be? This step requires absolute self-honesty, but the truth will help set you free.
3. Seek the Source  
Ask, from where are my problems coming? Who are my real and my mental spectators? What do my mental spectators look like, say, and do? Exactly who or what is keeping me from taking command of my life? This could be one of the most incredible experiences of your life. You will look into the abyss and see who is looking back.
4. Identify Your Role  
Ask, how am I contributing to my problems? What is my responsibility in all this? Did I decide to be a garbage disposal? Do I beat myself to death trying to please others? Do I expect things of myself that are unfair? Do I treat myself as a friend or an enemy? Do I allow my mental spectators to drive me to distraction, depression, anger, anxiety? Recognizing your role in your own problems is a positive—but scary—step toward knowing yourself and gaining personal command.
5. State Your Desires  
Ask, what do I specifically want to do about my problems? Do I want to be a doormat, a slut, a drunk, a friendless geek? Or do I want to rule my mental spectators? Do I want to stand up to a spectator, real or within, who puts me down? Do I want to take command of my education, my bank account, my relationships? Until you can actually list your desires in the order of their importance you will be a victim of negative self-concept. However, once you do this, you are on your way up from being vanquished to being victorious. You will be on the path of taking command of your own life and ruling your spectators.
6. Seek Options  
Ask, what are my options, and in what order should I place them? What is the first option I should concentrate on? The second one, the third? If you have a soul-sucking hangover most mornings, you might opt to give up your booze buddies for some real friends. Secondly, take the money you normally spend at bars and deposit it in a college fund for yourself or your kids. If, instead, you're a workaholic and you want to spend more time with your kids, then DO IT! Very few people on their deathbed have said, "If I could live life all over again, I'd spend more of it at work and less with people I love." Choices are involved here, but by weighing options and alternatives, and then making personal choices you are taking command. Do this and you'll begin to gain real power.

7. Learn Winning Techniques

Ask, how do I rule my real and my mental spectators? Must I collapse in a heap when they point thumbs down? How can I learn to take charge on every level and get a grip on my life? Now you apply the techniques that I'll teach you. There is no "magic" involved, but you might feel there is. Unlike a vanquished gladiator falling at the whim of spectators, you decide your own course.

8. Master Your Relationships

Ask, what more can I do to master my relationships by strengthening myself and my perceptions? How do I take command right now in developing my own identification and self worth? Congratulations! You're working on the one person in the entire world you can work on—YOU! And any improvement in yourself can't help but enrich your relationships with other people and the world around you. But remember, this is not an *end*, it is a *journey*—one that's worth traveling the rest of your life.

If you're willing to take action, the following chapters will change your life. The chapters and the workshops are in sequence for a reason—each step prepares you for the next one. Don't pick and choose. Drink in the information from the second chapter, then complete the workshop at the end. Wait until you are certain you've completed it fully and honestly before moving on to the next chapter. There are no shortcuts. But the journey will be worth the effort.

## Chapter 2

# HOW DID I GET TO BE ME?

Everybody has his own theater, in which  
he is manager, actor, prompter,  
playwright, sceneshifter, boxkeeper,  
doorkeeper, all in one, and audience into  
the bargain.

—Julius C. Hare

and

Augustus W. Hare, Guesses at Truth

### The role of Critical Thinking

So, how *did* you get to be you? This might seem like a stupid question, but I'm betting that something in your life sucks or you wouldn't have started reading this second chapter. And when something in your life sucks, it's usually because you have let emotions and knee jerk reactions act as your guides, leading you into being a somewhat different "me" than you'd like to be. As the selection above states, you are your own cast and stage crew, but is the play going on in your head based on your lazy willingness to accept other people's points of view, or is it based on your own critical analysis? That's why now, before beginning the eight steps, you need to commit yourself to replacing knee jerking and emotions with critical thinking.

Without critical thinking we are prone to mistakes of judgment. I'm sure as a youngster I made many such mistakes, but the first one I can remember occurred during the summer after the fourth grade when I spent July on the farm of my friend, Roy. We'd been playing in a field near his parents' farmhouse when we noticed that the main irrigation canal had dwindled down to a trickle. Roy said that would be a great time to catch crawdads, and, I, who had never seen a crawdad, thought that must be a great idea, too, because why else would Roy say it. Well, we ran home, grabbed a galvanized iron pail and two pair of rubber boots and rushed back out the door. Roy's grandpa, who was sitting on the back stoop, took one look at us and cleared his throat. "Harrumph!" Roy stopped dead in his tracks, his shoulders sank, and he let out a long sigh of disappointment. I asked why he did that. "Didn't you hear Gramps?" he asked.

"Yeah, he cleared his throat. So What?"

"That means we're about to do something stupid."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, and we better listen to him."

It was good we did listen to him. Ten minutes later, about the time we would have been up to our knees in mud and rocks, a powerful head of water roared through the canal channel and filled it from bank to bank. Roy's Gramps knew that on that particular day at that particular time the county ditch rider would be releasing water from the head gates about a mile upstream. The next time Gramps took charge was when Roy tried to sneak a pack of his Dad's Marlboros out to the barn. "Harrumph!" We returned the cigarettes to the pickup glove box pronto after hearing Gramps

gruffly clear his throat. Then, the last time was during Roy's birthday. I'd been on the phone with my mother when the cake was cut, and by the time I finished talking, everyone was outside playing. Roy said to go in and get my piece. But as I passed Gramps on the way through the door, I distinctly heard, "Harrumph!" I turned around and went back outside.

"What'd you do, swallow it whole?" Roy asked.

"No, I didn't even go in. Gramps warned me something was wrong."

"Huh?"

"He made that sound. You know . . . *the sound*."

"Ah, sometimes he's just clearing his throat. You have to learn the difference. Go get your cake. It's the last piece."

So, now I knew Gramps' throat clearing had at least two meanings: it could be a warning or it could be just a throat clearing. As I approached the dining room, the old man was shuffling out, wiping chocolate from the corners of his mouth. The grin and twinkle in his eye told me all I needed to know—there were at least three reasons for clearing his throat. This is when I learned to question authority. Had I known the first rule of critical thinking, a wily old man wouldn't have enjoyed my piece of cake and I would have. He was the victor, I the vanquished. That most important rule of critical thinking goes like this: Be skeptical. Ask, is someone selling something? Everyone—friends, the media, books, and your mental spectators—work round the clock to sell you something, whether it's their opinion or their product. Gramps sold me his "Harrumph!" as a word of wisdom. I didn't even question that it might mean something else. Examine the evidence before you accept something as true.

### The Powerful Social World

Because we live in a social world where others hold so much influence over us, it's essential that you constantly remind yourself to apply critical thinking in all your activities and relationships. After reading the first chapter, you are familiar with the term "mental spectator" to describe the influential characters you have in your conscious mind. The term shouldn't be viewed as mysterious in any way. Everyone has mental spectators in the form of images and voices inside their heads. So I'm certain that you, and every other reader, quickly and easily recognize what I am describing. I'm describing a social world filled with living, breathing acquaintances, and also with their images in your mind.

For example, right now you might be hearing me talking with you, while also silently discussing with yourself the reasons you are reading this book. You might be asking yourself about what social interactions will change due to the newfound knowledge you are about to learn. You can "see" and "hear" other people. Inside your head, your older cousin might be chiding you for reading a self-help book. Your boss might be telling you why you are a lackey and she is the boss. Your significant other might be ignoring your needs. Or you may simply be trying to tell your mental spectators that you *can* be your own valuable self.

Something is happening in your life that you want to alter in some way. Maybe you want to jazz up your love life, improve your employment options, or your relationship with a friend, your child, one or more parents, or even your ability in general to get along with others. You know that somehow this will improve your life. But one thing is clear—whatever actions you take (or don't

take)—involve your relationships with others. You are in an arena of social relationships. You can't make a move without bumping into someone, and all those someones press and guide you in ways you can barely imagine. That's the price, and the reward, of being human. You are always influenced by others, real or mental. You do remember things people say to you and what they do in response to what you say and do. Believe it or not, you do care. And you are swayed by other people.

#### Four Forces That Shape Who You Are

I'm not going to bore you with a lot of social psychology terminology, but I do want to emphasize that there is a powerful link between your *thoughts*, your *feelings*, and your *behaviors*. By understanding how your thoughts are formed, you become equipped to take command of your behaviors and your feelings. Your thoughts are based largely on your personal view of reality, which has been shaped by four forces.

#### **Four Shaping Forces**

1. Living Teachers.  
These are the people who teach you values and how to behave. Your parents, other caretakers, and influential persons, such as school teachers, taught you rules such as manners, and they taught you most of the basic laws that people have to live by. They also informed you about how your particular culture views certain things, including science and religion.
2. Personal Experiences.  
As you live in the world, you form your own opinions of what's right and what's wrong, what's real and what's fictional. For example, you come to the opinion that gulping hot chocolate (and therefore any hot drink) before it cools is wrong — and painful. You also form opinions about cartoon characters vs. real people. Wile E. Coyote can fall miles off a cliff, splatter like a grape on concrete, and then jump right back up good as new. Under similar conditions real people stay in the splattered grape stage.
3. Other People's Reactions to Your Actions.  
For every social action you make, someone else reacts to it. For example, when you mail out one-size-fits-all crimson and purple, rhinestone-studded loin cloths to your relatives for Christmas and all the gifts are returned with notes reading, “Thanks, but it doesn't fit,” you face the reality that you made a bad choice of gifts. The respondents reacted negatively. Even subtle cues, such as other people's facial expressions, provide you with feedback about your actions.
4. Your Imagined Reactions of Others.  
You constantly imagine how other people will probably react to your actions. Say you want to ask an attractive coworker to lunch, but you imagine that she or he will

laugh in your face. You accept the reality that you will not be sharing your life with that person.

If it's not clear yet how your personal reality is influenced by your societal reality, form a clear mental image as you read the following:

One person approaches another, embraces the other, then kisses the other profusely on the face. The kisser now takes the kissee's hands, kisses them, then kisses the kissee on the arms, the shoulders, and even the chest. All the while, the kissee is smiling.

What image have you formed? A mother and her baby? A father and his baby? You and your lover? Two other lovers? A movie of two lovers? A pornographic movie? Now, what if I tell you that the two people in the story were both men in military uniforms, and many other soldiers were watching? In fact, the incident was shown on worldwide television during the Persian Gulf War. Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein, about to review his troops, was being greeted by one of his generals. Now, picture the American General, Norman Schwarzkopf, greeting the first President George Bush that way. If the Iraqi general had *not* kissed his commander-in-chief all over, he would have been in big trouble. If Schwarzkopf *had* kissed his commander-in-chief all over, he would have been in big trouble.

You get the picture. The example I just gave was to describe how the individual and society are but reflections of each other. It takes people to create a society, but, once created, the norms and the rules of that society guide and direct the people in it. Let's look at how that comes about.

### The Games People Play

An early sociologist, George Herbert Mead, described how the “self” becomes a social product. Mead proposed two important stages during childhood that are typified by social activity. The first is the “play stage,” in which children play at reciprocal roles that are not bound by rules. For example, during early childhood play one child (the thrower) will toss a ball to another child (the catcher). Then the second child becomes the thrower and the first child becomes the catcher. Each is learning two separate roles, that of thrower and that of catcher — and they're doing it without formal rules.

In later childhood, the “game stage” occurs, with extensive involvement in organized activities based on rules. The structure of game behavior requires that children “see” the perspective of all those involved. Baseball provides an example of game behavior. Here, a child learns not just to be a ball player, but experiences what it's like to be a first baseman, a right fielder, a pitcher, etc., and what rules those players have to follow. The child now (say, as the batter) can reflect on what it's like for the pitcher, who is out there about ready to pitch the ball. So the pitcher isn't just an object standing on the pitcher's mound, but is a “real person” with a goal in mind, rules to follow, and emotional involvement in the game. If you hit a home run, you don't have to watch the pitcher's face to know that he or she is not happy at the moment the ball flies over the fence, you know it because you can put yourself in the role of pitcher.

From this and other game behavior children come to establish a sense of the “generalized other.” You might not be able to climb into the pitcher's skin, but you have a real sense of how the pitcher is feeling. Like yourself, other people have rules to follow, they have problems, and they have feelings.

By now you probably realize that the child's game stage is just the beginning of a lifelong process of discovering what it's like to be in "others' shoes." Through this process, you grow primarily in two ways. First, your understanding of yourself is associated with maturing cognitive (thinking) processes. Second, these cognitive processes are based on self-reflection within a broader social context. In other words, your ability to think about who you are has grown through experience with the world. You have come to see how you fit into your own social circles as well as in the larger society itself. This is good in that people learn how to get along in their world. Imagine the alternative in which each individual could only view the world from a completely self-centered perspective. How could the human race exist if every person, like a bawling infant, made only selfish demands and offered nothing in return? Obviously it could not.

### "Oughts," Truisms and the Media

The same phenomenon described above—learning to get along in social circles—also has a negative side to it. While it ensures the survival of societies, it also lies at the heart of so many individual difficulties. For many people, the mental spectators that are formed from their experiences in the social world give them mixed or troubling messages. Indeed, even perfectly "normal" people often face disparity in what they think they "ought to be" and in what they think they "actually are." That is, they see a contrast between what their mental spectators are telling them they "should" be and how they "actually" picture themselves. This is often associated with unrealistic self-demands and experiences of guilt. When you can't live up to "oughts," your self-concept spirals downward. After all, how can you think highly of yourself if you can't even rise to common standards?

This happenstance often occurs in the area of gender roles. By gender role, I don't mean your sex, I mean those nonphysical aspects of sex that are culturally regarded as appropriate to males or to females, and which are usually at the exclusion of the other. Think for a moment about all the "oughts" you carry around with you that involve this one subject alone. You ought to: "act like a lady," "stand tall like a man," "be more sensitive," "be more assertive," "take care of the kids," "bring home the bacon." I could fill the rest of this chapter with oughts, but the point is you know what I'm saying is correct.

I'm not going to harp on this subject by invoking political correctness: namely, insisting that all the evil in the world occurs because societies treat men and women differently, and women always get the dirty end of the stick. In fact, that's simply not true. For example, in American television commercials, men are almost always dunces who can't tie their own shoes. Some woman, who knows all and sees all, has to sarcastically tell him that "first you place this lace over this one, and then you . . ." I will also point out that men don't live as long as women, and the reason could include social ones. Men are expected to swallow their emotions, an act that can have negative health consequences over time. So I'm not asking for you to play the "poor me, I'm a victim" game. I'm asking that you apply critical thinking to everything. Remember, examine the evidence. Critical thinking includes not mindlessly accepting limitations of your gender. Indeed, tight social definitions threaten your independence. Consider these gender-limiting truisms.

## **Eight Gender-Limiting Truisms**

1. Adam's Rib  
Eve was not only created out of Adam's rib, but she was created second. This justifies the domination of man-husband over woman-wife and indicates that woman can never be “whole” without a man.
2. Seduction  
Eve seduced Adam to sin against God's dictate and lose innocence as well as the right to immortality and life in Paradise. God, therefore, punished Eve's (Woman's) disobedience and seduction of Adam (Man) by submitting her to menstrual suffering and subordinating her to the authority of man.
3. Rape  
Women manipulate and seduce men into losing their rational control and, therefore, actively fulfill women's sexual fantasies and desires through false innocence and passivity. Women seek rape to maintain their image of false innocence while passively exercising their sensual and sexual power over men.
4. Macho Man  
A real man shows no “soft” characteristics such as vulnerability or openness. He always exhibits a manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance while maintaining an aura of daring, aggression, and capability for righteous violence.
5. The He/She Double Standard  
Real men are irresistible and desirable to women. They demonstrate their sexual prowess through multiple sexual conquests. However, truly desirable women are virtuous and faithful while maintaining pure and nurturing ideals that preclude interests in sexual matters.
6. The She/He Double Standard  
Only women have morals and wisdom, and they are free to exercise their right of free speech to illustrate this. Any man who speaks an opinion that is different from the feminist line is a bully, a pig, and a woman hater.
7. The Mindless Man  
As attested by TV commercials, men are mindless dolts, unable to discern colors, follow directions, turn on a stove, or handle even their most basic needs without a woman to mother them.
8. Biology  
Through natural selection males had a greater need to develop physical strength and prowess as well as advanced mental faculties. Women were protected and sheltered

for childbearing, so they, therefore, were not exposed to the situations or circumstances that required the advanced development of such physical or mental capabilities.

Please understand *I am not attacking religion or any other organized endeavor!* What I am doing is identifying some truisms, that is, concepts we take for granted without applying critical thinking. Example 1: Even if you believe that Eve was created from Adam's rib, it doesn't mean that a woman is less justified to have a happy and productive life than a man is. Example 2: Even if it's true that males evolved to have greater physical strength than females, it doesn't automatically mean that they also evolved greater intelligence. Indeed, the argument could be made that if one is physically weaker, one needs to be smarter to survive. Example 3: A preponderance of the world's chefs and artists are men, so let's lay men's inability to turn on a stove or discern colors to rest!

I submit that these truisms lay at the root of many personal problems, including feelings of inadequacy, the harmful burying of emotions, and the avoidance of reality. In many ways they are like stage directions, which force actors to perform within certain prescribed guidelines. In the real world this tends to restrict personal freedom, and it can have disastrous effects on our relationships. How often does date rape occur when "Macho Man" carries the Rape truism along on an evening out with his dream girl? How many unwanted babies are conceived when a young woman falls prey to her faith in the Seduction truism, believing that her best (maybe, only) asset is a sexy image? And what of the father of her baby who excuses himself based upon the same truism, thinking that, "She teased me into it, so I'm really not at fault"? In our society these truisms affect almost every relationship, from the most casual to the most personal. Industries rely on woman as the seductress. Think of how much female skin is shown in television ads and the "come on" behavior of those women. And, for years, the rare successful man—the one in a million who is not a dolt—has been portrayed as using some product that enhances his macho image and guarantees that he'll score with voluptuous "babes." Let's consider how these truisms affect individual lives.

#### Case Report 1: Janet

My first impression of Janet was of a charming, attractive, young woman who had little reason for self-doubt. It was a short first impression. She had a real need for self-concept coaching. At 23, she was a single waitress in a popular, chic restaurant and wine bar. In talking with her, I discovered unsurprisingly that she collected more in tips than any of her colleagues. She'd recently dropped out of college in the midst of her senior year, lived alone in a small, but upscale, apartment, and she drove a two-year-old Mustang. With such material trappings, you'd think she would be somewhat pleased with her life. However, it turned out that her associations with other people were disastrous. The relationships she had with other women were shallow and competitive. In fact, she couldn't name a solitary friend: acquaintances, yes, friends, no. She was manipulative with men, and she used sexuality as a tool. Indeed, she left college after an affair she was having with a married graduate student blew up in her face. She had, herself, confessed the affair to her lover's wife in an attempt to create a divorce. The wife, the husband, and their two children stayed together; Janet was dropped cold. Janet complained that no one cared about her feelings, and that she always catered to others' wants or needs. She frequently became frustrated and angry at her situation. She believed that

her only real power was her ability to attract men. All women, she believed, were jealous and unfair to her.

Consider, now, how her life had fallen victim to the gender-limiting truisms. She felt extremely inadequate in almost every way except in her ability to attract men. To Janet, men were superior to women (Biological truism and Adam's Rib truism), but, nevertheless, she thought the only way she could get along with men was to manipulate them with her sexuality (Seduction truism). Janet also admitted to playing a very dangerous game. She liked to toy with men, implicitly promising sexual relations, but then reverting to childlike innocence in attempts to force the man to “take her” like some hero from a gothic novel. In doing this, she not only put herself at risk, but she was also rewarding men for aggressive behavior (Rape truism).

### Case Report 2: Colby

Colby, a 42-year-old steelworker, had been married for 22 years to an attractive wife. At home, his wife was in complete charge, even choosing what clothes he'd wear and when. In spite of having four children he loved, he had been involved in several extramarital affairs. When I met him, he was angry and hostile because his wife had asked for a divorce. He was a ruggedly handsome guy, who claimed that women came on to him and he was powerless to control his sex drive when they deliberately turned him on. He said that sex had nothing to do with love and that his wife—like his mother—didn't feel or understand this power of “down and dirty” sexuality. He thought his wife should have understood that he had a “man's” needs that she would find disgusting. He said that he loved her and wanted to keep her pure and protected.

Some men, like Colby, think they're supposed to leave all domestic decisions to their spouse (Mindless Man truism). Others really believe they are powerless to control their sex drive when women deliberately turn them on (Seduction truism). And once a woman has “deliberately” done that, any portrayal of innocence on her part is only meant to turn him on more (Rape truism). And while Colby wanted and liked sex, he wanted to keep his wife pure from the disgusting needs of men (Double He/She Standard truism). This brought on frustration and conflict about his most important relationship.

Colby, of course, had never heard of these truisms exactly as I have described them. Without my help he would never have had any idea they are truisms. They were just things in life he took for granted. During Colby's upbringing he was told by respected others—father, older brother, friends, the media—that sexy women say “no” when they mean “yes.” Somewhere in his background he learned that wives and mothers, as opposed to “other women,” were homemakers, pure and innocent of things sexual. By not recognizing how his beliefs, founded on other people's influence and on cultural truisms, influenced him, Colby was doomed to a life of unhappiness. His mental spectators were going to continue to give him thumbs up for destructive behaviors, even though his wife was divorcing him and his life was going to hell in a hand basket.

Same for Janet: Her mental spectators, formed during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, applauded too many wrong actions and booed too many right ones. Janet never tried to form any solid friendships. Her mental spectators told her that other women were rivals, not to be trusted, and that men were hers to be manipulated. This is hardly the stuff of friendship, or of a happy life.

### Breaking the Bonds

Fortunately for both Janet and Colby, life is not cast in stone. It is a process, and like any process, its direction can be altered. But a great deal of self-honesty and courage is involved in making the decision to alter one's life. It was certainly difficult for all the people I've known who have made the decision. That makes it all the more important to use my step-by-step process, beginning with Workshop 1. As with all people, it was next to impossible for them to start the journey of taking command of their lives without first defining what ailed them. Workshop 1 is a guide for doing just that. Colby's and Janet's self-reports are included as examples of how to go about this challenge, but, of course, only you can answer for you.

Before you begin the first workshop, however, I should mention that each individual will find his or her own level of difficulty in completing the self report. Some will quickly write down the information, others will take some time. *Go at your own pace!* Also, at the risk of casting stereotypes, I should mention that men generally find it more difficult to express what is troubling them. Researchers long ago identified women as being both quicker to form close associations with same-sex friends, and more likely to self-divulge to their friends. Men often have a very tough time expressing their concerns. Even when they attempt to disclose their problems in private, their mental spectators can be tough to deal with. "Stand tall like a man," all too often means to ignore the pain. In reality, pain is a messenger telling you that something is out of kilter. It's helpful to recognize this.

And that's one more advantage of this book and its methods. First, by now all readers—women and men alike—will have a basic understanding of the concept of the mental spectators, and how early socialization and cultural truisms have helped to shape those spectators. It's important, too, that you remember how your personal view of reality is sculpted by the Four Shaping forces: Living Teachers, Personal Experiences, Other People's Reactions to Your Own Actions, and Your Imagined Reactions of Others. In fact, it's so important that you shouldn't hesitate to return to this chapter to review The Four Shaping Forces, and also the Eight Gender-Limiting Truisms any time you desire.

Now we begin the first workshop.

## WORKSHOP #1

### WORKSHEET:SAMPLE "Colby"

- 1) List three to five of the most serious concerns you have about yourself and your relationships.  
My wife dumping me  
Looking like a loser to my buddies  
Being a failure  
Letting women screw up my life
- 2) List one to two feelings aroused in you by each of the concerns you listed above.  
Pissed off, lonely  
Shame, embarrassment  
Like a loser  
Like being stabbed in the back
- 3) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about yourself as a man/woman?  
Makes me feel out of control, and a man shouldn't be out of control. These kinds of feelings are for losers.
- 4) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about the opposite sex?  
Just makes me more sure of how controlling and tricky most of them are. They may not be as strong or smart, but they know how to get to you.
- 5) What do you believe the main differences are between men and women in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors?  
Thoughts:Men think about getting things done & having a good time. Women think about getting what they want  
Feelings:Men don't waste their time on feelings, and that's all women do.  
Behaviors:Men work their butts off. Women shop and take care of the kids.
- 6) Who taught you how men/women (whichever is appropriate to you) are supposed to behave?  
Mostly my dad, but also my buddies
- 7) Who are the people you care most about in your life?  
My wife, mom and dad. My kids, especially my oldest son.

- 8) How do each of these people see you as a man/woman?  
My son looks up to me. They think I'm strong and can take care of myself and my family.
- 9) Who approves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman should?  
My dad and son. My buddy, Darrel.
- 10) Who disapproves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman is supposed to.  
My wife, she won't understand what I need. She doesn't know what a real sex need is.
- 11) What truisms or parts of truisms have had an influence on your beliefs about men and women, in general?  
That the Macho Man is true of men. But what's the truism? This is how it is. Women are hot, so the Seduction truism and the Rape truism. But, the kind of woman you marry and have kids with shouldn't be that way, so the Double He/She Standard truism, I guess.
- 12) What truism or parts of truisms have had effects on you and your relationships?  
When you ask that way, I guess all the truisms I named in # 11 might cause some of the trouble I get into with women.

## WORKSHOP #1

### WORKSHEET:SAMPLE "Janet"

- 1) List three to five of the most serious concerns you have about yourself and your relationships.  
I don't feel like I have any real friends. Everybody treats me like they don't trust me. The girls I know are two-faced, they act friendly to my face but put me down behind by back because the guys they like think I'm hot. I get bored with men and always look for someone better.
- 2) List one to two feelings aroused in you by each of the concerns you listed above.  
I feel hurt and lonely. I get angry about how girls always have to compete, and I don't trust them. I get scared that I can't love anybody. I get tired of having to try so hard.
- 3) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about yourself as a man/woman?  
I feel like women are cats, purring and then hissing. I think I'm what a woman should be, but I don't get how women can ever be friends. Sometimes I hate being a woman.
- 4) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about the opposite sex?  
I believe men want women to be sexy and desirable, they want fun and to have their egos fed. But, men never really care what a woman feels or thinks, they just want sex.
- 5) What do you believe the main differences are between men and women in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors?  
Thoughts:Men think about work, sports, politics, & sex.  
Women think about getting married, looks, & being popular  
Feelings:Men don't share their feelings, so who knows?  
Women feel jealousy, loneliness, fear, & to be needed  
Behaviors: Men act stronger and more aggressive, they do more things. Women act sexy but sweet and not too smart.
- 6) Who taught you how men/women (whichever is appropriate to you) are supposed to behave?  
My mom and my two older sisters. Also, watching my mom and dad together. But, I also learned from TV and movies.

- 7) Who are the people you care most about in your life?  
My mom and dad and little sister, Lita.
- 8) How do each of these people see you as a man/woman?  
Mom & Lita think I'm smart and popular. Dad thinks I'm a princess.
- 9) Who approves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman should?  
Mom, dad, and Lita. They think I'm just what any woman should be or want to be.
- 10) Who disapproves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman should?  
My other sisters and the girls I work with. They always act like I'm stupid and selfish.
- 11) What truisms or parts of truisms have had an influence on your beliefs about men and women, in general?  
This is hard because I didn't know these ideas were truisms. I thought all the truisms were just true about how men & women act, feel and think.
- 12) What truisms or parts of truisms have had affects on you and your relationships?  
Since I thought all of those truisms were true about men and women, I guess all of them have had some influence on me & how I relate to people, especially men.

## WORKSHOP #1

BY PARTICIPATING IN THESE WORKSHOPS YOU ARE TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD TAKING COMMAND OF YOUR LIFE THROUGH BREAKING THE BARRIERS TO MORE POSITIVE, BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS. THESE ARE FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN ANSWERING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS. AS A POTENTIAL “MENTAL SPECTATOR” I SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR EFFORTS WITH BOTH THUMBS UP!!!

### WORKSHEET:

- 1) List three to five of the most serious concerns you have about yourself and your relationships.
  
- 2) List one to two feelings aroused in you by each of the concerns you listed above.
  
- 3) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about yourself as a man/woman?
  
- 4) How do your concerns and feelings affect your beliefs about the opposite sex?
  
- 5) What do you believe the main differences are between men and women in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors?  
Thoughts:  
  
Feelings:  
  
Behaviors:
  
- 6) Who taught you how men/women (whichever is appropriate to your gender) are supposed to

behave?

- 7) Who are the people you care most about in your life?
- 8) How do each of these people see you as a man/woman?
- 9) Who approves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman should?
- 10) Who disapproves of you most when you behave the way a real man/woman should?
- 11) What truism or parts of truisms have had an influence on your beliefs about men and women, in general?
- 12) What truisms or parts of truisms have had effects on you and your relationships?

## **SUGGESTED EXERCISE #1**

Should you choose to try this exercise, please remember that this is for your benefit and not to create any further problems with what ails you. Therefore, please be careful in your selection of an interaction partner. **CHOOSE SOMEONE YOU TRUST AND WITH WHOM YOU FEEL VERY COMFORTABLE. DO NOT CHOOSE SOMEONE WITH WHOM YOU HAVE CONCERNS!** With this understood:

Select one man and one woman you are close to and start a conversation about the most important differences in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors between men and women. After each conversation, identify and record any truisms or parts of truisms that you believe your conversation partner expressed or implied during your discussion.

## Chapter 3

# THE LIFESTYLE EFFECTS

One consequence of the fact that we are social animals is that we live in a state of tension between values associated with individuality and values associated with conformity.  
—Elliot Aronson

### Self-Concept: Who Evaluates You?

In the first two chapters you learned how early socialization, including your upbringing, school experiences, media influences, and so on, helped to guide your thoughts and feelings. By this stage of the book you should be familiar with the term “mental spectators,” “The Four Shaping Forces,” and the “Eight Gender-Limiting Truisms.” Now it is time to see how these important elements influence your lifestyle, and what your lifestyle can tell you about you. This is your chance to really start knowing yourself.

A major issue is the question of who evaluates you; that is, who determines your self-concept? Self-concept has been referred to as an individual's overall self-evaluation, with the self being an object of knowledge. This definition is usually taken to mean that you mentally “stand back” from yourself and evaluate yourself as you would almost any other object, except, of course, that you have stronger feelings about yourself.

I take a considerably different position. I say your self-concept is the totality of your thoughts and feelings about yourself. It is the “whole you,” otherwise known as your identity. And you don't have to step back from yourself at all because any way you try to evaluate yourself involves other people, real or mental. This becomes quite apparent as you look at the four sources for the formation of self-concept.

### **The Four Sources of Self-Concept**

#### 1. Reflected Judgments

An early sociologist, Charles Horton Cooley, coined the term, “Looking Glass Self” to describe how the individual and society are but reflections of each other. Reflected judgment (or appraisal), then, is the notion that our sense of self comes largely from our perceptions of how others judge us. Since we can never truly see ourselves through other people's eyes, we have difficulty judging ourselves honestly. Reflected judgments actually amount to the way we *think* other people see us rather than the way they actually do. In other words, our “looking glass” is distorted. Also, these reflected judgments have greater influence on us if we highly value the person we think is evaluating us. How you think someone you respect judges you has a lot more meaning than how you think some lowlife judges you.

(To consider how reflected judgments might be distorted, imagine that you are at a family reunion picnic. You are bent over the table, loading your plate with potato salad, when you hear the snap of a camera shutter. Looking back over your shoulder, you see your cousin lowering a camera after having just taken a photo of your aunt and uncle, who are seated to your right and across the table. You say to your cousin, "I hope you didn't get me in the picture." Your cousin explains, "Not to worry. I don't have a wide-angle lens." In reality your cousin actually did mean that you were outside the narrow focus of the camera. No insult was meant or even considered on her part. Nevertheless, you are nagged by the thought that she was really saying that only a wide-angle lens could photograph your immense backside. In other words, your belief of her judgment is distorted. Your reflected judgment is not accurate. Because of this, you dump the potato salad back into the serving bowl and go home hungry.)

2. Social Comparison

The social psychologist, Leon Festinger, identified a second influential source of self-concept as the social comparison process, where individuals measure their own competence by comparing themselves with others.

(Thus, if you are a woman and your personal body image is based on a comparison of your figure with women in general, you probably feel pretty good about your body image. If your comparison group is from the annual swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated*, you probably feel like a toad.

If you are a man and you evaluate your basketball skills by comparing yourself with your weekend over-the-hill competitors, you will judge yourself differently than if your comparison is with Michael Jordan.)

3. Self-attribution

Self-attribution refers to how individuals explain their behavior. The question is: "How much of this behavior is my responsibility?" This notion suggests that self-concept is tied not so much to an individual's behavior as to his or her interpretation of the behavior.

(For example, you serve dinner to your guests, who eat little of it, and you then think to yourself, "I have so much left over because all the guests filled up on hors d'oeuvres before dinner." Your self-concept has been preserved. On the other hand, if you think "I'm a schmuck of a host and always will be," you're probably making too much of a single incident and damaging your self-concept.)

4. Social Identity

Social identity refers to socially recognized belonging, such as one's social class and status, race, religion, or organizational affiliations. However, low prestige in terms of social position does not necessarily produce a negative self-concept. That is, you

may be a member of a poor family and not feel bad about it as long as the other families in your neighborhood are also poor.

(For example, picture yourself as a fourth-grader from a low-income family going to school with other children of your same economic status. You feel equal to the other students in your school. Then, the school board redistricts and you are sent to a school filled with upper class students. Suddenly, you are stuck in the uncomfortable state of comparing yourself with “privileged” kids. Your relative “poorness” could negatively affect your self-concept.)

Notice that all four sources involve some sort of evaluation or judgment of your worth as you relate to other people. As well they must. Human beings are social animals. No one is born mature, able to care for her- or himself. From the first moment of your life you required care and nourishment by other people. You learned their language and their customs, and you grew up under the umbrella of their culture with all its rules, roles, and institutions. And you learned how to behave largely by reward (anything that felt good) and punishment (anything that felt bad) according to whether your behavior pleased or displeased your caretakers, teachers and other important people in your world. There was — and is — no way to avoid the influence of others. So is it any wonder that, in one way or another, your self-concept depends upon their evaluation of you? Of course not!

But what's most interesting is that these people have become your mental spectators. Remember, it's not necessarily how someone else evaluates you, it's how you *think* they evaluate you for good or bad that counts. These other persons have become your mental spectators, but you still carry on dialogue with them as though they were standing right in front of you. Indeed, you often see yourself interacting with them. Sometimes you yourself are the audience listening to what you think they are saying about you. At other times you mentally rehearse either what you wish you had said to a real spectator the last time you two were together, or what you want to say the next time you meet.

#### Controlling the Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviors Connection

How your mental spectators affect your self-concept is not a matter of magic. Rather, it depends on the tight linkage of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember from Chapter 1 that any activity in one influences the other two. Consider the feelings that arise from your interactions with your mental spectators. The emotions you feel can range from generally good and bad (what psychologists call “affect”) to specific emotions, including anger, fear, sorrow, disgust, and joy. Your thoughts — how you perceive evaluations by your mental spectators — directly affect your feelings, and your feelings directly affect your behaviors. Your behaviors, in turn, influence your thoughts and feelings. This can manifest itself in either a positive cycle or a negative cycle. If positive cycles are characteristic of you, then your evaluations of yourself will be positive. Therefore, you will have a positive self-concept. The opposite is true if negative cycles are your norm. To illustrate, consider the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: You think that your social club members evaluate you positively. In fact, they consider you charming and witty. You feel good about that, and when you show up at the next meeting, your behavior reflects your charm and wittiness. Your behavior at this meeting continues to reinforce your perceived positive evaluations of your fellows, and, in turn, you feel even better, and so on. A cycle is operating.

However, if you are not aware of what is taking place, the cycle can be suddenly transformed — and in a direction you might not like, as in the next scenario.

Scenario 2: During the next meeting you approach the club president, Ms. Hearright, from her left side and you make an amusing remark to her. Ms. Hearright shows no reaction to your witticism. In fact, she doesn't even acknowledge that you are alive. Instead, she walks off to engage in friendly conversation with several other people. You feel terrible. And now, your behavior changes. You start withdrawing from the other club members, which changes their behavior toward you. You leave the meeting with your mental spectators giving you two thumbs down, and an entirely different cycle begins.

In the first scenario, you are in a positive cycle of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. And your self-concept is very positive. In the second scenario, you are in a negative cycle. Your self-concept suffers. You are somewhat of a robot, slavishly following your mental spectators. And that is *a central problem in human relationships*. Once you understand that you *can* rule your spectators, real or mental, you begin to take command of your thoughts-feelings-behaviors cycles and consequently of your self-concept. It follows that your relationships will improve. The key is your awareness of the immediate situation, and your ability to maintain your own positive self-concept over time. Consider the following variation of Scenario 2:

Scenario 3: If instead of withdrawing because of the apparent snub by Ms. Hearright, you approach her a second time, face her, and ask, “Are you upset about something, Ms. Hearright?” She answers, “No, whatever made you ask that?” When you tell her, she laughs and explains that she has not been able to hear with her left ear for years, and she would certainly do nothing to belittle you.

By being aware that you can command the situation, and then by taking action, you have preserved your positive cycle. You have not allowed someone else to decide your self-concept. And you can do that even in sticky situations — as in the next scenario:

Scenario 4: Suppose now that Ms. Hearright *can* hear from her left ear, but had turned a cold shoulder to you anyway. Then, after you approach her face on, she peers down her regal beak and explains that someone told her you did not like the way she was directing the club. You could still continue to command the situation by saying, “Well, there might be one issue where you and I have to agree to disagree, but I certainly don't want such a small matter to harm our friendship.” By taking command, you are assuming an active role in forming the relationship, and that is always better than slavishly following whatever happens to you.

But, you might ask, what if the worst happens when I approach the club president? Read on:

Scenario 5: Ms. Hearright squawks, “If we can't agree on that, we can't agree on anything. I don't like you, I don't like your kids. Hell, I don't even like your cat!” “That's okay,” you think to yourself, “I'd much rather know who my enemies are.” Now you decide to run against her in the next election or else support another candidate more to your liking. And while you're at it, you make plans to send her a 5 X 8 photo of your cat.

The main point is you have not allowed one incident, begun by a sole spectator, to damage your self-concept and cause you to perform negative behaviors — like withdrawing from the other club members you do get along with. I can't overemphasize this point: they who control your self-concept, control you. If you are convinced that you're not a valuable person, then how can you even hope to take command of your life? Think about the five scenarios for a moment. Place yourself in each scenario and ask yourself if you would behave the same way with the Ms. Hearright in your life. Do you see yourself as behaving in the manner of Scenario 2? Or would you behave in another negative manner, such as losing your temper and making a scene? Or whining? Or crying? If so, you have a self-concept problem.

A negative self-concept leaves you in a weak position. You, in essence, have nothing to bargain with. If, in my example, you already believe you are not a valuable person, or if you allow Ms. Hearright to convince you that you are unworthy, then Ms. Hearright will rule every interaction you ever have with her. And life is full of Ms. Hearrights! She can be just about anybody, but most likely she's someone (or many someones) close to you. Remember from the above list of sources of self-concept that reflected judgments have greater influence on us if we highly value the person we perceive as judging us.

I'll deal more with who influences you in Chapter 4, but for now, I want to help you understand what your lifestyle tells about you.

### Lifestyle Tells the Story

An honest evaluation of your present lifestyle is critical for understanding yourself and having successful relationships. If you have a strong, positive self-concept, chances are you have command of your life right now. This is not to say you won't still have ups and downs, but each up or down will be taken in stride. And, if that's the case, you're probably reading this book either to discover new ways to continue improving your life, or, perhaps, to find some means to help someone you care about who is having difficulties. If you're one of the ever-so-many people whose self-concept needs shoring up, then there are ways to discover that, too. Remember, self-awareness is an essential ingredient for self-improvement. And one of the best ways to examine yourself is to take an honest, courageous look at your lifestyle.

Certain lifestyle effects show up again and again among people who are having difficulty dealing with their problems. As I see it, three main problems exist, each of which can be displayed in a number of ways. Below, I have numbered the three central problems. Underneath each are the ways the problem is typically displayed.

## Common Negative Lifestyle Effects

### 1. My Personal Barriers.

Displayed as:

- a. Alone and lonely: You feel isolated from others and you have a real sense that they avoid you.
- b. Being a doormat: Other people seem to control you. For whatever reason, you have little or no personal command. Often “doormats” are jealous of others who seem to be in control and have things “going their way.”
- c. Strong, silent, and stressed: Many, many men, and a growing number of women fall into this category. You are unrealistically self-reliant, you complain little, but you do suffer the effects of stress.
- d. Living a lie: You have such a fear of rejection that you create a fictional self to hide behind.
- e. Downward mobility: Feelings of incompetence lie at the heart of your lifestyle. You can't seem to do anything right, and you are sinking deeper and deeper. It's not unusual for you to feel jealous of people you see as more competent.  
(Typically, two or more of these displays appear in the same individual who is suffering from personal barriers. For example, a person with a powerful fear of rejection (Living a lie) probably also feels incredibly incompetent (Downward mobility), and ends out being isolated from and avoided by others (Alone and lonely.)

### 2. My Emotional Roller Coaster.

Displayed as:

- a. Depression: You feel self-pity to the point of immobility. At its worst, you are “frozen in place.”
- b. Euphoria: This is often the flip side of depression, where you fantasize that life right now is somehow better than it really is, and you present an unrealistically happy face to others.
- c. Anger: This emotion comes at a time when you project your own failings onto other people.
- d. Frustration: You miscommunicate your goals (even to yourself), and you become confused and disappointed when you don't achieve those goals.
- e. Escapism: This display comes in innumerable forms. You may be involved in substance abuse, gambling with money you can't afford to lose, driving recklessly, having unprotected sex, or engaging in countless other risky behaviors.  
(It's fairly easy to see how any of these displays can lead to any other. Often, they are all, at one time or another, displayed by the same person.)

### 3. Where is everyone?

Displayed as:

- a. Losing friends: For some reason one friend and then another drops out of your life.

- b. Family conflicts: You can't seem to be around family members without bickering or slighting each other.
  - c. Gossip: Despite yourself, you can't refrain from badmouthing other people behind their backs.
  - d. Lack of credibility: People (or at least few people) don't trust you or believe you.
  - e. Being taken for granted: Your desires and opinions are not taken seriously by those around you.
- (If any of these displays are occurring in your life, a problem exists. And if you're blaming the problem on all the other people involved, then you probably are not facing reality.)

You can see that studying your lifestyle displays will allow you to identify how underlying concerns, like those you listed in Workshop 1, can affect your general pattern of behavior. Moreover, even if you could not think of a single concern to write down in Workshop 1, a study of your lifestyle displays can alert you to the fact that you need to go back and reconsider. If any of your displays matches any of the displays in the list, there must be some underlying problem causing it.

The importance of discovering the source of such problems cannot be overstated. The negative lifestyle effects I have defined are associated with severe stress, and a large body of scientific research links stress to numerous health problems as well as risky behavioral patterns.

I am reminded of a scene from the movie, *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, starring the comedians Steve Martin and John Candy, in which the two are cruising the wrong direction on an interstate highway. They are convinced that a driver across the median, who is traveling in the same direction as they are (and is frantically trying to signal them to turn their car around) is dead drunk because, to them, it is he who is driving the wrong way. They laugh and poke fun at the other driver until they find themselves staring into the headlights of two big-rig trucks roaring head-on at them.

Had the Martin and Candy characters paid serious attention to the displays of the other driver and to the fact that no highway signs on their side of the road were facing their way, they would have concluded that they had an underlying problem long before the trucks bore down on them. Of course, the scene wouldn't have been funny and would have been left on the cutting room floor. In real life, however, it's a good thing to study the displays that reveal underlying problems *before* you get big-rigged.

I want to emphasize that anyone can display any of these lifestyle effects at any time. If one occurs only occasionally, then it should be considered a signal to stop and consider what is causing it so you can prevent it from becoming a real problem. If one or more have already become problems in your life — if these displays are coming between you and someone or something important — then it is *essential* that you stop and examine the root causes of the problem. These negative lifestyle effects are barriers to communication. And if you can't communicate, you can't get in command. Your relationships suffer and your self-concept goes into a tailspin. As in Chapter 2, I will now introduce you to two characters to illustrate this problem. Notice how their complaints fit into the above list.

### Case Report 3: Donna

At 49, Donna was married for 23 years and had two grown children. Divorced for four years,

she felt unqualified for employment, too old and incompetent to go back to school, and too overweight and unappealing to attract a new husband. She was frequently depressed, resented her ex-husband's remarriage, his continued financial success, and their children's lack of compassion for her. Her daughters' closeness to their father was another source of irritation. She complained that no one wanted to be around her, and she constantly worried and fretted about having to take care of her limited finances. She thought that none of her friends or her children understood how abused and mistreated she had been, and that they were all insensitive to her needs and her depression.

Let's examine her problem for negative lifestyle effects. Donna felt unqualified for employment, too old and incompetent to go back to school (1.e: Downward mobility). She was frequently depressed (2.a: Depression), resented her ex-husband's remarriage and his continued financial success (1.e: Downward mobility). She complained that no one wanted to be around her (1.a: Alone and lonely). She thought that none of her friends or her children understood how abused and mistreated she had been, and that they were all insensitive to her needs and her depression (3.d: Being taken for granted). This bitterness alienated other people (3.a: Losing friends, and 3.b: Family conflicts).

#### Case Report 4: Denzel

Denzel, 32, was married for five years and divorced for two. He had twin six-year-old daughters who lived with their mother. After the divorce Denzel had several romantic relationships, but each of his female partners ended the relationship for another man. Denzel was intelligent and reasonably handsome, and other people viewed him as sensitive to their feelings. He was a successful vice president of a local bank. He had become mistrustful of women, felt confused and victimized, and was defensive and depressed. He was particularly hurt that women betrayed him after he tried to be understanding, helpful, and romantic.

And did he ever illustrate some lifestyle effects! He believed that he had no personal control of his romantic relationships (1.b: Being a doormat). His powerful fear of rejection led him to behave with exaggerated charm and romanticism (1.d: Living a lie). Any new romantic relationships he tried to establish suffered from his unwarranted displays of jealousy, which came about by his feeling that he was being taken advantage of (1.b: Being a doormat), while also being incompetent to do anything about it (1.e: Downward mobility). On top of it all, Denzel refused to surrender his manhood by talking out his problems (1.C: Strong, silent, and stressed).

Both Donna and Denzel suffered from failures of communication. Those failures froze them out of taking control. Denzel functioned almost totally off *his* interpretation of his behaviors. *He* was certain that he behaved romantically. *He* was certain that his displays of jealousy were justified. *He* was positive that numerous women had taken advantage of his sensitive and romantic behavior, and then betrayed him. And he did not talk out his problems to find out what was really at their roots. Therefore, his mental spectators all spoke from his interpretation alone. Each and every woman who left Denzel became a mental spectator who told him that he was a sucker, that women were not to be trusted, and that he would always suffer at their hands. In short, Denzel took every past broken relationship along for the ride with any new attempted relationship. And all his past lovers were giving him thumbs down. No wonder he couldn't make a new relationship work!

Donna's mental spectators were ruthless. She couldn't do anything right. With her mental spectators telling her she was old, fat, and unappealing, and that everybody else was somehow

against her, what chance did she have for a fulfilling life? None, if she couldn't come to terms with those spectators. But first, she needed to be fully and honestly aware of what was going on in her life. Negotiating from ignorance does not work! Honesty and self-awareness always must come first.

Workshop 2 became Donna's and Denzel's opportunity to attempt the honesty and self-awareness they so badly needed. So read how they did. Then take the next step yourself.

## WORKSHOP #2

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Denzel"

- 1) With whom do you have the most relationship problems?  
Women I get serious about.
- 2) What do you think causes most of the problems in your relationships?  
I think I must be too generous and nice. But, maybe I ask for or expect too much in wanting a true, faithful woman.  
Or maybe I just pick women who are untrustworthy.
- 3) How do your relationship problems affect your thoughts about yourself in other areas of your daily life?  
I get along great with others & am successful in my work.  
But, these problems do make me more aware of how other women are acting & I try to figure out if they'd be good partners.
- 4) How do your relationship problems affect your behaviors in other areas of your daily life?  
I try not to let the problems affect my behaviors in other areas. Maybe I do tend to express my romantic ideas and feelings to other women for some outside validation.
- 5) Describe two personal barriers that cause you problems in your relationships:  
I think I worry too much sometimes about women dumping me, which makes me feel too vulnerable and out of control in relationships.
- 6) How do these personal barriers affect the way others treat you in a relationship?  
I'm not sure, but I think women think I'm a pushover and they try to manipulate and use me until they get what they want or need and can move on to somebody better.
- 7) How do these personal barriers affect the way you treat others in a relationship?  
I get very mistrustful, but I also start trying too hard to give them everything I think they need or want.
- 8) How do these personal barriers affect the thoughts you have about yourself?  
I've started to think I'm a real sucker! I always thought I was a pretty good guy, but now I think women must not see me as much of a man.

- 9) What kinds of feelings do you have when these personal barriers cause problems in your relationships?  
I feel crappy. I feel like I don't have much control over my relationships & I feel frustrated and depressed that I always expect and do end up losing what I want.
- 10) How do you feel about the way others treat you in your relationships?  
I feel mad as hell about being used. I also feel betrayed by women's lies and pretended feelings.
- 11) How do you feel about the way you treat others in your relationships?  
Part of me feels good because I treat them the way I want to be treated. But, the other part feels lousy for being so gullible. I'd like to start treating them the way they treat me.
- 12) Describe what others think about you as a relationship partner?  
I think women think I'm weak and apparently not very exciting as a partner. I think they think I'm fun and easy to talk with, but not as a man worth staying with.

## WORKSHOP #2

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Donna"

- 1) With whom do you have the most relationship problems?  
My daughters and what I thought were my close friends.
- 2) What do you think causes most of the problems in your relationships?  
I don't think people want to hear unpleasant things or the truth about sad or bad things.
- 3) How do your relationship problems affect your thoughts about yourself in other areas of your daily life?  
Having these problems makes me think something is wrong with me. I spend most of my time trying to figure out why I'm not likeable or what I do that's so distasteful to people.
- 4) How do your relationship problems affect your behaviors in other areas of your daily life?  
I end up acting like a hermit. I get defensive and keep trying to explain why I'm so hurt, but nobody seems to hear me.
- 5) Describe two personal barriers that cause you problems in your relationships:  
Well, I guess I do tend to isolate myself so I won't get hurt so much. But, also because I feel so fat, ugly and stupid, I feel I can't do anything that's important or interesting to others.
- 6) How do these personal barriers affect the way others treat you in a relationship?  
Others treat me like I'm crazy or boring. But, they treat me nice at first & then, start making excuses to avoid me. My daughters get mad at me & tell me to get a life.
- 7) How do these personal barriers affect the way you treat others in a relationship?  
I get defensive and treat others like enemies. I'm always afraid they're going to start rejecting me or putting me down.
- 8) How do these personal barriers affect the thoughts you have about yourself?  
Well, I think there must be something wrong with me. Maybe I am stupid. I think I'm not good at relating with others. I don't know what others want, especially my daughters.

- 9) What kinds of feelings do you have when these personal barriers cause problems in your relationships?  
I feel so lonely and hurt, but confused too. I feel angry sometimes that I have to go through everything without any sympathy or help.\_\_\_\_\_
- 10) How do you feel about the way others treat you in your relationships?  
I feel betrayed a lot by others. I feel really hurt & angry that my own daughters don't care about my problems.\_\_\_\_\_
- 11) How do you feel about the way you treat others in your relationships?  
I feel I treat others fairly and with compassion until they start treating me badly. I always treat others with respect and show an interest in who they are & what they are doing.\_\_\_\_\_
- 12) Describe what others think about you as a relationship partner?  
I think they think I'm boring and a pain to be around. I think men think I'm too fat and old to even consider having as a relationship partner.\_\_\_\_\_

## **WORKSHOP #2**

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN ANSWERING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS. REMEMBER, THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE COMMAND AND BREAK THROUGH THE PERSONAL BARRIERS THAT STAND IN THE WAY OF IMPROVING YOUR LIFESTYLE AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. HAVE AT IT!

### **WORKSHEET:**

- 1) With whom do you have the most relationship problems?
  
- 2) What do you think causes most of the problems in your relationships?
  
- 3) How do your relationship problems affect your thoughts about yourself in other areas of your daily life?
  
- 4) How do your relationship problems affect your behaviors in other areas of your daily life?
  
- 5) Describe two personal barriers that cause you problems in your relationships:
  
- 6) How do these personal barriers affect the way others treat you in a relationship?
  
- 7) How do these personal barriers affect the way you treat others in a relationship?
  
- 8) How do these personal barriers affect the thoughts you have about yourself?

- 9) What kinds of feelings do you have when these personal barriers cause problems in your relationships?
- 10) How do you feel about the way others treat you in your relationships?
- 11) How do you feel about the way you treat others in your relationships?
- 12) Describe what others think about you as a relationship partner.

## **SUGGESTED EXERCISE #2**

Should you choose to try this exercise, please remember that this is for your benefit and not to create any further problems with your relationships. Therefore, please be careful in your selection of an interaction partner. **CHOOSE SOMEONE YOU TRUST AND WITH WHOM YOU FEEL VERY COMFORTABLE. DO NOT CHOOSE SOMEONE WITH WHOM YOU ARE HAVING PROBLEMS!** With this understood:

Select one man and one woman you are close to and ask each to describe you the way they think they actually see you, both good and bad. However, before you talk with either, make a list of the ways you believe they will describe you. After you get their actual descriptions, make a comparison of the way they actually described you and your own list.

## Chapter 4

### **EXPECTATIONS: WHO'S IN CHARGE?**

This tendency to prejudge reality on the basis of our expectations is one of the most important facts about the human mind.  
—David G. Myers.

In Chapter 3 it became clear that a negative self-concept weakens your chances for taking command of your relationships. The less valuable you believe you are, the less able you are to command the interactions you have with other people. This results in their ruling you. And you *do not* like to be ruled! So you become defensive and try to control the interactions in thoroughly negative ways. You throw temper tantrums, brood, whine, or skulk away from the situation. You are a loser and the giant sucking sound you hear is your self-concept spinning down the garbage disposal.

Remember, too, that the four sources of self-concept — reflected judgments, social comparison, self-attribution, and social identity — all involve some sort of evaluation or judgment of your worth as you relate to other people. As you know, the spectators judging your worth can be real or mental. And your self-awareness is a vital key to maintaining a positive self-concept. You need to be aware of what is occurring in a situation, and then you must be aware that you can take command of the situation.

This was discussed in the previous chapter. But there is one more enormous factor that you must be aware of if you are to maintain a positive self-concept and successful relationships. This factor is your expectations. Expectations include your desires, your hopes and wishes. And where your expectations are concerned, two important questions beg to be answered: 1. Do you, as a self-aware person, set your own expectations, or are they being set for you by other sources? 2. Are your expectations for yourself realistic, or are they unattainable? Please don't answer either question until you've read this chapter. You might be in for a surprise.

#### From Where Do Our Expectations Arise?

This is not a simple question to answer because expectations come from many places. To make the answer understandable we need to think in terms of who, where, and how. WHO helps set our expectations? From WHERE do our expectations arise? HOW are the mental spectators created? We also need to use critical thinking in becoming brutally self-aware. Without self-awareness we can never hope to challenge our expectations, to make them reasonable and achievable, or to live up to them once we do make them reasonable and achievable.

Let's examine some sources of our expectations. As you read about each source, consider how other people and society itself influence the way you appraise your self value. And keep this in mind: I'm not making judgments about the various influences. All I am doing is attempting to make you aware of them. Self-awareness is a vital key in taking command of your life and creating healthier relationships.

## **The Three Sources of Mental Spectator Formation**

### 1. The Who Source: Who Helps Set Our Expectations?

None of us have lived our lives in isolation. As I've stated before, each and every person functions in a world of social relationships. Other people influence us, and one major way they do that is by helping to set our expectations for ourselves. Sometimes we are aware of how others have influenced our expectations. Sometimes we are not at all conscious of their influence, but it still shows up in our habits. For example, when you were a child, your mother might have nagged you daily to brush your teeth after every meal. When you followed her orders, you were quite conscious that she had set an expectation for you to keep your teeth clean. Twenty years later you might brush your teeth thrice daily because of a habit whose source is lost to you. Or, twenty years later you might hate the very idea of brushing your teeth, never do it, yet never realize that you are rebelling against the expectation that your mother set for you. Either way, mom is still influencing you. Of course, in the last example, only two people will have anything to do with you: a dentist and a dental hygienist.

I can't possibly identify every person who has influenced your expectations, but I will address four very influential groups: family, peers, lovers, and authority figures. As you read through this section think about how people from each of these groups have influenced your expectations.

#### Family

The family is the primary agency of socialization, and its influence is usually very powerful throughout our lives. Your family determined whether you grew up in a city or in the country, what ethnic group you identified with, what foods you ate, what language you spoke, and what religion you practiced, if any. Your family even helped determine your sense of worth.

Additionally, you learned values from your family. Think for a moment about who first taught you right from wrong. You can probably remember many instances of mom or dad “straightening you out.” Indeed, it would be very unusual if your early caretakers — your natural parents, step parents, or others — are not among your mental spectators today. For example, when you are faced with right-or-wrong decisions, are mom or dad watching? More than likely they influence you one way or another, whether you consciously think about them, or whether you act by habits that were established early in your life and at their guidance. Their influence is so strong largely because your parents were models of behavior for you. They were important in providing you with examples of how to act. And they helped set a lot of your expectations about your plans for the future based upon your economic class, race, or religion.

On the residential block where I grew up, I had Mormon friends who knew at ten years of age that they would go on a mission after high school. They “knew” it because their parents and church had instilled that in them. I had some friends at that age who knew they were going to college some day, and other kids who knew they weren't. I was one who knew I would. It wasn't my idea. My mother set that expectation.

#### Peers

As you reached early adolescence a second major source of your expectations appeared that had as much — and sometimes more — influence than your parents. I'm referring to respected peers

and peer groups. A peer group could be a unit as large as every kid in the world your own age, or as small as your school. This large group was subdivided into an even more powerful units, the “in-groups.” Most of us have been (and are now) members of some kind of in-group. As a member of an in-group you were expected to conform to the group's norms, which are its expectations of behavior. If you belonged to the “ropers,” you were expected to do what ropers do — listen to country western music, wear the appropriate male/female jeans, boots, cowboy hats, and so on. If you belonged to the “preppies” you complied with the expectations to wear brand name clothing, try out for the cheerleading squad, drill team, or debate team, and to probably have something to do with student government.

The point is, no matter how small or large your in-group, your popularity within the group was based largely on your conformity to the group's norms. And one of those norms was to consider “out-group” members (anyone who was not part of your in-group) as inferior. You were expected to be prejudiced and to label out-group members as disgusting in some way. They were nerdy, or trashy, or cloddy, or uncool, or dweebs, or buttheads. Whatever they were, they were not as good as your in-group.

#### Lovers

Additional expectations are set for you by those with whom you have intimate relationships. It's obvious that people in love influence each other. However, the power to influence is often not equal. In part, it depends on how important the relationship is to each partner. If you consider the relationship much more important than your partner does, then he/she holds more power to determine what role each of you will play in your interactions, and you will almost certainly be the one to change your behavior to please your partner.

If you find yourself scurrying ahead of your partner, dropping lotus peddles for her or his divine feet to trod upon, then you are probably acting out the expectation to be your partner's lackey. On the other hand (or foot), you are setting expectations for your partner to take a god-like role in this relationship (and probably his or her next relationship after you have been used up and dumped). This scenario is an extreme one to be sure, but it illustrates that expectations don't always result in equal or fair treatment. Often, unfairness exists in the amount of time and effort the partners put into romance, sexual relations, and even into household chores.

#### Authority Figures

Authority figures come in two forms: models and commanders. The models are usually our heroes. Dad or mom can be among our heroes, as can famous athletes or people from our history books. What's important is that we tend to shape our own behavior based upon what we know about them. This shaping on our part can be positive or negative. For example, if you are a young person and Einstein is your hero, your related expectations will guide you to try to excel at math and science, and to hold humanity in high regard. If, instead, you idolize Osama Bin Laden, you'll probably spend your time scheming up ways to murder innocent people.

Commanders differ from heroes and idols in some important respects. For one, we often cannot choose who our commanders are. Second, we either meet their expectations or pay a price. Your parents were your first commanders (whether or not they were also your heroes). As mental spectators, they may still be ordering you around. Your teachers also fit this category. Finally, unless you are independently wealthy, you know what commanders your workplace bosses can be.

## 2. The WHERE Source: From Where Do Our expectations Arise?

Our expectations arise largely from three institutional sources: our educational system, our religious systems, and the mass media.

### The Educational System

For most of us, one or more schoolteachers exist among our mental spectators. We might have fond memories of a teacher who went out of her way to inspire us toward ever-higher goals. Another teacher encouraged us to overcome a weak spot in our life or in our education. Maybe we remember another teacher as an outright jerk whom we throw rotten vegetables at during a recurring dream. Most of us remember those kinds of educators. Moreover, many of our classmates have lived on to become mental spectators. Certainly, numerous experiences from our school years helped to form whom we are today. But, what many of us never realized is that the educational institution itself helped to create many of our expectations.

For example, your gender almost certainly played a role in the expectations that were being set for you. If you were in public school in the United States before 1976 when President Nixon signed Title IX, which forced schools to expend as much money on girls' sports as boys' sports, you probably wouldn't have expected to become an accomplished athlete if you were a girl.

Numerous studies from decades past showed that teachers treated boys and girls differently. A study of nursery schools revealed that teachers (all women) responded three times more often to disruptive behavior by boys than by girls. Teachers were also more willing to help the boys find something to do, while they ignored girls who were not doing anything. Boys were praised more for their academic performance, while girls were praised for their appearance. In more recent times, after this phenomenon was revealed, many educators over-reacted by treating girls positively and boys like criminals. One well-known feminist educator is even on record saying that boys, through the act of birth, raped their mothers. I'll say more about male bashing under the subhead, Religious Systems. The point is, the leanings and biases of your educators played a role in shaping your expectations.

Of course, there are factors other than gender that are related to different treatment in schools. Some studies show that teachers judge attractive students as more competent, and, thus, treat those students as more intelligent. Other studies illustrate that when teachers are tricked by researchers into believing that certain students are more intelligent than others, the teachers tend to pay more attention to the "intelligent" kids.

By now you might be asking what's the big deal about whom teachers pay attention to? The problem lies in a concept known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, when a teacher treats you as if you are intelligent and competent, you very likely will strive to achieve, and therefore you will behave more competently and intelligently. On the other hand, if a teacher treats you as though you're not smart enough to walk and chew bubble gum at the same time . . . well, you get the picture.

### Religious Systems

In Chapter 2, I identified eight gender-limiting truisms. Two in particular, the Adam's Rib truism and the Seduction truism, are derived specifically from Judeo-Christian doctrine. However, every major religion has similar truisms. And in every major religion, a man is the religious authority in his family. Indeed, traditionally, his home really was his castle, and his wife and children were

expected to be obedient to him. Even today in some countries including Iran, Thailand, and Japan, the male position of dominance is reflected in the law. North America, however, has undergone considerable liberalization in this regard (not including some fundamentalist groups), and the wife has become more influential in decision-making and in family income.

If you're from a fundamentalist group, you've probably been influenced in this male-superior direction. However, stemming partly from the male dominance of religious tradition, is a "backlash" phenomenon, in which, if you are a male, you are the enemy. You cannot do or say anything right. You are not part of the problem, you *are* the problem! If you are female, the purveyors of this backlash direct you to hate and distrust males, and you are a "victim" who should rise up in righteous indignation. Indeed, they appear to be promoting victimization and male bashing as a national religion. As I was completing this book and preparing it for publication, I took a moment to check my email and scan the MSN homepage. A featured article entitled, "Are you a doormat?" caught my attention because I discuss the doormat lifestyle in this book. This information could be very constructive for a lot of people, I thought, and began to read. However, immediately into the second paragraph was the following quote from a clinical social worker in New York City: "We're always trying to show dim-witted men that they'll be so much happier if they stay with us." *End of constructiveness*. Once venomous bigotry has been introduced, nothing beneficial can come of advice. Imagine if she had said, "dim-witted women," "dim-witted gays," "dim-witted blacks," "dim-witted Hispanics," "dim-witted Jews." Of course, she wouldn't have because that is frowned upon. However, the male bashing did not surprise me because our universities promote it. That's why a so-called educated social worker will feel at ease in committing such bigotry. Enough said. Whatever your background, you've almost certainly been influenced to meet the expectations of traditional religion or of the backlash to it.

#### Media Influences

Relentlessly, day in and day out, the mass media sell us on the concept that image is everything. And for the most part, the message is working. For example, try this brief mental exercise. Form a mental image of the women you've seen lately in any nationally distributed magazine, any advertising circular, or from almost any television advertisement, popular program or movie. Now form a composite woman from the many women you've envisioned. That's right, just blend them all into one woman. Describe her. Is she young? Are her clothes fashionable? Sexy? A perfect fit? Is her face perfect? Her hair? Her teeth? Her smile? Are her breasts perfect? Her buttocks? Her belly? Her legs? Her hands? Is she just, well, too beautiful? Or is she the woman you typically see at the office, the shopping center, or the supermarket?

If your composite woman is "typical" looking, then you have somehow been spared the media's onslaught. On the other hand, if you're like most of us, you envision a walking fashion fantasy who is 100 percent anatomically correct. This media image is the Seduction Myth writ large: "If you 'eat,' 'drink,' 'brush with,' 'slip into,' 'drive' our product you, too, will be beautiful and irresistible." The power of the media's exploitation of the Seduction Myth can't be overstated. When a major retailer introduced the Wonder Bra — an uplifting piece of apparel — the bra sold out within three days. One year later, Miracle-Boost jeans were introduced with similar success. The jeans do for the cheeks what the bra does for the breasts, raises 'em and rounds 'em.

Cosmetics form a multi-billion dollar industry. More money is spent on eye makeup in the

United States than on eye care. Most cosmetic manufacturers pay far more attention to skin cover-up than to skin health. Are vision and skin health really less important than beauty? Apparently. And if paint-and-powder beauty isn't enough, then there's always the surgical route. Many metropolitan newspapers run cosmetic surgery ads exhibiting a woman's body, with arrows extending from price stickers to various parts of her anatomy: \$750 for a reduction here; \$1,200 for an addition there; \$2,500 for some shaping elsewhere.

For years, beauty has been the standard for women. More recently, brains have been added to beauty. Why? Marketers have surveyed the retail market and determined that women out purchase men by a huge margin. The result is that woman is now all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-financially powerful. Try living up to that! If you're a woman, you're expected to be drop dead beautiful and omnipotent at the same time.

Males have also gone through a transformation in advertisements. Previously, they, too, were judged by their appearance, but the appearance usually projected power and authority. Indeed, often the male wasn't even seen. But his voice was heard in some 90 percent of voice-overs. When on screen, the real man dressed for success, drove a prestige car, and was a macho, stud athlete. But most important of all, his prestige gained the adulation and accompaniment of seductive women.

Some of that is still true, depending on what is being advertised, and where (men's magazines, for example). But, after marketers recognized women as their main target, males have been typically portrayed as idiots. They are mere foils to the overly beautiful, massively intelligent superwoman. This is patronizing to real women, in that it treats them like children in need of false praise, and it's outright demeaning to men. Nevertheless, the media continues to successfully shape our expectations because of its sheer, massive ability for exposure.

So far I have only addressed media advertising in the shaping of our expectations. But the issue extends well beyond advertising. For the most part, men and women are as stereotyped in the movies and on prime time television as they are in advertising. Characters in the starring roles are either super heroes or super schmucks; the people in between get lost. You don't need me to harp on the issue. The next time you watch a movie ask yourself, "Are these people setting realistic expectations for me?" Then think of all the times you've allowed precisely that to happen.

Before I leave this subject, I must mention the full-scale assault on the hearts and minds (and credit cards) of our youth. Teens spend an estimated \$150 billion per year, and their parents spend another estimated \$50 billion per year in directly related purchases. Five multimedia conglomerates exert unprecedented power these days in marketing messages and products to young people. Media critic and author, Robert McChesney, refers to the media giants' actions as "colonizing." He points out that the conglomerates look at the teen market as part of a massive empire that they're colonizing. And the weaponry they use are films, music, books, CDs, Internet access, clothing, amusement parks, and sports teams. McChesney's comments as well as other evidence appear in the PBS FRONTLINE presentation, *The Merchants of Cool*. Excerpts from the presentation can be found on the PBS website. One can also purchase the video presentation of *The Merchants of Cool*. I have no affiliation, but the program does drive home the point of this chapter. I urge you also to take the time to view a few hours of MTV to see what expectations are being set for young people. Such commercialization is as brilliant as it is crass. Today's youth not only spend \$150 billion in the present, but they will spend untold billions as a future, aging market.

### 3. The HOW Source: How Are the Mental Spectators Created?

I have stated before that the mental spectators are not created by magic. For good and for bad, everyone has them, and they come into being through two complementary paths, socialization (your learning how to become a part of your society) and internalization (absorbing social expectations into your mind).

#### Socialization

Learning about your society and how to function in it occurs in all interactions. This began the minute you were born. Living teachers (the first of The Four Shaping Forces) go to work on you right away. They talk to you in your society's language, they feed you culture specific foods, and they teach you what you should do and what you should not do in order to get along. Before you know it, you are powerfully influenced by all the factors we've just discussed under the WHO and the WHERE Sources. You simply cannot live in this world and avoid socialization. In addition to not avoiding it, you actually absorb it into yourself.

#### Internalization

This absorption process is known as internalization. Here, all Four Shaping Forces — Living Teachers, Personal Experiences, Other People's Reactions to Your Own Actions, and Your Imagined Reactions of Others — form the social expectations that you absorb into your mind. It is from these that your mental spectators spring. At this point the process is complete. As in my previous example, you may or may not realize that your mother lies at the source, but you are brushing your teeth after every meal (or not). Or you might be thinking, "I do this (whatever "this" might be, from wearing a particular brand of shoe to belching at the dinner table) because this is the way I am." Like Popeye, you are claiming, "I yam what I yam." But even the famed cartoon sailor wouldn't be exactly what he "yam" without the influence of Olive Oyl, Brutus, Wimpy, and a make-believe society.

You, too, interact with friends, relatives, business associates, and others. You know the norms, values, and rules of your society, you have internalized its social expectations, and your mental spectators are prepared to judge your every performance.

#### Seeing Through the Glitter

Again, I am not attempting to lay blame upon the sources of expectations I identified in this chapter. The only real problem they present is that they can blind your best judgment with glitter and lead you to follow false and unrealistic expectations. Using the gladiator metaphor, your blindness will cause you to flail about and become vanquished. On the other hand, shielding your eyes with self-awareness will present direction and opportunity for victory.

Simply knowing WHO, WHERE, and HOW is not enough to give you command of your life and to strengthen your relationships. To put that knowledge to work you must be aware that your own life has been and is now being influenced by those sources of your expectations. To provide an example, let's consider how a single one of the sources can blind you with glitter.

As you were reading my discussion of the mass media, it might have seemed as though I was attempting to become a media critic, or to convince you that movies are bad and television is worse. But that's really not my role. What I was trying to do was illustrate how expectations are created and perpetuated by the media. These expectations can be both positive and negative depending on your

self-awareness. In other words, do you critically evaluate media images and messages, or do the media masters blind you and lead you around by a ring in your nose?

The risks for failure to evaluate are costly, indeed. How many women, for example, could actually resemble a super model? And if you think there are many, then how come the few who actually make it are called “super”? The simple truth is that no matter how dedicated you are at dieting, at exercising, and at applying beauty aids, only a few people actually possess the required height, bone structure, charisma, and just plain good luck to become super models. But the many women who try to become that fantasy spend enormous amounts of money and self-worth on it. Advertisers aren't going to spend millions without getting even more millions in return, and they do that by saying, “This could be you.” If you believe what they're saying, you are making a social evaluation that will probably cost you heavily in terms of your self-concept.

What's more, trying to compete with any media image is an exercise in futility. What you may not know is that advertising agencies hire specialty models. You might see one model with a wasp-thin waistline and attractive face selling you on a product. When the camera focuses in on the object she is holding, you are very likely seeing another model's hands, which were chosen specifically for the close-up. It's true. There are hand models, foot models, leg models, name-your-body-part-models. You are being asked to spend your money to look like the best of each. Try to mimic advertised beauty, you lose.

Another danger for women lies in the message that only media-quality “beauty” will get you anywhere. Swallowing that illusion will land you in self-concept purgatory. And if you really believe it, then you are prey to almost every truism I illustrated in Chapter 2.

The media are adept at using the truisms to set expectations for men, too. How many men must feel like they “should” be able to introduce themselves with the equivalent of “Bond, James Bond” to any woman and have her mindlessly disrobe? She might be thinking “no,” but his urbane sensuality incites her into a sexual frenzy. Of course, most men know that they are chopped liver compared to the celluloid super spy, because those things don't occur in their real lives. If they are aware of how unrealistic the Bond theme really is, then it's no problem. For those who become obsessed with the Bond image, life can be pretty disillusioning. Unfortunately, armies of groupies stalking famous athletes and music stars lend credibility to the concept. But athletes and rock stars do not represent most people. And neither do groupies.

Another hazard for men, women, and their relationships comes in the way that women are portrayed by the media. If a man believes that his perfect soul mate should look like a starlet or an air-brushed centerfold, then he's suffering from unrealistic expectations. Woe to him, and to the relationship partner he settles for. Real people have real flaws. And unless you are perfect yourself, you should not expect perfection in anyone else. Self-aware people rejoice in that. It's easier to sense your own value when you know that no one else is perfect either.

Yet, when you consider how the mass media and the other sources of expectations work, you come to realize why most people are unaware of their influences. The sources don't just come out and say, “Hey, I'm grabbing that ring in your nose!” Instead, they tend to work on you for years in very subtle ways. Some glitter here, some glitter there, and soon you're blind. Considering that, let's take a look at two case studies. See if you can find some traces of yourself in one or both of these people.

### Case Report 5, Maria

Maria, 39, had been married for 15 years while maintaining her career as an advertising representative on a regional newspaper. She and her husband, a physician, had no children, but did have a very active social life. She said she felt trapped by and fed up with the double-bind accusations of her friends and colleagues who suggested that she acted like a man and thought like a woman. She complained that her professional peers viewed her as either a token woman who neither wielded nor wanted any real power, or else as a moody, castrating bitch. At social gatherings, she was always complimented for her feminine, sexy dress and attitude. But, after overhearing a colleague refer to her attire as “slutty,” she paid more attention, and discovered that many of her subordinate staff and her social peers thought of her party wear as discrediting to her professional strength and status. She complained of being depressed and unhappy because “no one ever takes me seriously.”

A big problem of Maria's was that she was caught in at least three double-binds: (1) she “acted like a man” and “thought like a woman,” (2) peers thought of her as either a “token woman” who neither wielded nor wanted any real power, or else as a moody, “castrating bitch,” (3) her sexy social appearance discredited her professional strength and status.

Consider her age and times. When Maria was born, there was no doubt about it — girls were girls and boys were boys. It is almost a certainty that her family taught her all the little girl things related to nurturance. In school, her peers and teachers reinforced those concepts. But by the time Maria was studying in college, the women's movement had a full head of steam. Her new peers, some of her teachers, and some of her heroes in the movement were pressuring her to display her newly found independence. Throughout it all, the mass media continued to pound out the theme of woman as beauty and seductress.

No wonder Maria felt trapped. Without understanding from where her expectations arose, and who helped set them, she had little chance of becoming a single, integrated person. Instead, she continued to send out mixed messages that bewildered and angered her colleagues and staff. After all, they didn't know whether to treat her as an old-fashioned girl, a flaming women's libber, or a sexily clad siren. The fact that she complained of being depressed and unhappy because no one ever took her seriously was a real and honest grievance, indeed. But how could anyone take her seriously until she herself uncovered the roots of her problems. Other people could not do that for her. Her own self-awareness was required.

### Case Report 6, Kevin

Kevin, who was 22, was set to be married in four months, after he and his fiancée received their college degrees. He complained of anxiety and depression, especially as the wedding drew nearer and nearer. His main fear was that he could not meet the expectations of his fiancée and both sets of parents. He needed to be a good provider, a sexy, desirable mate, fun, responsible, an “equal” partner, sensitive, the protector, and generally successful. He felt powerless and overwhelmed by the need to hide his fears and insecurities from his fiancée, family, and friends. Kevin said that out of resentment he frequently degraded his fiancée and other women in an attempt to make himself look better and to mask his fears.

So, why with so much to look forward to, did Kevin have a problem with anxiety and

depression? For one, the poor guy was trying to please everyone except the pizza delivery man. I'm stretching it, of course. But it is true that Kevin had a plateful of worries. He was trying to meet the expectations of his fiancée, her parents, and his parents. As if that impossible task weren't enough, he believed he needed to be a good provider, a sexy, desirable mate, fun, responsible, an "equal" partner, sensitive, the protector, and generally successful. Whooboy!

Kevin's problems were rooted largely in the Macho Man truism, which was perpetuated in the mass media, and through parents and peers. According to this standard, Kevin should never show fear or insecurity, even though he felt both — big time! So instead of talking it out with someone, he did what males have been trained to do for centuries, expressed himself in anger. Anger is an all-right emotion for men. Think of all the media heroes who, in righteous anger, demolish the enemy. But Kevin's anger was expressed in a more common, everyday way, in defensive aggression. Moreover, it was very likely grounded as much in the Adam's Rib truism as in the Macho Man truism. According to the "Rib" truism, his fiancée was supposed to be second to him. Therefore, he degraded her to keep her from prying into his private, but insecure, world and also to keep her down. Without his becoming self-aware, he and his fiancée had no chance of ever becoming full relationship partners. Even if the wedding took place, the marriage faced tough, maybe impossible, trials.

Were they fully self-aware, Kevin and Maria would come to the conclusion that they were trying to live up to impossible expectations. Maria's expectations were so mixed and confused that she was running in circles, presenting one side of herself at one moment, a different side at another moment. Kevin didn't have a clue about who or what was ruling him. He loved his fiancée, but couldn't talk with her about his emotional problems, which were centered on his false image of himself as a man who could be everything to everybody.

Discovery became the only solution for both of these sincere but troubled people. Cloudy expectations simply would not do. They needed to examine which expectations were actually set by themselves, and which were set by hidden sources. Only self-awareness could lead to active solutions. Their workshops follow. Feel free to use them as guides in your own quest for self-awareness. I think you'll enjoy discovering things about yourself that you may never have known existed, including how you answer the two questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. Those questions were: 1. Do you, as a fully self-aware person set your own expectations, or are they being set for you by other sources? 2. Are your expectations for yourself realistic or are they unattainable? Your answers lead to self-awareness, and that is a vital key in taking greater command of your life and improving your relationships.

### WORKSHOP #3

#### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Kevin"

- 1) Describe Society's view of the ideal woman.  
Some of Eve and some of Britney Spears mixed together with Gwynneth Paltrow. The kind of woman every man wants, but she only wants you.
- 2) Describe society's view of the ideal man.  
That's got to be Richard Gere in Pretty Woman. He's got it all: looks, wealth, mega-success, and all the power and charm women want. The guy's so awesome even a tree could fall in love with him.
- 3) If you could select any one person, real or imagined, to model yourself after, whom would that be, and in what ways?  
I just answered the "imagined" person. In real, I'd kind of like to be like my Dad. He's not perfect, but he's done pretty well. He takes care of himself, looks good, and people respect him. He never loses control and seems to have most of the answers.
- 4) What, if anything, do you do or have you done to be more like the person or people you most admire?  
I try like hell to look good and be confident about myself and what I'm doing. But, I also like to have a good time and kick back with my friends. I also try to be sensitive with Jennifer, my fiancée without being wimpy and losing control in our relationship.
- 5) Describe the types of people you most like to associate with and why.  
I like people who are looked up to and know how to be smart and cool at the same time. I like to be with guys and women who look good, are admired, hang out at the right places, and want to have the good life.
- 6) What do you do to assure that you are accepted by the types of people you want to associate with?  
I try to do what they do, say the right stuff, and wear the right clothes. You know, walk the talk.
- 7) Describe the types of people you would not want to be associated with and why.  
I don't want any part of the punks or the wimps. I don't want to be associated with people who get laughed at, pushed around, or looked down on as low class or stupid. Those kind of people don't have any goals or plans, and that means no power or control.

- 8) What do you do to assure that you appear different from the types of people you would not want to be associated with?  
I work out and dress better. And I don't whine to people or let them tell me what to do.
- 9) What are the most important expectations you feel you have to live up to in your life?  
I think the most important ones are living up to what it means to be a successful man, the head of my house, financially sound, a good husband and a great lover. I also want to keep up with my buddies and have them still think of me as cool and fun to hang with.
- 10) Do you ever feel like you have too many expectations to live up to in your life, and why?  
Yeah, that's why I'm doing these workshops. Lately I feel like I have to be something for everyone and I don't know if I can do it. I'm feeling scattered and out of control and I really don't want everyone to know it.
- 11) Who or what encourages you to live up to all the expectations you have for yourself?  
Well, just about everyone. My folks and Jenn's folks all act like I'm the greatest because I'm being so responsible and committed. Jenn keeps reminding me how much we have to do and how everybody envies us. My buddies tease me, but act like I'm some superdude.
- 12) Who, besides you, would be most disappointed if you failed to live up to all your expectations, and how would their disappointment make you feel?  
I think my folks and Jennifer would be most disappointed and that would make me feel like a real flop. I wish Jenn would back off some, because she doesn't know what it means to have to live up to so much. All she has to do is look good and depend on me to do everything. After all, I'm the man. But, I'm still only human. No wonder I've ready to blow! Everybody's kind of on my back. Maybe I am letting people tell me what to do.

### WORKSHOP #3

#### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Maria"

- 1) Describe Society's view of the ideal woman.  
I think society still views the ideal woman as thin, blonde, sexy, and nurturing. But, society is changing and I think they want women to also be brainy, sophisticated, and able to show more independence. It's just difficult sometimes to put it all together without everyone else's beliefs affecting your confidence and feelings.
- 2) Describe society's view of the ideal man.  
The ideal man is still powerful, financially successful, tall, and generally handsome. But, I think that the extremes of that view are more important to the male perspective. I think women would sacrifice some of that for a bit more sensitivity and understanding in the ideal man.
- 3) If you could select any one person, real or imagined, to model yourself after, whom would that be, and in what ways?  
I've always thought it would be great to be like CoCo Chanel. I may be fantasizing about her, but she seemed to have it all. She was a phenomenally successful businesswoman with Chanel perfumes, and yet, she was still able to maintain a highly feminine, desirable image. I would love to be able to do that and still feel credible. I'm beginning to see how my beliefs and the beliefs of those around me make me feel like you can't be both at the same time.
- 4) What, if anything, do you do or have you done to be more like the person or people you most admire?  
Well, when I think about CoCo, I usually focus on her feminine, desirable image and try to present such an image in my appearance, vivaciousness, and sense of humor. However, when I need to appear professional I think about those I admire from the Women's Lib Movement and try to be more authoritative and assertive so I can put forth a no nonsense attitude. It's like trying to be two different people.
- 5) Describe the types of people you most like to associate with and why.  
I like to associate with people who are moving up in their lives. They have plans and know how to put those plans into action. They want the better things in life and I find them to be fun and exciting.
- 6) What do you do to assure that you are accepted by the types of people you want to associate with?  
I try to keep up on what's new and interesting in current events, fashion, the latest restaurants, and such. I work at being an interesting conversationalist, taking care of my body, and presenting myself as fun and somewhat unpredictable.

- 7) Describe the types of people you would not want to be associated with and why.  
I really don't want to be associated with people who settle for 9 to 5 jobs, eating at Mac-Donalds, shopping at discount stores, going bowling, and talking about housework or the soaps. I feel like such people are going nowhere and are too lazy or ignorant to care about how boring or average they are.
- 8) What do you do to assure that you appear different from the types of people you would not want to be associated with?  
I definitely don't do the things I just described and I avoid looking average or getting to know such people. By not socializing with these types, I don't get identified with them.
- 9) What are the most important expectations you feel you have to live up to in your life?  
I feel the need to excel in my career, have people respect and admire my work, maintain an exciting and desirable appearance, be fun and interesting, keep my husband and friends intrigued, be a woman whom men find desirable and women can respect.
- 10) Do you ever feel like you have too many expectations to live up to in your life, and why?  
Yes! But, until I wrote them down I didn't realize how overwhelming all these expectations are for one person to try to live up to all the time. I'm always trying to juggle what I'm doing and how it will appear to those I'm with.
- 11) Who or what encourages you to live up to all the expectations you have for yourself?  
I thought I was the only one, but I think my husband and friends also expect me to keep up. I can also see how I'm trying to attain almost a movie image of the successful woman while trying to balance feminine ideals with hard line feminist actions that reject those ideals. No wonder I'm in conflict.
- 12) Who, besides you, would be most disappointed if you failed to live up to all your expectations, and how would their disappointment make you feel?  
I'm not sure. Maybe my husband and some of my friends, but they've never really said so. They all just seem to expect me to maintain my image and they appear to enjoy it. If they were disappointed in me I would feel awful and be afraid they wouldn't want to be with me any more. Actually, it makes me kind of angry that I think they would react that way.

### **WORKSHOP #3**

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN ANSWERING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND HOW THEY CAME ABOUT. THIS IS A THOUGHTFUL EXERCISE, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE AN ENJOYABLE ONE BECAUSE YOU'RE IN THE PROCESS OF UNRAVELING A PUZZLE. ENJOY!

- 1) Describe Society's view of the ideal woman.
- 2) Describe society's view of the ideal man.
- 3) If you could select any one person, real or imagined, to model yourself after, whom would that be, and in what ways?
- 4) What, if anything, do you do or have you done to be more like the person or people you most admire?
- 5) Describe the types of people you most like to associate with and why.
- 6) What do you do to assure that you are accepted by the types of people you want to associate with?
- 7) Describe the types of people you would not want to be associated with and why.
- 8) What do you do to assure that you appear different from the types of people you would not want to be associated with?
- 9) What are the most important expectations you feel you have to live up to in your life?
- 10) Do you ever feel like you have too many expectations to live up to in your life, and why?

- 11) Who or what encourages you to live up to all the expectations you have for yourself?
  
- 12) Who, besides you, would be most disappointed if you failed to live up to all your expectations, and how would their disappointment make you feel?

### **SUGGESTED EXERCISE #3**

Should you choose to try this exercise, please remember that this is for your benefit and not to create any further problems with your relationships. Therefore, it is okay to keep this exercise entirely to yourself. It is meant to help you understand where your expectations came from, and to determine if they are realistic or not. With this understood:

List the two most important expectations you have for each of the following areas:

1. My physical appearance.
2. My physical abilities
3. My mental abilities
4. My professional (job-related) abilities
5. My role in my love relationship (current, past, or planned)
6. My role in my other relationships

For each expectation, answer the two important questions from this chapter:

1. Do you, as a self-aware person, set your own expectations, or are they being set for you by other sources?
2. Are your expectations for yourself realistic, or are they unattainable?

## Chapter 5

### **SELF-CONCEPT: TREK OR TRAP?**

. . . one takes into his own organization  
at least some of the perceptions of others  
and uses them uncritically in the service  
of his own life, or projects his own fears,  
wishes and fantasies out into the world  
and at least sometimes reads into the  
environment things that are not there.  
—Ernest Becker

Evaluations, judgments, and expectations are familiar terms to you by now. They are part and parcel to your self-concept, the totality of your thoughts and feelings about yourself. In this process your mental spectators are unrelenting and ceaseless. They are busy little guys who don't always agree with each other. Sometimes one spectator will cheer you on while another curses you with two thumbs down, declaring that you are vanquished. This happenstance can be either good or bad, depending on your own role in it. To understand how it can be either positive or negative, ask yourself this: Do I allow my mental spectators to hide in the shadows, or do I expose them with the torch of self-awareness?

How you answer the question is vital! Your spectators, if left alone, won't show their faces. They're up there, to be sure, staring down at you in the arena, but their control over you is strongest when your self-awareness is weakest. Like puppet masters, they lurk in the shadows of your mind, tugging you by the strings this way and that, influencing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Each of us has had moments of doubt when we've asked ourselves, "What was I thinking of when I did such a stupid thing?" Or simply, "I feel terrible. What's wrong with me?" For some people, those and similar questions occur only occasionally. Other people are constantly plagued by them. As I've emphasized before, the difference lies in your level of self-awareness.

Importantly, self-awareness is not a passive process. It doesn't just "happen" to you. Rather, it requires your effort. You are the one who must take the time and effort to focus the light on your mental spectators. Once you fully see those noisy little characters, you are able to identify whose advice and criticism you are basing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors on. But that's not all. Indeed, you have some important choices to make. You literally have to decide who is going to be the puppet master, you or your spectators. Failing to choose guarantees that your spectators will return to the shadows, hide their faces, and control your life. On the other hand, making a positive choice takes courage and commitment.

But that's not all. Remember, you cannot silence your mental spectators. They'll be with you throughout your life. What you can do, however, is decide which ones you will take advice from. Think of it this way. You are journeying through the social arena, with all its pleasures and pitfalls.

An army of guides (spectators) surrounds you, each tugging at your strings, trying to influence which path you take. But only you can decide which direction to walk. You are the ultimate pathfinder. You are the one who gains or loses from your decisions. If you listen to the wrong guide, it is you, not he or she, who stumbles. If you fail to make any choice at all, then your guides, in effect, tug you willy nilly into one pitfall after another.

So this is a chapter about taking responsibility. I can teach you important concepts, and even tell you how to become self-aware, but only you can summon your spectator-advisors from the shadows, stare them in the face and begin the processes of mastering them. And the important decisions that follow are yours, not mine or anyone else's.

### Perception: The Filter of Reality

I've talked about shadows that hide your mental spectators, but I have not explained how the shadows themselves come into being. The answer is that your perception — the means by which you construct and analyze your mental world — filters your reality. It works something like the lens filter on a movie camera. The lens filter determines how much light will reach the film within the camera. It even determines which colors and hues of light rays will enter. Therefore, the filter is almost as important in determining how the finished movie will look as is the target the camera is aimed at.

Your perceptual filter performs a similar task. You could not possibly pay attention to every sight, sound, and event that goes on around you plus every sensation you are having at any moment without suffering what is known in psychology as sensory overload. The world is an overwhelmingly busy, buzzing place, and your perception must be directed toward what is important to you at the moment. So your perceptual filter does with information what the camera's lens filter does with light. But it also does more — much more. Unlike the movie camera's lens filter, your perceptual filter continues to work away even after you have internalized information. This is because you, unlike a movie camera, have the ability to think. You can take the information you have absorbed and run it over and over again in your mind. All the while, your filter is working to help make sense of the information according to your experiences.

For example, recall the scenario from Chapter 2 involving a kisser and a kissee. Undoubtedly, Saddam Hussein walked away from the event thinking not so much that he had been kissed all over by a man, but that he had just been highly honored by a general. Saddam's experiences from his earliest socialization to his total immersion in a particular culture worked through his perceptual filter to convince him of this. Had the kisser been Norman Schwarzkopf and the kissee been George Bush, would Bush have believed that he had just been honored? Or would he think that his general had gone bonkers?

The kisser/kissee example illustrates some cultural influences upon one's perceptual filter, but culture is only one of a multitude of variables which guarantee that your perception is different from anyone else's in the world. Nobody is exactly like you, and nobody has experienced the world as you have.

Recall how you answered questions 1 and 2 from Workshop 3 in the last chapter. When you described society's view of the ideal woman and man, what mental spectators were speaking to you? What pictures were in your head? Obviously you cannot know exactly what society's view is with-

out taking a nationwide poll. What you can do is remember images and information you've seen and heard from the mass media, from relatives, friends, and strangers. And then before you answered the question, your perceptual filter tried to make sense of the images and information according to your own experiences. Finally, you wrote answers of what you “thought” society's view of the ideal woman and man are. Certainly no one else in the world would have answered those questions precisely as you did. But that doesn't make them wrong and you right, or vice versa. What it means is that you wrote out your “perception” of what the correct answer was. Other persons reading the same questions also answered according to their individual perceptions. What's more, your own answers tend to change over time and circumstance. If you had just experienced a depressing event, you might have answered one way. If you had just received good news, you might have answered another. That's because your perception would be altered according to the good or bad experience.

Much like your experiences, your mental spectators have the capacity for either good or bad, depending upon your level of self-awareness and how you deal with them. When your perceptual filter is clouded over, your mental spectators are shadowy figures, indeed. It's not clear to you which or how many of them are guiding you along. You literally stumble down a darkened path. Even your view of yourself (your self-concept) is seen through a fog. And this is critical to the way you are living your life and mastering your relationships. Because this idea can be so overwhelming to think about, I have taken the effort to illustrate what smaller units fit together to form your self-concept.

#### Self-Concept: The Formation of Identity

People often confuse the term self-concept to mean the same thing as self-esteem. However, the two are not identical. Self-esteem is usually discussed in terms of two key components: the feeling of being loved and accepted by others, and a sense of competence and mastery in performing tasks and solving problems independently. Self-esteem, then is only part of self-concept. Think of self-concept as being much bigger than self-esteem. In fact, *self-concept is enormous!* It is not just how good you think you are at something, or how loved you feel, rather it refers to the totality of your thoughts and feelings about yourself. It is the “whole you,” otherwise known as your *identity*.

The development of your self-concept can be seen in terms of three building blocks, which are the images you hold of yourself as a physical being, a social being, and a spiritual or moral being. Let's look at these building blocks.

#### **The Three Building Blocks of Self-Concept**

1. **Physical Being**  
Each of us holds certain images of ourselves as physical beings. We might see ourselves as short or tall, or something in between. Likewise for our weight, our complexion, our facial appearance, our foot size, breast size, muscular makeup, health, physical fitness, and intelligence. I included intelligence, because it's a function of our brain, which is a physical organ.
2. **Social Being**  
As social beings, we see ourselves as members of cultures, nations, families, political parties, workplaces, social and friendship groups, etc. We form concepts of our roles

in each. It's also common to see ourselves in terms of our popularity within in-groups. For example, you might see yourself as a leader, as a peacemaker, or in many other ways as an important contributor to your in-group. And, of course, belonging to an in-group means you will also see yourself in contrast to members of various out-groups.

### 3. Spiritual or Moral Being

This building block can include your view of your standing within an organized religion, or your private, personal relationship with a higher being whether from within the structure of organized religion or without it. It also can include the concept you have of your moral stature in the physical world whether you believe in the metaphysical universe or not.

We constantly make choices about who we are based on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relation to these building blocks. In other words, we are contributors to the whole process. Indeed, we are the most important contributors. From the previous chapters we can see how the combined influences of socialization, our spectators (real and mental), the sources of our expectations, and our internalization of those factors affect our self-concept, or how we view our whole selves. But now we're faced with something else that can be quite scary: through our choices, we are the ultimate contributors to our own concerns. This makes it all the more important that our choices are informed ones, made during states of awareness.

#### Self-Contribution: My Role In Being Me

Years ago, when someone I know was about seven years old, he told his older sister that nothing was impossible. "Oh, yeah," she responded, "then fly." Not wanting to show off (or look stupid) he postponed the challenge. But he didn't forget it. Instead, several days later he slipped off alone to a nearby elm tree growing by a large irrigation ditch. Climbing to a branch some twelve feet up, he stood over the ditch and held his arms straight out like Superman. In the span of one second he discovered that he could fly with all the grace of a carp, but not swim nearly so well as one.

The boy's perception of himself as a flying object was obviously clouded. A few years later he still refused to believe that his taking off in flight was impossible. He would just need a little help. In other words, his perceptual filter was beginning to clear. So, one blistering summer day he set about building a hot-air balloon out of castaway black plastic sheets from a nearby construction site. In the back of his home, he spread the sheets over his mother's prized lawn so that the edges of each overlapped. Over a period of several days, he painstakingly drew beads of carpenter's glue along the edges and pressed them together. Unfortunately, the glue failed to hold. He was heartbroken. A major discovery did come of this, however: Hot sun on black plastic kills grass. And enough hot sun on enough black plastic kills a lot of grass. And some mothers get very angry when a lot of grass dies.

But the story doesn't end there. Many years later, a man with a vastly cleared perceptual filter and ample training tugged at the flight controls of a Cessna 172 and became airborne. At last, the boy inside the man flew.

I'm not telling this story to sell flying lessons, but to illustrate how our perceptions contribute to our thoughts, behaviors, and feelings — in other words, to our whole selves. And it's vital that our perceptions of our whole selves (our self-concepts) are based on the real us rather than the ideal us. It's easy to see how a boy, influenced by television super heroes, would believe he had a chance to defy gravity without mechanical support. Later, moving closer to his real self, he attempted to do what he was not yet capable of, to construct a hot-air balloon that would support him in flight. Finally, understanding the principles of flight and the reality that he required pilot training, he succeeded. And now he's writing this book.

As adults, it is even more important to recognize that a cloudy perceptual filter can lead us to make decisions that lead to painful results. If we're lucky, our misinformed decisions end in a sudden awakening, like splashing into the cold ditch of reality. On a more serious level, we can end up destroying something important in our life. Only now it's usually one or more important relationships instead of a plot of grass. Broken friendships, marriages, and alienation from one's children are much more serious than a temporarily angry mother.

Of course, there's not much we can do about this problem without recognizing what causes it. To do that, we must discover what clouds our perceptual filter in the first place.

### A Collision of Worlds

Self-concept is constantly under the influence of both the psychological, or inner world, and the sociological, or outer world. Our inner world is affected by the need for self-consistency. Thus, "I yam what I yam." Our outer world is affected by the need for social self-enhancement. Thus, "I yam what I present myself to be so other people will see the image of me I want them to see." For the sake of illustration, let's look at how this might work with the second building block of self-concept. Consider a person named Mortimer who is a member of a political party called the Republicrats. Mortimer is having the following conversation with himself:

"I think I'm a good Republicrat. I'm faithful to the Republicrat Party's platform, and I spend a lot of time, effort, and money to further its political causes. I even howl the Republicrat Hymn at the moon every night (self-consistency). There is a rally Saturday at midnight where good Republicrat's should go to howl the hymn together. Therefore, I should go to the rally and howl with the others (social self-enhancement). But fishing season opens Saturday and I really want to spend all weekend at Lake Troutmore. I'm tired and need the recreation. I don't know whether to go to the rally or to go fishing. I think I'm a good Republicrat but other Republicrat's might not think so if I don't show up and howl with them (a collision of the inner and outer worlds)."

Mortimer, like so many people, is caught in the bind between trying to be true to his "real" self (who he really is) and needing to present his "should" self (who he thinks he should be) to others. To complicate matters further, his real self and his should self are always viewed and evaluated by him through his perceptual filter. This is precisely why self-awareness is so important. It is difficult enough to balance your real with your should self without also having a foggy perceptual filter.

For Mortimer's immediate situation, a foggy filter can lead to unnecessary stress. But if he uses self-awareness to see things more clearly he will probably come to realize he *is* a good Republicrat. And, because of that reality, he doesn't have to be heard howling at every rally. Even if the case were otherwise I doubt that his condition would be life threatening, just stressful. However, in

real life that isn't necessarily the case.

For example, consider the pre-adolescent girl who comes to believe that her should self is a mirror image of the media models I described in Chapter 4. As she grows into a teenager it turns out that she is, instead, a large girl, one with big bones. Her real self and her should self collide. She diets and diets and diets and *dies*. Anorexia kills. Unlike the boy who thought he could fly, her perceptual filter never clears and she can never see that others have set her should self for her. She does not actively pull it into line with her real self. Her should self remains an impossible self. And the results are horrendous.

For most people the results aren't so stark, but they are very real. If you sit back and allow your mental spectators and the influences discussed in Chapter 4 to set your “shoulds,” you will face some uncomfortable problems. Failure to take an active role in your own choices of self can lead to stressful, even broken, relationships and all the depressing effects of that. Taking responsibility is an active process—and a good one. Remember, you have internalized all these outside influences. Now that they are inside and working through your mental spectators, you can take responsibility for commanding your thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. You do this by identifying which mental spectators and influences are pulling you willy nilly, and you actually decide for yourself which to listen to and which to ignore.

Ask yourself this: “Are my perceptions being influenced by others without my making active choices? Are they directing everything I do, choosing which options I take and which I don't? Or, do I look at all my options and then make informed choices?” If you are a real friend to yourself, you are taking the responsibility for making your own choices. If you are not a friend to yourself, you are almost certainly the victim of your own mental spectators. No one—*no one*—chooses to dislike him- or herself. Only mental spectators can do that. And they can only do it if you have allowed them to. Self-aware people are able to courageously face this question: “Was I a friend to myself today?” A yes answer doesn't necessarily mean that you did every single thing right. It means that you made informed choices. A no answer doesn't necessarily mean that you have become your own enemy. It means that it's time to reflect on what choices you made and how you made them. Indeed, I'll go further than that. It means that you *have the opportunity* to learn from whatever mistakes you made.

For an example of how this works, let's revisit one of the social club scenarios from Chapter 3 and your troubles with the club president, Ms. Hearright. Pretend now that you are alone at home several hours after the confrontation in which she walked away from you and you did nothing to find out why. You now silently ask if you've been a friend to yourself today. The answer is no. Maybe the reason is because you wish you had plucked out her dentures and clamped them on her noble nose. And then made her suck on a lemon until her face turned inside out. But what you really did was melt away into a corner, shun everybody and turn into a shrinking violet. Obviously your failed actions caused a lot of self pain or else you wouldn't be smoldering at yourself right now. So be honest. Ask yourself why you did what you did. What mental spectators were you listening to at the time? What influences and truisms had a hold on you? This is your opportunity to learn from your mistakes. Don't pass it up! Maybe your parents set expectations for you to always act like a “lady,” meaning, in the extreme, to always be passive. When you compare that should self to the real you, does it hold up? Probably not. You may have acted passive by wilting away, but your vascular sys-

tem did not remain passive. More than likely your arterioles (tiny blood vessels throughout your body) constricted, causing your blood pressure to skyrocket. If this kind of response is a habit it could put you at a health risk.

The real you wanted to take action, not sit in a corner and boil over. Now that you've asked the question about whether you were a friend to yourself, the problem becomes clear. You did not have to be a slave to your should self. You could have approached Ms. Hearright and asked if something was troubling her. Now, in your new awareness you can make a point of doing that the next time you see her. This kind of self-honesty is a big part of being a friend to yourself. It also is a major contributor to self-awareness. It is a means of discovering if you actually walk your own talk or if you walk someone else's talk. That is, if you really command your own behavior or if someone else does. You can also use self-honesty to discover if the roles you play in life are fair to you. Each of us has multiple roles. For example, we can be wife, mother, sister, aunt, business manager, Sunday school teacher, PTA member, chief cook and bottle washer, or we can be husband, father, brother, uncle, and so on. What's important is that we don't cheat ourselves by letting spectators (real and mental) keep us from attempting roles we want for ourselves, or make us add roles we don't want for ourselves. This is not to say we can choose every role we have. Refusing to play the role of taxpayer, for example, can lead one to play the role of prisoner. However, if we choose to develop ourselves, to play the role of amateur artist, or writer, or athlete, and so on, it should not be left to our mental spectators to dissuade us.

What's really important is whether or not we are active in choosing our roles. Here again, self-awareness is a vital key. We need to be aware that our roles are intricately tied to our expectations. Indeed, our expectations are actually expressed as roles. Think about our composite character, Denzel. At 32, one of Denzel's main roles was that of successful bank vice president. He was living out an expectation that he set for himself many years ago when, as a university student, he decided to major in business. Eventually, he wanted to be president of the bank, and some day to become chief operating officer of a major banking chain. And most people who knew him thought he'd achieve that. In fact, his apparent success was cause for much admiration.

Yet, look at the role Denzel played in his close, personal relationships. In that arena, his expectation was to be a loser. And he played the role perfectly! He got burned every single time. What's so outrageous to Denzel was that he offered each romantic partner so much. He tried to be understanding, helpful, and romantic. But the problem was Denzel wouldn't take the time to look into himself, to clear the fog off his perceptual filter. If he did, he would have found that he was offering his romantic behavior in exchange for clinging rights. Psychologically, he tried to grab on and hold each partner so tight that she had no breathing room. The pattern was to present her with his Mister Wonderful behavior and then make her feel as if she should fuse with him at the hip like a conjoined twin and give up her own independence. Sooner or later each partner saw that he used charm as a cover-up for his own insecurities. He was selling what he should have been giving. Loving acts need to be unconditional to carry any real meaning. When each partner discovered that conditions came with everything Denzel did for her, she wisely moved on. If she hadn't, she would have ended up being as big a basket case as he was.

Donna, our 49 year old, who was divorced and bitter, also played some depressing roles because her expectations were devastating. By thinking she was fat and ugly, she acted fat and ugly.

By thinking she was too old and incompetent to go back to school, she acted that way, too. She didn't give herself any breaks. Remember, no one chooses to dislike him- or herself. But Donna appeared to hate herself. It's apparent then that spectators ruled her by setting her expectations for her. It's obvious that Donna needed to take a personal stance and choose some beneficial roles for herself. But she wouldn't allow herself to be helpful. Her perceptual filter was so foggy her whole world was distorted. And if she didn't take some time to clarify her perception, the only things that would lay in her future were loneliness, ill health, and overwhelming unhappiness.

Both Denzel and Donna, as they appeared in Chapter 2, were miserable with their lives. Consider what had happened to their self-concepts in terms of the three building blocks. Donna's view of herself as a physical being was that she was a fat, ugly, stupid, old troll. As a social being she saw herself as an outcast, a social leper. As a spiritual or moral being she saw herself as a lost soul. Denzel saw his physical being in a positive light, while his view of himself as a social being was all mixed up. He knew he was very good at his profession, but saw himself as a doormat where close, personal relationships were concerned. That flaw affected his picture of himself as a spiritual or moral being because, to him, good people didn't deserve to be walked on. Something must have been wrong with him that caused women to dump him like dirty laundry, but he couldn't understand what.

Both people had made choices about who they were from a weak position of blindly following their mental spectators and the sources from Chapter 4. They did not realize that they could make choices from a strong position of awareness about the sources and their influences. Therefore, both people's choices stemmed from ignorance — and that was really no choice at all. They really believed they couldn't change who they were, that their identities were carved in stone. But that was a big lie!

Their self-concepts had become traps, leaving them stuck and unfulfilled. But self-concept should be viewed as a trek, a bold journey to the "you" you can be. Self-awareness is a vital key to self-improvement, to that bold journey of being you.

Let's look now at how Denzel and Donna used a workshop to apply self-awareness for discovering how they had contributed to their own problems and their distorted self-concepts. Then, go ahead and try one yourself. The workshop is meant to increase your self-awareness and shed light on those nagging little spectators. That's the way to choose friend from foe among them.

## WORKSHOP #4

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Denzel"

Please answer as you would have before I taught you this recent information on self-concept formation (for the reader, this means the current chapter). How do you view yourself as a:

- 1) Physical being?  
Great! I play racquetball, watch my diet, jog, and I almost always take stairs rather than the elevator at work. My weight is ideal for my height. I'm in good health.
- 2) Social being?  
I suck! Well, not totally. I'm a fairly good socializer and get invited to numerous events. But, as I've said before, I'm a disaster at romance. When I compare my physical appearance with others, it doesn't make sense. I've been left for some men who'd win no prizes in the looks department. Women are just weird. Who knows what they want?
- 3) Spiritual or moral being?  
I'm not religious, but I don't think that's a necessity where being moral is concerned. In fact, religion is at the heart of most wars, so I could argue just the opposite. I'd like to give myself a good grade for being a moral being, but one thing keeps me from it. I'm moral in my business practices, and I, along with my ex-wife, take good care of our twin daughters. So far, so good. But if I'm living the way a moral person is supposed to, then why do I get punished in my personal relationships? Frankly, I've had my heart shredded so many times, I'm afraid to try again.

Knowing what you know now, how is your perceptual filter affecting your views of yourself as a:

- 4) Physical being?  
Positively, I'd say. I study what it takes to be in good health, and I follow through. I don't see any problems here.
- 5) Social being?  
I'd say my perceptual filter is affecting my view negatively. I'm referring to my close personal relationships, not my professional relationships. Something keeps telling me I can't live up to my share of a romantic partnership. I expect to fail, and I do. It's that self-fulfilling prophecy you told me about.
- 6) Spiritual or moral being?  
Again, my perceptual filter seems to be pretty clear on everything but that one area. It's like I'm being punished by someone for something I've done or I'm doing, but I can't see what it is. Let's put it this way, if my perceptual filter is like a camera lens, then the lens cap must

have been left on it.

Think hard before answering this question. Who is setting your expectations for the three areas of your self-concept? Include who your mental spectators are.

7) Physical being?

I set my own expectations based on reading fitness magazines and my background in track when I was in public school and college. I learned good habits and I've kept them. My most obvious mental spectators are my older sister, Vivian, who ran the mile in high school and placed in state tournaments, and all the coaches I've had. Oh, and Keshan Nora, who beat me in 3 out of 5 tournaments in college. Some days when I feel too lazy to jog, I see him shaking his head at me like I'm a piker. That motivates me.

8) Social being?

Overall, my expectations are set by my recognition of how to behave professionally. That's probably why I'm successful at group functions and when working with the public. My personal social life is different. My sister seems to be riding on my shoulder. I mean she's a mental spectator. Her first husband abused her physically, and she and I hate him. I still hear the voices of a lot of my professors, who said that men had always had everything their way and messed things up. I told my sociology professor, Mary Black, about my sister, and she said that women can't make enough legal or criminal charges against their husbands; that every man should feel what it's like to be stepped on. I try very hard to be the polar opposite of the abusive male.

9) Spiritual or Moral being?

My father and mother are definitely mental spectators. They have a home-based remodeling business, and they've always been honest in dealing with customers. Other than them, the answer is probably the same as for my social being — my sister and professors are my mental spectators. Now I'm starting to wonder about something. Cindy, my wife, left me for a man's man kind of guy. All my other love interests dumped me after I thought I gave them everything of myself. Maybe I've been overcompensating. I'll have to think about that.

10) Over the past year have you been your friend or your enemy?

I guess my enemy because I've let myself be hurt so many times. Now that I'm actually practicing self-awareness, I think it was because I WASN'T practicing self-awareness. Maybe I should make a habit of that before I get into another romantic relationship.

11) Considering only today, have you been your friend or your enemy?

Good question. Great one, actually. By doing this workshop I've become my friend. I've never thought about my problems in this regard, but just sort of stumbled along hitting one rock after another.

## WORKSHOP #4

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Donna"

Please answer as you would have before I taught you this recent information on self-concept formation (for the reader, this means the current chapter). How do you view yourself as a:

- 1) Physical being?  
I'm a lump.
- 2) Social being?  
Ditto!
- 3) Spiritual or moral being?  
I'm very spiritual. I belong to the First Christian Church and, for most of my life, I attended services regularly. When my daughters were growing up, Doug, my husband, and I led a bi-weekly youth group. It was so much fun having our house full of wholesome young people. I loved life then. It seems like I had a purpose. A real reason to be alive.

Knowing what you know now, how is your perceptual filter affecting your views of yourself as a:

- 4) Physical being?  
My filter must be completely controlled by my mental spectators and the media. I haven't been able to see one positive thing about myself physically. One example: I just saw a TV ad for an arthritis over-the-counter medicine. The middle-aged model, who supposedly had arthritis, was slim and beautiful. Is there no other kind of woman? I can still hear my relatives talking one night when I was only 10 years old. They didn't know I was out of bed, but I heard them saying I was homely and built like a man. They were saying it like it was a joke, and they all were in agreement. It hurt, and I've never forgotten it. They are definitely my mental spectators, or tyrants, however you want to put it.
- 5) Social being?  
It won't let me see forward, only backward into the past. I had a husband, two daughters at home, and an active church life. Doug left me for a younger woman, one of my daughters left for marriage and her own family, the other one for college, and our church got a new pastor. It's like everything good in my life happened in the past, and there's nothing more to look forward to.
- 6) Spiritual or moral being?  
My perceptual filter hasn't changed my belief in God, but I'm starting to understand something about how it has limited me. I can pray and believe in God without going to a sermon. I believe that. But I had forgotten how important church was to my social being. You don't

have to be physically beautiful to have friends who share a faith. And part of my spirituality was sharing my faith with kids. I gave up on all that when Doug and then the girls moved out. My own bitterness cut me off from the world.

Think hard before answering this question. Who is setting your expectations for the three areas of your self-concept? Include who your mental spectators are.

- 7) Physical being?  
Those relatives I wrote about in answer # 4, and the media. They're in my thoughts almost all the time. They're the tyrants telling me what a lump I am.
  
- 8) Social being?  
My mother was so relieved when I got married. I didn't think much about it then, but she must have thought the same thing about my looks as my relatives did. She always told me what a catch Doug was, and said I should thank my lucky stars. I thought I really failed her, and myself, when Doug left me. I guess that's why I just dropped out of life.

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- 9) Spiritual or Moral being?  
My distorted view of God. It's like I created a new mental spectator. This new one was a version of me saying that God must hate me for failing in marriage. I used to believe that God didn't hate any of his creations, but, boy, did I ever change! My own voice in the form of this new mental spectator said God was disgusted with me and there was no use challenging that fact.
  
- 10) Over the past year have you been your friend or your enemy?  
Are you kidding?! I've been my own worst enemy.
  
- 11) Considering only today, have you been your friend or your enemy?  
My friend, I hope. And I think so, too. But, in a way, it's scarier to think I'm responsible for my own future. Now, I have only myself to credit or blame for my life.

## WORKSHOP #4

AS WITH THE PRIOR WORKSHOPS, THIS IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN ANSWERING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THE INFLUENCES ON YOUR SELF-CONCEPT, AN EXERCISE THAT CAN BE A TRULY GREAT DISCOVERY.

### WORKSHEET:

Please answer as you would have before you read the current chapter. How do you view yourself as a:

- 1) Physical being?
- 2) Social being?
- 3) Spiritual or moral being?

Knowing what you know now, how is your perceptual filter affecting your views of yourself as a:

- 4) Physical being?
- 5) Social being?
- 6) Spiritual or moral being?

Think hard before answering this question. Who is setting your expectations for the three areas of your self-concept? Include who your mental spectators are.

- 7) Physical being?
- 8) Social being?
- 9) Spiritual or Moral being?
- 10) Over the past year have you been your friend or your enemy?
- 11) Considering only today, have you been your friend or your enemy?

## **SUGGESTED EXERCISE #4**

Should you choose to try this exercise, please remember that this is for your benefit and meant to increase your self-awareness. Therefore, it is okay to keep this exercise entirely to yourself. **IF YOU CHOOSE TO SHARE IT, MAKE CERTAIN YOU SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE WHOM YOU ARE COMPLETELY COMFORTABLE, AND WITH WHOM YOU ARE HAVING NO RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS.** With this understood:

On three separate sheets of paper identify the three most important positive decisions you have ever made. On three other separate sheets of paper identify the three most important negative decisions you have ever made.

For each decision, complete the following:

1. Today, as I write this, I realize that the decision was most influenced by the following real and/or mental spectators:
2. At the time you made the decision, were you aware that these real or mental spectators were influencing your decision? If yes, which spectators were you aware of?
3. Had you been fully aware that these spectators were influencing your decision, would you have made the same decision or would you have made a different decision? If you would change the decision, state how?
4. Were you your own friend or enemy when you made the original decision?

## Chapter 6

### GOAL SETTING: THE RULE OF ONE

Whatever you can do, or dream  
you can, begin it!  
Boldness has genius, power and magic  
in it. —Goethe's Couplet

#### Lion or Army of Lions?

As a gladiator in the social arena, your ultimate goal is to master your own destiny. You can't do that by simply disengaging and walking away from battle. As I've said before, each and every day brings new battles whether we want them or not and whether we're up to them or not. There is no choice but to face one skirmish after another. There is choice, however, in being the victor or the vanquished. Self-aware individuals don't go into battle stupidly. They set goals, they itemize their problems, they inventory their resources, and they focus their resources and energy to overcome their problems and reach their goals. Importantly, they prioritize their most urgent needs (I'll explain the difference between problems and needs later). In the arena, you do not win by taking on an army of lions at one time, you prioritize—you pick and choose which lion to slay and when—and then you prioritize again. Think of it as the Rule of One.

This is another lesson I learned early in life. After receiving my first hunting license at the age of 12, I went duck hunting with Willard, an older friend of the family who was also an experienced sportsman. While hiking to his favorite local pond we crossed the inlet creek and flushed a flock of fifteen or twenty mallards. Heart pounding, I raised my 16-gauge shotgun and blasted away at the flock. Kaboom! Kaboom! At least three or four birds were going to drop like rocks. Duck l'orange was in the pan. Of that I was certain. I gazed in amazement as a single, downy feather no larger than my thumbnail drifted mockingly from the sky. The ducks, I was quite certain, were laughing. Others might call it quacking, but I was certain it was duck laughter. "You'll do better next time," Willard said, trying to mitigate my humiliation. Time would tell. The next opportunity came after we'd been in Willard's blind for about a half hour. A huge flock drifted in from the east, slowly circled and then broke up into smaller squadrons. One group of a dozen mallards descended, landing flaps fixed, and swooshed directly over our heads. Kaboom! As before, Willard didn't fire a shot; just watched me make a complete fool of myself. Kaboom, again!

"How could I miss a whole flock of ducks?" I wheezed.

"Two flocks."

"Huh?"

"You missed this flock and the flock at the creek," he said, as though I needed that reminder.

"Okay, then how the . . . heck did I miss two flocks?"

"That's an easy one," Willard returned. "It's because you were aiming at flocks, not birds."

"But there were so many birds, how—"

"There were a lot of birds," he interrupted, "but there was a lot more air. So you were shoot-

ing at mostly air. And you hit it.”

That’s when Willard taught me the secret of wing shooting – and of life. “It doesn’t matter,” he said, “if there are twenty birds flying by, or two hundred, the trick is to pick out one bird, and one only. Lead it according to how fast it’s flying, and squeeze the trigger. Then, if the flock is still in range, pick out a second bird, and so on. But only one bird at a time, understand?”

### Setting Goals: Real vs. Ideal

I did come to understand Willard. Trying to bag my entire limit in an instant wasn’t going to happen. I was learning an important concept in adolescent development. It’s called delayed gratification. When you’re trying to achieve something, you’re much more likely to accomplish your goal by making a realistic plan, then following it, rather than trying to snatch up the object of your desire in one gluttonous move. Unfortunately, a great many people never come to understand this concept. They spend their entire lives seeking instant gratification. Credit card companies understand this human frailty all too well. Don’t wait until you can afford it; purchase anything that strikes your fancy — *now!* Automobile and furniture manufacturers have caught on — buy now, no interest or payments for 90 days, or six months, or a year. The desire for instant gratification keeps divorce courts in hyper drive. Fall in lust, marry a schmuck, fall out of lust, divorce the schmuck, fall in lust with the next schmuck, and on and on. So what’s going on here? When you met the schmuck, you were meeting Prince Charming or Princess Pureheart. How did yesterday’s royalty become today’s royal pain?

The answer to questions like this is straightforward: when you want something, and you’re unwilling to delay gratification, you idealize that something. In other words, your perceptual filter becomes rose tinted and you view that object as more perfect than it actually is. And you do that whether it’s a potential mate, a vehicle, or a set of dining room furniture. Your mental spectators are telling you what a loser you are if you don’t acquire that object of desire, and they blind you with glitter (or rose petals). In your rush to show the spectators what a winner you are, you don’t take time to see the real object, only the false, ideal one — the one with no flaws. So you grab onto it as though it’s the most precious object in the universe. Then . . . comes . . . BUYER’S REMORSE! When the payments come due on the furniture or vehicle, it has lost its luster. It is used furniture or a used vehicle. Its monetary value has plunged, and, besides, you’re probably tired of it anyway. That’s a minor happenstance when compared to affairs of the heart. How many men have married Princess Pureheart only to find themselves wed to a bed hopper or a substance abuser? How many women have wed Prince Charming to later discover he’s a spouse abuser, or a lazy bag of bones who offers nothing in the form of monetary support? Truth is, those ne’er-do-wells were that way from the beginning; you just failed to take the time or effort to see the real them. After all, you needed instant gratification.

Self-aware people always question the need for instant gratification. They weigh things out. As I said earlier, they don’t go into battle stupidly. So let’s take a look at their winning ways of attaining goals.

## **Five steps for attaining goals**

1. State Your Real Goals  
Resist the urge to set ideal (therefore, unachievable) goals. We have a strong tendency to want to believe in ideal conditions. Ever hear someone who claims to have had a past life say they had been a serf or a slave? No, in their previous life they were always a princess or a king, in spite of the fact that there have always been millions of serfs to every princess or king. This is simply a desire for the ideal. Make your goals solid, realistic ones. If you're 40 years old and never completed high school, it's probably unrealistic to decide you want to be a brain surgeon. However, there are other health oriented positions, such as social worker, nurse's aide, or even nurse or, perhaps, physician's assistant, that would be realistically obtainable in your working lifetime.
  
2. Itemize Immediate Problems Related to That Goal  
You can't tackle problems unless you know what they are. If your goal is to lose weight, list the problems associated with it, such as lack of appetite control, love of sweets, loathing to exercise, etc. If your goal is to have a more satisfying marriage, list the problems you are having. If your goal is to have more friends, write down likely reasons you are now short of friends. Then put the list in order from most important to least important. Be brutally honest with yourself. Apply the Common Negative Lifestyle Effects from Chapter 3 to guide you in this endeavor. Using the example from # 1 above, you might have the desire to become a health care worker, but you are suffering the negative lifestyle effect of downward mobility. In this case, some of your immediate problems are: no high school degree, no college or vocational school degree, not enough money for classes.
  
3. Prioritize Most Urgent Needs  
You won't reach goals or solve problems unless you identify what they are. The first need is always recognition. That's why itemizing goals and immediate problems is essential, as in items 1 and 2 above. When dealing with problems, list your needs in order. Your needs amount to mini-goals. To reach the larger goal, you must think in terms of, "I need to do this first, then this second." Think of a need as a stepping stone leading to your larger goal. Continuing with the health care example, you might need to: 1) contact your community college, state your goal and your problems, and ask for academic and financial counseling, 2) apply for a student loan and any available grants, 3) make scheduling arrangements with your employer, 4) make child care arrangements if necessary, and so on.
  
4. Inventory Your Resources  
Ask, what assets do I bring to the situation? Do not fall into the trap of shorting yourself. Your resources can include everything from emotional stability to knowledge to a burning desire for self-improvement. If your goal is to make new friends,

list everything about you that would make you a valuable friend, such as loyalty, sense of humor, helpful nature, and so on. From the health care example above, consider your life experiences as a resource. Believe it or not, many colleges and universities now offer credit for life experience. In some cases, one can achieve a bachelor's degree in the same amount of time it normally takes to earn an associate's degree.

5. Focus Your Resources and Energy

Abide by the Rule of One! Remember the duck I couldn't hit because I shot at all the ducks, or think of the lions in the arena. If you try to fight them all at once, you'll become cat food. Focus on one goal at a time. Applying the Rule of One doesn't mean you won't move toward more than one goal at a time, it means that you are focusing your resources and energy toward a particular one. For example, your primary goal might be to improve your marriage, but, as you achieve that, you'll likely accomplish the goals of becoming a better parent and a happier person. There are always spin-offs to focusing on one goal. In our health care example, by focusing on an educational goal, you would also meet new and interesting people at college and make important social and professional contacts.

Concerning the Rule of One, I want to emphasize that it is not meant to restrict or narrow your life; it is meant to make you focus while growing your life. A divorced friend of mine in graduate school shared custody of two daughters with her ex-husband, and she was attempting to earn a doctorate in criminal justice. Yolanda spoke often of how dissatisfied she was with her studies, and she was concerned that she had chosen the wrong program. Still, she was able to pull high enough grades to reach the second year of criminal justice studies. She completed another semester, then, after winter holiday break, dropped out of school. Before I had a chance to call her to ask why, she sent my wife and me an invitation to her going away party. I was to discover that Yolanda had joined the National Guard and was leaving for six months of training. She had laid out solid plans, had sublet her apartment, and had made child care arrangements with her ex husband.

But her training didn't stop with the standard six months. Yolanda continued on to officer's training school, and the next time I saw her she was a second lieutenant. Moreover, she wasn't a weekend warrior, she had signed up for full-time service and was on her way to a stint in Europe. About a year and a half later, when I saw her again, she was a first lieutenant stationed at a nearby base. She was also sporting a wedding ring. When I asked her who the lucky soldier was, she said she was reunited with her husband and daughters.

Yolanda explained that it had been her own insecurity that had led to a divorce. She'd wanted to serve in the military as long as she could remember, but met only discouragement from her parents and relatives, because, "That's no place for a woman." By the time she was in college, she'd openly given up on her dream. She got married, had kids, graduated, and moved on to graduate school. But, inside, her dream ate away at her, causing resentment and frustration, which she took out on the nearest male, her husband. Not long after the divorce, her true desire to join the

military returned, and that's why she was so miserable in graduate school. In time, she contacted a National Guard recruiter about possibilities. She laid out a realistic plan to accomplish her dream, and then followed through, but not with the idea of reuniting with her husband. The importance of her marriage only came to her after she'd gained the self-confidence it took to become an officer and a lady.

And that's what I mean when I say there are always spin-offs to focusing on a goal.

### So, what's holding you back?

By now you might have figured out that this chapter is about action. Goal setting is, in and of itself, action. Listing real goals is the beginning of achieving them. But some people have trouble going beyond that exercise. Usually that's a problem of inertia. Webster's New World Dictionary defines inertia as: "the tendency of matter to remain at rest if at rest, or, if moving, to keep moving in the same direction, unless affected by some outside force." In the context of this chapter, this means that merely thinking about goals isn't going to accomplish anything. If you don't take some action to start moving toward your goal, then you will remain where you are. Working your way through the five steps I've identified makes you the agent of change. That gets you into action mode, but you must keep focusing your resources and energy on your goal to actually reach it. Re-read the definition of inertia. Notice it says that an object will keep moving in the same direction unless affected by some outside force.

In the context of this discussion, an outside force can be a negative real or mental spectator. It can be a perceived lack of resources, such as courage, skill, or money. Or perhaps you're a slave to failure; that is, you have a history of failing to reach your goals. Believe me, your mental (and often real) spectators will let you know if this is the case. One other problem can be that you see yourself faced with overwhelming odds. In other words, you've bitten off more than you can chew.

And this is what makes the five steps so necessary. It is essential to specify your *realistic* goals and concentrate on one at a time. If it is realistic, it is attainable. Do not set this goal so high that it overwhelms you. By accomplishing a goal, you will be setting a positive history. Winning begets winning. Calculate in advance what you need to do to accomplish this goal, and determine what resources you have to overcome problems on the way to winning. As with your larger goal, tackle one need at a time. Small accomplishments, added up, lead to success. Above all, do not become self-paralyzed by timidity. As Goethe's Couplet says: Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

In terms of self-concept, I've said before that your self-concept can be in a negative cycle or a positive one. Setting goals and achieving them will steer your self-concept in a positive direction. Remember, self-concept is the totality of your thoughts and feelings about yourself. It is the "whole you," otherwise known as your identity. It also has three building blocks: the images you hold of yourself as a physical being, a social being, and a spiritual or moral being. In the previous chapter you learned that self-concept can become a trek or a trap. Well, if yours is a trap, what better way to turn it into a trek than to set a real goal and go after it? Thinking about the three building blocks, where do you see yourself trapped? If one of those building blocks comes to the forefront, it's probably the one you need to think about when goal setting.

Remember Kevin? He was our 22-year old who suffered from anxiety and depression during

what should have been one of the happiest times of his life. His marriage was only four months away. Kevin, in trying to be everything to everybody, was overwhelmed. And no wonder! He had failed to set realistic social goals, which negatively affected both his image as a social being and as a moral one. He had lost himself in the ideal view that he could be a good provider, a sexy, desirable mate, fun, responsible, an “equal” partner, sensitive, the protector, and generally successful. Kevin, like me at the duck pond, was aiming at mostly air, and he was hitting it. Obviously, he needed to learn the Rule of One.

Maria, the 39-year old ad representative, was also a victim of her own faulty expectations and a negative self-concept. She was trying to be a sex object and a feminist businesswoman simultaneously. Her looks and talent allowed her to be both, but at a social and emotional cost. Socially, her colleagues didn't know whether to view her as a castrating bitch or as a sexpot, depending on which role she portrayed. She suffered emotionally because people didn't take her as seriously as she thought she deserved. Like Kevin, she needed something concrete to pull herself together. The next workshop helped them do just that. Follow them, and then try your own workshop.

## WORKSHOP #5

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Kevin"

- 1) State One Real Goal (and only one).  
My goal is to be godlike, to be able to do everything. I know, that's the IDEAL goal! Okay, my most important goal is to get myself out of this pressure cooker I'm diving into without losing everyone's respect.
- 2) Itemize Immediate Problems Related to That Goal.  
1) Our wedding is set in four months. 2) Our college graduations are set in four months. 3) I'm starting work full-time with an accounting firm immediately after our honeymoon. 4) My new employer expects me to study for my CPA license at nights while I'm working full time. 5) Payments on student loans will go into effect after graduation. 6) I'm a fraud because I told everyone, including my fiancée, Jennifer, and her parents, that I can handle all the pressure that's going to hit in four months. I can't even handle it now just thinking about it. I don't have a clue how I'll handle it when it actually happens.
- 3) Prioritize Most Urgent Needs  
1) My first need is filled. That's recognizing the problems. 2) I need to be honest with Jenn. I really can't handle all this at one time. 3) I need to enlist her honest opinion about how to deal with this. Something's going to have to be put off. Maybe we can reschedule the wedding for after I get my CPA license. Maybe I can talk to my employer about letting me get established before taking CPA classes, or working part-time while taking CPA classes. 4) Financially, I might need to ask for a temporary student loan deferment, depending on what happens with my new job. 5) I need Jenn's help in explaining this to our parents, who expect so much of me.
- 4) Inventory Your Resources.  
1) The love of my fiancée (sounds strange, but I think it's the best thing I have going in these circumstances). 2) Intelligence and education (made the accounting firm want me, so maybe they'll be more flexible than I've been thinking). 3) Good rapport with my parents, my future in-laws and lots of friends. 4) Self-honesty (Yes, I just found it! Better late than never.)
- 5) How Will You Focus Your Resources and Energy?  
By following the Rule of One. I'm actually going to show Jenn this worksheet and ask her to add to it, fill out another one, or just give me ideas. At least we'll be working together toward a goal. I guess that's the way a marriage should start.

## WORKSHOP #5

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Maria"

- 1) State One Real Goal (and only one).

I want to be a stable, whole person. I know that with the way I've been living my life, this sounds ideal, but I don't think so. Through the previous workshops, I've learned why I've portrayed myself as having something of a split personality. So here is my goal: I want to be a solid person, meaning to behave and be respected as a mature, thoughtful person, both professionally and personally.

- 2) Itemize Immediate Problems Related to That Goal.

1) The biggest problem is to overcome the inertia thing you've taught me about. In other words, I have to overcome my own and others' view of me as someone who doesn't know for sure what she is. That confused image is in motion and will need a force to send it in another direction. I have to be that force. 2) This is related to my first problem. My husband is a well-known medical doctor and I started out being, in all honesty, his trophy wife. But I kept that role too long, and I've got to impress him with the fact that our relationship has grown beyond that. 3) Time. This is the only way I've known myself, and others have known me. Time is a problem because this is not going to take place overnight, and even one moment of falling back into the old me will destroy any hope of credibility. To establish my desired identity will take consistent behavior over time.

- 3) Prioritize Most Urgent Needs

1) I need to never, not even for a moment, lose sight of this goal. 2) I need to be more aware of how I am behaving. I've allowed myself to slip back and forth from being a frosty, overly professional feminist to being a flirting femme fatale. The bitch and bimbo have to go. They were acts, anyway. 3) In order to be more consistent in my behavior, I need to make certain I never drink too much alcohol. I'm not an alcoholic, but I do use it to get into the party personality, which tells me I didn't really like that personality anyway. 4) I need to tell my husband why I'm doing this. I think my flirtatious behavior was amusing to him at one time, but he seems quietly embarrassed by it lately. Maybe he'll be my biggest ally. If not, I need to know where he stands.

- 4) Inventory Your Resources.

1) I'm very good at customer relations. That's why I've been successful in my job even with a lot of colleagues disrespecting me for my erratic behavior. 2) I have a great eye for art and I love to work with the graphics design group at work. 3) I'm loyal. My husband has never had to worry that I'd go too far in my flirtatious behavior. 4) Now that I think about it, I'm resolute. I can stay the course. I was never really fond of college, but I succeeded as a communications major. I've remained with my job even though I know some of my co-workers don't like me, and that, with my husband's income, I could quit. 5) Finally, I really like my job. What a resource that is when you think of how many people hate theirs.

5) How Will You Focus Your Resources and Energy?

By keeping this list of my needs with me at all times and making sure I fulfill every single one. In fact, I'm going to keep this worksheet with me and read it as often as I need to so I can stay focused. Everything I wrote here is real and not ideal. I just never knew how to do this before.

## **WORKSHOP #5**

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN COMPLETING THIS WORKSHOP. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO SET YOUR MOST IMPORTANT GOAL THAT IS ACTUALLY ACHIEVABLE.

Worksheet:

- 1) State One Real Goal (and only one).
  
- 2) Itemize Immediate Problems Related to That Goal.
  
- 3) Prioritize Most Urgent Needs
  
- 4) Inventory Your Resources.
  
- 5) How Will You Focus Your Resources and Energy?

## SUGGESTED EXERCISE #5

Should you choose to try this exercise, please remember that this is for your benefit and not to create any further problems in your life. Therefore, please be careful in your selection of an interaction partner. **CHOOSE SOMEONE YOU TRUST AND WITH WHOM YOU FEEL VERY COMFORTABLE TO OPEN UP WITH. DO NOT CHOOSE SOMEONE WITH WHOM YOU HAVE CONCERNS!** With this understood:

List three short-term goals you would like to accomplish. By “short-term,” it should be a goal that can be accomplished in two weeks or less. Examples are: mend a minor misunderstanding with a friend or lover, lose three pounds, resolve a billing dispute, get an A on an exam. Make the goal specific and of medium importance to you, but not life altering. The exercise is only meant to give you practice at setting and accomplishing goals. For each goal discuss the following:

1. Is this goal ideal (not accomplishable) or is it a real one you can actually achieve. Why or why not?
2. If the goal is real, list:
  - a. Problems related to the goal
  - b. Most urgent needs (mini-goals) to accomplish the goal
  - c. Resources you bring to it
3. Following the Rule of One, choose which goal you actually plan to accomplish at this time.
4. Meet again in two weeks and acknowledge if you did or did not accomplish the goal. If you did, state specifically how it was accomplished. If you did not, state specifically why not.
5. How did your success or failure affect your self-concept?

## Chapter 7

### OPTIONS, THE WAY TO EXPANSION

If reality is relative to perceptions,  
and the false is what limits and hinders  
human adaptability and growth, then truth  
for man must be the freedom to develop more  
unique, individual, and perceiving spirit.  
Because only thereby can more of reality be revealed.  
—Ernest Becker

#### Free Will or Determinism?

The answer to the free will/determinism question is “both.” It *is* determined that we live in the social arena. Human beings are social animals, nurtured from birth, linked by language and common needs for survival. None stand alone. As individuals, however, our role in the arena is not fixed. We do have choices. Yet, many of us go through life behaving as though we have no free will to examine and choose options. Like the vanquished gladiator, we humbly accept our fate. This is among the most self-destructive and unnecessary behaviors in which one can engage. Options are our portals to personal expansion, but we have to recognize options before they can benefit us. Recall Yolanda from the previous chapter. The option of enlisting in the military had been open for her many years ago, but her real spectators had convinced her the option was not there because, “That’s no place for a woman.” Many years later, after considerable pain and a broken marriage, she saw the option. Even with the much bigger cost of temporarily handing over her daughters to her ex husband, uprooting herself from graduate school, and leaving friends behind, she stepped through the portal. By taking that option and setting a goal, she changed her life. And I’ve told you about the spin-off of regaining her family.

The important point is, look for your options, weigh them, and make choices. If there is pain involved in selecting an option for moral, ethical, practical, or any other self-aware reason, that’s okay. For example, in the 1960s during the height of the Vietnam war, Muhammad Ali had the option of being drafted into the military (almost certainly as a celebrity soldier with no chance of seeing combat) or of facing criminal prosecution and losing his world heavyweight boxing title. He weighed his options and chose the painful one. That was an informed decision. But a young boxer I knew in the late 1970s set another example. Eddy was a top amateur as a featherweight. He had style, class, and fists of stone. When he moved to Denver to begin training for a professional career, I had little doubt he’d at least become a contender. But I didn’t hear much about Eddy, and when I saw him four years later, he was employed as a framing carpenter. What happened? Eddy had grown into a welterweight after going pro. He won four of five fights, and the single one he lost was a close, split decision. For most beginning pros, that would mean his career was on the way.

But not Eddy. Why? He said he realized he’d never be Sugar Ray (Sugar Ray Leonard was welterweight champ at the time). “Sugar Ray owns the division,” he said, and then changed the sub-

ject. Many years later I asked Eddy why he hadn't considered fighting as a lightweight, which would have been possible because he was a smallish welterweight at the time. Losing a few pre-fight pounds to drop into a lower weight division is common. Maybe he could have eventually "owned" that division. Or why not continue boxing as a welterweight? He was considerably younger than Sugar Ray, and Leonard wouldn't be fighting forever. As it turns out, Sugar Ray vacated the welterweight class to become middleweight champion less than a year after Eddy quit. But Eddy had never even thought of those options. All he could see was that he'd never be Sugar Ray, never have that superstar quality. Eddy deeply regretted the decision to give up his career, one he'd dreamed about since he was ten years old. But there was no going back. He'd been out of the ring for too long, and too much alcohol, tobacco, and who knows what had passed his lips. I don't know who Eddy's real and mental spectators were at the time he made that life changing decision, but they had obviously blinded him to his options. Sure, he couldn't be Sugar Ray, or anyone else for that matter. What he could have been was the best of himself. Sugar Ray didn't vanquish Eddy, nor did any other boxer. Eddy's mental spectators did. His self-concept dwindled from that of a champ to that of a chump, and, because I haven't seen him since, I have no way to know if it ever recovered. I doubt it.

### Old Territory

Choosing a poor option is painful. I know, I've done it a time or two. Ouch! But what is actually more common is not recognizing we have options in the first place. Like any other behavior, this can become a repetitive process. History unlearned is history repeated, so it's important for us to study our own history. I don't believe people should dwell in the past, spend all their time wandering in old territory, but there are times that one should reflect on the past to understand how one came to the present. If you're unhappy in any area of your life, if you are experiencing any of the Common Negative Lifestyle Effects from Chapter 3, then it would be a good idea to systematically discover what options you missed that would have led to a different situation for you now. Examining options is a combination of process and skill, and not many people know how to go about it. Typically, if I ask someone to think of a current predicament and then to tell me what options were available to them, they tell me there weren't any options, or else they say something like, "Well, I did this, and I did that. I guess I could have tried something else." Once in a while they can actually identify that "something else," but then have difficulty elaborating on it.

Try it now. Pull away from this book and think about some current difficulty in your life. Write down two or three options that were available to you that could have led to better conditions for you in the here and now.

If you're like most people, the best you can do is to come up with some fuzzy possible options. The reason for this is the failure to examine the problem systematically. Problem solving in a systematic way reduces the possibility that you'll miss something important by chance. Now, I'm going to repeat myself: If you're unhappy in any area of your life, if you are experiencing any of the Common Negative Lifestyle Effects from Chapter 3, then it would be a good idea to systematically discover what options you missed that would have led to a different situation for you now. Here is a practical guide for doing that:

## Examining Past Options

1. Identify some problem, something that is not currently right in your life.  
More than likely this problem is manifesting itself via one of the Common Negative Lifestyle Effects. For the sake of an example, let's use Effect # 1:d Living a Lie: *You have such a fear of rejection that you create a fictional self to hide behind.* In my example, we'll say that you belong to a tight circle of friends who, for years, did almost everything together. Your current problem is that you are becoming more and more isolated from them. Lately, whenever they invite you to go anywhere, you tend to make the excuse that you are too busy to accept the invitation.
2. Trace back to where it all began.  
In the case of our example, one day you discovered that the group went to the theater and you weren't even asked to go.
3. Ask: what decisions or lack of decisions did I make that led to the predicament I am in now?  
In our example, your decision might have been "I'll show those clowns I don't need them." You started to create a fictional don't-need-anyone self.
4. Ask: How did I feel about that decision or non-decision?  
Did you feel assured, ambivalent, apprehensive, miserable, or something else? Regarding our example: in your anger, you probably felt assured that you could punish the group by turning a cold shoulder to them. But a second feeling was pain, knowing you wouldn't be spending much time with people you had always liked.
5. Using memory and creativity, think about how you could have discovered options that would have led to a different conclusion.  
Examples: a) ask your most trusted friend among the group why you were left out; b) the next time you're with the group, tell them how it made you feel to be left out; c) look at the theater listing. Perhaps a movie or play was scheduled that you hated, and everyone in the group knew you wouldn't enjoy going to it. Also, you should ask yourself if you had actually considered some options at the time, and then discarded them. If so, why did you discard them? Were they bad ideas or was your pride so wounded you ignored them?
6. Ask yourself if it's too late to exercise an option.  
In our example, you still have the option of accepting new invitations and working your way back into the group. Or, if the invitations have ceased, you could make the first move and ask your old chums to go somewhere with you.

7. Learn from the past.

Whether you can remedy an old problem or not, you can learn from it. By tracing the roots of your predicament you can make certain you never let it repeat itself.

New Territory

Where we've been helps us to know where we want to go. We don't want to repeat our mistakes, yet that is exactly what happens to individuals who are not self-aware. They never seem to plan for anything, and if they do plan, they repeat old mistakes. As with trying to learn from the past, the problem in moving forward is often not knowing how. Helter-skelter, we try one thing and then another without ever understanding why we fail so often. So, this again is a problem-solving issue that should be gone about systematically. Only now we're not solving a problem that exists, we're working out a future possibility to keep it from becoming a problem. Here's a good way to explore options in planning for future possibilities:

**Exploring Future Options**

1. Identify where you want to be in X number of years.

Depending on your age and your desires, time is optional, but three to five years is not unusual. Give yourself the breathing room to climb this mountain one step at a time.

2. Visualize the path.

Create and pretend. What options exist for getting there? Free your mind, have fun, but fantasize within reason. Don't plan on a strangely-garbed man to give you a ride to your future in his Batmobile.

3. Brainstorm.

Brainstorming takes other people, so do this only if you're comfortable sharing your plans with others. A method for brainstorming will appear in Suggested Exercise 6 at the end of this chapter.

4. Find Allies for Suggestions.

As with brainstorming, this involves other people; however it is not structured in the way brainstorming is. This amounts to sharing possibilities with trusted others, and then soliciting their opinions and suggestions about what your options are.

5. Look for other sources of information.

Think about the education example I referred to in the discussion on goal-setting. I said that person should contact a community college and ask for academic and financial counseling. In that case, the counselors would be highly valuable sources who could provide specific information that would be difficult to gain elsewhere. Whatever your plans are, they might be better informed by looking in a newspaper, a library, going to an appropriate website, or by calling an agency, depending on

what information you're seeking. Notice that these are attempts to gain information — to become self-aware and to think critically.

6. Examine realistic possibilities that stem from the above activities.  
From the new information, generate possible options. Information is worthless unless it is used.
7. Decide on an individualized plan based on those realistic possibilities.  
Make it the plan that is best for you. You've moved past the "pretend" stage. You've gained information and become more self-aware. Now, what can you actually do, what options do you actually have? Prepare to move on them!
8. Ask yourself: Is anything or anyone in the way?  
It's good to know this now. Focus on your real and mental spectators. Are one or more of them going to be a problem in the future? If so, prepare to deal with them.
9. Ask: How do I feel so far?  
By exercising your options to achieve this possibility, are you acting like your friend or your enemy?
10. After exploring items 8 and 9 above, decide what matters the most.  
What's most important, exercising your possible options or starting back at the beginning? Compare all pros and cons, then make your decision and carry it out.

If this sounds like a lot of work, think how much time and effort people spend running around in a frenzy, only to accomplish nothing but frustration for themselves and everyone around them. And ask yourself this: what worthwhile endeavor in life isn't worth planning for? Think critically. Cars and houses aren't built without blueprints. Commercial pilots don't take off without flight plans. Why should something as important as your life be left to happenstance? Taking charge of your life becomes a pleasure once you know how.

Two characters you met in Chapter 2, Janet and Colby, had to work toward taking charge of their lives. My suggestion to them, as it is to you, is to explore some old territory before traveling into new territory. The following workshop illustrates how they did that. After you've read their sample workshops, go ahead with your own Workshop 6. You might want to complete this workshop several times, one for each problem you identify. Once you're satisfied you've explored old territory, create your own workshop for new territory by following the 10 suggestions above. If you decide to include a brainstorming session, Suggested Exercise 6 will guide you.

## WORKSHOP #6

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE “Janet”

- 1) Identify some problem, something that is not currently right in your life.  
I dropped out of college and have been too embarrassed to go back.
  
- 2) Trace back to where it all began.  
I'd like to say it began with an affair with one of my teachers, a graduate student who taught part-time. But, it goes back a lot further than that. I was the “baby” of my family until my little sister, Lita, came along, and my parents and sisters did everything for me. I really learned how to always get my way. I manipulated my sisters into doing most of my homework. In high school I manipulated my parents by telling them I was spending nights at friends' houses, when I was actually messing around with older guys. Even now, I haven't told my parents that I'm waitressing in a wine bar, because they paid my college tuition and don't know I dropped out. I talked Lita, who's now in high school and still living at home, into intercepting correspondence from the university to keep my parents in the dark. And the affair — that was just more of my manipulating people. What a mess!
  
- 3) What decision or lack of decisions did you make that led to the predicament you're in now?  
Way back, I made hundreds of decisions to use other people. I completely lacked making a decision to be responsible for my own rotten behavior. But, about the immediate problem, I made a decision to “catch” an older man, even though he was married. I think I did it just to prove to myself I could. How stupid! Then, out of embarrassment, I dropped college and decided to hide it from my parents.
  
- 4) How do you feel about that decision or non-decision?  
Like a low life.
  
- 5) Using memory and creativity, think about how you could have discovered options that would have led to a different conclusion.  
I could have listened to some other students who told me that an affair with a married guy was a dead-end street. Instead of hiding my plans from my sisters, I could have called and asked for advice. I could have talked with a school counselor before I ever made the first move. And believe me, I did make the first move, and the second. And I could have used a little (okay, a lot of) critical thinking, before I told my lover's wife. A quiet breakup would have been much better.
  
- 6) Is it too late to exercise an option?  
I have the option of being honest with my parents and enrolling with a different university, whether they pay my tuition or not. It's going to be tough, but I can't stand living this lie any longer.

7) What have you learned from the past?

I've learned so much. I know that I let some very wrong mental spectators rule my life. I fell for all the truisms about men and women. I believed — and lived in my head — the fallacy that I'd always be that cute little girl and that none of my actions would really hurt anyone. I didn't set any solid goals, because "I'd just make the world whatever I wanted it to be." What a mess I created. Now, I've got to start exploring real options and planning for the future.

## WORKSHOP #6

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Colby"

- 1) Identify some problem, something that is not currently right in your life.  
How about having your wife ask for a divorce? I'd call that a problem.
- 2) Trace back to where it all began.  
Ah, crap. This self-honesty stuff is tough. It goes back to me acting like a jerk. This guy I work with, Jason, said I thought I was god's gift to women. He asked me if I'd like for another man to look at my wife the way I look at other women. I got PO'd at him at first, and then thought about it. That's the way my dad always looked at women. And now I'm thinking, is that the way I want my sons to act? It's not.
- 3) What decision or lack of decisions did you make that led to the predicament you're in now?  
I guess there was no decision. I just grew up thinking the way my dad and a lot of other men thought about women. Your own wife is a saint and all the others are sluts.
- 4) How do you feel about that decision or non-decision?  
Embarrassed. Stupid, I guess.
- 5) Using memory and creativity, think about how you could have discovered options that would have led to a different conclusion.  
I'm not much in the creativity department, but I do remember times when some of my buddies would tell me I was stupid to cheat on my wife. Instead I listened to the ones who thought it was all right. Of course, they were doing the same thing. Maybe I should have talked to our priest. Bet he would've given me hell.
- 6) Is it too late to exercise an option?  
Probably. But I need to try. I don't want to be away from my sons. Or my wife. She said we should go to counseling together. I told her no. But I guess I better change that. It's embarrassing telling your problems to a stranger, but I better. Or else it's all going to fall apart.
- 7) What have you learned from the past?  
How much my family means to me. Also, that I thought my wife was a saint, but I treated her pretty lousy. I mean, I've always been gentle with her, but going after other women was a lousy thing to do. I've learned I was acting like a loser.

## **WORKSHOP #6**

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, IT IS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH, NOT FOR BEATING YOURSELF UP. WHENEVER NECESSARY PLEASE REFER TO THE SAMPLES PROVIDED TO HELP YOU IN COMPLETING THIS WORKSHOP. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS, AND TO EXPLORE OPTIONS THAT COULD HAVE LED TO A DIFFERENT SITUATION FOR YOU NOW.

### **WORKSHEET:**

- 1) Identify some problem, something that is not currently right in your life.
  
- 2) Trace back to where it all began.
  
- 3) What decision or lack of decisions did you make that led to the predicament you're in now?
  
- 4) How do you feel about that decision or non-decision?
  
- 5) Using memory and creativity, think about how you could have discovered options that would have led to a different conclusion.
  
- 6) Is it too late to exercise an option?
  
- 7) What have you learned from the past?

## SUGGESTED EXERCISE #6

This brainstorming session is meant to help you explore realistic options concerning either a current project or problem, or a future project and possible problems related to it. The exercise will require interaction partners, typically three to five people in addition to yourself. **CHOOSE PEOPLE YOU TRUST AND WITH WHOM YOU FEEL VERY COMFORTABLE.** With this understood:

Define what problem or project you want to work on. Do not at this time list possible options. You do not want to bias the ideas of team members.

### BRAINSTORMING STEPS

1. Introduction: Team Leader states the purpose of the session (the problem or project) and explains the steps and rules.
2. Brainstorming: Limit this active part of the session to 20-25 minutes. Stop whenever ideas dwindle. The recorder is supposed to write down every idea on a chalkboard or wherever everyone can see them.
3. Process ideas: Clarify ideas, eliminate duplicate ideas, and eliminate ideas that people agree won't work.
4. Score the ideas: Vote on 10 ideas, then vote on the top five of those 10. Once you've pared the ideas down to 5, arrange those 5 in order of importance.

### BRAINSTORMING RULES

1. All ideas are welcome. No judgments should be made of ideas during the session.
2. Be creative! Exploring options involves creativity, so be very open to new and original ideas. Respect everyone's point of view.
3. Keep ideas coming at a fast pace.
4. Play off of each others' ideas.
5. Team members (including you, the leader and the recorder) should make contributions in turn.
6. Each team member should make only one contribution each turn.
7. Each team member should try to make a contribution during each round. However, if a team member can't think of something, he/she can politely pass to the next team member.
8. Don't provide explanations for ideas until Stage 3, when ideas are being processed.

### ASSIGN ROLES

In advance of the session assign one of three roles to each participant.

1. Leader. This person needs to be open minded to others' ideas and opinions. Before the session, work with the leader to define the project or problem. The leader should prepare a statement to present to team members so they know what to focus on and the reason for the

brainstorming session. After the group meets, the leader should read the ground rules, the team procedure, and then guide the group without creating a bias toward any one idea.

2. Recorder. This person should be a good listener and able to take accurate notes. The recorder's job is to write every single idea where the group can see them. It's okay if he leader and the recorder are the same person.
3. Team Members. These are people you trust to provide ideas. It's okay to have fun, but not to be disruptive.

## Chapter 8

### WHERE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE MEET

Hope pities our doddiness. It promises that we will find the treasure, marry the prince, and inherit the kingdom. Hope says that it is our birthright to win the lottery and write a classic novel. If we are American it will be a bestseller. We will make the NBA, be a rock star, become president..

—L. Segal

#### Putting your selves together

Does the above statement by Segal strike a discordant note? I hope so, because that will mean you're on to something important. I don't know how many times in the last two chapters I wrote the words "real" and "realistic," but they were mentioned often. We need to set real, not ideal, goals, make realistic plans, and seek realistic options in our quest for self-improvement. Don't think of this in negative terms of setting limits on yourself; think of it in the positive term, self-discipline. If your genetic parents are built close to the ground, and you're showing no indication of being taller than they are, why waste a single ounce of energy on practicing to become an NBA superstar? If you're seven-foot-tall, why strive to become a jockey — unless you plan to race Clydesdales?

In Chapter 5, I wrote about several "selves": our real self, our should self, and our ideal self. The ideal self is on an even higher plateau than your should self. You always have mental spectators telling you that you should do this and you should do that to be a better you, but the ideal self is the totally idealized and unrealistic self you yearn to be. A lot of pain in life comes from comparing your real self with that ideal one. The greater the distance between your real self and your ideal self, the more likely you are to suffer a negative self-concept. On the one hand, your real and mental spectators are selling you on the idea of an impossible grandiose, ideal self, and, on the other hand, they're telling you that you're a failure for being the real you and not that other you. No wonder so many people suffer the results of negative self-concept, results that include depression, anxiety, and an inability to function in the social world.

Consider who these spectators are. They can be anyone from your relatives, to media creations, to a superstar whom you've never met. Remember Eddy, the young professional boxer from Chapter 7, who had failed to explore his options? It could be that Sugar Ray Leonard was Eddy's most damaging mental spectator. Eddy was a good boxer, but his personality was reserved. He was quiet, even shy. To the contrary, Sugar Ray had arguably the most charming and outgoing personality in all the sports world at that time. In or out of the ring, he had flair! If Eddy was comparing his real self with the ideal self of being another Sugar Ray, he was suffering, indeed.

The gap between your real self and your ideal self is an easy one to fall into, but a difficult one to climb out of. We've all been there. So what do those of us who succeeded in climbing out have in common? Technique, that's what. It doesn't happen by accident. Some people have accomplished it without realizing exactly how, but from many conversations with individuals with strong, positive self-concepts, the following technique revealed itself to me.

## **Making Peace Between the Real and Ideal Selves**

1. Get real  
As with setting goals and seeking options, the first thing you need to do is be realistic. Identify which real and mental spectators have determined who your ideal self is. Trust me, they are there. You weren't born believing you were going to be some impossible you. So what if you're not a perfect lover, spouse, parent, tinker, baker, or candlestick maker? Do not put yourself down because you are not a perfect something. Laugh at the idea of it. Revel in it. Perfect is *boring*! The spectators who have set an ideal self for you are cosmic comedians. Identify them and laugh at their joke. Your real self is better than your ideal self because you can build on it and improve it.
2. Bridge the gap between your real and ideal self.  
The wider the gap between your real self and your ideal self, the more negative your self-concept will be. Once you are able to laugh at the joke tellers, you can go to work creating a realistic "ideal" you, one who is not totally ideal, but a self you can grow into. This is a self you can actually begin to act and behave like, and, in time, to become. Once you have achieved this "becoming," you move on to another somewhat-less-than-"ideal" self. Life is not a structure, it is a process.
3. Form an assortment of future selves  
If you are a collegiate athlete and get a serious joint injury, you are washed up. If you are a collegiate scholar-athlete and get a serious joint injury, you concentrate on academics. Your life is buffered by alternatives. Having only one future self is short sighted. It leaves you nowhere to turn if something out of your control goes wrong. It also is dangerous in another way. You are likely to make that one self an obsession, an ideal, an impossible dream. It's okay to have a dream, but make it flexible enough to weather storms.
4. Approach the future in increments  
The becoming of a future self requires steps. Remember how I described needs as mini-goals? Well, mini-goals are required here also. You won't become a worthwhile future self by inaction. Determine what you need to do to get there, and then do it in steps you can handle.
5. Be fair to yourself  
Treat yourself with the fairness you would (or, at least, should) give to others. Ironically, we often treat complete strangers more politely than we treat ourselves. If someone is depressed over not achieving a goal, or for making a mistake, we usually tell them not to worry, but to try again. Why shouldn't we do the same thing with ourselves?

6. Respect yourself for being real and for taking action

It takes courage to face reality and to try to improve yourself. Real and mental spectators will dog you, try to impede your way and tell you that you have turned your back on your ideal self. But remember, these spectators are comedians who create false images. Laugh. Enjoy life and move forward toward your real future selves.

Allow me to emphasize something I said in item 2 above: *life is not a structure, it is a process*. By coming this far in the book you are in the process of understanding and liking yourself. Why else would you still be reading? I don't write deathless prose (translated: I'm too wise to use Twain or Dostoyevsky as models for my ideal self). No, I don't think you've read this far into the book because you're enamored with my writing. I think you're still reading because you're transforming yourself in the process. This transformation might be largely internal at this point. For one thing, you're becoming more self-aware. You are applying critical thinking, rather than simply accepting everything your real and mental spectators tell you. However, you will find that your outward "self-presentation" is also beginning to change. By self-presentation, I'm referring to how you alter your behavior to communicate some information about yourself to others. It's something all of us do, and we do it for two reasons (1) to please the others, and (2) to construct our public self to match our ideal self. My advice is to keep your self-presentation honest. Remember, we are always in the process of "becoming," so be straightforward in the way you present yourself to others. If your ideal self (or as you now know, your somewhat-less-than-ideal self) is a clinical psychologist and you have only recently completed your first undergraduate psychology class, do not try to convince people that you are a repository of knowledge about psychology. *Do* present yourself as a student on your way to becoming a psychologist. Being honest with your self-presentation will make you comfortable with it.

Thrust and Parry

Self-presentation is a fact of human life. Anytime we are in the presence of others, they and we are presenting ourselves. Indeed, it even goes on internally with our mental spectators. In one way or another we are almost always engaged in the concept of social influence. Social influence can be described as efforts by one or more people to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behaviors of one or more others. As a gladiator in the social arena, you know this to be true. How many conversations have you had in which you and the other person(s) weren't trying to influence each another? Very few, I'll bet. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing, but it is a human thing — and something of which you should be aware. There's always thrust and parry going on; your conversation partner thrusts an opinion at you, you parry (block) it with a belief of your own. Then you thrust an opinion back at your partner. Back and forth you go. Much of the time it is going on so subtly you are probably not even aware that it is occurring. And most of the time there's probably no harm done. However, there are times when others are trying to gain your compliance, and it's important that you understand what they are doing and how they are doing it. Only then can you make a self-aware decision about whether to comply with their desires or not.

The noted social psychologist Robert Cialdini took jobs at various businesses that employed what he called, "compliance professionals," so he could learn the techniques for gaining compli-

ance. These compliance professionals included fund raisers, door-to-door and in-store sales people, and advertisers. I'll share some of the compliance techniques Cialdini learned, and even a couple others. I'm doing this because professionals aren't the only ones who use these techniques. They are used by everyday people as part of their attempts to influence each other. As you read them, don't be surprised to find yourself groaning aloud. You've probably "been had" by one or more of these techniques. I have. And I've groaned after discovering what happened. However, it's also good to laugh about the fact that someone was able to pull one over on you. Just make sure it doesn't happen again. The old saying that goes something like, "Burn me once, shame on you. Burn me twice, shame on me," applies here.

### **Techniques for Gaining Compliance**

1. Foot-in-the-door technique  
Someone begins with a small request, and then, when you agree, he/she requests a larger one. The first request might be for a kiss, the second one for a grope, and the third one might lead to an unwanted pregnancy. This is a very common technique in which small favors granted lead to larger ones in the future. You've probably heard the saying, "What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." It's not uncommon for a friend or acquaintance to ask you to tell a small lie for them. The next thing you know, you're being asked to tell a big lie for them. Then you must tell lies to cover the other lies, and your life becomes a complicated mess. For example, a friend asks you to tell her husband that she was having lunch with you, when you know for a fact she was having lunch with a male coworker. You agree to tell this one small lie. A week later the friend ask you for a bigger favor: if her husband calls, tell him that the two of you went to a movie and had a flat tire on the way home that took two hours to get fixed. See where this is going? You've become entangled in your friend's extramarital affair. And that's not a good place to be.
2. Lowball procedure  
Someone offers you a deal. After you accept it, the person changes it to a less desirable deal. This is common practice on car lots. The salesman will offer you the auto, and the price includes, "All the candy!" Then, the sales manager says the price doesn't include all the candy (all the accessories). You are psychologically committed and will more than likely take the car with less candy, or else pay more to get the candy. It works in everyday life, too. Think of the work associate who talked you into car pooling with him. The original deal was that you would share your cars equally, you driving one day, he the next. Then, it turns out that his car doesn't run so well, or eats too much gas, so your car ends out being the one that gets the mileage put on it day after day.
3. Door-in-the-face technique  
This one is opposite the foot-in-the-door technique. Someone requests an unrealistically large favor of you. After you turn it down, the requester then asks for a smaller,

and, thus, more reasonable favor. It goes something like this:

Requester: “I’m in a real pinch. Can you possibly lend me \$100?”

You: “Expenses have been terrible this month. Sorry, there’s just no way. Wish I could help.”

Requester: “I understand. But maybe you can still help. Think you could possibly spare \$25?”

4. That’s-not-all technique

After someone asks you for something, but before you can answer, they sweeten the deal. This one is tediously common on television infomercials. They start out demonstrating a Vegg-O-Slaughter, but before you can pick up the phone to order it, they also throw in a Pancake-O-Flipper and a Fanny-O-Whacker. Give me a break! In everyday life, this technique goes something like this: “If you lend me \$100, I’ll pay you back \$105 on payday. Oh, and I’ll watch your dog next time you’re out of town.”

5. Playing-hard-to-get technique

Someone makes something you want appear to be scarce or difficult to obtain. Advertisers commonly tell you to buy something “while supplies last.” In the employment market, you’ve probably heard the term, “It’s easier to get a job when you’ve got a job.” And it’s true. Studies show that potential employers are more interested in you if you have a job, or if you have other job offers. In the dating game, studies show that if your affections are difficult to earn, or if you can have a choice of many partners, you appear more attractive.

6. Deadline technique

This is similar to the hard-to-get technique. Advertisers use this one to get you to buy right now. “Limited Time!” “Sale ends Saturday!” As a job applicant, it goes something like, “I do have another offer, and I have to respond by Friday. So please let me know if you plan to hire me before then.” And watch out for the horny young stud who says, “I ship out to basic training on the 30<sup>th</sup>,” meaning, the time to make whoopee is now or never.

7. The ingratiation technique

Someone works to get you to like them, and then they make a request of you or get you to change your behavior to their liking. Often, this technique involves flattery. I hate to say this, but this one could again involve the young stud from item 6. Men often use flattery to bed women. Of course, women also use flattery for all kinds of reasons. This technique is common in the sales field and the workplace. (Hey, come on, the boss’s necktie or dress can’t always be the most stylish in the office!) Other facets of ingratiation include doing small favors for you, flashing positive nonverbal cues such as smiling, or laughing at your jokes even when they aren’t funny.

8. The complaining technique  
Some people will simply complain, whine, bitch and moan until you cave in to their demands. Every parent is familiar with this tactic. Unfortunately, however, children aren't the only ones to apply it. Enough said. We've all known habitual bitches.
9. The guilt-trip technique  
Somehow you should feel guilty for not giving in to this person's requests. Again, we've all known someone like this.

I don't know if you're groaning or laughing right now, or simply involved in quiet introspection, but I do hope you have become more self-aware of how people try to influence you. Notice that I did not say these techniques are necessarily evil. Social influence is a fact of life. Indeed, you might have used many of these techniques yourself. As long as you're not using them for sinister manipulation, that's no problem. For example, I see nothing wrong with playing hard to get and letting a potential employer know you are also looking at other companies. I read about one high-powered executive who always asked interviewees what they'd do if they did not get "this job." One interviewee started crying and said he didn't know what he'd do because he "expected" to get the job. He didn't get it, of course. What a terrible self-presentation! Another job applicant, when asked the question, reached into his briefcase and pulled out packets of information on three other companies. He said he had researched the companies and would apply to them if he did not get this job. He was hired on the spot. And no wonder. He showed confidence and the ability to plan. I quite imagine, too, that the employer was influenced by scarcity (the guy was going to get a job elsewhere) and deadline (he would probably get another job soon).

From a more personal view, I know a student who, when nearing college graduation, applied to twenty university graduate programs and was not accepted at a single one. Indeed, only two even called to talk with him, and he was not invited for a personal interview at either one. Rather than give up, he decided to apply some of the compliance principles listed in this chapter. No, he didn't learn them from me. I didn't know him yet. He learned them in a social psychology course. Tim decided to apply to only eight programs the next year, but to focus his efforts. He read publications by at least one member of the graduate program at each university to which he applied. He then called that professor to talk about his or her work (ingratiation via flattery!). Before the conversation ended, he asked if it would be okay to call back from time to time if he had questions about the professor's work (ingratiation & foot-in-the-door). Six of the eight programs called him in for personal interviews. He let each know that the others were interviewing him (hard-to-get!). All six offered to have him join their graduate program. He was free to pick the one he wanted. And remember this: neither his undergraduate grades or his graduate record examination scores had changed from the year before when no program gave him the time of day! His success was due to applying compliance techniques and developing an impressive self-presentation.

Inside/outside: two worlds become one

By now, you must think this chapter has been one bumpy roller coaster ride. We descended into the mental world in an attempt to make your real and ideal selves pull together, and then we climbed to the outer world where you and society bump into and influence each other. That's life! Internally, you deal with your mental spectators and your various selves. Externally, you present yourself to other people and they present themselves to you. Welcome to the social arena filled with real and mental spectators. See them in the full light of day. That's how you become liberated. Knowing them fills you with power and lets you live a full life. Move forward in increments, be self-aware, know clearly that spectators will never stop trying to influence you. Influence them right back—and live a confident life!

This brings us to our seventh workshop and two of our characters who were having problems with negative self-concepts. Denzel, as you recall, couldn't keep a close personal relationship together if he had a bucket of glue and some nails. His wife left him for a "man's man," every woman he tried to form a romantic relationship with vanished, and the social component of his self-concept was in the dumpster. Last time we met him, however, he was using self-awareness to discover the source of his problems.

Donna thought of herself as a lump. She, too, had been left by a spouse. Her husband, Doug, is married to a younger woman, and her two daughters have gone off to lives of their own. Donna's favorite—no, her only, pastime is feeling sorry for herself.

Let's see how they're doing now, and then complete Workshop 7 on your own.

## WORKSHOP #7

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE “Denzel”

- 1) To the best of your ability, identify your ideal self and at least two mental spectators who created that ideal self.  
This is almost too easy. But only because I’ve come so far in self-awareness. My ideal self is a perfect husband and father, a successful banking exec., who’s mentally and physically solid. It’s the “perfect husband” part that’s been killing me. I said before that my divorced sister and Professor Mary Black were two of my most apparent mental spectators. But what’s exciting is I’ve discovered they’re not the most powerful ones. My former brother-in-law is. Whenever I would start to be assertive around a woman, I’d think of him. He was a bully and a coward. I wanted to be opposite everything he stood for. I over-reacted. Being assertive is not being a bully. I can see now that the women I dated thought I was a total wimp. I said before that my wife left me for a manly type. Now I get it. So it’s my former brother-in-law who’s the cosmic comedian! He’s also a cosmic jerk who is through ruling my life.
- 2) What are you going to do to bridge the gap between your real and your ideal self?  
I’m hanging on to the business part of my ideal self. I think that becoming a CEO of a bank chain is attainable and I’m right on track. But the perfect husband has dissolved right before my eyes. That’s impossible! I still see myself as being married, but I guess I’ll just have to be the best husband I can be, not a perfect one.
- 3) Concerning only your problem area(s), list a realistic future self other than your new ideal self, and state how you could achieve each one.  
Well, fortunately my ideal self is now a less-than-ideal self, so it should be achievable. As I said before, he is a married guy. But he’ll be involved with all the give and take of marriage, rather than being a door mat. Another future self —at least as far ahead as I can see right now — is a single man who spends more time with his twin daughters and dates occasionally. He’s not in a rush to get married, like the old me, and he wants people to get used to his new self-presentation. In fact, this future self might even be more realistic than my new ideal one. I’m going ahead step by step, getting to know the new me and enjoying life. I’m not going to date for a while. Maybe in a couple months I’ll start again, but not until the new me has emerged socially. It’s going to be fun seeing how people react to my new self-presentation.
- 4) How do you feel about yourself right now?  
Like the world has been taken off my shoulders. I think I finally am my friend.
- 5) How do you expect your self-presentation to change?  
I think I’ll project much more confidence. I’ll definitely behave more confidently in personal

relationships, but it might even come across in my business personality. I don't have to hide a wounded part of me anymore. It should be interesting.

## WORKSHOP #7

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE “Donna”

- 1) To the best of your ability, identify your ideal self and at least two mental spectators who created that ideal self.  
Without even knowing the term, ideal self, I already started making changes in it, so I should say how I would have described it before I started to change. Okay, I see a very respected lady, whose daughters love and honor her. People from her church come to visit her, and she gets invited to a lot of functions. Oh, and her ex-husband regrets leaving her for a younger woman. At least, this is the ideal self that came into being when I got divorced. My daughters helped form this image, and they stayed on as mental spectators. At first they made it look like this ideal self was going to happen. They were very sympathetic and kept telling me not to worry, that I still had them to look out for me. My church pastor is another one. At first, he would come over with other people and cheer me up. Then he moved to another state. I feel kind of like all these people used the lowball procedure you taught me about. They promised an important thing, their company, but ended out giving me less. I think what they got by giving me their company was an escape from my guilt trips. We were forcing each others' compliance.
- 2) What are you going to do to bridge the gap between your real and your ideal self?  
That's already in progress. I finally realized that my ideal self was a pampered matriarch. It was really selfish of me to expect everyone else to take care of me and also listen to my complaints at the same time. So I started bridging the gap by telling my ideal self to get real. Nobody is going to take care of you. Be responsible for yourself. Get back in the world. So my new ideal self is a self-sufficient person who helps other people. I'm also bridging the gap by making my real self work toward goals — and one of those goals is to become self sufficient. I'm doing volunteer work with the church now, and I've got a related part-time job at a community center that helps poor people get on their feet. I've been told that I might work myself into a full-time job. That'll bring my real self and my new, realistic ideal self closer.
- 3) Concerning only your problem area(s), list a realistic future self other than your new ideal self, and state how you could achieve each one.  
Again, without knowing the term, ideal self, I've already begun working on it when I started goal-setting and making plans. Each time I accomplish a mini-goal (need), my self-concept grows more positive. About another future self? Well, I hope this doesn't seem too crazy, but our church holds singles' functions. I've met a nice man, and, who knows, one future self might be a Mrs. I'll take that step by step as I learn how to make a relationship grow.
- 4) How do you feel about yourself right now?  
Pretty good. Not perfect. I made so many people look on me as a whiner, I may never be

able to make up to all of them. I've talked on the phone several times with both my daughters and they seem relieved that I'm "getting a life." The way I present myself is a lot different than before. There is hope.

- 5) How do you expect your self-presentation to change?  
It already has. I'm much more friendly. I make it a point not to whine. I even laugh now, and I can see that people actually enjoy being around me.

## **WORKSHOP #7**

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU FINISH THE RESPONSES IN ORDER. PLEASE CONSULT THE SAMPLE WORKSHOPS AS NEEDED. YOU HAVE A BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-AWARENESS AND GROWTH. ENJOY!

### **WORKSHEET:**

- 1) To the best of your ability, identify your ideal self and at least two mental spectators who created that ideal self.
  
- 2) What are you going to do to bridge the gap between your real and your ideal self?
  
- 3) Concerning only your problem area(s), list a realistic future self other than your new ideal self, and state how you could achieve each one.
  
- 4) How do you feel about yourself right now?
  
- 5) How do you expect your self-presentation to change?

## **SUGGESTED EXERCISE #7**

This is an extremely personal writing exercise. Should you choose to try it, I suggest you not share it with anyone at this time. In the future you may see some benefit in sharing it with a close ally. For now, however, keep it private so that you can disclose your innermost thoughts and feelings. With this understood:

1. In great detail identify the physical traits of your ideal self. Include, but don't necessarily limit your answer to height, weight, level of attractiveness, physical abilities, and intelligence. I include intelligence here because that requires a physical brain.
2. Complete the same exercise for the social traits of your ideal self. Include, but don't necessarily limit your answer to level of friendliness, ability to influence others, ability to communicate, emotional makeup, how well liked and admired by others, how easily influenced by others, behavior in romantic relationships, behavior in relationships in general.
3. Complete the same exercise for the spiritual or moral traits of your ideal self. Include, but don't necessarily limit your answer to belief/non-belief in a supreme being, religious affiliation, honesty, helping others, charitable acts, sacrificing time, money, etc. for others, how you speak about others.
4. For each answer 1-3 identify which mental spectator(s) are most influential. Tell why.
5. For each item 1-3, ask: Is the trait realistic? Can I actually achieve it?
6. If you answered no to any item in item 5, state what you will do to narrow the gap between your real self and your ideal self.
7. Write what specific steps you will take to become the realistic, not-so-ideal self.
8. In taking the steps, how will your self-presentation change?

## Chapter 9

### YOU, THEY, AND GETTING ALONG

To live alone, one must be either an animal or a god.  
—Aristotle

No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe.  
—John Donne

#### Why conflict?

Social psychology is the study of how people behave in the presence of real or imagined others. And that's been the perspective of this book. The first eight chapters dealt heavily with the imagined others — our mental spectators. I've described you as a gladiator in the social arena, and your mental spectators as little tyrants. Where they're concerned, you've acted alone to bring them under your rule. However, in the outside world, you need allies. They come in the form of relatives, workmates, friends and other acquaintances. So let's tackle the issue of how to deal with those life-sized spectators. Of course, you need to realize that from their perspective you are the spectator. The two of you have different perspectives on everything. Nevertheless, there is a powerful phenomenon that helps you and them understand each other. It's called empathy. Way back in Chapter 2, under the subtitle, Games people play, I related how, by playing the different positions in baseball, an adolescent learns what it's like to be in other players' shoes. Empathy is the mature version of that phenomenon. There are two components of empathy, a feeling component, in which you feel what another person feels, and a thought component, in which you think what another person is thinking. Empathy is not absolute; you never know exactly what another person is feeling and thinking, but you can have a strong sense of it.

Because of empathy, it seems that relationships would run quite smoothly. After all, you know that if you think positive thoughts and follow them with positive behaviors, then your feelings are going to be positive. Positive feelings then lead to other positive thoughts, and on it goes. And, of course, you're going to treat other people accordingly because making them feel good makes you feel good. Life becomes one great big, cream pie in the sky. So if it's that simple, why are so many human interactions more like a mud pie in the face? Why all the conflict, even among friends? There are probably more reasons under the sun than this book could list. Fortunately, though, social psychologists have brought them together under six topics. Here they are.

#### **Six sources of conflict**

1. Perceived injustice

One person believes he/she unjustly got less of some reward than another person. This is commonly known as getting the shaft, as in, "they got the praise, I got the shaft." Often the result of this is that the person who feels cheated will retaliate in some way, such as breaking off a friendship or starting a vicious rumor about the other person. This is one reason not to trust gossip. "Of course Bill makes more

money than I do. He spends eight hours a day sucking up to the boss,” could mean that Bill actually works harder than the tongue wagger, but the tongue wagger perceives any difference in pay as an injustice.

2. Actual injustice

One person takes advantage of the relationship through dishonesty and self-serving behaviors. This comes in the form of cheating, lying, stealing, manipulating the other, falsely placing blame, gossiping, belittling the other, breaking a contract, such as marriage vows, or even a handshake agreement. Actual injustice can be subtle, such as when one takes credit for the other’s positive acts.

3. Misperceptions

An individual mistakes the other’s motives and goals. Remember Ms. Hearright from Chapter 3? Imagine saying something funny to her and she walks off without any acknowledgement of your comment. You attribute her motive as sinister. She’s putting you down, giving you the cold shoulder. But, in truth, she is deaf in her left ear and can’t hear you.

4. Mirror-image perceptions

Each person sees vices in the other person but only virtue in his/her self. Their thoughts go something like this:

Person A: I just offered her a bargain from the goodness of my heart. Yet, she’s over there scheming up a way to stick it to me.

Person B: I’m thinking seriously about accepting her offer — just to help her out. But I think she’s setting me up for something.

5. Faulty communication

A person says something that emotionally arouses the other without meaning to. Recently I watched a video sequence on one of those reality cop shows, in which a rather plump female police officer had pulled over a woman motorist for speeding. In trying to ingratiate herself, the motorist asked, “When is the baby due?” Ouch! That must have been one of life’s longest moments for the motorist when the officer coldly answered, “I’m not pregnant.” Anger and embarrassment can easily result from faulty communication. So can frustration, such as when one party mistakes a gesture or word to be a sexual come-on and the other party didn’t mean it that way at all.

6. Naive realism

We see our own views as objective and reflecting reality, but the other person’s view as biased by their ideology. Perhaps you’re a Republican and you believe Ronald Reagan was a great president who caused the collapse of international communism. Your friend is a Democrat who believes Ronald Reagan was a mediocre president,

and communism collapsed because of its own faults. To you, your views are totally objective, but your friend's view is determined by her political affiliation.

So there you have it. When we look for black and white in human interaction we find multiple shades of gray. Empathy — well, yes, it helps to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, but conflict has the ability to make us jump right back out. Conflict is a fact of human existence. Get used to it. But don't let it roll over you. Just as there are techniques for dealing with your mental spectators, there are techniques for resolving conflicts with your real spectators.

### Negotiating a truce

Conflicts come in all forms and levels of intensity. Some are the result of misunderstandings between friends, and they can be resolved with a simple apology or acknowledgement that the misunderstanding isn't important enough to destroy a friendship. Other conflicts aren't so easy to resolve. They are emotionally intense and often come about over time, one problem building upon another, or a misunderstanding festering into an open sore. The parties then have to decide if the friendship, partnership, marriage or whatever relationship is worth repairing. Notice I said "parties" in the plural. It takes two to tango, and it takes at least two to negotiate. That's because communication forms the core of any negotiation. Let's look at how it works.

### **Twelve steps for resolving conflicts**

1. Initiate communication  
Someone has to utter some version of the famed statement, "Houston, we have a problem." Only now it will be, "Darling . . . friend . . . partner, we have a problem. Would you be willing to try a few steps to resolve it?" Without an agreement to communicate, none of the following steps are going to happen.
2. Listen to one another's goals  
This is beneficial largely for three reasons. For one, conflicting parties often commit an incompatibility error. That is, they assume that they have no mutual interests. If you listen to each other's goals, you'll discover that you do have some compatible interests. After all, something brought you together in the first place! Second, people have a tendency to commit the fixed-sum error. They think that each of them places the same priority on every issue. But if they communicate and listen to each other's goals, they'll discover differently. The third reason this process is beneficial is that it encourages the discovery of mutual goals. Mutual goals are ones that both sides seek and that tie their interests together rather than drive them apart.
3. Define mutual goals  
Clearly define one or more shared goals that require cooperative effort. These are goals that override your differences from one another. For example, if you're in a troubled marriage, a mutual goal might be the quality upbringing of your children. Another one might be debt reduction, which you can achieve only by working

together. If your relationship with your best buddy has been tarnished lately, a mutual goal might be something as simple as working together to repair the friendship.

4. Discuss outside influences

No relationship exists in a vacuum. Both parties are influenced by other people, other problems, and even other successes. This is not an occasion to trash other people. It is an opportunity to increase mutual self-awareness about what things and events are affecting your relationship.

5. Unite against outside negativity

Nations often form alliances to unite against a mutual enemy. However, it's better if you don't go out and start a war. Item 4 was meant to identify outside influences. Almost certainly some of those influences are negative. For example, say your closest buddy is Friend A. Your mutual Friend B distorts things you say about Friend A and things friend A says about you. You and Friend A might have to unite and tell Friend B that you expect honesty from that person.

6. Recognize your differences

You began the process of recognizing differences in item 2. Now, however, discuss your differences in personality. No two people have an identical emotional makeup or identical self-concepts. Your histories are different, too. A lot of things have taken place in your lives that make each of you a unique you, and your responses to events are going to be different. Just as you don't place the same priority on everything, you also don't respond the same to everything, you don't enjoy all the same things, or hate all the same things. Each of you is unique. Respect that.

7. Offer support for each other's limitations

After you recognize your differences, you should be able to see areas where each of you could use some help. In relationships, whether business, friendship, or love, each person has personal strengths and weaknesses. Use your strengths to shore up the other's weaknesses, and vice versa. Whatever you can do to help improve the other party's self-concept should benefit the relationship.

8. Be honest

Be true to this mutual endeavor. When you discuss weaknesses and strengths, do it in a positive, but honest way. Carry your share of the work, realistically face your differences, and accept the fact that no one — including you — is perfect.

9. Negotiate in good faith  
This is part of honesty. Don't try to gain advantage over the other person during this process. Keep in mind that you're not merely trying to gain the other's compliance, which would lead to even more conflict. You are trying to set terms of a truce.
10. Discuss reasonable compromises  
If you have to list possible compromises on paper and cross out ones that don't look so reasonable to one of you, do so. You might even want to write out lists separately, then come together to discuss them. "Reasonable" means acceptable and doable by both parties.
11. Set reasonable and beneficial rules  
If you are married, set rules, such as never going to bed angry, never resorting to name calling during a discussion, always having respect for the other's point of view, and so on. Whatever your relationship, by going through the above process, you will have learned something. Many rules should be apparent by now. Work on these together so future conflicts won't grow out of proportion.
12. Show respect  
This one could be any item, 1 through 12. I placed it at the end as a reminder. You showed a certain amount of respect for the other person by even beginning to negotiate. Hopefully, your respect for him or her has grown during the process. Showing respect is something all of us know how to do, because it is the way we like to be treated. Yep, this is the old, tried-and-true Golden Rule.

Making it all the way through the process isn't easy. Indeed, negotiations can break down at any point. When that happens, you might need a break, or you may even need to back up an item or two or go all the way back to the starting line. But it is worth it if your relationship is worth having. Completing all twelve steps can lead to some astounding results. If nothing else, you will make strides in self-discovery. That's personal growth! But, like life, relationships are not structures, they are processes. They change and grow, and take off in unanticipated directions. Occasionally you'll have to repair them, but you don't want to spend all your time negotiating for a truce. The way you do that is by following a few rules for maintaining the relationship. Here they are.

#### **Four rules for maintaining the relationship**

1. Stay true to yourself  
How can you be true to anyone else if you're not true to yourself? The biggest difference between sociopaths and other people is the sociopath has no conscience. This is a person who can successfully lie to him- or herself, even to the extent of being able to fool a polygraph lie detector. Most of us, though, suffer stress when we're dishonest with ourselves. Being true to yourself also means not letting others walk on you. Don't be afraid to take a stance and stick with it if it reflects how you feel. And don't let others talk you into doing things that you know are wrong for you.

2. Stay true to your agreements  
One of the surest ways to show disrespect in a relationship is to break an agreement. You expect certain things from the other party, and the other party expects certain things of you. When you violate that, you block the process. Even things that might seem insignificant to you can be important to the other person. For example, I know people who are habitually late in spite of their agreements to be some place at a certain time. They think nothing of it. I think they are rude, boorish and disrespectful. I choose not to have such people for friends.
3. Negotiate new problems immediately  
Relationship problems are like infections: unless treated, they spread. If you had a sliver in your knee, would you wait until a pustule the size of the Goodyear Blimp formed before seeking medical help? Not likely! Yet, most serious problems in relationships don't happen suddenly. They're usually the result of one or more wounds swelling out of proportion. If a problem arises, identify it, discuss it, negotiate it away.
4. Trust in your agreements, but be willing to renegotiate  
You made agreements because you thought they were right for the relationship. Trust them. Try them out. Let them age. Then, if they're obviously not working, talk with the other party about tweaking them. If they're seriously not working, you might have to return to item 1 of the twelve techniques for resolving conflicts and revisit the negotiation process.

In an ideal world the knowledge gained from this chapter would make it possible for all worthwhile relationships to be maintained and repaired successfully. Unfortunately, this is not an ideal world. Some relationships are in such disrepair that an impartial mediator is called for. Counselors are trained to facilitate constructive communication. If you find yourself in a relationship that is completely stalled by conflict, I suggest you contact a professional counselor to at least get the communication process started. Inability to communicate is a sign you might need outside help. Sometimes emotions run too high to allow any possibility of reasonable communication without a mediator to guide the conversation. Sometimes, too, there has been such perceived betrayal in a relationship, that trust runs down the drain. To regain it might take time and professional counseling. For example, if you look back on the six characters we've been following in the workshops, you might spot at least one who is in that situation. Let's move on to the workshop now. Read how Janet and Colby, both with troubled relationships, answered the questions, then try one yourself. Afterward, take a look at Suggested Exercise 8. It could be one you'll want to use many times during your life.

## WORKSHOP #8

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Janet"

- 1) Think about a relationship problem you're having right now or you recently had. Write down what you believe caused the problem.  
I found out the hard way what the saying, "What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive," means. When I finally told my parents the truth about dropping out of college, they got mad at the university for not telling them. When they called, they were told the U. had sent several letters. Well, putting two and two together, they looked in my little sister's dresser and found the mail. Did she ever get grounded, big time! Lita is a high school junior and her social life means everything to her. She was so mad at me for getting her into trouble I didn't think she'd ever talk to me again.
- 2) Where would you fit the reason(s) in the six sources of conflict?  
Number three. Lita misperceived my motives. She thought I ratted her out to take the heat of our parents' anger off me. Actually, I confessed to clear things up and to get on with my options of attending another university. I wasn't even thinking about getting her in trouble. But I'm also guilty of number two, actual injustice. I manipulated my little sister into covering up for me. I used her. She had every right to be mad at me.
- 3) What actions did you take or are you taking now to try to resolve the issue?  
We did the twelve steps for resolution of conflicts. It wasn't easy getting her to do it. I went to her with the, 'Houston, we have a problem,' thing a half dozen times before she'd agree to talk with me. But the steps worked. Going through that process helped us both grow up. She realized she should have been more assertive and never let me manipulate her in the first place. One of life's lessons.
- 4) Item 11 of the twelve steps is "set reasonable and beneficial rules." Write down some rules you've set, or you'd like to set, regarding this conflict.  
Your four rules for maintaining a relationship. And to love each other.
- 5) On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, what positive effect has this process had on your total self-concept? If you're just now starting the process, what effect do you think it will have? State the reason why.  
I'm going to say a 7. My self-concept has improved because of it, but I'm still mad at myself for all the stupid things I did that led up to the conflict. Maybe some day I'll answer 10, but not right now. There is quite an improvement though.

## WORKSHOP #8

### WORKSHEET: SAMPLE "Colby"

- 1) Think about a relationship problem you're having right now or you recently had. Write down what you believe caused the problem.  
My marriage almost broke up. The problem is I was clueless about how men should treat their wives. I treated her like she wasn't even a real person, and cheated on her with women I thought were real people.
- 2) Where would you fit the reason(s) in the six sources of conflict?  
The second one, actual injustice. I didn't keep my vows. I guess there were also problems with number 5, faulty communication. I knew that she knew I was seeing other women. It seemed to me like she wanted it that way so she could stay clean.
- 3) What actions did you take or are you taking now to try to resolve the issue?  
I tried your twelve steps, but I was lousy at talking with my wife. She said I wasn't trying, but I was. But just trying to do it was good, because that made me realize I should go to a counselor with her. It wasn't as bad as I thought. The woman we go to is helping us talk it out. And now at home we use the twelve steps for family stuff. Like you said, it's better to negotiate before a conflict gets out of hand. We're doing pretty good right now. A lot better than a while back.
- 4) Item 11 of the twelve steps is "set reasonable and beneficial rules." Write down some rules you've set, or you'd like to set, regarding this conflict.  
The therapist helped us with this. No violence. Don't be angry at the same time. No name calling. Never, ever, yell at each other unless the house is burning down. No fighting if one of us is drinking alcohol. When you screw up, admit it. Stay focused on the subject. That means don't bring up the past, and don't add an argument on top of what you are already arguing about. No blaming. Never go to bed mad. Respect each other. Every day say something nice or compliment the other. We decided to use your twelve steps to settle differences. And we also added the four rules for maintaining a relationship you told me about.
- 5) On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, what positive effect has this process had on your total self-concept? If you're just now starting the process, what effect do you think it will have? State the reason why.  
A 10, easy. My self-concept was in the pits when my marriage almost broke up. Life really sucked. I'll take what I've got now over the bad old days anytime.

## WORKSHOP #8

THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR YOUR PERSONAL BENEFIT AND IT IS A GOOD WAY TO IDENTIFY SOME RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT(S) YOU WOULD LIKE TO RESOLVE. PLEASE CONSULT THE SAMPLE WORKSHOPS AS NEEDED. ONCE YOU'VE IDENTIFIED ONE OR MORE CONFLICTS, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO PROCEED TO THE SUGGESTED EXERCISE THAT FOLLOWS. WHETHER YOU DO THAT OR NOT, THIS WORKSHOP WILL INCREASE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS REGARDING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

### WORKSHEET:

- 1) Think about a relationship problem you're having right now or you recently had. Write down what you believe caused the problem.
  
- 2) Where would you fit the reason(s) in the six sources of conflict?
  
- 3) What actions did you take or are you taking now to try to resolve the issue?
  
- 4) Item 11 of the twelve steps is "set reasonable and beneficial rules." Write down some rules you've set, or you'd like to set, regarding this conflict.
  
- 5) On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, what positive effect has this process had on your total self-concept? If you're just now starting the process, what effect do you think it will have? State the reason why.

## SUGGESTED EXERCISE #8

Use this exercise as often as necessary to resolve relationship conflicts. They don't have to be large ones. Indeed, one way to prevent conflicts from getting out of hand is to begin negotiations early. These are the twelve steps you read about in Chapter 9. For a more thorough description of each step, return to the chapter as you like. If the negotiation process begins to break down at any step, back up an item or two, or return all the way to the beginning if necessary. Some relationship conflicts are more difficult to overcome than others. If a conflict cannot be overcome by applying these twelve steps, please consider using a professional counselor. With that understood, identify a relationship problem and let negotiations begin.

### Twelve steps for resolving conflicts

1. Initiate communication  
Seek an agreement to communicate and commit yourselves to the negotiating process.
2. Listen to one another's goals  
Resolve the incompatibility error. Don't assume that you have no mutual interests. Resolve the fixed-sum error. Don't assume each of you places the same priority on every issue.
3. Define mutual goals  
Clearly define one or more shared goals that require cooperative effort. These are goals that override your differences from one another.
4. Discuss outside influences  
Define what people, things, and events are influencing your relationship.
5. Unite against outside negativity  
From item 4, decide which influences are negative. Resolve to either turn each negative into a positive, or to decrease its influence.
6. Recognize your differences  
Discuss your differences in personality. What makes each of you happy, sad, anxious, angry? Understand and enjoy each other's uniqueness.
7. Offer support for each other's limitations  
After you recognize your differences, use your individual strengths to shore up each other's weaknesses. Try sincerely to improve each other's self-concept.
8. Be honest  
Be true to this mutual endeavor. When you discuss weaknesses and strengths, do it in a positive, but honest way. Carry your share of the work, realistically face your differences, and

accept the fact that no one — including you — is perfect.

9. Negotiate in good faith

Don't try to gain advantage over the other person during this process. Remember, you're not merely trying to gain the other's compliance, you are setting terms of a truce.

10. Discuss reasonable compromises

Verbally or on paper, list possible compromises and delete ones that either one of you find unreasonable. "Reasonable" means acceptable and doable by both parties.

11. Set reasonable and beneficial rules

Write down rules where both of you can view them often. Work together on them to prevent future conflicts from starting, or at least from growing out of proportion.

12. Show respect

Follow the Golden Rule and treat the other person as you like to be treated.

## Chapter 10

### COMPLETE THE MOSAIC

How happy is he born or taught  
That serveth not another's will;  
Whose armor is his honest thought  
And simple truth his utmost skill!  
—Sir Henry Wotton

#### Maintaining positive self-concept

Self-concept, like life and personal relationships, is not a structure, it is a process. The totality of your thoughts and feelings about yourself will not be exactly the same from year to year, or even from day to day. For one, self-concept is affected by events. How strongly it is affected depends partly on how stable it is and where it lies on a positive/negative continuum. If you just paid a mechanic eight hundred dollars to repair your automobile's transmission, and now you are stuck in your driveway because it won't shift into reverse, you are going to have an emotional response. If your self-concept is negative or changes with every breeze, your first — and, perhaps, lasting — thought is likely to be, "What a loser I am." Contrarily, if you have formed a strong, positive self-concept, you're going to see the event as a problem to be met and overcome. You'll be upset, but not at yourself. True, there may be some variation in your self-concept flowing toward the negative, but nothing seriously out of balance.

Notice my use of the term, "formed a strong, positive self-concept," above. The context in which I used "formed" means to fashion or shape something. And, yes, you can shape a process. That's what you've been doing with your self-concept by reading and working your way through this book. Chapter 1 shed light on those limiting, crippling, mental spectators all of us internalize in the process of living. By giving them a name and a description, the chapter took away their ability to function anonymously. It also revealed their universality. That is, all of us have internalized them through socialization, a concept that is an unavoidable part of being human, of being a social animal. We are all in the same boat.

Chapter 2 was largely devoted to identifying what ailed you. It's almost impossible to combat an unseen enemy. Before Louis Pasteur identified microorganisms as the cause of many diseases, medical practitioners beat (literally) the devil out of some of their patients, and bled others through the use of leaches. They believed that if something harmful is inside a person, it was the medical practitioner's duty to get it out one way or another. Unfortunately they were ignorant about what they were combating and, therefore, often did more harm to the patient than good. Since then, a myriad of analytical tools and tests have become available to identify microbes, providing physicians with information about which antibiotic to use in combating a disease. Likewise for self-concept development. Without clearly identifying what troubles you, any attempt to positively alter your self-concept is a shot in the dark. The chapter also compelled the twin processes of self-honesty and self-awareness.

If something is ailing you, you need to discover how it is displaying itself. That was the purpose of Chapter 3. There, I identified the four sources of your self-concept: reflected judgments, social comparison, self-attribution, and social identity. You discovered that all four sources involve some sort of evaluation or judgment of your worth as you relate to other people. That's valuable to understand because, as a social animal, you cannot avoid such evaluations. Also discussed were three common negative lifestyle effects, with the numerous ways each is displayed. The lifestyle effects clearly demonstrate how your self-concept affects your life. This was an occasion for honest self-evaluation and to begin breaking through the barriers of communication.

In Chapter 4 you learned that the mental spectators are formed from three sources, the Who source, the Where source, and the How source. The chapter discussed who helps us form the mental spectators, from where they arise, and how they get into our minds through socialization and internalization. Without understanding how other people, institutions, and the mass media influence you, it would be difficult, indeed, to grow as a self-aware human being.

Chapter 5 built upon self-awareness and the idea of taking personal responsibility. It taught that only you can look through your own perceptual filter to summon your mental spectators from the shadows, stare them in the face and begin the processes of mastering them. And only you can make the important decisions that follow.

The next two chapters offered practical ways to change your life and enhance your self-concept. Chapter 6 identified five steps for attaining goals and the importance of the Rule of One. This chapter was about action, about moving forward with your life. Setting goals and achieving them has many positive consequences, including a positive influence on your self-concept. Chapter 7 focused on options. To avoid repeating history, the chapter taught how to explore old territory in the form of past options, but then moved quickly into exploring future ones. The inability to recognize options is a major factor in the failure to achieve goals and maintain relationships.

The thrust of chapter 8 was in bridging the gap between your real self and your ideal self. You learned about self-presentation and about techniques used for gaining compliance. In other words, this chapter was about how the social world influences you and how you influence it. Internally, you deal with your mental spectators and your various selves. Externally, you present yourself to other people and they present themselves to you. Through it all, you internalize mental spectators who constantly compare your real self with an unrealistic ideal self. The larger the gap, the more negative your self-concept. Pulling the selves together is crucial to a positive self-concept.

Finally, this book couldn't be complete without exploring how to improve relationships. Six sources of conflict were identified, as were twelve steps for resolving conflicts. After all, why identify sources if not to resolve the problem? Four rules for maintaining relationships were also identified. This chapter focused on relationships in general rather than on a specific type of relationship, such as romantic, friendship, parental, and so on, because each of those typically form the subject matter for entire books. Second, all worthwhile relationships have some things in common: mutual respect, communication, and support.

Indeed, Chapter 9 blends right back into Chapter 1. There is simply no way to remove "social" from "psychology." We are social beings, externally and internally, and we live with spectators, real and mental. Human life is a rich and fascinating mosaic. Live it, love it, and return to this book, its workshops and suggested exercises whenever you want to work on yourself and your rela-

tionships. It was written as a practical guide to positive self-concept formation, not as a feel-good, one time read. Work hard and enjoy the growth!

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