English Fluency For Advanced

ENGLISH SPEAKER

How to Unlock The Full Potential to Speak English Fluently

ADVANCED EDITION

WHITNEY NELSON

English Fluency For Advanced English Speaker

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Advanced Edition

Whitney Nelson

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Introduction

Congratulations! You're already an advanced student of the English language. Before you take another step in your journey of learning, though, you need to pause a moment and celebrate your success thus far.

English is no easy language to learn. It's filled with idioms that make no literal sense and colloquialisms that you may only hear once in a blue moon (like the phrase I just used). If that weren't enough, there are hundreds (if not thousands) of exceptions to the established rules of grammar – especially when it comes to turning single nouns into plural nouns. The plural of alumnus is alumni, but the plural of campus is campuses. And there's really no rule you can memorize to know that except to memorize them initially. After you speak it for a while, then you get to know almost intuitively.

But you already know the challenges that face you. I'm sure you've already been swamped with many of these puzzling contradictions already. Despite all those obstacles, though, you've progressed this far, successfully encountering every twist and turn the language has thrown at you.

But, you've encountered a problem you just can't seem to solve. You've reached a plateau in your fluency. Sure, you can read the language and understand it fairly well when it's spoken quickly by native speakers. Nothing you do, however, seems to help you to make any more progress. In a phrase: you're stuck.

Stop it right there. You hear other students speak the language well. Your first

thought is “Why can’t I do that?”

Ahh, but you can. That’s why I’ve written this book. It’s created just for you – the advanced English student who desires to take his/her ability to speak the language to the next level.

Don’t believe me?

What if I told you that armed with seven well-kept secrets you can nearly effortlessly soar to the next level of fluency in your study of English? All the struggling you’ve done, all the doubts you’ve had will fade away once your ability to speak the language you’re so excited about using improves.

How can I be so sure that that these steps will work? Because not only have I used them, but thousands of others have used these same techniques to improve their skills and crack through that glass ceiling. I started sharing these secrets with interested friends, family and students. Today, they’re speaking like English was their native tongue.

And you, too, can be among those successful students who discover the joy of conquering a language they once thought impossible to learn.

This Book is Not for Beginners

This book provides you with the key secrets you’ll need to unlock the next level of fluency and open an entire new world of fluency. With this book by your side, you’ll discover that taking your skills to the next level wasn’t nearly as difficult as you originally imagined it to be.

In this book you’ll not only discover the secrets, but you’ll also find the

encouragement to continue in your studies. As you read these pages, you'll feel as if you have your own personal English tutor sitting right next to you, guiding you every step of the way.

Having been in the same position myself at one time and helping hundreds of others in this identical situation, I have a good idea of what's running through your mind as we go through these steps.

The content of the book is arranged so that the first chapters have a general wide appeal and will help just about everyone become better at the spoken word. As you read farther in the book each section talks about the language in a bit more success. This doesn't mean that you can't understand Chapter Two without reading Chapter One. Feel free to read these chapters in any order, based on your perceived personal needs.

In the first chapter, we'll review the five myths about English that are the common obstacles of most students. You'll undoubtedly recognize at least one of them as an impediment to your learning. Once you know the myth or myths holding you back, it'll just be a matter of time to change your thinking and continue studying.

The following chapter introduces you to an effective method of creating attainable goals for yourself. Called S.M.A.R.T. goals, you'll learn how even a minimum of planning can bring a maximum of learning. You'll want to not waste a single minute implementing them in your learning schedule. Guaranteed. Not only will this goal-setting technique help you in pursuit of learning to speak the English language, but you can transfer these goal-setting skills to any dream you'd like to manifest.

The third secret to fluency is to immerse yourself in the language. Easier said than done, you say? Most students mistakenly believe that the only way to do that is to travel to meet native speakers. That's why the chapter is filled tips that'll have yourself "swimming" in English before you realize it.

None of these guidelines require travel or even walking up to total strangers

and starting conversations. In fact, they all involve low-risk situations that will have you speaking English in safe, low-risk situations more often than you ever thought possible.

When you begin reading chapter four's secret to success, you may shake your head in disbelief, but by the time you've finished it you'll be eager and excited to implement suggestions. That's because this involves the one step most of us fear most when we're learning anything, not just the English language. The secret key: it's perfectly fine to make mistakes. In fact, it's not only perfectly fine, but it's nearly mandatory. It's guaranteed to change your entire way of viewing the learning process.

What does listening have to do with speaking a language? Everything! In the fifth step you'll not only discover how improving this one habit can improve your fluency by leaps and bounds. The chapter also provides you with techniques to develop your active listening skills and then translate those into the breakthrough in your speaking of English.

But that's not all, we take listening to new heights with a technique called "extensive listening." Discover how it can be the key to your breakthrough in propelling you into new English-speaking opportunities.

Then we move on to the next chapter in which you'll learn about one of the most effective methods of learning any language. Known in academic circles as shadowing, this method is also called parroting by those who use it often. Essentially, you'll be improving your fluency the way you learned your native language.

In this technique, you'll be repeating the sounds of those speaking English word for word almost at the same time the person is speaking. You'll learn how you can use this technique in a variety of situations. With today's technology, shadowing is easier than ever before.

Your Journey to Fluency

While this volume is meant to be a student's guidebook through the English language, it's really so much more. You'll find yourself referring to this book again and again in your journey of learning.

Are you prepared to climb to new levels of fluency nearly effortlessly? It's time to discover what's been keeping you on this plateau of learning. It's time to remove the obstacles in your path and seriously continue on this amazing path of learning you've set your sights on.

Let's get started!

Chapter 1: *Getting Over the Plateau to Become a Fluent English Speaker*

Are you frustrated? Do you believe you've hit the peak of your learning with regard to the English language? You can read the language. You know the grammar and you can understand it when you hear the spoken word.

Yet, you're not speaking it as fluently as you want to – as you need to. No, there's nothing wrong with you. Many persons learning English feel as you do. They've reached a certain point in their ability to speak the language and just can't seem to advance any farther.

Unfortunately, they believe that what they've learned is all that they *can* learn. They've tried and tried to reach that next level fluency but to no avail.

Does this sound like your story? Are you ready to throw up your hands and give up, thinking any more progress is hopeless? Don't quit.

But before you continue any farther, stop knocking your head against the wall. Obviously what you're doing right now is not working. It's time to step back and analyze what needs changed in your approach to learning.

Instead of going any further in your pursuit of learning the spoken English language, you need to look into your own thinking to discover if you're holding any "limiting beliefs" holding you back. These are really myths that many people hold as the truth about their ability to learn to speak English fluently that, quite frankly, just aren't true.

Here are five of the most common limiting beliefs that students of English believe are natural barriers to their learning. These "beliefs" which many

attribute to holding them back from being a more fluent speaker are really nothing more but preconceived notions. They can be overcome simply by changing your thinking. Then you can break that barrier to attain the next level of fluency. It may sound a bit strange, but it really does work.

5 Myths That May Be Hindering Your English Fluency

1. Your age

This is just an excuse. At one time scientists believed that as persons aged, the harder it was for them to learn. And not just the English language, everything – math, science even the adopting of new hobbies like knitting or playing the piano.

If you think about it, that's a pretty dismal diagnosis. The standard scientific thought stated that your brain cells continued to reproduce and were receptive to learning only up to a certain age. Once you reached that age your body would no longer make any new cells. If you could learn anything new, it would be much more difficult, taking a longer period of time. Whatever it was you wanted to learn, the scientists warned you it would be an uphill battle.

The lesson people took from this dictum? If you didn't learn a language when you were younger, well you were out of luck. You weren't about to learn it as an older individual. If you did manage it, you'd be struggling every step of the way.

Today, scientists have discovered that proclamation – taken as a law for so long – is not in the least bit true.

You need to know right now that your age doesn't limit your ability to speak

English fluently. It’s more likely you believing your age is a limiting factor actually keeps you from learning. Once you overcome this mindset, you’ll discover that English isn’t as difficult to speak as you thought – and before you know it you’ve unlocked the secret that has prevented you from going any further.

It’s time to stop blaming your age for that plateau you’ve reached to learn and start using the English language more. With the suggestions presented throughout the rest of this book, you’ll discover that it’s easier than you once believed.

2. Fear of making mistakes.

Many individuals refuse to speak English as often as they could. Why? Simply because they’re afraid of making mistakes. But worse than that they believe that someone will hear them make these mistakes and laugh at them.

The thought of making a mistake when speaking English shouldn’t inhibit you or limit your speaking it in any way. In fact, it really should do the exact opposite – it should spur you on to speak it all the more.

Deep down you already know what I’m about to tell you: mistakes are your friends. Making a mistake when you talk is the ultimate way to learn the English language or any language for that matter.

Every single person learning a language made some type of mistake when they started. In fact, if the truth be known, they made what they considered more than their fair share of blunders. Even native speakers don’t speak perfect English. Listen closely to some native speakers and you’ll see exactly what I mean.

What if I told you that instead of fearing those mistakes, you should be embracing them? Would you think I was totally insane? Well, that's exactly what you should be doing – speaking more and making more mistakes. That's because the more mistakes you make, the faster you'll learn.

Let me tell you a story about two individuals, both learning English. Both, in fact, were at about the same level of fluency. They could read and comprehend English well and in general had a good grasp of speaking it. Both wanted to go beyond where they were currently and hit the next level of fluency.

But one student feared speaking it, not only in her daily life, but also in the classroom. She would never volunteer in class and when called upon she would barely speak up. When she did answer, she used as few words as possible. The instructor continually asked her to expand on her answers.

The other student, coincidentally, was in the same classroom, and took every opportunity to speak English. He was the student always first to volunteer to answer in English. Instead of just answering with a short phrase or a one-word answer, he would make sure he'd elaborate a bit more – sometimes more than he needed to. The point is that he took every opportunity in class to speak English.

Not only that, but he would make sure he used the language as much as possible outside of the classroom as well. He made a concerted to associate with people who spoke English and made it a point to speak up in conversations even. If someone corrected his English, he thanked them. He would go on to explain that he was still learning and appreciated the corrections.

You could tell in an instant that the first student shied from talking because she feared making mistakes. She believed that every word that came out of her mouth had to be perfect. The second student, though, approached his learning not only as a positive activity, but something that was actually fun. Making mistakes didn't bother him.

You can guess who learned to speak English more quickly and more fluently. Don't let fear of making mistakes – either in class or in public – hold you back from speaking the language. We've all made mistakes – whether we're learning a language or math or any other subject. Mistakes are the foundation of any type of learning.

3. You can't remember all the rules of grammar.

Wow! Definitely don't let this hold you back. No one, not even native speakers, can remember all the grammar rules. In fact, few speakers even try to follow all the rules. This includes native English speakers. If you took the time to review all the grammar that went into speaking a sentence before you spoke it, you'd never utter another English sentence.

Instead, place your faith in your vocabulary and especially listening to others. And if you make it a point to speak English, stop holding yourself to some impossible standard; you'll never ever enjoy the language. Belief it or not, learning a new language is fun – really fun.

Perfect grammar is the last thing you need to worry about. Instead, spend your time expanding your vocabulary, learning new words and using them as much as possible in conversations. Speak English every chance you get – whether you're clear about the grammar involved in the sentences you used or not.

This book is all about speaking the English language fluently. It's not about learning grammar. It's about using the language. Let's say that you're in a group of people and want to say that you ate an apple yesterday. If your grammar is shaky you may say "I yesterday apple eat."

Don't worry about making a fool of yourself. A native speaker may correct you and tell you the sentence is structured like this: "I ate an apple yesterday."

Poof! You've learned to speak the language a little better through speaking up. And now you actually have a pattern for speaking a sentence like that.

You've learned first how to pattern a sentence in the past tense. You've also learned that the past tense of eat is "ate." In that small insignificant mistake, you've broken through to the next level.

And the best part is that you didn't have to struggle over any grammar rules. All in all, you probably now feel better about yourself. Not only for speaking up but for actually learning how to use English grammar at the same time. Imagine how quickly you can improve your grammar without even thinking about it just by speaking a few sentences. Imagine what would happen if you spoke even more.

Instead of holing yourself up in your house and studying the dizzying array of grammar rules before you speak, get together with English speakers – native speakers and students like yourself – and use the vocabulary you've already learned.

4. You need to travel to be able to speak English fluently.

Another fallacy. You don't need to travel anywhere in order to improve your speech. There are many people who have learned the English language without going very far from home. If you're already living in the United States, that's not so much an issue, anyway.

But if you're currently living outside an English-speaking country and learning the language with an eye to visiting such a country in the near future you may view learning English is a hopeless pursuit. You may also be re-assessing why you're even bothering to learn the language.

Don’t start second-guessing yourself. You can learn the language from wherever you are at the moment even if you don’t have access to what you think you need. Have access to a computer? Then you already know how many video clips are on the web in English. Listen to these, repeat what these speakers say and the way they say it. Imagine these speakers are in the same room with you.

If you have to, stop the video and repeat what they’ve said, then double check yourself. There are plenty of ways of learning English – and as long as you’re learning, there is no wrong way.

The key here is to focus on learning it using a method that’s available for you. Instead of mourning that you can’t travel or you don’t know anyone who is speaking the language, dig around on the internet and find an English-speaking site. You may even discover a site that teaches you English. There are certainly plenty out there.

5. There are no other people around me speaking English.

This is a corollary to the “I can’t travel to an English speaking country” myth. While it certainly would be easier if you knew individuals who could speak English, it’s definitely not essential – regardless of what you’ve heard to the contrary.

With a computer keyboard at your fingertips, and the internet, it doesn’t matter whether you live with or next door to English speakers or not. With less effort than you’d ever imagine on your part, you can find someone who speaks English.

Not only that, I’m betting that you’ll also discover students of English – just like yourself – who are looking for others who speak at their level of fluency.

Imagine how much you all could help each other. Imagine how much you can learn with only a bit of effort on your part.

These are the five most common complaints that people use to block their excelling at speaking the English language like a native. How many of these apply to you?

What Are Your Personal Myths?

Do you have any other personally limiting beliefs that hold you back from learning to speak the English language? If you do, why not stop right now and write them down. Now study them really well. Are those really valid reasons for not learning the English language? Can you think of any way you can overcome them?

Regardless of what your personal thoughts are about your inability to get to the next level of English fluency, remember that the only thing that is holding you back are your beliefs. The moment you believe you can learn to speak the English language like a native, you will.

It’s time to think more positively about your ability to improve your ability to speak the English language. Just changing your thinking from “Wow! This is really difficult,” to “Hey, this is getting easier all the time!” will help you speak more fluently. Guaranteed.

Chapter 2: Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals — The Secret of Getting What You Want When You Want It

Pedro complained to his English instructor one day that he was disappointed that his fluency in the language seemed to have hit a peak. “I can’t advance any farther,” he said, “and I’m far from sounding like a native speaker. And that is the long run is my goal. Did I set my sights too high?”

The instructor told him that, indeed, he did not set any goal that he could not accomplish; he just may have to re-think how to reach them. That’s when he told Pedro about S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Are you feeling “stuck” in your level of learning? Are you, like Pedro, beginning to think you’ll never break through to that next level of learning in which you sound more fluent – more like a native speaker?

Then perhaps it’s time you look into using S.M.A.R.T. goals as well. What are they? What make SMART goals different from any other? Simple. When you create this type of goal, you’re strategically placing yourself in a position of achieving them. If you follow the guidelines of these techniques, in fact, it would be extremely difficult to fail.

S.M.A.R.T

I can hear you now, “When do we start?” Well, there’s no time like the present. S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Responsible and Time-Bound. If you make your goals in accordance with these five

guidelines, you're well on your way to fulfilling your English-language dreams.

But more than that, this is a technique used by a growing number of business executives as well as entrepreneurs to move their projects forward. It's time tested. And the best part is that you can take these guidelines and use them for any goals you have for your life.

The letter "S" in S.M.A.R.T. stands for specific. You've probably created many goals in your life. Think back to several of them. Think about the times you succeeded as well as those instances in which you didn't reach them. What made the difference? What did you do right when you achieved your goals? How did this differ from the times you didn't reach your dreams?

Perhaps it could be that the ones you achieved were worded more specifically. Did you know exactly what you wanted? This works regardless of what your goals are—they aren't necessarily related to your learning the English language.

Take, for example, the individual who wanted to lose weight. She started out by saying that "someday" she'd like to lose weight. But until she decided specifically how many pounds she wanted to lose, her weight held steady. Once she made the decision and gave herself a deadline, however, she couldn't understand why she couldn't stick to an eating plan.

So your first step is deciding specifically what it is you want to do. Once you know exactly what it is, then create specific steps you believe will get you there. Let's say your goal is to be able to speak English well enough to make a presentation in front of your supervisors and several department managers at work..

Now write down what you believe you need to do in order to speak English well enough to do it. These are your steps for reaching your goals. For example, if giving a presentation is the goal, you must look critically at your spoken language skills now.

Decide what type of improvements you need to make. You may decide you

Want to work on your pronunciation

Learn more vocabulary words – as well as perfect their pronunciation

Learn how to tell a joke in English

What else do you believe is keeping you from reaching this level of fluency in the English language. Not sure? Ask your instructor or a trusted friend.

Make sure you keep a list of these, because you'll going to need them for the next step. Keeping in mind your goal of making this presentation, we'll go to the next step in S.M.A.R.T. goals

The M in S.M.A.R.T. goals stands for measurable. That may be a no-brainer when it's said that way, but you'd be surprised how many people create goals without thinking about how they're going to measure their progress. And if you can't measure whether you're a quarter of the way to your goal or half to making your dream come true, how will you ever know when you've reached that particular goal?

That's why you need to discover a way to measure your progress. Let's continue with the example we used in the previous paragraphs. You want to perfect your ability to speak English so you can give a presentation at work.

The first thing we listed that needed to be improved was your ability to pronounce English.

Let's say this is your goal as well. Just saying it doesn't get it done. You could spend years perfecting it, but never recognize when your speech is, indeed, good enough. Your first decision – and creating a measurable goal – is to either recognize your improvement yourself or getting someone's opinion on your pronunciation. Ideally, this would be your instructor or a trusted friend.

You see how by adding this idea of measuring your improvement, you've created a goal you can work toward – and feel good about attaining once you've reached it.

Your second step in speaking English well enough to make a presentation was expand your vocabulary. Here again you need to set a certain number of words you want to learn and to pronounce. If you don't settle on how many words, you could be learning words forever. So not only settle on how many, but perhaps pick out a few from an English book, or ask your English teacher for recommendations on a few words. You may even want to ask a few colleagues what type of words they would recommend that may be business related.

Within this, you'll then want to start tackling this list. In addition to having friends and tutors help with your pronunciation, remember the web – especially any dictionary applications or sites you have access to. The definition each entry provides you with a proper pronunciation of the word.

And finally one of your goals was to be able to tell a joke. How are you going to turn this into a measurable goal? You may want to practice in front of the mirror or with a good friend who'll be honest with you. Once you've earned the thumbs of a friend you may want to take your joke to several more people to get their opinions.

The key to success in creating any successfully measurable goal is to look at the details of what needs to be done and honestly evaluate your ability to do it. Making the decision on how to measure your progress is a big step in ensuring this will work.

While you should never give up your dream, you also need to be open to the process of making it measurable as well as creating the best possible strategy to make this happen You also need to continually reassess how vital these goals are to you.

Now that you have one or more goals that are specific measurable, your next step is to ensure that your goals are attainable Yes, the A in S.M.A.R.T. goals stand for attainable.

This is an important aspect of creating any goal – not just those related to your speaking English. This step may take some time. First, you need to be absolutely honest with yourself. What do you truly believe you can attain. Don't overstretch your reach and set some impossible goal that is beyond your level. That will only disappoint you and you may wrongly believe learning English is simply beyond your capability.

It's better to set a goal and break it into two steps and reach it than set one that's simply impossible to reach. Let's face it I'm five foot two inches tall. If my goal were to play professional basketball that may be seen as an unattainable goal. But to set a goal that I make so certain percentage of the shots I take on the court is attainable for me. That goal involves more my skill more than my natural height.

Pedro, for example, originally set a goal of learning how to pronounce fifteen new words a week. Before he committed himself to that goal, though, he thought long and hard if it really were attainable. Having second thoughts, he instead set his sights on learning ten – at least for the first week. After that, he would adjust his goal depending on how he performed the first week.

When you're working with the idea of whether your goals are attainable, you may have to be flexible. If you discover that you set your sights a bit too high, reduce them. There's no shame in doing that. In fact, having a desire that is at least realistic will help build your self-confidence.

On the other hand, you don't want to make your target so easy that it doesn't challenge you. If your goal is too easy, you won't push yourself to do your best – and you may even lose interest.

Pedro may also want to create an attainable goal that he can meet with a teacher or close friend weekly to help him with his speaking. Once a week, for

example, sounds reasonable. If he set his sights on meeting with someone five times a week that may be a bit excessive and end up being something he couldn't achieve – which would possibly make him feel as if he failed. In reality, he really didn't fail, he simply underestimated the time involved in meetings like that.

Pedro gave much thought to how to perfect telling a joke and the attainability of that goal as well. He admired several comedians on television. The question he had to ask himself was should he hold himself up to a professional level of delivery when he wasn't even a native speaker.

The fact of the matter was that he admired the presentations of several of his colleagues who had told some great jokes. The attainable goal, then, would be to practice until he felt he could present more like them. He thought that would be an attainable goal.

He could learn to pitch these jokes through various ways – including professionals on television as well as the colleagues you work with. Pedro also recorded himself telling the joke to review his pronunciation.

Not only does Pedro have to learn to be flexible, he has to discover what smaller, equally attainable, goals he break this dream into smaller chunks.

The letter R in S.M.A.R.T. goals stands for the word responsible. The question becomes who is responsible for achieving this goal. The obvious answer is Pedro. As you create your goals, it will become quite apparent that you are ultimately responsible. What Pedro learned as he went along, however, was he needed to hold those who offered services of their help responsible as well.

He would have difficulty attaining some of the goals without the help of his friends, colleagues and instructors. This by no means absolves him of all responsibility for achieving them, but it does mean he may have to ensure in some from that those who offered to help him actually do.

If that should occur, he may have to take the imitative in reminding his instructor or others that they had volunteered to help. He may have to suggest times they could meet. Pedro can't – and neither can you – just ask for help and then expect them to always take the initiative to help you.

Other issues that may fall under the responsible portion of the S.M.A.R.T. goals include the amount of time you can realistically invest in each goal. Hold yourself responsible for ensuring you've created goals that over extend you or your resources. If you set unrealistic goals, you'll be disappointed and tempted to give up.

You'll also have to approach your goals responsibly. A large part of that is knowing when to ask for help. It could be that you need someone to spend time with you and assess your pronunciation. It could also be something as simple as an individual who you report to occasionally who holds you accountable for your progress.

The T of the acronym of S.M.A.R.T. represents the phrase time-bound. Have you ever heard the saying that goals without a deadline are dreams? While it's admirable to have dreams, the word itself implies that it's something that you'll see fulfilled in the future. Or worse yet something that's totally unachievable.

You're not dealing with pie-in-the-sky dreams that you don't expect to come true. Not by a long shot. You're creating specific targets that you expect to reach. When can you expect to see these goals manifest? That's up to you.

One thing is one hundred percent certain, though: if you don't hold yourself to a deadline, they'll never materialize. Pedro discovered this. He found that if he didn't put a specific time to reach his goal, he was far less likely to actually achieve them.

Pedro, for example, knew that it would take some time before he would be able to master the English language well enough to present a project report to his colleagues at work. So he set his sights on achieving them in one year.

But he also knew that he had to do the same thing with the intermediate goals that would eventually get him to his dream. So he sat down with pencil and a calendar in order to start assigning a timeline to his smaller goals.

In order to do this correctly, he needed to analyze the smaller goals and set an attainable time line for all of his goals. The moment he realized that he would be running behind on one of the smaller aims, he then would need to re-evaluate all the goals which followed. It could mean that he would encounter a chain reaction. All the steps after that one would also be met later than he had intended.

If he encountered this, he could handle this is two ways. First, he could just delay the attainment of these steps and assignment himself a later manifestation day. Or, he could adjust his goals – even if it means working a bit harder and longer – in order to reach his ultimate goal on time.

The point of setting specific completion dates is that it helps you to plan. Pedro set a final target date as one year. A year from the day he started he hoped to be standing in front of his colleagues informing them about the progress of a project. If he saw he was falling behind on this timetable, he could then adjust his intermediate steps to recover some of the lost time.

Being held time-bound for a goal is also a great motivating factor to aid in your planning. Once Pedro set a final goal, he worked backwards in planning deadlines for all the smaller steps. He started with his final goal date and carefully charted where he had a be a month before his final goal and then two months before that date.

He actually spent quite a bit of time figuring out how much time he'd need for all the smaller steps needed in order to get where he wanted to be on time.

Pedro decided that in a week he should work on one lesson on vocabulary – learning the meaning of the words. Additionally, he needed to put in two

practice sessions on pronunciation. One of those would be conducted on his own with the help of a recorder and the internet and one would be – when possible – with his instructor or a good friend.

The final decision Pedro made in fulfilling the time bound portion of the S.M.A.R.T. goals was to take a few moments periodically in order to assess his progress. He set his assessment dates as once a month. He compared where he was to where he hoped to be. Was he on track? Would he be able to make his goal within the time frame he set? Or was he running behind?

Did he need to increase the number of vocabulary words he was learning every week or did he need more work on his pronunciation. Whatever he eventually decided, he fine-tuned his schedule to accommodate his ultimate completion date.

S.M.A.R.T goals are an excellent method of ensuring you don't lose sight of your desires. How many times have set New Year's resolutions only to find by February, you realize you're not working toward them? That's because you didn't apply the follow up work necessary to keep you laser focused on your goal. You merely wrote down some vague goal and went on with your life. Your New Year's resolutions become nothing more than afterthoughts as you continued on with your life.

You can easily see how setting – and maintaining – S.M.A.R.T. goals are essential in manifesting your desire to speak English fluently. The key to working these goals is to keep them uppermost in your mind. Pedro learned – and so you'll discover this as well – that learning English is a daily discipline. You can't learn to speak fluently by cramming a week's worth of work into a day or two.

The Need for Flexibility

The other lesson Pedro learned from instituting this technique is that he needed to maintain a degree of flexibility. If a step isn't working, then he needed to revise it. If he hadn't progress as far as he had hoped by the end of a month or so, he needed to re-assess his strategy. He needed to analyze what was working and what wasn't. and he needed to do it on a regular basis.

But there is one more action Pedro took when he successfully completed each of his smaller goals. He rewarded himself. At the very least, he stopped for a few moments and told himself how good he was doing. Sometimes, he would treat himself to a dinner out or buy himself a small present.

You should consider doing something similar. It needn't be a large purchase or even a huge dinner. The important thing is that you stop for several moments and compliment yourself on doing a good job. Then cheer yourself on to going all the way.

Once you've set your goals, it's time to move on to learning methods on achieving these goals. In the next chapter you'll learn that the fastest way to learn English is to just dive into the language. You'll also learn some techniques on doing just that.

Chapter 3: Immerse Yourself in the English Language

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between an individual who seems to glide through learning the English language and someone who struggles with every word – perhaps even every syllable?

You may have assumed that's it a matter of skill. You dismiss their success as a natural talent they possess for learning the spoken word. You may even credit them with being smarter than the average person.

Well, you may think all of that, but you'd be wrong. Those who learn how to speak English fluently are neither smarter than you nor do they necessarily have a gift for learning languages.

What separates those who learn the spoken word of English from those who don't can be described in one word: immersion.

What? Those who seem to learn effortlessly simply immerse themselves into the language. They seek out opportunities to speak English at every turn. If they have to make a choice between speaking their native language or English, they choose English every chance they get.

Consider this for a moment. You'll never improve at any activity – jogging, playing piano or even knitting – unless you practice. Practicing the English language is the only way to immerse yourself in the language.

The Only Way to Learn English

Believe it or not, you can be the person who others envy at your quick grasp of the English language. You can be the individual who speaks it with ease. And you can start right now. As long as you keep these guidelines in mind.

1. Don’t spend a lot of time perfecting your grammar.

Believe it or not, this is probably the most important rule in learning how to speak English.

Your goal isn’t to write a paragraph in English with no grammatical mistakes. You goal is to speak it. So don’t obsess with grammar. If you listen closely to native speakers not everyone speaks English perfect all the time.

Let’s face it, at this point in your studies you already have a firm grasp of English grammar. You probably could even correct a native speaker when they don’t use proper grammar. So, if your goal is to become a better speaker you need to focus on using it as if it were your first language.

Actually, studying grammar will only hinder your development using the spoken word. If you analyze what you’re about to say and think about all the grammar rules before you speak, you’ll discover the precise moment to say what you wanted to.

When you’re thinking about this guideline you need to know that even most native speakers of the English language only know about 20 percent of all the hundreds (and hundreds) of the rules. A mere 20 percent. At this point in your studies, you probably already know more than that.

Don’t worry, the more frequently you speak English, you’ll undoubtedly get an ear for proper grammar. After a while, the sound of an improperly structured sentence or verbs that don’t agree with you subject will sound horrible. As long as you know what sounds right, you’ll be able to speak it well enough. I’m guessing that, as an advanced student, you already have a grasp of this aspect of your learning.

2. Learn phrases, not words.

Think about it. You probably know many vocabulary words. And you undoubtedly know how to pronounce them. But what you really need to study at this point are phrases. While knowing the words are, indeed, important, languages are really a compilation of phrases.

I’m sure you know students of the language who have an impeccable grasp of vocabulary words but still can’t create a sentence if their life depended on it. Why? They failed to study English phrases.

When children learn how to talk, they’re definitely immersed in their native language. It’s usually the only language they hear from the moment they wake up until they’re tucked into bed at night. What they hear are not separate words, but sentences, phrases and everything in between.

If you already know about 1,000 words (and you probably know more than that right now), you could still find yourself stumbling over stringing more than two sentences together to engage yourself intelligently in conversation.

But all you really need to know is approximately 100 phrases and you’ll be able to string sentence after sentence with ease. In contrast you’ll be surprised how much more fluent you’ll be. If you know 1,000 separate words, you may be able to correctly create one sentence. Only one sentence.

If you learn 100 phrases you'll be able to speak many more sentences. And if you get ambitious and learn 1,000 phrases (it's not nearly as difficult as it seems) … well … you'll be nearly as fluent as a native speaker.

Once you learn even a few of these phrases a week, your understanding of speaking this language with explode exponentially. The trick is to learn the phrase so well that you only have to exert a small amount effort on completing them.

Listed below are several of the most common phrases in the language. How many of them do you know? If you find there are some you're stumbling over, then you may want to study those some.

- *How often do you (plus verb)?*
- *Can I help you (plus verb or as a question by itself)?*
- *It's too late for that*
- *You could have (plus a verb)*
- *If I were you I would have (add verb)*
- *It looks like (plus a noun)*
- *It's time to (plus a verb)*
- *What if (plus a subject and verb)*
- *How was (plus a noun)*
- *Let's say that (plus subject and verb)*
- *I think I should (plus a verb)*
- *I'm sorry to (plus a verb)*
- *I was thinking about (plus a verb)*
- *I think I should (plus a verb)*
- *Thank you for (plus a verb)*
- *I don't know what to do about (plus a noun)*
- *Have you ever thought about (plus a verb)?*

Using just one of those phrases, you're about to see how many different situations it's suited for:

Have you ever thought about (plus a verb)?

- Have you ever thought about starting your business?
- Have you ever thought about changing jobs?
- Have you ever thought about learning how to swim?
- Have you ever thought about becoming a writer?
- Have you ever thought about having more children?
- Have you ever thought about selling your house?
- Have you ever thought about visiting South America?
- Have you ever thought about learning Russian?
- Have you ever thought about the meaning of life?
- Have you ever thought about joining a fitness center?

If you learned just this one phrase, you can immediately see how many ways you can use it in daily conversation. This phrase, in particular, is a great example, because when you ask it, you're inviting someone into a conversation with you. That will spawn the use of even more sentences using phrases you've already learned.

Can you see how pointless it becomes to learn individual words when your ultimate aim is to speak more fluently? That's not to say that learning more words isn't important. But don't forget to give a priority to learning phrases as well.

3. Think in English

When you go to speak to someone, don't think in your native language and then translate your sentence into English. Simply think in English. This is one of those guidelines that is easier said than done. You're trying to break a habit – thinking in your native tongue – that has been with you all of your life. To be honest, you probably don't know any other way to think.

Why is thinking in your native language not a particularly good idea? The ordering of the words in your native language is more than language not going to be the same as in the English language. Your natural tendency will be to repeat the English words in that order.

But more than that, in the process of translating your sentence, you'll probably be trying to use grammar rules you're not all that familiar with yet.

Thinking in English will, undoubtedly be difficult at first, but the more you force your mind to do it, easier it becomes. And the easier it becomes, the more fluent you'll be at the English language. Give it a try the next time you go to speak English.

4. Practice speaking English when you hear it.

Remember that reading and listening to the English word doesn't make you a better speaker. It will give you more knowledge of reading the written word and understanding it when it is spoken to you. But learning to speak it yourself, requires you do more work. It requires that you truly become interactive with the language.

Without a doubt, reading and listening to the language are two of the most important aspects of learning English. But you're missing the final piece of the puzzle if you don't practice speaking it. This goes for any language, not just English.

Think about the order in which young children learn their native language. They first learn how to speak it and become quite fluent in it and finally learn how to read. Yes, I know that in the process they make many grammatical mistakes. One of the most common is to use the word "brung" as a past tense form of "bring." The correct form is brought. "Look what I've brung you." But the vital point is they didn't wait until they knew what the proper form of

the verb was before they spoke. And they do indeed get their message across.

So, don't obsess with reading and listening. It appears the natural order of learning a language is listening, speaking, reading and then writing. So don't think for a moment that your reading and writing skills aren't good enough to allow you to speak it. Your average four-year-old doesn't seem to worry about it.

5. Surround yourself with others who speak English

I've said it before and I'll say it again: immerse yourself in the English language. Compare the English language to an ocean. As long as you stay on the ship you'll only learn what's at the surface of the ocean. Sure, you'll have a great view of the waves and you know the temperature by dipping your hands in the water occasionally. But you'll never know what lies beneath the surface unless you immerse yourself – submerge yourself – into the body of water.

If you don't the plunge from the boat into the ocean right now, when will you?

Think about this for a moment. Those English students who excel at speaking the language are usually the individuals who attended – or are still attending – an English-speaking school. Why is that? Because they were in a culture that forced them to speak English. If they had their way they might have preferred to speak more in their own language.

But they took all their classroom lessons in English, talked to their professors in English – even talked to their friends in English.

Compare these individuals to those who studied abroad, but returned lamenting they still aren't fluent in the language. Because all the while they were in an English-speaking country they never allowed themselves to take the plunge. For whatever reason, they never took the plunge into fully using

what skills they had developed up to that time?

So does that mean you have to travel or go to an English-speaking school in order to speak the language fluently? No, not by a long shot. You can become fluent in the language without ever traveling anywhere! Simply make a pact with your friends who are also learning the language that you're all going to dive into the ocean of English to learn what's beneath the surface.

Promise each other then when gathered you'll only speak English. Don't have that many friends who are English speakers or learning the language? Before you know it you'll find yourself thinking in English when you're around these individuals and speaking in the language won't seem so frightening any longer.

Chapter 4: Mistakes Are the Foundation Of Any Good Speaker

"Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really.

Double your rate of failure."

—Thomas J. Watson, founder of IBM

Right about now, you may be thinking that this chapter is a thinly veiled attempt to make you believe that mistakes are good. They're our "friends" in fact. You may also be thinking that I'm crazy.

But it's true. Mistakes are your "friends." I hate to tell you but the sooner you recognize this, the faster you'll learn the English language.

If you've ever heard any motivational speaker, then you've probably heard that you can only learn if you're willing to make mistakes. This statement is true regardless of what you're doing learning a language to building a multimillion dollar business.

The speaker, of course, didn't mean that you should purposely set out to make mistakes. What he meant was when you find you've made a mistake, learn from it and continue on.

It's the greatest advice you can be given, in fact, with regard to learning how

to speak English. You can only be a fluent speaker if you actual speak it. When you do speak it you're very likely to make mistakes, it's only natural.

In a way, you could say if you're not making any mistakes then you're really not learning much. You may think that's a harsh statement, but it happens to be the truth.

When you hit that plateau of speaking English, then it's vital to break through to the next level as quickly as possible. And the only way to do that is to expose yourself to the possibility of making mistakes in your speech.

For most of us that means to step outside of your comfort zone. That's a scary proposition for most of us. But you know you have to do it. The following are a few tips of how to practice speaking more despite your fears.

1. Enter a low-risk situation

What's a low-risk situation? It's one that's friendly enough that when you do make mistakes, those around understand and gently correct you. It's a situation in which you trust those with whom you're speaking to understand you're learning.

One of the best situations to put yourself into is to work with other students. You need to ask everyone in the conversation to correct you – diplomatically, of course – when you misspeak or your grammar is horribly incorrect. You, in turn, are confronting your fear and leaving your comfort zone in a limited, controlled way.

So what produces this fear anyway? It seems counter-intuitive that you would fear speaking the very language you've been so enthusiastic about learning. But that's human nature.

You're not alone in your fear. And if you understand the origin of your fear, then you'll be able to grapple with it better. Many psychologists will tell you that the fear of doing something, even learning a language, stems from your thinking that you must speak it perfectly. That is without any mistakes.

You need to ask yourself why you feel this way. What would happen if you did make a mistake in your conversation? The worst-case scenario would be being laughed at, let's say. Your mistake may unintentionally offend someone. Or it may mean that someone misunderstood what your said.

There may be other reasons though you fear mistakes when speaking to others. Perhaps you have the long-held belief that making a mistake is a sign of weakness.

The problem with this line of thinking, though, is that you have molded these thoughts to such gigantic proportions and distorted them so they're all you can see. Now, you've created the mindset that you can't afford the "luxury" of making a mistake in your conversations.

Does this scenario apply to you? If the perfectionist line of thinking is hindering your learning you *can* change your thinking with three easy steps and start speaking English again.

1. First you need to identify this type of thinking.

This means you must give some thought to why you're hesitating about speaking English in public. Have you been laughed at in the past for mistakes you've made? Perhaps, in making a mistake you've inadvertently offended someone. Now, you're afraid of offending any more individuals.

If you can identify why you're fearful of speaking in public, then you can start to design a strategy to conquer it.

2. List other ways of thinking about this

Once you know the catalyst of your fears, then create a list of other ways of thinking about your speaking English with others. This could include such thoughts as, "Others understand that I'm still learning and will forgive my mistakes," "The more I speak the better I'll become and the fewer mistakes I'll make," "I need to accept these mistakes myself and not only forgive myself for them, but learn from them as well."

3. Now review this list of alternative thoughts. Compare it to your perfectionist thinking.

Once you analyze both ways of thinking see if you can't develop another perspective on the situation that will be helpful to your learning and give you a more realistic view of the situation.

It may take some time to change your thinking, but you can if you follow these suggestions. You may even begin speaking a limited amount while you're reviewing your situation.

I have a friend who's still learning English. He speaks it fairly well, but the one situation he hates to find himself in is ordering pizza over the phone. He's terrified he'll order the wrong toppings and he then has a worthless pizza.

So this is how he used these steps to reduce his fears about it. After he calmed down a bit from the thought, he identified his perfectionist thinking: "The

person taking my order will think I'm stupid."

He then created alternative thoughts to counter that: "I'm anything but stupid." "I'm using a new language that's not my native tongue." "I'm speaking English the best I can at this point." "Speaking on the phone is a wonderful way to use my English skills." "In fact, the more I take risks like this, the more natural my speaking skills will be," "The more I speak the language, the better I'll be and the more confident I'll be."

Then he evaluated the situation in a new light: "I may be afraid of looking stupid. But I know differently. I'm learning a new language and I'm giving it my best shot. I'm allowed to make mistakes. It is, after all, the only way I'll improve."

And improve you will. The more often you step out of your comfort zone and push yourself to speak English, you'll discover that your English is getting better and better. Why not try it yourself? What have you got to lose – except your fear, that is?

Are You Ready to Accelerate the Learning Process?

Yes, I am talking about mistakes. Just like the individual above you finally took the risk of ordering pizza in English, it's time you take that giant leap to not only accepting your mistakes, but embracing them. You've probably heard the story about Thomas Edison, probably the most prolific inventor of the twentieth century. He was asked once how he felt during his failed attempts at finding the proper material for the filament of the light bulb. The individual specifically pointed out that Edison went through nearly 10,000 various materials before he discovered the proper one.

Edison quickly corrected him with this unique perspective on the situation: "I

did not fail 9,999 times. I found 9,999 ways of how not to create a light bulb."

As long as you view your mistakes as signs for not learning or reasons why you'll never learn to speak the language, you'll never go beyond the level of fluency you're at right now.

The moment, however, you accept mistakes as not only a natural part of life, but a very necessary tool in the learning process, you'll unleash that hidden power of learning that lies within you.

Now is the time to accept the power of mistakes and press on and expose yourself as often as possible to the English language. Do this not fearful of making mistakes, but vowing to embrace the mistakes and learning from them. This, more than any other piece of advice, will radically change your view of learning the English language.

Here are a few tips to start you off:

1. Find a trusted partner to work with

You can spend all the time you want reading English, but the moment you do you've expanded your world of learning. Grab a partner that's ideally at your level of fluency or better. The idea is to create an atmosphere for learning that embraces – even encourages – mistakes. If you're both at about the same level of development, then you'll discover that you'll be benefit from this partnership.

When you're searching for your partner, don't fear from asking someone you know from the internet or a friend in another part of the country. You can always practice the language through the technology of Skype.

You may also want to spend some time exploring the web site sharedtalk.org. Here, you'll discover not only students of the English language, but native speakers as well. In addition to chat rooms, the site contains "voice rooms," where several individuals can go to comfortably practice the language.

There's just one word of caution in this method. That's the fact that you must find a person who embraces the possibility of mistakes as you do. You both need to know you have that freedom.

2. Refine and expand your learning

Once you've found your partner then it's time to get down to business. You may believe that sitting and talking is an excellent exercise. But think a moment about taking the extra step. Expand and refine your learning by through several strategies.

One of them is to purposely ask your partner to pronounce a few of the vocabulary words you've been using. Then repeat the words after him or her. This works extremely well if your language partner is a native speaker. He'll know the nuances of the spoken word that someone who speaks English as a second language may not.

Another trick to getting the most out of these sessions is to record them, with the permission of your language buddy of course. Then you make reviewing this recording a priority of your next study session when you're alone.

This will take certainly enhance your learning capacity. Even though you believe you'll never forget both the mistakes you made as well as the proper way to speak the words, don't count on it. Your ability to retain all of this information in this situation is limited – and no, not because you're not bright enough.

Rather, in this type of situation your mind is reassessing and processing so many different things, that not everything you learned in this session may get transferred along to that not everything you learned in this session may get transferred along to our long-term memory. Once you play this information back on a recorder, you'll undoubtedly encounter something you had completely forgotten about.

3. Talk about interesting subjects

What's worse than being engaged in a boring conversation? Being engaged in a boring conversation in which you're still learning the language.

I guarantee you that if you don't choose topics that fully engage you, two things will occur. First, you'll become incredibly bored with the conversation. Second, you'll cut the session short as soon as you get the chance.

But by choosing a topic that you're already interested in – ideally passionate about – you'll discover that you can talk on forever. Not only that but you'll be far less fearful about making mistakes. You'll also be eager to expand your vocabulary and pronunciation of new words.

Fluency in any language is only possible if you learn the subtle art of listening. Don't expect to gain much knowledge if when you do get a chance to speak in English you're too nervous to listen or to busy translating what the others are saying to concentrate on the meaning of the words and the course of the conversation. We discuss this in more depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Improve Your Listening, Your Fluency Will Follow

It’s nearly impossible to talk about enhancing your fluency in English without talking about the act of listening. The two are intertwined. The only way to truly speak the language like a native is to listen to those who already speak it well.

While you may believe you’ve been “listening” all this time, perhaps it’s time to dig into what’s involved in the listening process – especially the more advanced listening skills that every language student needs. It’s actually not extremely difficult to develop these skills. If you simply keep your mind on the conversation at hand, then you’re already far along in improving your active listening skills.

There are many reasons to develop such skills, even beyond that of learning a language. Listening is actually a fundamental method of learning knowledge of any type. Think about it, when you were in school you needed to learn how to listen to your instructor or your professor. If you didn’t actively listen, you may have found yourself struggling in class.

Active listening in a classroom setting means not only understanding what your teacher is saying, but even taking notes on the topic, in order to take a test at a later date.

Once you progress into the business world, you’ll discover the ability to listen actively will help you understand customers, clients and colleagues alike.

It should come as no surprise then that active listening is an important aspect in learning how to speak the language. It’s how you’ll learn what syllables to emphasize in certain words, how to structure sentences and how to make plural nouns out of single nouns. And that’s just for starters.

As you go along, you'll soon be recognizing idioms and colloquialisms. And before you know it, you'll be not only understanding them, but using them yourself.

Tips for Enhancing your Active Listening Skills

1. Face the speaker, make eye contact and watch him speak

This is excellent advice for anyone engaged in a conversation. It's especially important for those involved in business. In fact, you may already have developed this habit if you've conducted any type of business in your native language. But this advice is critical to an individual learning the language.

What do you gain by listening this way? Watching him speak will help you see how he forms words with his mouth so you can do the same when you use those words.

2. Pay attention to what the person is saying, but stay relaxed.

Perhaps this is the hardest advice of all when it comes to attentive listening and learning the English language. After all, you're going to be nervous, just making sure you understand what he's saying. It's difficult to stay relaxed, but if you can do just that, you'll actually increase your power of learning.

3. Mentally screen out all distractions

Background noises and movements of those around you are considered distractions. Once you begin to focus on what the English-speaking individual is saying, you'll probably find this comes naturally to you.

If you do find your mind wandering, simply bring it back to the present moment and the speaker. Don't waste any time or energy belittling yourself for your slip up.

4. Listen to the words being said and visualize what the speaker is saying

This is an effective way of immersing yourself in the language. It allows your mind to create relate words and images and will help you with your ability to actually think in English. Not only that, but you'll also discover that when you do that, you'll retain the information longer.

After all, what good is learning the language if you don't retain what you're learning?

5. Summarize what the other person has said

In many ways, this is the ultimate test of how well you understand the spoken word. But more than that, by paraphrasing and summarizing what you believe you've just heard, you're actually using all your skills in speaking. Speaking on your feet challenges you to think in English, something you need to learn in order to speak the language better.

Beyond Active Listening

But if that's as far as you've taken your listening skills, then you're actually cheating yourself. You're holding yourself back from quicker, easier fluency in the English language. That's because there's a skill beyond active listening and it's called extensive listening. If you've never heard it, then it's time you not only learn what it is, but how to use it to your advantage.

Extensive listening is an amazing tool you can use in practicing your skills at listening to others speak the English language. Basically it involves taking a topic and listening to it presented in a myriad of different forms – recordings, videos and interviews, both live and recorded. ~~he~~

If you had to make one change or add one thing to your learning program, including extensive listening would be the item. It's easy enough to start.

Choose a topic that interests you. If you read the last chapter and have a favorite subject matter you're already talking with your language partner with, it could be that. The alternative is to select a different topic. Consider though how you can expand your language skills if you used the same topic for each exercise.

Whatever topic it is, two things will help you excel at this challenge. The first is to make sure that it's a subject you'll be able to find a good deal of material on. Second, try to make it a topic you're already have at least a passing knowledge on. This will definitely facilitate your learning.

Once you've chosen your topic, then begin to research it. You'll be searching for resources that require you to listen. That means reading articles at this point, at least, is not a priority. Think YouTube videos, podcasts, television documentaries and even radio talk shows.

When you listen, especially at first, listen to comprehend the main ideas. At this point, don't worry about many of the details. If you can understand and repeat the important points of the topic, you're doing great.

Choose sources, by the way, that emphasize the basic information. If you delve too far into the topic, you may discover that you become frustrated, especially if it involves the learning of a specialized vocabulary. Of course, the more advanced you are when you start this exercise the more you can dig into the topic.

You may find yourself discarding one topic and choosing another. The initial subject may be beyond your language skills at the moment, or you may find the subject matter to easy depending where you are in your learning.

Keep in mind during this challenge, that extensive listening is probably the most difficult thing for a language student to do so be prepared to dedicate yourself to this technique.

Not sure what topic to select for this exercise? Below are several general selections. You can begin exploring these to see if anything interests you. In the process, though, it's very likely you'll discover even more interesting topics you'd like to pursue:

1. News stories and biographical information on political leaders and international sports stars.

2. Reviews given in English of movies or television programs you've watched in your language.

Thanks to the internet and the myriad of cable networks that the average person is exposed to today, this is an easy topic to research. From here, you may discover an interest in one of the actors or actresses and expand your horizons.

If you're not quite sure where to look for listening material, try a few of these more popular web sites:

- Spotlight English
- Ello
- Voice of America

Regardless of the listening technique you use in your English conversations, the point is to be involved in the present moment. It's difficult to advance your ability to speak English when you're thinking of your grocery list while the other person is speaking. Of course, this is excellent advice for everyone in a conversation whether he's learning the language or speaking his native tongue.

If you've been doing this and still frustrated in what you perceive as a lack of progress, then you'll be interested in learning the incredible breakthrough technique in the following chapter. It's called shadowing and in a moment you'll learn why.

Chapter 6: Shadowing

Pedro sat down for a cup of coffee with a friend. “I’ve hit a major snag in my ability to speak English,” he said. “I’ve hit this brick wall and can’t seem to breakthrough it. I’m not quite sure what to do.”

The English student made sure he was talking to his friend in English. He also was attentive when his friend answered in English. “I know you’re doing everything right,” his friend replied. “You’re being an active listener right now.”

“So what’s my problem?” Pedro asked.

“Perhaps you should try a technique called shadowing,” ~~in~~ his friend suggested. “Have you ever heard of it?”

Pedro shook his head no.

If, like Pedro, you don’t know about the technique of shadowing, you may be missing that piece of the language puzzle that will pull your entire learning experience together and have you speaking English like a native in no time.

Shadowing is at least what this method is referred to in academic circles. Many others know it as “parroting.” This learning method was originally developed in Germany and then later in Korea. It involves the awesome power of listening with the indispensable power of actually speaking the language.

It’s an easy method to implement. You simply listen to a person who has a

basic grasp of the language and you repeat – to the best of your ability – what he's saying. You do this immediately after the other individual (or recording) has spoken and you do this whether you understood all of his sentence or not.

According to Dr. Alexander Arguelles, the developer of this method, it's best to be repeating the words while you're walking. In doing so, he said you'll not only enhance your alertness but increase the oxygenation process of your body.

In fact, anyone; who has ever practiced this will testify that there is something – they aren't quite sure what – about the walking (preferably outdoors) while you repeat what you hear. In fact, many individuals who have successfully performed this method describe it as the closest thing to listening to music and singing along.

No doubt you've done this. Every time you hear your favorite song, you can't help yourself, you end up singing along. If you pay close attention to what is occurring, you'll notice you're singing the words nearly at the same time as the musicians.

If you give this some thought it appears weird, especially because you probably couldn't recall the words unless you hear the start of the song. Then all the words come flooding into your memory without much effort. It's the same mechanism working when you shadow.

The peculiar aspect of learning a song is that you can go decades without hearing it or even thinking about it. The moment you hear even a portion of the tune, you're singing along with it like you heard it yesterday. All the lyrics come flooding back to your memory.

There are actually courses available to get you started. But as you decide whether you want to use them, you may want to try this on your own. This technique isn't that difficult with all the amazing technology that abounds. You can listen to almost anything on your cell phone, take a walk outside and parrot the words almost at the same time the recording is. You can do this with

any material from recordings of speakers to audio books.

It's easy enough to get started. Decide on the English audio you'd like to use. If at all possible, choose selections that have an accompanying transcript or at the very least subtitles. The nature of the material doesn't matter. If you have a favorite movie, by all means choose that. You really couldn't get bored when you're watching and listening to something you enjoy.

Perhaps you have a favorite television show – either a crime drama or a situation comedy. Some individuals recommend such sites as Power English Lessons. You may want to give that site a try.

Prior to actually shadowing this material, you'll be wise to listen through it once without shadowing it to get acquainted with the content. This is especially true if you've never heard it before. It's actually a bit easier to shadow if you have at least a passing familiarity with the piece.

The Process of Shadowing

Once you've initially reviewed the material, start listening to it again. This time your goal is to imitate or parrot the actors and narrator as precisely as possible. The ultimate goal is to repeat everything they're saying.

Ideally, you'll want to say everything they're saying at precisely the same time as the recording. If at first you're not that familiar with the content, you can wait until the sentence is complete before repeating it.

When parroting the words don't just say them without any feeling. Imitate everything the native speaker is saying, down to the precise pronunciation, the inflection in the voices. If you try to be perfect in all of this, you'll drive yourself stir crazy.

Your goal is to try to keep up. The more often you shadow this material, the better you'll get. So instead of trying to perfect your presentation right from the start, just make up your mind you're going to have fun with this.

Below is an alternative to this specific approach to shadowing which may be more suited to your needs.

1. Start with finding a text at your spoken proficiency level in English.

2. Listen to this once in order to gain a general understanding of it.

This is a great step that many students try to skip only to find they need to stop and perform this ritual from the start – and this time listening to it before you shadow it. First, you'll know for certain if the chosen text really does match your proficiency level.

Secondly, you'll discover if the topic holds your interest. There's nothing worse than try to read something in a language that's not your native language and find it's … well, boring. If either of these is the case – too difficult or too boring – then go back and select another text.

3. Listen to the piece a couple of more times.

When you do this, you'll be sure to be confident in your ability to know what the text is talking about. You don't have to fully understand everything before you shadow it, but at least you know you'll eventually be able to figure it out.

4. If there are any words you don't know the meaning of look them up before going any farther.

That's right! Before you start shadowing look up the words you aren't positive

you know. It may take a little more time, upfront before you shadow, but I promise you it'll save you time later in the exercise.

5. Listen to the text at least once a day.

Listen more than this if it's at all possible.

6. Pronounce the same piece until you can repeat it at the same speed as the recording.

7. Move on to another piece in the English language.

Approach the second piece in the same manner as you did the first.

Why Walking and Talking?

While you're shadowing remember that the ultimate way for this to work is by walking – preferably outside – while you're repeating the language. Don't overlook this seemingly inconspicuous aspect of this exercise. Why is this so important? According to some, and you probably have experienced this yourself, it's actually quite difficult to have your brain focus on learning a language while your body is trying to walk.

Think back to when you were learning how to drive. If you were like most of us, the first several times you were behind the wheel of a car you didn't talk much. You probably turned the radio or CD player down or even off as well. Once you conquered the act of driving, though, you felt much more comfortable listening to music or talking to your passengers.

There's a very good reason for this. It's difficult for the human mind to speak a

language you're unfamiliar with and perform another activity. While at first you'll find this next to impossible (but don't give up on it) as you continue, you'll see improvement.

Shadowing while you're walking is challenging your brain. It's forcing your mind to understand new language skills and eventually train your body to accept speaking this language as an automated process. That in the end is exactly what you want: to speak English without giving it a second thought.

The Scriptorium Method

At about the same time Dr. Arguelles developed shadowing, he also created a related method for learning the spoken word. This technique, by contrast, combines the power of repeating words out loud with of the reinforcement of writing them on paper. It's called the *scriptorium method* and you may already be unwittingly using it. It might even be a method you've used in your native language as a youngster learning spelling words.

Instead of just working with words, you'll be working with sentences at least initially. Create a sentence or choose one you've already learned. Get a piece of lined notebook paper and begin writing the sentence. Instead of writing it all at once, however, write it deliberately. As you copy each word, pause momentarily and say the word out loud. Then – and only then – can you continue to the next word.

If, for example, you were using the first line of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, you would use this sentence: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Now grab your pen and paper and begin. Write the word it, pause and then say it. Do the same for "was." Write it down and pronounce it. Write and speak each word in the sentence until you've completed the each word.

No, you aren't quite done – not yet at least. Now that you've written it on the

page say the entire sentence out loud. Pause for a moment. Do this again with the same sentence a minimum of ten to fifteen times. That purpose of this exercise isn't simply to recognize the words when you see them, but to actively speak them.

If you want you can now move on to another sentence. Some individuals choose to work from the sentences of a novel like this (although *A Tale of Two Cities* would take quite a while). Another option would be to copy and recite sentences from any of your lessons.

This is a great secondary method of learning pronunciation, especially if the option of shadowing is unavailable to you. The aim of writing and pronouncing words, like in shadowing, uses more than one sensory organ of your body. By combining these organs, you'll be increasing the chances that you'll remember not only the structure of the sentences, but the pronunciation of the words.

Use this interactive approach to the English language as often as you can fit it into your allotted time to study. You'll be amazed at how much faster you'll learn how to speak the language simply by writing and pronouncing your words and phrases once a week.

In the next chapter you'll learn one simple habit that just about all successful English students have used at one time in order to improve the ability to speak English and sound like a native.

Chapter 7: Secrets of a Fluent English Speaker

If you've been struggling with soaring to the next level of the spoken English language, then you may have already been asking yourself this one question, "What are those students who are excelling in this area doing that I'm not?"

And you're right to ask that question. That's the only way you can diagnose what you're doing compared to what they're doing. Here's a surprise. Usually it comes down to one exercise. One simple ten-minute exercise to be exact. This habit helps to thoroughly immerse these individuals in the language.

This chapter explains how you can use this incredibly powerful tool to aid you in soaring to the next level of fluency in speaking English.

Read a Book (Yes, in English!) out loud

What if you knew that there were one simple exercise that could totally transform the way you spoke the English language? That if you participated in this routine every day for as little as ten minutes, you'd be building your English speaking ability, not unlike an athlete improves his skill through daily practice?

Imagine what it would be like to speak the English language like a native without even the need to venture into any conversation with another person? If this sounds too good to be true, think again. You're about to be introduced

to a simple ten-minute daily method that will do just that.

Not only that but this simple method can help you keep up in those conversations among native speakers who ordinarily speak so fast that most students get lost and even discouraged.

Simply reading a book written in English out loud. Yes, that's all there is to it. But there are a few criteria that go along with this exercise. The first caveat is that you have to read the words as fast as you can while retaining proper pronunciation. At first this may seem like you're reading at a snail's pace, but as you continue to practice you'll find yourself getting faster and comprehending the words more quickly.

Part of the key to this is the careful and deliberate pronunciation of words. Keep in mind that pronunciation depends on you to open and move your mouth properly. When you pay attention to the movement of your mouth, you'll be pleasantly surprised at the improvement in your pronunciation.

Many individuals try this suggestion but are, quite frankly, just a bit skeptical of it. They're not quite sure how reading a book out loud – to no one in particular, in fact could increase their skill. So why does it work?

1. This exercise is doing nothing less than creating an oral atmosphere around you.

If you're anything like the average student learning English as a second language, English is probably seldom if ever spoken in your home. This exercise, then, is an awesome way to practice speaking the language when you aren't in touch with others who speak it, even on a rudimentary level.

Try to invest at least ten minutes daily reading out loud five days a week. In fact, why not try it for a month. At the end of the month, see if you notice any changes in your fluency.

2. Reading out loud increases your opportunity for retention.

Not only does it increases your chances to retain more of what you read, you increase this opportunity by approximately 100 percent when compared to reading silently. When you read silently you use two parts of your body – your brain and your eyes. While this is good, reading out loud actually doubles the number of body parts involved in the process. This activity forces you to not only use your brain and your eyes but your ears and voice as well.

Scientists have discovered that this really does double your retention of the material. You're not only thinking about the language and seeing it, but you're also hearing it and saying it.

There is possibly no better way to actually immerse yourself in the English language. While you're reading you're actually subconsciously soaking up the thinking and speech patterns of the language. But that's not all, you're also enhancing your ability to remember in English as well as communicate in the language.

3. You're exercising your facial muscles.

Yes, this isn't the most exciting result of this habit, but it is more important than you think. The sounds involved in speaking the English language are formed through the passing of the air through a certain segment of our facial organs.

As you probably already know through your studies, the sounds are then formed through the use of your lips, nose, teeth, tongue and other facial features. When you're learning a new language, there are many new sounds you need to learn in order to speak it properly. At first it may seem that you're totally incapable of pronouncing certain sounds.

Many individuals whose first language is Spanish have a difficulty enunciating the letter "z" in English. Spanish doesn't contain that sound. But just for your

information, native English speakers sometimes have a hard time with the “rr” sound of Spanish. This is not a natural sound for them to use. In each case, the individual needs to develop the specific muscles for proper pronunciation.

4. You’ll learn how to become responsible for correcting yourself.

You’ve been studying the English language that you’re already fairly proficient in the proper enunciation of it. Don’t be surprised that as you read out loud, you’ll slowly begin to “police yourself.”

Eventually you’ll hear yourself pronounce one or more of the words incorrectly. When you first start this habit, you may slide by this. After you’re established in this habit, though, you’ll discover yourself, stopping and pronouncing it again properly. That’s exactly one of the goals of this exercise.

5. Reading out loud increases your oral fluency.

There’s no way around it, reading a book or newspaper out loud must improve your fluency in English. Ideally, you’ll want to take time out of your morning to read out loud. And yes, I do mention this for a reason. This short, simple exercise loosens your speech organs, getting them accustomed to making the sounds of English.

Not only that, doing it before class jogs your memory of the sounds necessary for the language. You’ll soon discover that your fluency will be greatly enhanced on those days you take the time to do this exercise.

One of the great things about this exercise, you can choose a book that actually interests you. Choose a novel you’ve always wanted to read or one of your favorite authors. If you’re a sports fan, for example, then you could read an autobiography of your favorite athlete or merely read the sports section of the newspaper daily.

Remember, though, that you'll gain the most from this exercise when you read actively or observantly. What do I mean by that? Be totally involved in what you're reading. Use your mind taking note of not only the material being presented, but the structure of the sentences as well the order of the words in sentences. Ideally, you'll transfer these observations into your daily practices. And the next thing you know you're speaking English like you were born into it.

Chapter 8: Idioms and More: You Can't be Fluent without Idioms

Hmm? Did you notice that title of this chapter? Yes part of it is what's known as an idiom. In fact, that's probably one of the most common idioms native speakers use.

The English language can be a struggle to learn on its own. Throw in an unexpected idiom or two and now you've opened a whole new can of worms. There again, is another idiom. Just for your information, opening a whole new can of worms means that in an attempt to solve one problem an entirely different problem popped up.

Even children who are native to the language have a difficult time learning some of the idioms if they've never heard them before. When I was a child, for example, and an older one at that, my mom and I were finishing up washing the dishes after supper one day. My father, who had gone into the living to read a book, actually fell asleep reading it. The book lay on his chest.

Mom said to me. I need to "take a page from Dad's book." I was horrified. "But, Mom," I said, "that would confuse him to no end." My mother looked at me like I was crazy. She was using an idiom and I was taking her words literally. I thought she was going to pull a prank on my father by actually confusing him by tearing a physical page from the book he was currently reading. As an avid reader, I didn't even say where the humor was in the act. What she meant, though, was that she was going to follow his example and take a nap.

Knowing the confusion I had with several idioms, who knew as I got older that I actually confused my own child with one. I said to her, in all innocence

one time, that something I did would undoubtedly get her Dad's goat. She said to me (as if I weren't already aware of it), "But Mom, Dad doesn't have a goat."

Now as you probably have already guessed getting someone's goat has nothing to do with stealing his farm livestock. What I meant by that was I was going to agitate him, get him worried and perhaps even a little concerned about something. But my daughter, like myself before her, had to learn the language one idiom at a time.

How to Learn Idioms

Right now you're probably thinking that an idiom is a secret joke that native speakers like to pull on non-native speakers and children. Who knows? Perhaps that's exactly how idioms did come into use hundreds of years ago. Now there they are common phrases that are widely accepted in the English.

Unfortunately for the serious student of English, there is really no way to learn them except by memorizing them one by one. While there are really probably hundreds of them, I'm providing you with the meanings of the ten most commonly used idioms in the English language.

These are the ones you're most likely to encounter as you begin to delve deeper into the language. If you can begin by learning these ten, you'll probably reduce your confusion of listening to native speakers by quite a bit. You'll then be able to focus more on the other parts of the conversations you're listening to.

10 of the Most Common Idioms

1. **A piece of cake**

You'll hear this quite a bit. "That test was a piece of cake," someone might say walking out of a classroom. That means that it presented no challenge to them. It represented , in fact, quite the opposite — something easy to accomplish. Another, related idiom, meaning much the same thing is "easy as pie." Why anyone would compare a pie to something being easy isn't really understood, but at least you now know the meaning of both of these.

2. It cost an arm and a leg

That would be a gory financial transaction if you were to take this phrase literally. This idiom means the item being referred to was expensive. It's used nearly constantly in this language. In fact, you've probably already heard it.

A second idiom with a very similar meaning is "it broke the bank." It doesn't mean that the bank – whatever or wherever that might be – literally broke into pieces or that it ran out of money. The phrase just means the cost of the item was quite expensive. In both of these cases, many times the implication is that the cost is more than what the item is worth.

3. Break a leg

Believe it or not, this idiom means "good luck." It's especially used backstage in theaters just prior to actors going on stage. It's considered bad luck to say the phrase "good luck" back stage, but apparently it's all right to wish someone to break a bone. It's widely used outside of this venue as well. So the next time someone tells you to "break a leg" they really aren't hoping you trip and fall.

4. Let the cat out of the bag

Here's another curious phrase. After all, who would place a perfectly good cat

in the bag in the first place? And who would care if the cat got out? This phrase's true meaning, though, is to reveal something that was meant to be kept a secret. When someone tells you something and you inadvertently tell another, you're "letting the cat out of the bag."

5. Hit the books

Idioms can certainly conjure up some bizarre images in the minds of those who aren't native speakers. Upon first hearing this, perhaps you had an image of students surrounding themselves with the textbooks they like least and physically punching and hitting them. What a strange way of releasing your anger. This phrase is really synonymous with the act of studying. Yes, it's that simple. Not nearly as colorful, though.

6. Hit the nail on the head

When you hear this one you may believe you're speaking to a carpenter. But that's not necessarily so. In fact, chances are good the person who uttered this expression has never even used a hammer in his life. Once again, like with all good idioms, it hasn't a single thing to do with the physical item it's referring to.

Instead it has everything to do with performing a right move, action, or even the proper interpretation of a fact or statistic. At least with this idiom it's nearly understandable how it might have got its start. When you take a hammer and hit the nail on the head, the nail glides perfectly into the wood. With the idiom, you've done everything right.

7. To scratch someone else's back.

You may also hear this phrase as "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." This doesn't mean that you'll be literally standing behind someone asking them exactly where there back itches and then he'll do the same for you. Although implied in this literal interpretation is that both individuals are

helping the other.

This often-used idiom means that if you help your friend with a problem or out of a tight situation, he'll return the favor when you need something done.

8. When pigs fly

Can you imagine anything more ridiculous than looking up in the sky and seeing a pig fly? They definitely weren't designed with flight in mind – regardless of how they may in evolve in the future.

So just the idea of pigs flying is utterly ridiculous. And there you have it. That's the entire point of this idiom. When pigs fly refers to an event that is highly unlikely, if ever, to occur.

9. Bite off more than you can chew

Do you recognize this idiom from the title of this chapter? While this has nothing to do with eating, with a little thought, you might be able to figure it out. Imagine you're starved and have been waiting in a restaurant for a meal that's more than a little late. By the time you get your sandwich you grab it and take a huge bite. Unfortunately, it's a bit more than your mouth can handle and you find it extremely difficult to deal with this situation in a polite and mannered fashion.

While this has absolutely nothing to do with food, it has everything to do with your trying to attempt a feat that is just a bit beyond your capabilities. If you've ever volunteered to perform a project for work only to discover you don't have the knowledge or skill to complete it, then you've bitten off more than you can chew. You've taken on a project that is just too large or beyond your capability to handle at the moment.

Homophones, Homonyms and Homographs

Just when you think the English language can't get any more difficult to understand, someone has to start talking about homophones, homonyms and homographs. It's bad enough that each of these words sound and look so similar, just wait until you discover what each word represents. Learning about these categories of words alone will convince you, if you need any more evidence, that the English language is not the easiest language to learn.

So what are they and why in the world should you even learn them? Let's tackle them one by one. A homophone, also called a homonym, is a word that has at least two distinct, usually unrelated meanings but are pronounced the same in each situation. Sometimes they have the same spelling, but not necessarily.

What do we mean by that? Look at the word rose. "The rose bloomed today." Used in this sentence you know that the word is referring to a flower. But in the sentence, "Diana rose from her nap" means something entirely different, even though they are the same word, spelled the same way.

When you read these words in sentences, you're likely to immediately know the meaning intended. When you and others use them as part of the spoken language you may have to listen closely to know what the word means in the context that it's used.

The use of all types of homophones in the English language is just another good argument for something we talked about earlier in the book: learning to recognize phrases instead of just words.

If you only learned words singly in your early years of language study, you may be puzzled by the use of the word rose in either of those sentences. Depending on what you learned, you may very well be picturing a flower when a person said "rose" instead of the verb, meaning to get up.

As you progress in your study, you'll recognize more and more of these. Here

is just a small sampling of homophones:

Lacks – to be without something

Lax – not strict

See – to use your eyes

Sea – a body of water

Erie – one of the Great Lakes in the Midwest of the US

Eerie – a strange feeling, usually referring to something that is paranormal

Vein – blood vessels of mammals

Vain – to attempt something but have it not mean anything

Male – a man

Mail – letters that are delivered by the post office

On to Homographs

If you're not confused enough already, you just may be after you learn about words that are commonly called homographs. These words, more likely a pair of words, are normally spelled identically. The catch is they mean something different depending on their pronunciation. Again, these belong to a class that you'll discover as you continue speaking the English language tests not only your skills, but your patience as well.

Sometimes the pair of homographs are pronounced differently. The difference, however, is a subtle one. It's usually just a matter of the placement of the

accent in the syllables that make up the word.

One thing you may want to know is that there exists an entire class of homographs that end in the three letters “ate.” When they are pronounced one way they have one meaning and when you shift the accented syllable they mean something else.

A classic example of this is the word “advocate.” When you pronounce it with the long “a” sound the meaning of the word is to be in support of something. When the word is pronounced with a short “a” sound, the word means a person who either supports or acts on behalf of the cause of another individual.

Unfortunately for the student of the English language these words are strewn all around. You’ll never know where or when you might encounter them. But as you progress in your ability to speak the language you’ll discover that you’ll become much more familiar with them and recognize them when you both read and listen to the language. Below are just a few of the more common homographs you may encounter in your studies:

- **Attribute:** a characteristic or quality of something or to assign a characteristic to a specific person, place or thing
- **Axes:** the plural of the noun ax or the plural of the noun axis
- **Bass:** a deep tone or a type of fish
- **Bat:** a piece of equipment used to hit a baseball or the winged mammal
- **Compact:** something small or to make something small. It also refers to a case that holds make up. Additionally, you’ll occasionally find this word meaning agreement or covenant, as in the historic Mayflower Compact.
- **Compound:** something created from more than one substance or an enclosed area that includes at least one building
- **Content:** Satisfied or something that is found in an enclosed case. It also means the words found in books or other material
- **Desert:** an arid, dry place; to leave someone behind. Not to be confused with dessert, which is a sweet after-dinner treat.
- **Does:** a form of the verb do; the plural of doe, a female deer

- **Down:** the opposite of up or soft, young feathers of birds
- **Entrance:** the area in which you enter a room or to bewitch or delight an individual
- **Fine:** sharp or very thin or the penalty you pay
- **Lead**: to take a group behind you and show them the way or a type of metal
- **Minute:** 60 seconds or a portion of an hour
- **Object:** another word for anything you can see or touch or to speak up against something
- **Produce:** fresh fruits and vegetables as in the produce department of a grocery store or to create something
- **Refuse:** a verb meaning to decline something or a noun referring to garbage or waste
- **Row:** a fight or to move a boat with oars
- **Second:** a portion of a minute or the item after the first
- **Tear:** the water that comes from the eyes or to rip
- **Wind:** moving air or to turn in a circular motion
- **Wound:** an injury or something that has been turned, the past tense of wind

While much of this information is important in the written language, it's also fundamental to your acquiring better skills when it comes to the spoken word. If you hear one of these words spoken and need to take time out of your listening trying to decide what it means, you're also losing vital listening time for other portions of the conversation. In fact, in doing that, you may be missing the most important parts of the conversation.

Chapter 9: Contractions in the English Language

One thing you've undoubtedly discovered about the English language is its apparent randomness. As soon as you learn a grammatical rule or a way to pronounce a word you discover at least one exception to the rule. There you are thinking you were making progress. Now you're only left confused.

While it may not make you feel any better but everyone who learns this language has the same problems. We've already mentioned even native speakers have encountered these same problems and some of them have never fully conquered them.

One of the idiosyncrasies of the English language – and one that seems to confuse many students – is the contraction. Students and native speakers alike have problems knowing when to use them and when not to. Some individuals have problems knowing what the contraction even stands for.

If you're having these problems or try to avoid speaking with contractions for fear of making a fool of yourself join the club. But now, we're going to give you a quick course in this unique part of the English language. Before you've completed this chapter you'll be not only using contractions like a native speaker, but you'll know exactly why and how you're using them.

What is a contraction, anyway?

In its basic form a contraction is a shortened form of a word or two words. It's created, in its most common written form by omitted a letter or letters and replacing them with an apostrophe.

Contractions are normally used in spoken English. Not always found in the written language, a contraction represents syllables that have been dropped by native speakers because on the whole they speak fast and simply compress the words together. One of the ones you've probably encounter frequently is "can't" for "cannot."

You may already be using this one and a few others. They are after all, a more informal way to speak and they actually make you sound more like a native speaker. You're less likely to find them in the written language except in some informally written books, like this one whose writing style is to sound more conversational.

Essentially, English uses two types of contractions. The first variety is the type we've just defined, in which one or more letters are missing and replaced by an apostrophe. The list below contains a comprehensive list of contractions you may hear people speak, but it's not necessarily complete.

These contractions have been used for hundreds of years and agreed upon as it were by speakers of the English language. Due to the possibility of being misunderstood, it's widely accepted in the spoken language that individuals don't randomly create their own set of contractions. While these words are definitely the informal presentation of two words they are widely accepted by linguists.

Below are many contractions and the words they represent:

Contraction	Original
aren't	are not
can't	cannot

couldn’t	could not
didn’t	did not
doesn’t	does not
don’t	do not
hadn’t	had not
hasn’t	has not
haven’t	have not
he’d	he had, he would
he’ll	he will, he shall
he’s	he is, he has
I’d	I had, I would
I’ll	I will, I shall
I’m	I am
I’ve	I have
isn’t	is not
it’s	it is, it has
let’s	let us
mustn’t	must not
shan’t	shall not
she’d	she had, she would
she’ll	she will, she

	shall
she’s	she is, she has
shouldn’t	should not
that’s	that is, that has
there’s	there is, there has
they’d	they had, they would
they’ll	they will, they shall
they’re	they are
they’ve	they have
we’d	we had, we would
we’re	we are
we’ve	we have
weren’t	were not
what’ll	what will, what shall
what’re	what are
what’s	what is, what has
what’ve	what have
where’s	where is, where has

who’d	who had, who would
who’ll	who will, who shall
who’re	who are
who’s	who is, who has
who’ve	who have
won’t	will not
wouldn’t	would not
you’d	you had, you would
you’ll	you will, you shall
you’re	you are
you’ve	you have
you aren’t	you are not

There’s technically one other form of contraction, even though few people ever refer to it as such. That’s the contractions that English uses in front of full names to identify gender or occupation. In these, only a few letters of the original word is used and when writing them English rules state you place a period at the end. They should cause you absolutely no problem when you’re speaking the language, just be aware of the pronunciation if you read any material aloud in your daily practice.

Mr.	Mister
Mrs.	Mistress
Dr.	Doctor
Atty.	Attorney
Rev.	Reverend

Learning contractions will go a long way in helping you to speak the English language more fluently. In fact, once you feel comfortable and confident using them – as well as understanding others who use them – you'll be well on your way to speaking the language like a native.

Conclusion

At this point of the book, you may be tempted to say that you've finished reading about breaking through to the new level of fluency in the English language. And you're certainly have completed the reading portion of this vital journey. However, you're far from completing your journey.

In one of the most vital ways, you've only just begun. Now that you know what it takes to learn how to reach that breakthrough level of the spoken English language, there will be no stopping you. You're beginning your journey of submerging yourself in English, taking up the challenge of speaking it whenever and wherever you can.

Congratulations. You've made a wise decision to continue to work toward your goals and not allowing anything to hold you back. Armed with the guidelines, suggestions, tips and techniques in this book and your own personal study and speaking habits that have been successful for you, you'll discover great success.

If your goal is to get a promotion at work, you can rest assured you'll be one of the prime candidates. If your goal is to earn better grades in school, you'll discover the aid in this book will provide you with the foundation you need.

Or perhaps you're learning English simply because your children are beginning to learn it in school. In any case, it's a skill that will be most vital to your future.

There are as many reasons for learning the English language as there are

individuals using it. Regardless of your reason for learning it, you'll discover that once you put your mind to it, you'll have no problem.

If, any time along your journey, you feel as if you can't take another step or don't know how to go any further, simply open this book again and begin referring to it. Haven't been shadowing like you used to? Perhaps that's why you should be doing once again to breakthrough to yet another level of fluency.

Sometimes we get so involved in the day-to-day activities of life, that we forget to spend the time on goals that mean a lot to us. Sometimes we lose the ardor and excitement we had when we first started the project. If you believe that this is happening to you, why not just review one more time why you wanted to speak English in the first place. Review with yourself why you wanted to speak it as if it were your first language.

Of course, it's natural to feel a bit frustrated by the brick wall you seem to have it if you're feel as if you're not progressing in Of course, it's natural to feel a bit frustrated by the brick wall you seem to have it if you're feel as if you're not progressing in your pursuit.

This is the perfect time to refer to your S.M.A.R.T. goals again. When you read over these again, try to capture the excitement you felt when you originally wrote them. Hopefully, the goals were internally stimulated. That means you created them because you felt deeply serious about pursuing them for your own reasons.

If your reasons were because others were telling you that was what you should be doing, then it will be more difficult to recapture that magic that you initially felt. Even if they were externally stimulated, chances are that you felt so confident while learning the language that you adapted these goals as an internal challenge for yourself.

Here are two tips to help you stay with the program, as the English idiom goes:

You've already set your S.M.A.R.T. goals. Initially it really didn't matter the language. But now use both languages but don't stop there. From these goals, create what many would call a vision board. Remember earlier in the book, we used the goal of being able to give a presentation at work. Write this goal out and then find a photo of a boardroom or an office to represent the presentation and the desire to progress in your career.

If your desire was to keep up with your children's increasing knowledge of the English language which they learning at school, then take a photo of them and put next to that goal. You get the idea. Doing just this will revitalize you.

But then how do you maintain this excitement? Make sure you place these boards in a location in which you can see them, even briefly on a daily basis.

Each time you do see it, repeat your goal out loud. You may even want to stop for a moment and reflect on what this goal means not only to you but to your entire family.

Imagine how proud your children will be of you, for example, when you visit their teachers on the next parent-teacher conference day, speaking like a native speaker. Imagine how your career will soar when you improve your English enough to actually in front of your supervisors and colleagues and talk about the project in English.

Want to Go that Extra Step with Reminders?

Why not take advantage of the current state of technology and set daily or periodic reminders on your phone of what your true goals are in your studies. If you reflect at least once daily at a specific time every day, you'll be keeping these goals in your consciousness. In this way, you'll be less likely to get depressed over your studies and more likely to stay enthusiastic and centered.

Well Done! Look how far you’ve come since you took your first step. Remember to have a consistent English practice schedule everyday. Keep up the good work. Before you know it, you’ll be speaking fluent English like a native.

Accent Reduction For Professionals

How to eliminate your accent to sound more American

Whitney Nelson

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Introduction

It may frustrate you endlessly – especially as a professional with goals of being successful in your career. The fact that many find your accent "charming" doesn't compensate much. It certainly doesn't mean it'll make you successful.

Of course, your accent is less than charming when it prevents someone from understanding what you're saying. It's less than charming when you find yourself repeating yourself. It's especially frustrating and less than charming when you discover that your accent is actually preventing you from advancing in your chosen career.

While this book is useful to all individuals who wish to reduce their accent and sound more like a native speaker, it's written with the professional individual in mind. If your English language skills are solid, your grasp of the vocabulary solid and you're comfortable speaking the language itself, then you may very well be searching for the last piece of the puzzle. Eliminating the accent so you can not only be understood a bit more easily, but feel like you're a better fit into your office environment.

As sad as it may seem, a strong accent when speaking English can actually keep you from achieving your career goals as well as reaching your full potential. It has been proven that when some individuals continually ask you to repeat yourself, it can lower your chances of professional advancement. In other words, enunciating your words and using correct grammar are two requirements to conquer the business world today.

I know how serious you are about your career. Because of this, I also know how serious you are about improving both your pronunciation and in the process reducing and eliminating your accent. This book deals specifically with helping you speak more like a native.

Working with Your Accent

Before you get the wrong idea, there's absolutely nothing "wrong" with a foreign accent. Everyone – even native speakers of English – have some type of accent. Have you ever traveled to Boston or New York and listened in on conversations residents of those cities hold on the street?

Arguably, there are also situations when you can use your accent to your advantage. If you want move from being considered at "very good" at the English language to the next level, "excellent," then you need to make a concerted effort to help soften your accent.

We'll help you do just that. Once you've conquered your accent, you'll notice how confident you are in talking not only to your supervisors, colleagues and clients, but also at making presentations.

What is an Accent?

In the largest sense of the word, an accent is how you sound when you speak. Generally speaking, there are two types of accents. The first is what is most commonly identified as a "foreign" accent. This accent is the natural lingering effects of learning, let's say English, using (consciously or unconsciously) the rules or sounds of your native language.

It's actually a coping mechanism, if you really think about it. When you're learning English as a second language, you may encounter some difficulty making all of the sounds of English. There are several sounds that no other language contains. Or it could be that your mouth isn't cooperating because it never had to say these sounds before.

The accent occurs when you substitute similar sounds, drawn from your native language. It's called a "foreign" accent simply because it sounds "foreign" to those who are native speakers of English.

The second type of accent, which we lightly touched on earlier, is the one which is used by a specific group of native speakers, usually clustered in a general geographical location. These individuals have cultivated certain pronunciations that are unique to them. Consider the classic Boston accent. Or the accent you'll find among many in New York City. If you travel the United States at all, you'll discover variations of accents. From North Carolina, to Kentucky to Texas, each of these areas contain their own accents.

Why are some Sounds Difficult for Some Individuals?

Some people, you'll notice, have a difficult time with sounds that are new to them. The truth is, if you would have learned these sounds when you were an infant, you wouldn't have any trouble at all with them. Children are born with the amazing ability of being able to pronounce all the sounds of every language.

As an infant matures, however, she or he soon learns which specific sounds are important in his language. He then simply ignores the others. If the sounds don't serve the infant and he doesn't use them, you can see how easily it could be for that ability to slip away.

Linguists say that by the time children reach one year of age, they've intuitively learned which sounds don't serve them and simply disregard them. As we age then, these sounds become increasingly more difficult to pronounce.

Individual sounds aren't the only reason you may find yourself speaking with an accent. There are elements to any language called "sound patterns." Specific sound patterns naturally differ among languages. To fully understand this you'll need to look an example or two.

A syllable in an English word may begin or end with a cluster of consonants, like "str" and "ngth." Right now, think of the word strength. This word

contains both of those. This is different than the Japanese language, in which a typical syllable contains no more than one consonant immediately followed by one vowel. The examples here are in “ma” or “ki.”

For native Japanese speakers, pronouncing these consonant clusters can be problematic. This is why they may place a vowel sound between the consonants in an English cluster.

Another cause of a foreign accent may be derived from the natural sentence structuring of the language. This problem often crops up in Russian. An excellent example is found in the English sentence “The house is very large.” The problem for the native speaking Russian is that there is no word corresponding to the English word “the.” Therefore, he doesn’t see it as essential to speaking it in English.

The second problem is that Russian doesn’t require the speaker to place the verb “is” in the sentence. So, if you’re translating the sentence into English, the typical Russian speaker would be inclined to simply say, “House very large.” While it sounds perfect to the Russian ear, it sounds clumsy to the English ear.

Is Eliminating Accent Really Necessary?

Many students of English ask if eliminating their accent is really necessary. For some, it may not be. There are many individuals who take great pride in their accent. My grandmother, whose first language was Slovak never lost her accent. I suspect that she retained it out of a sense of pride. That doesn’t mean she didn’t have a great grasp of English. She did. She lived to be 87 years old and always talked with an accent. But then, she was essential a farmer and a stay-at-home mom.

Examine your career honestly and you’ll probably come to the conclusion that it would help you immensely. If you find yourself having difficulty communicating with others due to the way you speak the English language, you may consider reducing it. Just what are the “difficulties” you may

experiencing? A very few of these are listed below:

People not understanding you.

I can’t tell you how many of my friends and family refuse to go to an excellent doctor or other medical specialist because they have difficulty understanding their strong accent. I can’t help but think it’s a shame to not avail themselves on what could possibly be the best possible health care they may get.

In many college settings, students give up or refuse to take certain courses because the instructor or professor speaks with a foreign accent. As with the health profession, a student may be passing up the chance to experience a great course.

Avoiding social interaction with those who may not understand you.

In these instances, you’re missing out on what may be the best areas of your life, getting together with good friends. Why cut yourself off from social interactions needlessly?

Frustration from having to repeat yourself all the time.

Many individuals find it frustrating to have to continually repeat themselves because they can’t be understood. You may not only be frustrated when you speak, you may also hesitate to speak. Why not enjoy all the aspects of a good conversation and the interactions of good friends?

People focusing on your accent more than on what you are trying to say.

We mentioned this problem at the opening of the introduction. There are some

individuals who'll find your accent "charming" and get lost in the melodious sounds and ignore the message. If this happens to you, think about reducing your accent. You'll find they're less likely to comment on your accent and more wiling to talk about the substance of what you said.

When Problems Turn Into Barriers

But these problems with communication go deeper than what I've outline above. When the problems are severe enough and occur frequently, these seemingly minor problems can avalanche into barriers in any number of ways. They could hinder your job performance, your advancement in college as well as making your personal life less than satisfying.

So many individuals also tell me their accent is lowering their self-esteem. It's easy to see why. Having to repeat yourself, trying to get your point across and just thinking twice before saying anything in public is sure to have some effect on how you view yourself.

Before you begin to think that it's impossible to eliminate your foreign accent, I'm here to tell you that it's not only possible, but probably easier than what you believe it to be. With even a little concentration and practice you'll find yourself speaking like a native in no time at all.

The key words, though, are concentration and practice. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. Then, again, you probably already know this because you didn't learn how to speak English overnight.

Right now you're so close to mastering the language it would be a shame if you didn't take that extra step to eliminate that accent.

What's In This Book to Help You?

This book is divided into ten chapters, starting explaining why a strong accents can reduce your chances of getting hired. It's difficult to have any type

of career if you can't get past the first hurdle getting hired.

From there, I take you through the most important steps you'll need to take in order to speak more like a native. Together, we'll be reviewing the various sounds that usually trick and trip those who have learned English as a second language, such as the vowel sounds – a, e, i, and u – as well as what syllables to stress with certain words.

In addition, you'll learn what the soft palate is and why it's important in reducing your accent. This book will provide you with examples and exercises you can use to help in this area.

There are certain letters and sounds in English that can even challenge native speakers. Take the "r" sound for example. Native Japanese speakers naturally find this sound difficult. But you'd be amazed at how many individuals who have learned English as their native language also stumble on this.

I should know. As a grade-school student I went to speech therapy to learn the proper way to pronounce the letter "r." To this day, I find myself occasionally, not pronouncing it properly, especially if I'm tired.

Sounds like the "th" may be difficult for you to say, which may, in turn, contribute to your accent. There are few, if any, other languages that even have this sound. So, it's naturally a problem for many people who are learning English as a second language.

But that's not all you'll learn in this small book. We'll review intonation, which is nothing more than the natural melody, flow and pitch of a language, the use of diphthongs (two letters strung together to make one sound) which aren't found in all other languages.

You'll also discover how to put all these disparate segments of the English language together. You'll discover in the last two chapters of this volume, not only how to combine all this learning, but the best methods of practicing them.

It may sound overwhelming at the moment, but as you tackle each of these areas one by one, you'll notice how your accent softens and with time, patience and practice actually disappears.

Are you ready to start your next step in learning the English language – that of reducing and eventually eliminating your accent?

Then, let's get started.

Chapter 1: Is Your Strong Accent Preventing you from Getting your Perfect Job?

It’s not fair, you might say. You’d be right. Nonetheless, it occurs every day.

Imagine this scenario. Two individuals interview for the same position with a corporation. Both are equally qualified. One speaks English like a native. The other person speaks with a foreign accent. Who gets the job?

If you said the native speaker, then you already know the odds are swinging that way. Everyone knows that potential employers can’t discriminate in the hiring process based on race or gender. But what if an individual were denied a position because of the accent associated with his speech? Could an employer not hire and individual based on the way he speaks the English language?

Legally speaking, I’m not sure that issue has ever been tested in court, but that is probably something that happens more often than most of us would ever suspect. Perhaps it has even happened to you. Have you ever felt you were excluded from the short list of candidates or actually not hired because of your speech and speech patterns?

If you have been the victim of this type of hiring practice, then you’ve no doubt walked out of the office depressed and angry, to name but a few emotions. You know you have to keep looking, but your chest tightens just thinking about going through the interview ordeal and hiring process again.

That being said, you’ve got to be realistic about your accent as well. Some positions require public speaking. Some even require speaking with no identifiable accent. For example, listen to all the national news correspondents.

What type of accent do you hear?

None. Normally a news reporter doesn't even have an American regional accent. Many of the native English speakers take elocution lessons to learn how to speak without an accent. Consider the actor who plays the lead in the now-defunct television series, House. What kind of accent does he speak with? If you can't detect an identifiable accent, you're right.

But have you ever heard him on national talk shows? He speaks with a definitive English accent. Which is natural, since he was born in Oxford, English. He's only one of many actors and actresses who can slip in and out of accents seemingly with ease.

Granted, you may not hunger to be an actor and news reporting may not be your profession. Consider the typical business positions, though. Many of these require you to stand up and speak to a group of potential investors or clients or even your colleagues. As with the individual you initially hired you, they're trying not to prejudge you based solely on your accent.

If your accent is so thick that you're spending more time repeating and explaining yourself than concentrating on your method that doesn't forebode well. At this point, your thoughts may be turning negative. "Will I ever find a job at this rate?" you're asking yourself.

You've heard the saying before. "If you keep doing what you've always been doing, you're always going to get what you've always got."

Not eloquent. But true. So how does this pertain to you? Perhaps it's time to take the first steps to change that accent?

No, it won't be easy, even linguists admit this. Listen to what Dianne Markley, a professor at the University of North Texas at Denton, says about learning a second language later in life, like you did.

“It’s nearly impossible to speak any acquired later in life without an accent.” The kicker in this scenario is the research she’s unearthed in her academic research. There exists “an incredibly strong statistical correlation between judging someone as cultured, intelligent, and competent and placing them into prestigious jobs” based on the *lack of an accent.*

Many Americans are guilty of this when it comes to their fellow countrymen. While it’s not very popular to admit of late, you’d be astonished to discover what some northerners think of those who speak with a dialect normally associated with the south, especially with West Virginia and Kentucky. Or perhaps you wouldn’t.

Not Really a Conspiracy

Some people may view this as an intentional conspiracy or some subversive racist behavior. But Victor Arias, who is a manager partner a Heidrick and Struggles said that really isn’t the case. He’s involved in diversity practices for the executive search firm.

Instead, accents tend to trigger emotions in a subtle way. These emotions, he said, “may make a difference.” It’s clear he admits that “people “make judgments based on accents.”

This doesn’t mean this near-instant judgments are all negative, Arias added. But, this is where the idea of discrimination may appear. “Not only may someone with a Hispanic accent may be perceived as less educated,” he said. “An individual with a British accent may be seen as “more intelligent.” This occurs daily, despite the fact there’s absolutely nothing to base this judgment on except the opinion of the person listening.

But that’s only the tip of the iceberg. What if someone was interviewed for a job who spoke with an Asian accent? How would that affect his or her chances of winning the position?

Marley explains an Asian accept could be the edge that candidate needed if he or she were interviewing at a scientific or engineering firm. She concluded that these issues aren't set in stone. "They're all very situational."

Even the intensity of the accent triggers certain feelings. Arias readily admits that someone with only a slight accent may be seen by many "as more educated or worldly than someone with a thick accent."

He continues. "I've fallen for that," he said. He has heard both the thick and thin accent and made a rash judgment. He concluded the person's level of education based on hearing him talk and later admonished himself for jumping to that conclusion.

Before we go any further, let's get one thing straight. An accent is nothing more than a pattern of pronunciation. It's in no way a reflection of how well the person uses language. He may speak with a thick accent and speak impeccable English. Despite this, to the native speaker's ear, he may be perceived as an individual who cannot adequately fill the position for which he's applying.

No one is defending this behavior, especially those in charge of doing the hiring. Indeed, candidate – all candidates – should be chosen on their qualifications and only that. But that's not always the case.

Do you recall earlier in this chapter we asked if denying a person a position based on his accent were legal? Apparently it is. Marley uses the position of a customer service representative as a prime example. One of the prime requirements for this position, she explains, is that the candidate has excellent communication skills. An individual who could not be well understood over the phone could very well disrupt the flow of business.

Again, though, this is only the tip of the iceberg, Markley explains. When an employer denies a candidate the position as an excuse to discriminate against his national original, then that's definitely illegal. Take the case of two candidates for the same position. One candidate has a thick Hispanic accent;

the other possesses an equally thick French accent.

An employer can't choose the candidate with the French accent over the other based solely on his pattern of speech. That, in effect, would be discrimination.

As you can see, that when you interview for a job, regardless of how qualified you may be, you may be at the mercy of the person doing the hiring more so than an individual who speaks English as his first language.

Once again, we repeat. No one said that was fair. In fairness to those who do to the hiring, for the most part, these persons try hard to ignore these aspects. There's also much on the line for them as well. There's a lesson to be learned here for the person doing the hiring. He needs to be aware of the possibility of an unintended and certainly unconscious bias against those who speak with foreign accents.

But there are definitely lessons for those who speak with the accent to learn. Believe it or not, an accent does serve a purpose. One of the most important things it does is connect you and your family with a specific part of the world. In short, it's part of your heritage. Viewed from this perspective, an accent is not a negative thing.

Going for the Interview

Why, of course, you need to interview for your dream job despite your accent. You can't just wring your hands and complain, "Poor me!" You've already got enough stress working when you're job searching. When you do step into that office for the interview and the door closes behind you, keep these few simple rules in mind.

First, use your best grammar. That alone will set you apart from many of the candidates. Don't worry, your use of proper grammar practices will be heard above your accent, regardless of how strong you believe it is.

The second rule is to speak slowly. This allows your interviewer to process your words easier. Not only that, but it forces you to pay attention to your pronunciation. In many ways, you and the interviewer can reach a happy medium.

Whatever else you do, don’t get frustrated if you’re asked to repeat yourself. It’s not the end of the world. How you handle your language and accent under pressure like that has the potential to impress your potential employer. He or she may decide that based solely on your ability to remain calm under stress, you’re just the person they’re searching for.

But the best advice of all, comes from Carlos Soto, who in his capacity as president of the National Hispanic Corporate Council adds this piece of advice as well. “Prepare.” Prepare more than any other candidate.

Part of that preparation, he says is to practice your potential answers in English.

Of course, your accent shouldn’t make a difference in the hiring process. Unfortunately it does. That means you should do everything within your power to stack the odds in your favor.

In the next chapter, I suggest that the best starting place to speak more like a native is to understand and concentrate on changing where you put stress or emphasis in your words and sentences. This one step will help you in ways you couldn’t even imagine right now.

Chapter 2: Can you Hear That? Placing Stress on the Proper Syllables

It seems like such a subtle aspect – the syllables that Americans stress when speaking. Who would believe that this small point can distinguish a native speaker from one who isn't?

The fact is when you already have to learn the meanings of the words swirling around you and sentence structure and the crazy and not extremely constant rules of English grammar, you're already feeling overwhelmed. Worrying about which syllables to stress when speaking out loud is probably the last thing you're concerned about.

Now, though, you're a more advanced English speaker, so advanced that you're using the English language in many different settings. One of these setting is in your workplace. You now can take a breather because you're fluent in the language.

Your focus is on advancing in your career but, you realize that the biggest roadblock you're encountering is your "foreign accent." It's time to start learning what you can do to reduce that accent.

Your first step is to listen to native speakers with an ear toward which syllable is stressed when words contain more than one syllable. Though I'm a native speaker of English, I noticed the differences in this area when I talked with foreign students who learned British English overseas. I'll never forget the first word I heard from an instructor with an accent. The word was "distribute." As a native speaker I've naturally stressed the second syllable. This instructor though stressed the last syllable. This one subtle difference spoke volumes to me.

For some people reducing their accent this could easily mean just changing the syllable stressing of many of the words you're using. If you could do this – and only this — you may be taking a large stride toward eliminating your accent.

It's not Always the First

Probably the biggest mistake those who learn English as a second language make is assuming that Americans naturally – and always – place the spoken emphasis of a two-syllable word on the first syllable. That just isn't so.

Granted, the stressed first syllable occurs quite a bit in the English language, but it just doesn't show up in every single word.

Speak the following list of words out loud. Listen to yourself closely as you say them.

- Window
- Target
- Baby
- Auto

If you've said them as most Americans do, then the first syllable is emphasized. Take just a moment now and say them again, this time ensuring you're placing the stress on the first syllable of each word.

If you have a really good ear, you'll also hear that when you stress the first syllable the pitch of your voice lowers even while you're still speaking it. If you're near a friend you feel comfortable with right now, ask him or her to say these words while you listen attentively. You may even ask him to listen to you while you say these words. Get his feedback.

If you're having a difficult time conquering this, don't worry. In nearly every

other language in the world, the stressed syllable is normally pronounced with a rise in pitch. With enough attention to detail and enough practice, you'll soon be able to do this.

Words with Three or more Syllables

The other mistaken assumption many non-native English speakers make is assuming that all words are spoken emphasizing the first syllable. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Speak these words while emphasizing the underlined syllable

In tro *duce*

Dis ap *point*

En ter *tain*

I wish I can provide you with a quick and easy rule of thumb that makes it easy to recognize which multi-syllabic words are pronounced with a distinct stress pattern. Unfortunately, there are no rules. So it's a matter of listening, learning and repeating. Here again, the more you listen and repeat the words, the easier and more natural you'll become when speaking.

Noun versus Verb: Oh, the Stress!

That's all well and good you say. You can concentrate on that. But you also need to know that the syllable being emphasized depends, believe it or not, whether the word is being used as a noun or a verb within the sentence. In essence, how you pronounce the word is dependent on the context in which it's being used. Emphasizing the wrong syllable here also reveals your accent.

You've probably encountered more than your fair share of words that are used as both nouns and verbs. These words are spelled the same, but when used as a noun the stress falls on one syllable. When used as a verb, a different syllable

should be stressed. This is more than just a lesson in semantics. Placing the emphasis on the wrong syllable depending on its use actually gives the word an entirely different meaning.

As a rule of thumb, when the first syllable is emphasized you can be fairly confident the word is being used as a noun. If you detect the second syllable is emphasized then you can be relatively sure the word is being used as a verb. If you place the emphasis on the "wrong" syllable, then you may very well be changing the entire meaning of the word without knowing it. Listen to yourself closely as you say the following two sentences out loud. Better yet, if you have a native-English speaking friend recite these out loud. Listen to see if you can tell on which syllable the emphasis is placed.

Your *conduct* was outrageous.

Rick and Jane will *conduct* the meeting.

In the first sentence, the initial syllable of the word conduct is emphasized. In the second example the second syllable is stressed. Is there really a difference in meaning between the two pronunciations?

Indeed, there is. The noun means how a person acts. The verb means to take charge of or to direct a group of individuals. If you emphasize the wrong syllable of the word when you use it in a sentence, you may not only confuse yourself, but others as well. The following words are those that also fall into this category – two different ways of pronouncing the same word which gives that word two separate meanings.

- Contract
- Suspect
- Insert
- Subject
- Insert

Looking Within: the Sentence that is!

There’s yet another way to reduce your accent and sound more like a native speaker. That’s by knowing which words to stress within the sentence itself. Again, this is not just some silly rule, even though you may think so. The words you choose to emphasis in a sentence has the potential to change the meaning of the sentence.

When spoken, the English language indicates stress by pronouncing a word or a phrase either slightly louder or longer (or sometimes both). You may also be able to indicate emphasis within a sentence by changing your pitch of certain words.

You need to realize, though, that we aren’t talking about altering the stress of the syllables of the words. This requires simply changing the stress of the words in the sentence.

The following is a single sentence to give you an example of how changing the emphasis of one of the words in the sentence can give it a different connotation. Let’s use the following sentence as an example.

Rose bought a gorgeous outfit.

When you say this sentence with the word Rose emphasized, **Rose** bought a gorgeous outfit, you’re defining who did the buying. It was Rose, not Mary or Jan.

Rose **bought** a gorgeous outfit.

When you place the emphasis on the word bought, you’re making sure your listeners know that Rose purchased the dress, it was not given to her (or she stole it!).

If you’ve really never thought of this before, you may be a bit puzzled now.

While there are many rules in the English language and many exceptions as well, there is one dealing with the emphasis of words within sentences that you can usually follow with confidence.

For the most part, native speakers tend to emphasize content words, not the function words. Content words are readily recognizable: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. On the other hand, function words are those that are consider parts of speech articles, prepositions and conjunctions. The second category of words isn't usually emphasized since they're considered transition words.

As transition words, they don't carry the vital information the content words do.

Another way of emphasizing your speech which will help reduce your accent is studying the category of words known as compound words. This is a word created by placing two words with separate meanings together to form one word with a more specific meaning. Think of the word "bathtub."

In English the word bath is a noun with a meaning of its own and the word "tub" has a meaning and can be used in many situations. When you place these two words together, you get a specific meaning.

So which word do you stress within that compound word? Again, for the most part the first word of that compound word is emphasized. Below are just several compound words in which the first word is stressed. Read the list below out loud. Be sure to emphasize the first word when you read these:

- Thunderstorm
- Birthday
- Cupcake
- Toothbrush
- Earthquake

The sooner you start putting these rules on emphasis and stress into action, the

sooner you'll be on the road to reducing that accent.

Do you know what that means? The sooner you're on the road to opening new and exciting doors in your career. Knowing which syllables to emphasis when speaking is only part of the knowledge needed (and to be implemented). There are still a few hints that can carry you even farther in your quest to reduce your accent. The next section introduces you to these.

Syllables: Still More Secrets to Reveal

Shh! There are still two more secrets native English speakers know that you may not be aware of regarding proper emphasis on words. If you're not aware of these "secrets" you may find you'll never be spot on when it comes to sounding like a native.

Don't get upset. These native speakers aren't deliberating keeping these secrets from you. The truth is that they probably don't even know they exist. I venture to go one step further and claim they probably don't even know what they're doing. They couldn't reveal these secrets even if they wanted to.

We'll talk first about the "ing" sound you see at the end of many English words. When a word ends with a combination of these letters, it's safe to say the emphasis is not on the last syllable. For example, say the word "trying." You'll notice that only the first syllable is stressed. If you can't hear it when you speak it, ask someone else to say this word out loud and listen to it carefully.

Here's a word with even more syllable that follow this rule: demonstrating. Native English speakers only stress the first syllable. You'll find a similar pattern in the word *negotiating.* Only in this word, you'll stress the second syllable, the "go" sound.

This is a rule you can take to the bank. The only exception, of course, (Let's face it, this is English. You'd be disappointed if there weren't any exceptions.) refers to single-syllable words ending in the "ing" sound, like "sing," "fling," or "sting."

When Words End in “ion”

Here’s another fairly solid rule of pronunciation. It’s based in the “ion” that you’ve no doubt have come across. You can be sure that the stressed syllable isn’t the “ion” ending, rather it’s on the syllable directly before it. Even in pronouncing seemingly smaller words the rule still holds up. It works for the word, union, for example as well as the two-syllable word million.

Let’s look at the word negotiation. Even though the “ion” sound is pronounced differently (like “shun”), you’re still not emphasizing the “ion” sound. You are, however, stressing two other syllables in negotiation.

The next step in your accent reduction program is to learning how native speakers use the vowel sounds: a, e, i, o, and u. Follow me to the next chapter to discover how.

Chapter 3: Learning the Sounds of the Vowels

A, E, I, O, U.

This chapter explains in simple language how to properly pronounce the vowels in order to reduce your accent.

One of the very first aspects of the English language you learned, no doubt, was the differences in sounds between the consonants and vowels. The vowels, of course, are a, e, i, o, and u. How you develop the pronunciation of these five letters will determine your ability to speak like a native.

It would be great if I could tell you that those five vowels contain only five separate and distinct sounds. The truth is though, as you're well aware of, that's just not the truth. There's not only several pronunciations of each of those five vowels, but depending on what syllable you stress in a word, you'll discover yet one more variation of how to pronounce it.

If it sounds messy . . . well, it is. But at the same time, messy isn't quite the same thing as hard. And messy doesn't mean it's not worth tidying the mess up a bit and buckling down and learning and practicing the difference in the spoken word – especially when it's instrumental in losing your accent.

If you recall, we've already talked about how the stressed sounds of English are pronounced. Unlike many languages, those words or syllables that are stressed are, for the most part descend in pitch. You only have to pronounced the vowels to get a good idea of what I mean. Why not say them out loud (You're exempt from this suggestion if you're in a library or other quiet area. Then that suggestion is problematic.)

- A
- E
- I
- O
- U

As you say these out loud, listen closely to how each of these actually do descend in pitch. You could also ask a native speaker, whom you trust to say them out loud. Listen closely to see if you can detect a difference in your pronunciation from his. This might be a part of your accent reductio̲n program that you may need to hone to perfection.

As part of this process, you should also study some of the following sentences we've created to serve as examples and training your pronunciation of the spoken word. Keep in mind that all of the emphasized the sounds you voice should naturally be lowered in pitch. I've italicized the words which need emphasized and the pitch lowered.

Let's Start with A

Since it's the first letter of the alphabet it seems the logical place to start. The first thing you should know about this sound is that it actually takes two steps in order to pronounce it accurately.

You begin by pushing your tongue forward in the mouth and then as you're closing your jaw, you move the body of your tong upward until it almost reaches the tooth ridge. At the same time the sides of the tongue touch the top teeth as you finish enunciating the sound.

Here are a few sentences to get you started.

His secret is *safe* with me.

You, madam, are no *lady.*

Don’t you dare *take* advantage of me!

You’ll probably need a *safety* net if you insist on doing that.

This marks a big *change* for me.

Maybe she should *make* more cookies?

The pie crust needs to be *flaky.*

Maybe I should *name* the actress’ *age.*

EEK!: Listening to the Long E Sound

When you’re pronouncing the English long “e” sound properly, you’ll immediately notice the sound actually resonates slightly off your lower teeth, as a bright, sharp sound.

In order to pronounce this sound correctly, your tongue should be positioned toward the front of your mouth. In fact, the body of the tongue should be close to the tooth ridge. Ensure that the tongue is higher in the mouth than for the other vowel sounds. You’ll notice that this tongue position nearly automatically closes the jaw. The sides of your tongue should touch the top side teeth while you’re enunciating this vowel.

You can practice making this sound by repeating out loud any or all of the following sentences. The italicized words should be pronounced as a long “e” sound.

Keep the *keys.*

I don’t *need* to *read* it.

They are *meeting* by the oak *tree.*

It’s human nature to thirst for *freedom.*

She was *relieved* to *clean* the mess.

If you believe you're struggling with this sound, then ask a trusted friend to read these sentences out loud to you. You can pantomime the words while she's enunciating them or repeat them after her – or both.

In order to make the most progress, you may want to work in a "safe" environment – with a friend who's only concerned with your ultimate progress.

Listen to the Long I Sound

What exactly are you listening for? Technically, this sound is composed of two separate sounds that ends with a brief "y" sound. The first step in pronouncing this vowel is to place the tongue within the mouth so it touches the bottom side teeth.

Once you've learned that, then you close the jaw slightly, while the body of the tongue moves upward until it nearly touches the tooth ridge. Again, this position should remind you of the position of the "y" sound. The sides of the tongue, near the front, actually should touch inside of the top, side teeth.

You can hear the long "I" clearly in the following words: guy, invite, sign surprise, while, why. Here are some sentences below you can repeat saying as examples:

She's *trying* to do what is *right.*

Good *night,* sweet prince!

My mother never *liked* that *kind* of talk.

He's a *fine* man.

Look for a new *kind* of *society* to emerge.

Notice that some of these sentences contain more than one long "i" sound. You must pronounce each sound the same way. This is a sure method to temper

your accent and sound more like a native speaker.

As you begin practicing you'll probably need to consciously make an effort to pronounce them. You may want to start by repeating these sentences and others you find as you read or hear others talk. The more you use this sound, more comfortable you'll be with it. By the way, in the final chapter of this book are tips to help you put all these ideas into implementation as you work toward your goal.

Oh, No! The Long O Sound

Carefully notice the next time you say a word containing the long "o" vowel. When properly spoken your lips will form a "w" at the end of the word. If you ever find it necessary to seek a word with this sound in a dictionary, you may notice that the reference book even adds the "w" at the end of the pronunciation.

In order to perfect your enunciation of words containing this sound, practice reading out loud either while you're alone or with a native English speaker. You may even want to have your friend read out loud first and then you parrot enunciating his words.

The following sentences all contain at least one word with the long "o" vowel.

I *hope* to go *home* Saturday.

Jane *rowed* the *boat over* to us.

Fred called *home.*

He had *hoped* his parents would *loan* him the money.

The only way to master this sound is to repeat it – as much as possible. By now this advice shouldn't come as much of a surprise: enlist the help of a friend you can trust, or use the internet or television.

The key is to pause the recordings and repeat them. In this way, you can see how close you can sound to the native speaker as possible.

The Long U Sound

The long U sound may be difficult to notice in the written language, but you'll have no trouble identifying it when you hear it. If, however, you're having difficulty pronouncing it like a native speaker, take your time and try to follow these instructions.

Begin with your jaw mostly closed. At the same time, place the top of your tongue close to your tooth ridge. From here, the sound changes into the "oo" sound we've mentioned previously.

You'll form this by performing two acts, one closely behind the other. First, close the lips forming a small circle. Immediately after that, you're lowering the tip of your tongue while raising the back of the tongue.

It's difficult sometimes to recognize when to pronounce the long "u" simply by looking at the spelling of a word. The spelling varies greatly word by word.

The following list of sentence should help you recognize when the long "u" is spoken.

Of course, the best way to learn this is through repetition. Here's the list:

My *shoes* are dirty.

I've lost my *toothbrush.*

The same *rules* hold *true* for you, *too.*

He was *introduced* to the largest *opportunity* of his career.

The *community* restricted the developer's plan.

The plan failed to receive the *approval* of city council.

What's the *use?*

Should we really be *doing* this?

If you've been practicing the suggestions and hints found in the previous chapters, they you can be assured you're well on your way of reducing your accent. But, there are still more methods you can learn to eliminate your accent. One of the ways is to learn about the soft palate. It's possible you may have never heard of this portion of your mouth.

If you are familiar with it, it's now time to reveal how to use it properly in order to get you one step closer to your dream job. Follow me to the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Considering the Soft Palate

You probably have heard of the soft palate, even though you may not know exactly what it is or even where it's located.

In simplest terms, it's the delicate piece of cartilage located between the roof of the mouth and what's known as the uvula. That's the fleshy extension that hangs in the back of your mouth.

If you're curious enough, you can place your finger in your mouth, touch your top teeth, then reach back a bit more. Now, you should be able to touch the gum. Don't stop here, though. Continue to reach up and back, past the roof of your mouth. You'll notice it feels a bit wetter and softer, the further back you go.

Congratulations! You've found your soft palate. Now, forget you even have it. Well, almost forget. This portion of your anatomy is the key factor why your voice may sound "nasal" when you speak. That nasal sound, in turn, may be causing your accent to be heavier than it needs to be.

That's because the palate is responsible for separating the oral cavity from the nasal cavity.

When you lower the soft palate, you allow air to pass through the nose via the nasal cavity. This causes you speak with a nasality – or a distinct nasal sound. If, though, the soft palate, remains in the original position, in which it would separate the nasal cavity from the oral cavity, air is trapped. In simple terms, the air can't travel through the nose.

If not the nose, where?

Instead of going up the nose, the air goes up through your mouth. This means you're producing a sound that's not nasal – as not as strong a nasal sound as when the soft palate is lowered.

It only seems logical that enunciating weaker vowel sounds would have the sounds traveling up the back of the throat and closer to the nasal cavity. This adds to the nasality of the sounds. Stop and think for a moment, if you will, where your vocal folds are located: They are positioned toward the front, close to the bottom of the mouth and in the throat.

When this occurs you're producing a nasal-like quality when you speak. You're lowering the soft palate during the course of your talking.

The goal is to sound less nasal. In order to do this, you'll want to consciously not lower your soft palate when speaking.

The most efficient way to do this is by speaking more from your throat or at a minimum, speak from the lower part of your mouth. Make a conscious effort not to speak through the upper portion of your mouth.

When you try this, you may be confronted with an Irrefutable law of nature: It seems impossible to speak without moving your soft palate – at least a bit.

Limited Jaw Movement

Before you say "there's nothing I can do to reduce this," I'm going to say, "Yes, there is." When you're not moving your jaw much, you're enunciating less and producing weaker vowel sounds. This could be a large part of your nasal sound which, in turn, contributes to your accent.

Your goal should be to produce vowel sounds that are stronger. In order to do this, you'll need to enunciate more clearly. You'll discover you'll have to work

harder to produce the sound by moving your mouth and lips. In you do all of this, you'll be speaking with more definition. This may mean you'll need to adopt a slower speech pattern.

Speaking slowly general frustrates advanced English students like you. But be patient. It won't be something you'll need to do for a long time. Consider it a temporary trade off.

Another bone of contention for many individuals who speak English as a second language is that pesky "r" sound. Getting the pronunciation is a bit more difficult than many individuals believe. But it can be accomplished. Visit the next chapter to learn the way to do this.

Chapter 5: Learning about the “R” Sound: It’s Trickier than you Think

It’s called the hard “r” sound and it’s hard in more ways than one. In fact, this sound is even a bit difficult for many native English speakers to conquer. I mentioned in the introduction. I spent at least one year in speech therapy in an attempt to learn the proper pronunciation of that sound.

I eventually conquered the sound, but to this day, if I’m tired, I’ll mispronounce it.

Even though it may be tough, many instructors of English feel that the “r” sound is the “most important aspect of the American accent.” No pressure here, now is there, to get this right?

You might also be interested in knowing that the hard American “r” is actually the only “r” worldwide that is distinctly considered a true hard sound. Yes, the Irish sound “aaR” comes in a close second.

In order to make this sound correctly, you’ll move the tip of your tongue toward the back of your mouth, pointing it backwards and flex it.

The hard sound comes in three varieties: or, ar, and air.

We’ll tackle the “or” sound first. Keep in mind, though, that if you can pronounce one, you’ll eventually be able to pronounce all three. Just don’t get discouraged. You’ll also want to always keep in mind learning how to pronounce the “r” properly will go a long way toward reducing your accent.

Here are just a few examples of words with that “or” sound: floor, for, fork,

order, ordinary, force, and remorse.

Of course, this is English so you can bet your bottom dollar that there are exceptions to this variety of spelling. Just a few of these include word, worm work, world and worst. Another variety of pronunciation can be heard in English as well, which is the “ore” sound. A few good examples of these include before, restored, more and shore.

Surprisingly, the same sound is often found in words spelled with the letter “a.” Consider the words – all of these sounds, you’ll notice follow the letter “w.” These words include: swarm, war, warn, toward, and warrior.

Notice the difference, however, when the “e” follows the “war” sound as in warehouse, hardware and stare.

Yes, this can be a bit confusing. But as you study it more, it’ll become second nature to you. The following sentences will all have the hard “r” sound in at least word. If you practice, you will conquer it. Guaranteed.

He placed his *order* with his server.

This is a *world* of *disorder.*

Many interpretations were *explored* in this book.

The *four* of them were searching for the *fork.*

The building looked *ordinary.*

We have *restored* the *floor* to its original elegance.

The *corners* of his mouth twitched.

May the *force* be with you.

Checking out the "ar" Sound

The sound of "ar" is produced, for the most part, when the combination of "a" and "r" are spoken together with no "e." Some of these words are quite simple, including: car, bar, far, Mars, darn, large, dark, arm, smart and remark.

Just when you think you may have found a pattern, the fact that you're studying English hits you square in the face. Here are a few words that are exceptions to the rule: backward, toward and forward.

If all this weren't enough, it's time to throw in one more exception. Take a good look at the word "our." Technically, it would be pronounced so it sounds like the vowel sound in power. But Americans, more frequently pronounce it with the "ar" sound.

Here are a few sentences to help you learn to how to perfect this sound.

I'm going to *our* car.

That's *our* only chance to claim what's truly *ours.*

Our meeting starts shortly

He was tall, *dark,* and handsome.

The *art* of writing letters has nearly disappeared.

She *startled* the intruder.

He gave her *harsh* glance.

He's a member of the *armed* services.

Exploring the "Air" Sound

Now that you're busy studying those typically American hard "r" sounds, we're about to move on to a slightly different sound, but still well within the definition of a hard "r." That's the "air" sound.

You'll discover this is more often sounded out like "ar" when it's followed by an "e," "y," or "i." Say these words out loud, or better yet, ask a native English speaker say the following few words out loud to get a better of idea of what I mean: care, share, scare, scares, barely, marry, rare.

The sound of "air" may show up with other spellings as well, most noticeably "ere" and "ear." Look at the words, wear and swear. Ask a native speaker to pronounce them for you or listen to them on an online dictionary which offers correct pronunciation of its entries. Be careful, though, because there are two common exceptions to this that immediately come to mind: were and ear.

Confusing? You bet. But you'll probably want to study and practice a bit and even enlist the help of native English speaking friends. Listen to someone recite these sentences, then repeat them after him or her.

I don’t *care* what you think of me.

Do you know *where* Tony is?

I was *upstairs* most of the day.

I *swear* I don’t know *where* she is.

The trick to pronouncing and sound like a native is to remember that all hard “r” sounds are short. Don’t linger too long on that sound. Again, if you listen closely to native speakers, you’ll at least have an idea of the sound you should be making when speaking these words. Then you can tackle it for yourself.

Chapter 6: Conquering the “th” sound

Just when you think the English language couldn’t get much more confusing, we’re moving from the hard “r” sound to the “th” sound. This is another aspect of the English language that frequently even gives native speakers a difficult time.

While I was in speech therapy for the “r” sound, my best friend was going through the same instruction, only for the “th” sound.

But, while it may be – dare I say – “foreign” to you, you’ll soon be conquering the pronunciation of these two letters just as you have done with all the other tricky sounds we’ve thrown your way.

In this chapter, we’re going to talk about the two subtle, yet different sounds these two letters make depending on the words in which they’re included. Linguists refer to the two sounds as either “voiced” or “unvoiced.”

The voiced and unvoiced “th” sounds are the only pair that actually use the same spelling – which, you can undoubtedly guess, only adds to the confusion. This sound is also problematic, because to be truthful, most Americans probably can’t tell the difference most of the time. If we were to take the time to truly listen closely enough, we’d be able to detect. Before you’re done reading this chapter you’ll probably be able to tell the difference yourself. The next natural step then is to embrace the differences and conquer the sounds.

How to Pronounce these Sounds

As we mentioned the differences in sound are subtle. It should come as no surprise then that the way you pronounce them are also very much alike.

Below are the basic instructions on how to get started for either sound.

First, you position the tip of your tongue behind the top of your front teeth. This ensures that when you go to pronounce this, you'll have generate the friction necessary for proper enunciation. Keep your lips relaxed.

An Alternative Method

There's also a second way to pronouncing this sound. In this method, you'll position the tip of your tongue between your top and bottom front teeth. If you find yourself using this method, you may also discover it makes it difficult to shift quickly to other sounds.

The reason for this is that your tongue needs to be so far in front when its placed between your upper and lower front teeth. You may not consider this much of a distance, but your tongue doesn't have quite the agility to move swiftly, either.

Consider this: Continuous Consonants

The other hint that is helpful in learning to pronounce either the voiced or unvoiced "th" sound is that they are what is known as "continuous consonants." This means that you should, under ideal conditions, be able to hold these sounds for a few seconds. Not only should you be able to hold them, but do so with in an even and smooth enunciation for the entire time. No pressure here, right?

The second aspect of these sounds are they're known as "fricatives," which means most of the sound is derived from the friction produced from the air traveling through that small opening in the vocal tract.

Now that we've have the technicalities of pronouncing these words correctly, it's time to show you the subtle difference between the sounds of the voiced and unvoiced "th."

The Good News about the "the" Sound

After everything you've learned about the "voiced" and "unvoiced" "th" sound, you may be a bit surprised to learn that there is even a spark of good

news out there about it. Believe it or not, it's considered one of the most consistent sounds in the English language.

When you see the combination of letters together you can be sure that they are almost always pronounce it the same way. But English being what it is, does contain its exceptions in this sound as well. Consider, for example, the words, Thailand, Thomas and Thames all of which you'll pronounce with a "t" sound.

You'll also find that on occasion that the "th" is really a cluster of two consonants and you'll pronounce the "t" and "h" separately. This occurs most notably in compound words. Some of these include anthill, lightheaded, lighthouse and knighthood.

Examples of Voiced "th" Sounds

Here are few examples of the voiced "th" sounds. The voiced option can appear in any part of a word, the front, the middle or the end. I realize that makes it more difficult to recognize. In order to hear the difference and the proper pronunciation, as a native speaker to read these words to you: that, than they, though, themselves, therefore, therein, feather, together, bathing, father, mothing, clothing, weather, another, rather, soothing, tether, breathe, lathe. Seethe, loathe.

Just as with the voiced "th" sound, the unvoiced alternative can and does show up in any part of a word. The following is a list – of course, not complete – of the unvoiced "th" sound. Listen closely to a native speaker say these. Then try to imitate him or her as closely as you can.

They include: thorn, thin, think, thousand, thirsty, thief, thermometer, thaw, thread, thoughtful, three, thick, therapy, thimble, Thursday, bathtub, toothache, toothbrush, toothpaste, toothpick, marathon, python, healthy, truthful, wealthy, athlete, birthday, pathway, cloth, math, math, tooth, month, fifth, path, beneath, path, wreathe, broth, booth

Are You Making any of these Errors?

If the “th” sound is new to you, it may take some practice for you to learn the proper placement of your mouth, as well as listening to the correct sound. The good news is that while this is a difficult sound, there are a few ways that it’s sometimes pronounced by non-native speakers. If you can identify one of these ways, then you may find it easier to correct and even perfect your pronunciation.

For the most part, those who speak English as a second language stay within the appropriate sound category. They substitute the voiceless “t” or “s” sounds for the voiceless “th.” Similarly, they use the voiced “d” and “z” sounds for the voiced “th.” Here are just a few ways these can manifest in your accent.

Many individuals end up saying “mouse” when they’re trying to pronounce “mouth.” They say the word “tree” for the word “three.” They say “sink” for “think” and “bat” for “bath.” You’ll also hear the word “dare” for “there” and “ladder” for “lather.”

If this sounds like you, then you’re probably already working on this area. Don’t be too upset if the pronunciation doesn’t click with you immediately. Work on this area consistently and persistently. You’ll be pleasantly pleased – and mildly proud – at how quickly you’ll pick it up.

In the meantime, we’ll talk about another portion of the English language which may be giving you a difficult time: diphthongs. Don’t know what they are? You’re not alone. In the next time, you’ll discover what they are and how you can use them to speak like a native.

Chapter 7: Discovering Diphthongs

You say you've never heard of the word "diphthong" before? No problem.

Many native speakers have no idea what a diphthong is even though they use them every day. Probably many times throughout the day, in fact. The fact is that it's difficult to speak the English language without using diphthongs.

A diphthong is a single vowel sound that are composed of more than one vowel. It really is much easier to understand than you're thinking at this moment. This sound begins as one vowel sound and moves toward the next sound. When they're pronounced they are enunciated as one sound. Take the words coin for example. Your mouth begins as an "o" but as you form the "i" sound, it's pronounced as "oy."

Loud is also a good example of a diphthong. It, too, starts with an "o" sound, but then merges with the "u" to produce an "ow" sound that rhymes with "wow."

These two pronunciations stand in contrast to two vowels standing together in a word which retain their distinct vowel sounds. Words with these sounds are called monophthongs. The words violin, triage and chaos fall into this category. Notice that not only are the vowels are pronounced separately, but they also are split into separate syllables.

A Difference you can Feel

If you're unsure how you're pronouncing them, there is, believe it or not, a method you can use to test yourself. Place your index finger on both sides of your mouth. Next, say the short vowel sound of "a" (pronounced "ah"). Your

fingers shouldn’t move. Nothing happens. Why? Your fingers are motionless, because your mouth doesn’t move during this. You’ll discover this is the case with most of the vowel sounds.

This same test ends with different results when you pronounce the “oy,” and “ow” sounds. When you place one index finger on each side of your mouth and make those sounds, your mouth should move. In effect, your mouth moves from making the first vowel sound to the next to create this sound.

Curiously (and I certainly don’t mention this to confuse you), there are two other vowel sounds with actually pass the diphthong test. They aren’t vowel consonants, but free-standing vowels: the long “i” and “a” sounds. If you place your index fingers on the side of your mouth, you’ll discover that your mouth moves – because they are composed of two distinct sounds. Most linguists recognize these as diphthongs. Most reading teachers do not.

Here are a few of words that are pronounced as one sound, blending one vowel sound flawlessly into the other. This short list shows you the diphthong that is pronounced in the words, how and wow.

These include: cow, allow, owl, down, clown, drown, browser, browse, powder, proud, cloud, doubt, foul, noun, south, mouth, couch, found, around, amount, mountain, bounce, allowing, plowing, towel, bowel, hour, sour, flour.

The other diphthong we’ve mentioned is the “oy” sound as in the word boy. You’ll discover that there are many words with these sound, some with different spellings. Here is a partial list — and I do mean only a partial list: noise, voice, avoid, poison, join, point, foil, oil, spoil, exploit, toy, toying, annoy, employ, employing, employer oyster, destroyer.

Have I filled your head with enough rules and regulations – and exemptions to those same rules and regulations? Are you ready to say, “Enough!”

I have to admit you have enough material to master to take you along your

journey to sounding like a native English speaker. In the following chapter, I'm ready to show you how to put it all together. Go ahead! Take a deep breath before you go there. You deserve at least that.

Chapter 8: Putting it All Together

For some individuals the idea or reducing or eliminating their accent appears like an insurmountable hurdle. Just when you think you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, you encounter a person who's been speaking it as their second language longer than you've been alive. The person is still speaking with an accent. What gives?

If they haven't eliminated their accent by now, how could you ever hope to? First, stop thinking like this. You can and will reduce your accent as long as continue to pursue this goal. Of course, there are some more effective ways and not-so-effective ways. This chapter lists some of the most efficient methods of putting everything you've learned up to this point and literally "putting it all together."

1. Watch television shows

When I talk to individuals how have successfully shed their accent, they confess that watching TV played a major role. Wow! I thought that impressive. I had never really thought as this being a viable option until a variety of people, with different first languages, kept telling me how much watching television helped them.

Why would that be so?

First, watching television is a safe way of studying what the English language is all about. Not only do you get to hear how it's spoken naturally, but you can also sample the idioms used within a safe environment. If you don't understand a phrase or a word you can either literally write it down later to discover the meaning or ask someone later.

Secondly, you'll develop an ear for the nuanced accent of the speaker and how you may then repeat it. If you can, watch television shows already pre-recorded on DVDs, so you can listen to them time and again and immerse yourself in the language and especially the accent.

2. National Public Radio as a Model

Perhaps there is no better model for perfecting the pronunciation of the English language that National Public Radio better known NPR. Even native-speaking English speakers are in awe of the powers of speech the typical host and reporter has.

3. Shadowing

This technique is highly recommended if you're either in your beginning stages or for individuals, like yourself, who are already advanced students trying to speak with less of an accent in order to be better accepted at work or within your study group.

If you've never heard of it before, the concept is simple. While you're listening to someone or something, like a television show or a National Public Radio broadcast, try to repeat – technically to shadow – what you've just heard. Do this as quickly as you can. By this, I mean to repeat it sentence by sentence. It doesn't matter if you repeat the entire story. The goal is to pick a sentence, repeat it. Then as soon as you have done that, repeat the next sentence you hear. t is one of the most beneficial ways to learn.

The only addition to this technique is to be walking swiftly while you're doing this. I wish I could answer why the walking and talking – when taken together work so well, but I can't. Many experts believe it may have some relation to receiving more oxygenation helps you to learn.

As a professional attempting to boost his ability to sound like a native speaker, you're probably ready just to jump in at the advanced shadowing. You can

shadow an audio recording of a book or even a news talk show while you walk. If you're reading – and you're careful – consider walking and reading. This is problematic at times. But if he stay in your home and walk from room to room where you're comfortable maneuvering, it works nicely.

Those who have used shadowing as a method of acquiring a more American accent when speaking English, say that while it's effective, it's also a tedious, difficult method to accomplish.

I tell you this not to discourage you, but to warn you. The individual described shadowing as a "boring, grueling technique." He also said it was "about as much fun and as much work as weightlifting.

However painstaking this technique may be, he did offer this one bit of advice. Only perform shadowing one sentence at a time. Listen to the sentence; repeat the sentence. Listen to the sentence; repeat the sentence.

After all these caveats, he did admit that he didn't "know of any other effective way to reduce an accent with home study."

Keep in mind that reducing your accent may not always be easy, but if you remember all the reasons you're doing it – which may very well include a promotion or advancement in your career, you'll then realize the effort you exert is well worth.

4. What about Podcasts and YouTube?

There are primarily two ways you can put podcasts and YouTube to work for you in reducing your accent. The first is straightforward. Search the internet for podcasts and YouTube videos created specifically to give you advice on the topic. There are several good varieties. As you search, you'll discover the one that perfectly fits your needs.

The second method and is one frequently overlooked. Listen to a podcast or a YouTube video on a subject you enjoy. In this way, the subject matter will be able to keep your interest. Use these as a form of role modeling. Listen to them not only for content, but to immerse yourself in the English language. Imitate the way the native English-speaking participants talk.

Adopting a Role Model

This probably seems too simple to work. Many individuals have tried it and say that it works much better than they thought it would. This technique is just as it says. Select an individual who speaks English the way you would ideally like to. Be sure when you're searching for this "role model" that you select an individual you can trust.

Part of this exercise is that you're going to ask him or her to correct your English when he notices your accent getting heavier. Ask him if he'll work with you. Sometimes this means stopping an entire conversation and spending a few moments just working on a phrase or a word.

Your responsibility is to follow his instructions. Now you can see why you need to select an individual you can trust. Don't take offense when he corrects you, keeping in mind he's doing exactly what you asked of him.

The following chapter is all about reverse accent mimicry. This method, which is remarkably similar to the ones we've talked about in this chapter, actually takes the suggestions one step further.

To discover how more than one person has successfully reduced his accent using this remarkable imaginative method, all you need to do is to continue on to the next chapter.

Chapter 9: Reverse Accent Mimicry

Since your goal is to reduce your foreign accent, then you may want to explore the concept of *reverse accent mimicry.* It's not the simplest idea to understand, but it just may be an exercise that'll work for you. So I feel compelled to at least talk a bit about it.

The idea is that the quickest and easiest method of breaking through your accent and any pronunciation issues in your second language, in this case English, is by finding a person who speaks English as their first language and simply mimic their "accent" while you're speaking your own native language.

Think about it for a moment. When I first explored this concept, I had to allow the idea soak in for a while. In fact, when it was first explained to me, I wasn't even sure I fully understood the concept. But as I continued to explore the theory, it made sense to me.

In essence, you'll walk through four steps.

1. Find a "reverse model."

This is a person who speaks your native language with a thick accent based on the language you're attempting to conquer. Let's say your first language is French, but your goal is to speak flawless English. You're looking for someone who is comfortable speaking English but, still has his or her French accent.

I know right now, you're tempted to bail and move on to another chapter, but at this point stay with me, please.

2. Your goal is to mimic your model in your first language.

If you speak French, then ask this person to speak some in French. Don't just repeat what they say, mimic everything you notice in how they speak, down to their gestures. In a very real way parrot everything you can as well as you can about them when they speak.

If you're afraid you won't remember what your model is saying, then give him a monologue to read or a portion of a book to read. If it would make you feel more comfortable record a television show or watch one Netflix or Hulu. You can then just mimic these characters down to a tee.

3. Transition this mimicry into your second language.

The next step is to shift to mimicking this character or person, only this time in the second language. Yes, the language in which you're trying to reduce you accent. It's essential at this point that you keep everything as close to his "act" as possible. Don't change is animation, expression, pronunciation or even intonation. The only difference is that not you're speaking in the language you're learning – your second language. You'll discover that while you were mimicking your model, you almost subconsciously adopted much of the necessary native nuances of the language which are vital to learning a second language.

4. Finally, use one-on-one interaction with a speaker of your second language.

Preferably, you'll want this face-to-face time to be with a native English speaker. As you speak with him, you'll notice an immense reduction in your accent. Not only that, but you'll soon discover that others can hear it in your spoken word as well.

A friend of mine is a strong advocate of this method. His first language is English, but was trying hard to speak French like a native. Unfortunately, as he tells it his "carry-over English foreign accent" always got in the way. He explained that even though his French grammar and vocabulary were great, his listeners "often misunderstood me or asked me to repeat." Sound familiar?

He finally broke through that barrier, he told me, when he was in France watching the old movie Gigi, starring the legendary actor, Maurice Chevalier. The theater showed its original English version with French subtitles. After the movie was over, he began doing his impersonation of Chevalier, mimicking everything from gestures to the way he spoke English.

Without giving it a second thought, he was “effortlessly mimicking French prosodic melody and stress patterns,” as he explained it to me. He said what he heard as he did this was his speaking with exaggerated and tenser French speech patterns. Without even knowing it he was using the French intonation and pronunciation qualities that had been so difficult for him to acquire up until then.

Furthermore, he continued to tell me excitedly, that he suddenly had the ability to use “a whole cluster of salient spoken French intonation and pronunciation qualities” that had before somehow eluded him.

Reverse accent mimicry could be a unique and enjoyable, even playful, way to reduce your foreign accent quickly. At the very least, you can give it a try. If nothing else, you’ll have a good time. My bet is, though, that you’ll find, just as my friend did, it could be the “superhighway” to reducing your accent.

He even confessed to me: “I discovered that from that moment on, my accent problems were nearly gone.”

Give it a try. If it doesn’t work for you, that’s fine. But if it indeed does, then you’ve found the elusive “superhighway” to accent reduction. Congratulations.

The following chapter provides you with eight tips, tricks and techniques of squeezing in methods of accent reduction throughout your day. These are, for the most, part quick and easy.

The goal of these is to keep the need of accent reduction front and center in your consciousness. To discover these, simply continue reading to the next chapter.

Chapter: 10: 8 Secrets to Accent Reduction

If you're as serious about reducing your accent as I believe you are, then you're probably already implementing quite a few of the methods explained in the previous chapters. In addition to those, I'd like to share with you eight secrets of accent reduction that most individuals don't think to share with you. It's not that they're purposely keeping these tips, tricks and techniques from you. It's that they may have stumbled across them in their search for shortcuts to accent reduction.

Test out the following tips. If they work for you great!

1. The English language has a unique cadence.

Some have compare the cadence of English to that of jazz music. Think about how in that genre one note sometimes flows effortlessly into the other and how the intonation of the music changes at a moment's notice.

Many students, new to the English language, are naturally careful in their speech, fearful of making a mistake. They speak slowly and carefully with pauses between every word. This, for a native, is a telltale sign that English isn't your first language. So many English words are connected. Consider the phrase "How are you?" The first two words are said almost as if they were one.

Another good example of this is the phrase "got you." For some reason, native speakers string this together to make it sound like one word. On top of that, they also place a "tch" sound in there. In effect, it sounds more like "gotchya" than anything else.

The point is that if you deliberately separate every word you speak, you'll sound stilted and robotic. The next time hear someone speak English, pay attention to this aspect of the language.

2. Listen to audiobooks.

Without a doubt, this is one of the best ways to reduce your accent. Not only that, but it's a "safe" method. While you listen to these native speakers in the privacy of your car or home, you'll be able to get the feel for all the nuances that go into the English language. In effect, this secret trains your ear to actually "stop hearing with your accent," which can be critical to your ultimate success.

3. Detect when an "s" is really a "z."

What? There really are times in the English language that we write the word using the letter "s" but end up saying the word as if it were a "z." Go figure.

You'll find this occurs, more often than not, when the "s" is the final letter of the word. Knowing when to use the "z" sound and when not to will help you reduce your accent. Listed below are just a few words illustrating this example.

In the following words the final "s" sounds like a "z" when spoken: beds, cries, rays. The next three words end in the letter "s" and are pronounced as an "s": bells, hits, tacks.

4. Learn to detect "voiced" sounds from "unvoiced" ones.

Many consonants in the English language are only spoken as voiced. These include, "b," "d," "g," "l," "m," "n," "ng," "r," "v," "w," "y," and "z." Quite a long list, isn't it?

We've talked about this in regard to the "th" sound, which has a slight difference to its sound whether it's voiced or unvoiced. What we didn't mention, however, is the fact that there are a few others, including the "h," "k," "p," "t," "s."

Here's another way to tell whether the words below have a voiced or unvoiced consonant. Place your index and middle fingers at the hollow of your neck. The closer to the base of the neck you can put it, the more accurate you'll be at identifying the sound. If the sound is voiced, there'll be no vibration there. If you do feel a vibration then you'll know the sound is unvoiced.

In each pair of words, one is voiced and the other not. Practice distinguishing one from the other:

bad/bat	rod/rot
lab/lap	tab/tap
bag/back	beg/beck
bus/buzz	lace/laze

5. Record yourself speaking English.

Yes, record yourself, but don't stop there. Take a sentence or two and record yourself. Then play it back and write down what you said. Here's the catch, though, don't write it as it's correctly spelled. Transcribe it phonetically. Let's say you recorded yourself speaking the sentence: "I think the bed is too soft." What you hear when you transcribe this is "I dink da bet iss doo sof."

If that's what you hear, write it down. Look for errors. In this example we know the "th" sound came out as a "d" and the voiced sounded more like a voiceless "t." Additionally the "z" sound in the word is sounded more like an "s" and the final "t" in soft was actually dropped.

This is one of the best ways that you can evaluate yourself. Of course, the key is to keep using this method while at the same time listen to native speakers to help you overcome these errors.

6. Buy a Pronunciation Dictionary

This can be one of the most valuable things you can do. If you've never heard

of one before, it’s exactly what it sounds like. In addition to giving you the proper pronunciation, this type of dictionary also helps you with discover the proper stress and how to break the word into syllables.

You can find them in just about any bookstore. If you have trouble finding it, ask a clerk; she’ll know exactly what you mean. Some varieties of this dictionary may even come with an audio CD so you can easily listen to the correct pronunciations.

7. Practice, practice, practice.

Perhaps this secret isn’t quite what you expected. It will, however, make the difference between speaking with or without an accent. The fact is that unless you use the English language, you’ll never be able to speak it without your native accent. Give yourself time to learn the pronunciation. Don’t think that you’ll lose your accent overnight. If you practice, though, you will eventually speak more like a native.

This happens, if for no other reason, you’re practicing the correct placement and movement of your tongue.

8. Learn the art of message chunking

The art of what?

I can hear you ask that now. It’s called message chunking and it’s a habit many native English speakers have. To sound truly native, your delivery of English need to be broken into “clear and logical” breaks of words, commonly called chunks. These are often referred to as thought groups.

In English, an average thought group is approximately three to four words long. At the end of each of these thought groups, native English speakers insert a pause. It’s only a split second long, but if you listen close enough you can hear it. They’re called thought groups because they are a chunk of words that can stand alone and still make sense. They’re similar to a short portion of a much longer sentence. If you choose the wrong time to pause, like in the midst of one of these thought groups, you’ll discover your listeners have a difficult time following your train of thought.

Not only that, but within each of these chunks of thoughts, there should be a single word that takes on the main emphasis. This is the word that needs to be stressed or emphasized when you speak. It may take a while to discover

exactly where to stop to create these chunks of messages. With enough practice, though, you'll soon know nearly instinctively how to create effective and intelligent thought groups.

You may not think this is a big deal, but give it a try. You'll be surprised at how much your accent disappears.

Even if you only implement a few of these eight tips, you'll be making great strides in reducing your accent. When you put these tips together with the previous suggestions and directions found in all the other chapters, you've found a remarkable and nearly unbeatable road to sounding more like a native speaker of English daily.

Conclusion

Congratulations! You have learned the most important tools needed to effectively reduce your foreign language and make great strides in acquiring one that sounds more closely to a native English speaker.

Having said that, I'm sure you realize you probably haven't mastered any of these techniques – yet, that is! – nor do you sound like you have spoken English since the day you were born.

But, if you continue to study these, practice them on a daily basis and keep some of these tips, tricks and techniques in your consciousness, then you've taken some of the most important steps toward making it so.

If, prior to reading this book, you felt as if there were no hope for you in ever accomplishing this, then my sincere desire is that we've lifted your expectations that it really is possible to do so. You've heard many people from other countries talk fluently and flawlessly in English – without the accent. If they can do it, so can you.

You'll naturally want to re-read certain sections of this book, depending on what presents the most trouble for you. I encourage you to. In this way you can work on the most stubborn aspects you're encountering.

There are plenty of methods other than what I've just presented here. These, though, I've discovered are among the quickest and most relevant one. I'm quite sure you'll find more ways to do this than what I could list here. If so that's great. Just keep in mind that for the most part, you'll want to listen carefully to those who were raised with English as their first language.

If you're planning on being successful, you'll have to put yourself on the line at times and ask those native-speaking individuals you know to help you

overcome your accent. You'll discover that there are many people who would not only be glad to help you in your quest, but would probably be honored as well.

A Tedious Job

I've quoted one friend who described overcoming his accent as being as tedious and boring as lifting weights. For some that may be so. Keeping this in mind, try to meet this goal with a smile, knowing that in the end, all the effort and "weightlifting" is worth it. Because it is.

There's not a place or sentence in this book in which I've promised shedding your accent and adopting one closer to a native speaker of English would be easy. You, however, already knew that. If it were easy, you wouldn't need any guidebook.

So as much as you dream of waking up one day and waving a magic wand that allows you to speak perfect English accent-free, it's not going to happen that way. It will, however, occur and with less pain than you may think, when you develop the habit of speaking English and listening to native speakers on a daily basis.

Don't worry that you may not be able to learn it in person. Take your education whichever way works. By this I mean that the internet opens new vistas generations prior to us never had.

In previous generations, meeting native speaking individuals of a language was about the only way to shed your own accent. You had to be lucky enough to visit the country or happen to run into one in your country.

Today, you can turn on the television, cruise the internet, watch Netflix and so much more. Many of them, by the way, can be accomplished in a "safe" environment – one in which you needn't fear about anyone making light or teasing you about your accent.

It’s up to you to take advantage of these amazing methods as best you can.

Continue working toward your goal. The sky’s the limit.

Public Speaking Secrets for ESL

How To Deliver A Perfect Presentation For ESL Students

Whitney Nelson

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Introduction

Milosh knew one thing for sure: That making this presentation was essential to his eventual rise in the company. Okay, Milosh knew something else. He knew he wanted nothing more than to make a name in the company. He wanted a promotion and he wanted a pay raise. The presentation, scheduled for several weeks from now, was a large part of attaining his goals.

He sat down with his former English teacher and expressed his concerns. His main fear was that because he didn't speak English like a native, he faced a larger chance of failure.

When he confided his fears in his English teacher, he laughed. "Milosh, I'll be straight up with you," he said. You're one of the most talented students I've ever had. You'll give that presentation and nail it." "

But before parting, his teacher did speak a bit on the extra burdens that ESL students encounter when they're facing an audience. This information isn't meant to make you feel more inadequate, it's meant to encourage you to prepare. It's meant to emphasize the importance of proper preparation.

Ask any ESL student. They'll all tell you the same thing. Sure, native speakers may whine about stage fright and forgetting their presentation, but this situation is doubly as difficult for anyone who's speaking to a large audience in English as their second language.

It's only natural for it to be a bit more difficult, just a tad more problematic, a little more challenging. That doesn't mean it's impossible or, for that matter, you won't find it one of the more thrilling times of your life. For many, it truly is.

It might be more satisfying for the average ESL student because they've faced all the possible hurdles. They've seriously prepared for them and conquered them all. They discover two things. First, they've raised their self-confidence levels which help them realize that there are other goals they now could embrace.

Secondly, they do have a place in corporate America. They can communicate just as well as their native-speaking peers and they're ready to compete, anywhere and anytime.

ESL Students and Additional Presentation Concerns

Let's face it. Public speaking may strike fear and anxiety in those who are just beginning, regardless of what language they grew up speaking. When you add in a dash of fear based on culture shock and excessive concern about speaking the language well enough to be understood by a group of your peers and colleagues, even the best of students may be a bit intimidated.

According to some experts, the level of anxiety you'll experience is increased compared to native speakers. This makes sense to many since you're not only concerned about the writing and structure of your presentation, but you have additional apprehensions that a native speaker wouldn't have. For one thing, you may be wondering if your audience can understand you, given your accent.

Those students who learn through more visual means are those who seem to be more hesitant and more troubled when told they must present their findings to others. If this describes you, don't resign yourself to a mediocre presentation. Yes, you can give your audience an outstanding talk, opening it up to audience participation without breaking a sweat.

Even accounting for the potential of cultural indifferences, you can be more self-confident and in turn present a better talk than even your native speaking

counterpart.

How do I know? Because I see it occur every day. If even one ESL student can give not just a good presentation, but an excellent speech, then you can too. Keep that in mind.

Some call it Communication Anxiety

Just like with other students, you may be suffering from communication anxiety. How can you tell if your fear is unnaturally high and are in need of a bit more specialized and generalized practice before you stand in front of your audience?

Trust me, you'll know. You won't have to take any quizzes or ask anyone. If you feel unusually nervous, then do yourself a favor and begin to take the necessary steps to practice. And do it immediately.

In this way, you'll feel infinitely more comfortable with just the idea of giving the speech. You probably won't be feeling be totally fear-free, but you'll discover an underlying feeling of self-confidence you didn't possess before your practice.

How Can This Book Help You?

This book is your valuable companion as you're practicing for your next presentation in English. Regardless of what your native tongue is, you'll discover these universal suggestions, practice exercises and secrets you probably never knew existed to be of amazing help.

For example, in the first chapter, we've outlined the ***four major fears*** of any speaker whose first language is not English when they face the audience. In addition to the natural fears, we'll also tell you the first steps in overcoming them.

A large part of feeling confident when you walk to the podium and begin to talk is to be prepared. That's why many of the ideas and concepts in this book fall into this category.

Illustrating this idea is the second chapter, which will not only encourage you to practice your English prior to speaking in public, but provide you a few of the more successful methods others in your position have used successfully.

Chapter three speaks more generally to the equipment you need for a great presentation. Of course, these are undoubtedly the same tools any great speaker needs. But when you're fighting off an extra level of fear because you're speaking in your second language, it's even more important that you don't run into any technical or electronical problems that can shake your confidence. There are times when one unexpected hurdle can cast a pall over the rest of your speech – if you allow it. The more prepared you are and the more comfortable in operating you equipment, the smoother the presentation will flow.

Have you considered how to build a rapport with your audience? That's the topic of the following chapter. The best speakers know how to make the audience feel as if they're speaking specifically to them – that what they have to say was written just for them, in fact. In many ways, that's the truth.

Regardless of where your abilities lie on the English-speaking spectrum, believe me, your English is great if you're already making a presentation. Among other concepts you'll encounter in this portion of the book include speaking in simple terms and using clear prose. Accomplishing this may mean a bit of work on your part. You may have to break through some of the technical jargon or vocabulary of your area and make it sound more user-friendly to your audience.

The last thing you want is your listeners losing valuable information, not because they couldn't understand your English, but they couldn't understand the vocabulary of your area of interest.

Signposting is Essential

Chapter Six is all about signposting. If you can learn to help guide your listeners through your talk – even before you've gone into much detail – then you're making it that much easier for them to follow your train of thought regardless of your accent or your presentation.

Of course, the structure of your presentation and how you introduce your signposts depends on the purpose of your speech. You'll learn how to adjust these signposts for the ease, comfort and learning of your audience. They'll appreciate you for that.

The final chapter sums up public speaking when English isn't your first language with a series of tips, tricks and techniques that perhaps no one has thought to tell you. These are "secrets" of the trade, so to speak, that all the great speakers use. Learn as many of these as you can and practice them before your next presentation. When you do this, you'll discover how much smoother your speaking can be.

This small book, as comprehensive as it might be, will never, ever replace the "practice, practice, practice," necessary for you to make the greatest speech of your life. But if you conquer even a few of these techniques, polish up your abilities in a few of the others and embrace the ones that truly talk to you, you're well on your way to making yourself a great speaker. Someone, who in fact, will probably have more invitations to speak in his or her future.

Making the Most of this Book

The key to using this book and to being an effective and popular speaker is to not reading it just once, but making this book a go-to volume whenever you're faced with a speaking engagement. In this way, you can always be sure of brushing up on all the necessary components of public speaking for the ESL student.

Are you ready to prepare yourself for your next speaking assignment? Then I suggest you move on to the next chapter right now.

Chapter 1: Stage Fright Speaks in Every Language, but …

Milosh sat at the coffee shop staring at his cappuccino when his friend Raj saw him. Asking if he could sit with him, Raj commented that it looked as if he were deep in thought.

Milosh readily opened up. "English isn't your first language, Raj. You've spoken in public. Weren't you the least bit nervous?"

"But, of course, I was" he said quickly. "Are you scheduled to speak?"

"Yeah, and this is important. If I do a good job, I may be on the shortlist for the promotion at work. No pressure here, right?" He paused, took a sip of coffee and looked his friend in the eye, as if asking for advice. Finally he asked, "How do I survive this, let alone speak coherently enough to win that promotion?"

Have you found yourself in Milosh's position? Do you have nightmares about being in such a position? If you believe it's impossible to present a coherent, well-received public presentation while speaking your second language, English, think again.

You shouldn't be surprised if you experience stage fright when you're invited to speak before an audience – or even to give a presentation to a small group of individuals at work.

Even individuals who have spoken English all their lives know what stage fright feels like. Of course, I understand this innate fear may very well be heightened when English is your second language. I agree, it feels as if that

one element throws an entirely new perspective on the event.

But that doesn't mean you can't conquer it. There are some easy ways to overcome stage fright – even when you're speaking in your second language.

In this chapter we investigate the reasons why you – speaking in your second language – may feel the bite of stage fright a bit more than native speakers. We'll even offer you methods that have worked for so many that reduce that fear as much as possible.

Broadly speaking, the fears are formed around five broad concerns.

Fear # 1 – I'm embarrassed by my foreign accent

Many individuals who speak English as a second language have that very same fear: What about my foreign accent? This fear not only includes a general embarrassment of your so-called accent, but the potentially devastating effects you mistakenly believe it may have on your presentation.

Let's get one thing straight right now, even the most polished speakers are sometimes misunderstood. I'm not only talking about those who speak English as a second language, but native American speakers can easily be misunderstood in their own language.

Right now, I'm sure you're not real concerned about those whose first language is English. But what if I told you that even one of the most famous non-native English speakers have been misunderstood when giving a presentation.

Even the Dalai Lama can be Misunderstood

Who? The Dalai Lama. Yes, the Tibetan leader was speaking at Brown University. The closed-caption transcriptionist mistook his saying the word

“forget” for another, albeit, rather offense swear word, also beginning with the letter “f.”

The context in which this happened appeared simple enough, at least on the surface. The great spiritual leader said that if his listeners had found his ideas thought-provoking, to please share them with others. If not, then they could simply “forget.” That’s not what the transcriptionist heard or typed.

It’s unlikely that such a mistake will happen to you. And should it does happen, you can at least take some solace in knowing it’s also happened to none other than the Dalai Lama. So now that we’ve tried to assuage your fears some, let’s emphasize that accents shouldn’t be embarrassing.

Many individuals will actually spend more time listening to you speak (as long as they can understand you) with your accent than without. There are always those persons who are enthralled listening to the intonation as well as the meaning of the words.

According to some, that wasn’t the first time audience members have mistaken his word “forget” for the other, less tolerated (and much less spiritual) word. Have you heard that he has given up talking in English in public? Absolutely not.

So, let’s just push that fear right out of your mind. Not that I’m discouraging you from taking measures to reduce your accent. If you feel that would make you a better public speaker, then the moment you know you need to make a public presentation, then by all means start practicing exercises that will help overcome your accent.

Fear #2: What if I can’t find the right English words for my topic.

This can be a fear you can simply drop in the trash. You’ll have absolutely no problems searching for the correct word as long as you keep on practicing your presentation.

This piece of news is nothing new, speakers have known about it for years. The more you've prepared your speech – in essence work with words – the easier the proper words will pop into your mind.

This doesn't' matter if your first language is Spanish or Italian. Practice the words that surround your area of interest. The more words you can use when you talk, the better your speech will be. While you're searching for one word using a thesaurus or other word will eventually be followed by even more words.

If you know your topic, chances are you won't forget words. Of course, if you do forget an occasional word, it's not the end of the world. Here, again, even native speakers forget words. Recover and move on. Just keep in mind while you're practicing for this event, that the better acquainted you are with your topic, the least likely you are to forget a word.

Many speakers – regardless of their first language – may forget a word or two simply because they're under stress. That's why practicing can help. It will lessen the stress on you, making it far less likely for you to forget a word here or there or even chunks of your presentation.

You can easily understand why adequate preparation can help relieve your stress and in turn make it easier for your mind to recall the words you need whether it's in your native language or not.

There are still two more tricks you can easily put into effect to help practically ensure that you don't forget a word or two. The first is through preparing the "vocabulary" that forms the majority of your presentation and rehearse it continuously. If you know that every topic has "most used" words and phrases, you'll be wise to study them and, specifically, say them out loud as often as you can.

The second trick is to place special emphasis and concentration on the start of your presentation. By this, I don't mean to emphasize the beginning of your speech to the exclusion of the rest of it. The very first few minutes of this

speech are critically important to your success. When you start off on the right foot, as they say, the better and easier it'll be for you to develop the rest of your topic.

By emphasizing the beginning of your presentation and nailing it, you'll also increase your self-confidence dramatically.

Fear # 3 – Is my English going to be easily Understood?

It's a natural fear that you believe that some individuals in the audience may not understand your English. If you speak with an accent, you're probably repeating yourself because people didn't quite grasp what you said the first time around.

But, once again (and I'm sure you're getting tired of me saying it) even some native speakers are tough to understand when they get to the podium to speak.

Your audience will find it much easier understanding you, when you structure your presentation properly, that is, in a logical progress. This ensures that those listening to the speech will be able to follow the flow of your presentation with ease. When it flows, your audience doesn't need to fumble around spending time thinking about how to piece your information together. That gives them more time to listen and comprehend you.

We'll talk more about structure in a later chapter. The way in which you structure your presentation depends on its goal. You'll prepare and structure your talk differently for different messages. This will help your audience in understanding you.

Secondly, much of what we call communication is simply the use of intonation of the language. Your audience is not only listening to what words you say, but also how you say them. A sure way to get their attention – and keep it – is to sound expressive as well as friendly.

Sounding “expressive” really shouldn’t be much of a problem. If you’re giving a presentation, it’s probably about a topic you’re at least interested in, if not passionate about. If you can convey your enthusiasm for the topic, then that will filter through to your audience and they’ll be enthusiastic too.

More than that, though, your intonation also reflects how your audience perceives the meaning of your words. The identical sentence, spoken with different emphases on different words, can and does take on different meanings.

Here’s a quick example of what I mean. Think of the sentence: “I’m sure he’ll think of a better plan.”

When no one word is stressed above any other it’s just a general statement. It carries no implications or connotations. Now, say that same sentence only emphasize the word “better.” This hints that that first plan was less than good.

If you say it emphasizing “he’ll” in the sentence, then that implies he is critical of the first plan and may not have even been the creator of it.

When the word “sure” is stressed then you’re expressing the fact that there is no doubt in your mind that he can think of a better plan.

As you can see, there are plenty of ways to interpret this sentence depending on the emphasis of your words. Every sentence you speak – especially in your presentation – can be taken and interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on your intonation.

Fear # 4 – I’m afraid my presentation will be boring because I speak too slowly

If this is your fear, you’ll be surprised to learn it’s really your strength. That’s right!

You're aware that it's natural for you to speak in your second language more slowly than you speak in your native tongue. But up to this point you may have considered it a weakness. At this very moment, it has now become a strength. Congratulations!

This is one area of using your developing language you don't have to worry about. Native speakers are constantly told to slow down when speaking in public. If there is one major criticism – especially those who aren't used to standing in front of the podium — it's they speak too fast. Their natural rapidity of speech is then exaggerated due to the stress they feel while they are speaking.

I have a friend whose first language is English. He'll practice his presentation, even timing it, ensuring it's just the right length. He doesn't go over his allotted time and he's provided time for questions and answers.

Do you know what happens when he actually gets in front of the audience? He shaves even more time off the presentation because he talks faster than he's ever done in his practice sessions. He speaks even faster because he's nervous.

When you're speaking in public, you can't use the same flow of words as in a normal, casual conversation. Why? Because your presentation (hopefully) contains new information for the audience to digest. They need the time. If they're still trying to process that last sentence you said while you've already covered three more sentences, you've lost them.

That's not fair to them – they aren't receiving all the information you want them to have – or to you. They're missing out on something important you want to convey and have been practicing. Speak too fast and it's a lose-lose situation for everyone.

The best speakers adjust the pace of their speech. By doing this, they ensue that their listeners totally understand what's being said.

The use of the subtle pauses in your speech also conveys certain meanings and adds emphasis to what you're saying. It works, in fact, very much like intonation does. Let's look at the words in this sentence, "If all of us do our share, we will succeed!"

Read it out loud. It could have any number of meanings when read with little enthusiasm and too quickly. Now see how the entire meaning of the sentence changes when you place pauses in all the right places. "If (pause) all of us (pause) do our share (pause) we will succeed!"

Can you see how the second sentence is stronger than the first?

Fear # 5 – Will I understand the audience's questions?

The question-and-answer portion of a speech generates the most fear for most individuals who speak English as a second language. Why? Because they feel as if they aren't in control. They feel they can't rehearse or prepare for potential questions.

Rest assured, that there are even professional speakers who present in their first language who are also intimidated by this portion of the presentation. Opening the floor up to questions is quite risky. You never know who's about to ask what kind of question.

There really are methods you can use to provide you with the self-confidence you need to get you through this portion of the event.

First, you need to convince your inner fear-monger that you really aren't walking into a lion's den unprepared. That's really the truth. You've undoubtedly prepared quite a while on this presentation. All you need to do is to spend just a little bit more time and anticipate – based on what you're talking about – the potential audience questions.

Take a good, long look at your topic. What parts of the speech are most likely to produce the most questions? This becomes fairly easy if you're presenting any controversial or new ideas. Right away, you can count on someone

challenging them or at the very least desiring to learn more about them.

Once you have identified these parts, then you can just about guess off the top of your head what questions you'll be asked. Secondly, keep in mind that you are the expert. Look at you. You're the individual standing at the podium. You're the person talking to the audience. That point should not be lost on you. Trust me, it's not lost on the audience. It means (in case you need reminding) that you know your material very well.

Simply put, if you've prepared every other part of your speech, then you'll be able to handle the question-and-answer session – even if English is your second language.

If your fear, as a speaker of English as a second language, is that you won't understand a question, here are a few strategies you can employ to buy you a bit more time before you answer.

Simply ask the audience member to repeat the question under the pretense that you didn't hear it.

Ask the questioner to clarify what he means. In this way, you'll have another chance to hear the question (from a different angle, perhaps) while you're planning your response.

This brings us to the final question in this part. What if, despite everything, you really don't know the answer to one of the questions? Don't panic. It happens to everyone. Simply admit you don't know the answer, that you've never been confronted with the question before this, but that you certainly would be happy to investigate it further. After all, you may decide to add, you're eager to know the answer as well.

In this chapter, we've talked about preparation as the key to gaining any confidence in public speaking. In the following chapter we'll provide you with a few of the keys to prepare yourself for your big day.

Chapter 2: Practice your English Before you're scheduled to Present

MIlosh sat at his favorite coffee shop reading his notes. His public speaking engagement was fast approaching and he wanted to be doubly sure that he was prepared.

Some of his friends chided him for taking the event so seriously. "Just relax and be yourself," they told him. "There is something called over-preparedness. You already know the material backward and forward, inside and out. What more can you do?"

Milosh, the wise man that he is, ignored this advice. No one needed to tell him he was an expert in his area. That aspect of his public speaking engagement gave him little concern. The part that kept him up at night, figuratively speaking, was the actual speaking.

You've probably have heard this particular advice over and over again. I'm betting you've been told this so much that its full implications may not even register with you much anymore.

It comes to you in two words: be confident. Not only will your friends and family tell you this, but go to any website on public speaking and they'll tell you the same thing. Self-confidence is the key to a speech well presented.

Unfortunately, few of these well-intended people and sites

actually tell you how you gain this self-confidence. Sure some of them start out by saying, “act as if” you already have it and it will eventually settle on your shoulder like a butterfly.

Excuse me, since I’ve never had a butterfly settle on my shoulder, I’m not sure I’m going to depend on this method. Sure, I can act as if, but I sure hope I have something else in my pocket to bolster my confidence.

What many people don’t tell you is that you need to be thoroughly prepared in order to gain that elusive self-confidence.

It’s true. The more you prepare, the more self-confidence you’ll gain. So instead of lecturing you on the fact that you should have self-confidence, like it’s a commodity you can go to the corner store and buy off the shelf, I’m going to provide you with a few tips on how you can thoroughly prepare for your public speaking engagement. If you follow and practice these even occasionally, you’ll find your self-confidence about talking in your second language grow.

No Time Like the Present.

This is a politely subtle way of saying “this is not a time to procrastinate.”

Indeed, it isn’t. When should you start preparing for your

engagement? If your answer is the moment you're assigned or invited, then you get a gold star. You're absolutely right.

Waiting till the last minute to prepare a speech may work for some people. But it seldom works for those who are presenting in a second language. Allow yourself as much time as possible to prepare.

In fact, it isn't that outrageous of an idea to give yourself an extra week – even two – if you can to focus on this presentation.

Don't Trust Your Memory to Speak Off the Cuff

You may have notice that some individuals have the talent of speaking extemporaneously. Just jumping off on the spur of the notice and presenting a perfectly structured, finely delivered speech. Or so it may seem so to the audience.

It's true. Some individuals can do this, but more often than not, somewhere along the line, these people have been planning this moment. Sure, they probably weren't scheduled, but in their minds they've probably rehearsed what they would say if they ever got the chance to speak.

Not only that, but they've probably been practicing their English skills as well, in hopes of one day being able to speak in this manner. What appears to be unplanned and off the cuff was probably months in the making.

Write the Speech Out in English.

No, you won’t read your speech from your notes, but there are so many advantages to writing it out. First and foremost, the simple act of writing it out will clarify your thoughts.

If you opt to write it in your native language and translate it, you may find that, upon translation, may lead to improper sentence structure as well as some poor phrasing.

Read Your Speech Out Loud

Once you’ve written your speech, then it’s time to read it out loud. This will help you feel more comfortable with the pronunciation of words that may give you a difficult time. This also is valuable in listening to the proper sentence structure of these ideas in English.

And by the way, read it more than once. Reading it more than once provides you with the familiarity you’ll need in order to give a first-class, professional style. But more than that, this form of preparedness will give you the confidence you probably never knew you had.

Create a Set of Notes based on your Speech.

Yes. You read that correctly. Once you’ve written the speech out and read it a few times, then you’ll want to take notes on it. These don’t have to be extensive notes. They can be fairly simple – enough even to give you a hint of where you’re going next in the presentation. If you even create an outline, you’ll find this to be of great help. These notes should not be written out in full sentences as much as you think that method would be better.

Instead, the purpose of these notes is to help you keep track of where you are in your presentation as well as where you’re headed. If you write out full

sentences instead, you may discover this method awkward when you consult them.

Practice Presenting your Speech

Did you really think I would neglect to tell you this? This is one of the most important steps to preparedness. In fact, the ultimate practice session is to give this presentation to a native-speaking friend or two.

This may go without saying, but I'll say it anyway, the more often you can give these practice presentations, the better your presentation will be. In turn, you'll find yourself gaining self-confidence not only in your trial runs, but when you eventually stand in front of that audience.

There is a key to this suggestion, though. Many individuals read their speech in front of friends and family who tell them how great it is. Before your trial run, explain to your "beta listeners" that you want feedback – honest feedback.

Of course, we all want positive feedback, but not at the expense of the quality of our speech. Explain to your listeners that you want – indeed – need their honest criticism. Promise them you won't take it personally. Then, don't take it personally. Instead, think about the reason for constructive criticism for what it's meant to be– a means to make you a better speaker in English.

Record your Presentation during your Practice Sessions

This is critical in truly learning how you sound when you speak in public. Your first thought upon hearing this is to simply record your voice. Give consideration, though, to actually video-taping yourself as well. When you do this, you may find your body language is less than inviting. Or it could be that your body language or posture doesn't match with what you're saying.

You'll also discover when you do this, you may become your worse critic. Take your own criticism with a grain of salt. Sure, you may never get to the level of perfection that you desire, but that doesn't mean you should give up. It may just mean, for one thing, that you're expecting a bit too much from yourself at the moment.

Remember, too, that you've started earlier in preparing than most people just because you know it's going to take you a bit longer to get yourself to the point where you're satisfied.

Reverse Accent Mimicry

Many speakers who present in their second language tend to worry about their accent. English has a few sounds which no other language has – perhaps some of these sounds are new to you. On top of that, though, when you speak English you may become confused by the stress or emphasis of syllables within the words. This is exactly where reverse accent mimicry can help you overcome these hurdles that so many ESL students seem to stumble over.

It could be that right now, knowing you have a speaking engagement in your future, you're concerned about how your listeners will accept and understand your accent.

The concept behind this practice is easy enough. The method simply involves analyzing an English speaker who has a strong English accent speaking in your language. If Spanish is your first language, for example, then you're o searching for someone who speaks Spanish with a thick American accent.

What you're going to do is to speak your native language, in this case, Spanish, as your model is speaking it. Be sure to imitate everything – and I mean everything – the person is saying and how he is saying it. Incorporate all his "mistakes" from difficulties in pronunciation to the grammar issues and the structural difficulties.

The problems that this person has when speaking your language, can reversibly reflect the problems that you will have when speaking English.

When you do this, you'll discover, much to your surprise, that this is a quantum leap in perfecting your own English pronunciation and reducing your accent.

Practice. Record, repeat. Review.

Ask any language instructor. The best way to become fluent in a language is to use it – as often as possible. So it should come as no surprise to learn that by reading your presentation out loud, recording it, then listening to is one of the quickest and easiest ways to become proficient at delivering your speech.

Not only that, but the instructions for doing so, are as simple reading the instructions on a bottle of shampoo: lather, rinse, repeat. In this case, practice, record, repeat, and review. You've no doubt taken more than enough courses in the English language that these instructions are a well-worn mantra. But just because it isn't a creative approach to practicing for your big day, doesn't mean it's not an effective one. Because it certainly is. In fact, it's one of the most effective, despite its mundane and tedious application.

When you're using this method for your presentation, you simply record yourself reading or better yet, presenting it from your outline without notes – and then listen to the recording. While you should be critical, don't be overly so. Choose one or two areas you'd like to improve in initially and study these diligently. See how many items you can improve upon in the time you have.

Do this until your comfortable presenting your speech, not only the material itself and the outline, but also the intonation of your voice and the stress you place on the syllables of your words and the pauses among your words themselves.

Alternate your Practice Material

But you can take this form of rehearsal one step further. Because inevitably your presentation will become routine for you, alternate reading and repeating your speech with reading other materials. You may want to read a novel, using all the forms of emotion the author intended for the characters to possess.

Do everything you did with your speech, but just practice it with the book. This will keep you speaking English and not boring yourself or sliding into bad habits because you've read your material too many times. Choose a book you've been longing to read and this should keep your interest for a while. In fact, if you choose your reading material wisely, it won't seem the least bit tedious, it may even become a pleasure.

Of course, your selection of exactly what to read out loud and how you do this are only limited by your own imagination. Below are some materials as well as ways to institute this practice if reading novels get boring.

Are you a news hound or a political junkie? Then why not try reading a newspaper or even a web site devoted to news or politics. Select a story in a printed newspaper or magazine or one on a web site. Read it out loud recording yourself as you go along. Play the recording back, listening to yourself critically. Then record yourself again, searching for ways to improve your speaking.

Do this at least once a day once you've been assigned or committed yourself to the public speaking engagement. This is a form of rehearsal you can easily start even before you've written your speech simply by reading books, magazines, newspapers as well as web sites out loud.

Once you begin composing your speech, you then can record snippets of the speech, listen to yourself – and to the actual writing – and know how you sound and, as an added bonus, how well your speech is written.

If you've given yourself the two-week practice time as we've suggested earlier, you'll have plenty of time to correct any words that may be tripping you up. So, there's no need to get frustrated or worried.

Listen to Four Areas

As you listen with an ear to improve your speaking voice, there are four areas in particular that are critical. They're listed below:

Pronunciation and Enunciation

You may think that this goes without saying, but when you speak in public it's doubly important. For one thing, your first goal is to make it as easy as possible for your audience to understand – and not question – what you've just told them. This means that when you express yourself you place the emphasis on the proper syllable or syllables in the words. I've said it before and I'll say it again. You don't want your audience questioning what you said and entirely missing a chunk of vital information that follows.

Make sure you're not mumbling and that each and every word is pronounced clearly. When you are doing this correctly, you may feel as if your mouth is working overtime, exaggerating the movements of your jaw and lips. Don't worry about that. Record yourself. If your words sound clear when your listen to them, then you can rest assured your mouth isn't in any exaggerated position.

Projection

I know. I know. You're going to have a microphone to amplify your voice. You really don't need to worry about that. But you do – even with a microphone. When you learn how to project your voice, speaking from your diaphragm, then not only will you sound naturally louder but more authoritative as well.

This means, should any mishap occur with the electronics you will still be able to carry on. Not only that, when you speak louder, people automatically

assume you're more knowledgeable about a subject. Any doubts you may have in your own mind about them not taking you as seriously as you wish because of the way you speak English will vanish. And that's always a good thing!

Your use of inflection

You might not be able to provide a good definition off the top of your head of the word inflection, but you know it when you hear it. Let's just say you immediately recognize it when you don't hear inflection.

You've probably sat through enough college lectures in which the professors couldn't or felt they didn't need to utilize this tool. The result? Boring courses in which very few students learned much if anything at all! You were subjected to monotone speakers who had more than one student sleeping and many struggling to stay awake. That's not exactly the reaction you want from your audience, now is it?

Instead, you want to make your presentation as entertaining and engaging as possible. And before you say that it's impossible with your topic, think about the TED talks that have become increasingly popular thanks to YouTube and NPR or National Public Radio.

What does TED stand for? Technology, Entertainment and Design. Notice that the "E" stands for entertainment – not education. While it's a given your presentation will educate your audience, consider that in order to maintain their attention, it should also entertain. Part of the way in which to do this is through a vivid presentation. And that definitely involves the inflection of your voice.

Listening to your Cadence

You've no doubt heard the word cadence before as well. Sometimes it's used when individuals talk about the pace of soldiers walking together. While we're

talking words, the meaning is similar. When I mention cadence, I'm referring to the pace of your delivery. Just like you can bore your audience without using varying degrees of inflection, you can do the same with your cadence – or lack thereof.

Listen to your presentation paying strict attention to the speed of your delivery. Is every sentence spoken at the same pace? Is it excruciating slow or do you quicken the pace every now and then based on the emotion you're conveying and on the content of your presentation?

When you can slow what you say at critical points you want to emphasize and want the audience to truly comprehend, you can feel comfortable they've received the message. By the same token, if you're telling a story involved in your topic, you might want to speed your pace or cadence to indicate a higher degree of excitement. Again, this is where the TED talks are one of the best examples around of this.

Pauses

A well-defined pause is as important in a talk as the use of any other form of communication. Pauses, when positioned correctly, can build tension if you like (watch any television reality show to confirm this) and to allow your audience to really concentrate on what you've just said.

They're also critical if you've added humor into your speech. A well-timed pause will give your listeners the time to laugh without worrying that they're missing something you've just said.

Chapter 3: Don't Underestimate the Power of Visual Aids

The day of the presentation was fast approaching. Milosh had mixed emotions. He felt excited because he finally gets his chance to speak to his colleagues as well as his supervisors. This is his big break to show everyone how talented he is. He knows if he can performs well on this project his prospects of receiving the promotion he hungers for are greatly increased.

To ensure that the audience fully understands the points he's making, he had decided, upon the advice of a good and trusted friend, to use some equipment to help illustrate his points.

Have you ever heard the adage *a picture is worth a thousand words?*

I'm not sure exactly how many words a picture may actually take the place of, but it's certainly is a near instantaneous way of getting individuals to take notice of the issue at hand. Sometimes merely reciting statistics and stating summaries, while fine, don't drive the issue home like the same facts and figures in illustrated form, from bar graphs to pie charts to photos of economically poor conditions or even natural disasters.

Yes. I know technically this is not a matter of how well you speak the English language. At least on the surface. However, if you dig a bit deeper, below your understanding of the English vocabulary and below your accent, you'll find that equipment you can use to help illustrate your point are priceless.

If anyone in the audience is having difficulty following your speech, you can ensure that the problem will be lessened and most probably eliminated by illustrations. The success of these illustrations, though, are tied to several things. First, you've got to know what equipment is available to you.

Second, you need to know how to use them. I'll just give you a hint. This means learning how to use a PowerPoint presentation properly or slides expertly takes longer than one evening.

In other words, you'll want to start checking out the proper use of these wonderfully inventive and critically useful pieces of technology – perhaps several hours after you've learned about the scheduling of your opportunity. If you're not quite sure what technology, then this chapter gives you a heads up on the most popular and easiest to use aids.

If you're an old pro at using the gadgets, so much the better. You've already been convinced how powerful the addition of these visual aid media can be. If you're not particular familiar with them, then you may want to ask individuals who have used them. Get their opinions about these aids.

PowerPoint presentations

Without a doubt, a presentation which includes PowerPoint is one of the most engaging, most vital and helpful ways to illustrate ever invented. PowerPoint is a Microsoft software program that makes it easy to create attractive slides to help speakers like you illustrate and illuminate vital points to highlight their importance.

The key to this instantly recognizable electronic slide presentation is to keep any font size you're using large enough to be seen with ease the length of the room. In that way, these slides reinforce what you're already telling the audience.

Many use these to emphasize a point or to add to the content of the presentation through bullet-point summaries of sections of their speech. This is great, but you can do so much more with these as well, including photos of places or screen shots of computer pages. And definitely don't forget to use statistics and charts, as we've mentioned above.

- **Hand outs**

No, these aren’t particularly technically advanced. But they are still valuable, perhaps more than you can ever imagine. Why? Because the audience can take them home, study them and really learn from them.

Hard copies of pie and bar charts can be crucial to your presentations. Don’t dismiss this possibility.

I’ve attended many presentations and workshops and, unfortunately, don’t seem to receive enough of them.

Flip charts and markers

The old-fashioned paper flip chart is still marvelously priceless in some situations. If you’re like me, you have the habit of writing while you’re talking. In this way, your audience see the development of an idea or a project.

Flip charts are especially vital is you’re inviting the audience to join you in creating a mind map of an idea or concept. It’s also a great aid if you’re presenting your outline in the mind map form. Not only can you show your thought process clearly, you can use an occasional hand drawn illustration to emphasize an idea.

You may even discover that one day you’ll be brave and confident enough to use different colors on your flip chart.

You’ll be amazed how much more clearly your presentation will be received through merely using one of these alternatives, if appropriate. Keep in mind though that especially with any presentation involving computers, there’s always a chance that something could go wrong and you’ll find that it’s not available.

That’s the moment you’ll be thankful for the backup plan you’ve devised. If you have PowerPoint slides you think are essential, then make hard backup copies of these. If the computer can’t display them for whatever reason, simply pull out your hard copies. You’ll get points from your supervisors for not panicking and being extra prepared.

Not only that, but even if the Power point slides work flawlessly, you’ll have them stashed away and ready to pull out should you get any requests for them. Once again, you’re being perceived as prepared. We all know that perception is everything.

In the next chapter we embrace another technique professional speakers know that you may not how to build rapport with your audience.

In the following chapter, you’ll discover how to win an audience and have them rooting for your success. It’s so much easier than you ever thought possible.

Chapter 4: Build a Rapport with your Audience

Milosh felt prepared for his presentation. He had listened to himself more than several times, rehearsed his presentation as well as practicing it in the presence of friends who provided him with useful constructive criticism.

He felt his accent was less pronounced than ever before and in the process of writing his speech, he made sure he knew his topics jargon, but what he felt was even more important, able to translate that into an everyday language his audience could understand.

And he had gone the extra mile, as advised, to produce slides and back up handouts in case the computer plan failed or someone wanted hard copies to take away.

Yup! He felt thoroughly prepared. Then it happened. Someone asked him if he knew how vital it was to create a rapport with his listeners. He hadn't thought of that.

Even though Milosh had a moment of panic, he soon calmed himself down and did a bit of research of how to do that. He thought it was very fortunate he had started working on his presentation early enough to discover how to convince the audience to be on his side.

All the best professional motivational speakers know a tip that they all too often fail to share with other speakers who are beginning their speaking career.

Whether you're planning on making presentations a career or you're only

when speaking in public when pushed, it's a secret that you should learn right now: it's essential you learn how to build a rapport with your listeners.

Granted, this is essential for every speaker. But for those who speak English as a second language and those who may be speaking with an accent this is especially vital. This could mean the difference between gaining the acceptance of those listening to you or to have them sitting in front of you criticizing not only your every move, but also your every use of inflection.

There are basically seven easy ways you can build nearly an instant rapport with a audience – even if you feel they're a hostile group of people when you step on the stage or in front of the podium.

1. Be your own "warm up" act.

What do I mean by this? Talk to people before your presentation begins. This may mean walking through the aisle, if you're located in a larger auditorium type space or if the group is smaller sitting around with them chatting with a cup of coffee or tea in your hand.

Either way, breaking the ice, so to speak, before you begin your talk really does work wonders when you're a presenter.

This works for those who speak English as their first language, but it also is vitally important if English is your second language. It gives your audience a "preview" of your accent and how to pronounce your words. While you chatting, they'll be processing – whether they realize it or not – the way you speak.

During your "warm up act" your audience is also getting to know you better, not only personally but also gauging your professional expertise. It's more difficult to be hyper critical of someone they already have made some conversation with than some who's standing in silence or pacing with worry.

2. Ensure your speech and your intentions promote your audience's best interests – and not yours.

If this sentence is a bit vague or fuzzy when you first hear it, but if you allow the meaning to sink in for a moment or two, that light bulb above your head will switch on.

We both know that this presentation is vital to your future. But have you ever stopped to think why these individuals are listening to you? Perhaps this very information you have is vital to them? Have you ever thought they're attending today to improve their future, guarantee their promotion?

If you haven't, think about it. Then do everything in your power to help them understand and digest this material and make it their own. They will be grateful to you.

In other words, you can have two choices once you stand up there and start presenting your material. You can either use this time to "sell" them on some topic or you can view your talk as an opportunity to serve them.

Believe it or not, your audience will recognize the difference immediately. They'll know once you start talking whether you're sincere in "serving" them or you're just paying lip service to that idea. On the other hand, your listeners are no doubt sophisticated enough to know when some is only out to sell them something, whether they need it or not.

How do you want to be remembered? As someone who helped another along their own path, or the individual who tried to hard-sell them?

3. Look audience members in the eye.

If you're fearful of standing at the podium and talking to your audience, you may be tempted to look at the wall behind your audience. I did this at one time. I had hoped the audience would think I was looking at them. In reality I

was only fooling myself.

You really need to take the bull by the horns – or in this case the stage fright by the fear – and look your audience in the eye. By this, I don't mean a quick glance stage right and then a quick glance stage left.

No, choose someone seated in front of you and look him or her straight in the eye. Do this for a few moments, perhaps while you're making a specific or important point, then move on to another individual.

This isn't as easy as it sounds. As you do this you'll also have to know where you are in your presentation. If you're following a mind-map outline you've already revealed for your audience's viewing it becomes easier. You're far less likely to lose your place in your speech.

Eye contact is vital to building a quick rapport. Give it a try. Not only will you audience feel it, and be more willing to forgive you for any deviations in your speaking that results from your accent or your searching for the right word. But, you'll also feel it nearly immediately and you'll feel much more at ease.

4. Approach your topic from your audience's perspective

This tip it's vastly similar to the previous one about "serving" your audience. Of course, your immediate, personal goal is to get through with this presentation in one piece. And hopefully in a manner that may even put you on a short list for a promotion or help your standing at work.

But your long-terms is it to address the concerns of your listeners. If you're all colleagues and you're working on a project, then you know either intuitively or because you've talked to them individually about this topic, exactly what their concerns are.

If you're speaking before a group of people with whom you're not familiar, then you're probably presenting materials we all grapple with. Show them you understand exactly what they're going through. They'll appreciate your concern and your ability to help them deal with these concerns.

5. Avoid using language that may offend your audience.

This may seem like a no-brainer. However, as a student of English as a second language there still may be a few words that trip you up. Some words can be taken the wrong way, some of which may be sexually or racially charged.

This is why it's extremely important for you to have someone you trust listen to your presentation. If they don't say anything about double-entendres embedded in your presentation, then ask them outright. Better to double check your wording than to make a major faux pas.

6. Interweave stories throughout your presentation.

Humans, it seems love to listen to stories and storytellers. I believe it's somehow embedded through our DNA. You'll build a lasting rapport with your audience that will bond you. But more than that, the audience will remember what you've said and it's important because you've linked it with a story they're able to relate to.

7. Be sure your body language says what you intend it to say

Always keep in mind that as the person who is informing your audience, you are the established authority in their eyes. This is true whether it's a group of strangers that you're speaking to and you're not sure of the level of their understanding or if you're giving a presentation to your supervisors.

You might not believe the latter statement, but it's true. At this moment you probably have more current information regarding the subject than your supervisor has. Otherwise, he would be the person giving the presentation.

This means that, first and foremost, your posture needs to speak volumes about you. You need to stand or sit so you have an immediate command presence in the room. You've probably already figured out slouching, legs crossed and other positions which say "I really don't care" are not appropriate at this time.

Additionally, your audience immediately believes, upon seeing this, that you aren't being sincere with them. When that happens, they will no longer accept your or maybe even listen to it any more.

Not quite sure what your body is saying about you? Then have a friend (one you can trust, of course!) evaluate your body language. Sit or stand as you would giving the presentation. You can even do a dry run of the speech.

Here's an even better idea. Have someone record you while you're rehearsing your presentation. Then you study it. Are there areas in which your body language isn't conveying what you want it to? Could you stand taller or be more poised at places throughout the presentation?

After you view it once, take those movements you believe need polishing and do just that. Decide – perhaps again with a trusted friend – how you can convey confidence or authority in areas in which you seem lacking. Then once you believe you've conquered it record yourself again.

If that sounds like too much work, you may just want to stand in front of a mirror or position a wall mirror so you can view yourself.

In either case the idea is discover the best way to use body language to not only impress upon the audience that you're the authority, but that you're open and willing to connect with them as well.

It may seem like a tall order at the moment, but once you begin to practice, you'll see it's much simpler than it sounds.

If you follow these seven tips to building rapport with your audience, you'll discover that building a rapport with your audience is easier than you were led to believe. You'll also discover that the members of the audience will be rooting for you to succeed. And that's always a god feeling.

In the following chapter you're going to learn how easy it is to make the best use of your language – even if you're giving the talk in your second language, English. Follow me to the next chapter to learn these normally well-guarded secrets.

Chapter 5: Making the Best Use of your Language

Milosh sat once more in his favorite coffee shop deep in thought. His friend walked up to him placed his own coffee cup on the table and sat with him.

"Are you still concentrating on your presentation next week," the friend enquired of him.

When he nodded yes, the friend then asked.

"Is there anything I can do to help you? Anything you want to talk about?"

"My supervisor today," Milosh said, "gave me advice."

"That's great," his friend said enthusiastically. "What kind of advice was it?"

Milosh sighed deeply, answering, "Make the best use of your language?"

"That sounds like good advice," the friend agreed.

"It might be," Milosh conceded, "but I'm not quite sure what it means."

If you're like Milosh, and speak English as your second language it's doubly important that you make the best possible use of your language. There are a variety of ways in which to do this, only a few of which are outlined in this chapter.

Read this chapter over, think about the ways you can use your words to the best possible way – and then do what you believe will make your presentation that much clearer and understandable to your audience's ears.

Speak in Simple Terms

This is no time to show off a big vocabulary, as tempting as it might. Keep any terms referring to your area of expertise as simple as possible so they can be quickly and easily understood.

This is essential advice if English were your native language, but it becomes nothing less than crucial when you're addressing your listeners in a language other than your first.

Your goal as a student of English is to discover the most succinct words and strategically place them in your presentation so your audience automatically knows what you mean. It may mean you find yourself writing your talk more than once in order to select just the right word that denotes exactly what you mean.

Here's is a hint to remember when you're giving a formal presentation. The English language has, at minimum, two different vocabularies. One is the written vocabulary, where you can open yourself up to a wider range of large words.

The other language is our speaking vocabulary. Smaller, simple, easy to understand. This is the one that you ideally want to use when you're giving your presentation. The idea is that you want the audience to spend time on what you're saying not on trying to figure out the meaning of your words.

Clarity

Try not to beat around the bush. Say what you have to say in the fewest amount of terms. If you're not getting your message across, your audience will ask questions at the end of the presentation. If you feel you spent too much time at the end of your talk answering questions that seem to revolve around word use, then perhaps next time you should clarify your language more. The key to this is to file this experience away so you're better prepared for the next time.

You'll also need to take into account who is in your audience. Obviously, if you're presenting to a small group within or corporation who as familiar as you are with the topic, you can expect to sprinkle in some larger words and terms more specific to the industry without the need to explain.

If your audience is composed mostly of lay people who don't have a grasp of the industry jargon, then you'll want to explain events and important facts in smaller, more digestible terms.

The speed of your speech

We've talked about your cadence and pacing earlier in your presentation. This point is closely related. Did you know that the normal pace in giving a presentation – specifically one in which you're trying to persuade someone is between 140 and 160 words per minute?

If you speak any faster than that, you may appear glib and pushy. I knew one gentleman who had been trained as a used-car salesman. I knew it the moment he tried to persuade me to do something his way. His words would come out faster and faster.

It didn't take me long to recognize this. When he started to rev up his speech I simply stopped him and explained to him that nothing he had to say would convince me otherwise, so he could simply save his breath.

We also talked earlier that it was important to speak slowly. But here again, you need to be careful. If you speak too slowly, you may give the impression

that you're lecturing them, which in turn, implies that you're "better" than they are. That's not the vibrations you intend to give off at this time.

If you're not sure about how quickly or slowly you're speaking, there's a simple solution. Record yourself for a minute. At the end that minute, count the number of words you spoke. While you're listening to yourself, try to imagine how the audience would interpretation your speed. If you can get inside your listeners head even before you present your speech, you'll be a step ahead and preparing will be much easier.

But more than that, if you speak too slowly your audience will tend to drift off. Keep in mind that the average human ear and brain together can hear, compile and then decode more than 400 spoken words per minute.

The human ear and brain can compile and decode over 400 spoken words per minute, so if you are going too slow your listeners' minds are going to start to wander as the brains finds other ways to keep themselves occupied.

Using language to accommodate your audience is essential if you want them to truly understand and appreciate your presentation. If you don't find a way to write and give your speech in a manner that they can understand without sacrificing quality or meaning, then you're really just wasting your time and their time as well.

That would be a shame when, as this chapter shows you, it's so easy to ensure they know exactly what you're talking about and can, in turn, talk about it themselves.

In the following chapter, I'm going to provide you with several ways to help you and your audience know exactly what's coming next in the talk. It's as simple as using words either before or after (or both) a segment of your talk telling them what to expect. The use of what some individuals call transitional phrases and others call signposting.

Why wait any long trying to figure out what I mean, when you can turn to the chapter right now to begin using these terms and phrases. Not only that proper use of these words will give you a leg up on writing your speech as well.

Chapter 6: Signposting: The Best Kept Secret of Professional Speakers

There he sat, our friend Milosh, who was rewriting his speech. He had written it once already and after reading it out loud, knew something was wrong. But what?

His friend, Raj, agreed to meet him to discuss what was needed. "Nothing, really," Raj said.

Milosh looked at him, not quite believing him. Before he could say a word, though, Raj, explained. "All you really lack are some signposting phrases in order to point your audience in the right direction. Let me show you what I mean. We'll put some in and you'll hear the difference immediately.

Regardless of your first language, signposting is a secret that many professional speakers don't like to reveal to other less experienced speakers. As useful as it is when you're speaking to an audience in your first language, it becomes even more critical to use when English is your second language.

Signposting is surprisingly exactly what it sounds like. It provides your audience with the clues it needs when you're giving them quite a chunk of information at one time.

Using signpost language is nothing more than using certain words and phrases that clue the listener in to what is either about to occur in your speech or what you've just gone over.

It's a type of "heads up" to the audience. Those who speak with any type of

accent find this quite reassuring that that their message hasn't got lost in the midst of their accent.

To explain it in its simplest terms, the use of signposting language actually guides the audience through your presentation. One of the first things you need to know, though, is not use these words generously and to sprinkle them throughout your entire speech.

If you're not familiar with these words, then it's the perfect time to learn them and how to use them.

Start off in the Introduction

That's right! You'll want to start using these vital words in the introduction.

There are several ways you can alert your audience that you're about to tell them what you're talking about today. In introducing the topic and the specific aspects of it, here are popular phrases professional speakers use.

"The topic of my talk today is …"

"I'm going to talk to you today about …"

"My presentation today is concerned with …"

When you're standing up at the podium and you use these words, you'll practically be able to see people immediately paying closer attention to what you're saying. They know you're about to tell them the topic and thesis succinctly.

Giving your Audience an Overview of the Structure of

your Speech

The following signpost words are excellent indicators for your listeners. These phrases will help them know in what order you're tackling your topic. You're providing them with clues when you say things like:

"Today, I'm dividing this presentation into four distinct parts … "

"I'd like to make seven important points today that are vital … "

"Basically, I'm going to be talking about three things today …"

"My goal is for you to take three major points away with you today …"

"I'll simply start by saying …"

"First of all, I'd like to tell you …"

"Last of all … "

"The next topic we'll cover … "

"I would be remiss if I didn't mention …"

Finishing a Section

Before you move from one section to another, be sure your audience knows you're done talking about the first. That way there should be little doubt that

you've started to talk about another angle of your topic.

You don't need to do this transition with much fanfare. It could be as simple as saying:

"That covers what needs to be said about …"

"So far, we've looked at …"

When you start a new Section of your Presentation

In the same way that you've provided your audience with clues about where you're taking them in your presentation so far, you can let them know that they're about to start a new section within the speech.

Again this isn't difficult and doesn't take much time from talking about the vital facts. Your listeners will immediately know you're about to take a turn in the road when you prepare them with such phrases as:

We're now moving on to …"

"Let's turn our attention to …"

"Having said that, the next issue that needs covered is …"

Analyzing a specific point or providing recommendations

There comes a time in many presentations that you've made your argument or presented the evidence. Your next move then is to inform your audience what you feel it all means. Don't be shy about mentioning to them that they're about to learn what you believe is most important in all of this. They'll know exactly

where you're going with this when you use phrases like this …

"So, what does all of that mean?"

"Let's look at the evidence in a bit more detail."

"It's time to translate this information into terms that really matter to you …"

"Why would we even consider this all important?"

"The significance of all this data is …"

Providing the Listener with Examples

You'll also want them to have a few moments before you start dealing with specific examples in your speech. Examples are great ways of illustrating your point and in effect, bringing it to life. You can easily let your audience know you're about to do this through the following language:

"For example … "

"A good example of what we've just covered …"

"A good illustration of this principle …"

"To illustration this point, I'd …"

When it's Time To Conclude

Just as it’s important your audience knows when you’re taking certain turns in the road of your talk, you also need to give them a heads up when you’re getting prepared to conclude.

Before ending your speech, you’ll no doubt want to sum up what you’ve said, wrapping everything up in a nice package for them to take home with them. Below are some very effective reasons you’re about to do just that.

“To sum up … “

“Let’s summarize what we’ve talked about today”

“If I can just pull this all together for you …”

“I’d like to recap what we’ve covered …”

“I’d like to conclude briefly with these words …”

“Just to summarize what I’ve covered in this presentation …”

“Just a reminder to of the issues we’ve covered today …”

Paraphrasing your Presentation

Many of the most effective speakers not only summarize what they’ve covered in their talks, but clarify and paraphrase what they’ve talked about. Again, signposting in this section is easy enough by using transitional phrases such as:

“Simply stated …”

“In other words …”

“What I’m saying is …”

Introducing the question and answer segment

Your next step may very well be to welcome questions from the audience. There’s no reason to approach this in an awkward manner. You can easily slip into this section simply by using any of the following phrases:

“I’d be happy to answer any questions at this time.”

“I’m willing to take questions from the floor at this time.”

“Does anyone have any questions?”

“Please feel free to ask any questions you may have.”

“Can I answer any of your questions at this time?

These are just a few of the ways you can use signposting to help guide your audience. While many native speakers seem to know how to use these transition phrases naturally, sometimes those who speak English as a second language need reminding.

Not only that, if you’re fearful your audience isn’t following along due to your accent, this gives them a chance to catch up to you and reflect on what you’ve been saying.

In the next chapter, I offer you a few miscellaneous tips that every professional speaker knows in keeping their audience's attention, but seldom share with others. Read the next chapter to get a leg up on other speakers who give presentations in English when it's their second language. It'll ensure your presentation will be well received.

Chapter 7: Miscellaneous Tips

Four, three, two …

Milosh was on the final countdown of his formal presentation. He had everything aligned as best he could. His friend found him in his office muttering. When Raj realized Milosh was spending one or two last times reading over his presentation, Raj apologized. He explained he merely wanted to give Milosh this small pamphlet. It was called “Miscellaneous Tips all Speakers Must Know.”

“It’s never too late to take a look at a few more tips,” he said cheerily. “And good luck, I’ll be rooting for you.”

1. Breathe, Baby, Breathe!

Your first and natural response to this advice is probably, “Of course, I’m breathing! Thank goodness it’s one thing I don’t have to worry about.” Your body may always be breathing, but sometimes in times of distress you breathe a bit shallower than usual.

Many individuals find themselves standing in front of an audience about to present their speech in their second language, is a time of distress. It’s at this time you find yourself telling yourself exactly that, “breathe, baby, breathe.”

In fact, it’s exactly at this moment, you’ll need to remind yourself to breathe. So how do you do that?

Before you step in front of your audience, practice this short but effective relaxation technique.

First, stand still. Close your eyes. Envision yourself being suspended from the ceiling with nothing but a thin string holding you.

It's now that you want to actually listen to your breathing. Once you're concentrating on your breathing, then simply count to six while you're inhaling. Count another six breaths while you're exhaling.

If you find this relaxation exercise a bit much to envision – and many do – then instead see yourself on a relaxing beach in the sun. For just a moment, visualize how it would feel to be there. Now count your breaths as you breathe deeply. Six in and six out.

This should help you be more comfortable and in turn more confident in front of your audience.

2. Facing the Dreaded Question and Answer Period

Even speakers whose first language is English very often dread the final question and answer period of a talk. Part of it is the natural fear of the unknown. You, as the speaker, have no idea what kind of questions that may be thrown your way.

It's bad enough when you're concerned if you're going to be able to answer questions intelligently about the material itself. If English is your second language, there's a voice in the back of your mind asking yourself, "Will I be able to use the proper language in answering? Or worse yet, "Will I be able understand the terms my questioners present me?"

One way to circumvent this, at least for a few moments is to answer the question "provisionally." By this, I mean you can

answer the question off the top of your head, but explain to your audience you may revisit that answer again – especially if you discover a better way to phrase it.

If you've understand all the terms and are grappling with a way to answer the question in English you can stall at least momentarily simply by prefacing your answers.

Before giving an answer, use phrases like, "Off the top of my head … " or "The first thing that comes to mind is …" In this way your audience knows clearly that your answer is really just a first impression. It gives you a chance to think about it as you go along and change your mind without appearing like you don't know what you're talking about.

If you feel uncomfortable with these prefaces, try saying something a bit more nebulous such as "I'll check to see if this is really true, but …" You may even say, "I have the exact figures for that at my office or in my computer …" You may also offer to check it out and get back to them.

In this way you've not only provided a provisional answer but you've gone the extra step of checking out to ensure you've given the proper answer. Believe it or not, that goes a long way to establishing your credibility and your authority.

3. Discover the source of your fears.

As much as I've been saying, you still may not believe it. I'm

going to say it one more time, though. It’s natural to be nervous and even fearful before giving a presentation or talking in front of a group of people.

The ultimate source of most people’s fears are not related so much to the actual presentation as they are to the natural human fear of the unknown. Think about it, you’re not fearful of not knowing your topic. My goodness, you’re probably one of the most knowledgeable in your area of expertise. It’s more that nebulous fear you have that as you stand before that audience you may not be ready for every problem or situation that may occur.

Let’s face it, the truth of the matter is that when you do step up to the podium you have, in effect, relinquished control of your future – at least for the next hour or so. Anything, literally anything, could happen.

Before you present, ponder for a moment what exactly you’re afraid of. Are you afraid someone judging you when they hear your accent, or commenting rudely on your use of vocabulary?

You don’t want to step up to the microphone and allowing that fear grip you. Remember the adage, what you fear most comes to you. In order to perform at your best, you need, then, eliminate your fears. Change the way you think, the way you view your experience and you’ll be, in effect, changing the experience itself.

Believe it or not, your fear is something you can easily eliminate

and in the process, therefore, virtually assure that you'll succeed.

Here's an extra heads up about what audience is thinking. Overall, those people you're about to talk to really do want you to succeed. Trust me they didn't come to hear you talk with the thought, "Let's see how badly this person is going to do."

Here's another hint. If you are true to yourself and you can talk clearly about your subject matter, you've conquered at least three-quarters of you battle with fear. The rest is smooth sailing.

4. Use the wall push to help banish tension

There are many physical exercises you could use to ease your tension, especially right before you begin your talk. This is the same exercise that Yul Brynner used to ease his stage fright when he starred in "The King and I" on Broadway. If he could face down those theater critics with this technique, then it should work very well for you. Here is all you need to do:

Standing approximately eighteen inches from a wall, place your palms flat on it. Push against the wall. While you do this, your abdominal muscles will contract. When you inhale, be sure you hiss and contract the muscles located just below your rib cage. The overall effect should feel as if you were rowing a boat against the current. You only need to do this a few times and it'll actually banish your stage fright. Really!

5. Experiment – and Have Fun while you're Doing it.

"Impossible," Milosh protested. "How can I even imagine have fun? I'm practically scared to death."

And having fun is just the ticket to help to sweep that fear out of your mind. Instead of being so very serious, make up your mind that you're going to have fun with the audience.

You can do this by finding new, innovative ways to connect with your audience. You may want to trying taking a new approach to the material – one that will inject humor in the subject.

You may want to try walking into the audience and just wandering around to various places. Each time you do something different be present enough to gauge the audience's reaction. You'll know what they and you enjoy most.

Once you begin to enjoy yourself, you'll feel much less self-conscious about it. You'll find yourself being "in the moment" as they say and before you know it, both you and your listeners will be having a great time – and you'll be getting your message across.

6. Meditate before your presentation.

No, let's set the record straight right now. You do not have to be a monk or even the least bit spiritual to meditate. More business executives than ever before are meditating right now because

they've discovered that the time they spend stilling their minds actually is invested greater productivity and more concentration on their tasks at hand.

If they spend twenty minutes in meditation, they may gain at least twenty minutes, thirty or even sixty minutes or more throughout the day. Many executives now go on ten-day meditation retreat programs. You may think that after spending ten days out of the office (ideally total out of reach) that they would return to a mess.

It's true that there is work waiting for them, but they are so refreshed that they can take care of the work in record time.

In your case, even a few minutes – as little as five – sometime the night before or an hour before you present could mean the difference between quivering in your wingtips and sailing through a stress-free talk that everyone enjoys, especially you.

7. Answer questions as they arise.

That's right. Perhaps you've asked the audience to wait until you've finished the presentation to ask questions. But believe it or not, there are always a few people (like myself) who can't seem to wait until the end. Perhaps some of us are intuitive about what's coming up next so we ask questions in the middle of your talk.

Some speakers will politely push the question aside by saying "we'll get to that in a few moments." The best speakers however, will answer that question, even if they have to adjust

the talk accordingly.

Why? For one thing, they realize they have the attention of at least one person. And your talk has interested the person enough that he wants to engage with you. That’s awesome! It also deserves encouragement.

But there’s also another universal reason to do this. The best presentations should feel like a conversation, just a friendly chat between friends. When you stop the train of thought you’re on and answer the person’s questions you have the opportunity to create an atmosphere that approximates

If you happen to have a slide or other graphic that illustrates this then skip to that while you’re answering the question.

Most of the individuals are worried that especially since English is their second language they may get hopelessly lost if they divert from their intended outline, even a bit.

Don’t worry. If you’ve prepared you’ll have absolutely no fears of getting lost. I’m betting that this short detour will only gain the attention of the audience and help to increase your enthusiasm and your overall performance.

Never, ever ignore that chance to encourage interaction between you and your audience. That’s really the ultimate goal of your presentation.

Conclusion

Yes, speaking in public strikes fear in the hearts of most of us. In fact, if right now, you're feeling pangs of stage fright at the thought of your upcoming presentation, don't worry. It's normal.

How normal? Statistics show that almost three-quarters of the adult population in North America are afraid facing an audience. It's probably save to say – even though I have no hard statistics to back me up – that the majority of those individuals are native English speakers. So, if they are fearful, you too can expect to be a bit intimidated by what you're about to do.

Ironically, though that fear keeps few people from giving talks. It's amazing how many speeches are given each year by both professional, non-professional and indeed members of corporate America.

Just look around you. There's no dearth of presentations, talks and motivational speakers. That means that if all of these individuals have overcome their stage fright, you can too.

And one of the quickest way to help build your confidence as an individual who is presenting a talk in English is to ensure your English is as good as it can be. If you're confident in the way you speak, if you're confident that your accent is not blocking people from understanding your message and if you're confident that you know your material, then you'll be a huge success.

You may be thinking right about now, that's an overload of ducks to get in a row before the date of your present. Once you review what's being asked of

you and your own potential, then you're already on the road to recovery from stage fright.

I can't help you learn about your topic. That part is up to you. I have to presume that you're already an expert in your field and you have something important and eye-opening information to provide others.

What I can help you with is to aid in preparing your English language skills, from building a vocabulary to helping you reduce your accent. I'm hoping that this small book will help you in learning the nuances of the English language, how to pronounce words properly, provide the right inflection essential for entertaining and engaging speech making.

All you need to do is to choose the topics, tips and techniques you believe will do you the most good and begin practicing them. This implies that you can't wait till the night before to begin preparing for your big day. Give yourself as much time as you can.

Yes, I know that sometimes events like this are foisted upon you and you don't have the time you'd like to prepare. Whatever time you've been assigned for this event, take it. Embrace it. And use it to your advantage. If you have just learned today that you have a speech to deliver, then start today. Give this book a thorough reading. Put as much time into preparing today as you can. Continue daily to dedicating some effort to it.

In this way, your speech will remain upper most in your mind. Your efforts in refining your English will turn, much more quickly than you can ever imagine, will bear fruit.

But beyond the tips in this book, you must remember one thing: you have everything within you right this moment to succeed in your assignment. If you keep affirming that, then all your practice and effort will be even more effective than predicted.

As you practice your speech, refine your English and polish your presentation

skills, there are other small, but very important things, you can do. What do they include?

Think positively.

Never doubt for a minute that you will succeed. Your own confidence will reflect in your performance. Guaranteed.

Prepare.

That's what this book is all about. Whether you have two weeks, two days or two hours, take as much of this time as you can to prepare. Prepare your presentation. Prepare your English. Prepare your mindset.

Preview

After you've prepared, then preview what you're presenting. Pour your energy and positive thoughts into it.

Relax.

That's right. After you've done everything you possibly can think of – relax. It's not healthy to brood over a possible outcome in the future. Trust that it's all going to be well.

Enjoy.

If you've got to be at the podium giving a presentation, you might as well enjoy it. Remember at this moment, you're at the height of success in your career. Be proud of yourself. You've worked hard to get there. So take your time and enjoy the ride.

Smile.

As you're enjoying yourself, let your audience know that. Smile at them. They'll smile back. But even before you stand before that podium, smile while you're piecing your presentation together. Smile while you work. It may sound silly, but you'll see how much easier preparing can become.

Reward.

Don't forget to reward yourself. Reward yourself when you first discover you've been chosen to present your speech. Reward yourself as you reach your self-imposed milestones. Reward yourself when you've completed your preparation and practice and you're ready to stand in front of that podium to present.

As you complete each of your self-imposed milestones, try to find a creative way to give yourself a pat on the back. If you can afford to go and buy yourself something, then do it. If the budget says no to that, than take some time to yourself somehow. You and you alone know the best way to make yourself feel good. You're accomplishing something good here. Be sure you remind yourself of that.

Gratitude.

That's right! Be grateful that you've been given such an awesome opportunity as this. Be appreciative for the chance to hone your speaking skills in this amazing fashion. Be thankful that starting with this moment, every time you speak, you'll be stronger in your presentation skills, and most importantly, in your ability to speak English will be all that much stronger.

The Power of Not Caring

How To Regain Control When We Are Constantly Worrying About What Others Think Of Us

Grace Scott

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Introduction

It is important to understand why we care about what people think. The part of our mind that produces this fear is often in place to protect us. For example, if we don't care what others think then we might go out and murder everyone we hate or run through shopping malls completely naked.

The real reason why we care what people think is because we base our identity on everyone's judgments of us. It doesn't matter whether the judgment is positive or negative. Because we think that part of our identity is how people view us, then we must protect that so our identity is not affected.

Lao Tzu once wrote, "Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner."

At one point or another, we allow ourselves to become prisoners. We define our own limitations by thinking too much about people's perception of us. However, we simply cannot judge ourselves from the eyes of others.

Although it is true enough that there are some useful things you can pick up by listening to other people's feedback, thinking about these things too much may also become destructive. When you care too much, you will end up living your life in limbo. And that is nowhere near true living.

Caring too much about what others think, whether or not you realize it, is not helpful for your growth as a human being. You must care, but never to the point of sacrificing your own happiness just to get the approval of others. Ultimately, you should be in control of your own life. Do not let others dictate your path.

Why exactly do people care too much?

One of the main reasons is that we are afraid of being rejected. We cringe at the thought of disapproval. We ultimately want to belong and that makes us feel much better about ourselves. Another reason why we care too much is that we simply want to be viewed as important. This is why we seek positive attention, so we can be perceived as “normal” in society.

When does caring become problematic?

It is perfectly all right to consider other people’s opinions, but to live by them is plain wrong. A lot of people live their lives unhappily. They limit their lives and restrict their choices only to those that other people approve of. They live in the shadow of other people’s expectations, and end up not living their life at all.

Just be yourself.

This must be one of the most overused pieces of advice ever, but it does not make it any less true. Everything starts from within. Learn to accept yourself and others will follow, at least those who are worthy of being in your life.

It is very important that you get to know yourself first. Be your own person. Do not submit to other people’s opinions. Do not surrender yourself to their expectations. Meet your own standards and values, not theirs. Live on your own terms. Prioritize your goals. Use other people’s feedback as a point of reassessment.

Life is not a popularity contest. Some people will like you while others will

hate you for no reason at all. You cannot change that. However, you can change your life. You can choose to create your own destiny.

If you feel like you have been unhappy for a while, there may be something wrong with the way you are living your life. It is normal to be unsatisfied once in a while, but never always. If this is the case, it may be time to start asking who you are really living your life for. Are you living for your own purpose?

Chapter 1: Who Are You Living For?

Shake it off all you want, but it seems too difficult to simply stop caring about what other people think of us. We are social beings and it is only natural to consider other people in our lives, but when does it become too much?

Admit it or not, you care about what others think of you. People who declare they don't are more than likely just being pretentious. You cannot stop caring; it is in your nature. Yet it is absolutely wrong to live your life for others, to make your decisions based on other people's perceptions and expectations.

Are you caught in your parent's expectations?

John fell in love with art when he was old enough to scribble, but he belongs to a family of lawyers. Since the day he was born, his destiny has already been decided. He will be a lawyer like his brothers, his sister, his father, his grandfather, his uncles and the rest of his family. Although he wanted to study art and make art, he kept it to himself and decided to follow his parent's expectations of him.

It is quite typical for parents to want the best for their children. This is why they always try to influence their children's decisions in a genuine effort to keep them on the right track. It can be smothering, but they only want what is best for their kids. The question is: Are you one of those kids?

What role do your parents have to play in your choice of college? Are you pursuing good education based on their standards? Is it your dream you are chasing after, or is it theirs? While you may not want to disappoint your parents, you do have to stand up for yourself at some point. At the end of the

day, you will be living your own life, but are you willing to live it on their terms? Can you bear the thought of letting go of your dreams to pursue what they dream that you will become someday? Pleasing your parents is one thing, but living only to please them is wrong.

Are you making choices because of peer pressure?

Paul always hangs out with his buddies and he enjoys their company quite a lot, but as they grow older his friend's interests start to change. Paul is interested in girls too, but he is simply not quite there yet. He does not feel ready to be with a girl and there is no one in particular that interests him in their school. All of Paul's friends have a girl of their own now. He is the only one left in the group without one. Afraid that he will be labeled a loser, he randomly picks a girl to call his girlfriend.

Fitting in with a group of friends can feel absolutely wonderful. The sense of belonging can put more meaning in your life. It simply makes things more fun when you share it with other people outside your family. But there are times too, when you may be forced to do something just because you are afraid of falling out of the loop.

Young boys and girls especially chase after the opposite sex. When all their friends are with a significant other, they also feel the need to be with someone. They want to be able to relate to their friends. Ultimately, they want to be accepted. In this sense, having a boyfriend or girlfriend can seem like a competition. Just because your friends are in a relationship, you also feel the need to find or be in one, and this is not only true for young adults. It haunts even people of age, especially single individuals surrounded by friends who are in coupledom.

Who are you dressing up for?

Lizzie is in high school and she is quite lucky to hang out with the popular kids. All her friends wear the latest fashion trends, they shop every weekend and they only buy clothes from expensive boutiques. Although she may feel it is ridiculous to spend that much money on a dress, she does anyway. She simply wants to fit in, and she pays the price for popularity.

Fashion is an interesting subject matter. But when you put on clothes, whose style are you really wearing? Are you trying to express yourself or are you simply trying to make an impression? People should always make an effort to look presentable, but there is something wrong when you copy someone else's style and don't follow your own. When you shop, do you really want to go after designer and rather expensive clothing? Are you looking at the style rather than the price tag? When you wear your clothes, are you doing it to show off?

Are you a class clown?

Rob's parents are divorced. His dad, whom he is staying with, does not have a job and has a drinking problem. He does not want his friends from school to find out how pathetic his life is, so he tries to project a different image, far from the real one.

A positive disposition in life is encouraged, but people also say that the saddest people are the clowns. They always have a smile on their face but in reality, they only put on that smile in an effort to please others, to make other people happy and hide their own sadness.

Do you want to get fit for the sake of health or for some other reason?

Mary is not exactly obese but she is on the heavy side compared to her girlfriends who are just skin and bones. She feels she looks fat. She does not like her curves so she decides to save up enough money to undergo liposuction during the summer.

The call for health has become louder and louder. It seems that people are now much more conscious about their body. But when you diet, when you go to the gym or buy expensive products, or go through expensive treatments, are you doing it for yourself or are you simply worried about your body image?

Why do you want to lose weight? Is it because you are afraid of being called fat? Is it because all your friends are skinny? What's stopping you from leaving an abusive relationship? Why can you not quit your job? Why is it too difficult to move out of your comfort zone?

A Sense of Belonging Makes Us Feel Comfortable.

Somehow, being in a group, being accepted by family, relatives, friends, colleagues and even strangers is what most people live for even without realizing it. It feels much more comfortable not to go through rejection. But only aiming to be accepted cannot make you feel truly happy. It can only help you avoid fear and rejection.

Chapter 2: Are You a Lost Soul?

Studies indicate that people can benefit from what others think. That's because other people can see things in you which you may not be aware of. In this way, it is also helpful to acknowledge other people's opinion of you. However, everything should have a limit.

What is caring too much?

How can you tell if someone or some people are pulling your strings? It does not necessarily mean they command you to do things you may not exactly agree with. Sometimes or most of the time, we allow people around us to pull our strings. That said, below are the top 6 signs that you run the risk of getting lost; hints to warn you when you are caring way too much.

You are always concerned about what others may think or say about you.

You hesitate to share your good ideas when you are in a group.

You always feel the need to seek approval from others first.

You are afraid to speak up.

You hesitate to express an unpopular opinion.

You have spent so much money on clothes, jewelry, cars, houses and other material possessions because you think what or how much you own defines your worth.

What happens when you care too much?

The bottom line is it will not do you any good to constantly think about what others may say or think, because you will only lose yourself and your real purpose.

Other people's opinions take the center stage in your life.

A wise man will tell you that only you can define yourself. You can choose your destiny and you can make your own situation. What if you get to decide on your life but the things you choose are those that conform to other people's opinion of you? Are you truly free?

When you become too concerned with what the rest of the world say about you, it is a sure sign of insecurity. People develop their opinions based on complex variables. They may be able to see some aspects of your personality and values, but the plain truth is that they also have their own prejudices. Such prejudices inadvertently affect their perception of you.

In other words, it will not help if you focus on other people's opinions. In fact, it can be very problematic. For one, you pay a lot of attention and spend too much energy on things you cannot truly control - the way others think. Two, you are taking the focus away from what you can actually control - yourself.

You should be able to accept the fact that it is impossible to please everyone. If

you want to be accepted for who you are, you should stop conforming to their expectations or trying to change their perceptions. Rather, you should be more authentic. You should stay true to yourself.

You are a yes man.

There is a movie by Jim Carrey about being a yes man. In some situations, saying yes can be very helpful, but you must also learn the importance of saying no.

If you are terrified of the world, of disappointing your peers, then you are in deep trouble. Do not agree or say yes just because you think the other person may take it the wrong way. You do not have to say yes just to demonstrate your manners. An insincere yes is actually more disappointing than a genuine no.

You have to be in the spotlight, always!

People like talking about themselves. They like to tell other people their accomplishments, where they have been, and where they are headed to. If you think it is a sign of confidence, you are wrong. People who become too boastful are rather insecure. People who overdo it are constantly seeking validation. They do what they do because somehow, it makes them feel better about themselves. It is the only way they know how to impress those around them, or at least those who are willing to or pretend to listen.

By lifting themselves high, they tend to make other people feel inferior. If you are crossing this border, you have more problems than you may be willing to admit.

You tend to do everything to gain favor.

Not everyone will like you. Every one of us probably has our own share of haters. That is a fact of life. Do not play nice, pretend to be happy, polite or what have you just to change other people's perception of you. There will always be people with whom you will not jive. This does not mean there is something wrong with you. It is probably just a personality conflict.

Not everything can be fixed. It will be a huge waste of your time and energy to try to fix things that you simply have no power over.

Your decisions are based on other people's expectations.

It may not seem problematic when you decided to go and get a degree that your parents wanted you to take. But in the long run, you will realize how much of a problem it can be. Small choices have ended up ruining so many lives. You may not realize it now but you will soon when you start feeling miserable.

Some people just seem to exist, and they never live the way others do. What they are lacking is passion. If you feel unhappy about your situation, you probably paid too much attention to meeting other people's expectations of you.

You have to create the life you actually want to live. Listen to what your heart tells you. Pursue your dreams even if they do not exactly match up to what your parents, friends, colleagues or everybody else expect. Do not put yourself

in a box and allow yourself to become a prisoner of other people's hopes for you.

What would you become?

When you allow yourself to be controlled by other people's opinions and expectations, you will never be truly happy. Sure, you may feel good every now and then by getting a tap on the shoulder for a job well done, but living your life should not feel like a job, something that you do only because you feel you have to.

When you care too much, you lose your own identity. You lose the meaning of life. You cannot live life fulfilling the purpose of others. One day, you will wake up wondering where ten or twenty years have gone and regret how you spent them trying to please the people around you.

Chapter 3: Why Do I Care?

It may not be possible to completely stop the constant worrying about what other people think or say about you, but there are ways to keep it within a healthy amount. Quit obsessing about other's opinions, or else you will find yourself lost in a negative cycle.

When caring hurts more than it helps you, it must stop. Steer yourself to the right direction, and turn your life around by following this advice.

Quit over-thinking.

You are not the center of the universe. Your loved ones may treat you like you are the most important person in the world, but not everyone shares the same opinion. Not everyone will take the time to scrutinize your personality and analyze your flaws. They probably have other and more important things to do than to be a judge in your life.

If you still do not believe it, you are encouraged to put it to the test. Try to make a change in yourself. It could be anything physical that is out of the ordinary. Now, check people's reactions. Your family, friends and other people you spend the most time with will probably notice the change, and are likely to share some comments too. However, it is very unlikely that a complete stranger will care.

When you start the pattern of over-thinking, stop yourself immediately. To counter attack the negative cycle, recognize the positive aspects of your life or your personality. This practice can at least help boost your damaged self-

esteem.

Finding the right perspective.

Are you paying too much attention to the details and end up completely missing the big picture? That is exactly what you do when you care too much, and this makes life more stressful than enjoyable. Instead, try to put things in proper perspective.

Life is too short to spend time worrying about nonsense. You simply cannot have everything you want, and you definitely cannot have everyone's approval. Instead of focusing on what we don't have, we should be focusing on what we already have and be thankful for it, because gratitude is the real way to happiness.

You can also make a list of the things that you are thankful for. This list becomes tangible proof that things are in the right place. Also, it will show you that your life is not as bad after all. Appreciate all the things that life throws at you, because what matters the most is living your life with your own purpose, not other people's.

Building confidence.

Quit second guessing yourself. While you do need to make sure that your decisions are well thought out, you also need to find a way to build your confidence. This will make you more comfortable about your decisions and actions.

When you feel too conscious about something, people can sense that. Take for

instance, someone who is wearing something outrageous, like a hat too big for their head. People will probably turn their heads away. They may even giggle or whisper to one another. But if that person wearing a big hat does not seem to care, eventually the people around the person will stop caring too.

Everyone is insecure. And some people are just vultures waiting for someone who has much less self-confidence to take down. That is when you are more likely to be attacked. But if you have confidence they will sense it, and that can make you almost untouchable.

So how exactly do you build your confidence? Try smiling more often. As the saying goes, smile and the rest of the world will smile with you. Adopt a more positive outlook in life. Instead of anticipating failure, visualize your success. Finally, break down your life goals into smaller ones. Take one step at a time. And do not forget to celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small or minor they may seem to be.

Take control of your emotions.

Mixed emotions can put you through a roller coaster ride that will make you feel nauseous and overwhelmed. A simple solution for taking control is to separate yourself from the emotion. Recognize what you are feeling and observe it. The mere act of putting the emotion under observation can help separate you from it. That can also make the emotion fade into thin air.

Accept yourself for who you really are.

How can you expect to have other people's approval when you do not approve of yourself in the first place? To save yourself from the limbo of negative

emotions, constant fear and worrying, you must first learn to accept yourself for who you are.

Make a list of all the things you do not like about yourself. Separate the things you can change and those you do not have control over. Change for the better, but do not even attempt to make impossible changes in yourself, as you will only end up more frustrated. You will soon realize that you have been worrying about unimportant things and it has been a complete waste of energy and time.

Enjoy your individuality.

You are unique, and you should celebrate your uniqueness. There is nothing more boring than being ordinary or being like everyone else. Sure, you may have some flaws, but these are all part of your individuality - so accept and celebrate it.

Imagine a worry-free life.

It may be a little more challenging to see the light at the end of the tunnel when you feel like your life is in a rut, but it may help to think the other way. Imagine what kind of life you will have if you are not constantly worrying about what others are thinking.

Imagine getting rid of the burden of your fear of rejection. You will find yourself free from expectations. Don’t you want that kind of life? Imagine all the things you could do if you do not care too much about opinions and expectations. You could be unstoppable!

Other people worry as well.

The funny thing is that other people may have the same concerns as you do. They spend 90 percent of their time worrying about what they are doing or what they are wearing, and if other people think that they look ridiculous. That means they have less time to spend criticizing you. Now though, it is time you leave that boat and steer your own ship.

Respect yourself.

Do not allow other people to trample on you or take you for granted. Recognize your worth as an individual and do not let others treat you as less of a human being.

Surround yourself with positive people.

Negative people will drag you down no matter what. They suck your energy and motivation away. Avoid these kinds of people. If they are putting you through a great deal of stress, then it is a good sign to block them. Instead, surround yourself with positive energy. Be with positive people. The energy can be contagious.

Stop being submissive

Take pride on who you are as a human being. Do not follow others blindly. Question if you must. Stop being a pushover. Stand up for yourself. Show them you are not the type of person that can be pushed around and treated like an inferior human being.

Be yourself

There are many things you can probably change about yourself for the better, but do not change just because other people tell you to. When you start a change, make sure you are doing it for yourself, and not for other people.

Never be afraid of your own true colors. You are beautiful in your own way. You are absolutely good enough!

Decide firmly.

Taking back control over your life starts with making a conscious decision. You have to stop caring too much about other people's opinions. You do not have to be mean. You do not have to compromise your values and beliefs.

You can be yourself without being offensive. Try and stop caring about getting other people's approval and worrying about not fitting in. There is no one else like you and that is a blessing. Be yourself. This can be the best contribution to the world.

Chapter 4: In the Real World

One of the greatest obstacles to your success is probably your approval-seeking behavior. When you try to control other people's way of thinking, you would most likely end up being controlled by fear. Here is a list of many great reasons why you should stop caring too much about others opinions.

Not everyone will like you.

People will always have bad things to say about others. It is just a reflection of their insecurities. You cannot make them change, but you can change your perception by stopping the habit of caring too much.

You do not need their "approval" in order to be happy.

Their approval is not a prerequisite to your happiness; so do not allow them to define your worth as a person. You are good enough regardless of what they think or say about you.

People will think about whatever they want to think about.

There is no way to control other people's thoughts. They will keep thinking what they want to think about. As mentioned in the earlier chapter of this book, everyone has their own prejudices that affects their judgment. It is not something you can control.

Seeking approval is a waste of time and energy.

If you cannot change the way people think, then why spend your time and energy trying? It simply does not make any sense. Imagine the things you can accomplish if you can spend your time and energy on more productive activities.

Take control of your own life.

If you feel like someone else is holding the string and you are the puppet. It came to be that way, because you allowed it to be. You impose these limitations and restrictions on yourself by caring too much about other people's opinions and expectations, but you should be controlling your life. You should make the decisions that suit you. Otherwise, you will ultimately suffer from unhappiness just trying to please others.

Your approval is what is most important.

Some people may genuinely like you. Others may absolutely hate you. And some could not care less.

When you learn to accept yourself for who you are, it becomes less important of what others may think of you. If you are confident about who you are as a person, you will be happier. At the end of the day, what matters the most is to understand the value of self acceptance, and living a happy and fulfilling life.

Nobody is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. There are things that are totally out of your control including how other people react about you. Accept this as a fact and you will learn to be more self-forgiving and more self-accepting.

Conclusion

We are social beings and it is quite normal for us to consider other people's opinions. In fact, in some ways, this can be helpful to our growth, but anything in excess can be hurtful rather than helpful. So, what must you do?

Pay attention and stop worrying.

Nothing good comes from worrying too much. You will only suffer from anxiety and become trapped in an unhappy life. Realize the fact you are your worst critic. Do not read too much on things or take comments too seriously.

Pick only those that matter.

You know you are in trouble when you care too much about a complete stranger's opinions. Know whose opinions matter the most in your life, but even then, draw limitations.

Utilize feedback.

Just because someone gives you a negative feedback does not mean they do not like you in a personal level. You may be able to use the feedback for

improvement. When you receive one, ask yourself whether or not it will help you improve if you apply it in your personal life.

You may find yourself torn between considering what makes you happy and what makes the important people in your life happy. People who truly care about you will not be concerned whether or not you take their advice. Their main concern is your happiness and self fulfillment.

Sure, your parents may be a little disappointed when you do not go to the college that they picked out. They only want the best for you, but they will certainly understand the fact that you want to fulfill your own dreams.

Set your own goals. Never let anyone do it for you.

Don’t forget to protect your values. Consult your values when something does not feel or seem right. Have conviction, and people will respect you.

Remember, Life is not about being popular. Free yourself from that kind of mentality. Do not be afraid to fight for things you want even when no one is supporting you.

If you want to set yourself free and be happy, know who you are and know where you are going. You can only live your life to the fullest when you fulfill your own purpose. Being considerate about other people is a good trait, but know your boundaries. It is your life. After all, you are now free to choose on how you live it.

The Billionaire Professor

Heather Royer

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Chapter 1

Maxwell

The deafening cacophony of so many voices, trying so hard to out shout each other jangled my nerves. I stepped as far out of earshot as I could, without being called out by some drunken professor trying to be pals with me.

I was stuck at the yearly art department mixer, trying hard not to listen to the same bloated egos, telling the same exaggerated stories as the year before. Those overbearing, over-rated academic snobs knew nothing of the art world.

What a shame that they were charged with instructing others. Not only is their knowledge of the real art world superficial – they wouldn't know an original Bosch if it bit them in the ass – but they're boring as hell even in class.

I took another sip of my Scotch on the rocks. The ice melted ever so slightly that the smooth taste of the single blend whiskey was slowly moving to the more subtle stage two taste. A little more mellow.

That's when I saw her. How could I have missed her? She was standing just outside a group, fiddling nervously with her glass. I could tell immediately she was part of the group, yet she distinctly separated herself from it.

Her dress highlighted every curve in her figure. What a refreshing view. A woman who didn't try to hide her classic sensuality. When she turned around, that's when she definitely aroused my loins. Her dress was cut just low enough to tease me. I hardened immediately. Not something that usually occurs during these god-blessed mixers.

And certainly something worth getting chastised over for leaving this dreaded blatant one-upmanship. I took another small sip of my drink and made my way through the crowd. The day before fall session at New State University brought everyone and their brother out.

On my way there I encountered no less than three coeds who had taken previous courses with me and thought that – and their drunken state – gave them the right to try to pick me

up. Coeds like that, little do they know, are a dime a dozen.

But the one lady I was searching for was cut from an entirely different cloth. Let's say that I was no stranger to the many varieties of women the good Lord created for the delight of the male gender. But there was something distinctly unique about this one. This one is the woman you'd want to have modeling nude for you. This woman was a celebration of the human spirit and she didn't know it, I'm sure.

Finally I was close to her. She exuded sensuality from every pore. I'm not sure what cologne she wore, but it was subtle enough to entice me. I purposely approached her at an angle so she wouldn't, couldn't see me coming. The way she worked her fingers on that glass I was afraid if I approached her straight on, she would sprint off like a deer.

"Well, you don't hide your true feelings very well, my dear," I said. "Are you really as totally bored as you appear to be?" I touched the curve of her back gently and dragged my finger slowly over her spine.

She stood motionless for a moment, then turned my way. I tried to read the expression on her face but my interest was piqued when I could detect no surprise, no delight, not even a hint of wonder.

Jazmin

I had seen him there almost as I entered the bar. He stood there as if he were waiting for the admiring, adoring women to flock to him. Without a doubt he was the most incredibly handsome man I had ever seen in my entire live. Dark, thick hair with a controlled wave. He wore it back but not slicked back so he looked like a gangster.

No, he definitely had a class of another era. Was he a reincarnated spirit? Or perhaps merely a figment of my over-active, hopeful imagination? Throughout the dreadful dorm social I stole glances of him. Of course, he never noticed. And why should he? After all, I was that plump girl that always got overlooked in high school. The one who never got asked out a date. The one …

Oh, I could go on, but what good would that do? That would just make me more miserable. I really didn't want to come to this event, but my best friend Myriah insisted. "It'll do you good to get out and check out the men at the very least."

You'd think she would know me better by now. The one girl no guy ever looks at. But my friends were all apparently oblivious to this. If I had a dime for every time some guy asked what I looked like and my well-meaning friends said, "She has a great personality."

So there I stood, with the crowd but apart from it just like at every other social function in my life, nearly in tears. It was my own stupidity for agreeing to attend to this hideous function. It only brought back horrible memories of the cruel words of both men and women who felt they had to comment on my weight.

I had taken several stolen glances at him throughout the evening. After all I had nothing else to do. Not a single person I came with was talking to me. Mariah found a cute football player who wanted to make small talk with her.

There was something that told me this man – my man, I've already claimed him — quietly drinking and surveying the landscape, was a true gentleman, that is if I ever got the opportunity to meet him he would actually treat me like a lady and at the very least not belittle me for my looks.

But then that was just a fantasy on my part. It would always remain a fantasy. Why was I even looking at this man? I'm sure he could have any girl in the bar. But in my mind, I

envisioned him walking over to me, my knight in shining armor. Approaching me from behind and pressing his hard penis against my body. In turn, my vagina would immediate respond, but I would stand there, not giving him the satisfaction of how he had made my body sing.

His hands would then make their way perilously close to my clit and slowly rub the area. At that point, playing the cosmopolitan girl I never was, I would …

Even before I finished my well-crafted fantasy reply, I took another sip of my Coca Cola – no I didn't even drink alcohol – and glanced his way for the fifth, or was it the sixth? — time that evening. Much to my chagrin, he was gone and I could feel an abrupt depression stir my soul. My heart dropped so thunderously I thought it overtook even the horrendously loud music.

"Good grief, Jazmin," I muttered, "what did you expect? Did you really think he would stand there all night just so you could stare at him?"

Then she saw him talking to two stunning, tall blondes. Ahh, of course, Jazmin, old girl, your fantasy is now officially burst. He, like every other man on the planet, is guided by his penis. Did you really expect him to be any different? Did you —?

My thought process was abruptly interrupted as I felt a hand on the small of my back. I stood without moving a muscle for just a moment making sure it was what I thought it was. When I turned around, there he was, the dark-hair mysteriously brooding man I had been coveting for who knows how long.

Don't panic, my brain said. Play it cool. My body, however, said don't let a good thing get away. Jump his bones now. You may never have another chance. Screw his brains out, woman.

My brain responded, "You're still a virgin. How in the world are you going to 'screw his brains out' let alone even begin to satisfy him?"

After all that conversation passing between my body and my very excited sexual organs, I could only manage a weak smile and I "Hi." Not really an intelligent approach.

Chapter 2

Max

Was she playing coy? Or was she really not moved by my presence? Either way, her cool-as-a-cucumber reaction to my approaching her was exactly what I wish more women would give me.

If the average woman knew what type of impression she gave when she appeared so eager and hung on a man's every word as if he were some god. That type of woman didn't impress me. She only made me think that she wanted desperately for the man to crave her. She wanted approval.

Oh god, please don't bring down the women's movement on me for even thinking it, but those women are like puppies vying for a man's affection. "If I'm the friendliest and listen the most attentively and pretend to be interested enough maybe, just maybe he'll take me home."

This one, though, she was as different as I had originally thought. When she turned and her emerald green eyes scanned my body, lingering perhaps perilously a bit too long on certain body parts, I knew I had discovered a gem in the sand. She indeed was a pure spirit, but a pure spirit who possessed a healthy dose of sexuality. My type of woman.

Not usually a man who is short on words, her presence, her glow momentarily took my breath away. I asked her if she were as bored as she looked. Her throaty laugh said it all even before she got the words out. "Couldn't be more board. I'm not extremely comfortable in these types of settings."

Oh how I wanted to say that I knew. That she was perfectly suited to a quiet evening in a luxury penthouse, unencumbered by any clothes, laying on satin sheets with my fingers exploring all of those sexual, subtle curves.

I knew I was taking an enormous chance, but I had to ask her. I didn't think I could stand there making coherent small talk with her when I madly craved her body. "I know this sounds quite forward. I also know I stand the chance of never seeing you again if you say no, but I have a question to ask you."

Her eyes begged me to continue, but as hard as I gazed at her, I couldn't figure out whether the straightforward approach would backfire on her. This desire for her, I feared,

ran deeper than sex. Much deeper. I felt a bond with this woman that went beyond pure flesh. I felt that we had been my model in a former life. I saw a flash that I had been a Renaissance artist and she would be the model that would promulgate my work to immortality. Her body would forever be admired by men throughout the centuries.

“Yes?” she asked. I wondered at this point if my pause was too long. But I went ahead and asked. “I’d very much like to treat you to an evening in a luxurious penthouse suite, one that more becomes your true essence.”

Jazmin

I had heard many pick up lines in my time – well, okay, not many were aimed at me, but my friends. And never in all that time did anyone use that one. I'm betting that's because no one could offer that. Intriguing. Could this man actually back up that line?

Quickly my brain stepped up in an attempt to counter my body's strong aching to be possessed by this man, thoroughly and totally. I took a few moments to answer. Certainly I had never left a bar with a man. But I had witnessed many of my friends doing just that. But with far less distinguished men. Mostly my friends accepted invitations from men our own age, already half sloshed.

This man, by contrast, appeared to be in total control of his senses. He didn't appear to have too many drinks. I tried to look around, thinking that maybe a friend had put him up to it. Perhaps my brain suggested to me that he had pulled the short straw and was the one to tease me, to humiliate me.

I didn't see any buddies standing in the wings. I looked him over again. His eyes were a clear Pacific blue. Even under his dark blue suit, you could tell he had strong, muscular arms. I could only imagine what they were like without a shirt.

Of course, I had more than an idle curiosity about the rest of his body as well. I glanced quickly down at his legs, imagining the strength in his thighs. It was highly unlikely he would allow me to take him right there on the bar, like my body wanted to do. I wanted to wrap my legs around his waist, and then feel the reaction. I was sure I would find him responsive, his penis would harden nearly on contact.

Should I? Could I leave with him? What would my friends think?

Max

She remained unresponsive to my question. Should I repeat myself? I never had to before. But perhaps she didn't realize that I was suggesting I take her away from all of this tonight, offering a sanctuary in a sea of slobbering stinking drunks.

Just as I was about to paraphrase my offer, she finally showed a small amount of emotion. "Interesting pick up line," she finally commented, continuing to study me.

It was one of the very few times in my life I actually hoped a woman would find me worthy enough to allow me to take her my penthouse.

"Did I understand you right?" she finally asked. Only the subtle up turn of her luscious red lips belied the beginnings of a slight smile. My penis hardened more at the thought that this goddess may actually be considering my offer.

"You probably did" I replied, giving her a grin in response. "I'm offering you an environment that's more suited to your tastes. One that wouldn't involve men who had no idea how to conduct themselves in front of a lady the likes of you."

"You certainly have a unique approach," she said. "You don't appear to be the type of man who would offer something he couldn't deliver on."

"Oh, I can deliver on it, my dear, I can deliver on the offer."

I held my breath while I gave her plenty of time to respond. This goddess was a total enigma.

Jazmin

I’m not sure what made me trust this man. Usually, a man this gorgeous, this stylish wouldn’t give me a second look, let alone offer me some outrageous proposal.

As ludicrous as it sounded on the surface, there was something sincere in the delivery. Something in my heart—or was that my clitoris? – told me to trust him. Again, my mind reminded me how I was about to make a totally irresponsible decision. Could I trust my heart? Should I trust her heart? Would my mind overrule my heart?

Chapter 3

Jazmin

He opened the car door for me. No man had ever done that before. Certainly I never knew anyone who owned a metallic red Lamborghini. Doubts abruptly flooded me. Was I doing the right thing?

Of course, I knew it *wasn't* doing the right thing. No "good girl" would leave a bar with a strange man. No, good girls went home alone to a cold shower and an even colder bed.

That's the instant I hesitated for just a moment. What if this man were a serial killer, preying on the weakest women? What If he had marked me because he knew I was lonely enough to say yes? He would prey upon my loneliness and …

Stop it Jazmin, I thought. It's time you've lived a little. If you're going to accept any man's invitation, it's just as easy to accept one who appeared to be outrageously rich like this one as it was to accept one from an ego-filled, self-proclaimed drunkard.

I'm already in college and I'm still a virgin. While everyone in high school was running around exploring their sexuality, I was sitting home alone watching television and reading books. It's now my turn to explore mine. It's my turn to enjoy myself.

Why should his extravagant lifestyle, and his ruggedly handsome looks make him any more suspect than the egotistical jockey her roommate, Carly, brought home last night?

What made the difference? Or was there a difference?

Max

I led her to the car. If she were surprised to see a metallic red Lamborghini she never showed it. This beauty of a woman did seem to hesitate only a moment when she began to place her leg in the vehicle. It was as if she made one final debate with herself.

I closed the door after she got in and then entered the car myself. As I started the engine I purposely placed a hand gently across her knee, hoping to feel a ripple of response. The only reaction, though, was from me, who felt a sudden surge of electricity run up and down me.

I needed no further sign. The universe had answered any lingering doubts I may have had about her being the perfect companion for the evening. Tonight, in the most unlikely of places, I may have found the answer to my extended prayers. The answer to my broken heart.

After a moment, I felt her hand in response on top of mine, her thumb gently circling the top of it. Again, I suddenly hardened at the gentle, caring touch. She shyly looked up as if asking permission to continue. I held her knee just a bit firmer. Perhaps she did feel what I felt.

We rode in silence for several minutes. I soaked up her sexual energy; I connected with this woman whose beauty had been sleeping deep within her all this time. I felt another surge of blood rush to my loins as I thought this. Finally, she spoke, “So where is this penthouse?” she asked quietly, as if she were afraid that conversation would break the moment.

“Ever hear of the Plaza?” I asked her. She nodded. “That’s where we’re headed.”

She gasped, then actually laughed out loud. “Should I be surprised,” she asked, “that a man who drives a car like this would just happen to have access to a penthouse at the Plaza?”

That small bit of conversation seemed to have assuaged her nerves some. She appeared more relaxed, a little more at ease in my presence. She was the first female I ever encountered who gave me a distrustful look. The first who looked at me as if I were some serial killer.

I stopped for the traffic light. And pulled her close. I kissed her deeply, passionately on the lips. She didn’t pull back. On the contrary, she welcomed the action with every inch of her. I saw her legs tighten out of the corner of my eye. She leaned further my way, stretching her body, displaying those precious curves, and wrapped one hand around my shoulders. She raked her fingers through the hair at the back of my neck. So she wasn’t impervious to my attempts at arousal. Just very good at self control.

Jazmin

He closed the door. I drew a breath before he lightly jogged to the driver's side and slid in. In that split second, I realized the decision had been made. I had committed myself to going "home" with this man. Oh my God, my brain scolded me for a moment, "You don't even know this man's name."

Shut the hell up, I directed it. There was no turning back. The Adonis had already started the engine. It roared like the perfect road machine it was. I took a deep breath. Then he carefully placed his hand on my knee.

His touch was surprisingly gentle, almost as if he were asking permission. His strong hand sent shivers of uncontrolled electricity down my spine, through my thighs. I was relieved I was sitting. If I had been standing and felt this shot of testosterone, I would have fallen to my knees. Now, I only had to pray I could walk when I exited the car.

Then it happened. At the red light he kissed me. He took his mouth to mine. His tongue explored every crevice and corner of my mouth and my sexual excitement soared to another level entirely. So, this is what I had been missing. Is this what everyone else experienced?

No I quickly decided. This man had a way, a talent, a passion for women. Yes, that was it. He had passion. That was the missing puzzle piece she had been searching for since she first laid eyes on him. *Passion.*

The men she met in class, the men her roommate brought home, lacked this. They had been simply looking for an easy way to satisfy their base animalistic needs. This man, though, I'm sure is pursuing a passion. He experiences in life are deeper, more meaningful, perhaps even more spiritual than the average person.

I wriggled to get closer to him, I swung one arm around his shoulders, felt the natural muscle under the designer suit. Began massaging his shoulders then took my forefinger and thumb and massaged the base of his neck. I then raked my fingers through the hair on the back of his head as he continued to fervently kiss me.

The light changed, I reluctantly pulled my arm off of him and he even more reluctantly removed his tongue from my mouth. But he instantly grabbed my hand, wrapping his

sturdy fingers around my entire palm. We rode like that to the hotel, my pulse felt like it was quickening with each revolution of the tires.

My mind finally quit challenging my body. It accepted what I had done and I swear was enjoying the experience as much as every other part of my body. I hadn't been paying attention to the route we took. If this exquisite specimen of a man wanted to kidnap me and take me to a secluded, wooded area and kill me, he had distracted me enough that I wasn't putting up a fight.

But he didn't. True to his word, he pulled the Lamborghini up to the Plaza. I had heard of this hotel. Well, who hadn't it? Passed it many a time. But never had the nerve or the need to enter it.

He parked it at the door and immediately a valet appeared and opened my door. "Good evening, madam," he said as he tipped his hat. "Good evening," I answered back and gave him what I hoped was a confident and polite smile.

My moment of truth was about to begin.

Chapter 4

Max

I tossed the keys to the Lamborghini to the valet. I gave him a generous tip. I knew the car would be well taken care of. I walked over to what I now called the sleeping beauty, took her hand and guided her through the door. The doorman bowed and tipped his hat.

She reacted as if she were born for this royal treatment. She walked proudly by my side. We entered the elevator to the top floor, a floor that I had rented out for myself for who knows how many years. The elevator door closed. I turned to her and my tongue quickly resumed exploring her mouth. This time she pressed her body against mine — hard. Any hesitation she might have had vanished in the solitude of this tiny box.

She pressed her body close to mine, purposely putting pressure on my penis. I closed my eyes at the instant hardening of the organ. I took my hand and cupped her breast. I took as much as I could in my hand and pressed and massaged it, gently at first, then with more vigor. She emitted a pleasurable moan. She didn't hesitate to place her hand on my penis, rubbing it. This beauty had a magic touch. Despite my resolve to try to remain cool and calm, I immediately responded.

I could feel her heartbeat quicken. It turned me on even more. This would be the perfect evening. My desire to lead her on slowly, suddenly vanished. I became a man in need. And she was exactly what I needed. Every inch of the luscious, curvacious body. I hadn't felt hot in years – perhaps decades.

I slowly disengaged my mouth from hers momentarily. "I lease the entire floor, my dear," I told her, "so there will be no one but us when we get off the elevator. Especially at this time of night." She moved not a muscle as she looked up at me. All too soon the elevator stopped.

My more civil sense told me to disengage and take her hand. My savage side told me to keep kissing her, keep pawing at her breasts until we reached the door. In respect for this eternal beauty though, I withdrew and took her hand in mine.

Her small fingers, wrapped around my hand, tightened. Her body slowly, but noticeably melded closer to mine. I draped my arm around her. Her head cradled comfortably under my arm. Until that moment I didn't realize how short she was. The best gifts come in small packages. That's what my mother always told me. Of course, I'm sure this wasn't

exactly what she had in mind.

Jazmin

I confess. I melted. The moment the valet opened the door for me, the moment I realized this gentlemen with a seemingly ravenous hunger for sex really was taking me to the Plaza, the moment I stepped into the lobby, I wanted to pinch myself to make sure it wasn't a dream. A private floor. I'm not sure exactly where that lands on the scale of impressive, but I have a hunch it's light years beyond "I'm-bringing-the-football quarterback home."

He took my hand and acted the perfect gentleman as we crossed the lobby. I wondered if anyone suspected what had gone on in the car. Perhaps that was mild and ordinary for him, but it was the sexual thrill of a lifetime. Dowdy, dumpy, frumpy Jazmin riding in a Lamborghini and experiencing the most incredibly exiting sexual surge of my life – delivered by what appeared to be some type of mega-milllionaire. An enchanting Prince Charming.

The moment we entered the Penthouse and he closed and locked the door, everything changed. He approached me confidently, boldly and spoke more than several words. "You have no idea young lady, how supremely perfect your body is. I wanted you the moment I saw you standing there in the bar. I can't believe you consented to my proposal. You have been what I've dreamed about for years, perhaps decades."

While he was plying me with these incredible words, he began to massage my breast again, as if his hand couldn't be torn from my bosom for more than a few moments at a time. I felt the electricity flow through me again, this time with such a force, I swear I was already near the point of orgasm.

He must have had a sixth sense, because he led me to the couch, lowered my body and stripped my blouse off. Before I realized what I was doing, my pelvis arched, hoping to feel a part of him, to be a part of him, just a bit longer.

Chapter 5

Max

She whimpered a bit, and arched her pelvic, her body begging for what she craved, but couldn't put into words. She looked up at me, merely waiting for my next move. I gently removed her jeans. After that my attention immediately shifted to her clitoris, to her beautiful pubic hair. I had to gently play with it. That only excited her more. She was on the verge of orgasm before . Just a few more of my special moves, as I liked to think of them, and I'm sure she would come. She was ripe, ready and willing. What else could any man ask for?

I lifted her off the davenport. Her body gave an ever-so-slight quiver. And I carried her to the bedroom, laying her gently on the red satin sheets. She immediately moaned ever so slightly as her body sunk into the luxurious bed.

She looked like a classic Renaissance painting come to life. Her Rubenesque body stretched across the dark red background. He legs were spread, opening and inviting. Her luscious lips slightly parted and her hair tussled just enough to be sensually enticing.

I couldn't believe how excited I had become in this short period of time. I tried hard not to let this creature see how thrilled I was. I wasn't sure I was successful yet.

She was already wet, more than ready to come, but I asked anyway. She squeaked something I couldn't understand, the nodded, letting out a sigh.

I placed one knee on the oversized bed, lifted up my body. I could see she was transfixed by my dick. It had been hard for quite a while now and I knew that I could come with ease anytime.

My goal was to please her. She hungrily grabbed my shoulders with her small soft hands. I easily could have resisted, teased her more. I easily could have taken her hands and pinned them back, like I've done to so many women so many times before.

But I didn't. I obeyed her and felt my dick entering her already wet vagina. And then it happened.

Jazmin

I couldn't believe what was happening. I thought the events of the evening were occurring so fast on the one hand. Yet, it felt that each of his touches occurred isolated in a vacuum and moved in slow motion. My head spun with excitement as he lifted me up as if I were as light as a feather.

I could feel his breath up against my ear and that alone brought me that much closer to an orgasm. So I promised myself I wasn't going to come until he was ready, but his continual exploring of every inch of my body made that promise difficult to keep.

He touched me in places that I never knew were even connected to anything sensual or sexual. I couldn't keep my gaze off of him as he undressed. Beneath the tie and shirt was a torso that begged to be caressed. Then he took off his pants. His dick was already hard screaming to be free of his jockey shorts. Was this man teasing me? Would he just take his shorts off already? I propped my body up on my elbows momentarily in an effort to do it myself. But this was no do it yourself project.

He had been teasing me. His grin as he stripped off his shorts filled his entire face said so. Damn. Could he read me like a book? Was I that transparent? I didn't even know him.

I couldn't enjoy the beauty of his face as it glowed with excitement because the size of his cock drew my attention toward his groin area. I fluttered my eyelids for a moment and wondered what it would feel like inside me.

He asked if I were ready. Ready to come. I tried to tell him, "Oh, God yes! I had been ready since the moment I first saw him." I opened my mouth to say so, but no words would come out. All I could do to tell him how badly I needed him was to nod. I hoped that would get the idea across.

It must have because he began to climb onto the bed. Since I was incapable of talking, the only was I had to tell him of my needs and desires was to reach up for those shoulders, those unbelievably robust shoulders. They were much stronger than I ever imagined and I momentarily became nervous as I touched them. I immediately felt the power they could wield.

I had a moment of regret. What was I thinking? A man like this alpha male naturally

wanted to be in charge. The way he effortlessly carried me to bed in his Rhett Butler manner told me this.

If he resented my reach or my straightforwardness, he never showed it. Instead he complied. He lifted himself up onto the bed while I continued to pull him close. He expertly guided his dick into me.

“Are you ready?” he asked. My response caught in my throat. I know I moved my lips but no sounds came out. I merely nodded. “Yes! Yes!” I thought. “Now! Now!” Could I convey my excitement and my sense of expectancy with a weak nod?

Apparently I could. He knew exactly what to do. His cock went into my vagina smoothly and I became even more excited. Then he began his rhythmic movement, slowly at first up and down, up and down. Faster and faster he moved. It felt as if every fiber of my being was experiencing this moment.

I could feel his heart beating like a jackhammer. For a moment I had presence of mind enough to think “My body is making his this excited. I never thought anyone would enjoy my body.” But swiftly the thought passed as I could feel his penis harden still more. This would be it, I discovered.

My blood coursed throughout my body like rocket fuel and in the next instance he ignited it.

Chapter 6

Max

I exploded.

Never in my life had I experienced such an explosion of sexual energy. No woman had ever affected me like that before. Normally, I was in full control of my orgasm, knowing the exact moment I chose to come. I would make sure that she was fully sated before letting go.

This time she was in full control of my body. What a totally foreign feeling.

Jazmin

He came at the same exact moment I did. Did he plan this? The force of his orgasm startled me at first, but my entire body became limp. He fell to one side of me, breathing in short raspy rhythm. He pulled me closer. I immediately got as close to him as I could. His body a sexual refuge. We were here in this room, together and nothing, absolutely nothing, could be wrong with the world.

Chapter 7

Jazmin

I had a 9 am class the following morning. The entire walk to class my roommate Carly tried to pull information from me. I wasn't about to tell her anything. She wouldn't believe me had I told her the truth.

We walked into class and I immediately chose a seat in the front row. Yes, it was a geeky choice. But it was an art history course. My future major. My passion. I didn't want to miss a single word.

Carly wanted no part of the front row and I can't say I blame her.

I got my laptop out and readied myself to take notes. Even though I had been up half the night I felt energized about this class. It was with well-known art historian who also happened to be a prestigious fine art collector.

Slowly the class filled and I was the only person in the front row. Go figure.

Then the professor Maxwell St. James walked in. The class got quiet. I nearly died. I could feel my cheeks flush. They felt as if they were fire-engine red. I slinked as low as I could in my seat. It was the man with whom I had sex.

I felt trapped. I looked around. There was no gracious way to leave. Just when I was hoping he wouldn't notice me (despite my prominence in the front row!), he whipped out an attendance sheet.

"I'm going to call roll," he announced, "at least for the first week or so of class until I can learn your names. Please bear with me in this elementary action. If I could think of a better way to get to put faces with names, believe me, I would."

He called only a few names before he got to me. "Jazmin Donovan," he said and looked around. I answered meekly. "Here." Did he pause a bit longer over my name or was it merely my imagination. I felt as if the entire class were scrutinizing me, wondering who the hell I was. His dark chocolate brown eyes bore into m soul, yet again and I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. I had to be quite a site. Guilty as charged, I thought.

Oh how I wanted to run and hide! Then I saw my chance. “Any student taking this course because they think they’re going to get ‘an easy A’ can leave right now.” A few of the known jocks on campus filed out. I began to pack up my computer and was about to stand when he said, “Everyone but you Ms. Donovan. I do believe you’re far too smart of a student to believe in easy ‘A’s.’ Please stay for the entire semester.”

I could hear an undercurrent of laughter ripple throughout the class. I sighed and sat down. I was almost relieved. I did want to take this class almost as much I wanted to make passionate love to Professor St. James again. I just wasn’t sure how I could do both. If I stayed in his class I feared it would end our relationship or at least put it on hold.

What the f? My mind wasted no time. It caught the thought and chastised me. What relationship? One sex-charged night did not make a relationship. Right. Right. I answered my brain. You’re absolutely right. I took a deep breath and convinced myself that a well-rounded education in the field I loved was more valuable and vital than one or two nights of wild and wanton sex that was unlikely to end in any long-term relationship. Regardless of how much I wished it would.

Max

My heart leaped with unbounded joy! Once again my sleeping beauty gave me hope in a hollow world. What are the chances that the shy but exponentially sexual beauty from the night before would be sitting in the front row of my first class of the day – my first class of the semester. The Universe, no matter what anyone thinks works in mystical, magical ways!

Her name is Jazmin. What a beautiful name for a sleeping beauty like her. How was I supposed to keep my mind on the subject matter?

I also knew I needed to stand behind the podium at all times. This was no time to be walking around. Not the time to let people know how sexually charged I was. I rushed through my expectations for the semester and gave those less than motivated students an opportunity to walk out with dignity before they flunked out with no options. Ms. Donovan, Jazmin, that she was going to walk out of my life. I urged her to stay. It would break my heart. I spent literally my entire life looking for her. I felt she was a gift from the angels.

After class I called her to the podium. Another coed immediately appeared next to her. I pretended to fool with my notes until she left. Then I gave Jazmin my full attention.

“Come,” I told her, “we need to talk in my office.” She looked up at me – I never realized until moment that she was five foot two – at the tallest – nervous. I wondered if she knew just how nervous I was.

As soon as we walked through my office I instinctively locked the door. As the lock clicked shout, I lost control of my sexual urges. I feverishly began clearing my desk. I had a quick image of Jazmin lying on it.

I stole a quick glance at her. My penis immediate hardened – for like the fourth time since I walked into my classroom. She smiled back. I knew there was no fooling her. She waited patiently, not saying a word. I knew she knew what I was anticipating. The touch of her supple breasts, her hardened nipples, he low sensual moans.

She slowly moved to my side without me even suggesting anything. With the desk cleared I lifted her atop it, spread her legs and was surprised, pleasantly so, to see she wasn’t

wearing underwear. I could feel her legs tense the moment I touched her. So responsive.

Chapter 8

Jazmin

He lifted me and set me on top of his desk as if I were as light as a feather. He sat in his chair and pushed my legs to either side. I thought I would come right at that moment. Then I thought if I did what would I be missing. His hand exploring my clitoris, his tongue prodding my mouth, hitting every sexual sensory in there. Who even knew there were sexual sensors there?

In a few moments, his fingers fondled my clit, starting with my pubic hair then my lips and finally he pushed them inside, making sure he pressed all sides. I squirmed with sexual delight and this only encouraged him more. Just at the moment I thought I couldn't take any more, he took his finger out of my vagina and began caressing my breasts. Gently at first. Then a bit harder.

I reached for his penis. I rubbed it. I caressed it. I wrapped my legs around his waist, trying to tell him without using words that I desperately needed him to get as close to me as he could. He complied. Did I actually hear him whimper?

"It's time," he whispered hoarsely, "are you ready, Jazmin?"

It was the first time he used my name, he even knew my name and I thought that in addition to every part of my body prickly with excitement, my heart would melt. My name sounded so beautiful when he said it.

Max

I guided my penis into her, with full knowledge I couldn’t stay there long. We came at the same time, groaned together almost in harmony and I completely fell limp. Some events you build and embellish in your memory so that when you finally repeat them, you’re disappointed.

Not so with Jazmin. This was even better than I remembered, more powerful than I ever thought possible. I took a deep breath and fell onto her. If I hurt her flopping onto those delicious curves she never let me know. She welcomed me, in fact, playing tenderly with my chest hairs. She made me feel as if I were the only man in the universe and I could do anything and everything.

The knock on the door startled both of us.

Chapter 9

Max

At least we had the presence of mind not to scream out loud. I'm sure that was Jazmin's initial reaction. I was grateful she suppressed it.

We looked at each other for a split second, then the intruder – he had no idea what he was interrupting – knocked again. I could see panic in her eyes. I jumped off the desk, pulled my clothes together quickly. I told her to hide under my desk. For a moment her eyes questioned the command. But only for a split second. Once I knew she was completely hidden, I opened the door.

It turned out the knock was a group of students who took my offer of dropping out of the class. They wanted my signature for their drop slips. One would think that in the digital age someone could invent a less inconvenient way to drop a stinkin' class.

No sooner did I get rid of them did the chair of the department walk in. He certainly made himself at home, settling into the receiving chair on the other side of my desk.

"Sit down," he told me, as if I were visiting him in his office. I had no choice but to sit behind my desk. I may be the billionaire, but he was the boss of the department. And I respected him.

So I reluctantly sat down. All I could hope was that Jazmin was listening to the conversation.

Jazmin

I scrunched back to give Max enough room to sit down, but being so close to the lower portion of his body made me go insane. I couldn't just sit there next to his pent up penis without releasing it and, of course, pleasing it.

So I moved forward as much as I dared. I heard the conversation, but really didn't pay attention to it. I unzipped the fly of his trousers, then maneuvered his penis out of both the trousers and his underwear.

I rubbed his penis slowly with my fingers, at least at first. I could feel Max reposition himself in his chair. He didn't use any signals that told me I should stop, so I continued on. Soon, his penis was in my mouth and my tongue was busily and happily discovering all the wonderful nuances of this powerful organ.

I took it in as much as I could considering the circumstances. I sucked, licked and occasionally punctuated all of this with a short stop, just to give him an opportunity at anytime to signal to me to stop. I felt no such signal. So I continued.

I heard the words of the conversation, but I wasn't processing what the two were talking about. I'm sure it was nothing that involved me anyway. At what seemed like an eternity, I heard the department chair mutter something about leaving. I quickly released my grip on Max's penis and pent it back up in his pants. I have to admit I did a pretty good job, considering I was a complete novice at this.

Max stood up and I could hear the footsteps of the department chair head toward the door. I was in position to get up myself, when the footsteps abruptly stopped. I froze.

Chapter 10

Max

“By the way,” the chair said, “thanks for volunteering to add to the pot. I didn’t think the patron’s donation alone could match what other bidders could put toward buying the painting.”

“My pleasure, Dr. Newton, I’m always up for a good bidding war.” I chose my words carefully. Hopefully Jazmin enjoyed the irony of the phrasing. I was relieved when he left. I closed the door after him and again locked it.

I hustled over to the desk to discover Jazmin looking up at me questioning. I laughed, I had never seen any woman look more innocent sitting under a desk before. Come to think of it, I don’t think I ever saw a half nude woman sitting under a desk before. Especially my desk.

Jazmin

Max pulled me out and pressed his body close to me. My body melted. Then he asked me, “Are you a serious student of art?”

I moaned something I hoped indicated a yes.

“Have you ever been to Christies for an art auction before?” I shook my head no.

“Would you like to go tomorrow afternoon?”

I took a step back and stared at him. “Are you kidding?” I said, “It would be a dream come true.”

He then explained that a patron of the department had just donated a large sum of money so the university could acquire this very rare Vincent Van Gough painting. Unfortunately, Max continued, as generous as the offer was, in his professional opinion it wouldn’t stand up to the vigorous bidding that was expected to occur. Max said he offered his own money to cover any costs above that donation in order to ensure the University bought the masterpiece.

“And you want me to accompany you?” I asked incredulously. “Why, of course,” he said.

There’s only one down side to all of this, though,” he said, “you can’t please me at Christies like you just did. As much as I liked it – and it was such an imaginative and thoughtful gesture – we can’t be playing at the auction house.” Then he let out a hearty and infectious laugh and kissed me lightly on the forehead.

“Now, I’ve got some work to do reviewing the provenance of this piece of art in order to bid smartly. I hadn’t expected to cut our play time short, but we can continue tomorrow – sometime.”

He told me what time to meet him in his office and I scooted off to buy books, computer supplies and other supplies for the semester.

Chapter 11

Jazmin

“You’re going where tomorrow?” Carly screamed. “The first day of class and you’re already the teacher’s pet?”

Actually, I welcomed the chiding about my “date” with Professor St. James to Christies. It took the pressure off of her needling me to explain to her where I had been the last night. And a date to Christies with an exotic art professor and collector was much more acceptable to talk about than the sex we were indulging in. Bring it on, Carly, I thought, bring it on.

Frantically, I pulled clothes out of my closet. I had no idea what women wore to buy a multimillion dollar art masterpiece. So as I was searching I thought I’d ask Carly to see if she knew.

We spent several hours piecing clothing from her closet and mine. Finally we came up with something that was sophisticated enough, not flashy and fit me. Quite snugly.

“Listen,” Carly told me, sounding serious, “Professor St. James is a hunk. I’m so happy that he asked you.”

Oh, if she only knew what else he has asked me to do.

Chapter 12

Max

The moment I saw Daphne at the auction every muscle in my body tensed. She was beautify personified and a wicked sex partner. I totally misjudged her all those years ago when I first met her. Luckily, I've learned a lot since then.

"Why Maxwell, Dearheart."

Damn it, she spotted me.

"Daphne, what a delight to see you," I said as we approached each other.

"You never could lie, Darling, so don't do it now." I gave her a short, quick peck on the check.

"Just because we couldn't make our marriage work," I told her, "is no reason why it's not a delight to see you."

"I suppose seeing me reminds me of how delighted you were to divorce me, even though it cost you a large chunk of your fortune," she said. "You were a self-absorbed bastard during our brief stint as husband and wife." She paused a bit then added with that quixotic smile that at one time charmed me, 'And I was an equally horrendous person."

Before I could even answer, she changed the subject. "Don't tell me you're alone, Darling?" She scanned the room. I knew she was trying to figure out what woman was accompanying me this time to an auction.

"No, hardly. See that young lady over there? I'm here with her." I gave her a few minutes to size her up.

"Daphne I think I've found my soul mate. I'm sorry for putting you through such pain all those years. Had I only known Jazmin was in my future, I would never have put you through such hell."

Daphne raised her eyebrows as she gazed at Jazmin. I never could read her face, so I wasn't sure what she thought.

"She looks like she belongs in one of those Rubens paintings you love so much."

"More than her body," I responded, "she has a depth of soul I've never met in anyone before."

Daphne asked me how long I'd known Jazmin. I answered truthfully. She laughed. "Knowing your habits the way I do, hon," she said, 'the two of you probably haven't had a chance to do much chatting."

"Guilty as charged."

"Yet," she said, his voice taking a wistful tone, "you've never said anything like that about your other encounters. For your sake and, especially for hers, I hope you're right."

"So what brings you to Christie's today?" I tried hard to change the subject. I'm not sure exactly what she thought of what I considered my heartfelt confession. In any case, it was sincere. Jazmin was truly unlike any other woman I had ever met. She had that je ne sais quoi. That essence that I couldn't put my finger on.

Daphne's reply brought me out of my contemplative state. It appears that she had her eye on the same Rubens I wanted to purchase for my personal collection.

"I'm here for two reasons. The university wants me to purchase the Van Gogh, which one of our alumnus wants to donate to the school. And personally, I want …"

"Don't tell me," Daphne laughed. "The Rubens I'm after."

Jazmin

“Hello, I presume you’re Jazmin.” I knew immediately upon seeing this elegantly dressed woman I was out of my league. I just assumed at this point those were real diamonds in your earrings. Rather large diamonds at that.

My makeshift “Christies outfit” of which I had been so proud of this morning, suddenly felt shabby. I felt like Cinderella before her fairy godmother waved a magic wand over her.

“I’m sorry,” I said slowly trying hard not to scrutinize her too much, “do I know you?”

The woman – who by the way was drop dead gorgeous – gave a throaty laugh. “Of course you wouldn’t, my dear,” she apologized. She extended a hand and I shook it.

“I’m Daphne St. James.”

“Are you … ?” I tried to ask if she were related to Max, but I couldn’t think of a polite way of asking.

“Don’t worry, honey,” she said. “I’m Max’s ex-wife. Wife number four to be exact. He’s told me many good things about you.”

My face must have looked as horrified as I felt. Again, that throaty laugh. “No, my dear, if I still know Max’s massive appetite for woman, let’s just say, I know what’s going through your mind.”

“He’s told me he thought he’s finally discovered his soul mate. My ex-husband has a ravenous sexual appetite, Jazmin, but don’t judge him solely by that. He’s not a shallow man.”

Maxwell

What I saw scared the hell out of me. Daphne and Jazmin talking. I only had one thought. I had to go intervene. I nonchalantly started to walk towards them.

Thankfully, I didn't need to panic. The auctioneer singled the start of the auction. If he only knew that he saved me from a potentially embarrassing situation. I could see the ladies part – quite amiably it appeared – and my soul mate returned to my side.

"So you met Daphne?" I queried Jazmin.

She only smiled and nodded.

I waited a brief period of a comment, but she said nothing. "You have nothing to say?"

"She told me a few interesting things about you."

"Like what?"

Chapter 13

Maxwell

For starters," Jazmin began, "your ex told me –"

Jazmin was interrupted by the auctioneer's gavel. It was time for the bidding to begin. Jazmin gave me an impish grin. God, really didn't know how incredibly sexy she was. She made my penis harden – again!

The auctioneer unveiled the first painting – the Van Gogh that the alumnus wanted for the school. I made quick sport of this piece. It seemed as if I had unlimited funds, with the tidy stash the alumnus brought to the plate. It took me no time at all to out bid several others.

The second painting was quickly unveiled. Ah! The Rubens I needed for my private collection.

"This particular painting was lost in someone's attic for years," I whispered to Jazmin. I knew it said all of this in the program, so I really wasn't telling her anything she didn't know, I just wanted an excuse to lean in to her and smell her sensual cologne.

"I knew I had to have it after I met you the other night. This model reminds me of you."

Jazmin

Goosebumps raced down my spine. That model reminded Maxwell of me? Really?

“Wow,” I whispered back to him, “She’s absolutely stunning. And the entire painting is just breathtaking.”

“I’m glad you think so. You really do have a natural eye for art, my dear.”

“Well, just look at that technique. Aside from screaming Rubens, it shows the love that he had for this piece.”

Having never been to an auction of this caliber before, it astounded me how quickly the bidding went. Maxwell had snatched up the Van Gogh within minutes. But with his billions and a couple hundred million thrown in there by that anonymous donor, I just assumed that was to be expected.

But the bids on the Rubens flew back and forth quicker than a tennis ball on the Wimbledon court. It started with nearly a dozen individuals raising their numbered fans. Without much warning the number dropped precipitously. Until …

Maxwell

There were just two of us left actively competing for this precious piece of art. I quickly looked behind me to see who was left. I should have known. Daphne. I wondered if she were doing this to spite me for all the years she had to put up with my shit.

Even Jazmin noticed the bidding came down to the two of us. “Yeah, I noticed that myself,” I told her, remaining cool. “Just watch, you ain’t seen nothing yet.”

“So you’ve been through this before with her?” Jazmin question.

“Too many times to count,” I said. “It’s like bidding against myself.”

“Why?”

“Because she made her millions by divorcing me. She’s essentially using my own money to piss me off.” I paused.

Jazmin gave me a cherubic smile. God, I was hungry for every part of her body.

Daphne had just bid $15.2 million dollars. As much as I wanted to bid higher, even billionaires face daily limits of spending.

“I’m sorry, love,” I told Jazmin. “I would go higher, but I augmented that other painting. I hated to let Daphne have this victory, but … there’s a limit even to my spending. I hope you’re not too disappointed.”

The auctioneer looked my way and I shook my head. There was no way I could go any higher.

“Perhaps outbidding me will boost her fragile ego,” I whispered to Jazmin. She squashed a laugh.

“Why don’t I pay for the Van Gogh, arrange for delivery and then we can play?”

Chapter 14

Jazmin

The penthouse looked different by daylight. Or maybe I was just more observant on this visit. This time, I actually got a quick glimpse of the walls of his rooms. They were covered with the most well-known and obviously most expensive masterpieces money could buy. I bet his penthouse had more paintings than some of the art museums I'd visited.

After the Christies adventure, Max had driven the Lamborghini straight to his penthouse. He hadn't bothered to ask if I had the time to come back to his place. Then again, when he suggested we "play" I hadn't argued. So perhaps I silently consented. There's a lot I can consent to when it comes to "playing" with Max.

What if I had something I had to be? Okay! Okay! The truth was I didn't have any other place to be. The real truth was I had actually hoped we'd end up here.

The ultimate truth? My body couldn't get enough of him. All parts of him.

We entered the penthouse. I heard the click of the door lock. My body responded like Pavlov's dog. Every cell in my body tingled in anticipation of is hard penis pressing close to me. It took no time at all for my imagination to make the leap to visualizing his hard dick in my vagina, pressing on the sides. Oh my God. I felt myself getting wet just thinking about it.

My thoughts were interrupted when Max pulled me close, cupped my chin in his hand and kissed me. Passionately. I felt His tongue inside my mouth before I even knew what was happening. What a luxurious surprise.

My body, now overwhelmed by sensually inspired tingles, relaxed. No, I melted. I totally gave myself to Max. As exciting as my experience at Christie's was, it was no match to the moments when I willing gave myself to this amazingly hot man. I knew where this would lead. My body knew instinctively where the situation would end.

He guided me back toward his bedroom. Even though my tongue was entangled with his and he titillated every possible part of my body, I was able to see that even his bedroom held a Renoir, a Monet among other masters of the art world.

He lightly pushed me down on his bed. His gravelly voice said to undress and I did so without a moment's hesitation. I was ready, more than ready. While I was taking off my clothes, he hurriedly undressed. Suddenly he was on his knees, his tongue exploring my clit. My pelvic jolted at his initial touch and then rolled with every time his tongue poked at the side of my vagina.

In addition to his tongue action, he began to rub me right above my clit and the combination made me crazy insane. I began to think that I was insatiable. I didn't want him to stop. I moaned, I cried out. I felt the freedom in the privacy of this room, knowing his body a bit better, to cry out.

He took his mouth out of me, massaged my tits and asked, "Are you ready yet?" Our "playtime' before our orgasms seemed to take less time. It's as if we both knew how we would react to the other person's touch and our bodies responded almost instantly.

I moaned something incoherently that I hope he interpreted as a yes. He pinned my arms above my head, his hands tightly clasping my wrists. This position made my pelvic area jump, it arched toward the ceiling in an instant.

He then entered me with his powerful penis already as hard as a rock. He slowly dove as deeply inside me as he could, then just as slowly pulled out slightly so that I felt his penis in all the right places.

Soon, he was moving faster and even faster. He established a tremendous rhythm that I momentarily thought knew no limits. Just at the moment that I knew I would be coming, he did one final entry and he warned me he was going to come. I nodded yes. And we came at the exact same moment. He fell on me and quickly rolled to one side.

I wrapped a leg around him and snuggled as closely as I dared. He pulled me even closer and kissed the top of my head.

Max

I didn't speak on the way to the Penthouse. I hoped that Jazmin wouldn't be upset. But I was pissed. Totally pissed. Call it a male ego thing. But I wanted that Rubens more than anything at that moment. The fact that was Daphne who outbid me with essentially my own money was not only maddening, but humiliating as well. And it all happened in front of Jazmin. What was that all about?

Oh why even ask? I knew what it was all about. It was yet another dig at my sexual appetite and our seven-year marriage that ended – tragically ended if you ask her.

We divorced with her claiming I was a sexual deviant. A man whose sexual appetite knew no limits. And a woman who claimed it was a perverse form of abuse. Add to the mix that she strolled over like an abused ex-wife and spoke to Jazmin in what appeared to be a pleasant and amicable conversation burned me to no end.

By the time I got to the penthouse, my rage had transformed to passion with the help of the woman who had been riding with me – not pressing me for much conversation. She allowed me to be inside my own head, working this shit out. She didn't need the constant attention, the endless compliments, or the continually petting that most woman did.

I locked the door to the penthouse. Finally, the outer world couldn't reach me anymore. I was alone with my thoughts. I was alone with my feelings. I was alone with Jazmin. Even though we spoke little, I took her to be a confidant. Someone with whom if I did need to blurt out my feelings would be there to accept the barrage unconditionally. And still love everything about me.

There was no doubt in my mind that these last several days have been the most wonderful of my entire life. I could only imagine how the path of my life might have been changed if I had found this beautiful soul earlier in my life. My mind boggles at what other roads I may have traveled if I had her calm mien to accompany through my rowdy raucous years.

I tried not to think of that. I pushed the regret aside, rationalizing that she probably wouldn't have given me a second look.

I turned to the sleeping beauty and discovered her looking more beautiful than ever. I pulled her close to me, took her chin and then kissed her with a passion I didn't even know

I had. As I was trying to decide exactly where that had come from, my tongue went on an excursion, nearly on it own and sought every possible spot in her delicious mouth.

She reacted just as passionately with her tongue. It excited and encouraged me to continue.

I led her toward the bedroom. She didn't miss a step as she moved step-by-step with me, her tongue never losing the engaging rhythm. Silently, I instructed her to sit on the bed, I began to undress her and allowed her to continue. Then I made great haste to ensure that I, too, was naked by the time finished.

I knelt down in front of her. Her legs were still hanging over the side of the bed. I motioned for her to lie down and my tongue dove with an unfettered excitement into her vagina, no hesitation. I can't even remember if I started out slowly for her to get accustomed to it.

Was I the first? I couldn't help but wonder if any other man's tongue had been here before. God, I hope not. At that moment it was all about possession. I wanted – no needed – to possess every part of her body. My tongue quickly, almost wildly, wanted to claim it – all of it. As if I were marking my territory.

She complied with every small movement of my tongue. Her pelvic rotated, moved up and down. She groaned ever so slightly and I knew that she was ready. Perhaps knowing this young lady the way I now did, perhaps she was even more than ready to come.

Without skipping a beat with my tongue, I moved a hand on top of her clitoris, took my index finger and rubbed it. The combination sent her through the roof, I swear. I had never known any woman to be so responsive, to be so physical, who outwardly enjoyed sex as much as she did. No phoniness on her part. No pretending. Nothing but sincere raw sexual excitement. Sincere enthusiasm.

"It's about to happen," I told her. "We're about to make magic one more time."

I guided my penis inside her I held it there for only an instant. She began to wiggle, encouraging me to wield my dick inside of her. Slowly and carefully at first. When I knew she was ready I went faster and faster. I pinned her hands to the bed, holding them at the wrist, making sure that as the mounting pleasure continued, she wouldn't be in any

position to stop it.

And then it happened. It happened so quickly it seemed and I knew in an instant we had both come together. We both felt the fireworks and the ultimate sexual release that came with such a monumental event.

I wanted to mark the date on the calendar, but knew there would be many more. I knew that this was only the first of many.

Chapter 15

Maxwell

I lay on the bed, Jazmin cuddled close. Both of us, at least for the moment, lost in our own thoughts. It had been a long day, if not so much physically, but emotionally. We got back to the penthouse about 6 pm. We weren't satiated until well after midnight. We lay there for another half hour to forty five minutes just indulging our bodies with intimate feeling of being close.

It felt good just to lie there, not needing to make any conversation. It felt good just being and not having to perform either in bed or the classroom or even in public needing to live up to a self-imposed persona. Oh, what a trap I made for myself all those years ago.

The last person I expected to see at Christies was about the very first person I bumped into, Daphne. Ex-wives show up at the damnest times. They tend to zoom into the persons you least want them to. It's never a good thing to get an ex-wife talking to a current partner. But, both of them walked away from that conversation alive—and neither of them started throwing punches. All in all, I would count that a friendly encounter.

I thought about it a moment and then decided I needed to clear the air with Jazmin about Daphne – and while I was at it I should probably mention my other three ex-wives. The only problem was I wasn't quite sure how to broach the subject. I decided there was no easy way to slip it innocently after an evening of amazing sex.

Hungry? I asked Jazmin finally. "As I matter of fact, I think I am hungry."

"I don't want to leave the penthouse, though," I told her, "and I really don't want to ring room service. I do have some food in the fridge. I think maybe even a dozen eggs. Want to see what we have there?"

Jazmin

It’s amazing how hungry good sex makes you,” I ventured that observation to Max while he whisked the eggs for the omelet.

Abruptly, Maxwell brought up Daphne. “Wow. That’s a random thought,” I told him.

“Not really,” he said, “I saw you two talking and your encounter with her has been in the back of my mind all day. This is difficult for me to say but I really feel as if I need to tell you a few things.”

Max’s back was to me as he poured the egg mixture into the frying pan. All I could muster was an “Oh?” Not a very intelligent reply, but my brain seems to shut down every time I’m around Max.

The momentary silence was deafening as he finished dividing the egg and placing it in front of me. He sat down. For a moment I thought he had abandoned that train of thought.

“Jazmin, I’m not sure what you know of my background. But I have a few things I’d like to tell you about my personal life. I feel like it’s only fair to you. I don’t want you to think that the time we’ve been spending together has just been a romp in the park.”

He paused and took a deep breath. “I know I call what we do ‘play,’ but I must tell you I don’t view you as a ‘plaything.’ Far from it. In this short time we’ve been together, I’ve come to have deep feelings for you. I would like to get to know you – as a person.”

I couldn’t think of a response to that. I stared into his deep-set eyes. Poets always say you can tell a lot about a person’s soul by staring into their eyes. I got momentarily lost. They were beautiful, absolutely beautiful. In a flash, I knew what that meant. His soul was just as beautiful. The message from the universe? Trust him, Jazmin, trust him.

He must have read my face, because he finally continued. “The fact of the matter is that I love you. And despite our age difference and my, well, slightly unorthodox way of introducing myself and getting to know you, I hope you think of me as more than just a sex partner.”

I nodded. I couldn't believe my ears. Daphne had told me this, but I wasn't sure I could trust her. I thought it impossible for someone like Maxwell to be attracted to someone like me.

"In order for this to be a long-term relationship," he said. "And I guess I'm assuming you would like it to be a long-term relationship as well." He paused waiting for a reply.

"I would, but I can't think of a single reason why you would be attracted to me," I offered.

"Well, I'm giving you enough information about my past," Max said, "that you can make a decision made on full disclosure of the course of my life. You've already met Daphne. I can't imagine what she told you about me."

I smiled. "Actually she spoke quite highly about you, Max."

"In addition to Daphne, I have another three ex-wives walking about. Does that bother you?"

I suppose it probably would have upset most women and, indeed, I suppose it should have irritated me, but it really didn't. I give Max a lot of credit.

He quickly named his ex-wives. I knew that I would never remember the names. I really wasn't concerned about them right now. I kept replaying the portion of the conversation that talked about that long-term relationship. That just blew my mind.

Max continued to brief me on his past sexual behavior, basically his reputation as a lady's man.

"A well-deserved reputation," I said, mustering a small smile.

To make a long story short, by the end of the conversation and the end of the omelet, I knew where I stood in this man's life. Apparently, it was front and center.

We retired back to the bedroom where he asked if it were okay if he flipped on the

television. I looked around. “I don’t see a TV.” He pushed a remote control and a large panel on the wall in front of us slid open displaying the largest television I had ever seen. We both fell asleep watching some late night talk show.

When Max woke me, it was almost 7 am. “I hate to brush you aside darling,” he said softly, “but we both have to be someplace at 9 am. and we really shouldn’t show up together.”

Chapter 16

Jazmin

Since I formally accepted to try to establish a long-term relationship with Max, he decided, it was time I met his chauffeur. When he called for his limousine to take me home, he walked me through the lobby of the Plaza hotel and out to the limo.

The bright morning sun nearly blinded me. “Joel, this is Jazmin,” Max said formally and with much respect. “She will be a frequent visitor and it’s high time the two of you got to know each other.”

Max gave me a quick peck on the cheek. “Gotta get ready for class, darling,” he said.

Joel opened the car door for me and we were off. For the first few minutes, Joel was quiet. And me? Well, I was lost in a maze of thoughts of my own.

Joel finally broke the silence. “You probably don’t realize what that introduction that Max did back there meant, do you?”

Before I even answered, he continued, “It means that he cares about you much more than just as a sex partner. I’ve seen lots of women come and go. And never took the time to introduce them to me. You have got to be a special young lady.”

I walked into my apartment Carly immediately cornered me.

“Details!” she screamed. “I need all the details about the auction and especially where the hell you were all night!”

After I took a shower and got changed for classes. I began to tell her everything that happened to me. In the process I had to ‘fess up’ to the fact that I had spent most of the night with Max night before classes started.

She took it all in. In fact, from the look on her face, it almost appeared that she was proud of me. “Who knew there was a Mrs. Dr. Maxwell St. James?” Carly asked incredulously.

“Can you imagine how much money this man must have to be able to support, not one ex-

wife, but four of them?" Carly asked.

"Judging by the amount of money she was throwing around, I don't think any of them are living below the poverty line," I ventured.

While I joked about it, I couldn't help but think to myself about the amount of money Maxwell must have. Was that why when I first met him he didn't tell me who he was?

The two of us had been sitting on the couch. The television was on to CNN cable news, but we weren't paying much attention. Until …

There was a pause in our conversation at the very moment the news anchor started a story about an art collector and professor who had been arrested for murder. We were both attracted to the story at the same instant.

"That's Max," I cried, as I jumped up. "Max has been arrested for murder. And for theft of the Rubens he had been bidding on,"

"Evidently, he was busy," Carly said.

I continued to listen intently to the news story. "No he couldn't have done it," cried out again, "he was with me. We were making omelets."

The sound of the doorbell made both Carly and me jump. "Jesus!" Carly said, "Who in blue blazes could that be at this hour of the morning?"

The bell rang again, this time repeatedly. "Whoever it is certainly seems to need attention urgently," I said.

Carly went to the door and opened it. I could tell by the look on her face she was shocked to see a man dressed in a chauffeur's uniform.

Of course it was Joel. He looked right past Cary and at me. I was standing right behind her. "Ms. Donovan," he said flatly, "Professor St. James requests your presence. While he didn't explicitly say it, I'm sure it's an urgent matter."

“Joel, I saw the news just now,” I said. He looked relieved he didn’t need to explain anything further.”

“Let me grab my cell phone and my purse and we can leave.”

Carly followed me, leaving poor Joel stuck in the doorway alone. “Excuse me,” she said, “you know this guy by name?”

“Yeah. I was just formally introduced to him this morning. He drove me home.”

Alone in the limo, Joel and I were able to talk freely. “Joel, both you and I know that Max couldn’t have killed anyone. We both know where he was all night long.”

“I know, Jazmin, but he would never tell the court that. And I was willing to testify, but they didn’t want to hear it. I wasn’t actually in the room watching you guys.”

I laughed. “It actually was better off that way. No offense.”

“None taken, Jazmin,” he said laughingly. Then I turned the conversation back to the problem at hand. “So for that time period during which the murder occurred, he’s basically without an alibi.”

“Exactly,” Joel said, “but not only that the cops found his gun next to Daphne. He went to where he usually stores it and it was missing.”

“Does he have any idea who might have taken i?.”

Joel looked at me via the rear view mirror. “None at all.”

“So he needs me to testify on his behalf?” I asked.

“Professor St. James would never ask you to do that,” Joel said. “That would be incriminating yourself and he has too much respect for you as a lady to do that.”

“But if I don’t all the circumstantial evidence points to him. The police won’t bother to look much farther for the real murderer with all the evidence they have already collected.”

“I know,” Joel said, “It’s not my place to advise you on something so personal. After all, I’m just a chauffeur. As far as I know, Professor St. James wants you in the courtroom for moral support.”

As he continued to drive, Joel called the courthouse to learn the time of Maxwell’s hearing. “it’s the first one up, Jazmin,” he told me. “Ten am.” The attorney assured me that we could have a few minutes alone with him before he faces the judge.

“So what exactly am I to do?”

Joel looked at me via the rear view mirror. “To be honest,” he said, “I don’t know. And even if I could give you some advice, do you think a chauffeur should be dealing out legal advice?”

His humor broke the tension – at least temporarily.

“I will do whatever it takes to get his name cleared. I hope he realizes that.”

“Trust me,” Joel assured me, “he really doesn’t expect you to give testimony to his whereabouts. I think he just wants you there for moral support.”

“But if I do testify, will it at least get him released for the moment? To get the police looking for the real killer?”

“Here again, you’re seeking legal advice from a chauffeur. I can’t say that for sure. His attorney seems to think so. But it would throw you into the national spotlight.”

Joel’s words rang true. Just walking into the courthouse abruptly threw me into the national spotlight. I walked up to the courthouse with Joel, but I was certainly unprepared for what I had encountered. The steps of the county building were flooded with photographers, broadcast journalists and videographers. I couldn’t believe that as I

climbed the steps each of them was aiming their equipment at me.

A couple of them called to me. “Are you Jazmin Donovan? We understand you’re here to testify on behalf of St. James. Would you care to comment?”

I instinctively kept my down and shielded my eyes from the flashes. God, there were so many flashes. I kept my mouth shut. I had seen this scenario played out countless times on television and in the movies. But I never in a million years thought I would be in this position.

Maxwell

She walked into the courtroom, a pair of just-right tight jeans. A lovely blouse with the proper neckline cut to show off her bosom. She took a seat not far from me. Joel talked to the attorney to let him know she had arrived.

The attorney strode over to her and sat down. They conferred quietly for a few moments. Those moments were excruciating. I know I was the topic of conversation and I wasn't used to not being in control. I wasn't used to being the person needing help.

After a few moments, the attorney motioned for me to come over. I scrambled over and gave Jazmin a kiss on the cheek. Chills ran up my spine just doing that.

"Now, Maxwell," the attorney said sternly, "I am your legal consultant and I would really appreciate it if you'd actually listened to me and take my advice. We're talking about serious charges here and it's no time for you to play attorney. Got it?"

I had never heard anyone talk to Max that way. "Jazmin and I have this under control," he said. "We still have to depend on the leniency of the judge. But, given what we plan to do, I have a lot more confidence you won't be spending the night in jail. And I can just about guarantee the police will start a real investigation."

"No, I can't let Jazmin do what I think you're asking her to do."

"Maxwell St. James," I said. That was the first time I ever addressed him by his full name and for some odd reason, it excited me. "No one is asking me to do anything. I'm volunteering and I really don't need your chivalrous thinking getting in the way."

"Wow! You're even more beautiful when you're angry," he said.

The attorney laughed uncontrollably. "Let's focus a little here, shall we? "he said.

"I am," Maxwell said, almost wistfully. "I am."

“All rise.”

The judge entered the room. We stood. The judge called Max to the bench and in turn, his attorney motioned me to follow them.

“I understand that you’re charged with murder and with the theft of a multi-million dollar original masterpiece. A Rubens, wasn’t it, Professor St. James.”

The attorney quickly spoke for his client. “Yes, your honor, my client is charged with the murder of his ex-wife, Daphne St. James. And he understands he is charged with the theft of a Rubens. But since he did not steal it, he cannot testify to the exact painting which was taken.”

The judge nodded his approval. “And this young lady with you attorney, is?” The attorney spoke before I was able to react. “Jazmin Donovan, your honor.”

“And her purpose here today?”

“She appears before the court today in order to testify on behalf of Professor St. James whereabouts the night and time of the murder.”

“Hmm. This is an interesting development. According to the police report, St. James said he was alone last night.”

“He wasn’t, though, your honor. He was trying to protect the identity of this young lady. He feared, and perhaps rightly so, that her name would be unfairly dragged through the mud if he admitted to being with her for a large portion of the evening, specifically the time of the murder and theft.”

I didn’t like the way the judge initially looked at Jazmin. He scanned her up and down as if he were trying to decide if she were a hooker, some paid prostitute. That was exactly what I wanted to save her from. Every fiber of my body shouted out to the judge, “She’s not a whore or a prostitute and don’t judge her by my overactive appetite for sex.”

The judge finally asked Jazmin to speak. “Please tell me in your own words, where you and Professor St. James were at the time of the murder of his ex-wife, Daphne.”

Jazmin looked at the attorney and he nodded his consent. “The two of us were in his penthouse the entire evening – from the end of the auction till about 7 a.m.” I paused. “We were both awake during the time period that Mrs. St. James was killed. Professor St. James couldn’t possibly have killed her or stolen the piece of art. There was no way he could ‘slip out’ of the room without my knowledge.”

The judge sighed. It was almost as if he were disappointed that I had an alibi. He paused for a long time. Far too long for my comfort. It made me worry. And I could tell by the look on my attorney’s face, he was a bit worried as well.

Finally he admitted. “Considering the new testimony I can’t recommend bail. Would the defending attorney and the prosecutor please step forward?” They did and conferred.

“Thank you.” The judge then said, “Ms. Prosecutor,” he said, “would you like to change your charge?”

District prosecuting attorney Eleanor McNeil gave what sounded like a sad whimper. I’ve known her for ages – and she has always wanted to nail me to the cross. She has wanted to arrest me for art theft and forgery for so long. But has been unable to.

“Based on this testimony, I must withdraw the charge of murder and grand theft at least temporarily. I would like to reserve the right to ask Professor St. James to stay in the country – ideally within the bounds of this county. And cooperate fully with the police and District Attorney’s department as this enquiry progresses.”

My attorney grabbed my shoulder. Apparently, he felt I was about to say something stupid. The truth be known, I probably would have if left to my own devices. “My client fully understands the terms of the dismissal and will not violate any of the orders of the court. Furthermore, he also fully realizes that he may be subject to occasional questioning and is still a ‘person of interest’ as this investigation continues.”

The judge banged his gavel. “Given all of this, Professor St. James, I am now releasing you. Please behave yourself.”

Thank you, your honor,” I said weakly.

As we turned to go, I wrapped my arm around Jazmin. I so wanted to take her right then and there. She sacrificed so much for me. As soon as we reached the threshold of the courtroom I paused and kissed her passionately on the lips. She responded in kind. We were so involved momentarily with each other that I didn't realize at first that the entire waiting room was packed with students and other supporters cheering at our own personal celebration.

I held her at arm's reach for a moment. "Did you bring all these people with you?" I asked her. She laughed. "No, I thought all these people came to see you."

My attorney interrupted us for a moment. "Don't get too jubilant," he said. "You're not really in the clear until they have arrested the real killer."

Jazmin raised an eyebrow and whispered in my ear, "You know what that means?"

I pulled back and looked at her quizzically. "No, what does that mean?"

"We should probably start hunting for the person who killed Daphne St. James and stole the painting. They left your gun right there. They intended to frame you. I don't know what kind of enemies you have Max, but I don't think you'll be in the clear until the real killer is in custody."

I looked her squarely in the eyes. "We'll discuss that later. In the meantime," I told her, "let's go home and play."

The Billionaire Professor

2

Heather Royer

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*** Before Reading This Book ***

I Have a **Very Important** Message For You!

Prologue

Maxwell St. James

Never have I ever been so sexually aroused in a courtroom before. Especially in a courtroom standing before a judge who wants to convict me of murder.

The murder conviction suddenly became a secondary issue in my life compared to my lust for this woman's body and, yes, even the love of this woman.

From the moment I first saw this classic beauty – just days before my world fell apart – till this nightmare in the courtroom, she has been the epitome of grace.

There was absolutely no doubt about it. Her mere presence in front of me made my dick harden involuntarily. I would have done anything that night –and anything right this moment, even in a court of law – to take her and ravish her body until she cried "uncle."

What was the most incredible part of her beauty? Her sincere naïve innocence that she even possessed it. I have never met a woman so incredibly unaware of the effect she had on men – especially me.

The luscious curves of her hips, the deep set cleavage of her bosom, and her long flowing hair that came down nearly to her ass set me afire. I wanted to take her right there in the courtroom without regard for what consequences may come.

And now, defying all convention, she stood before the court with utter disregard of personal reputation, knowing that she may be facing possible repercussions from New State University and, perhaps most dangerous of all, throwing herself headlong into national headlines.

All to clear my name, without any thought for herself or of how others may judge her. She risked her own reputation attesting to the fact that I couldn't possibly have killed my ex-wife Daphne.

I can't lie. I could feel my knees knock when I stood before the judge. I feared that they knocked so rapidly and so loudly that the entire courtroom heard them.

Sadly, though, that wasn't the only physical problem I was experiencing at the moment. It had more to do with who I was standing next to, Professor Maxwell St. James. The man I met just the other night, whose sexy gravelly voice swept me off my feet, created a sexual drive in me I never knew I had and now he's the man whose body I can't get enough of.

I volunteered to offer an alibi for the professor. He had apparently refused to tell the authorities that another person could verify his exact location at the estimated time of the murder and the art theft. Of course if the judge wanted an accounting of precisely what we were doing, the testimony could then become a little embarrassing, to say the least.

But, if it meant getting Maxwell cleared of that murder charge and the theft charge as well, then my discomfort and embarrassment were small prices to pay. I drew in a deep breath as it appeared the judge was ready to talk to me.

The judge asked how I can be so certain. "We were both very much awake," I answered back quickly. Now that I consider my remarks perhaps a bit too quickly. The judge pressed me further.

"Now think back, Ms. Donovan, before you go making rash statements. After all, if you're lying and Professor St. James really did leave the house and it turned out he did kill his ex-wife, that would make you an accessory to murder. So please be honest with this court, it will be in your best interest."

I turned quickly to Max's attorney, who gave me a quick shrug and a nod. So I just blurted it out. I thought the sooner I released it from my mouth by telling everyone, the quicker my anxiety and panic would flee. "We were having sex." There would be no use telling him it was the best sex a woman could ever imagine. A ripple of laughter spread throughout the courtroom. The judge wisely chose to ignore it.

"You spoke so quickly, Ms. Donovan," he said, "how can you be certain that you both were awake at that hour?" He pressed me further, warning me about perjuring myself in the courtroom.

"Is it possible that Professor St. James could have left the premises … your presence without your knowing it?" Another undercurrent of laughter filtered through the courtroom, this time a little louder and a little bolder.

"There's no chance you could have fallen asleep at any time during this time period?" I felt irritated in addition to terrified. I remember thinking, "Must I spell everything out for you?"

Someone in the courtroom spoke up, "Not by a long shot, I'm betting." The judge brought the gavel down – hard – on this smartass remark. He looked at me waiting for my

response. “No, your honor,” I assured him. “Professor St. James was not out of my sight even for a moment during the time in question.”

I hoped I sounded professional – like one of those television attorneys. I tried hard to use the same style of wording the attorneys would.

I could see that this presented the judge and the prosecuting attorney with a dilemma. My unexpected testimony upset their applecart, so to speak.

With my testimony they had to release Max, at least for the moment. That meant their major suspect – their only suspect – looked much less suspicious. No longer was this an open and shut case for the prosecution.

Chapter 1

Maxwell

That evening Jazmin and I felt classic “peer pressure” to celebrate at the very bar we met at just days prior to this.

There were so many people behind the scenes to thank, from the chairman of my department who refused to suspend me, to Jazmin’s friends who rallied together on a moment’s notice coming to the courthouse to provide her with moral support.

It felt like from the very first moment we arrived people were trying to separate us. They succeeded. I glanced at her from across the bar, sighing. Instead of shyly turning away as she did the night I met her, she gave me a shrug and mouthed “Help me!”

I studied Jazmin a moment, her black dress that perfectly tugged at her curvaceous hips, showed enough of her bosom and her cleavage as well as accented that sensuous waistline.

Some men may consider her a bit too curvy for today’s “look-like-you’re anorexic” standards. But she had the perfect body for a Renaissance model. Especially Rubens.

Jazmin’s classic beauty also rivaled that of Marilyn Monroe. What man wouldn’t get a hard on every time he saw the iconic photo of hers with the register blowing air up her skirt, showing a very lovely set of legs?

Jazmin

The two of us arrived at this celebratory gathering together, but it was clear our friends had a different idea about our staying together all evening than I had. They immediately dragged us off in opposite directions.

“Come on,” Carly whined, “the entire art history class is waiting for you and then some.” She tugged forcefully at my arm. I looked into Max’s eyes pleading he find a way to help me escape from the group.

I didn’t fit into the group the other night when everyone was here. What made these people think I would fit in with them tonight? I distinctly felt as if they were using my presence and the circumstances of the day as an excuse to go out drinking.

I needed only one person to celebrate with tonight. And he was across the bar. He might as well have been on the planet Mars.

Max

I couldn't look at her curvaceous body without touching it a moment longer. I know it was a victory celebration as much as for my release from jail as Jazmin's bravery for standing up on my behalf. But the longer this public celebration continued the more it delayed our private one. I still had not expressed my gratitude to Jazmin – not in the way, at least, that sincerely conveyed my true feelings.

The truth was I could be patient no longer. With drink in hand, I approached her from behind, gently touching her on the shoulder and then deliberately worked my hand down toward that damned sexy ass of hers.

I felt an immediate hard on when she instinctively grabbed for my dick. My body involuntarily flinched in sexual pleasure if only for a second.

I whispered in her ear. "Let's get out of here. I can't stand another minute only imagining tearing your clothes off. I want to physically tear that dress off of you – and I want to do it immediately."

She blushed slightly. "I thought we'd never get to that point of the evening, Max." She pressed her soft bosoms up against my torso and gave my dick on last rub before she said she was more than ready to leave.

I dare say my dick told me I should have already left.

Jazmin

He approached me when I least expected it. His strong, large hand on my shoulder sent shock waves of sexual delight throughout my entire body. I knew the instant he touched me it was Max. No one else had ever touched me with that incredible ability to transcend time and space. When Maxwell St. James put a hand anywhere on my body all time stood still – the world as I knew it froze.

My only thought was what his next move would be. What sexually pleasing surprise did he have hidden inside of his bag of tricks he had planned on pulling out?

Truthfully, though, all I needed was a whiff of his cologne and I instantly felt the volcanic start of a sexual orgasm bubble up inside of me. Could others tell by looking at me that I was a walking Pompeii about to explode? How transparent was I?

He blew lightly into my ear. Did he even know that I would follow him anywhere with that small signal? I took a furtive scan of the immediate area and saw no one watching us and reached for his crouch.

It gave me a modicum of pleasure – okay, it pleased the hell out of me – to see his reaction to my touch. I imagined his blood racing to his penis even before I could release my hold.

It looked as if Max tried hard not to smile as he felt the effects of my touch. He so tried to maintain a stoic exterior. But, even in these last few days of knowing him, I have come to recognize his thoughts through his facial expressions.

The sexy small crinkles appeared and highlighted those penetrating eyes.

I can’t say that I didn’t have some reaction myself when I touched him. My thighs tingled, my knees buckled and even as familiar as he had become to me in the last few days, it was as if I were looking into his soul for the very first time.

And every time I touched him my heart melted. I would follow this man through hell. Little did I know how prophetic those words would be.

Cha p ter 2

Jazmin

I hadn’t felt his strong arms sending goose bumps down my spine, tingling my thighs and driving me crazy with desire all evening. Then I felt it. His undeniable touch. His fingers arousing every single cell of my body.

My soul ached for this moment. I prayed that it would last forever. No, that’s not right. I prayed he would take me away from this public celebration of his release from jail. I begged the gods that be that we would find ourselves alone on top of red satin sheets in in penthouse suite at The Plaza.

He whispered in my ear. Even before I recognized the words, the unmistakable rich, full touched voice captivated me, once again stirred me to a sexual rebirth as if he never touched me before.

Will every touch be this exciting? Will it always lead me to this stirring of my soul? Oh, God, I hope so. I plead that I never take his magic for granted. I prayed that the carnal attention never ends.

“Jaz.” His whisper in my ear reverberated throughout my body, sending my legs trembling with excitement, wobbling and weakening as I fantasized about what might be, what could be if we ever got the chance to leave this place.

“Let’s get out of here, we have some celebrating of our own to do,” he said. “That is, if you would like to.”

I turned to him, furtively looked around and quickly but firmly grabbed his dick as best I could through that horribly obtrusive clothing.

“I’d rather clear that table over there,” I pointed to the round bistro table to the left of him, “and screw your brains out, Professor St. James.”

He purred an utterly sensuous guttural sound. “So, I’ve unleashed a monster?”

“I prefer to think that you’ve awakened a superhero.”

“And Ms. Superhero,” Max began, “what’s your superpower?”

“What, you don’t know?”

He shook his head.

“My superpower is giving incredible orgasms.”

Max

I was tempted for a second to accept her offer of allowing her to take me on the table, considering her formidable sexual superpowers.

Instead, I said, “For natural security reasons, super sexy, we can’t chance revealing your true identity in public. But if you’d oblige me, I’d love to test those superpowers of yours I the privacy of my penthouse.”

She gave my dick one last squeeze. I rolled my eyes, then closed them. I didn’t even try to disguise my look of sexual satisfaction on my face.

“What are we waiting for?” she asked.

Chapter 3

Jazmin

Max barely allowed the elevator at the Plaza to close and I felt the warmth of his mouth in mine. His hands were as expedient as his mouth, as he ravenously dug under my blouse, found my bra and released it.

“Those girls were telling me they wanted to come out and play,” he whispered. I laughed as he pulled one out with one hand and began massaging it.

Max

Her squirming told me everything I needed to know. After a much too short of a ride, the elevator stopped at the floor my penthouse was on. The door began to open and clicked it to close.

My mouth moved swiftly from Jazmin's mouth to her tit. I sucked on the nipple, quickly but boldly. I pulled away and looked her straight in the eyes — those precious pale blue eyes. "Where are your super hero powers now?"

"I think you sucked them out of me," she answered.

"Oh, that was the grand plan of the evil art history professor. Now, without your super shield force of protection, you're at my mercy."

"Quite frankly, my dear man," she answered, "I can think of no one better to be under … " She paused a beat. "…both figuratively and literally."

Jazmin

I'm amazed at how, in the past several days, I'm growing more comfortable with Max. When I first met him, I thought his attention toward me was nothing more than a joke. I thought a group of friends bet him he would go up to the fat girl, hit on her and make her cry.

Other girls always got picked up in bars – at least hit on. But not girls like me. And even if we did it wouldn't be by dark-haired, drop-dead gorgeous men who performed sizzling sex.

What prompted this man's attention to me I may never know. What I do know, though, is that because of the way he looks at me, I see myself differently. I feel as like a brand new person. A born-again sexual creature, if you will.

We exited the elevator to his penthouse and crossed the short hallway. All the while he continued to drive me mad by teasing me with an orgasm, merely by massaging my tit and playing with my nipple. I thought I could stand it no more and thought the orgasm would burst at any moment. Right at that point he would release the tension on my breast.

He magically, or so it appeared, unlocked the door and interlocked as we were moved step by careful step toward the living room.

"No," I said firmly, "let's use the kitchen table."

He didn't hesitate to take me up on my suggestion. He began to lay me on the table. "Oh, no you don't," I said as I took his shirt off, making sure I fondled every tendril of the hair on his chest. "That table is for you." His face expressed no sense of reaction to this remark.

He dutifully helped me undress him. My level of excitement rose steadily like a thermometer heating up. I felt as if I could feel each and every rise in my temperature.

My thighs tingled. The feelings in my clit heightened to an urgent level. As much as a part of my romantic side wanted to slowly undress Max, my sexual animal drive wanted to rip his clothes off. The animalistic me kept nudging the romantic me. "Don't be gentle. Take him like he's never been taken before. Screw his brains out."

I felt an involuntary smile grow on my face.

Only several days ago I was standing alone, even though I was 'in' a group of people. Today, I'm making love passionately to possibly the hottest man on the face of the planet.

Max hopped on the table and leaned back on his elbows as if he were going to lie back.

"Oh, no you don't, big boy," I admonished him, looking directly at his penis.

"Sit up straight, like I'm sure your mom always told you."

He complied, no questions asked. That in itself surprised me. All the while I've been playfully rubbing his dick, getting him in the mood. Now that his dick had hardened, I

surveyed the situation.

Being short, I wasn’t sure that I could hop up onto his lap with the aim required for this maneuver.

So I moved a dining room chair, stepped on it (The expression on Max’s face showed his amazement at what I was doing.) From that higher perch I could swing a leg over him and sit on his dick.

“Nice,” he said, “very nice touch.”

I wrapped my legs around his waist and squeezed with all my might. In response, he wrapped one arm around my waist; with his free hand he fondled my clit, searching for my sweet spot.

“Oh my God,” I abruptly squealed. I reeled from the shock of the feeling, even though I had been anticipating it all evening.

Max

“I take it I found it,” I asked Jazmin when my fingers hit that golden spot on her clitoris. Sometimes it’s so satisfying to be a philanthropist like myself and give back to society.

I leaned forward and kissed her passionately on the lips. I didn’t know any other way to express my deep appreciation and love for this sleeping beauty.

Without a doubt, she was ready and she repaid the enjoyment I had teased her with. She provided me with enjoyment of my own. With my penis in her, she began to move up and down. Slowly and deliberately at first in a distinct and delightful rhythm. The lady knew exactly what she was doing. Even though I thought I knew what was going to happen next, my level of sexual anticipation would only make the ride that much sweeter.

I made sure my penis, in its hardened state, pressed against the sides of her. I could tell by the look on her face she was doing everything within her power to contain the orgasm that so wanted to explode inside her.

“Where are your superpowers now?” I asked her.

“Every superhero has her equivalent of kryptonite,” she said through clenched teeth. “Obviously, you’ve just exposed mine.”

Her timing was impeccable. “I’m coming,” she finally confessed, whispering in my ear. Together, we created an explosive synergistic sexual pleasure that defied all logic. If I didn’t know better, I would have said her evil plan to ‘screw my brains out’ was working … and working very well.

There was really only one word to describe what I had just experienced: raw. I had to repeat that single word over and over again in my mind. Even though it was rough – raw – and exquisitely pure sexual experience, it involved a level of pure, unconditional love. It seemed like an unexplained paradox. Something so rough, so solidly instinctive, could be infused with a tremendous amount of pure, unadulterated – dare I say unconditional – love.

Jazmin placed on hand on my chest. It rose and fell swiftly as my heartbeat pounded with a quick succession of thuds within me. She lovingly massaged my chest all the while playfully fondling every tendril of hair on my chest, I swear. In turn, I cupped my hand behind her head and stroked her hair.

Together, we slowly fell backwards and lay on the table together, as if the table were our life raft from the outside world. Here nothing and nobody could harm us.

The lady had surprised me once again.

Chapter 4

Max

So much for my persona as a macho fellow with no feelings. If it weren't enough that I immediately felt a stab of … I'm not sure what it was whenever I saw Jazmin … I was now beginning to feel concern about the speed and direction of the police investigation into the death and theft.

Even though I was temporarily free, I still had to answer to a host of questions from the police. They ranged from a list of enemies I knew my ex-wife, Daphne, may have had to anyone who wanted to see me framed for her murder and the theft.

During all of this, I knew they treated my so-called "innocence" with an ever skeptical eye. And, yes, even though I wasn't charged with murder or grand theft at the moment, the odds of me not being arrested were dwindling by the day.

One evening, after the most satisfying sexual encounter of my life, Jazmin and I were entangled in the red satin sheets of my bed. With our hearts beating in linked rhythms I fully believed that we really had melded into one heart. One mind.

It was actually Jazmin who broke the silence and voiced her concern. "Do you really think the police are doing everything in their power to look for the real killer?"

"I don't know, sweetheart," I answered. "There's a part of me that feels as if they already have found the real killer." I closed my eyes and squeezed her body tightly. I let out a staccato sigh.

"And that someone they found would be you," she said almost as if it were fait accompli

"Precisely," I said.

She gave my body a quick tight squeeze in return, kissed my chest and finally said, "Then we have to force their hand to seriously start searching."

Chapter 5

Jazmin

Carly and I approached Max after class the following day. We told him what we needed and what we intended to do. At first he seemed elated.

We went to his office. He let out what could only be described as a sigh of concern as we all sat – him on one side of his desk, Carly and I on the other. The question for me, though, was what was he concerned about.

I wasn't sure that he was more concerned that the police investigation always seemed to point back to him or that Carly and I proposed digging through his past. Nonetheless, he appeared to be cooperating fully with us. He quickly gave us the names of the three remaining ex-wives of his.

We did get a bit personal, even to the point of asking the circumstances under which he and his former wives parted. If we were going to be of any help to him, though, we needed to know as much as we possibly could.

I didn't see anything too surprising about any of the information he had given us – at least so far. Let's face it, once you realize that Maxwell St. James was a sexual-loving man who had difficulty staying married, you understand a lot about him. But, he's not singular in his love of sex. He indeed has a desire, or should I call it a need, of multiple partners. It happened to millions of men. Not to mention women.

Something odd happened, though, when we started talking about individuals who might hold a grudge against him. A grudge, large enough, that is, that the person would like to see him serving time in prison for murder.

While he offered a few names, mostly former art auction bidding competitors, especially those who were prevented from buying a masterpiece because of his unlimited bank account. I wondered if it were just me that noted his hesitancy or did Carly sense it too.

As much as I loved being in the same room as the man, basking in the glorious scent of his cologne reminded me of the one of the many episodes from our last sexual encounter.

What I needed more than anything was to strip him naked and suck his dick. Why even mince words?

Good God, woman, I suddenly thought, we're trying to ensure Max's freedom to keep him from going to prison for a very long time – okay, trying to prevent him from spending the rest of his natural life in prison. So what's in the forefront of my mind? Screwing him beyond his (and mine) wildest dreams.

Max

God! Was that an uncomfortable situation! I love Jazmin with all my heart; I've never had better sex in my life. But if she discovered my secret … oh damn! With all the digging and investigating these two are planning to do, one of them is bound to find out about my past.

I should own up now and get it in the open before Carly or someone else tells her. As the ladies were scribbling down nearly every word I said, there was a knock at the door.

Without thinking and without even going to the door, I invited the person in. "Max, you haven't changed a bit. You're holding court to two beautiful women. My, how do you do it?"

Jazmin

The knock at the door provided the distraction I needed. Max invited the person at the door in casually without even glancing toward to door. My eyes immediately lifted to see who it was. There stood a man who bore an uncanny resemblance to … .

Max?

Who knew there were two of them?

Before we could even ask, the visitor greeted Max. “Yo, brother! See you just can’t stay out of trouble.” He paused a beat after realizing that Carly and I were in the room with him.

“And you, brother, always know how to make an entrance.”

Max bolted out of his chair and nearly sprinted over to – yes, his brother. They engaged in a long, familiar bear hug. Then Max took a step backward. “You’re aging very well, little brother.”

“You’re not doing too bad yourself,” the man volleyed. Then his eyes caught sight of Carly and me. “I apologize for interrupting.” He stared at me and exclaimed, “I would know that lovely face anywhere. You must be Jazmin Donovan.”

I blushed fifty shades of red as Max made proper introductions. It turned out the man was Paul St. James, not only the younger brother of Max, but a Pulitzer award-winning reporter for ***The New York Times.***

I thought Carly would swoon when she shook his hand. Max turned toward Paul and asked, “What’s so important that pulls you away from New York City?”

“You want an honest answer? It’s you big brother, you!”

I quickly closed my notebook and pushed it in my backpack. “I think it’s time we leave, right Carly?”

Carly’s eyes were still transfixed on Paul, who was also endowed with every gorgeous physical feature Max had and perhaps a few more of his own unique attributes.

“Carly, come on, we need to go.” That last comment finally broke her concentration and reluctantly agreed.

Chapter 6

Max

Paul knew how to come straight to the point. “Have you told that sweet young lady who’s standing up for you about your less than stellar past escapades?”

I shook my head. He always had a way of shining his figurative light on me and making me feel like a large stinkin’ pile of shit.

“Her face is plastered all over the internet. Her actions in saving your puny ass made the front page of the Arts section of last Sunday’s New York Times.

“Don’t remind me,” I told him, “I saw it.”

“Did Jazmin see it?”

“I don’t know,” I honestly replied, “Probably. I’m sure if she didn’t one of her friends did.”

I thought for a moment that Paul was going to raise his voice at this point. He, though, was able to keep his composure. “This young lady is going far beyond the call of duty just for a good lay.” He stared into my eyes. It was his classic “I don’t approve of your behavior” look.

Even though he was my younger brother by five years, he’s always been the emotional and moral bastion that I depended on. He was born with common sense. I’m not sure sometimes what happened to mine.

“The bottom line, Max, is that you’re allowing her to go that far is a friggin sin if the only future you’re considering with her is to be the fifth ex-Mrs. Maxwell St. James. It’s also a shame that she’s going through this media circus without all the necessary information. Let’s face it. It’s only going to be a matter of time before that part of your past which you believe you’ve effectively buried pops up somewhere on the internet.

“You can run, Max, but you can’t hide.”

Wow, Paul’s observations hurt. That didn’t mean, though, he wasn’t one hundred percent correct. But before I could even formulate a coherent complaint, he kept on talking. “You are going to try to tell me you’re finally ready to settle down. But I know better. The day you settle down is the day hell freezes over.”

Sitting in of the receiving chairs all this time, Paul crossed his legs and carefully studied my reaction.

“Oh, my God,” Paul exclaimed and abruptly jumped up. “You really are taken with this young lady.” He placed the palms of his hands on the desk. He reminded me of an attorney trying to make an argument to the court.

“Then all the more reason to tell her NOW!” If you hold something like that back, she’ll drop you like the inconsiderate bastard you truly are.”

Chapter 7

Jazmin

“Carly, Max wants to know if you have plans for tonight. Want to go out to dinner with Max and me —“ I didn’t get to finish asking her when she quickly replied.

“Sounds intriguing, but I think –“

“And Paul.” I know withholding his name till last was mean, but I so did want to see her reaction.

“Max’s brother?” Now I had her full attention. She raised her eyebrows. Her voice rose an octave. “Hell, yes!”

Of course the four of us had a pleasant time. I was overjoyed to see how well Carly and Paul got along. They bantered between them almost as if Max and I didn’t exist. I couldn’t say the same for Max and me though.

I selfishly confess I missed the sexual playful nature that characterized all my other moments with Max. That doesn’t mean that fantasizing about what could have been that evening wasn’t sexually arousing. Curiously, ever since I met Max, even my sexual fantasy life became more exciting and stimulating.

Carly and I were sitting across from each other at the table. It was Paul’s idea who insisted, like a modest teen, that “boy, girl, boy, girl” seating was “cozy.” His exact words, I swear. I couldn’t make something like that up.

I knew even back at the office that Carly was taken with Paul. And why not? He bore an incredible resemblance to his brother. Both had gorgeous dark, nearly black hair. Both had sea green eyes that pierced your soul spewing out all of your emotions. Both wore the same amazing sensual cologne. Go figure!

Max, bless his soul, did everything he could to keep our “playtime” even a bit active. I appreciated his attempts. He pulled his chair close to me so his knee could “accidently” bump up against mine. He was also strategically positioned so his hand could grab hold of my thigh. So, I guess it was better than nothing.

In fact, it allowed me to anticipate what the night might bring. You know what Andy Warhol said about anticipation, “The idea of waiting for something makes it more exciting.”

He placed his hand on my knee as often as he could between eating and using his phone. I, in turn, would place my hand on his thigh, teasing him each time with getting as close to touching his dick as I possibly could.

But I found that I, like Max, seemed to be involved in a cell phone conversation via text. Carly texted nearly immediately after we were seated. She was overwhelmed with anticipation and nervousness.

She needed my encouragement as well as advice on how to react to Paul’s remarks. She

thought that knowing his brother as intimately as I did, I could help provide some advice.

We texted back and forth nearly nonstop even as we talked with the brothers, each of us staring down at our phones we had hidden under the table.

Carly had come under the sexual spell of the St. James family. Of course, until that moment, I never knew the family had possessed any such sexual spell. My phone erupted with a series of short texts. At one point, as I looked up at Paul, I rapidly texted her, “What red-blooded American girl wouldn’t be craving his body right now?”

And so it went all evening with Carly and me, texts flying back and forth in cyberspace. What I didn’t realize for a while though, that while our texts were taking flight back and forth from our ends of the table, there was another series of texts being sent between the men, criss-crossing ours. Just like airports had air traffic controllers, our table was in dire need of a text traffic controller.

Curiously, I noticed that Max, too, seemed to be uncharacteristically involved in a texting conversation. On one visit my hand made to his thigh area, I accidentally squeezed his cell phone instead of his thigh. For a moment, I thought I had actually worked my way up to his penis. But then I realized that even though his dick got hard, it still didn’t have that metal feel to it.

After I quickly withdrew my hand, he smiled and winked at me. Then he sent me a text, “Nothing wrong with dreaming, you know.”

When the meal came, I realized that the men, even though they had ordered these huge steaks, didn’t start eating right away. Both brothers acknowledged arrival of the meals at the table and then bent their heads down. Now I know they weren’t saying grace over their foods.

That’s when it finally became clear to me. Just like Carly and I were texting each other, the brothers were busy texting each other as well. I could only hope that Paul’s correspondence to Max were asking about Carly’s availability.

I’m sure we made quite a sight that evening. We had lively discussions about art, about which Max was passionate about and politics, which turned out to be Paul’s passion. This made Paul all the more attractive to Carly, who was a journalism major. Despite the lively conversation, something tells me the real conversations that night were happening under the table – via texting.

So this is what twenty-first century dating was all about.

After dinner, Carly and Paul went up to Max’s penthouse where Paul was staying. They had made arrangements while we were eating that they were going to continue the research that would find any piece of evidence, no matter how small that would call off the hounds of the local police department from trailing and questioning Max at every opportunity.

They were determined that Max eventually had to “slip up” as they told him and reveal something that would conclusively prove he killed his ex-wife and stole the piece of art she outbid him on that day at Christies auction house.

The pressure was building to find someone in the wake of his past who wanted him framed for murder. There was one person who went to great lengths – murder and grand theft itself – to make it look as if Max did it.

After Paul and Carly left, Max folded his white linen napkin and said, “You appear disappointed, my dear.”

“Uhm, I just …”

“. . . was expecting us to play after dinner.”

Max’s eyes twinkled with excitement as he rubbed my thigh under the table.

“Well, yeah,” I simply said. I always liked it when he referred to what we do as ‘play.’ It made it sound as if the time we spent together having sex sound as fun as child’s play. And since it brought out the best in me, I like to think it somehow touched my inner child as well as my inner sexual beast.

“We’re going for a long walk in the woods tonight and if we find a bed of leaves or soft grass or anything else as equally as inviting, then who knows what may occur?”

He wrapped his strong arm around my waist as we left the restaurant. When we arrived at the restaurant, there were no photographers anywhere to be found. You couldn’t say the same thing when we came out. Now on the way out the paparazzi, the tabloid reporters, the internet videographers and who knows who else were crowding in close to the entrance of the restaurant, waiting to snap a photo, a thirty-second video clip of us or if they were extremely lucky perhaps even a small sound bite of Max proclaiming his innocence.

The press were even calling me by name, pressing me for a comment.

Max deftly guided me as he negotiated his way through this chaotic sea of bizarre media with minimum exposure, quickly tucked me into the vehicle and hustled over to his side of the vehicle. He hit the accelerator and the Lamborghini did what only Lamborghinis could do – left them all in the dust, so to speak.

“That didn’t even seem to rattle you,” I said, after I turned around to make sure no one was following us.

“I’ve winded my way through larger, rougher media crowds, my love,” he said as his strong fingers squeezed my knee and stroked it. You think as familiar as his touch was, it wouldn’t affect me anymore. Not! I still reacted as if it were the first touch. My clit waited in anticipation for what lay ahead. I found my body preparing to get wet and slippery for the eventual, delightful conclusion of the beginning signal of our version of foreplay.

Max

Damn. Yes, I was glad to see my brother. And I unquestionably welcomed his help at clearing my name. After all, his place of employment alone opened doors that even I couldn't get into. ***The New York Times.*** Certainly he could also be of great help to Jazmin and Carly as they searched for answers.

Okay, so I admit it. I was being short sighted. But having two dinner guests that evening at the restaurant – Paul and Carly – severely limited the extent to which I could "play" with Jazmin throughout the meal.

If that weren't bad enough, Paul blew up my phone texting me all evening long, asking questions about Carly, most of which I couldn't answer. He seemed "smitten" with her. When he finally understood I knew very little about this woman, he began sending me a series of texts about revealing my past to Jazmin. Frankly, the topic was getting old.

But I knew it had to be done. And tonight, I suppose was as good as any night. Something told me that Paul's insistence might be related to some evidence he had found that could help point the finger at someone else, but he didn't want to reveal it until I had come clean with Jazmin.

He was always the brother who got his ducks in a row before he started a project. Not me. I just jumped in, made a huge splash in the water and then tried to calm the seas as I swam to shore. Perhaps my brother's method was superior to mine. I had never really given it much thought before this.

To make matters worse, I felt even more outside pressure about my past, the moment we exited the restaurant. I'm not sure how they found out where we were eating, but the sidewalk was littered with paparazzi and nosy reporters and videographers trying to make a name for themselves. With my arm already around her, I held her even closer to me as we worked our way through to the car. Wasn't it enough that her name and picture had already been plastered on not only more newspapers, television shows and internet stories as each day passed? Now these media heathens wanted more.

I hoped as I helped her in the car that I had minimized her as collateral damage. I had promised Paul I would reveal my past to her tonight. It was as if the universe were kicking me in the ass to do so as soon as possible.

And, don't get me wrong, I had every intention of doing so. But then I looked into her soft, trusting eyes, I tried to imagine explaining it to her. As soon as I visualized my confession, I saw nothing but a hurt and painful look on her face. I didn't want to be the person responsible for that look. I didn't want this wonderful woman, who had placed so much trust in me from our very first encounter, to begin to lose faith in me.

Chapter 8

Jazmin

We lay naked together in a patch of leaves and soft grass in the park following dinner. Laying on my back, I swear I could see every star in the universe.

While I marveled at the night sky, Max was on his hands and knees looking down at me, almost as if he had something to tell me. Before he could say a word, though, I pulled him by his shoulders closer to me and I kissed him. For the first time it was my tongue that explored his, my tongue that pushed its way to the edges of his mouth, that felt the immense delight of tasting his tongue, feeling its texture, exploring every part of his mouth.

Oh, God, yes, he became a willing participant soon enough as his tongue took its own turn.

He slowly lowered himself ever closer to my body and resting his pelvic area and that nearly hardened dick on my pelvic. He first gently pushed my hair out of my eyes. Then, kneeling back to free his hands, he took one of my breasts and massaged it, using all the pressure, I swear, he could muster. I squealed with delight.

“Did you know that it’s possible for you to experience an orgasm just through me playing with your two play pals here,” he said, referring to my breasts.

He took his other hand and began massaging that one as well. I tried to speak the words to answer him, but no words would come out. I just lay there, feeling the natural comfort and coolness of the earth, leaves and grass on my back and the heated sensual buds of an orgasm building inside.

Oh, my God, I thought. It just might be possible. The sexual urge crescendoed within me. It was as if a rush of flood waters were pushing rhythmically against a dam, a forceful ebb and tide threatening to break the barrier. Each wave far greater than the last.

‘Don’t hold back, Jaz,” Max told me. “Don’t wait for me this time.”

I reached down to rub my clitoris. “Oh, no fair cheating,” Max admonished. He grabbed my hand and pinned it above me, all the while somehow without lessening the pressure on the breast. The man was simply amazing.

He lowered his face closer to mine and kissed me. “You can do it, sweetheart,” he said. “You know you can.” Since one of Max’s hands still pinned my arm to the ground, Max, after muttering those words of encouragement, immediately sucked my other breast and using the sexual magic of his tongue, stimulated my nipple.

I couldn’t hold the flood waters back any longer. An orgasm burst forth, a sexual experience unlike any other I ever had.

Max let go of my hand, and leaned back on his knees. If he thought he was going to get a breather, he was sadly (or perhaps not so sadly) mistaken. After all, it was I who had just climaxed, not he.

I cupped both of my hands, held them behind his head and passionately – yes, if you can call a passionate kiss violent – violently kissed him. I raked the ever-beckoning hair with both hands. The soft strands contrasted starkly with the hardening of his penis.

I thought at that very moment, I was the luckiest woman in the entire world. No, the entire universe. There was nothing, absolutely nothing that Max could do or say that would break this magical spell.

Max

I had every intent on telling Jazmin. I really did. But I gazed down at her lying there naked amid the grass and leaves. I tried to fulfill my promise to my brother, Paul, but I got lost in those eyes, her luscious red lips. Before I knew it, I was transformed into the average American male – my dick hijacked my brain.

I gave her an orgasm in a way she'd never experienced it before – and through a route she's not likely to ever forget.

We rolled in the fallen leaves and I found myself prone on the ground, I felt unusually vulnerable at that moment. I'm not sure if Jazmin could read that on my face or through my body language.

Regardless, her touch, while always loving, seemed even more extraordinarily caring. She knelt above me, traced the crow's feet around my eyes with her fingers, brought the fingers down gently, working her way down toward my Adam's apple. Before she could move her finger that far, however, I hurriedly grabbed for it with all the force I dared muster.

Her initial reaction was one of pure reflex that reverberated throughout her body, right down to her pelvic area. The pelvis, which obvious was aroused, moved involuntarily at least an inch. It pleased me to give her so much pleasure. I don't ever remember such a feeling with any other woman.

She only allowed me to keep her finger in my mouth a short time. But, she did position her body, so it was pointing in practically the opposite direction as mine. It made it so much easier for me to rub her clit (What a thoughtful lady!) as she covered my dick with her hands. Her touch was light, feathering her fingers down then up to its head. She allowed her fingers to dance, almost as if the digit had a mind of its own.

Then abruptly she bent her head and put my dick in her mouth. She used only her lips initially to propel my penis as far as she could inside her mouth, then smoothly pulled it out like her lips were simply gliding on ice.

She did this three – perhaps four – times, I can't recall because the sexual act sent shivers down my spine and drove me mad. If that weren't enough stimulation for one man, her hair hung down around her face, causing my penis to tingle as well as bulge.

I quickly and happily returned the favor, rubbing the outside of her clit. I knew this woman and her sleeping beauty so well, I didn't need to search for her sweet spot any longer. I played on the outside for several minutes, but purposely didn't linger there. It wasn't long before they found their way inside her and I poked and prodded inside and got an extra sexual surge just by watching her unbridled reactions. My dick grew even more if that were possible and I was damned close to emptying.

Without even taking her mouth out of my organ, she said, "Bwing bwit bwon!" After translating that as "Bring it on!" I erupted. Much to my delight, she had come again – the

second time that evening.

Jazmin repositioned herself and cuddled in the crook of my arm. Feeling not only sexually fulfilled, and definitely at least momentarily exhausted, I also felt – for one of the very few times in my life – loved. Loved beyond anything I had ever experienced before.

Then horror struck. I was supposed to ‘fess up to this sleeping beauty. I failed. I failed to keep my word to my brother. I failed to come clean with this amazing lady.

Would Jazmin still feel the same way after I tell her about my past?

Oh God! I can’t do it now – and disrupt this ideal movement.

Chapter 9

Max

Jazmin and I walked – arm in arm – into the penthouse. Carly and Paul were huddled over the laptop at my desk.

“Well, bro, I was hoping Jazmin would still ‘keep’ you despite your –“

Standing directly behind Jazmin, I manically sprung up and down as rapidly as I could thinking that I would get Paul’s attention before he went too much farther all the while taking my hand and cutting my throat, what I assumed was the international sign for “cut it out.”

He did stop talking. Now I had to tell him I was such a chicken shit that I hadn’t told her. Well, he’s smart enough that he had already deduced that by now. But as I looked at both him and Carly, I knew that Carly knew. Hell, everybody knew by Jazmin.

And in the process I broke my promise to my brother. All in one fell swoop. Way to go, jackass!

Jazmin pivoted on a heel and glared at me. “What in the hell is going on – and why does it appear to me I’m the last to know?”

Jazmin

Carly’s reaction looked as equally as horrified as Paul’s. I stared at Max, searching his face for answers. But all I could red was horror as well.

“Max!” Carly and Paul exclaimed in unison.

Then Paul continued. “You promised me. You’ve never broken your word to me before.”

“Is there something I should know?” I asked. Even though I said it as a question, I thought of it more as a demand. If he had been keeping something from me, I wanted to know, especially if it affected the quality of our relationship – and from the reaction of my best friend and Max’s brother I do believe it did.

I wanted to run and hide. I didn’t even know what he was keeping from yet, but I already felt ashamed and used. I had poured my heart out to this man. I stood up in court for Maxwell St. James – and now I discover he has some deep dark secret that I don’t know about.

My stomach dropped.

Max

“I owe you an apology and an explanation,” I told Jazmin. Even though I used my most repentant face, it did nothing to curb her irritation with me. No, right at this moment, I could almost guess she hated me. And I couldn’t really blame her. I didn’t think too highly of myself, either.

I took her hand and began to lead her to the bedroom. No, not to try to cajole her with sex, but just to give us a quiet private room. She shook free of my grip and followed me.

“Sit down,” I said, as I sat on the edge of the bed. I patted a spot next to me. Without saying a word though she sat on the chair on the far end of the room. I sighed deeply knowing that I’ve really mucked up this time.

Just hours ago I was secure in the unconditional love of this young lady, my sleeping beauty. How time – even a short period of time – changes things. Now, I’m facing possibly not only the end of our relationship, but a prison sentence.

I took a deep breath. “Jazmin, I wouldn’t blame you after hearing about my past you never want to see me again. And I wouldn’t blame you if I’m faced with a trial for the murder of my ex-wife you wouldn’t testify on my behalf. And –“

“Cut to the chase,” Jazmin said, her face turning a bright red the more I rambled on. It was the best advice I heard all day.

“I’m not the man you think I am,” I said. “I have a history that I have been trying to keep from you. I knew intellectually it was only a matter a time before you discovered it, especially since you appeared so determined to search through all my contacts, trying to find someone who would hate me enough to frame me.”

Jazmin started to cry. “This is the place you tell me that you keep this penthouse because you have a wife and a family tucked away in the safety of a home somewhere and you’re leading a double life.”

Jazmin

Maxwell let out a loud, long laugh at the suggestion that he led a double life. He dismissed the idea that he had a family – a wife and several kids waiting for him to come home even as we spoke.

It would be easy enough to do, I thought, given the amount of money this man tossed around. Maintaining this palatial penthouse and a home in the suburbs or even in New York City seemed like a scam that he could easily pull off.

Now, the man I loved more than life itself was mocking me. Why didn't he just tell me? When he realized I wasn't even in the least bit amused by his outburst, he stopped – quite abruptly.

"Oh, honey. There is absolutely no one else in my life but you. Daphne told me she informed you of that. I didn't even have to tell Paul," Max paused, pointing toward the door, 'he could read it in my eyes. And this may sound stupid, but it was love for you that I've put off telling you this.

"Every time I started to tell you I look into your eyes and –"

"Now just cut the crap and tell me," I told him.

That's when he spilled his heart out to me.

Chapter 10

Max

“About 10 years ago, I was a notorious, international art thief.”

Jazmin laughed. Loud and long. “No cut the shit, Max, tell me the truth,” she said.

“That is the truth,” I insisted. “How do you think I could afford all of this? I stole my first painting, a Renoir, on a dare. Once I realized I not only could get away with it and sell it and in the process make enough money to sustain me for several years, I thought I hit upon the perfect profession.”

Jazmin sat, completely silent. From the look on her face, I’d say she was stunned. Perhaps even in shock.

“At that point, if I had invested well, I probably could have lived quite well off of the proceeds of that one painting. But when the full implications hit me that I pulled off this incredible art heist and not a single person suspected me, my adrenaline wouldn’t let me stop.

“I spent several years of my life running around the world, planning daring art thefts.”

Jazmin tilted her head to the side and smiled slightly. If she hated my guts at this moment, she had a strange way of showing it. I still hesitated to continue. But I knew I had no choice.

I explained to her I finally hung up my thieving equipment for good and settled down into teaching. The rush I got from it wasn’t worth the risk. Sooner or later, I told her the odds would catch up with me and I would be sent to prison for a long, long time.

Well, I had to admit that reason was only really part of the reason I quit.

“Don’t tell me,” Jazmin said smugly, “you woke up one day and found your conscience? You discovered what you had been doing all along was wrong.”

“You aren’t going to believe this, but you’re exactly right. And it was my little brother in there that helped me to see that. At first I thought he was just being a prude about my hobby, as I would call it. But then one day I saw something in his eyes when he looked at me. He really did care for me – and my welfare. And he was worried about where my continued avocation would lead me.

Without saying a word to anyone, Jazmin walked out of the penthouse. Was she walking out of my life together?

Chapter 11

Jazmin

I couldn't sleep that night. I tossed and turned. Whenever I did fall asleep I had nightmares. Nightmares of me being in prison merely because I knew Max. Nightmares of Max being in prison for murder and grand theft.

When I finally climbed out of bed the following morning, I noticed red blotches on my arms. I thought little of it. I figured I had hives. I had been in less stressful situations in my life and had come down with them. If anything, I wondered why they took so long to show up.

Within several more moments, however, the full effects of these so-called hives hit me. They seemed to be all over my body. If I didn't know better I thought I saw them actually forming into red blotches. At the very least, I found them in places that only moments before were clear.

I yelled for Carly and high-tailed it into the living room. By the time we met there, I could even feel my eyes swelling shut.

"Carly, I need to go to the hospital. I don't know what's happening to me." Instead of being the alarmed, concerned friend, she stood in front of me and laughed.

Personally, I didn't see anything to laugh about.

"They're not hives," Carly said, between bursts of laughter.

"Oh? Can Dr. Carly also tell me what I have then?" Before she could answer, her cell phone rang.

"Hi, Paul …"

While I was pleased that she and Paul were hitting it off so well, I thought it a bit inappropriate she should interrupt my health crisis for her potential sex life. Talk about annoying.

"The car's outside now," Carly said rather obtrusively. If these hives weren't causing my eyes to swell, I would have raised my eyebrows.

"Okay," she said, once more talking into the phone, "we're coming down."

"Let's go," she urged me, "they're waiting for us."

"Who's waiting?" I demanded. My patience was reaching its limit. The itching was, quite frankly, driving me insanely wild.

"The St. James brothers," Carly said, without missing a beat, "Max woke up with a serious case of 'hives' just like you."

"How can that be?" I asked. "Hives aren't contagious."

Recognizing that I was beginning to have a very difficult time seeing, Carly took my hand and became my "seeing eye roommate." She laughed as she led me to the door and as we

walked out into the hall.

“You haven’t figured it out yet?” Carly questioned.

Her game of twenty questions was becoming quite irritating. By this time it felt as if I didn’t have a spot on my body that was “hive-free.” There were parts of my body I never knew I even had that were now itching. I knew not to scratch any of it, but the sensation was getting overwhelming.

“Oh my God, Jazmin!” Carly said as she carefully led me down the stairs. “Are you really that dense?”

As she guided me to the car, she whispered in my ear, “It’s not hives, it’s more like poison ivy. And Max has it every bit as badly as you do.”

Once in the emergency room Carly and Paul got Max and me registered and then pretty much dumped us in the section of the waiting room while they sat several seats away. Just far enough away that we couldn’t easily talk to them.

I sat next to Max, but I refused to talk to that man.

Max

I eventually broke the silence. “I couldn’t bear to lose you, Jazmin,” I said. “Not a lot in life scares me anymore, but the thought of losing you does.”

By this time, though, the poison ivy was even swelling my lips shut so it was difficult to talk and I’m sure even more difficult to understand me. All I know was that it was difficult for me to talk to her not only from an emotional aspect, but from a physical one as well.

“I thought a sweet and lovely girl like you would run like hell from me if you even got a whiff of my incorrigible past life. I knew that every moment longer I delayed the odds were increasing that you would walk away from me just on general principle. But every time I looked into your eyes –“

Suddenly Jazmin laughed. “What’s so funny?” I said, more than a bit defensively.

“Right now, the poison ivy is so bad that you couldn’t possibly see my eyes,” she said.

I found the irony in it and even in my pathetic state, thanked the universe for helping me keep my sense of humor. “Even if they were open,” I said, “I wouldn’t see them for my eyes being swelled shut.”

“Ironic,” I said, “but it appears to be an absolutely fitting example of karma.”

Jazmin

His voice sounded pathetic. I was glad, in a way, I couldn't see his eyes.

"Oh, Max, I was so mad at you last night, I didn't sleep. I was extremely upset with myself as well. To be truthful, I was appalled when you told me – and I really did think I could never see you again.

"I could ramble on and on and tell you how I couldn't live without you. And a whole lot of other mushy stuff. Instead, I'll keep it simple."

I paused a beat and laughed. "I have to keep it simple because my lips are swelling more and more by the moment. I vowed that when I found the right man, I would love him unconditionally. I can't judge you on your past behavior. I only know I love you in the here and now and I'll love you forever. I don't care about your past. I care about our future."

I wasn't sure how Max would react to my saying I loved him. I'm not sure when I said this if I were really looking him in the eyes – heck about this time I could barely see him even though I knew he was sitting right next to me. I sat there for a moment waiting for his answer.

Max

I thought I'd never hear those words from any woman. She loves me unconditionally.

"I love you too, Jazmin," I told her, "from the moment I met you. I knew there would never be another woman in my life. Even if you left me. No one else could live up to you – your beauty, your compassion …"

She wouldn't allow me to finish. I didn't see very well at this point but I felt her touch as she pulled me closer to her. Even with my entire body seething with poison ivy her touch still excited me and ignited a passion within me. My sleeping beauty was finally awakening to her own inner sexuality and especially her own inner beauty.

She kissed me. Not quite on the lips at first because, well . . neither of us could see that well. We both were flying blind, so to speak.

When our lips did finally connect, it was magic, pure unadulterated magic. Until, that is, our magic became a bit too passionate and too painful. The poison ivy brought us back to reality.

Not before we were "caught in the act."

"Something tells me that kiss wasn't as much fun as last night's frolic in the park." The unfamiliar woman's voice startled me.

"You two look pretty miserable sitting here." The voice belonged to one of the nurses on duty.

"I'm calling right now to see if I can expedite you two," she said flatly.

"I've got an '069' in the ER waiting room. Can you … okay I'll bring them over right away."

Carly came over with Paul trailing behind. "Thank you," she told the nurse, "just out of curiosity, what is an '069'?"

The nurse answered without even breaking into a smile, "Lovers screwing in the poison ivy at Hubbard Park."

Talk about adding insult to injury. Carly and Paul laughed uncontrollably.

The nurse added, "Yeah, we get this all the time. So if you two believe you did something unique last night, it definitely wasn't in your choice of location."

"I must admit, though," she said, "this is the first time a couple has come in together."

Chapter 12

Max

I got the shock of my life when I walked into my penthouse that day. The living room had been stripped of every single painting on the walls, from by Blue Period Picasso to my abstract Jackson Pollack.

It seemed as if thousands of pieces of paper had taken their place, hung randomly across every wall.

“What in the … ?” I couldn’t help myself, I was totally stunned.

Carly, who was behind the computer, looked up. She appeared to be concerned about my reaction. Paul, however, quickly took control of the situation and put me in my place.

“Max,” he began. By the tone of his voice, it sounded as if he were reasoning with a toddler instead of talking to his older brother. Hmm. Then again sometimes my maturity level hovered around that point. “We carefully took the paintings down so we could hang all the pertinent information about those who might want to frame you.”

I guess the look I gave him wasn’t approving, because he hastily added, “If you like, we can put all the pictures back up, but it certainly would slow down our work.”

Luckily, Jazmin jumped in and answered for me, “No, by all means I’m sure those masterpieces aren’t being hurt one bit for this little bit of time they aren’t being displayed. Are they, Max?”

I knew I was outnumbered. But more than that I knew that, for I think the first time in my life, I had a core of people around who I could call friends. Friends and family. And they were all working hard to keep me out of jail. I needed to be as cooperative as possible.

Then an odd thought bounced into my head. With all the money I had stashed away in the form of liquid assets, paintings and investments, I didn’t have enough to pay these people back for their attempts to help me.

While my mind was going through all of this, Paul and Carly had been busy explaining what they had been discovering about potential suspects.

Jazmin

With all the paintings taken down, and biographies, photos of individuals, string connecting one piece of information to another it was a regular Crime Scene Central. That's what the living room of Max's penthouse looked like. Obviously, Paul and Carly had gone to great lengths to find anything at all that might help clear Max and point the police to focus their attention on someone else. Max made a few weak attempts at complaining about his precious paintings. While I certainly understand his concern – those paintings are worth millions of dollars. Hell, one alone is probably worth upwards of twenty million dollars by itself.

But right now, he has to learn to be flexible. He won't be able to enjoy this fabulous collection if he were sitting in jail. A few moments of inconvenience for a lifetime of freedom. Let's see. That's a tough decision to make.

Carly and Paul wasted no time in explaining to us what they had found. They started in describing their findings even before Max was done complaining about the transformation of this living room.

"We've checked out all the ex's, brother," Paul said. "All the remaining three living ones. Abbie is in the Cayman Islands, enjoying her time as ex-Mr. Maxwell St. James. She took the money she got in her divorce settlement and invested it well. From the way she talked, I got the impression that you two haven't talked in a long, long time."

Max nodded affirmatively.

"Well, she thinks it's a dirty shame that someone wants to frame you and wishes you the best of luck."

Carly jumped in. "She says she harbors no ill will against you because you and your settlement helped her establish her own business. She said she actually owes you a debt of gratitude."

Paul then took another turn. "That's pretty much the same with the other two ex's, Belinda and Christine. They are both living out of the country loving every second of their lives, thanks to their divorce settlements from you. Not only did they appear not to have a motive, they had no means and certainly no opportunity."

Max's brother paused for a second before commenting, "You really are generous with your divorce settlements."

"Uhm … I have one question before we leave this topic," Carly said weakly.

"And that would be?" Max asked.

"Did you purposely set out to marry alphabetically?"

I laughed, but poor Max didn't get it right away.

Paul jumped in and said, "Abigail, Belinda, Christine and then Daphne — A, B, C, D —

do you have any ladies hiding in the closet named Edith or Ethel."

"If I did, with names like that, they're staying in that closet," Max said.

He then carefully wrapped his poison ivy covered arm around me. "The only lady waiting in the wings is right here next to me." He looked me in the eyes, the swelling in both of our eyes was beginning to subside. What a relief to be able to see, even a little again. "Her name starts with a J and I have no intention of working through E through J in order to enjoy her company. I've got her right here and right now."

"If we can eliminate the ex-wives – pardon the wording on that – then who else have you found?"

"I'm glad you asked that. Because we've hit a dead end," Carly said.

"Not quite a dead end," Paul said, "but we certainly need your help with this one, Max." Paul walked from one wall, which had all the ex-wives information pinned up on it, to another."

"This wall contains the names of just about everyone I can remember and the internet can tell me about your former comrades in crime. Those people who may be carrying grudges because they felt they got a bum deal in your art heists."

Carly gracefully joined Paul at the wall and was beginning to point out those art thieves Max had worked with. Most of them were still in prison. Only a handful had been released."

Paul read the list of potential suspects. "Anyone else you can think of Max? Now think carefully before you answer."

Max stood up and paced. "It seems to me we're missing someone," he said. He walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. "Is there anything good in here to eat? I can't think without something substantial in my stomach. How about pizza? I can get Joel to pick it up for us."

"Is this your way of avoiding the conversation?" Paul asked.

"No," Max said firmly, 'it's my body's way of dealing with the steroids the doctor gave me because of this damned poison ivy. I don't think I've ever been this hungry in my life."

"Thank goodness," I said. All eyes were now on me. "I'm starved too and I couldn't figure out why."

Chapter 13

Max

My, how my life had changed in the past couple of days, I thought. Here I sat, in my own multi-million dollar penthouse at the Plaza.

Instead of enjoying it by sipping champagne and eating some caviar, I'm sitting here covered in some prescription topical cream trying hard not to scratch and munching out on pizza and drinking beer.

I sighed. Who said life wasn't full of surprises. And the most surprising element in all of this, was that I was more than content with the situation just as it was. I had the sleeping beauty of my life sitting next to me – covered in the same topical prescription cream – my brother who came to town just to save my sorry ass and Jazmin's roommate busily at work finding the real killer.

I was nuzzled up as close as I could get to Jazmin, making sure our knees touched. It was all I dared to do while we were busy on this investigation. But even our bodies touching each other that much sent electrical shockwaves throughout my body. Now that I was confident in her unconditional love the effects of our bodies touching each other were heightened. Did she feel it as well?

With my mind clear and no immediate worries weighing me down, something in my mind clicked. I nearly knocked over my beer jumping up in excitement. "Barry O'Malley," I exclaimed, startling everyone.

While it took Paul a moment or two to comprehend what I meant, I saw Carly waste no time in whirling around toward the computer.

"Up until last week," she said finding data about him in record time, "he had been in a prison in upper New York doing time for being involved in the theft of the one of the rarest Monets." She gave the title. Paul looked at me. I was hoping he wouldn't mention it out loud. Up until he cleared out the living room to hang these informational notes, it had been hanging in my living room.

While Paul was quiet, Jazmin let out a small gasp. I turned toward her. She gave a small knowing smile. Who knew while we were busy making love that as we passed through this room, she actually paid attention to the paintings on the wall? All she said, though, was that particular painting was one of her favorites.

Barry went to prison. I got off Scott free and I kept the painting as well. "Yup, if any person had a right to be pissed off at me, it would be good ole Barry. I really hadn't intended things to end up the way they did. But I certainly wasn't going to volunteer my involvement. The way I looked at it at the time, he knew the risks. He got caught and I didn't.

It's not like I testified against him or gave the police any information that would implicate him. I just laid low.

Go ahead. Call me a coward. Looking back on it, that's exactly what I would call myself. And that's exactly why I didn't want Jazmin to know about my past. But looking at her right now, after she knows exactly what I did, I'm suddenly aware that nothing in my past could make her run. A woman who was sticking with me through a potential murder charge, would go to hell and back with me. As a matter of fact, she was going through hell and back with me.

Jazmin

Max closed his eyes for a moment. “Oh my God,” he exclaimed. “Oh no! How could I have been so blind? Why didn’t it register sooner?”

Paul prodded Max to say more than just a string of rhetorical questions. “When we were at the auction, I saw this man who gave me a very brief nod of recognition. I nodded back because I meet so many people – most of which I don’t remember.

“Now that I see him again in my mind’s eye that was Barry. I’m sure of it. He wore a beard the other day that he didn’t back in our … “ Max stumbled over his words, evidently unsure of what to call that period of his life, “In the old days.”

Paul grabbed his cell phone and placed a call. “Got an address for him?” he asked Carly as he waited for the phone to ring. She immediately handed him a scrap of paper. The pair worked together like a well-oiled machine.

The call he had placed was to the homicide division of the police department. After getting in touch with the proper person, he told them what we had found. When he had finished talking he reported that the police weren’t that enthusiastic, but had promised to follow up on the lead.

Carly expressed doubt that they would. Even before she could finish her sentence, Paul was busy dialing a second number. This time it was to Barry O’Malley himself. “He won’t answer,” Max said.

Surprisingly Max was wrong. O’Malley did answer the phone. And it appeared from hearing only one end of the conversation that he was answering the questions Paul was asking.

After he hung up, Paul agreed with Max’s description of his emotions. “Yeah, he’s one pissed off dude, bro, but he swears he didn’t kill Daphne.”

I laughed. “We really didn’t think it was going to be that easy to convict him, now did we?” I asked. “Let’s hope the police follow up on this and have a way of getting more information out of him.”

In a matter of minutes, Paul’s cell phone rang. He looked at the caller ID. “Speak of the devil,” he said, “it’s the police.”

“Really, already? Oh, I see. You haven’t actually arrested him yet, but he doesn’t have an alibi for the evening? Yeah, I can understand that part. Access to Max’s gun? That’s a tough question to answer.”

Max’s brother hung up. “They’re bringing Barry in for questioning, because he doesn’t have an alibi, but unless he confesses, there’s still the issue of how he got possession of your gun.”

The room fell silent.

Chapter 14

Max

It seemed like only moments had passed. But the four of us had been busy talking so I'm sure it was probably more like an hour since the last conversation with the police.

Paul answered his cell phone and was told that Barry O'Malley had just been let out of prison for a crime remarkably similar to Daphne's. This murder, it seemed, took place in France. The victim was involved in a vitriolic bidding war for a masterpiece. The following day, she was found dead in her mansion and the only thing taken was the painting that she had bought the day before.

While the police were bringing him in for questioning, there was something about the whole thing that bothered me. Barry O'Malley was a professional art thief and far too clever to commit the same crime twice. It just didn't sound like the same person I knew and trusted.

But the police were more than confident and weren't worried about the small detail about my gun at the crime scene — at least not at this. "They seem to think," Paul said, "that a thief of that caliber could easily sneak in here undetected and steal one of your guns. And if that was all they were taking, it may take months or longer for you to notice it was missing."

Paul finished his explanation with a resounding, "You're off the hook, little brother. The police are convinced they've found the right person."

I have to admit, I didn't know that gun was missing until it showed up at the crime scene, so I guess that could be a plausible explanation.

Still, it was a relief and I couldn't help but be overjoyed.

Jazmin

Paul and Carly were ecstatic. I was doing the happiest happy dance ever. Paul came up to the two of us and said, “I don’t think I ever saw Paul this happy.”

I took his approaching as a cue to give Carly and Paul some congratulatory time together. They had spent many hours together working hard to find the real killer. I ran over to Max and gave him the most passionate kiss a man could ever ask for.

I really didn’t care how many lovers he may have had before me. I’m guaranteeing no one had ever laid a lip lock on him the likes of the one I just had placed on him. I felt as if I were part of that iconic photograph shot at the end of World War II in Times Square. A sailor was kissing a young woman with apparent uncontrollable emotion upon hearing the news that the war had ended.

I heard Paul calling room service for a bottle of champagne. Personally, my emotions were engulfed in Max to pay much attention to anything else around me. Everything else seemed to fade into the background.

Chapter 15

Max

The intercom buzzer at the door went off, startling all of us out of our thoughtfulness. I quickly went over to respond to it and was told by the attendant at the hotel's check in that Prof. Louis Howard was here to see me.

A colleague in the art history department, he was probably the most capable of the professors on staff. I actually admired his intellectual ability and would have made a superb teacher except for one thing: he was boring as anything.

Listening to him give a lecture was torture. Because of this, he was not the students' first choice as an instructor. His classrooms were never full. In fact, he had a difficult time even getting enough students for some of his classes. And that was a shame, because he did know his art history backwards and forwards.

I told the desk to send him up. "What a pleasant surprise, Louis," I said when he came in.

Louis said he just dropped by to extend his concern about the charges and to wish me the best of luck. He commented on the level of positive energy in the room. I explained the latest news to him. While I can't say he had always been a close friend, we were close allies in the art history department, pushing for higher standards, more interesting classes – anything that would make the department a more respected center for learning.

So when he did just pop in like that, I really didn't think much about it. I thought, in fact, it was quite a gentlemanly gesture.

"I didn't think it would be so cheerful in here," he said. "I've heard that you were still a prime suspect."

"He was," Paul said, "until moments ago when the police called." He explained that O'Malley's ties to Daphne's murder and a similar one in France not too long ago were too close to be merely coincidental."

Was it only me or was Louis's reaction one of feigned happiness?

Jazmin

Was it my imagination or did this dude's reaction really not display the degree of happiness that one would give a colleague at such a life-altering moment in their lives.

I slipped from Max's hold and sat on the arm of the couch. After studying him a moment, I sensed there was something wrong, very wrong with this scenario. I held my breath waiting for something to happen.

I didn't have too wait long.

Professor Howard stammered. "But how can that be?" The murder in France was far different." I saw his hands shake. "It was a totally different type of gun."

Paul's radar went off. "How do you know the guns were different? The local police never revealed the make of the gun that shot Daphne, purposely."

"Oh, sure they did," Howard insisted. He rambled on about the make and model of Max's gun.

Now, Max's curiosity was aroused. "How did you know what type of gun I have?"

"You showed it to me the night of the mixer you hosted here."

Max

When Louis uttered those words, I thought back to that night. Then I said out loud, “Come to think of it, that was the last time I saw that gun.”

The energy in the room changed instantly.

Before I could ask another question, Louis volunteered yet more information.

“And the murder in France only took one shot to kill the victim. In the murder you’re accused of, it took three separate shots to kill Daphne.”

Paul bolted up, his senses on full alert.

“Now you went over the edge, man,” he told Louis. “I know for a fact that the local police didn’t release that information. You couldn’t possibly know that unless … “

Carly jumped in to finish the sentence, “… you were there.”

I was probably the last person in the room to comprehend what was happening.

“No, the number of bullets shot at the scene was on the internet somewhere … some blogger must have printed it,” Louis insisted. “I remember reading it somewhere.”

Paul was losing patience now. “Look around this room, man. We’ve researched every nook and cranny of the case, possible connections to other cases and individuals who may have been carrying grudges against either Daphne or Max. I spent several days now without sleep. If the number of bullets shot had been released publicly either Carly or myself would have found it. Trust me, we didn’t find it anywhere.”

Carly was tacitly giving her approval to Paul’s words.

Louis’s eyes looked like those of animal caught in a lion’s stare. He was frightened, but knew that running was the worst of all options.

“Louis, what’s going on here?” I finally asked. “I really thought someone needed to cut to the chase. He looked from person to person to person.

“Holy shit.” He let out a big sigh. ‘I knew I would screw up. I just didn’t think I would screw up this soon and this badly.”

“Wait,” Paul interjected, not allowing him to say another word, “would it save you embarrassment and be easier to talk about it if we asked the police detectives to come here?”

I felt Jazmin’s arms tightening around my waist and her entire body sinking into mine. It was an indescribable feeling having her stand right next to me.

Chapter 16

Jazmin

Professor Howard poured his soul out to the police. He recounted how he had been at the auction because of the school acquiring the Van Gogh. When he saw the vitriolic nature of the subsequent bidding between Max and Daphne, he was reminded of a similar situation in France years ago, which ended in one dead ex-wife.

While he had wanted Max out of the department for ages, he finally saw a foolproof way of getting him out of the picture.

“I had already stolen the gun the night of the department mixer,” Professor Louis said. “So it was just a matter of follow up.”

“But why?” the detective asked. “Why did you want Professor St. James ‘out of the picture’ as you said.”

“Don’t you see?” Professor Howard, exclaimed, displaying a hostility I’m sure no one expected from such a mild-mannered individual. Everyone except Max shook their heads indicating their perplexity. Max, though, seemed to understand what he meant even before he explained it.

“Max was the star of the department. No offense, Max, the students love you. And I have to admit you know your art. The coeds all fell in love with you whether they were art history majors or not. And their boyfriends took your classes just to keep an eye on their girlfriends.

“Every term your classes were packed. I taught the same damn classes and barely had enough students to prevent them from cancelling. I could go one and one with your knowledge. By God, I spent a lifetime following my passion. But when it came to charisma and presentation, I was woefully deficient.

“I thought if I got you out of the department, maybe I would have more students, more respect from them and greater respect from our colleagues as well.

“I suppose my actions appear extreme to all of you.”

Max

I had to admit that I've plenty of ex-wives who wanted me out of the picture, but were never quite that clever enough to think of that. The man was brilliant, in a warped sort of way.

"For what's it worth, I'm sorry. I'm not quite sure I intended it to go this far. Even while I pulled the trigger, I knew I was doing something tremendously stupid. But by then my mind was in full-blown revenge mode."

Chapter 17

Jazmin

It had been three months since Professor Howard confessed to the murder of Max's ex-wife and Max was free of worry from those charges. It seemed like yesterday yet in some ways it felt like years ago all that had happened. Since then Max and I had been experiencing the best, most passionate sex of our lives.

Even just hearing his name nearly gave me an orgasm. How did I ever live without him? Hell, how did I ever live without his magical, mystical touch? I just pray to God I never have to live without his strong arms around me at night, his way of touching me that sends electric tingles throughout my entire body.

The knock at the door startled me and brought me back to reality. It was Joel, Max's driver. He had come up to take my suitcase and other bags down to the car. He was driving me over to Max's penthouse. From there we would travel to the airport. Max had promised me a week of rest and relaxation timed perfected with the break between terms.

I was eager to get started. I was actually quite curious as to where we would be going. He refused to tell me. He just told me to include a swimsuit. Sounds someplace tropical to me. Since I've never been anywhere except Niagara Falls my whole life, I was excited to say the least.

Joel took my bags and after saying good bye to Carly followed Joel down to the car. A whole week alone with Max. The sexual fantasies were already crowding out any logical thinking my brain may have been considering doing.

By the time I entered Max's penthouse, my imagination was working overtime. Deep down I really didn't care where we were going on our vacation. I only cared that I spend the entire week with Max.

I finally found someone who loved me, who respected me and who gave me the greatest orgasms. Unconditional love. Respect. Mind-blowing sex. How could life get any better than this?

Max

Jazmin appeared at the door of my penthouse looking hotter than ever wearing a pair of shorts and a button-down blouse of sorts, buttoned barely enough to cover those marvelous tits of hers. She was without a doubt a beauty – both outside and inside. Her curves appeared more inviting – and sexual – than usual. She was, without a doubt, even more beautiful than the first time I saw her across the bar standing there all alone. Perhaps it was her anticipation of our vacation.

She stood there, fresh and eager. I wanted to take her right there. But there would be plenty of time for that later. Right now, we had a plane to catch. A plane to a destination I had refused to reveal to her.

She had begged me to tell her where we were going, but I really love making women wait for their pleasure. You can take that remark anyway you choose.

There was only one thing I knew for sure. I loved Jazmin Donovan with all my heart. I love her unconditionally. And of all the men in the world, she loved me. And I need to show her every day of our lives that I loved her.

The sleeping beauty had finally awakened to her own innate beauty.

The Billionaire Stepbrother

Heather Royer

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CHAPTER ONE

I sighed as his lips slid down the column of my throat. A moan escaped my open mouth. I shuddered. His hands slid down over the curves of my body; touching me everywhere, sliding further and further down until they reached their mark. I spread my legs for him as he whispered my name.

"Linda," he said right before his fingers stroke my most sensitive part; leisurely taking his time. Tormenting me. It was as though he was there, but not there at the same time.

I tightened my inner muscles, searching, begging him to enter me. I moaned again. Oh, Chris. "Chris."

"Linda?" His voice seemed distant now.

My eyes fluttered open. In seconds they were focused. Chris was standing at the foot of my bed. His expression was one of pure puzzlement. Dang it. I had been dreaming. I hadn't expected Chris to be there. What was he doing there? My heart dropped down to my stomach as I watched Chris' eyes narrow at me; examining me. I raised my hand to my chest as though I could block him from seeing my most sacred of secrets. My voice was hoarse from sleep when I finally asked, "What are you doing here?"

Chris' pale blue eyes flew wide. He looked around before coming back to me. "I live here."

My heart leaped again. Of course, I'd forgotten this was his apartment. I'd moved myself in two months ago when my landlord, George, had finally decided to kick me out. I couldn't afford the rent and there were only so many weeks that batting my long lashes will work before they demand more. George's price was not something I was willing to pay. I'm not a prostitute. I'm a model. Actually, I'm barely even that. I hardly get any jobs, because I'm not willing to do what most other models are. The entertainment industry was not a friendly place. If you wanted to get somewhere, you had to basically sell your soul. I wasn't willing to do that… not yet.

Chris' next words recaptured my attention. "What are you doing here?" He lifted a dark brow as he waited for my reply. His strong and handsome jaw set into place. His hands were in the pockets of his light gray designer business pants. He wore a pure white dress shirt with the first two buttons undone, showing off just enough flesh to put knots in my stomach. Chris Ray was the most attractive man I knew. He was also my step-brother. His hair was black and kept professionally short. His skin held a warm medium tan, even in the dead of winter. But his most striking feature was his almond-shaped, pale blue eyes. So pale, they were almost gray. But put a sky blue shirt on him and the color would turn vivid.

Chris' broad shoulders slumped as he crossed his arms and leaned back against the

cherry wood dresser behind him. I realized that I had yet to answer his question. And honestly, I didn't know how to respond. I could tell Chris that I got kicked out of my old place, but I hated disappointing him. So, I said the only thing I could think of at the moment. "Since when does a little sister have to ask to crash at her big brother's house?" I tilted my head for added effect and felt my large brunette curls move across my back. My hands went to my hair. I was sure I looked a mess.

A phone rang. Its sound muffled. It was my phone somewhere in the sheets. Saved. I turned away from Chris and started to rummage through the 15,000-count Egyptian cotton sheets. The sheets alone were reason to break in. I finally found my phone and answered right before Chris could verbally stop me. "Hello?" I smiled up at him, giving him my most innocent face. The one that said, 'oh, I'm sorry, did you have more to say?'

"Linda? Is that you?" It was Julie. My stepmother.

"Yes, *Julie*." I emphasized her name for Chris' ears. My smile brightened as I stared up at him. Immediately he began to shake his head and wave his arms. I got the message. He wasn't available.

"Oh, good, you're up! You're usually never up. It's Sunday. Are you coming for breakfast?"

Julie had married my father ten years ago. Before meeting my father, Henry Shaw, Julie Ray had been married to a very wealthy man, Chris' father, Christopher Ray, Sr. The match hadn't been a for love. It had been for money. Julie had given Chris a son, as was expected of the marriage, but once Christopher, Sr. had died, she'd only mourned his death for a short period of time before falling in love with my father.

My stepmommy's words made me look over at the clock on the nightstand. Seven-thirty. She was right. I'm usually never up this early. But I was up now. Might as well do something. "Sounds great, I'll be there."

Julie's smile came through the phone. "Excellent! Mother is here early for the renewals, so she'll be at breakfast as well." By mother, Julie meant, Anna. Anna was Julie's mother and Chris' grandmother. I called the old woman Granny Annie, because I thought it sounded funny and seemed to irritate the woman, but not enough for her to stop me from calling her that. Anna was as rigid as a rod. She was strict and always gave her opinion. I still didn't understand how the woman allowed me the honor of continuing to call her something that she obvious detested, but I saw the win for what it was.

My eyes flew wide as I looked back over at Chris. "Ooh, Granny Annie will be there?"

Chris immediately looked pale. It took everything I had to not burst with laughter at that moment. He didn't like get-togethers with the family. For some reason, Chris was always quiet and withdrawn when family was around, but put Chris in a room of friends or other professionals and he was right in his element. The man could work a room.

Julia sighed. "It's a shame that your brother is out of town. I know he said he'd be

back in time for the wedding renewal, but…" Julie's sadness struck a chord within me. Julie and my dad were having a ten-year wedding renewal and it seemed everyone who was someone in New York was invited. With the way Julie talked about the event, you would think that she were getting married for the first time. She was excited, but one thing always dampened her mood. Chris.

Chris had been twenty-five when his mother had married my dad. I'd been fourteen. I hadn't been too thrilled with the idea, but Chris hadn't been happy about any of it. Chris had assumed my father was simply after his mother's money, but only a fool would believe that. I took one look at the couple and wanted to gag. They were in love, but Chris didn't see it, not for a long time. Even now, everyone suspected that Chris didn't really like my father, and probably saw Henry as a man who would ruin things for Julie, but the only person I knew was ruining things was Chris.

My eyes met Chris'. He must have seen something on my face, because he walked over, took a seat by my side on the bed, and gave me a very stern look, warning me to not cross him. I shook my head. It was too late. My decision was already made. I was going to give him over to the family wolves. "Julie, Chris is right here."

There was a pause on the other end. "What do you mean?"

"Chris is back from France."

I had to push the phone away from my ear as I heard a loud shriek peel from Julie's lips. While she continued to talk on and on about how happy she was, I simply looked at Chris. I put the phone on mute while Julie continued to talk so she wouldn't hear me talk to him. "We've been invited to breakfast." Julie's happiness made great background for the not-so-happy conversation that we were about to have.

Chris' eyes narrowed. For a thirty-five-year-old, he could be so adorable at times. "I can't believe you've dragged me into this."

I narrowed my own eyes. "If by *this*, you mean your *family*, then I think you were *born* in this."

Chris released a breath. His anger calmed. He held his hand out for the phone. I gave it to him. He stood up and headed towards the window, opening the curtains as he spoke.

I shielded my eyes at the sudden brightness of the room. I was dizzy for a moment. I'd been unprepared for the light. I felt like a vampire, ready to attack the person that had offended me. That person being Chris. I liked it really dark when I slept. That was partly because I barely slept at all. I was always out at night, hanging out with my more successful modeling friends, hoping their success would rub off on me. So far, no amount of rubbing had worked.

I rolled my eyes and began to climb out of the bed. When I finally stood, I realized that I barely had any clothes on. I was wearing a black silk lacy tank top and a pair of black lacy panties. I turned quickly, facing Chris. He was silently staring at me. There was no expression on his face.

I quickly covered the juncture of my thighs, but neither of us made a move otherwise. I didn't know how to get out of the room without flashing Chris, and he didn't seem capable of turning around. Neither of us spoke, but Julie's voice could be heard through the speaker of my tiny phone.

She must have said something to wake Chris' mind back up, because he blinked a few times before turning towards the window. I let out a breath once his back was to me and ran towards the master suite. All of my clothes were in the gigantic walk-in closet. I'd moved in two months ago, and when I say moved in, I really mean 'moved in'. I'd taken the master bedroom, because I knew I could. Chris had gone to France to work on a movie advertisement. He owned an ad company. Let me stop. Chris owned 'the' ad company. Just a few months ago, his picture had been on the front of TIME. They were saying that he'd changed the advertising world, for whatever that meant. I hadn't read the article. All of my friends and family had. Everyone loved Chris and fawned over his success. Not me. I always wanted to feel above him. Reading the article would mean that I'd submitted to whatever power he had on the rest of humanity.

I leaned back on the walk-in middle island. The island held cufflinks, shades, and other male accessories. I picked up the remote and pushed a button that would cause the wall of clothing I was facing to rotate for me. I smiled. This never got old. The closet was bigger than my old apartment and I loved it. It was the first closet that had fit all of my clothes. Yes, I had a lot of clothes. Yes, I was broke. Sue me, it's New York.

"You have thirty minutes before we leave."

I swung around and looked into Chris' eyes. He was standing at the entrance of the closet. The only thing between us was the island. I couldn't see my panties anymore, but I still was not wearing a bra under the silk top, and I had more cleavage than any good woman should. I believed it was another reason I didn't get many modeling jobs. My body didn't fit into the normal catalog. I was curvy, but my breasts were bigger than what would be considered acceptable in the modeling world.

To stop my nerves, I resorted to hostility. "Could I get a little privacy, please?" The on-suite had no doors. The only door was the one that led to the bedroom itself. Since Chris had already been in the room, I hadn't had the chance to lock him out.

He crossed his arms and laughed; his blue eyes twinkling at me. "This is my house, Linda."

I crossed my own arms, but had to do it under my breasts. My breasts always stopped me from really doing it over my chest. "I know it's your house, Chris, but I'm kind of naked."

Chris smirked and scoffed. "Linda, I see naked women everyday."

My hands went to my hips. "Your little stick figure friends have nothing on this."

Chris' face slid right before he said, "What are you doing in my house, Linda?"

I turned back towards the wall of dresses I'd been looking at. There were a few of his suits mixed in with my clothes, but I'd taken up most of the space, just as any woman

should. If someone else were in the room, I was sure they'd assumed that the clothes were owned by a married couple.

I started to spin the clothes, deciding to ignore Chris. He didn't seem to like that response, because he came to stand beside me. I could feel his eyes on me and immediately wished I'd put clothes on once Chris' back had been turned in the other room.

I turned towards him and stopped breathing. He was so close. He only stood a few inches taller than my 5'8 height. I guessed him to be around 6'3. His breath was warm on my face. He smelt expensive and powerful. His eyes reminded me of winter icicles against the morning sky, capturing the faintest color blue. I felt my nipples harden right before his eyes drifted towards my top. But they didn't settle there, only glanced.

Before I could say anything, Chris turned and headed out of the closet. "Fifteen minutes."

I opened and closed my mouth in rapid succession before I could speak. "No one can get ready that fast," I finally yelled in the general direction that he'd gone; it was the only thing I was willing to say. There were other things I wanted to say though, or ask rather. Like, what the heck just happened?

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CHAPTER TWO

I hadn't gotten ready in fifteen minutes. I was doing my makeup in the car. I had one of the quickest showers I'd ever received. Usually, if Chris hadn't been home, I would have taken advantage of his enormous jacuzzi tub. I laughed to myself. Funny how I'd only been living there for two months and could already claim anything I did in there as usual.

Thinking of that made me look up at Chris. He was driving his car. We'd just made it out of the city on our way North to Chappaqua. It was an hour from the city and we'd only been on the road for thirty minutes. We hadn't spoke, but I knew we would need to soon. I lived at his house and I was only a little afraid that he'd kick me out. He'd given me a key for emergency reasons and I'd taken advantage of it. But why should a perfectly good brownstone in Manhattan go to waste?

Finished with my lip gloss, I turned to Chris. "How do I look?" Since the shower had been quick, I hadn't had time to dry and style my hair. I'd piled the long brown strands up into a high bun. I'd chosen to wear a pale green sleeveless sheath dress and beige heels, Easter colors, since it was spring. For makeup, I'd gone subtle. I did just enough to highlight my big hazel eyes and soften my lips.

He barely glanced over before responding, "You look nice."

I frowned. For a man whose business involved the arts, he should have had more to say. "That's it? You can do better than that. You've revolutionized advertising." Even I could hear the sarcasm dripping from my words. "Give me the Chris Ray version of 'you look nice.'"

Chris quickly cut me another look. "What are you doing at my house?"

Diversion. "A woman stopped by while you were gone."

Sweet silence. "Who?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I didn't get a name. When I opened the door, she took one look at me and left." It was the truth. I didn't know the woman's name. She'd been short and blond with a pair of angry eyes. I was sure the anger was directed at me, I hadn't asked. She hadn't given me the chance to.

He frowned. "You didn't tell her that you were my sister?"

I shook my head. "And it probably didn't help that I was wearing one of your shirts." I smiled to myself as I looked straight ahead.

Chris sighed. "Can you describe this woman?"

I turned back to him. "Why? Are you going to ask her to marry you?"

He sucked his teeth. “Hell no.”

I frowned. “But you don’t even know who the woman was. What if she was someone you really, really liked?”

Chris shook his head. “She’s not.”

“How do you know?”

“What are you doing at my house?”

“You don’t even know what woman is coming by your place. That’s said, Chris.”

He shook his head. “No.” Chris was no longer falling for the distractions. “What are you doing in my house?”

I let out a frustrated breath. I was tired of that question. Tired enough to want this conversation over with. “Are you kicking me out?”

“No, I’m asking you why you’re there? At first, I thought you’d just slept there or something, but when I walked into the on-suite, I realized you’d truly made yourself at home.” There was sarcasm in his words.

I threw my arms up. “Fine, I’ll leave. Happy?” My heart was beating so fast. I was angry, and hurt. I looked out of my window, not wanting him to see how truly upset he’d made me. A tear I hadn’t known was building, fell. I swiped at it quickly and continued to study the natural arrangement of trees as the car sped past.

“Are you crying?” Chris’ voice sounded angry now.

I closed my eyes tightly, trying to block all of my emotions out. I hated him at that moment. I hated that he could affect me so thoroughly. I honestly didn’t know why I was so hurt or angry. He shouldn’t have been able to get to me this way. But as I thought about it, a sharp pain settled in my heart. Why had I let him drive me? At the moment, I wanted to be anywhere else, but stuck in this car with him.

A hand touched the one that was on my lap. I knew it was Chris’, but I didn’t turn towards him. I didn’t want him to see my face. His thumb began to stroke my hand in a gentle comforting way. The touch was so nice. Too nice. It overwhelmed me and tears that I’d been holding back broke from my tear ducts, rushing over my pale skin, ruining my makeup, and breaking down my shields.

The car jerked to the right as Chris pulled over on the side of the road. He brought the car to a stop. I took my hand from his and held myself tightly. I didn’t want him to touch me. I didn’t want him to say anything. I just wanted him to drive and get us to our parents’ home.

“Linda.”

I didn’t respond. I leaned my head back against the leather seat and turned my entire body away from him. Well, as best as I could with the seatbelt on.

“Linda, what’s wrong?” Chris words were soft.

I didn’t know. I truly didn’t know, but I didn’t say that to Chris. “Just drive, Chris.”

The sounds of passing cars filled the interior for a moment. I heard Chris open and shut his car door. I hadn’t turned to see what he was doing, but jumped when his face filled my window. He swung my passenger car door open and leaned in. I backed away, not sure what he was doing, but stilled myself when I realized he was simply undoing my seatbelt. He took it off me as if I were a child and then grabbed my hands and pulled me out of the seat. He shut my door behind me.

I tried to turn away, but Chris cupped my chin and firmly turned it towards him. I tried to not meet his eyes, but after awhile, I gave in. I almost gasped at the look he was giving me. He was angry. “When have I ever done anything to hurt you?”

I swallowed and then looked away again. I thought really hard, looking back over the last ten years of our lives. I went through every moment I could think of that had Chris in it and couldn’t come up with anything. That was because the answer to Chris’ question was ‘never’. He’s never hurt me. Ever. I sighed. “You’ve never hurt me.”

“Then why do you think I’d kick you out?”

I looked at him then, meeting those beautiful pale eyes. “Because, you’ll be mad at me.” And the moment the words left my mouth, I knew why I was crying.

Chris frowned. He was still lost. “Why would I be mad at you?” His hand dropped from my face now that he had my attention.

Once I was out of his grasp, I stepped back and leaned against the car. My heels tried to sink into the soft Earth, but I managed to stay above ground. “Because I failed.”

Chris’ look softened. “What have you failed at?”

I slumped my shoulders and let out a laugh that had nothing to do with humor. “Everything,” I whispered. I was used to these deep conversations with him. At first, I thought it was simply because he was so much older than me, but after awhile I figured that age had little to do with it. I trusted his opinion, and even worse, I valued his opinion of me.

Chris grabbed my arms and began to rub them up and down, warming me. “What happened, Linda?” He was neutral again.

“I’m broke, Chris. I got evicted and had nowhere else to go. I thought you’d be in France for at least another four months, so I moved in.” I knew I was rambling and talking fast, but I wanted it all out as soon as possible. “No one will hire me, Chris. The only men willing to give me a shot want me to do things I’m not willing to do. I have no money. And I know what you’ll say. You’ll tell me that maybe I should do something else, like you’ve told me before, but I don’t want to do anything else. I want to be a model, Chris. It’s all I’ve ever wanted in life. I keep trying, because I refuse to give up on it, so please don’t tell me to, like everyone else has.” Done, I finally looked up at Chris and saw an expression that I hadn’t expected.

A smile climbed on Chris' face. "You haven't failed, Linda."

I lifted a perfectly sculpted brow. "No?"

Chris shook his head. "No. I'm proud of you."

I flung my head back. "Proud?"

Chris nodded. "You've not only held on to your dreams, but you've refused to do anything just to achieve them. That's more than many people can say. Most people can't say that they've done both. Most people give up on dreams, either that, or lose their morals on the way to success."

I smiled and shrugged. "You make it sound so noble."

Chris' smile widened. "It is, Linda and you have no idea how refreshing it is to hear."

I narrowed my eyes. "What do you mean?"

Chris' face went serious. "There are a lot of women that would be willing to do anything for fame. I've seen it happen. I've seen successful people that were never happy, because the awful things that they'd done to become successful still hung around their necks like chains. I never wanted you to enter into that kind of work, because I was afraid of what you'd be willing to do."

My eyes went wide at the confession. Chris had tried to warn me away from modeling on many occasions, but I'd never truly understood the reason. Or maybe, I'd never believed it. I'd always assumed that he thought I'd fail and wanted to save me the time. But nothing and no one would turn me away from this. "I want to be a model, Chris."

Chris stared at me for a moment then nodded. "Then I will help you."

"What do you mean?"

Chris shook his head as he headed back to his side of the car. "Let's not miss breakfast, I'm hungry." He slid in before I could respond.

I looked around for a moment, before climbing into the car myself. "What do you mean that you'll help?"

He started and car and pulled back into the flow of traffic. "I'm going to help you become successful."

I shook my head. "I don't want your charity, Chris." I could hear everyone I ever knew call me stupid in my head at the moment, but I didn't care. I didn't want Chris' handouts. I wouldn't be one of those people that bowed to his might. I wouldn't be one of his little followers. One of his minions or adoring fans. Yes, I was staying at his house, which I knew made me seem hypocritical, but ultimately, I wanted my success to be my own. I didn't want to be the infamous Chris Ray's Little Sister. I wanted to be supermodel Linda Shaw.

Chris must have known what I meant, because his next words struck home. “Don’t worry. Any job you get will come from your own doing, I’ll just be there to protect you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll be there to make sure no one takes advantage of you.”

I laughed. “Like a bodyguard?”

“More like a manager.”

I sighed. “Or an older brother?”

He glanced over before turning back to the road. “I am your brother, Linda.”

I knew that, but there was something in the way that he’d said it. It was almost like he’d spoken the unknown into existence. Was he telling me or himself? I already knew Chris was my brother. Well, step-brother. Yes, I found him extremely sexy, but I knew that I could never truly cross the line with him. We weren’t blood, but sex with him would be like incest, right?

CHAPTER THREE

The sight of our parents' front iron gate brought me to attention. It was black with a large 'S' on one door and an 'R' on the other. When the gates opened, they would part and when they closed, they would swing back together like a pair of old lovers. Chris pushed a button that would lower his window, punched a code into a box, and then drove through the gate.

Half a minute later the mansion came into view—a large monument in an ancient red brick. It was an old mansion, with towers and balconies, but I knew that the interior was brand spanking new. Only the latest of everything would do for Julie. She'd buy things that she didn't even know how to use. Her spending habits were unnerving at times, but who was I to cast stones? We drove up the long curve and stopped before the tall staircase up to the front door.

A footman came out of nowhere and opened my door. He helped me out of the car and Chris came around to grab my hand. I looked over at Chris. He squeezed my hand and I realized that the hand-holding wasn't for my benefit, but his. He really didn't want to go in. I squeezed his hand back, letting him know that I would protect him as best as I could. I smiled, happy I could do something for him that probably no one else could—protect him from his family.

We'd barely made it the door when it swung open. Julie was there, her arms out wide, ready to embrace us both. She hugged Chris first, starting a gentle rock that probably resembled something that she'd done to him as a baby. "Chris, I'm so happy you're here."

"It's good to see you, too," he mumbled.

Julie pulled out of her hold on him, smiled, and then turned that beaming smile over to me. Her eyes were the same almond shaped pale blue of Chris'. They even shared in their medium tan skin tone, but where Chris had black hair, Julie was a true blonde. Her eyes glittered at me. I knew what she was saying without words. Thank you. I'd brought her son home. She hugged me and I hugged her back. I had been fourteen when Julie had married my father and I had tried to hate her, but couldn't. She wouldn't let me. She'd always wanted a daughter and had told me so. Even before our parents were married, Julie would dress me up and parade me around to her country clubs. We went to mommy-daughter brunches and had done girly spa trips, just the two of us. I hadn't known how to be a girl until Julie had come into my life. She'd gotten me into my first bra. She had truly been a mother to me and had refused to let me push her away. I loved Julie. I'd always had the urge to call her 'mom', but never got the courage.

Julie pulled back, took one of my hands and one of Chris'. She started towards the back of the house while she told us of the plans for the wedding renewal. Everything

seemed like it was coming together.

We reached the back wall, which was nothing but a long glass door. It could fold together and open the entire room, bringing the outdoors in. A table a few yards out on the grassy field was set with guests. I spotted my father, Anna, and then I paused. I looked over at Chris and saw his reaction as well. He looked over his mother's head and gave me a very hostile stare. Julie was a short woman, so I got the full punch of it. He was more than upset. He was enraged.

Julie's bubbly voice broke in. "Oh, Chris, did I forget to tell you that Donna's daughter, Patricia would be joining us? Sweet girl she is. Did you know she's only twenty-eight? Still able to marry and have children. If she were to marry this summer, she could possibly have two or three. Sweet girl. But I do hate summer weddings. Maybe not summer. A winter wedding. A winter wedding would be just divine…"

She kept talking as Chris continued to just stare at her. He sighed and slowly let his true emotions slip from his face. A smile appeared on his face. "Mother."

Julie looked up at him; innocently. Her blue eyes wide with false sincerity. I think I got that look from her. Scary thought. "Yes, dear?"

He smiled down at Julie with as much falseness as she was giving him. "It's been so long since I've seen Patricia. I'm happy you've invited her."

Julie brightened. "Truly?"

Chris said no more. He just held out his elbow and allowed Julie to slip her hand into its bend. Chris then looked at me expectantly. He gestured his other elbow to me. A smile that didn't quite reach his pale blue eyes looked at me. I hesitated before walking over and taking his other side.

I slipped both of my hands around the arm that Chris offered and let my finger grab hold of his large bicep. The evidence that he wanted out was plain. We started down the back steps and began verbally greeting everyone at the table before fully approaching. I hugged my father, kissed Granny Annie's cheek, and leaned in to give the smiling Patricia two air kisses.

Patricia leaned back and smiled at me. It was a real smile. "I love your dress."

I smiled back, not able to help myself. "Thank you, yours is nice as well."

Patricia battered her long lashes at me. People could say a lot of things about a lot of people, but not Patricia. She truly was a very sweet girl. Her dress was a cute baby blue number that had a queen annie cut. The wide V stopped just before her cleavage. The skirt flared around her knees. If Chris were to stand next to her, the color would bring out his eyes. She was twenty-eight, but such a darling, much more innocent than even I. "Thank you, Linda."

We both took our seats. Patricia swept her long brown hair behind her shoulder. The waves looked glossy and bouncy. I pouted. That's how my hair would have looked had *somebody* allowed me the time to finish getting ready.

I sat next to Patricia and my father, who was at the end. Across from me was Chris, who sat next to the stylish Anna. For seventy, the woman knew how to dress. Her white shirt suit fit perfectly on her petite form. Julie, who was wearing her own glittery version of a white skirt suit, had taken the other head of the table, like a good host should, so she was facing my father when she said, "I didn't expect you to be back so soon, Chris. How was France?"

Chris hadn't dropped his smile since he'd put it in place in the house, not even once. He wasn't going to keep it up. I, for one, wondered just how long he could. "I don't miss the food."

Everyone at the table had a good-natured laugh.

My dad spoke, "Well, we're glad you could join us this morning. Your mother truly missed you."

Chris hesitated for one moment, before replying. "Well, I'm happy that I managed to make you both happy." I wanted to believe him, but I didn't believe him. With the slight pause, it had almost seemed genuine, but I wasn't sure.

Patricia's voice swung my head in her direction. "What were you doing in France?"

Chris told her about his latest project on a movie set just as the servers began to make their rounds with the plates. Patricia leaned in, her light brown eyes showing that she was completely captivated by Chris' words. I had to admit, the story was interesting. Apparently, Chris Ray Inc. was never supposed to get the big Hollywood job. It had been given to another studio who had done an awful job with advertising. Chris' company had been given the assignment at last minute. The producers of the movie had been so upset with the first company they'd hired that they'd been willing to shell out a lot of money to make sure that Chris didn't just send anyone from his company. They wanted the man, Chris Ray, himself. So, Chris had stopped everything to fly out to France. He'd given me the key to let some workers and other people in while he was gone. It had all been so sudden. I hadn't even asked why I'd received the key. Now I wish I had ask a few questions.

I watched him as he spoke, taking more of him in than just his words. He was still in his dress shirt, the two top buttons still undone. I easily pictured myself undoing the rest of those small clear buttons, one at a time, while I ran my tongue down his throat, chest, and abs.

Anna spoke, shaking me out of my daze, "I read about that in the TIME magazine article." She was referring to his job in France.

I looked over at her. "It was in the article?"

"You didn't read it?" Chris asked.

I swung my head back to him. "No."

His eyes narrowed. “Why not?”

I shrugged. Was it really that big of a deal?

Anna threw down her napkin. “You two fight like an old married couple.”

That got everyone’s attention. I gasped, but then threw down my own napkin. “Granny Annie, how could you say such a thing?” I tried to lighten the mood at the table, but once Anna was on a roll, no one could stop her.

“It’s true. I don’t know why you two don’t just go ahead and get married. Keep the family money where it is.”

Julie laughed then and shook her head. Everyone else shook their heads as well. So, it was about the money. The air seemed too calm. It was always about the money with Anna. She hadn’t truly meant anything by her comment. Julie turned her eyes to Henry. “If I had simply married for money once again, I would never be as happy as I am right now.”

I looked between the two adults and shook my head. The love flowing between them was almost thick enough to touch. I looked across at Chris. He was looking at them himself, probably seeing something that was completely different than what I saw. But I’d never know. He still wore that false smile on his face. It had lowered just a little from Anna’s comment, but never completely.

Anna caught everyone’s attention by her next words. “Oh, please.” I slumped in my chair, bracing myself for Anna’s full comment. “If it’s love you want, then why did you invite Linda’s twin to breakfast?”

I couldn’t drop my mouth from hitting the floor. Twin? I looked over at Patricia who was looking at me and couldn’t see it. I laughed. “Granny Annie, we look nothing alike.”

Patricia was staring intensely at me. I broke contact with her eyes and scanned the rest of the table. Everyone was looking at us. Julie had her head tilted. Another gesture I’d mistakenly inherited from her. When I turned towards my dad, his face was way too close to mine. “I don’t know, honey. I think you two could pass for sisters.”

I rolled my eyes. “Daddy, that’s ridiculous. Patricia and I do not look alike.” I turned to look at Anna, whose expression let me know I would get no support from her. So I looked to Chris.

The look in his eyes were just as intense as Patricia’s. What was everyone looking at? Patricia stood from the table. My eyes flew to her, just as everyone else’s did. She wet her lips. “Uh, I just remembered I was supposed to be somewhere else.” She started to back away from the table. “If you’ll excuse me.” She made a dash for the house.

Chris stood too, going after her. “I’ll walk her out,” he said over his shoulder at everyone left at the table. I watched him leave and panic set in. Why was he going after her? Why did I care?

Julie huffed at her mother. “Was that necessary?” Her irritation clear.

Anna leaned back in her white picnic chair. “You invited the poor child. If she can’t handle me, then she can’t be part of this family.” Anna threw a wink my way. I had no idea what the wink was suppose to signify, but I didn’t think that I liked it.

My dad rose as well. He didn’t say anything. He just gave Anna a disapproving look before retreating into the house. Ten years ago, he never would’ve done anything to displease Anna, but apparently, time changes things.

Julie turned to her mother. “How could you embarrass the girl that way? I’ll never hear the end of it from Donna.”

Anna scoffed. “The girl is too weak for Chris. She’d never survive in his world.”

I frowned and almost believed Anna had a point, but I couldn’t verbally voice my opinion. It wasn’t my place.

CHAPTER FOUR

“What do you think, Linda?” Julie asked. Maybe I could give my two cents after all.

I was unpleasantly surprised that the two women had decided to include me in the conversation. “Oh, I don’t know.”

“Spill it,” Anna told her.

I narrowed my eyes quickly, before regaining my composure. “Patricia is probably the sweetest person I know.”

“You see?” Anna said, as though I’d said more. “I won’t have weakness in my family.”

Julie rolled her eyes. “You didn’t want Henry in your family.” The news was no shocker.

Anna readjusted herself. “Henry has proven himself to be a good man. You’ve heard nothing but praise from me in the last few years.”

Julie stood. “It’s all about money with you.” She was angry now.

Anna looked her dead in the eyes. “Love never fed a soul. In the end, it’s always about money.”

Julie scoffed before retreating. I guess the breakfast was over. Good old, Granny Annie to the rescue. I started to get up when Anna stopped me. “Have a seat, Linda.”

I looked at her, meeting her dark, all-knowing eyes. I slowly lowered back into my chair as my heartbeat picked up. I sighed. Anna and I had only had serious discussions on a handful of occasions. None of them had been good and I had a sinking feeling that this would be one of those times.

“Is there something you want to tell me, Linda?” she asked. She held her cup up and a server appeared. He refilled her tea before stepping back to his post. I just realized that there were other people at the gathering. Three of them. They’d obviously heard the entire conversation, though I knew they wouldn’t breathe a word of it. The family paid them to keep their mouths shut, but it was still unnerving. I should have known they were there. When did I become someone who didn’t notice the presence of ‘the help’?

I looked back at Anna. Her eyes had never left my face. He knew when to stop. She was sipping her tea now. Anna was, at times, a very scary woman. There was something about her that always made me assume that she had no limits. Perhaps it was the fact that she’d had four husbands who all seemed to die mysteriously. Yeah, that was it. I watched her watch me and tried to remember how to breathe. “What could I possibly

have to say, Anna?"

She narrowed her eyes. I'd called her Anna. She'd seen the slip for what it was. "Are you fucking Chris?"

I felt my mouth hit the floor that time. I looked around and sure enough, the servers all had an expression of surprise on their faces. It was subtle, but very much there. I'd heard Anna curse before; she only did it when no one outside of the family was around. Never in front of guests. For guests, she was always as proper as anyone could expect from her, but behind closed doors… Anna had never cursed at me before. It was frightening. I looked back at her. "Granny, how could you think that? He's my brother."

Anna laughed. "Dear God, how many times a day do you tell yourself that?" She ended her line with a chuckle.

Dread slowly slipped into me. No, I wasn't sleeping with Chris, but I wanted to. I'd been wanting to for a long time. But I couldn't. Chris was basically blood. Furthermore, I was sure that Chris only saw me as his little sister. He was eleven years older than me and didn't date women my age. He'd told me so when one of my friends had hit on him. So no way would Chris truly consider ever dating me. Lastly, there was the gorgeous factor. Chris drew women like ocean waves to the moon. He didn't really date. He slept around. Chris wasn't a complete whore, but he was pushing the line. He didn't do commitment. We'd talked about it before, briefly, during one of those life's philosophy kind of conversations.

But Anna's words made me think. How many times a day did I remind myself that I was Chris' sister? Well, that depended on how often I thought of him. The answer: when I woke up in the morning, a hundred times during the day, and before I went to bed. And then there were the dreams I'd have, like the one I had this morning. I felt my face turn red right before Anna broke out into another laugh. "I knew it."

I let out a shaky breath. "Chris and I are not… screwing." Yes, I had a problem saying curse words and not for the obvious reason. I just didn't think that any of them sounded right coming out of my mouth, if that made any sense. I had tried a few times, worked on it, like exercising a muscle, but it just didn't fit me. I even skipped them while singing songs. Oh well.

Anna rolled her eyes. "Let's do both of us a favor and not lie to one another."

I grabbed two handfuls of the tablecloth. My anger was coming. "I'm not sleeping with Chris, Anna."

Anna just stared at me for a moment, then turned away. "Not yet, but it's bound to happened."

I shook my head. "What makes you say that?"

She turned back towards me. "Because of the way you two stare at one another. Before, Linda, you did a great job of hiding how you felt, but I've known for awhile that you liked Chris."

I felt the blood drain from my face. I didn't blink. I couldn't. My stomach turned and panic set in. Anna knew. Who else knew? Dang it! The need to hide shot through my veins. Perhaps I could sell some jewelry and get a flight to the middle of nowhere or disappear to an island in the middle of nowhere. That was a great idea. No one would find me. Ever. I'd be free. Free with my feelings and secrets. I'd be untouchable.

Anna waved her hand, recapturing my attention. "Linda, calm down. No one, but me, is on to you." Her voice held a touch of annoyance. It was the only reason I believed her. I settled back into my seat. I hadn't even known I'd gotten up. Escaping to the middle of nowhere had really sounded like a good idea ten seconds ago, and for a moment, I was really committed to it.

I grabbed the chair's arms in order to keep myself rooted into the seat. I held Anna's eyes and let out another breath. "Please, don't tell anyone." And as the words left my lips, I felt lighter. Yay, someone else knew. The pressure of the secret finally had an outlet.

Anna shook her head. "I won't, but you need to do something about your feelings before Ms. Goodie-Two-Shoes takes your man. You've been pining after that man for too long for you to let someone else have him."

I settled into the chair. "If you've known I've liked Chris for so long, why didn't you say anything before?"

"Because, while you've been giving Chris googoo eyes for the last few years, Chris always seemed to not care, but I think France changed him. He seems different. And this is the first time I've ever seen him look at you that way."

I narrowed my eyes. "Looking at me, how?" My heart skipped.

Anna lifted a white brow. "The way a man looks when he sees something he wants."

I rolled my eyes. I didn't believe Anna. She was seventy and going senile.. I stood, deciding the conversation was done. I couldn't afford to allow Anna to feed me these lies. This had nothing to do with my feelings. She didn't care about my feelings. This had to be about money. It was the only reason she'd say something like this. She wanted to keep the family money within the family.

"Linda, where are you going?"

I refused to look up at her. "I have to catch Chris before he forgets that he's my ride."

"I wouldn't forget that."

My head flew up and looked Chris in the eyes. My heart jumped into my throat. I was happy I'd said what I did and not something that would have alluded to the conversation I'd just been having with Anna. "Where's Patricia?"

"I walked her to her car." His face was neutral. "Patricia will be my date at the renewal."

The surprise registered on my face before I could school my features. Chris had never brought a date to a family function. I tried not to let the thought bother me, but it did. I shook my head. “I didn’t think she was your type.”

Chris shrugged. “At least she read the article.”

I stared at Chris for a long time, waiting for him to laugh or even smile. It never happened. My face fell. “You’re not serious, are you?”

Chris turned to Anna, a bright smile for her. “Could I escort you indoors, Grandmother?”

Anna stood and took his arm. “I’d love you to, Chris.”

They both turned to leave and left me standing at the table by myself. Before they disappeared into the house, Anna turned and gave a look that said everything. My time was running out.

CHAPTER FIVE

The ride back from Chappaqua was silent. We were in the living room when I finally spoke. “Do you want me to move my clothes out of your closet?” I popped off my heels and walked into the kitchen. I went into the stainless steel fridge for a bottle of water. I was having one of those moments when I was feeling extra dehydrated.

When I turned around, Chris was sitting in a bar stool, leaning on top of the granite peninsula, watching me. His face resting on a propped up fist. “The other closets don’t rotate.”

I smiled as my face turned red. Had it been that obvious that I enjoyed such a simple thing? “I know.” I leaned back against the counter behind me.

He smiled back at me. “Do you want to move your clothes?”

I made a face. “You know I don’t.”

“Then why did you ask?”

I shrugged. “To be polite.”

Chris laughed. “Polite?” He sat up straight. “You come into my house, sleep in my bed, load your clothes into my closet, but now you want to be polite?”

I sighed, angry now. “Are you going to hold this over my head forever? Because if you are, I’ll leave.”

Chris shook his head. “I’m not trying to hang anything over your head. I just would have liked a heads-up before I got home. What if I’d been bringing a female over?”

That got my attention. I hadn’t even thought of that. I could see now how that would have looked. If Chris had come home with a woman and they’d seen me in his bed… it could have been bad. I leaned off of the counter behind me, moving closer to Chris. “Did you plan for a female to come over?”

Chris leaned closer to me as well, placing his elbows on the counter. Our heads were still about two feet away from one another. The counter was pretty big. But standing this close, face to face, I could see the intricate details of his eyes. I could also see how tired he was. “It had been a thought,” Chris confessed.

The confession hurt. Chris narrowed his eyes, and I realized it was because I’d narrowed mine. I relaxed my face. “I’m sorry,” I whispered and I started out of the kitchen. “I’m going to move my stuff. Maybe I’ll be able to move in with a friend so that you can have your space back.” I walked past Chris’ chair on my way towards the bedrooms.

He grabbed my arm, making me pause. I turned towards him and met his serious face. “Why do you do that?”

I kept myself clear of anything that I was feeling. And honestly, I was feeling too many things to actually narrow down what I was feeling at the moment. Hurt, sadness, anger, confusion. I shook my head before meeting his face again. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

His hold on me tightened. “Yes, you do.”

I sighed in exasperation. “What do I keep doing, Chris?”

He was angry now. “Getting all… Linda on me.”

I lifted my chin at that. “What does that mean?”

“Retreating. You retreat from me, all the time.”

I frowned. “No I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.”

“No, I don’t. Let me go.” He did it just as quickly as the words let my mouth. I hated that. Yes, I should have my sanity checked, but it’s true. I’d rather he’d held on me, fought me, because he needed to touch me just as much as I wanted to touch him.

“Why don’t you like me?”

My face fell. What the heck was wrong with everyone today? Was I the only one who’d miss the memo about today being National Confess Your Feelings Day? “I don’t not like you, Chris.” I love you. Though, I wouldn’t tell him that. Ever. That was one confession that I would most likely take to the grave. Unless I told Granny Annie. I could probably tell her. She could keep a secret. I could tell. There was something in her dark eyes that said she had loads of secrets; like why they call it 2% milk when it’s actually 2% fat or why the letters on a phone start at the number two, but skip number one.

“I don’t believe you.”

This close to him, I could smell that expensive cologne that he liked to wear, something I’d developed a craving for. When Chris had left for France, the scent had been left in his sheets. There had been days when I hadn’t wanted to get out of the bed and the thread count had nothing to do with it. I felt close to him, lying there in his bed. With the faint smell of him surrounding me while I slept, the dreams had come easily.

I rolled my eyes, put my water down, and placed both of my hands on Chris’ hard face. He was being silly. I looked him straight in the eyes and said, “Chris, I don’t not like you.” I didn’t even understand how he could think that. We probably weren’t best friends, but I considered him my friend. Over the last few years, we’d had some really deep moments and had probably shared details about one another that no one else in the world knew. There were times where just standing next to Chris was both the safest and yet scariest place in the world. He gave the best advice and seemed to genuinely care about my wellbeing. It was, at times, easy to open up to him. And that’s when it got scary. I couldn’t afford for him to know how I truly felt about him, so I would distance myself from him every now and again. I hadn’t known it bothered him so much until this very moment.

Chris narrowed his eyes, right before his face went neutral again. He pulled away from my grasp. “Forget it. It doesn’t matter anyway. Forget I brought it up.” He started past me.

I grabbed his arm then, but couldn’t make him turn back towards me, so I had to walk around him to see his face. “Chris, what is wrong?”

“Why didn’t you read my article?”

I looked around the room before looking back at him. He had to be kidding me. It was just a stupid article. “Chris, it’s just an article. You’ve done interviews for other magazines and papers before. Why should this be different?”

Chris smiled and I knew it was as phony as his next words. “You’re right.” He walked past me and I let him go. I didn’t stop him. I didn’t know what I’d have said if I did. He was being silly. Everyone was being silly today and I felt completely lost.

CHAPTER SIX

Chris woke me up. Hours had passed. Thankfully, I hadn't been dreaming about him this time. I'd retreated to a guest room once he'd disappeared into his own room. His eyes still looked tired, as though he hadn't rested. "Get ready. We're leaving."

I sat up. I was wearing clothes this time. A white hoodie and a pair of gray sweatpants. You didn't get more dressed than that. I enjoyed sleeping in hoodies. There was something about the hood that made me feel safe and tucked away from the rest of the world. I felt like I was in my own little world inside of a hoodie. A warm little universe with sleeves.

I looked out of the window and saw that the sun was setting. Darkness would take over the sky soon. "Where are we going?"

He started for the door. "Dress ready to impress."

I pulled back the duvet and followed him out of the room. We were both walking towards his room. As I followed him, I realized that he wasn't wearing a shirt. I watched the muscles in his back and arms and got the urge to run my hand over his flesh. My stomach flipped. I sighed. It's an awful thing to be repeatedly presented with what you can't have. I knew then that I couldn't stay here. I couldn't stay in Chris' house. It was like standing between heaven and hell all day. It was one thing to fantasize about him from a distance, but a completely different thing to see him without a shirt on a daily basis.

Without speaking, we both went into the closet. He gave me the remote and I couldn't help but smile. I let the clothes turn once or twice before giving any of the clothes a really good look. "You're the advertisement expert. Tell me, what should I be wearing tonight?"

Chris thought on that for a moment. "It's gotta be sexy."

"Of course."

He turned to me, his pale eyes gleaming. "But most of all, it has to not only capture every man's and woman's attention, but also creativity."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

Chris smiled and then stepped towards the wall of clothing. He grabbed a dress just as it passed. He turned to me so that I could see it. I'd never seen the dress before. "It has to be a dress that inspires the imagination."

I wasn't aware that I'd walked up to him and the beautiful piece of cloth until I was touching the white fabric. It looked so delicate and felt softer than anything I'd ever felt before. "Where in the world did you get this?"

"It's the dress that every woman will be wearing next year, but you will be wearing it tonight." The dress had a sleeveless top that was done in lace, cut into a deep V that would

leave the center of my chest bare. At the waist was a large belt that looked as though it was made of pure gold,. The skirt, done in a completely different material, flowed down like a waterfall to the floor. The skirt looked like a soft cloud and had a long slit that reached up high, stopping only inches from the belt. The first word that came to mind was ‘goddess’.

I couldn’t help the grin that spread across my face. “It’s gorgeous. Where did you get it?”

He shrugged. “Paris, of course.”

I rolled my eyes. “Of, course.” But then I thought. “I feel like I’m too… endowed for the top. Won’t I fall out?”

Chris shook his head. “I made sure the dress would fit you.”

That earned him a look. “You got this dress for me?”

Chris nodded his head. I hadn’t expected a gift. Sure, Chris had brought me things in the past, but nothing this extravagant. Ever. The dress was beautiful and if it was next year’s look, I knew it was expensive. How had Chris made this happen? When? Why? Why get a dress made for me? Chris must have seen the look on my face, because he spoke before I could. “I did it because I knew you’d like it.” He ended the statement with a cocky shrug, before handing me the dress and heading out the door. “You have two hours.” I frowned. He hadn’t answered my question. Not really. It was nice. Sweet even. I didn’t know what to say.

Once I heard the bedroom door close, I ran towards it and put the lock in place. I would be taking my time tonight. I’d start with the bath my body had been denied only hours ago and go from there.

Thirty minutes later, I heard a knock on the door. There were two people. A masseuse and a hair and makeup artist. They were both shorter than me. The masseuse’s name was Jen. She wore her hair in a blonde bob and had one of those professional white masseuse outfits. She looked innocent enough and seemed to be the exact opposite of the other woman. The hair and makeup artist’s name was Tara. She wore her hair electric red cut into a pixie style, and had artfully done her makeup. Her outfit? Black and leather everything. I was both ecstatic and nervous to see them. Ecstatic, because I hadn’t had this kind of treatment since I’d left home. Julie and I would get these kinds of things done before big events, but once I’d left, I hadn’t been able to afford it on my own. Getting the royal treatment tonight was truly a gift, but then I had no idea where we were going. The dress had already made me aware of that fact that wherever we went would be high-class, but all this was truly taking the night to the next level. Where was Chris taking me?

I emerged from the room exactly an hour and thirty minutes later to find Chris sitting on the couch. His head was down, gazing into his phone. I had to clear my throat to get his attention. His eyes looked up before the rest of his body followed. He sat up on the couch and stared at me.

I smiled and gave him a twirl. “How do I look?”

He gave me a faint smile. “You look nice.”

My face fell. I looked more than ‘nice’. I looked amazing. The dress fit me like a glove. I’d feared falling out of the top for nothing. It was as if the dress had been crafted by someone who’d cupped me before. It fit me like a lover. It was as though the dress knew just how to touch my every curve. I loved the dress and looked dazzling in it. My hair had been done in heavy waves, down my back, just the way I liked it; full, with my light brown and gold highlights catching the light. My hair emphasized the whole free goddess look, and the makeup too. It was done in all natural hues, only highlighting what beautiful I already had. Even the lip was a nude color that I’d never tried before. Plus, I not only looked amazing, but felt amazing, thanks to Jen.

I crossed my arms. “Nice?”

Chris stood and walked over to Jen and Tara, thanking them for their service and escorting them out the door. Once they were gone, he turned to me. “Ready to go?”

I placed my hands on my hips. “Not until you tell me how amazing I look.” It was childish, but I didn’t care. Though his opinion shouldn’t have mattered, it did. It mattered more than anyone else’s. It was the curse of love.

Chris didn’t move from the door. He simply tucked his hands behind him, still holding onto the doorknob. I realized then just how amazing he looked himself. I didn’t know where he’d gotten ready, since I’d taken over his bathroom, but Chris looked hot. He was wearing a black tux. The cut emphasized his height, broad shoulders, and utter masculinity. His pure black hair was swept back.

I walked over to him and stopped only a few feet away. “You work in advertisement. Say something that has more creative juice.”

Chris laughed. “How creative?”

“Make me feel beautiful. Show me why you’re the best, Chris Ray.”

Chris slowly sobered, but there was still a flicker of life in his pale eyes. “To look at you, Linda, is to look at the sun. An experience that is both warming as it is dangerous. A heat that touches the soul, yet a curse, for one glimpse of you and obsession sets in. A need grows that could never be sufficed. Yet, one could never truly turn from you, Linda, and no man would want to, because like the sun, you are completely irresistible; a superior being to be both worshiped, adored, and feared. You call and man answers and whatever you give, man will take. To eat from the floors around your table is an honor and to never see you again would be a sentence worse than death. You, in essence, Linda, are light, and we would all die without you.”

I knew I had the stupidest, silliest, grin on my face, but knew I could do nothing about it. I’d asked for creativity and he’d given it in spades. “You’re good.” All I’d wanted for him to say was that I looked beautiful or lovely, but no, Chris had taken his compliment to Shakespearean levels. I almost wanted to cry. How would I ever find a man to top something like that? Was it even possible? Part of me wanted to dig into the pocket of my skirt, pull out my phone, and get him to say it all again on camera. I could see

myself playing it over and over again. At least three times a day. I knew he hadn't really meant it. He'd only been doing what I asked, and yet… a girl could dream.

I loved Chris. I'd probably always love him. But at the moment, I hated him. I hated that he was my brother and not just some guy that I'd met in a bar or coffee shop somewhere. Sure, I never wanted to be one of those women that he seemed to throw away once he was done, but a part of me would give anything just to have one night with him. Just let him touch me. Just to feel a trickle of what his words had implied. To have my body worshipped; give myself to him. Truthfully, Chris already had me; he just didn't know it. He talked about obsession, but he had no idea what that was like. He didn't know what needing someone like air and water was like. Chris went through women like Kleenex. But me?

There were moments when I felt like I was a slave to my feelings for him. That was the part I hated about myself. The part of me that bowed to his glory just like everyone else. The people that waited on pins and needles just for a glimpse of him. The people that read anything that was written about him. I hated those people. Those people could say that they loved him, but I would laugh. Love? They knew nothing about love. They didn't even know Chris. I knew him. I knew him better than most people. We'd shared deep and intimate moments together over the years. Chris had told me things that I knew no one else knew. What we had was real. It was like we were more than just friends… we were… siblings?

I took a breath and put on a smile I wasn't really feeling. Yeah, that's what we were. Siblings. Brother and sister for life. So be it. "Thank you, Chris."

Chris bowed his head and then opened the door. He held his arm out to me and I took it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

We arrived at an apartment building in Manhattan that had a line of cars approaching. A valet came and opened our door about a block away. “What’s happening here?” I whispered over to Chris once we were both on the sidewalk. I was holding on to his arm as we walked up to the door. The valet had taken our car and another man opened the door for us.

The apartment’s lobby was full of people riding up on the elevator. Chris said hello to a few people, but didn’t introduce me. His focus was getting on the elevator. Once there, I asked again. “Chris, what’s happening here?”

Chris didn’t answer. But once the elevator opened and the first man to shake Chris’ hand appeared, I knew everything. “Chris, I thought you said you weren’t going to make it.” The man had dark skin and was really tall. He played for the New York Knicks. I recognized him immediately. He turned to me and his smile grew. “Chris, you’ve been holding back on me.” The look he gave me almost caught my face on fire. There was such raw lust in those dark eyes.

Chris laughed. “Andre Coleman, meet my sister, Linda Shaw. And happy birthday.” A gift appeared in Chris’ hand out of nowhere and Andre took it.

Andre shook it. “Oh man, is it the key to Linda’s heart?”

I laughed. We all laughed, and after that, I felt less nervous. I didn’t even know I’d been nervous before this moment. I felt my shoulders relax. We talked to Andre for awhile and then moved through the party to speak to other guests. I met actors, musicians, and some of New York’s finest socialites. There were other celebrities there too, you know, the kind that just wake up in the morning and they’re famous? The ones that have reality shows and makeup lines. Yeah, those guys.

“Chris,” a woman’s voice made us turn.

My eyes widen as my heart stopped once I recognized her. Maria Vega, one of the world’s top Spanish fashion designers. I’d been to a few of her shows that my friends had been in, but I’d never seen her up close and personal. This was my first time. She smiled at me, looking my dress up and down. She sucked her teeth. “Don’t tell me this is what John John is doing next year.”

Chris grabbed my hand and gave me a spin. It wasn’t the first one I’d done that night. “This is John John, indeed.”

Maria crossed her arms and gave me a dirty look. “You are sickening to look at.”

My eyes went wide, but I couldn’t speak. I was dumbstruck. She’d spoken to me. She’d addressed me. She’d insulted me, but I still had a smile on my face. I couldn’t take

my eyes off of her. I loved her. I know, I know. I was being silly, but it was true. The woman's clothes filled my closet, well, Chris' closet, but you get the point.

Chris broke my trance. "Now, Maria. Be nice, this the world's next supermodel, Linda Shaw."

Maria's eyes widen. "Oh, this is Linda?"

They way she'd said my name really got my attention. "What do you mean?"

Maria looked me over, a smile on her face. She scoffed. "She is still sickening to look at. So gorgeous. Look at those cheekbones." Maria reached up and grabbed my chin. "She brings life to that dress." I felt my face turn red.

Chris sighed. "Yeah, well, don't let us hold you up."

Maria pulled her hand back and began to frantically wave them in the air, trying to clear Chris' words away. "No, you bring her to my office. I want her for my next show."

Chris started again. "Well—"

"No," Maria cut him off. "I must have her. Tell John John to find someone else." She looked at me again and smiled a most devious smile. "You want to walk in my show, *chica*?"

I just smiled. This was the happiest day of my life. Chris nudged me, bringing me back to life. I blinked a few times before answering. "I would love to—"

"*Bien*." She turned to Chris again. "Call me." Then she was gone.

Any designer that approached after that kind of did the same thing. It was spring, but John John was already showing off his line for next year. It was a frightening thing, apparently. Other designers were not ready. Revealing a creation so far in advance was like calling a challenge. It was a bold move and possibly meant he had more up his sleeve.

Many of the designers present had asked me to show up for auditions. It had been a successful night and I had Chris to thank for that. After running into Maria Vega, talking to everyone else had been easier, but honestly, I was still a little nervous. I was totally out of my element with famous people. Rich people, I got. Famous people were different. Rich people had money and bought entertainment. Famous people almost all had this entertaining element engraved in them, and some of them weren't even wealthy. I'd never laughed so hard at jokes or found myself raptured in well-told stories. It was an experience I would surely remember. Chris had walked me around the entire room and everyone stopped to stare. Some men had tried to do more than just stare, but as promised, Chris had protected me. He'd been the perfect manager.

Once we got to an area where the music was lower, I leaned over to Chris and whispered, "Thank you."

He nodded his head. "I'll be right back," he said as Andre called him over for something. I didn't mind. I needed a break. I waited where I was and pulled out my phone. The party I was currently at was being featured on an entertainment site. I surfed through

the article and found a photo of Chris and I. I smiled. My name was printed alongside Chris'. We looked good together.

Underneath the picture was a link to the TIME article about Chris. I sighed and clicked on it. I might as well. Chris had been so nice to me and seemed pretty bothered by my not reading his article. After tonight, the least I could do was read an article about him.

The article was an interview that had back and forth questioning. Most of it focused on the spy movie that was being shot in France and how Chris had gotten the job. They talked about the latest technology and how Chris' company was specializing in its use, but then they'd moved on to personal questions. Who was Chris dating? What he wanted in a woman. They were questions I already knew the answers to.

But then the interviewer asked what Chris attributed his success to.

Chris: "I have a great team that I work with, but I would have to say that my sister, Linda, inspires me."

Interviewer: "How so?"

Chris: "I will always have a special place in my heart for her. Linda keeps me sane."

The interviewer said that they shared a laugh before moving on to other things, but none of those other things mattered to me. I stopped reading the article and stared at my phone… I felt like shit. There was no other word that fit. Chris had said my name in front of the entire world and I'd turned my back to him.

I kept him sane. What the hell did that mean? Why did it matter? I kept him sane. Me. I did that for him. No one else. Sanity is a good thing. Almost a necessity and he got that necessity from me. And he had a special place for me in his heart.

Yeah. I was shit.

I turned and caught his eyes. He was in the middle of a laugh, but it slowly died when he saw the look on my face. He walked over very quickly and didn't stop until he was touching me. His hands went to my bare arms. "Linda, what's wrong, you're shaking."

I was? I shook my head. "I'm fine."

Chris scowled at me. "No, you're not. What happened?" He looked around me, looking for the culprit, but he wouldn't find them, because the culprit was me.

I just stared at Chris and waited for him to look back at me. When he did, I didn't know what came over me. Maybe it was the way he was looking at me or maybe I was high from the night's magic energy, but there in that dark hall, nothing else mattered. I brought my hands up to Chris' face, leaned forward, and kissed him.

His lips were soft and the feel of them was more than anything I could have imagined. His mouth opened, maybe in shock, I don't know, but I took advantage of it. I kissed him hard and passionately. I swept my tongue into those parted lips and thoroughly searched

his open mouth as though I could find his soul. I felt Chris shudder right before his hands went about my back, bringing me closer to him, deepening the kiss. He leaned his head closer to me as I felt the first touch of this tongue in mine. Heat shot through me, hitting my flesh like hot rain. I moaned as I pulled him closer to me.

Chris stepped back. My moan must have caused him to do so. The look he was giving me was not a friendly one. “What was that?” he asked.

I had to fight to find my words. I found a few, but none of them sounded right, but I went with the best ones I had. “I don’t know.” Heat spread over my face that had nothing to do with lust and everything to do with embarrassment.

Chris was really upset now. “Linda, you’re my sister.” The look he gave me was of disgust.

Now I was pissed. “I’m your step-sister, Chris. ”

He shook his head. “No, this can’t happen.”

I knew that. I’d always known that. I had just gotten swept up in the moment, but the moment was gone. Now Chris knew how I felt and for a moment, I thought he’d enjoyed the kiss just as much as I did. Maybe Chris did, until he realized who he’d been kissing. I never should have done it, but the cat was out of the bag now. Chris knew how I felt, well, not really, but he knew my feelings went past the love of a sibling. But it didn’t matter. He didn’t want me and now I wouldn’t have to say ‘what if’ for the rest of my life. I would know. Chris had made himself perfectly clear. This couldn’t happen. I threw up my hands. “You’re right.” I was so done. I headed towards the door.

No one tried to stop me as I made my way to the elevator. No one said anything on the way down or in the lobby. I didn’t hear anyone call my name until I was outside.

“Linda.”

I waved my hand and a taxi pulled up. I quickly opened the door and gave the driver directions before I closed it. “Drive.”

The driver asked no questions. She just drove and I caught a glimpse of Chris’ face as I passed, but couldn’t see his expression in the dark. I turned away from him and wrapped my arms around myself. I felt cold. It was a cold that had nothing to do with the weather.

Ten minutes had passed before the driver asked me where I wanted to go. She was a good driver. She’d left me to my thoughts for a moment before saying anything to me. She probably knew that I needed it. Or, she thought that driving in the wrong direction would earn her more money. But I didn’t want to think of her that way. Tonight, she’d saved me and that was good.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I'd been prepared to see Chris when I got the brownstone. He lived there, but I hadn't thought he'd be up waiting for me. I'd stayed away from the house as long as I could. I'd caught a late movie at a theater. God bless, New York. The city that never sleeps. People had looked at me funny because of the dress I had on, but I didn't care. I'd eaten a large bag of popcorn and had propped my feet up on the chair in front of me. I don't even remember what the movie was about. My only request to the tenant had been for a ticket to the longest movie that they had playing. The movie had been over three hours long. I found the length ridiculous, but who was I to judge? Maybe everyone had gone to the film with the same request as me. Probably not.

Chris stood up from the couch. I took off my heels and walked passed him. I knew he wanted to talk, but I didn't. I wanted to sleep the rest of my existence away. What was the point of life without love? I was feeling emotional and sappy, but I didn't care.

"Can we talk?" he asked before I could turn down the hall.

I turned back towards him and took every bit of him in. Sweet torture. He was still in his back pants and white top. The bowtie and jacket were thrown on a nearby chair. His hair looked a little messy. The top two buttons on his shirt were undone. He was breathtaking and I for one was not up to looking at him anymore. "I'm moving back home tomorrow."

A pained look crossed Chris' face. "Don't, Linda."

I shook my head. "I think we both know it's for the best."

He started to walk towards me and I took a step back. He stopped. "I hate it when you do that."

I rolled my eyes. "Do what? Back away from you? Is the reason not painfully obvious now?"

His face softened. He knew now. I backed away to avoid touching him. I backed away so that I didn't embarrass myself like I'd done hours earlier at the party. I wish I didn't have feelings for him. I wish I could take back the last five hours of my life, but I couldn't. Our world was so advanced, yet no one had invented time travel yet. I should complain to congress about that. Someone in the science community was slacking.

"Linda, I'm sorry," Chris eventually said. Whatever that meant.

I turned towards the guest room. "Okay." What else was I supposed to say? It's okay, Chris? Apology accepted? No harm, no foul? I didn't think so.

I walked into the guest room and turned on the light. I turned to close the door and

Chris was looming there, taking up the entire entryway. His quiet presence had scared me half to death. “Can I help you?”

His expression was neutral. “I don’t want you to leave.”

I stared at him and wondered what could possibly be going through his head. “Why?”

He shrugged. “I like you here.” He was so adorable at times.

I looked away from him. “Well, you can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

He frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

I lifted a brow. I had no idea, but it had sounded right at the moment. What was I trying to say? No clue, but he didn’t have to know that. “You know what I mean, Chris.”

Chris’ black brows pulled together. His pale eyes seemed to darken with anger. “So that’s it? If we don’t fuck, you’ll leave?”

Is that what my words had implied? I didn’t have a chance to answer. Chris’ hands came to my sides and pulled me roughly against his body. I could feel the hard member in his pants. I caught my breath. Chris’ menacing stare didn’t change. “Is this what you want?”

I felt the lower part of my body tighten, as if it could reach out and grab him. Yes, I did want him, but not like this. I placed my hands on his chest and tried to push out of his grasp. But Chris wouldn’t budge. I felt my body being yanked further into the room. The door slammed and then I was pinned to the door.

Chris’ large hands slid up the top of my dress and cupped my full breasts. His thumbs rubbed over my nipples through the material. My body began to respond against my will. I threw my back and took in a shaky breath. “Chris, please,” my voice sounded strained to my own ears. I couldn’t think. He had to stop before we got too far. Before I wouldn’t be able to pull back.

His lips touched my throat and I was lost. His mouth was just as teasing as his hands. “Is this what you want?” he whispered. His words pulled me out enough to think.

I shook my head and brought my eyes to look at his. “Not like this Chris.” My hands moved to his face, holding him in place. There were so many things I wanted to tell him, but I didn’t know where to start. Plus, his hands still hadn’t moved.

Chris’ hands stayed planted in their place, his thumbs still over my tender buds. His eyes were still furious. “So, you don’t want me?”

“That’s not what I’m saying.” I remained calm, level-headed, and worked on slowing down my heart rate.

“Then what do you want?”

Still holding his face, I didn’t know what to say, so I tried to show him. I leaned forward and kissed him gently, slowly. I rubbed my lips across his in the most loving way

I knew possible, trying to express everything that I was still too nervous to say.

Chris' breath came out unsteady. "I can't do this, Linda."

"Why? Because you're my brother? Because you're too old for me?"

He looked at me and I saw the pain return to his eyes. "No."

Now, I was really confused. I pushed my fingers through his hair, still holding him in place, taking advantage of the fact that he was allowing me to touch him so intimately. "Then why, Chris?"

"Because I'm Christopher Ray, Sr.'s son." Then he looked at me as though his words made all the sense in the world. They didn't.

I frowned. "I don't understand."

"Don't you? I'm just like him. Rich, powerful, and unloveable."

Now I was completely lost. "Chris, what are you talking about? Everyone loves you."

He pulled away from me and shook his head. "No, they don't, Linda. Fans don't count."

"Your mother loves you."

"No, she doesn't. She tries, but she can't." Chris ran frustrated hands through his hair before taking a seat on the bed. "I'm the product of a loveless marriage. I'm a reminder of the worst part of my mother's life."

I went and knelt in front of him. My dress pooled into a white puddle around me. "Chris," I placed my hands on his knee. "Julie loves you. When you were away, she moped every day about how she couldn't see you for Sunday breakfast and how you were too far from home. When she thought you wouldn't make it for the wedding renewal, she literally had a crying fit."

Chris just stared at me. "Really?"

I got the urge to knock him in the head. "Of course! Your mother is crazy about you."

Chris blinked. "I feel like she loves you more." His words lacked any emotion.

I blinked a few times myself. Chris and I had had so many heart-to-hearts about life in the past, but this was the first time I'd heard any of this. I suddenly wondered what the heck we'd been talking about for years when this was the real stuff. Though, I couldn't complain. Not really. Chris still didn't know that I loved him. So, we both had our own secrets, but still. "What makes you say that?"

He was frowning again. "Because, once you came into her life, she basically dropped me like I was last year's model."

I wanted to laugh, but couldn't. "Chris, I was a fourteen-year-old girl who knew nothing about being a girl. You were twenty-five. I think she believed you'd do fine on

your own.”

Chris just stared at me for a while. He looked away and then back at me. “Well, when you say it like that.”

I punched him in the ribs. He flinched back, surprised. “Hey. My feelings can be hurt, too.”

I sighed and stood. “You’re ridiculous.”

He gave me a soft smile just before his lips fell. And I saw then that Chris didn’t believe me. He just wanted the conversation over with, but I couldn’t leave him like this. Was this the reason he didn’t like coming around the family? Did he think himself the black sheep? If he did, he was wrong, because that role had already been taken by me. I was the unsuccessful one who’d barely had a dollar to her name, gotten evicted from her crummy apartment, resorted to taking advantage of her brother’s absence, and moved into his home without letting him know. Oh no, if Chris wanted the position as black sheep, he’d have to get a ticket and wait in line.

I placed my hands on Chris’ shoulders and spread my fingers over them. They were solid. I could feel his strength through the material of his shirt. He was crazy if she believed himself to be unloveable. Any woman would be happy to have him, especially me… and Patricia. “Are you seriously taking Patricia to the wedding?”

Chris gave me a genuine smile at last. “No, I just said that to make sure that Mom didn’t try to surprise me with a date when I got there.”

I smiled and let out a half-sigh, half-laugh. “Oh, that makes sense.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Plus, I wanted to make you mad.”

I narrowed my own eyes. “Why?”

“Because you didn’t read the article.”

My hands left his shoulders and went around my own. “I read the article.”

Chris didn’t move, but the surprise was on his face. “When?”

“At the party.”

He seemed confused. “Is that why you kissed me? As a thank you?”

I shook my head. “No, not as a thank you.”

“Then why?”

CHAPTER NINE

I reached up and rubbed my arms. I felt cold again. Chris was asking for an answer that I knew he wasn't ready to hear. I looked at him and knew he wasn't ready. He would probably never be. We'd shared our thoughts tonight, but a confession of love would lead to nothing good. Yet, for the life of me, I couldn't figure out a reason why I thought not to tell Chris that I loved him. Maybe it was simply because I'd held on to the secret for so long? But what did it matter? I'd already kissed him. He'd already experienced just a touch of my desire for him. Even if I wasn't his sister, Chris already had enough reason to want me out of his life. Chris didn't do relationships and he had to know that I would want one. I didn't just sleep with every man I found attractive. It took more than that.

I needed something to distract me from what was happening. I needed clothes. The safe confines of a hoodie. I started for the door. "I'm going to change." I opened the door and started for his room. All of my clothes were in there. Oh yeah, I'd taken drawer space, too. I'd really moved in.

I knew Chris had followed me, but the nearness of his voice confirmed it. "Why did you kiss me?"

I'd just made it to a dresser when his hand came over mine. I slowly lifted my eyes to look at him. He didn't ask me his question again, but his look was expecting.

"Because I'm in love you." Why not tell him? I was already moving out tomorrow. Other lines had been crossed already. There was really no point in holding on to the secret any longer. It didn't matter. Chris could know.

I watched him, looked into his eyes, and saw nothing. He gave no reaction for a long while, until finally, he gave a heavy sigh and shook his head. He started to back away from me, continuing to deny what was happening, trying to remove himself from a situation that he didn't want to be in. I didn't stop him. I let him back away and watched him walk out the door.

Once he was gone, I expected to feel something. I expected to feel pain—hurt. Anything. But I didn't. Maybe I was going to have one of those late reactions. You know? The kind that came hours or days later? Maybe my mind was still in shock over the fact that I'd just told the man I loved how I felt, or maybe, just maybe, a part of me had been prepared for his rejection. Chris running into my arms, now that would have been something to see, but it was highly unlikely. So unlikely, that I had to laugh.

I reached behind my back and began to unzip the dress. My hands shook the entire time. The late reaction was kicking in. My mind wasn't aware of it, but my body was. I managed to get the dress undone, breathing calmly as I worked, trying to get my nerves

under control. With the dress finally off, all I had left to change out of was my underwear. I was currently wearing a thong, not something any woman wanted to sleep in.

I slipped the underwear off and then reached into the drawer for something more comfortable to change into, but I couldn't find anything. As I frantically pushed clothes around, I realized that the reason I couldn't find anything was because I couldn't see anything. My vision was blurry. It was blurry, because I was crying.

I felt the first tear slide down my cheek just as I was abruptly turned around. A pair of lips found mine and I heard myself automatically moan. My hands rested on a large pair of shoulders. A second later, I realized it was Chris. Chris was kissing me, touching me, and my body had known it before my mind did.

Chris' touch was not kind, but rough, fueled with need. His hands explored me everywhere, frantically, as if he was scared I'd disappear into thin air if he stopped. I realized then that we were not about to make love. We were going to fuck. We were going to do the thing that had been forbidden to us—seek pleasure from one another.

I was backed up into the dresser. The back of my thighs hit the edge of the wooden surface just before I felt Chris' hand reach around my back, and in one powerful move, lift me off the floor. I heard the items from the dresser being swept to the floor just before everything made a loud crash. Things broke, but I didn't care, and I don't think Chris cared either.

My hands slid down Chris' chest, and I realized he still had all his clothes on. It angered me. I wanted, no, needed to feel his warm flesh against mine. I needed to feel it underneath my hands. Now. My fingers found a hole between two buttons and yanked hard against the fabric. The buttons from his expensive shirt spilled to the floor. Then my hands were moving to tear the fabric from his arms, jerking them over his massive biceps. He helped me and then pulled the undershirt over his head. My eyes barely glanced at his chest. I knew it was impressive, rock hard abs and all. I'd seen it before, but he still had clothes on, pants, and I wanted them all off.

I fumbled on his belt, but eventually got it undone and immediately started for the button and zipper on his pants. While I worked, Chris' hands massaged up my thighs, inching higher and higher, getting close, but never close enough. It was so distracting. It drove me mad. With his pants undone, I pulled them down. The underwear went with them, as far as I could tell from my position on top of the dresser. I only stopped when his member popped out to greet me. One look at it and I knew that I'd never wanted anything so bad in my life. It was the one thing I'd always coveted. Every time I knew another woman had experienced it, I'd gone mentally mad with jealousy. It was in those moments that I hated who I was. I hated being Chris' sister, but now, now it was mine. All mine, and I wanted every inch of it. I wrapped my hand around it just as Chris' fingers finally found the spot on me that I'd been waiting for him to touch.

We sighed. It was exhilarating. Magic. It was like we'd finally reached a place that we'd both been searching for. It was that feeling of finality. Rightness. It should have felt wrong, but it didn't. It was so right. This was right. My hand began to slide over every

vein and ridge and his finger began to explore me as well. All the while, we stared into each other's eyes, watching one another, seeing what pleased the other. It was the most intense experience of my life. Watching Chris' hooded pale eyes while I stroked him, feeling him inside of me, hearing nothing but our heavy breathing filling the air around us. It was a moment of intimacy in its purest form. It was something that went beyond just sex. This moment would be engraved in my mind for the rest of my life. Vivid and alive.

I threw my head back, my hand stopped just as Chris found it. My spot. I dropped my hold on him and my hands found the edge of the dresser. I was so lost to the manipulation of his hands that I screamed the moment I felt Chris replace his fingers with his mouth. I screamed and I kept screaming as I came and I didn't stop screaming until I felt my world began to slide away.

Then Chris was holding me. I felt my body hit the cool sheets of the bed just as I felt the warmth of his body cover mine. His lips found mine, waking me up, reenergizing my body, fanning the fire in my body, spreading its flames through my veins. My hands cupped his face, my legs went about his body, and I felt his throbbing member lying against my entrance, pressing into my folds.

Chris slipped away from my body for a moment and I heard him open the bedside dresser. I sat up. "Don't."

CHAPTER TEN

Chris turned to me, his hand still in the dresser. I shook my head. “I’m on the pill.”

He shook his head. “I always use protection,” he said, but he didn’t move. His hand just sat there in the dresser drawer. His body leaned over. My eyes roamed over his every plane. Toned, solid, strong. Leaned over he looked like a sculpture of some Roman god.

My hand went back up to his face and I found him doing the same to me, studying my body as I’d done his. Chris’ eyes seemed to mark my body wherever they landed and I saw the hesitation in them. He wanted me, and he was considering doing it raw. I wondered if he’d ever done it raw before. I was sure he had, but I could see how big of a decision he felt he had to make. It came down to trust. Did he trust me?

I watched him fight his conscience and I smiled when I realized that I’d won. He trusted me. His body came back over mine and I rewarded him with a kiss. His lips felt softer than pillows, but there was nothing soft about the thing that was asking my lower body for access. I opened for Chris, body and soul, letting him successfully take me, fitting his body into mine. The connection was perfect and so complete.

Chris began a moderate tempo and my body followed his moves. Our bodies met and then parted almost to the point of detachment, right before we’d rock back together. With each stroke, Chris enticed me more. His body seemed to call something within mine, bribing my senses, promising things I knew only he could give. I felt seduced by him. My body began to shake as if it were ready to cry, scream out at him. And I realized that I was screaming, shouting, begging him to let me have the thing promised. And he did.

Chris’ head went back just as my eyes closed. We came in waves, calling out each other’s name, shouting up towards the heavens. With every release, I felt lighter and lighter, until I felt as if I were nothing, as if I ceased to exist. A great nothing, right before the final lingering tremor of pleasure writhed through my body. Right before I relaxed with exhaustion and Chris crashed on top of me.

I tried to move my arms and wrap them around him, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t feel them. I didn’t even think my mind knew where to start to find feeling in them. My body had shut down for the time being. It seemed my limbs had all taken a vote and decided they deserved to rest. I couldn’t disagree, so I just laid there.

While I laid there, I thought about what had just happened. I’d just had sex with Chris, my brother, and it had been everything I’d wanted it to be. Thinking about it seemed to trigger something in my mind and I felt my body shake again with the memory of the pleasure.

Chris' head slowly came up. "What was that?"

I blushed, but didn't turn away. "I don't know." My voice was hoarse, rough from the screaming. I was trying to be coy and see if he'd let it go.

He smiled a knowing smile and then proceeded to rain kisses down my throat and chest. I felt him take one of my nipples into my mouth and my body reacted. A sharp hiss left my lips. I found the strength to sit up and look at him. "What are you doing?"

His answer was a flick of his tongue across my nipple before taking it into his mouth. I fell back on the bed as my body began to burn from the inside out. I felt possessed. Desire crept through me like a prowling lion, invading every corner of my being. I sighed from surprise. "What is this?" I asked aloud, but I didn't think my question was to Chris. I thought I was asking my body, or anyone in the universe who had the answer.

Chris' teeth raked over my nipples and I let out a moan. My head rocked back and forth on the bed. I felt amazing, crazy, and wet—very wet. How could that be? Surely my body had nothing else to give. Chris had already emptied me. How could this be happening?

Chris' hands played over my sides. He grabbed me by the hips and flipped me over. My face had just hit the pillow when I felt his hardened member begin to tunnel its way back into my swollen flesh. It hurt, but my body didn't care. I wanted it. I wanted him back inside of me. I was mad with the need to feel him.

A hard slam came over my ass right before Chris shoved his entire length into me. I grabbed the headboard just as my mouth opened, but no sound came out. I strained to scream, but couldn't. I couldn't breath. My nails dug into the headboard as Chris began to pump fast and furiously into me. I finally found my voice, and the words that left my mouth were words that had never left my mouth before. I urged Chris on, crying and pleading for him to never stop, asking for it faster and harder, begging for him, calling his name over and over again. He'd invoked something deep inside of me that I'd never known existed, a hunger. I wanted to devour him, seal him to myself for all eternity.

I heard Chris shout right before he came, still pumping inside of me, emptying himself into me, filling me with his body, seeds, and emotions. Filling me with everything that he was. I could feel it. It was more than a sexual release. It was himself that opened for me and I took everything that poured out of him.

The moment he withdrew, I flipped over, crawled into his lap, and grabbed him to me. I held him and felt him grab me, hold me just as tightly as I held him. His breathing was harsh and warm on my flesh. His body slippery with sweat, but I held on to him. I held Chris as if he were a child and he held on to me like I was the last boat off a sinking ship. And maybe something was sinking—his defenses. The defenses he put up against the world, including me.

I held him while one of my hands touched his hair, sliding through the short black strands, while I whispered soothing words to him. Eventually, all I kept saying was how

much I loved him and would always love him, repeatedly, filling that place within that he'd dumped only seconds ago. Giving him my comfort just before he could rebuild the walls around his heart. I needed him to more than know the truth. I needed him to feel it. Chris was hurting and I needed him to know that he didn't have to hurt anymore, because I was here and I would never let him go. He was mine and I was his. Forever.

Once Chris' breathing calmed, he looked up and stared into my eyes; his hands still around my back. I didn't know what I saw in those eyes, but I sensed a peace or acceptance right before he confirmed it. "Okay."

"Okay?" I asked.

He nodded. "Okay." A smile on his face. I'd messed up his hair so he looked completely adorable. I couldn't help but return the smile.

But I still needed to know what we were agreeing to. I didn't want miscommunication on either of our ends because my heart could not stand the disappointment now. Not after what we'd just done. If we were going to be moving forward, I needed to know exactly what that included. "Okay what?"

Chris' hand slid up my back and waded through my hair. "Let's do this."

"Let's do what, Chris?"

"Us."

"What does 'us' mean?"

He shook his head. "What do you need it to mean?"

I shook my head. "No. You tell me what you mean by it."

He looked away before looking back at me. "I can't live without you."

My heart skipped a beat. My hands held on to him more firmly. "What does that mean?"

He smiled. "You know what it means."

I smiled and slapped his sweaty shoulder. "No, I don't, Christopher Ray. You say it, right now."

His grin reached all the way up to his eyes. "It means that I love you, Linda."

My hands tightened even more, pulling on as much of his short black hair as my fingers could lock on. "Chris, don't lie to me."

He shook his head and laughed. "I wouldn't lie to you, Linda."

My face went very serious. "If you hurt me, I'll skin you alive."

His eyes widened at my words, but his smile didn't fall. "Okay."

"I mean it, Chris. I'll kill you."

His smile slowly fell. He grew serious as well, his hands resting on the side of my

body. “Have I ever hurt you?”

“Yes,” I quickly said. “When you walked out of the room an hour ago.” I could feel my heart beating in my throat. I was scared. So scared. I wanted him enough to risk my heart. I really did. Even if he tried to pull back, I knew I’d give in. I couldn’t live without him either. I needed Chris any way I could have him. He was mine, but if he hurt me, I’d kill him. At that moment, that’s how I felt. He was mine and I’d destroy anything that got in my way. “You hurt me when you walked out after I told you that I was in love with you.”

Chris’ hands came up and cupped my face gently, the exact opposite way of my hold on him. “Linda, you are my sun.” His hand moved through my hair so lovingly; his words whispered across my face. “You are my obsession. You are the need that is never sufficed and now that I have tasted and touched you, my only wish in life is to worship and adore you. So it is you who has the power to hurt me. And do not hurt me, Linda, because life without you would be a fate worse than death.”

My hand relaxed its hold on him as I stared into his soul and saw the truth of his words—the serious set of his jaw. I was his sun. He was just as crazy about me as I was of him. I shook my head as tears leaked from my eyes. Chris’ lips were there to stop them before they fell too far. I wiped my face against him; certain I was messing up any makeup that I still had on. Nothing mattered though. I wanted to bathe in this moment. I wanted to hold this moment in my hands forever. I was free. I had the one thing in life I thought I would forever be denied. Chris was mine and I would never hurt him. I would never let him go. He’d be mine forever.

The Last Chance

Heather Royer

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Chapter One

Anna Crow ran to her car, put on her seatbelt, and hit the gas. Not for the first time, Anna was upset that she'd chosen a home in the city, but she couldn't imagine living anywhere else but in the heart of Boston. She found herself stuck in traffic almost immediately. Great. She was going to be late to the wedding.

She unfolded the front window vizor and made a series of quick glances in the mirror, all the while trying to not hit the car in front of her. Road. Eye make up. Road. Lipstick. Road. Smile. Wink. Road. Everything looked to be in order. She'd worn natural makeup to make her pale blue eyes more punchy. Her permed auburn hair was cut into a short bob. She'd chosen the style to make her look more serious. Anna's five foot five inch height hadn't changed since high school and at times, people easily assumed she was still sixteen, instead of the twenty-eight year old that she was.

Today, she put on a dress that highlighted her small curves. It was a soft silk pastel yellow dress. It had spaghetti straps, a heart shaped neckline, accentuated her small breast, hugged her stomach, and slid over her hips, just before it flared out, stopping at the knee. She had a pair of white pumps on her feet to match her purse. White to a wedding. Just a little white. She didn't think anyone would mind. Now if only Anna could get her nerves under control.

Folding the vizor back up, Anna's hands tightened on the wheel. Her heart jumped right before it took on a fast tempo. She sighed, trying to get some of the anxiety out, but nothing seemed to work. Anna wasn't ready. Everything was moving so quickly. But even as she thought it, Anna knew there was nothing she could do about it. Brian was getting married. Her Brian.

Her heart leaped again. She choked back a sob and immediately shook it off. She'd cried enough in the last four months. If she were to be completely honest with herself, Anna could say that she'd cried over Brian for the last seven years.

Anna finally made it to the freeway and was able to pick up some speed. The wedding was to be at the bride's family church. It was going to be beautiful. Anna would know. She'd even helped plan the wedding. It had been a favor to Brian. He wanted her to like his bride. Anna quickly wiped at a lone tear that fell. Anna needed to accept her reality. The man she loved was in love with someone else. Tears wouldn't get Anna out of this situation.

She could still remember the moment she'd been told that Brian was getting married. His fiancee had announced it during one of Anna's dinner parties. The woman sure did know how to steal a show. Jealousy coursed through Anna. Vivian Green. Little Miss Boston. Literally. The woman was a pageant queen.

An itch to check herself out in the mirror again ran through Anna. But there was no use. It didn't matter how she looked. Even if she could upstage Vivian, she still wouldn't win. Vivian had won. Vivian had Brian.

But to be fair, Anna hadn't tried. There'd been no competition for Brian's heart. Anna had never told him how she felt. That was what hurt Anna the most. He still didn't know and now it was too late to tell him.

Anna took her exit off the freeway and turned down a series of short streets until she finally reached her destination. She found a parking spot, hopped out the car, and ran on high heels towards the entrance of the church.

Reaching the front of the steps, Anna realized she wasn't the only one late. Her eyes widen at the man who was running in her direction. "Brian?"

Brian Walker smiled as he slowed to a jog right before he stopped at her feet. He rested his hands on his knees, trying to find his breath.

Anna leaned down to look at his face. "What are you doing out here?"

Brian held out a hand, asking for her patience. Anna leaned back, only getting a view of his short brunette hair. Once he'd managed to breath at a rate, he stood up, going to his whole six foot three inch height.

He was breathtaking and looked completely dangerous in his black tux. Almost like a younger James Bond, bow tie and all. A pair of solid green eyes stared down at her in that same gentle manner they alway did. He had very strong facial features. High cheekbones, a straight nose, and handsome pair of lips. If not for the tenderness in his eye, Brian could be unnerving. An upset Brian was not something anyone wanted to be around.

"Brian, why are you just getting here?"

His grin slowly pulled to the right side of his face. He was so adorable when he did that. "Honestly, I'm surprised I got here when I did. I just flew in this morning."

Anna shook her head. Just like Brian to work on his wedding day. He hadn't always been this way. He'd been kind of lazy freshmen year, but Anna had corrected him. Now he was 'Brian the Workaholic'. She'd created a monster. "Vivan will not be pleased." Anna crossed her arms over her stomach, given him her best stern look.

Brian rolled his eyes. "She'll live." Brian's eyes returning to hers almost made Anna want to run and hide. Only Brian could bring out Anna's girly side, making her want to giggle. She made it a point never to giggle. Anna knew her college students would get a kick out it if she did. Ms. Crow? Intimidated by a man? Nah.

Yet, she was. Just by this man. Both Anna and Brian had studied Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences while at MIT. It was where they met. She'd been one of the smallest people in the class and one of the only female. Anna had met her share of challenges from male colleagues. She'd impressed them all, not that she'd been trying to impress any of them. Anna was confident in her intelligence. It was everything else that frightened her. "Did you finish the batch file?"

Brian lite up immediately. He was a kid in a candy shop whenever there was a conversation about computer algorithms. "Yeah, but I want to you take a look over it. The script is pretty basic. Let's meetup next week-"

Anna was shaking her head before Brian had the time to finish. “You’ll be on your honeymoon.”

Brian paused and looked towards the church awkwardly. It was as if he’d forgotten it was there. Or rather, he’d forgotten why he was here. “Oh yeah. I should go inside before everyone thinks I’ve changed my mind.” He gave a quick laugh.

“No, we wouldn’t want that to happen,” sarcasm dripped heavy from her words. Anna turned towards the dead road. Not a car or pedestrian around. It was as if they were the only people in the world. If only.

“What was that about?”

Anna looked towards Brian then. There was confusion in his green eyes. Anna’s heart started to beat rapidly. She rubbed her bare arms, trying to warm herself. It wasn’t cold outside, but for some reason, she felt a chill go through her. “What are you talking about?”

“The attitude in your voice.”

Oh crap. Had he heard it. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Brian scoffed. “Like you don’t know,” he then put on his best impression of her, dramatizing every word she said, dragging it out to insure that Anna did miss an inflated syllable, “No, we wouldn’t want that to happen.” He then lifted a brow, waiting, expecting an answer.

Anna looked away again. She was caught. She’d let herself get carried away with him. That always happened around Brian. Anna would have her guard up, but after a few minutes, it would slip and she would say something embarrassing. She was surprised that she’d held on to the secret that she loved him for so long. “It doesn’t matter.”

Brian didn’t say anything. Then the silence became awkward, Anna looked back over at him and almost gasped. The anger on his face was raw. “Do you not like Vivian?” He asked very slowly. His eyes were narrowed, studying Anna every move, her every twitch.

Anna gray eyes fluttered. “No, Vivian is… I like her.”

“Then what was the comment meant to mean.”

Anna felt trapped. Time for a good old diversion. “You’re going to miss your own wedding.”

“Yeah, a wedding you don’t think I should be having.”

Anna dropped her arms at her side. She wanted this conversation over. Now. Before she said something ridiculous. “So what? Why does it matter what I think?”

Nothing about Brian’s stance changed. He was still studying her. His eyes still trained on her face, reading her lies. He knew her too well. They’d been friends too long. “Anna, do you not want me to marry Vivian?”

Anna feel her heart drop out. Her hands flew to her chest in an effort to keep it from falling out. This was not happening. Not now. She tried to read Brian’s eyes, tried to see

where the line of questions were going, but she couldn't. His was giving her one of his guarded looks. Blocking her out until he got the information he wanted.

Well, Anna wasn't going to give him anything. She made a quick turn towards the parking lot. She stopped when she almost crashed into something. Or someone. It was Brian. He'd moved quick. His hands went to her shoulder, steadying her. "Why don't you want me to marry Vivian?" The question was no longer 'do' but 'why'.

Anna closed her eyes. It was the only way to shut him out of her thoughts, but even still she could feel his green eyes roaming over her face. Looking for some sign. Anything that would tell him what lay deep within Anna's heart. He wanted to know. She could tell. He sensed it, but it was too late. It didn't matter. "You're going to miss your wedding." It was all she could say. Anna couldn't bare her heart out to him. She wasn't ready. She never would be. It was why the Vivians of the world would win. Anna was too afraid.

She felt Brian's arms leave her then. She opened her eyes and found him still staring down at her, but the anger was gone. He was calm now. There was almost a peace within him, but something else as well. Regret. "Why didn't you just say 'yes'?"

Anna was holding her arms again, confused. 'What?"

Brian put his hands in the pocket of his pants and took a step back. "When I asked you out senior year? Graduation night? Why didn't you say 'yes'?"

Anna was stumped. She hadn't thought he'd remember. It had been seven years ago. They'd been twenty-one. They'd just become legal to drink. Everyone was going out, but Brian wanted to be with Anna, but Anna had said 'no'. She'd regretted it ever sense. "I was scared, Brian." She self consciously reached in an effort to touch him, but Brian took another step away from her. He laughed a cruel laugh. There was pain in it.

Someone came outside the church doors. "Brian! Hurry up! Their about to play the song!"

Brian turned towards the church, gave a nod of the head, and then turned back to Anna. He didn't say anything, but the look said everything words wouldn't. She should have said yes. It should be there wedding day. She should have spoken up when he first brought Vivian around. Should've, would've, could've, but didn't. It would be the story of their lives. Brian was now looking at Anna as if it would be the last time she saw her this way. And it probably would. This would the last time Brian, the unmarried man, could feel anything for anyone outside of Vivian.

Anna stood there, not moving, letting him soak in his fill of her. His eyes prowled over her short frame before meeting her eyes again. His hand unexpectedly reached up and softly caressed her cheek. "You should have said yes," he whispered, right before he dropped his hand and turned towards the church. He walked up the steps and through the door, without ever looking back.

Chapter Two

Anna sat in her car and cried. Her heart was poured out in every sob and tear. Her body shook with sadness. Her car, thankful, was parked a little away from the church. Nobody she knew would see her.

She hadn't gone in. She couldn't. Not after what had happened only an hour ago. Brian knew. He knew that Anna had feeling for him and he was still marrying Vivian. With that knowledge, nothing would change for the better. Her heart had already been broken before Brian had known how she felt, but now that Brian knew… It would be awkward.

Anna would have to sit across from Brian and Vivian at dinners, watch Vivian's stomach grow with child, watch Brian build a life without her, all the while knowing how she felt. Anna couldn't bare it. Anna couldn't bare to ever look in his eyes again.

You should have said yes. You should have said yes. Brian's parting words played over and over in her mind. It was like a track on repeat, clear as if it were his first time saying it. If only she could. If only there were a way to go back to that night. If only.

Anna laid her head on the steering wheel just as someone opened her car door, got into the seat, and closed the door behind them. She jumped. Her eyes met the wide eyes of a stranger. He looked a homeless man. His black hair was long and looked dirty. A beard and mustache covered the lower portion of his face and spilled over his dark baggy clothes. His black eyes were piercing. There was a look in them, a look that said at any moment, he would attack. Anna screamed. "Get out of my car!"

The homeless man didn't move.

Anna did. She went for her door handle, but found that it wouldn't open. She began to cry hysterically. She banged on the glass, shouting, hoping someone would hear her, but the street was bare. Where was everyone on a Sunday morning?

"Got a smoke?"

Anna whipped back towards the stranger. He was still staring at her cautiously. He almost looked afraid of Anna. Why would he be afraid of Anna? He was the one who'd jumped into her car. His hand came out, which only made Anna jump again. She whimpered. Her body squeezed as close to her side of the car as she could. She closed her eyes in fear, but quickly popped them back open. She couldn't close her eyes. There was stranger in her car. She had to watch him, keep an eye on him. Like that would do her any good.

Anna stared at the man's open hand. It was shaking and dirty, very dirty. His eyes still looked at her expectantly. He no longer seemed scared. Now that Anna looked at him, she knew what it was, simply nicotine withdrawal. He need a smoke bad. "I don't smoke."

"I didn't ask if you smoked. I asked for one for me," his rough voice sounded angry. His hand thrusted further towards her.

Anna choked a sudden sob. She was going to cry again. The man was crazy. She didn't have a cigarette. She didn't smoke. Why would she have one? Wait. Anna's eyes flew wide. She did have one. Just one. She'd confiscated it from one of her students a week ago. She swore that college was just the older version of high school. It was simply full of big kids who would either test their teacher's patience or be cooperative. Some failed, some succeeded. You knew who would be who immediately. The daily drama didn't change, the insults just got more sophisticated. "It's in the glove."

The man turned away from her and immediately began to dig through the glove compartment of her car. He threw papers everywhere in a relentless pursuit for what he wanted. "Ah." There is was, at the bottom of everything else. When he found it, he held it in his hands with such care, you would think he'd struck gold.

Anna tried the door latch again, but it wouldn't budge. Her turned back towards the man just as he lit the cigarette with a match and took a slow and long drag. Breathing out, he sighed. The smell of tar filled the little car's interior. The man seemed to calm immediately. Anna felt herself calm as well. Maybe he would leave now. He'd got what he wanted. What else could there be? Just the thought of it made Anna panic again.

The stranger turned towards her then, a smile on his face. His teeth were a deep yellow… at least, the ones that were still there. "What do you want?" he asked.

Anna's brows drew with her confusion. What did he mean? He'd come to her. "I want you to get out of my car."

He laughed a rich laugh. His head turned towards her. Why did his face look brighter? "No, you don't" His voice sounded different now. More clear. Less rough. Almost younger.

Anna shook her head. She stared and watched as the man's hair seemed to restrict back into his face. The dirt marks that sat on his cheeks seemed to fade as well. His eyes, they were still black, but there was a faint twinkle in them now. Anna blinked a few times, not sure of what she was seeing. This couldn't be real. She must be dreaming.

She felt herself almost climbing on the seat, trying to get as far away from the transforming stranger as possible. His facial hair was gone, leaving the impression of a strong jaw. The hair on his head was now short, black, and clean. It now looked to have been freshly cut. The entire time, the man simply kept his eyes on Anna. He smiles again, this time, showing off a beautiful row of pearly whites. In a matter of seconds, the stranger in front of her had gone from being a very scary looking homeless man to one of the most attractive men Anna ha'd ever seen in her life. Anna stared into those black eyes. Long, beautiful lashes fanned around them. Even in the baggy clothes, he was still gorgeous, but Anna couldn't take her eyes off of his. There was something in them. Something that called to her. He winked.

Anna screamed.

He laughed and took another drag of the cigarette. "Thank you for the smoke. I truly needed it." No kidding. His smile was devastatingly handsome.

“What do you want?”

The man turned away from her then, and began to stare straight out of the front window of the car. He sighed. “It is not what I want. It is what you want. You called me.”

Anna was confused. “I didn’t call you. I didn’t call anyone.”

The man turned back to her then. His movements were so smooth. Graceful. It was almost un human His eyes were looking into her’s again. “Are you so sure, Anna?”

He knew her man. Panic rose in Anna’s throat. She looked into his eyes and felt like she were looking into the universe. She felt like she could fall through them and that if she did, Anna would be lost forever. “Who are you?,” she whispered.

This eyes stayed steady. “You know who I am, Anna.”

Anna stared transfixed in his eyes. She didn’t know him. His face. It was not one she would forget. And yet, there was something familiar about it. Looking at him almost made her feel… safe. Home. Anna shook her head. “I don’t know you,” but her words lacked confidence. She was almost sure she didn’t know him, and yet, something told her that she did.

“Come one. Who am I, little Annie?”

Little Annie? No one had called her that in years. The last time Anna had been called that she’d been five or six. Anna’s breathing slowed. She felt weightless looking into his eyes. “I don’t know,” her voice was growing weaker. She was beginning to feel dizzy, light headed. “I don’t know.” Even to her own ears, she was sounded like a child, young, shy, unsure. But he could help her. Anna felt the need to go over and crawl into the stranger’s lap. Let him hold her. Let him take the pain away. A part of her believed he could. Knew he could. She looked into his eyes now, searching.

His eyes looked kind. “What do you want, Anna? Tell me what you want?”

“Brian.” Immediately, Anna felt reality come back with a force so powerful, it knocked her back. The hand that wasn’t braced on the seat flew to her mouth. Anna had said too much, revealing her deepest feeling to the perfect stranger. But the stranger seemed unmoved, his eyes just stared, so gentle.

He put the cigarette between his lips. “I can not give you Brian.”

A sadness slipped into Anna. What had she been thinking? Of course this stranger couldn’t give her Brian. No one could. Anna was upset with herself now. She felt foolish. She looked away.

“But I can take you back.”

Anna’s gray eyes flew to his then. “Take me back?”

His eyes were no longer gentle. They were serious now. He suddenly sounded very professional. “Graduation night. Seven years ago. You’ll have twelve hours before you come back to your present time. It is all the time I you have left.”

Anna frowned. “Have left?”

The stranger kind of let out a giggle laugh. It didn’t really fit him, yet at the same time, it did. “Yes, Anna. We’ve done this before.”

Anna’s face fell. “We have?”

He nodded. “In your twenty-eight years, you’ve used twelve hours of time reversal. You have twelve hours left. How much of it would you like to use now?” The stranger was now looking down at his clothes. Distaste in his features. He didn’t approve. Who would?

Anna’s mind tried to think. The man did look familiar, but she couldn’t place him. He said they knew one another, but she couldn’t place him in any of her memories. “I don’t understand.”

The man sighed, his patience growing thin. “A select group of humans are given 24 Hours of rehearsal time. You, Anna Crow, are one of them and you have used approximately half of your time.” He flicked a piece of lint from his clothes. It didn’t help.

“I don’t understand.”

The beautiful stranger turned his eyes towards her again. He didn’t move for a moment. Then his hand shot out and touched Anna’s. She hadn’t seem him move. Anna began to pull away, but then felt something electric shoot through her. Her mind filled with images. Horrible images. Her childhood dog had gone missing? She’d broken a leg when she was in high school? When had her father died a few years ago? That was impossible. Her father was still alive. But the images said differently. The last one had been the worst. A car accident. Her father had once died in a car accident, but Anna didn’t remember that. It was awful, so awful. Anna could feel herself crying, but the crying didn’t seem like her own tears. They were tears of someone else. She didn’t remember any of it. She wanted to leave. With great force, she pulled herself away, breaking the connection. The images left. In a flash of light they were no more. With the connection gone, Anna felt herself begin to breath. Had she’d not been breathing before? She looked up into the stranger’s eyes. “All of that happened?”

He didn’t reply, but Anna knew the answer. They had. He was at the end of his cigarette now. They both looked at it. One, maybe two more puffs were left. The man’s eyes looked back at Anna again, there was urgency in his voice. “We don’t have long, Anna. Choose now. Do you want to go back?”

Anna was shaking her head, but heard herself say, “Yes.” She wanted Brian. She didn’t want to go the rest of her life without him. She wouldn’t, not if she could help it.

The man nodded. He took the last drag, inhaled, moved his hand away, and blew the smoke into Anna’s face.

Anna tried to fan the smoke away, but it only got thicker. She couldn’t see. Then, she felt herself falling, really falling, but she didn’t scream. Something slowed her fall. Something still held her.

A voice came from somewhere far. “Goodbye, Anna.” The voice was kind. It was the

stranger’s voice. “I am happy to have met you. Have a good life.”

Anna looked around, but she was surrounded by a cloud or fog. There was nothing she could grab that she could hold on to. Underneath her, she saw nothing but more cloud, an endless pit. She felt her breathing slow. Her eyes closed.

And then nothing.

Chapter Three

The sounds of the cheering crowd, blow horns, and the faint hit on the head from a beach ball woke Anna up. She looked around the and could not believe were she was. It was a sunny day in May. She turned toward the stage. Sure enough. A sign with her graduation year hung from the building in the front. Graduation.

As a professor, Anna came to this ceremony every year, but she had a feeling she wasn't a teacher today. Anna looked herself over. Just like everyone else who stood around her, she was dressed in a black commencement gown. Her feet were in a pair of black wedged sandals. Leaning over caused her crazy red hair to fall over her shoulders. Anna sighed. She'd forgotten about the hair. She wouldn't cut or permed it until she was in her Master's study. But today, the long mass of curls and waves had been fluffed and styled by Heather.

The guy sitting beside Anna bumped her as he gave a hug to the person beside him.

"Anna!"

Anna turned around. Ten rows behind her was her best friend, Whitney. Anna laughed. Whitney would kill to look like she did right now. Whitney was gorgeous still, but after marriage and twins, in Anna's real time, Whitney wasn't so pleased with her middle. Whitney had got a degree in Education, but what she really got is a MRS degree. Whitney, unashamedly, came to college looking to marry the best and she had. Anna found herself weaving through the crowd so that she could hug her.

Whitney's long golden hair fell in heavy waves. Her blue eyes sparkled as bright as the ring on her left hand. "We did it!" Whitney shouted at her.

"Yeah," Anna smiled. Even though this day had happened seven years ago, for Anna it was still one of her biggest accomplishments. She'd graduated summa cum laude from MIT. That would be a nice feat for most people.

Anna felt a pair of arms circle her from behind and lift her off the ground. "We did it!"

Anna rolled her eyes. It was Charles "Chuck" Sanders. Her dropped her. Anna turned around and gave her friend a real hug. Chuck was large, but not in a fat way. At first glance, people alway assumed that he played football and was a complete moron, but the exact opposite was true. The guy was six-five, nothing but muscle, and could run math circles around the best of them. He had the trophies to prove it.

His brown curly hair was spilling out of his cap. The smile on his lips played through his entire face, causing his brown eyes to squint. Yeah, it was easy to mistake him for a jock.

"Where's my hug?" Whitney pouted.

"You get something better than a hug." Chuck leaned over Anna and brought his lips to Whitney's. They were immediately lost to a world of their own. Seven years from now, they were still like this. Anna loved it and hated it, but she knew that the hate was only

jealousy.

When the kiss deepened and moaning began, Anna found herself shuffling away as quickly as possible. The couple completely towered over Anna. If she didn't move now, Anna would find herself trapped. She made it out just as Charles' hands moved around Whitney's back. The words 'get a room' never fit better.

A strong hand circled Anna's. She turned back and her heart dropped down to her toes. Brian. His green eyes and crooked smile had Anna completely captivated. The smile softened the hard lines in his cheeks and jaw. He was so breathtaking. Anna allowed him to gently pulled her into a hug. Anna placed her cheek on his chest. Even through his graduation robe, Brian smelt amazing. Woody and masculine. Anna couldn't remember the last time Brian had held her like this. A part of her didn't want to let him go. She had to hold down a sob that threatened to come up her throat. Brian was married. Or not. That thought reminded Anna of why she was here in this moment in time. To get Brian.

With much effort, Anna slowly pulled out of Brian's embrace. She looked at her watch. Three thirty. Anna supposed she'd used about thirty minutes of her time so far, meaning she only had until three in the morning to make sure that Brian was hers.

"Okay, so, what are we doing tonight?" It was Whitney. She was leaning back into Charles' embrace. Her lipstick was gone, but a very pleased smile painted her lips beautifully.

Brian put a hand on Anna's shoulder. "What's everyone thinking?"

Anna panicked. This was it. This was that moment. Now she remembered why she'd told Brian 'no'. Looking at Charles and Whitney, it all made since. This was not just as 'let's all hang out'. This was a 'let's double date'. Anna's heart rate picked up immediately. Anna took a step to the side. Brian's hand fell. "Uh, I have to find my family."

Brian's eyes narrowed, studying her face. Anna looked away from him. Her eyes caught the look of Charles and Whitney. They looked disappointed. Anna felt the world around her shift. Was this a set up? Had they planned this? Had they all been in on this? Anna felt her own arms wrap around herself. How hadn't she known? All these years?

The feel of Brian's hand on her arm caught Anna's attention. His face had softened, well, as soft as he could get it. "Okay."

With that one word, Anna knew she was saying a lot more. He was letting her go, not just today, but forever. What he'd assumed was rejection was really just Anna's shyness. If she said yes, so many things could go wrong. She could end up embarrassing herself. Brian could discover that she really wasn't what he wanted. The rejection would be painful. Anna wasn't sure she was up for that. She'd rather have Brian has a friend then not have him at all. "I'm sorry," she softly whispered. She immediately felt stupid. She'd wasted this trip back in time and it was her last one. She wasn't confident enough to be in Brian.

Brian shook his head. "Don't worry about it." He smiled, but Anna could tell it wasn't genuine.

Anna quickly smiled back then turned away again. The crowd around them had started to

scatter across the lawn. She could see her family in the distance, waving in her direction. “I’ve got to go,” Anna said, right before she turned and ran across the grass. She didn’t look back. She couldn’t.

Anna didn’t stop until she was in front of her family.

“Congratulations, Dear” Anna heard her mother say right before Teresa Crow’s lips softly touched her cheek. Anna looked over at the woman she’d inherited her pale eyes from. They were both petite, but where Anna lacked confidence, her mother and sister oozed it. Teresa had blond hair that she wore swept back and away from her small face. She had on one of her power suits. Teresa was a lawyer.

Heather came over next and snapped the cap off Anna’s head. Without permission, she started to fluff back up the top of Anna’s hair. Anna let her. It had truly been Heather’s handiwork anyway. “Come out of that gown and let me see the dress I picked out,” she had a gritty smile on her stunning face. Heather, Anna’s older sister, was not petite. She’d received her height and hazel eyes from their father but shared in Teresa’s confidence and blond hair. She’d picked out Anna’s dress today.

Anna slipped out of the gown. Heather anxiously helped. She was so into fashion, it was so easy to assume the woman was a stylist instead of the mechanical engineer that she was. Education was extremely important to the Crow family.

The gown was off. Anna immediately wanted to cover herself up. The dress had been easier to wear when the black gown had covered it, but now Anna just wanted to hide. The dress was actually a two piece that seemed like one… until Anna raised her arms or bent over… not that she would. The lace fabric was black and had an antique design. The top was sleeveless while the skirt stopped mid thigh. Heather loved to dress Anna up this way. At times, Anna knew that she was simply a life size doll to Heather. But if they wanted to be serious, Heather’s tall stature, angled face, and blond hair made her look more like a doll.

“You look beautiful.”

Anna looked up at met her father’s hazel eyes. She immediately reached up and gave him a hug. Reaching up caused her dress to part, but Anna didn’t care. Richard Crow was more like Anna then either Teresa or Heather. They were both shy, computer professors at MIT, and shared in their crazy red hair. Anna pulled up and looked up into his smiling face. Imagines of the fatal car accident began to flash before her eyes. The funeral. Her father’s dead body. Anna started to cry as she held him. She’d almost lost him. If it hadn’t been for the man with the stars and moons in his eyes, Anna would have lost him. She buried her face into Richard’s middle as the tears fell. His arms came around her, holding her. “Yeah, I cried when I graduated too,” Richard whispered in her hair.

Anna laughed as she came out of his embrace. If only he knew. She could feel a hand from both her sister and mother on her back, but her eyes never left Richard’s. What would life be like without him? Where would she be without her father’s love? Where could she be with Brian’s love?

And it dawned on Anna. Seven years into the future, Anna couldn't truly say that she was happy, not as happy as she knew she could be with Brian. She had to have Brian. She had to try.

"What does everyone feel like eating?" Teresa asked as she pulled out a kleenex and wiped the tears from underneath Anna's eyes.

Anna shook her head. "I'm going out with Brian."

That got everyone's attention. They all knew Brian. He was one of Anna's closest friend. For a moment, Anna wished she'd phrased her words differently, but then shrugged it off. She had no idea what this day would lead to, but her excitement was almost strong enough to outway her anxiety. Almost.

"Well, let me touch up your makeup before you go." Heather reached into her designer bag and pulled out a smaller purse that she used as a makeup carrier. Without a comment, Anna simply turned to her sister and allowed Heather to go to work.

Chapter Four

Five minutes later, and with a new lipstick tube in her shoulder purse, Anna was turning in the direction that she'd last seen her friends, but they weren't there. Anna panicked. Had they left? She looked around the lawn and could see them on the edge of the parking lot. "Wait up!" She yelled.

The trio turned. A stunned look covering their faces. Brian was the first to break and began a jog to meet up with her. They met halfway.

A hesitant smile was on his face. "Did you change your mind?"

Anna smiled. "Yeah, let's do this."

Brian's smile seemed to bloom before her eyes. Anna felt it touch her heart and hit her right in the heart. He held out his hand. Anna only hesitated for a moment before taking his hand in hers. They'd held hands before, just as friends, but this was different. Anna could feel it. Looking into his vivid green depths, she could tell me could feel it as well. Their fingers entwined.

"Hurry it up!" Whitney yelled in their direction, right before hopping into the passenger seat of Charles' car. Hand in hand, Anna and Brian walked towards the car. He held open the door to the back seat and Anna slid in. Brian came in beside her and closed the door. Charles pulled off after seatbelts were put into place.

Charles always had the best cars. His father played professional football. Go figure. But Charles was already making his own money. He'd started an internship at a large corporation last summer and they'd offered him a package deal before he'd graduated. Charles had bought the car and Whitney's ring with his own money. Seven years from now, he'd be the Head of Technology for the entire company.

The plan was to head to Brian and Charles' apartment, change, and then hit up a series of hot spots downtown. Anna had been to the guys' apartment before. She knew Whitney had clothes there. So that meant, everyone would be changing, but Anna. "Wish someone had told me to bring a pair of jeans," Anna said to the car at large.

"Anna, you look great," Whitney said before waving her off. "I'm the one dressed like a nun."

"A very sexy nun," Charles grabbed her hand and kissed her knuckles. Her large engagement diamond close to his mouth. Whitney giggled.

Anna shook her head at them and knew she'd probably be doing it for the rest of the night. It was either she take it one minute at a time, or she burst their bubble by laying out their entire future, or at least the next seven years.

A wave of unease hit her when she felt Brian lean over. His mouth hovered over her

shoulder. She could feel his warm breath against her ear. “I think you look amazing,” he whispered. He’d told her that before, in their future life, but never the way she’d just said it. His sweet words had been said in the low tempo of a lover. She couldn’t believe she was hearing them from Brian. Anna felt her head turn in his direction and immediately regretted it.

She watched as his eyes roamed over her body. She had to tell herself not to shield herself from his gaze. When it landed on the edge of her skirt, which looked even shorter now that she was sitting down, Anna had to fight herself not yank it down. His eyes did a slow travel up until they landed on her face. The look in them was something Anna knew she’d never seen before. Lust. Her lower body tightened. Fear made her want to slide to the other side of the car, but her own lust made her stay. His breath was on her face now, faintly brushing her lips. It wouldn’t take a lot to just lean in and…

“Alright, boys and girls, we’re here.”

Charles’ comment was all Anna needed to break out of the spell. She saw a nerve jump in Brian’s jaw right before she turned and got out the other side of the car. The heat of the weather was a strict contrast to the cool interior of the car. The shock had been just what Anna needed to get her hormones in check. The sun would be set soon.

Walking up with the group up to the third floor of the apartment building felt like old times. Anna remembered everything about this place. When the doors were opened, memories flooded back to her. Board game nights, finals cramming, and just plain old hanging out session had all taken place here. The only time Anna hadn’t come over was during a party. Too many people. Too much that could go wrong. Brian and Charles may had been computer nerds, but they were great looking and knew how to party just like the rest of the world.

The apartment was sweet. It had the latest of everything and smelt new. Dark hardwood floors went throughout the entire two floors. A red bricked accent wall, the hanging spotlight fixtures, and the black leather furniture were like a neon sign that said, ‘Bachelor Pad’. The bedrooms were upstairs. Whitney was climbing the stairs after Charles when she turned to look at Anna. “Are you going to check out Brian’s room?” She purred.

Anna had seen Brian’s room on multiple occasion. Part of her wanted to check it out for sentimental reasons, but after what just happened in the car, or what almost happened… Anna did even look over at Brian as she answered. “I’ll be alright.” She took a seat on the couch.

Whitney sighed, before retreating up the stairs. Brian was behind her. “I’ll be right back,” he called at her.

“I’ll be here.” Anna didn’t know what else to say, but she saw that the words pleased Brian before he disappeared upstairs.

Chapter Five

The sun was gone by the time everyone was dressed. Anna had gone to a bathroom in order to really get a look at herself and was shocked at her make up. It was no longer the soft look from this morning. When Heather had touched it up, she'd changed it to suit the evening. Her eyeshadow was done in dark shades of brown. The black eyeliner was sharp. It added an energy to her pale blue eyes. It made them look more alive. Her cheeks were highlighted and her lips were a deep shade of red. With her wild red crown and black dress, Anna had to admit that she looked kind of fierce. Nothing truly needed to be done, so she just added a little more lip gloss and left. The guys were dressed and ready when Anna came out. Charles wore a red shirt and faded jeans. Brian a black shirt and really dark pair of jeans. And guess what Whitney was wearing when she swayed down the stairs? You guessed it. Jean. They were such a faded color that they were almost white. A matching jean midriff shirt completed the look. Red heels were on her feet.

Part of Anna couldn't help but wonder what happened this night in her original timeline. She knew how Whitney and Charles' night had ended. Sex. But, Brian had never spoken to her about this night. It was almost as if they'd both avoided talking about it. Like the topic had been too taboo for their friendship. Anna remembered what she'd done. She'd gone home with her family and had been surprised with two tickets to France. Anna had taken Whitney who'd been sad about leaving Charles all they up until they'd walked into the first Paris shop. Retail Therapy to the rescue.

Anna looked over at Brian who sat on the couch with her. He was almost sitting on her. He was so close. Their arms brushed. They were slightly slouched, both leaning into the back of the cushion. It was a very relaxed position, but Anna noticed that he watching her rather intensely. She had to crane her neck to meet his eyes. Brian's expression was unreadable. "What?" He was making Anna nervous.

Brian didn't answer, he just kept looking at her. His expression unchanged. He looked as though he wanted to tell her something, but wasn't sure if he should share. He eventually shook his head, deciding that he wouldn't share his thoughts. The move did nothing to help Anna's anxiety. Charles and Whitney heading for the door. Anna got up, pulled down her skirt, and followed. Brian was right behind her.

Chapter Six

The first place they'd ended up at was a red bricked apartment in downtown Boston. It was the house of the parents of one of the school's lacrosse players. Cars already filled the entire street. The quartet had been forced to circle the block in order to find parking. Anna could hear the music before the door opened, but nothing seemed louder to her than the beating of her heart. Brian grabbed her hand. She looked over at him and her nerves calmed. This was her first party. Ever. He knew. She gave a mocking evil eye. "You better not ditch me." Anna was serious.

"Never," Brian told her. That lopsided grin appeared on his face. Anna got the urge to kiss him, but didn't dare. Instead, she took the liberty of grabbing hold of his bicep with her other free one, locking herself around his strong arm.

The door opened that they were greeted by shouting, loud music, and flashing blue lights. Anna could barely see where she was going as they moved through the house, but she kept her hands in Brian's.

The house was packed with bodies and sound. It was hard to avoid hitting anyone, but Anna managed to rub against as few shoulders or arms as possible. The group made their way to the kitchen in the back. A large pool and jacuzzi could be seen through the bank of windows that covered the back wall. People out were in nothing but underwear out there. Did they realize that people could see them? Anna was getting too old for this.

"Do you want a drink?" Brian was shouting over the music.

Anna looked at the variety that had been put on display in two ice filled tin buckets on the kitchen island. A beer keg sat in the middle. Taller liquor bottles flanked the display. It looked like a buffet. "No thanks."

When Brian didn't move, Anna looked up at him. He was smiling at her in a lazy way. She knew what he was thinking. His eyes said, 'Anna, it's a party. Chill'. Anna sighed. Talk about peer pressure. This is why Anna avoided this things. It wasn't so much the alcohol. She'd had it before. It was alcohol in public. Liquor had the ability to make her say all the things she was thinking. If there were ever a worst time to drink, it would be now. There was that whole, time travel topic she wanted to avoid bringing up.

"Brian, Anna."

They both turned to find that Chuck had laid Whitney on the kitchen counter. A lemon wedge was in her mouth. A crowd formed their backdrop. Chuck held a bottle of vodka in one hand. A devious expression was on his face.

Anna groaned. Please don't. Please don't.

But even as she thought it, she could see it written all over Chuck's face. Standing there in

his red shirt, looking like a beefcake, he reminded Anna of the Kool-Aid guy. Oh yeah.

“Body shots!” Chuck yelled right before the group around him ripped into a high and encouraging shout. People quickly lined up with their own partners. Anna avoided looking at Brian. She didn’t even want to go there.

“Hey Brian.”

Anna cringed before she saw her. She then looked over and watched as her worst nightmare slithered over. Tiffany Kent. She was like a man’s wet dream come to life. Leggy, thin, and beautiful. Her dress stopped right before her high rear. And Anna thought her dress risque? Tiffany wrapped her arms around Brian’s shoulders, completely ignoring the fact that Anna was standing right there, his hand in hers. The jealous rage that whipped through Anna shocked her. Brian’s expression went blank. The muted mask in place.

Tiffany threw back her head, her long brunette hair fell over her shoulders, she laughed. She was drunk. “I thought we were going to hang out tonight.”

Red flags went flared in Anna’s head. Did Brian originally have planned to spend his night wrapped in Tiffany’s arms? Anna looked at Brian, but his expression still didn’t say anything. Neither did he seem to bother with unwrapping Tiffany from around him. Anna’s hold on Brian’s hand tightened.

“Change of plans,” Brian finally told Tiffany. His face was still unreadable. Anna couldn’t tell if he was pleased with the change or not.

Tiffany pressed herself closer. Brian leaned his head away from her. Anna thought that was progress. Tiffany didn’t seem to mind. “Well, at least take a shot off me.”

Anna had had enough. “Oh my god, Tiffany. I’m like standing right here!” Anna shouted in the woman’s direction.

Brown almond shaped eyes turned in her direction. Tiffany took one arm off of Brian then. Further progress. Tiffany was smiling. “Oh my god, Anna. I didn’t even see you.” She swayed a little. “You never come to these things.” Even drunk, she was confidence. It was almost enough for Anna to want to take her own sip of liquid courage.

But the anger would fuel Anna for now. “Yeah, well, I’m here now.”

Tiffany’s smile widened even more. “Indeed you are.” There was a look in her eyes. Challenge. Anna recognized it. It’s the look everyone in her field of study always gave her. People always assumed that short meant easily intimidated. Well, it didn’t. Now, Anna did admit that social gathers always made her take a step back, but there was no time for back pedalling. She only had a few more hours to secure Brian’s place in her life and she wasn’t about to let Tiffany to sway her from her mission. She wouldn’t accept defeat.

Funny thing was, Tiffany wasn’t the type to accept it either. “So, I’m guessing you’re going to allow Brian to do a body shot off you, right?” One of her brows went up.

Anna shook her head. It was just like Anna thought. College was just like high school. Bigger playground, same kids. Anna had never played ‘Truth or Dare’, but there was a first time for everything. Double Dare.

Anna didn’t even ask if Brian wanted to do a stupid body shot as she led him over to the counter. The sea of people parted. Anna faintly heard Chuck shout ‘first timer’. There were some oohs. Whitney had a overly pleased smile on her face. Anna could basically hear her thoughts. My little Anna is all grown up. I’m so proud.

Anna began to use a stroll to lift herself up, but felt a large pair of hands take hold of her waist and hoist her. It was Brian. Reality clicked into place. Brian was going to take a shot off her body. His mouth would touch her body in front of everyone. What had she been thinking?

“Hey, Brian!” Anna turned just in time to meet Tiffany’s shrewd look. “Sugar or Salt?” Another combination of laughter and oohs went through the crowd that seemed to be growing by the minute. If Anna survived the night, she’d ruined everyone’s transcripts.

Anna turned to meet Brian’s eyes. He’s strong jaw was locked. This expression didn’t look happy. “You don’t have to do this, Anna.” Anna didn’t know if he was upset with her or Tiffany, but either way, he was giving her an out. It was a waste.

“Sugar or salt?” Anna’s eyes didn’t leave Brian’s. His muted expression didn’t didn’t change, but something flickered behind his eyes. Something dark and hidden deep within his green depths. A chill ran through Anna. To break the connection, gracefully, Anna leaned back and took the breath she hadn’t known she’d been holding.

Chapter Seven

Anna felt Brian place his hands on her waist and slowly slide her shirt up, bunching the material, exposing her middle. His fingers softly brushed over her bare flesh. Anna sighed. He was taking his time, dragging it out. The crowd around them grew quiet. The anticipation was thick in the air. Anna leaned her head up to look at him. Brian's eyes were concentrating on her stomach. This hands swept the flat lines. He was completely fixated on her her body. Anna felt a heat begin to build between her legs. If he didn't hurry, she was sure she'd catch fire. She opened her mouth to hurry him along, but was stopped when Tiffany popped a lime into her mouth.

The look she gave Tiffany was one of anger, but it didn't cause Tiffany to flinch. Instead, she gave me a look that said, 'you can still back out'. Yeah right.

The feel of something wet splashing on her stomach almost made Anna jump. Brian was pouring liquor up and down her abdomen. It made Anna wonder if he planned on licking it all up. At the moment, Brian turned to meet her eyes and those green depths opened for her. The answer was 'yes'.

The first flick of his heavy tongue was almost enough to cause Anna to moan out loud. Brain's eyes stayed with hers as his tongue ran down the planes of her belly. His strokes were long and Anna knew her panties would be soaked by the end of this. Their eyes stay locked. The room around them faded. Everything cease to exist, except for the way Brian was lapping at her body right then and there.

As he moved higher up, his tongue picked up the sprinkle of crystals that laid there. Anna didn't know if he'd chosen salt or sugar. All Anna knew was that she wanted that tongue in other places. Right now.

Finished with his sweet torture, Brian leaned over her face and plucked the lme from her mouth without so much as touching his lips with hers. He didn't move back far once the fruit was in his mouth. Brian just stayed hovering over Anna face. That time, Anna did moan, but not at the pleasure of the experience, but at the lost. Only Brian was close enough to hear it. He smiled around the lime that was still planted in his mouth.

There was so much Anna wanted to say to him. Beg him for. A strong need for Brian coursed through her. She knew he could see it in her eyes. She was never good to lying to him. With him, Anna was completely readable. Unlike Brian, who'd smile had slowly began to slide away. They were both very still for a moment. Brian took the lime out of his mouth. "You should stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

Anna felt herself being elevated off the table. On instinct, she wrapped her arms around Brian's neck. The crowd broke away as Brian carried Anna away from the kitchen. They were cheering them on, assuming that Brian and she were about to have sex. So

supportive.

Brian didn't put her down until they were back outside the front door. Anna fixed her skirt once she was on her own feet and prayed she hadn't flashed anyone while Brian had been carrying her. Anna began to fuss with the back of her hair when she realized what she was doing. She was avoiding to look at Brian.

"What do you want to do?"

Anna looked over at him. The faint light coming from the doorstep was all they had. Brian's back was to it. He looked like a large shadow glooming in the light. She couldn't see his face, but didn't believe that would help her any. She never would guess his mood unless he wanted her to know. Seeing his face would please her, but never help. "We don't have to leave because of me."

Brian shook his head. He moved away from the light, coming closer to her. Anna's eyes slowly adjusted to the dark. She could see his face now. His expression looked annoyed. He grabbed her hand and began to walk with her down the street. It was a rather quiet neighborhood once you got away from the party's door. "No, I was over it the minute we walked in."

Anna stopped walking and crossed her arms. "I don't know. You seemed pretty at home to me."

Brain stopped as well. "What do you mean?"

Anna told herself not to say it, but… "The way Tiffany was all over you". Anna turned away from his gaze. She didn't want him to see how she felt. "Did you two have plans before you roped me into hang out with you tonight?"

His hands touched her arms, but he didn't say anything. Brian waited until Anna looked up at him. His eyes were gentle. "No, I made plans with Tiffany after I asked you, but once you changed your mind, I cancelled the plan with her."

The news didn't make Anna feel any better. It should have, but it didn't. Was Anna so easily replaceable? Not even thirty minutes had past before Brian had made plans with someone else. She stepped out of his hold. A feeling of unease was starting to settle back in.

Anna was starting to realize that she knew nothing about Brian's dating life. Sure, they were friends, but Brian never talked to her about the girls he went out with. It had been mainly her fault. Whenever he'd bring it up, she'd shy away from the topic. Anna didn't want to know what went on in Brian's bed. Her imagination was too good for such knowledge. "You didn't ask me out." She wouldn't look at him.

There was confusion in Brian's voice. "What?"

"You said you asked Tiffany out after you asked me out, but you never asked me out, you just assumed I'd go along you guys."

Brian's hand reached out and lifted Anna's chin, forcing her pale blue eyes to look at him. His words were soft. "You're the only one I want to be with tonight." His eyes looked

sincere.

Anna didn’t believe him. Her eyes narrowed. “Then why did you ask Tiffany out?”

Brian dropped her chin and shrugged. He took a step back. “I don’t know.”

Anna invaded his space. “Yes, you do.” She was growing angry. She’d used the last twelve hours of her time travel allowance to come back and get this man, but now Anna wasn’t too sure if Brian was worth it. Yes, Anna loved him, but she wouldn’t play second best for anyone. Not now, not ever. She had more pride than that. She’d rather live her life alone than allow a man to trample over her heart.

Anna placed a finger on his chest. “Tell me,” she demanded.

Brian ran both of his hands through his short brown hair. “Anna, I don’t know.” His face revealed a sense of panic right before the muscles slipped back into a blank canvas. “I don’t know.” He was calm now.

Anna took a step back. She was wasting her time. “Fine.” She shrugged. “Have a good night.” Anna turned to leave.

Chapter Eight

A strong pair of arms grabbed Anna. She felt herself beginning pulled into Brian's chest. She didn't fight him, but when she tried to turn back around in his arms, he wouldn't let her. He just held her to himself. They both faced the empty street.

Anna was still angry, but felt it begin to slip away when when Brian freed one of his hands, pushed her curly hair to one side, settled his face next to hers. His arm went back around her, holding her. They both sighed.

No one said anything.

One of them started a steady sideways rock.

Anna freed her hands and wrapped them around the arms that held her. She closed her eyes and settled into Brian. She loved him so much that at times, it was painful. She sighed again, letting out the last of her anger. Only pain remained. Even if she didn't end up securing Brian tonight, this night would change their future, but Anna had no clue as to how.

Brian released a major sighed and then brought his mouth to her ear. Even this close, Anna had to concentrate in order to hear him. "I didn't want to be alone."

Anna tried to turn around, but Brian stopped her, holding her immobile against his hard body. He didn't want her to see him. Why? Instead of trying to move again, Anna's hands simply tightened around his arms. She replayed his words in her head. Had there been some sadness in his words? Anna had never heard Brian like this before. She desperately wanted to see his face, but he wouldn't let her. "Why would you have been alone?"

There was another lapse of silence. Anna thought he wouldn't answer, but had decided she wouldn't push. She was enjoying the feel of him. His body was so much bigger than hers that it would have been too easy to just curl up against him. Unconsciously, Anna lifted a hand and began to stroke his face. It was so smooth.

"No one came."

Anna stopped her hand. "What?"

"No came to see me graduate."

Anna tried to turn around again, but Brian's hold was so tight. Sadness rested on her heart. How could she forget? Brian didn't have a family, not one like hers. His mother had died when he was young and Anna had never met Brian's father. There were no brothers or sisters. Just Brian and his dad.

Brian's father had never showed up during Brian's four years of college. Actually, in the last seven years since they graduated, Anna could only remember seeing Brian's father once, but he'd been driving away when she saw him. She hadn't even truly seen his face. She'd asked Brian who the guy was that had pulled out of his driveway and Brian had

simply said, ‘my dad’. He hadn’t said more after that.

Brian’s father was still a mystery to her, but Anna had assumed the man had come to his only son’s graduation. Was that too big of an assumption? Anna had the perfect family and at times, it was so easy for Anna to forget that some people had no family at all. “Let me turn around, Brian.”

He didn’t say anything. He simply shook his head against hers.

Anna tapped his arms. “Let me go, Brian.”

He sighed and released her.

Anna turned around and the look in his eyes was almost enough to break her heart. His green eyes reflected his opened wounds. His jaw was locked tightly. Anna grabbed it in both of her hands. In these last few minutes, Anna had seen more of Brian then she could remember ever seeing in the last eleven years of knowing him, and what she saw was deep trust issues. That’s why she wore the mask. He was keeping people out, making sure that no one would be able to see what he was truly feeling. But tonight, Brian was letting Anna in, and a part of her knew just how much it had cost him.

Anna didn’t know what to say. ‘I’m sorry’ didn’t seem like enough and ‘thank you’ was sure to make the moment more awkward for him. So, Anna decided to not say anything. Instead, she brought Brian’s head down towards hers, stood tipped toes, and rained a series of tiny kisses on his strong face. His eyes, his cheeks, his nose. She felt Brian sigh right before her lips touched his.

Chapter Nine

The kiss started out gentle, but didn't stay that way for long. Brian's hands went to Anna's back and pulled her closer. Anna hands went around his neck, playing with the soft ends of his soft short hair.

Brian's lips felt firm against her mouth. He moved them expertly. His tongue touched her lips. Anna's mouth parted under his as she was quickly reminded of what he'd done to her with that tongue just over an hour ago.

Once her lips were parted, Brian went in. His mouth prowled over hers, seeming to search for something. His tongue touched hers. Anna's knees went weak. If Brian's hands hadn't been holding her to him, she might have fallen.

The warmth from his mouth began to spread down her body, pulse through her veins. Anna's senses seemed to heightened. The feel of his hands as they slid under her shirt, touching her bare flesh. The smell of his aftershave mixed with something that was all him. The taste of his mouth.

The alarm of the black car next to them went off. They both jumped and looked around. They must have been putting on a show for someone.

Brian smiled. He took Anna's hand and began to walk her further down the block, he was pulling her towards the city lights. "What do you want to do?" It was the same question as before. Brian seemed to be in a better mood.

"I don't care." Anna was too.

She looked down at her watch. It was eleven. She had four hours left. She hurried up and came to walk beside him. Her arm went around his waist. His arm held her by his shoulders. They seemed like a normal couple going for a midnight stroll. This was what Anna wanted. Being held at Brian's side, she felt like he belonged to her, and perhaps, he felt the same way about her. They walked silently until the reached the edge of Boylston Street. They were now minutes away from a variety of clubs, bars, and theaters.

The night was a buzz with activity. Natives and tourist had been drawn to the lights like flies. Anna recognized a few people from her class. They waved, not truly recognizing her until they saw Brian. Anna waved back anyway. Yes, she was that Anna. Brian's friend, Anna. Story of her four years in college.

"Are you hungry?" Brian leaned over and placed a kiss in her hair.

Anna held him tighter. She didn't want this night to end. "I could eat."

Brian started to walk again, taking her further into the sounds and sights of Boston nightlife. They ended up at a bar was known for their burgers. Anna loved a good burger. The establishment was old irish, had the Boston traditional brick exterior, and an dark green awnings over the glass windows that wrapped around the exposed sides of the

building.

They had outdoor seating, but in this nice weather, it would be hard to find any open. Brian and Anna decided to go inside, though the place looked to be just as packed inside. The lights inside were dim. Rock music played at an entertaining level. Not too loud, but not very quiet either. They were only at the hostess desk for a second before being ushered to a booth in the back. All the tables were made from a wood of a rich oak. The seats were a dark green with a red stripe going down the middle. The back of the booths were tall enough to give each table a sense of privacy even though they were in a crowded place.

Brian sat across from Anna and Anna tried to hide the disappointment from her face. She failed. He smiled, got up, and came to sit next to her. They huddled together over the menu and ordered drinks quickly.

Anna looked over at him and couldn't help the happiness from shining on her face. Brian took his eyes off the menu and looked at her. He was smiling as well. It was one of his crooked ones. It had that pull to the left side of his face that made him equally adorable and sexy at that same time. He didn't have to ask why she was smiling. He already knew. Whatever was happening between them was something they've both wanted for some time. Anna was curious though. Just how long had Brian been waiting for this?

She narrowed her eyes at him. "When did you decide you wanted to ask me out?"

Brian looked away momentarily. Anna was nervous that he'd pull down his mask again, but when his eyes returned, they were still honest, open. "Since that day I asked you for help with my part of our project and you refused."

Anna narrowed her moon colored eyes. "You didn't ask me for help. You asked me to do it for you and I said no." It had been sophmore year. They were in a software construction class. For Anna, it seemed so far way. Nine years ago. He'd liked her almost as long as she'd liked him? "It was ridiculous of you think that I would do your portion of the work.."

Brian smile slipped a little. He was staring at her mouth. "You'd be surprised what a woman who likes me would be willing to do."

Anna's smile left. "No, I wouldn't." A warmth that had nothing to do with their attraction forced it way into her. Anger. And Anna wasn't angry that Brian had used his good looks to get people to do his bidding. She was upset because he'd tried to use her feeling against her. Brain had just confessed that he'd known how she felt when they'd been sophomores. All these years and he'd said nothing.

Brian's eyes lifted towards hers. His face was so close to hers. "You turning me down was the best thing anyone had ever done for me."

Anna narrowed her eyes further. "I don't understand."

His hands touched her face. "You're so real, Anna. You're so honest to yourself and to me. You don't let me run all over you. You tell me the truth. I love that about you." Brian's hands slipped into her hair. "I love everything about you."

Anna didn’t know what to say. She didn’t feel like she’d been honest to herself. Well, maybe honest wasn’t the right word. What Anna felt was that she’d let herself down. She should have said something about her feeling. She knew it was futile to worry about it now, especially with the second chance she’d been given, but a part of her still wanted to cry. Anna placed her hands on the ones that cradled her face. “If you knew I liked you and you like me, why didn’t you say anything?”

Brian brought her head to his. Their foreheads rested together. He closed his eyes. “You were so different than other girls. You wouldn’t let me just win at any games. You kicked my butt in the classroom. You made me earn everything. You challenged me. I didn’t want to ruin you.”

Anna pulled back. She tried to not laugh. “Brian, you wouldn’t have ruined me. This is who I am. I don’t change. I wouldn’t change. Not even for you.”

Brian smiled. “Yeah, but I’ve changed because of you. You make me better, Anna.”

Anna brought her forehead back to his. The anger was gone. Oh, how she loved this man. “I still wished you’d said something.”

Brian dropped his hands and pulled a little away from her then. He was smiling as he turned away from her. He leaned his head back against the back of the booth. The dim light overhead highlighted his dark hair and high cheek muscles. He was so handsome. “You’re kind of intimidating, Anna.”

Anna’s head reeled back. That was the last thing she ever thought she’d hear from him. “You’re intimidated by me?”

Brian’s head turned sideway just so he could look over at her, but he kept his head rested on the the wooden wall behind him. He sighed. “I knew you were attracted to me, but I didn’t know how much you really like me. Not until Whitney told me.”

Anna’s face fell. She was going to hurt that girl. Not in this time, but when Anna got back to the present. Brian must have seen the plans being made on her face. A finger came up and swiped the top of her nose. “Don’t be mad at Whitney. She just told me this morning.”

That shocked Anna further. “I don’t understand.”

Brian turned his head forward then, staring at nothing in particular. “I got a job offer in Japan this morning.”

The room swayed. Anna wasn’t sure if she could manage to anymore shocking revelations. Japan? “You never told me about Japan.” Anna shut her mouth quickly. She’d almost revealed that she’d known Brian for eleven years. That would have made things awkward. Either she’d had then tried to explain the time travelling or she’d come off sounding like some type of stalker that had been watching him from a distance since he was a kid. Neither one of those options sounded good.

“I just got the call today. The company was congratulating me on graduating and asked if they could send me an offer letter.”

Anna grew nervous. She hoped she hadn’t changed the future for the worst. “What did you

tell them?”

“I told them that I’d call them back.” Brian looked at her again. “Once I hung up, I ran into Chuck’s room and just started to talk. He thought I should take it, but then I brought you up. I didn’t realize anyone else was in the room until I saw Whitney come out of Chuck’s bathroom. That’s when she told me.”

Anna shook her head. Whitney had told Brian about her feelings in an effort to stop Brian from leaving the country. If the roles had been reversed, Anna would have done the same thing for her. Whitney was such a good friend. Anna loved that girl. She’d buy her gift when she got back to the present.

But it still didn’t make any sense that this was Anna’s first time hearing about Japan. If anyone had asked her ten hours ago if she and Brian were friends, she would have told them that they were best friends. Anna had thought them pretty close, but so many secrets were being uncovered. She wanted to talk about Japan, but didn’t know how. How could she say, ‘Even though we never dated, you never took the job in Japan. Why?’, without actually saying that. “Are you going to take the job?” It was the best question she had.

Brian shook his head. “No. I’d only applied, because I thought I wanted to get away from my dad, but moving to the other side of the world isn’t worth it anymore.”

“Because we kissed?” Anna had to know.

Brian shook his head again. “I’d like to say that was the reason, but it’s not. Even if you’d turned me down tonight, I couldn’t have left.”

“Why?”

He held her eyes. “Because I rather have you in my life as a friend than to not have you in it at all.”

And at the moment, Anna knew that she would never love anyone more than she loved Brian. Her heart beat solely for him. That once confession was worth the entire trip. She’d wanted to say, ‘Ditto’, but it didn’t seem to fit the mood. Words, at times, failed her. It was why she always elected to stay in the shadows of social events.

But right now, Anna didn’t need words. She simply needed to be with Brian.

Their food came.

Neither of them touched it. They were no longer hungry.

“Can we get these to go?” Brian asked the server.

Three minutes later, hand in hand, they were out the door.

Chapter Ten

It was raining hard by the time they made it into the hotel. They were soaked, but they didn't care. During their journey, they'd ducked under almost every shelter, awning, or canopy. And while there, they'd taken full advantage of one another's bodies. They'd kissed, rubbed, and licked one another. Anna's hands had roamed over the plane of Brian's abs. Brian's hand had travelled up her skirt. She was wet. They were drenched by the rain, but Anna was moist for other reasons. She had become so consumed by her need to have Brian inside of her. She had been so worked up that she'd almost been ready to throw caution to the wind and beg Brian just take her in a back alley somewhere. But they'd made it.

The grand lobby was basically empty. Only a lone desk clerk waited in the quiet. Holding hands, Brian and Anna ran up to the desk, leaving a trail of water behind them. The clerk didn't look to happy about that.

"I want your best room," Brian said.

That got the clerk's attention. A smile appeared out of thin air.

Once in the elevator, the touching recommenced. Their food was in a bag. It's ends were looped around Brian's wrist, leaving his hands free. He pushed the button and then walked Anna back into the far wall. He placed his hands underneath her butt and picked her up. Anna wrapped her legs around him. At this angle, she could feel his hard member pressed against her panty covered opening.

His lips began to move down her neck, over her collarbone. Anna leaned her head back, giving him full access. Her hands inched under the wet fabric of his sleeves. Her fingers roamed over his strong shoulders and arms. He was so well build.

"I've wanted you for so long," his warm breath was at her chest.

Anna sighed. "You have no idea."

He laughed.

The elevator rang right before the door opened.

Brian didn't put her down. He carried her. There was only one door on their floor. They had the penthouse. He pulled out the key card and inserted it into the door. The green light flashed. He turned the knob and pushed them in.

Anna didn't get a chance to look at the room. His face blocked her view as his mouth found hers. Once his tongue was in her mouth, she was all but lost to everything but him. A moan came from her mouth.

She felt him place their food on a table. The key card as well. He kicked off his shoes and began a quick jog towards another door. Anna kicked her shoes off as well. It was dark. Their only light came from the city below them outside the window. They stumbled through the door and found the bedroom on the first try. Anna was glad.

Once they were by the bed, Anna felt him put her down on her feet. Her hands went to his shirt. She wanted to feel his skin. His hands covered hers, stopping her.

She looked up in confusion.

His face was serious. “Have you done this before?”

Anna was ready to say, ‘duh’, but stopped. She hadn’t. Not with this body. Anna wouldn’t lose her virginity until she was in her Master’s study. It was also around the time Anna would cut and permed her hair. For a moment, she wondered if the two had anything to do with one another. Either way, Anna didn’t know how to respond.

Brian placed his hands on her face and brought her eyes to meet his. He seemed to think he knew the answer. “We’ll go slow.”

No. Anna didn’t want it slow. She wanted it hard. She wanted Brian to work her body until she saw stars. But Anna didn’t say any of that. He didn’t give her the chance. He simply began to kiss her again, but the urgency was gone. It was gentle now. So sweet. So loving. Anna moaned again.

His hands went back to hers and helped her remove his shirt. Anna had seen his chest before, but this was different. There was no pool around. There was no skins vs. shirts basketball game happening. It was just them two. Alone. In one of the nicest hotel rooms Anna had ever been in.

Anna leaned forward and place a kiss close to the middle of his heart, where she believed his heart lay. It wasn’t not so much as a sexual gesture as much as it was a loving one. His hands still held her head. He lifted her tolds him and kissed her again. Her hands caressed the muscles in his back.

Brain’s hands went to the back of her neck, found the zipper, and began the slow trip down her back. When he reached the end, his fingers found the zipper that held the skirt. He unzipped the skirt just as he’d done the top.

He stepped back and Anna let the top fall and stepped out of the skirt. Once she was done, she crossed her arms around herself. She stood in nothing by a white bra and panty. She tried to move back into his arms. Brian took a step back. His eyes roamed over her. Anna never felt so naked in her life. It wasn’t just her body. It was everything that had led up to this moment. The emotions. The exposed feelings. Everything seemed to be building up to this one conclusion.

Brian sighed. “You’re so beautiful.”

With her wet red hair still plastered to her face and body, Anna doubted it. She was sure she looked like a drowned puppy. She turned away. “I bet you say that to all the girls.”

Brian didn’t comment. They both knew that he did.

He walked up to her and tilt her face up to meet his. Anna hadn't realized she'd been looking away until she met his eyes. Their eyes held. He placed a simple kiss to her lips. Her chin locked in his fingers. His voice was soft. "No one means more to me than you do."

Anna didn't want to believe him. She didn't want to be just another girl in the Brian Walker Fan Club. Yeah, she'd probably build and maintain the website, but she'd rather stay anonymous. "Prove it."

Brian's eyes searched hers. "What do you want?"

Anna placed her hands back on his warm chest. Did she dare ask him for something he wouldn't give? "What if I want everything? What if I want all of you?"

They seemed to have entered into a staring contest. "I'm already yours."

"For how long?"

"How long do you want me?"

Forever. Anna didn't say that. She didn't dare. She loved him, but she didn't dare, but Brain's eyes narrowed. He could see her mind working. "What do you want, Anna?"

"Make love to me."

"Okay."

Chapter Eleven

They were kissing again. Anna found the buckle to his jeans and peeling the wet fabric off of his muscular thighs. She only got a faintest glimpse of his manhood pressing against his boxers before he was touching her again. His hands came back around to her butt and lifted her off the ground. He cradled her to him and placed her down on the bed. Their lips never broke as Anna's body hit the soft and cool sheets. Her feet were planted on the bed.

Brian's mouth moved down her neck. His hands took the edges of her panties and began to pull them off her. Once they were discarded, his hands went for her bra. His massaged her breast through the fabric. Anna arched into his hands. Her fingers dug into his shoulders. She sighed. She then felt one of his hands reveal one of her nipples and get replaced by his warm mouth. Anna soared.

She was so lost in his mouth that she jumped when she felt something hard at her lower entrance. Anna's eyes flew open. She leaned up to get a look, but was blocked by Brian. He kissed her mouth and began to lean her back down on the bed. The head of his warm member rubbed against her folds until he was slick enough to push forward.

Anna hadn't gotten a chance to see it, but knew it was big. Brian began to stretch her open. He was doing a gentle in and out motion with just his head. Anna felt herself tighten around him as she tried to inched down the bed, drawing more of him into her. She wanted him so bad.

Brian placed a hand on her hip, holding her in place. "Anna, please stop," his voice sounded strained. Anna stopped moving altogether. She quickly popped her head up, looked, and then lowered her head back down. Brian was huge! Anna started to panic. She'd just opened her mouth to say something when Brian started rocking again, this time, the pace was a little faster, he was moving deeper. It felt good. It felt so good. Her skin felt like it were trying to shout from the pleasure. Anna shuddered as a rush of hot need flooded her.

Brian's pace kicked up as Anna grew more wet. He body slid further into hers until it pressed into a wall. Anna's eyes flew open again. It hurt. She was a virgin. She hadn't remember that it would be a big deal until this moment. Her hands went up Brian's chest to stop him just as Brian pushed past the barrier.

Anna's mouth flew open as a loud cry ripped out of her. It was all pain. No pleasure. Brian stopped moving. Anna buried her face in his arm. His hand began to gently run through her hair, comforting her. She didn't say anything as her sobs subsided. Brian began to move again, inching himself out of her just before sliding back in. Over and over again, he did this while continuing to rub his hands through the back of Anna's hair, cradling her to him.

Anna closed her eyes as the pain was subdued. Soon, his rhythm began to reawaken her pleasure. The friction of his long shift refueled Anna's hunger for him. She laid back. Her eyes met Brian's. She saw concern in his brows. "How does it feel?"

Anna leaned up and kisses him hard on his mouth. She tightened her lower muscles. She felt him shudder. He cursed in her mouth. Brian kept the same pace, inching deeper into her still, opening her up to him. Anna began to slid her body further down him, taking more of his swollen shift. She rode him as he began to thrust into her, slamming into her, feeding her body all of him, driving her over the edge.

Anna felt her body begin to shake. She grabbed her hands full of the bedspread as she felt flames light her entire body. Anna exploded around him. Brian picked up the pace, which only caused the wave of ecstasy to crash over her again. Anna cried as she came a second, third time. A hoarse cry broke from Brian's throat. He buried his face in Anna's shoulder as he came. He held her close to him, tightly, as the waves calmed. When his heartbeat slowed, he rolled over onto the bed, taking Anna with him. "How do you feel?"

Anna snuggled into his chest. She wrapped an arm around his middle. "Amazing," she told him. His ran his hand through her hair. Anna closed her eyes and sighed. She'd never felt so perfect before. "I love you." Anna's eyes flew opened at her words. Her body went very still as she hoped Brian hadn't heard her. But his hand had stopped moving. He'd heard.

Anna started to pull herself up, but Brian's arms stop her. He was so strong. He brought her up over his body, forcing her face to hover over his. Anna turned her head away. Her hair became a wild veil around their faces. She didn't want to meet his eyes. Anna felt so stupid. This was why she'd tried to maintain distance from Brian all these years. He saw too much, forced her to reveal too much of herself.

"Look at me, Anna."

She couldn't. Instead, she buried her face in his neck, wishing the words back. She held her eyes shut tightly, praying over and over again that the words would be retracted from history. If only I could go back. Just two minutes? Hey, it had worked before.

"Will you marry me?"

Anna brought her head up to look into Brian's face. His face was closed to her. He was wearing his emotionless mask again. His hold on her was loose. Anna leaned all the way up onto her knees. Brain sat up as well, his eyes locked with hers.

Anna was shocked. She didn't know what to say. She would have said 'yes', but Brian didn't look happy. "You want to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Brian didn't move. Only his blinking let Anna know he was still alive. "Because I love you too."

Anna's eyes narrowed. "You saw it so matter-of-factly."

Brian shrugged. "It is a fact."

Anna touched his face. "Then why don't you look happy about it?"

Brian sighed. His face softened. His hands brushed the hair from her shoulders. They travelled down until they touched her taut nipples. Anna closed her eyes and leaned her chest into his hands.

“If you were any other woman, I’d know what you’ll say. I’d know you’d say ‘yes’.” Anna opened her eyes and looked at him. He had a gentle smile on his hard face. “But you’re not any other woman, Anna. You’ll do what it is that you want to do, and that scares me.”

Anna smiled. Maybe she wasn’t as predictable as she assumed. She leaned forwards and placed a kiss on his lips. Her hand wrapped around his already hardening member. Brian drug in a shaky breath against her mouth. Anna pulled back. “Ask me again.”

His green eyes stared into hers. He was smiling softly at her. “Will you marry me?”

A flash of light caught Anna’s eye.

The clock on the the nightstand read two fifty-nine.

Anna panicked. The time changed. Three.

The world around Anna began to fade away. She became surrounded by a cloud. She was returning to her time. “No! I mean, yes! Yes! I’ll marry you!” But it was too late. She knew it was too late. He hadn’t heard her answer and she didn’t know which answer she’d given him. She was traveling forward in time, travelling back to the point in time that she’d left behind twelve hours ago.

Her body felt light. She was falling again. She tried to cry, but found great difficulty in it. The air was tight. She didn’t know what happened and a felt dread overtake her. Please have said yes. Please have said yes. Please.

And then there was black.

Chapter Twelve

Anna opened her eyes just as she felt something crash into her legs. She looked down and all she could see was a ball of long and shaggy red hair. The head lift and a pair of the most intense green eyes looked up at her. A little girl had her arms wrapped around Anna's legs.

Her face was so innocent. "Mommy, what are you doing?"

Anna heart began to beat rapidly. She looked around and found herself standing in an elegant all white kitchen. She was in a home. She looked at clothes. She was wearing a hot pink business dress. It hit her small curses perfectly. When had she brought this? As she leaned down, her own long hair caught her eyes. It was straightened, but not permed. She hadn't cut it.

Shouting came from the hall around the corner. Brian came into view with two more little girls hanging from his limbs. One on his arm one riding his leg. Their faces completely identical to the one that still had her arms wrapped around Anna's legs. Triplets?

Brain looked at her. He looked amazing in his gray suit. His expression looked confused tough and he did looked kind of silly with two girls crawling all over him like monkeys. He didn't seem to mind. "What are you doing?"

Anna didn't know.

Brian walked over to her and placed a hand on her forehead. "Are you feeling alright?"

Anna narrowed her eyes in confusion, but didn't answer.

Brian looked worried. His hand rested on her stomach. "Is it the baby?"

Anna's eyes flew open. "I'm pregnant again."

He grinned. His eyes flew wide as well. "I know, right?"

The little girls around them began to dance around in circles, their fire engine red hair and white dresses flowing around them. They were singing some song Anna didn't know.

Anna's eyes went back to Brian. Her hands grabs his shoulders. Her eyes spotted her ring. Nice. "It's just one, right? Tell me it's a boy."

His hands cupped her hips. "We can only hope." His kissed her cheek.

Anna's heart flipped. Brian was hers. They were together. They had triplets. She was having another baby. Tears sprang to her eyes. She started to cry.

The girls stopped dancing and came over to hug her. They were all saying different things, but Anna couldn't really hear them over her crying. And it struck her that she didn't know their names. She'd given life to three little girls and she knew nothing about them.

But then Anna remembered a wedding. Hers. She remembered going out on dates with Brian. Moments that Brian pissed her off. The times when they made up. She remembered being pregnant. She remembered giving birth. Their names. She not only knew their

names, but she could tell them apart. She remembered everything and as the memorize came back, the olds ones began to disappear. There were barely any memories that didn’t include Brian at her side now. There was no Vivian. No secret lonely nights. And lastly, Anna couldn’t remember the homeless man whose eyes glittered with moons and stars in their black depths. This was Anna’s world. This was her reality and she wouldn’t change a thing.

The Mind Reader

By

Heather Royer

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Chapter 1

She looked into his blue eyes and recognized the depths of his love. Chara felt an unspoken bond with Jake. Without a doubt, it was a love she had thought was impossible to find.

Jake looked back at her and stroked her hair. Then he reached for her breast and slowly massaged it – again. That's how their first session of lovemaking started that night and ended with a climatic orgasm. Every muscle in her body tightened at the anticipation of another round of sexual delight.

It had been a difficult day at work. Chara Ferguson worked as a registered nurse and seldom felt she was in control of her day. Her patients always needed something. If it wasn't time to dispense medications, change the intravenous bags, or take vital signs, Chara felt compelled to visit individually with the patients just so they could talk.

Chara tried to be a good nurse and felt for the most part she was. But in return it felt incredibly remarkable to have someone pamper and love her the way Jake did.

He continued to massage her breast as she tenderly fondled his chest hairs. She caressed his chest then moved her hands toward his penis until she had a firm grasp of it and lovingly guided her hand up and down the shaft.

His slight movement and low moan told her that she had found the spot to provide him with exactly what he needed. But, of course, she knew that. "Oh, Chara, it's like you can sense my needs without me even speaking them," Jake said to her. *If you only knew the half of my talents.*

"It's just my woman's intuition," she said modestly. "We women are usually born with this sense."

"No, no. You've got this down to a science," he said lovingly. "It's like you're a wizard in the bedroom."

As if that were her cue, she maneuvered her body lower and gently nibbled at his penis with her lips. She glided her mouth up and down his organ, gently at first, then as she felt it grow, she moved faster and faster. The organ hardened quickly. His moaning increased in tandem with the speed of her strokes.

In turn, Jake slapped her butt, took his index finger and rubbed her clitoris. Chara immediately noticed and appreciated his skill at finding her sweet spot in a matter of moments. They shared a single rhythmic movement, as if their separate hearts and had melded and their separate bodies were now one.

Chara cherished moments like this, when she forget about the activity of the day and lost herself in her own thoughts. She didn't need to worry what others were thinking. In rare moments like these she placed a priority on the needs and desires of Jake and indulged herself in the utter heavenly feeling of being totally at peace.

Finally, the pair found that moment together when they both claimed a climax that was indescribable. Jake held Chara tightly and together they fell backwards onto the bed, totally spent.

It was only now that Chara relaxed. She opened herself and her mind to her surroundings. Cuddling closer to Jake, she listened intently for the sound of his heart beating and once again tried to control her breath so their hearts would be as closely in rhythm as possible. Could life get any better, she wondered.

She was grateful for this time, even if they only lasted a few moments in a day, when she could use the gift she was born with to not only please another, but help her find pleasure as well. If she were honest with herself, she never regretted having the gift. It certainly became a blessing to many around her, especially her patients at the hospital.

Her gift allowed her to interpret to the doctors what many of them were thinking, but couldn't find the words to articulate them. She could specify using terms the doctors could understand for feelings the patients were fully incapable of describing.

What was this present from nature? Chara could read minds. She had inherited this rare trait from her grandmother, who had inherited it from her mother.

While her grandmother always emphasized she had a responsibility to use this power to help others, it was gratifying to use it now and again in a way that she, too, could gain some satisfaction.

Jake laid back on the bed, his eyes closed. Chara took this time to stare at him lovingly without him making fun of her. She heard his thoughts, "It's time for that omelet I've been craving from Ryan's Diner."

Food! Only now did she remember she had skipped lunch and in fact, couldn't even remember if she had eaten anything for breakfast. She jumped at the chance to go and eat at Ryan's.

"Ryan's sounds great, Jake," she said, out loud, "they make the best omelets in town. Let's go."

This spark of conversation apparently was not the turn Jake had intended. In fact, he apparently hadn't envisioned any type of conversation – at least now with Chara. In a panic, he thought, 'This isn't quite what I had imagined. I'm meeting Denise there in a few hours."

Upon hearing his thoughts, Chara felt heartbroken. She never would have "answered" his unspoken thoughts had he mentioned Denise at the beginning. She stopped and listened again to his thinking. Apparently, this Denise character was someone he had been seeing for a while. How did manage to hide that from her for so long?

Determined to keep a shred of dignity, she bolted out of bed, began dressing and spurted her apologies in a flurry of words. "Oh, no Jake, I'm so sorry. I can't go to Ryan's. I promised my mother I would stop by tonight. She needed some help around the house. I'm already running late."

She finished pulling on her scrubs, kissed him on the forehead and ran out of the bedroom, and bolted out of his apartment. She didn't stop running until she got to her car. Unlocking the door, she dropped herself in the driver's seat, laid her head on the steering wheel and cried.

Once the majority of tears were spent and she felt she could see well enough to drive, she headed over to her mom's house. Her mom was sympathetic, but could offer little in the way of practical advice.

Her mother wasn't endowed with the gift the way Chara and her grandmother were. Her mother couldn't advise her on the details of the gift, but she proved invaluable in helping her to pick up the pieces of her life in moments like these. A mom's love was priceless.

Chara knew two things growing up. First, that her grandmother was able to read thoughts of others and was diligent in guiding Chara in using it properly. The other thing that was evident to her as grew up was that her mother never had the gift and didn't understand either generation she was sandwiched between.

Despite that, though, her mother did everything within her power to encourage Chara in perfecting it and encouraged the relationship she had with her grandmother. Chara admired her mother immensely for that.

She had read that in some families the gift became a bone of contention when it skipped generations. Some parents who didn't have it were at a total loss of how to treat their children who did. Worse yet, many of those parents feared the gift and tried everything in their power to prevent their children from using it. Others were convinced it was a demon-driven power.

"I'm never going to see that jerk again," Chara said, tears unexpectedly burst forth again. The mother and daughter had been sitting on the living room couch. Her mother cradled her like a little baby.

Chapter 2

Every day Chara tried to live up to her grandmother's last words. "You have a beautiful God-given gift. Use it to the best of your ability to help others."

Even in her dying moments, Chara's grandmother thought of the one grandchild she treated more like her own daughter than a grandchild.

It wasn't even seven in the morning and she was looking over her list of patients she had for the day. Most of them were there on her last day of work, two days prior.

Those patients admitted on her days off were Anita Kendricks, Anthony L. Petruzzi and Ted Langley.

"Ted Langley," she uttered to herself. A nurse, just passing from behind the nurse's station into the corridor answered her unasked question, "Yes, that's THE Ted Langley, multi-millionaire who's been all over the news lately. Messy divorce. Bankruptcy."

"It says here he's being observed for a possible heart condition," Chara said.

"Is it any wonder?" the other nurse asked. Chara would have answered but she was quickly out of earshot.

Taking a deep breath and silently reciting a positive affirmation to get her through her shift, she strode off to make her rounds. She chose to see her new patients first.

"Good morning, Mrs. Kendricks," she said as she entered the first room.

"Yes dear?" The patient's said, her voice barely audible. Clearly, she was in pain.

"Your chart says you're here for unexplained stomach pains."

"That's right, my dear."

After that, she could hear Mrs. Kendricks think, "I keep asking the doctors whether I could be sensitive to gluten, but they do nothing but scoff at me."

Mrs. Kendricks slight moan woke Chara from her pensive reverie. "I see here," she said to her patient, "they've run nearly an entire battery of tests and they're all showing that everything is normal."

The middle-aged patient sighed, "Yes, they have."

Even though she didn't say anything more, Chara read what was left unspoken. She resented that the doctors suggested her pain had a psychosomatic cause.

After Chara took her patient's pulse, and blood pressure and a few other routine duties, she decided to direct her comment to this line of thinking. "Right about now, you're probably thinking how to get these blessed doctors to stop thinking it's all in your head."

Anita jolted up. “It’s like you read my mind,” she said. “How did you know that?”

“I’ve been working here for a while,” Chara said, casually, shrugging off the mind-reading comment. “Besides, it’s what I would be thinking if I were in your place. The moment the average doctor doesn’t understand a problem and can’t offer an easy solution they like to say it’s all in the patient’s head.” She paused a beat, smiled and leaned in closely to her patient. “Between you and me,” she whispered. Chara looked around the room for effect, an exaggerated way of making her point, “it gets them off the hook for saying those three little words.”

“What are they, my dear?” her patient asked.

“I don’t know.”

Mrs. Kendricks broke into laughter then immediately caught her stomach. “Sorry, but it was too good of a line not to use.”

“I’m grateful for the humor, honey,” she said.

Chara paused as she wrote a few things on the chart. She looked up from her writing and squarely in her patient’s green eyes. Eyes that begged her to help ease the pain. More often than not they’re wrong.”

The nurse asked a few questions about the nature of the pains, apologizing for the need for her to repeat information she had already told her doctors. But Chara wanted to discover if the woman was holding vital information back. Was she telling the doctors about the true extent of her pain?

Sometimes patients did this, she discovered, not so much because they intend to intentionally withhold information, but because many times they can’t explain how they feel.

This is where Chara felt she excelled. She could take the spoken and the unspoken complaints and recite them back to the patient. The patient, in turn, was normally thankful someone had finally understood what they had been saying. It was then just a matter of informing the doctor of the problem in terms he or she could understand.

After going through this routine with Mrs. Kendricks, Chara looked over the chart, just as a formality, then suggested, “Maybe it’s time we re-visited the possibility of gluten intolerance or celiac disease, especially since the doctors aren’t coming up with any better alternative.”

“They’re pretty adamant,” Mrs. Kendricks said, “that I was foolish for even thinking it.”

“Let me try to persuade them,” Chara offered. “As a nurse, I can’t diagnose, but it’s within my rights to make suggestions.” She paused a beat as she went through the motions of appearing to make a several more notes on the patient’s chart. “Of course, the doctors are well within their rights to ignore me as well.”

Mrs. Kendricks face lit up and she easily revealed her thoughts to Chara. “I would laugh if it didn’t hurt so much when I did.”

“But, I seem to have a knack for suggesting possible solutions. I’m not bragging, mind you,” Chara said, “but sometimes the attending doctors listen to me just because I’ve been right so often.”

“Bless you, my child,” Mrs. Kendricks said, “All I ask is to be tested for it. If it turns out I’m not, I’ll accept that. I just want to leave no stone unturned, if you can understand that.”

“Of course I understand that,” Chara said, softly. “If I were in your position I would demand the very same thing. Don’t be ashamed of voicing your opinion with a doctor. My grandmother taught me one thing long ago. Even though they may wield the knowledge, the doctors work for you. Don’t allow them to intimidate you. If you’re not satisfied with the service they’re delivering tell them so.”

She squeezed Mrs. Kendricks’ hand. “If it turns out it’s not celiac disease then you’ll have peace of mind and, at the very least, we’ve at least positively eliminated one more possible cause.”

Chara excused herself with the instruction to call her whenever she needed anything. “That’s what I’m here for,” she said. “Even if you just need to talk to someone. Call me. I always make time to talk to patients about anything and everything. In the meantime, I’ll try to find a doctor around here who I can talk to. We might as well make good use of the time we have you as a ‘captive audience’ and see if we can’t get you tested right away.”

The last remark put a smile on her patient’s face. “Thank you again.”

As Chara left the room, she heard the patient’s thoughts. “It’s about time somebody listens to me.”

Chapter 3

“Mr. Petruzzi, I presume,” she said brightly as she walked into the room. Chara never failed to be amazed at the differences in energy levels in two physically identical hospital rooms.

Each had impersonal white walls. Each had the same ugly green wood-framed chairs for visitors. All equally uncomfortable by the way. Each had the same bulletin boards with the same information that no one but bored, wandering children read when their parents dragged them in for visiting hours. Yet, when she had walked into Mrs. Kendricks’ room, the negative energy attacked Chara and nearly zapped her of her strength, both physical and mental.

It was definitely a study of contrasts in Mr. Petruzzi’s room. She could feel the positive energy emitting from this room even before she entered it. It spilled out into the hallway and down the corridor. She had no doubt it traveled right into the adjacent rooms as well.

“You’ve got the right person,” he said brightly.

She introduced herself. “I’ll be your RN for the next eight hours,” she said good-naturedly.

“You already know my name,” Mr. Petruzzi said. “I’ll be your patient for the next eight hours.”

Chara was already scanning his thoughts. “Finally, a nurse with a sense of humor,” he was thinking. She took this as a segue. “As you’ll soon discover,” she told her patient, “I believe in the power of humor to heal.” He laughed.

“What are you in for? Wait. Let me guess you’re in for observation because they believe you’re too happy and cheerful. Therefore, something must be wrong with you.”

“For a while I thought just that – the way some of your colleagues mope around these halls.”

“That’s because not every nurse is blessed with such wonderful patients like I have,” she said.

She picked up his chart as he said, “I fell and my family was concerned I sustained a concussion. The doctors thought it was a distinct possibility so they kept me overnight for observation.”

Those may have been his words, but Chara heard his thoughts loud and clear. “That’s a bunch of bull. I told the doctor that right from the start.”

“And I can tell,” Chara danced around the verbalized and the unstated thoughts, “you told them they were full of it. Right?”

“Exactly,” he exclaimed. “Only I didn’t mince any words. You’re good at reading people, young lady.”

“If you only knew the half of it,” she told him returning the smile he had given her. As far as I can tell from your chart, they’ll be coming around to your way of thinking very soon. Your period of observation is nearly complete.”

“Alleluia!” He said.

“I won’t bother you any more, Mr. Petruzzi. It doesn’t appear you need anything. If you do – even just a simple conversation – please call me. Is there anything I can get you right now?”

“Nothing but a release form,” he said eagerly.

“Easy, there tiger, easy. Everything in due time.”

“Thanks, uhm …” he said out loud, while his inner thoughts debated whether he should call her by her first name. He never could get that social etiquette right, he thought.

In response to his thoughts she said, “Please, call me Chara. And if you should need something, I’m only a push of a button away, Mr. Petruzzi.”

That only left one new patient to visit: Ted Langley, celebrity multi-millionaire. Before she reached that room – or even a chance to gauge the energy level of it – she heard the urgent click of footsteps from behind. And as the figure got closer, so did the thoughts in his head.

“I don’t know these thoughts,” Chara said to herself, “this is no mind I’ve ever read before.” What was even more curious, though, she could have sworn the person was thinking with … no is that even possible? A French accent?

She thought for a moment. Shouldn’t all thoughts sound universal? Who knew it was even possible to think with an accent?

“Chara?” the voice asked, not surprisingly with that same French accent. She had never realized how terribly sexy the accent alone could be. “Chara, hold up a moment, would you please?” Chara was almost afraid to turn around. What if those sensual sounds came from a real geek? How disappointed would she be?

Pivoting on a heel, Chara came face to face with the most handsome doctor she had ever met in all her years of working at the hospital. He was so handsome, his presence took her breath away. Dark brown hair, eyes the color of a melted chocolate bar, aquiline nose, thin lips and she hadn’t even got to assess his body yet.

Broad shoulders. A torso that he couldn’t hide regardless of how baggy that white lab coat was. If Chara had to guess a profession merely on the state of his amazingly sexy body, she would have sworn he was some type of fitness professional – a bodybuilder or a fitness trainer. Not a doctor.

It was Doctor Jean Renault, the most recent addition to the hospital staff. She had read about him in the latest magazine the hospital sent out to its patrons and area residents. He had a list of credentials a mile long. The hospital had hoped his presence would attract more potential patients.

Granted, she had seen a photo of the man in the magazine, but it certainly didn't do him justice. Either the photographer was very bad at his profession or the doctor was not the least bit photogenic.

"Yes, doctor," Chara responded, trying hard not to hyperventilate. "Can I help you?" She knew darn well now that he was a bit closer what he wanted. She had already heard his thinking, loud and clear.

"Loud and clear," Chara thought, it was an apt description, in fact, for his thinking. She had never heard someone's thoughts with such crispness and precision before. If she didn't know better, she would have thought he was purposely shouting his thoughts at her. "Impossible," she said to herself.

"Can I ask you a question about Mrs. Kendricks in room 926B, please?" Before Chara could agree, he launched into his question. "You were just in there moments ago."

"Sure, doctor," Chara said. She hadn't remember reading him as attending physician on her case.

"I've been assigned to this case," he confessed, "because I'm low man on the totem pole."

"Regardless, it's nice to meet you." Chara extended her hand. Apparently, he wasn't used to shaking hands with nurses because he hesitated for a moment before he offered his. "How could I possibly help you?"

"I'm curious about the note you wrote on her chart," he said. "The one that mentioned she might be afflicted with celiac disease or gluten intolerance. What makes you think so?"

Chara shifted the weight on her legs and quickly ran a hand through her thick, dark brown hair. She wasn't sure how to word what had occurred in that room. She quickly thought. *As long as I've been reading minds, I would think I could easily explain what I know without saying the words "reading minds."*

She couldn't possibly tell this doctor that she read Mrs. Kendricks thoughts and was able to read thoroughly enough to pinpoint the types of pain and around where it hurt her most. That combined, of course, with the woman's own hunches made celiac disease a logical – at the very least plausible – possibility.

"I spent some time listening to her." She decided that was an appropriate response without having to get into too much more detail.

"I see." The doctor accepted the response at face value, but Chara knew he was still harboring doubts about the answer. "There has to be another answer," he was thinking, much louder than Chara thought necessary. That's the moment, Chara understood he was shouting his thoughts. He was trying hard to think in English and not French. So he had to "think loudly" as it were so his English thoughts could talk over his instinctive thoughts of "thinking in French." Clever. Very clever.

"I asked some of the other doctors about you," he said out loud. *Yeah, I know you have.*

Chara raised her eyebrows and immediately folded her arms in front of her.

“They told me you’re intuitive mind is invaluable in instances like this. They said if you suggested it a possible option, follow up on it. Nine times out of ten, it’s right. Some doctors swear you can read the minds of patients.”

“What?”

“Yeah, silly isn’t it? But you do have a valuable gift.”

“Patients find me easy to talk to, Dr. Renault, that’s all. Sometimes I’m lucky enough to be able to interpret what they’re trying to say but can’t articulate fully.”

“From what I understand from the few doctors I’ve spoken with, they feel lucky to be working with you.”

“That’s very kind of you to say,” Chara stumbled over her words. No doctor has ever told her this and if they thought this she had been out of their range and couldn’t hear it. “It’s also very kind of the other doctors to speak so highly of me. It feels good to be appreciated.”

Chara wasn’t even pretending to be modest. She’s had so many arguments with doctors, it felt good to be appreciated.

“I won’t take up any more of your time, Chara,” the doctor said, “I know how busy nurses are. Especially valuable ones like you.” Chara heard the words and read his thoughts at the same time. He hoped they worked together more often. She complemented, apparently, one of his weaknesses: that of listening closely to patients. Therefore, he was very often at a loss to offer a proper diagnoses.

Odd. His reputation shone as a doctor. How he could excel in his profession without the ability to diagnose?

Chara was disappointed when he simply walked away. According to his unspoken thoughts, he was about to ask her out for some coffee. *I wonder what changed his mind?*

The nurse simply shrugged her shoulders and turned to go when Dr. Renault called back to her. “One moment, please,” he said. He turned around and hurried to her side.

“Would you like to meet me in the hospital cafeteria for your lunch break?” he asked.

Chapter 4

“Purely professional lunch date, you know. Maybe you can shed some more insight on Mrs. Kendricks.”

He paused for a beat, at a loss for words. “And if you don’t mind if I could tell you what other patients I had and if you could share anything about them with me?”

“Why, yes, doctor,” she said. “I’d be more than happy to help you out. I’m sure you’re only beginning to learn about some of the individuals on this floor.”

“Great!”

Chara told him her lunch period and he promised to meet her downstairs at that time.

His thoughts, though, left the nurse puzzled. She couldn’t tell if he wanted to actually date her socially and used that as an excuse to meet with her or if he needed help decoding some the patients’ needs. His thoughts were a bit murky on this topic. Either way, Chara thought, I’m sitting with one dashing doctor at lunch.

She didn’t have time to ponder it too seriously, though – not at the moment. She still had one more new patient to see and then it was time to check in on all the others.

As she walked into Ted Langley’s room, the energy level nosedived. It was as if she were entering a funeral home. The room was void of any energy, almost as if the patient were dead. Of course, Chara knew better, but from her quick reading of the room, she knew the patient was depressed – very depressed.

“Mr. Langley,” Chara said as cheerfully as she could muster in such a dismal energy-sucking atmosphere.

The man barely acknowledged her. She thought she noticed a slight nod of his head. “My name is Chara and I’ll be your registered nurse today,” she said.

“What happened to the one I had yesterday?” he grumbled barely audible. “Did I run her out of town?”

“Heaven’s no!” Chara answered. “Today is her day off.”

“Oh,” he said.

Chara tried to engage him in a bit more in conversation. “You sound sad that you didn’t run her off.”

“No, not really,” he said as he sighed heavily. “It’s just that it seems I run all the women out of my life. First my only daughter and now my wife. So it’s not surprising if a run off a nurse or two. What the hell, why not?”

Chara waited to hear his thoughts. Invariably, people speak and then add their thoughts to their verbal words. But he didn’t. Come to think of it, she couldn’t hear his thoughts as she entered his room either. She was just too busy thinking about the new doctor to notice at

the time.

Was he that depressed he didn't have any thoughts? Chara never met a person whose thoughts she couldn't eventually decipher. Some individuals were easier to read than others. Dr. Renault was a great example of that. His thoughts came through so clearly that he drowned out the physical sounds in the hallway.

The nurse read over his chart and then sat down next to him. "You were admitted because they thought you might have heart problems," she said, "but it says here all the tests for heart disorders show up negative. Are you in any pain now?"

The patient glowered at her. Chara had never met such a miserable soul as this one. "My chest is still tight. I don't feel like myself and … " His voice trailed off for a moment before he finished his sentence. "… I don't have any ambition."

Ted paused again for a beat and said, "But I'm sure you don't want to hear any of my problems."

"But that's where you're wrong, Mr. Langley," Chara said softly, "that's exactly what I'm here for. There's no way any of us in this hospital can help you heal unless we know everything that's troubling you."

"Even personal problems?" he asked. His hazel eyes shone bright, despite his outward sorrowful demeanor.

Chara laughed softly. "Especially those. I am a firm believer that medicine should be a holistic treatment of the individual. No one ever got healed with prescription drugs alone. But if we know what's bothering you on a personal level, then sometimes we can discover what's actually going on in other parts of the body as well."

"You're the first medical professional I've ever heard talk like that." He sat up a little in his bed.

Chara was still puzzled, though. He was the first person she'd met whose thoughts weren't reverberating through her mind. She was sure his depression wasn't the cause of the immense silence in his head.

She had worked with many depressed patients and was able to tap their thoughts. Some of them were even easier to read than those of a well-adjusted individual. They pondered very little else except their sorrow and sadness.

"Mr. Langley, I don't mean to pry into your personal life. I know you've already been through enough, considering that your every move is monitored by the media. But, more often than not, talking out personal problems with someone can help. As a nurse, I have an obligation to keep all our discussions confidential. I won't even reveal them to your doctors."

She paused for a beat. "If I hear something you say that may lead me to think we can treat it medically, I'll just mention it without ever telling them how I discovered it. You've gone through – and probably still going through a hell of a lot of stress."

Ted laughed. Chara looked at him surprised. He had a delightful laugh and she told him

so. “Saying I’m under a ‘hell of a lot of stress’ is like saying that the Atlantic Ocean is a puddle.

“I’ve discovered in trying to talk to people, that most people don’t want to hear about the problems of a bankrupt multi-millionaire. I’ve had more breaks and have been vastly more fortunate than the majority of people out there. They don’t believe I have anything to complain about.”

“Sir, I’m going to speak frankly and I hope this doesn’t offend you.”

He nodded her to continue. “I’m stuck in this room. I suppose you can’t offend me too much.”

“Any person who experiences a divorce has the right to be upset. Even those with lots of money. Any person who has to declare bankruptcy has the right to feel badly – especially when you had a fall larger than most people. Money alone doesn’t insulate you from problems or from feeling sorrow over your problems.”

“Don’t I know that?”

Was he sounding a bit brighter already? Could it be that simple? Chara wasn’t sure anything she said could resonate with this mystery man. She had never met anyone like him before. She just couldn’t, for the life of her, read his mind.

Ted Langley proved to be the first enigmatic person she had ever met. She wasn’t sure how to handle him.

Chapter 5

For the rest of the morning, Chara's own thoughts mixed with the ones of her patients bounced around her head like ping pong balls. It was getting loud in there with all of that activity going on.

Her thoughts at least kept settling on two men: handsome Dr. Renault and billionaire – rather former billionaire – Ted Langley.

She was drawn back to Dr. Renault because one, he thought with a French accent. How cool was that? Okay, how sexy was that? And two, he seemed to be conflicted about how he wanted to approach her. Professional only relationship or a personal one?

Chara finally admitted to herself that such a handsome even considered a personal relationship with her sent shivers down her spine. Most men just blew her off. It's not that she wasn't good looking, she had always tried to reassure herself. She just wasn't movie star good looking.

She was a bit shorter than most men liked. She was barely five-foot five inches, men liked the women with longer legs. Men also liked women who were a bit thinner than she was. While Chara didn't carry that much extra weight, no one ever accused her of being anorexic. One of the men she dated actually said he appreciated her "love handles," those ripples of extra weight around her hips.

Chara knew that he meant it as a compliment (because she could read his mind) but she took it as a backhanded compliment.

Then there was Langley, the patient who revealed nothing about his thoughts. She wasn't sure why. Was it his current health condition? *Or had I met him prior to his illness would I still be unable to read him?* Lots and lots of questions. No answers. Chara wasn't accustomed to not having the answers regarding these types of questions.

Yet, she was strangely and inexplicably sexually attracted to him.

Chara headed back to the nurse's station as her lunch break approached. She had finished her rounds, checked in several times with those patients who had the most needs and was mentally preparing herself for a lunch with Dr. Renault. She knew for a fact that he was going to inquire about the status of other patients.

As she passed Langley's room, she heard him call her name. She stopped and stuck her head in. "Wow," she said in astonishment, "you're sitting up. When I was in here earlier it appeared that you'd never sit up without a threat."

Once again her first impression of the room was its utter silence. She still couldn't pick up on any of his thoughts. She had no idea what this man was thinking. Except when she was at home alone did she ever experience such silence. This is weird, she thought.

She did notice a big difference in the energy of the room, though. Instead of the negative

energy that permeated it earlier, the room was a bit brighter. As she studied, Langley a bit closer, she also observed that his nearly black hair, previously disheveled, was now neatly combed. These observations alone brightened Chara's day and she had yet to speak with him.

"I was thinking about what you said," Langley said, "and the word selfish came to mind. I had been so fortunate for so long. It's time I decided just to snap out of it. If I could make millions of dollars once out of practically nothing I could do it again. In fact, it should even be easier – I learned many valuable lessons the first time around that I could make good use of this time. Which means I could recoup my fortunate and then some even faster."

Chara knew she was probably running late for lunch with the handsome hunk of a doctor, but she had to stop and celebrate this joyful moment with her patient. The good doctor, being the good doctor he was, would know that a nurse sometimes is late for lunch. At least good nurses are.

Chara sat on the edge of his bed. "I also decided that if I found one good woman out there – Well, I thought she was a good woman—I can find another one to love me for who I am and not my money."

He paused a beat. "I'm so pleased you've made those decisions," Chara said with sincerity. "It's good to see you sitting up and to hear you talking about a future."

"I'm sure you're busy and I won't take up any more of your time right now," Langley confided.

"Just on my way to lunch," Chara responded quickly.

"I'm sorry. You're on way to an important part of your day," he said. "It's probably the only time in your workday you get to relax."

"Actually it's a working lunch today," she replied quickly, not knowing why she felt the need to confess that to this man. It was something about his eyes, though, those bright blue beautiful eyes that drew that information out of her.

"If you have time after lunch," he suggested, "I would love for you to stop by for a few minutes so we can talk a bit. Would you mind?"

"I would love it," the nurse said, "that's what I'm here for. I'll check in right after I'm done with lunch."

"Only if you have the time, remember."

"If talking provides you with a remarkable recovery in such short of a time," Chara said, "I'll make our conversations a priority."

"You're too kind," he replied.

Chara walked out of that room a bit taller. It amazed her at how that small conversation she had with Langley earlier had influenced him. Could the fact she wasn't able to read his thoughts make her more amazed than usual over the recovery of a patient? Probably, she

decided.

She always knew right before some event like that happened (and yes, his sitting up was an event!) because she always heard the patient finalize the decision in his head first. So this is what it is to be “normal” she thought. She would have to check with her mom. Her mom always explained very patiently how individuals without the gift experienced the world.

“He’s growing increasingly good looking,” she said to herself, “now that he’s feeling better about himself.” Stop that type of thinking, she scolded herself.

Chapter 6

The silence she experienced in Ted's room abruptly changed once she entered the hallway. She could hear a large, loud group of people excitedly thinking. This could only mean that a gathering of some group was experiencing a lively discussion.

Chara learned a while back that for every one or two sentences someone in a group – any group — verbalized, there were at least two or three thoughts rummaging through their minds. This made for one large, raucous and sometimes confusing discussion to follow. More than once the gifted mind reader would accidentally agree with a thought that hadn't yet been vocalized and sometimes never intended to be. She prayed she didn't do it this time.

It appears, as she closed in on the group and some of the thoughts became clearer, she heard her name – and not just being spoken out loud. Upon a more intent listening she was fairly certain that she was on all of their minds. It also becoming increasingly clear to her why. That made her leery of them, but unfortunately, there was no way to get behind the desk without walking around them.

One of the group saw her and called, "Hey, Chara! We hear you're having lunch with the new doctor."

Chara felt her cheeks getting warmer and warmer. Her body froze in mid-step as she searched the eyes of the other nurses. She concentrated on untangling the mess of knotted thoughts bombarding her.

Most of them were friendly and encouraging. "Lucky woman." "Way to go!" "There's more to you than meets the eye, kiddo!" But the one thought that leapt out louder than the rest came from her best friend, Elizabeth Bethlehem or better known to her as Eli. Every single thought of Eli's was nothing but uber-supportive. Further proof to Chara was Eli was such a dear friend.

There were a few disgruntled women who appeared to be jealous. Jane Hudak, a single mother of two who had several more years seniority as a nurse than she kept repeating to herself, "What does she have that I don't?"

"Listen ladies," Chara said as loud as she dared. "I only agreed to meet Dr. Renault in order to consult with him on a few of our patients. He's only trying to come up to speed."

"Yeah, right," Jan finally verbalized out loud, "up to speed perhaps but not on his patients." The group laughed and even though Chara thought the remark clever, she couldn't bring herself to even smile at it.

"Wait a minute," Chara said, "how did you guys find out?" She thought she read some of the minds, but she also knew that sometimes what people thought wasn't exactly how it happened in reality. People either purposely misremembered events or got the wrong impression.

“Dr. Renault called the nurses’ station,” Jan volunteered, “with a message for you that he was running a few minutes late. But he would be there.”

Chara took a deep breath, thanked the group and tried her best to walk with dignity down the hall to her lunch appointment. That’s it, she thought. I’m going to call it a lunch appointment. Not a date. That elevated it to a professional level. She hoped.

As she took the elevator to the basement cafeteria, fear shot through her. An appointment, she kept reminding herself, an appointment.

She prayed the elevator would take her down to the cafeteria swiftly, she was driving herself crazy alone with her thoughts and doubts. Just at that moment, the car stopped and another passenger. He made movement to push the floor number he needed to get off on and a moment before he could reach for it, Chara volunteered, “Here let me do that for you.”

Without even asking she pressed the second floor. “Uhm, how did you know?” he asked, appearing to be unnerved by the action. Chara deep in her preoccupation with what to call her lunch with Renault had once again acted hastily. “Actually, I didn’t really. It was just a good guess. Most people coming onto the elevator from that floor need the second floor for some reason.”

She hoped that would satisfy the gentleman – and help him relax. He thought he was trapped in the elevator with a witch and wondered if she carried a magic wand. Actually, Chara was thankful he appeared. Now she found herself focusing on his thoughts instead of hers. There was nothing worse in the world than a person who could read minds to be stuck in an elevator alone – and be faced solely with her own thoughts.

The man next to her had been released from the hospital that day and was headed home. His doctor, though, had admonished him to take it easy. That meant he was not to go back to work for at least seven days. Despite the obvious pain he was still experiencing – and Chara could tell he was – he seriously considered disregarding his doctor’s orders and go to work before the seven-day rest period had passed.

He wanted to call his supervisor right away and make arrangements to go into work the following day. This was all Chara could gather before the doors opened to the second floor.

“Have a nice day,” she said, as he stepped out of the elevator car. Then she held the door open and added, “Sir, you really should listen to your physician.” He pivoted on a heel and looked her straight in the eye.

“You know you’re in too much pain to got back to work tomorrow. Just rest for the next seven days. You’d be amazed how even a little bit of rest can make your pain disappear.”

Chara gave him the sweetest smile she could muster. And at that moment she could make out his thoughts. “She really is some sort of witch.”

The elevator door closed and Chara laughed out loud a moment. What a wonderfully delightful, if yes, slightly wicked, attempt at diversion from her own problem. Despite her lighthearted approach, she sincerely hoped the gentleman would opt to take the days off.

Chapter 7

Dr. Renault wasn't difficult to find in the large cafeteria. Actually, he hadn't even entered the cafeteria yet. He was waiting for her by the door. "I was hoping even with running a bit late I would catch you before you chose your food and sat down. Chara quickly heard in her head though, the additional and unspoken, "so I could treat you to lunch."

His next thought was an apology aimed directly at Chara, yet unspoken. "This isn't a romantic venue but wait until our next date."

All the preparation of emphasizing this meeting as an appointment had been torn down in an instant – even before they sat down to eat. So he thought of this as a date, did he? She felt herself blush again, the heat on her cheeks kept rising. She wondered if he noticed her blush.

"She's even more stunning when she blushes," he thought.

Dr. Renault's thought blew her away and only made her cheeks grow all the hotter. She knew they were candy apple red now. She had to stop focusing on his thoughts. This was the hardest aspect of possessing the gift. Her grandmother had warned her about this since she was a child and barely understood what was happening to her.

While Chara couldn't completely shut his thoughts out, if she concentrated enough, she could push them far enough to the back of her mind to be able to pay attention to the verbal conversation. She tried to do just that.

After selecting their food and the doctor paying for it, he led her to a table in the far corner of the cafeteria. They sat down to casual conversation. Halfway through the meal, Dr. Renault finally opened the discussion on the patients.

"You appear to have a real gift for diagnosing," he told her.

"You know as well as I do that nurses can't diagnose," she teased him.

"I do, but your suggestions are spot on," Dr. Renault's words were interrupted by the buzzing of his cell phone. If she couldn't tell by the look on his face, Chara certainly knew by the string of curse words shooting through his mind he was irritated by the interruption. His mood, though, changed as soon as he saw the caller ID.

"The results of all the tests I ran on Mrs. Kendricks today," he said to her. "I'm going to take this if you don't mind."

His French accent appeared to be even more distinct as he talked on the phone. Upon hanging up, he said with glee. "You've seemed to have done it again, my dear. Mrs. Kendricks does have a full-blown case of celiac disease." He paused a beat. Chara beamed. She felt a sense self-worth that her ability, her gift, was instrumental in helping someone. He then said exactly what he thought. "You are an amazing nurse."

I hope you're proud of me right now, Grandma, she thought. *We've just done our part in*

reducing the suffering of a person. Thank you for everything you've taught me about using the gift.

He sat with his eyes closed for a moment. Chara dared not disturb him. She knew he was formulating the patient's planned treatment. When he opened his eyes, he apologized. He explained – needlessly, but he didn't know that – to Chara.

"Sounds like the perfect start," she agreed. "Would you like me to let Mrs. Kendricks know when I get back to the floor or would like to stick with protocol and tell her yourself."

"Again, it's like you read my mind. If you could not only inform her, but tell the cafeteria of her need for a special meal I would greatly appreciate it. I'll forward the formal paperwork to them shortly."

Abruptly, the glowing beam that Chara felt coursing through her body halted. She heard him say, "This young lady is the one who can help catapult me to the success I've been craving. I need to do everything in my power to keep her on my good side."

His mind reeled. Less than a half hour ago, there was not one indication in his thoughts that was where he wanted this relationship to go. Now abruptly, he thought the only purpose she had in his life was to forward his career. What an SOB! There was no doubt about it, she was crushed.

She tried to console herself. She shoved his greedy, egocentric thoughts aside and instead imagined how Mrs. Kendricks would react learning the news. She could even feel the excitement she would feel at learning the pains were real and someone finally took her seriously. But more than anything else, she knew the relief that would flood the patient's entire body as she learned how easily it could be managed.

Chara, for her part, was ready to walk away from the lunch. Walk away from the bastard doctor and forget all about helping him with any of his other patients. She put down her fork, picked up a napkin, wiped her mouth and was about to get up from the table.

Chapter 8

“Oh grandma,” she said silently, “what did you do to me?”

Once again, she heard her grandmother’s words ring in her ears. It’s all about the gift, my love. Use it to help others. It may cause personal heartbreak somewhere down the line, but sometimes it’s better to know when others are deceiving you. You’re a strong young lady. You’ll know what to do regardless of the situation you find yourself in.”

Chara fought back tears and resisted her initial instinct to flee. It didn’t matter she felt humiliated at this point. The only thing that mattered right now was that she helped patients if it was at all possible. Pull it together, Chara, she scolded herself. The gift isn’t about you. It never was and never will be.

“Everything okay, Chara?” Dr. Renault asked. The nurse stoically fought the meltdown that usually followed hearing his accent.

“Yes, doctor,” she said reflexively. “I was just imagining Mrs. Kendricks’ reactions at finally knowing a cause to her pains. The other doctors almost had her convinced that the pains were psychosomatic.”

“It’s only proper that you be the one to break the good news to her,” he said with no conflicting thoughts whatsoever. Damn that man, she thought. I don’t understand him.

The pair continued their lunch as the doctor talked about a few other cases. Chara offered her opinions on the patients she had. He shook his head and took notes. “I hope you know that I appreciate all that you’re doing.”

Chara was relieved he didn’t add the last two words to that sentence “for me.” He was definitely thinking that. She played down the cooperation, but made it clear that she was doing this solely to help her patients. “They place a lot of confidence in me. I do my best to honor that confidence.”

When the pair completed reviewing the list and Chara offered all advice she could, she looked at her watch. “Oh my! I’m overdue up at my station,” Chara said in a panic.

“Don’t worry about it,” Dr. Renault said swiftly. He whipped his phone out of his white lab coat and informed the head nurse of what was going on. “I’m afraid I stole her for a bit longer than I intended,” he told her. As he said this he gave Chara a quick wink. Oh, if only that man weren’t such a career-climbing jerk, intent on using everybody to get to his next level of achievement.

“But she’s been providing me with valuable insight on some of the patients we’ll be working on together. Thank you. I appreciate your patience.”

As soon as he disconnected from that call, his phone rang. “I’ll be right there,” he told the caller, “I’m in the cafeteria now. I’m only an elevator ride away.” Then, he looked at Chara, with those charming eyes (Did all Frenchmen have eyes that captivating, she asked

herself), and said “I’ve got to dash. An emergency has occurred. I hate to make such an abrupt exit.”

Chara offered a weak smile. “I completely understand.” The doctor gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and he was off. She swore at him again. Then she called her best friend.

“How did it go,” Eli asked, “was it romantic?”

Chara laughed. “How romantic can a lunch in a hospital cafeteria be? Really, Eli.”

“Sorry, kiddo. I got carried away for a moment,” her friend responded.

“I guess it went well enough,” Chara responded. “I really don’t think he has any romantic interest in me, though. I believe his motives are purely clinical. Despite his dashing air, he accent dripping with sensuality, his motives were clearly and coldly clinical.”

Eli didn’t have to say a word. Chara could tell even through the cell phone that Eli was disappointed for her. “Don’t worry,” Chara told her. “I’m glad I figured it out now before I was too involved emotionally with this man.”

“Yeah, I know,” she replied. “It’s still disappointing.”

“No kidding. Let Barb know I’m on my way back to the floor. I’ll be there as quickly as I could.”

“Hey, you could do me another favor, too, if you would.”

“Sure, pal, anything.”

“Casually mention to Jan that Dr. Renault doesn’t have a romantic interest in me. Something tells me she wants him all for herself.”

“She’s never said anything,” Eli said.

“No, but I can tell. Something about her body language earlier today told me she was disappointed we were going to lunch together. This will let her know she still has a shot with him.” Chara paused a beat as she stood up to leave. “I’ll be there shortly.”

“Take your time,” Eli said, “Barb was really flippin’ upset until your doctor called. I don’t know what he said, but she calmed down.”

“I’ll apologize when I get there too,” Chara offered. “Are my patients all right?”

“They’re fine,” Eli said, but both Mr. Langley and Mrs. Kendricks would like to talk to you. No hurry each of them said.”

“Would you do me a favor and let them know I’m on my way. I’ll see them as soon as I can.”

Chapter 9

Chara had no sooner exited the elevator and stepped on her floor than she heard it. “Wow, that lady is loud when she wants to be,” Chara mumbled under her breath. Mrs. Kendricks was wondering where her nurse was. Instead of being upset, she seemed pleased, at least the thoughts Chara could muster her from this distance. But she couldn’t quite make out why.

She made a brief stop at the nurses’ station to let the head nurse know she was back, then hustled off to calm Mrs. Kendricks down.

“I’m so sorry my lunch appointment took so long,” Chara said as she entered the hospital room. Wham! The change in energy hit her like a bullet. Instead of the negative, low vibrations that had been ricocheting around the room, nothing be high energy, positive thoughts filled it.

And then Chara paused a moment and knew why. Renault had been in giving Kendricks the good news. He became the hero after he made this great big scene of allowing Chara to do the honors. Of course, Chara was still thrilled for Mrs. Kendricks, but was disappointed that Renault had lied to her. She certainly didn’t see that coming.

How could he lie to me she thought. *How did I miss those thoughts? Where were they hiding?*

“Chara, I know you were behind all this,” Mrs. Kendricks said, as if this woman could read her mind. “I can’t tell you how grateful I am. I’m excited to start my new diet. Dr. Renault said you would help me select my meal tonight so it would be gluten-free.”

“Of course I will. In fact, let me call the cafeteria right now and see what gluten-free options they have. The problem has become so widespread that they may have those types of choices. We may be able to get you gluten-free bread or pasta if you like.”

The nurse pulled out her cell phone and made a quick call. “That should be perfect. Thank you so much.”

When she left that room she hurried to Mr. Petruzzi’s room. Just as she suspected, they had already released him. Yea! She thought. Good for him.

Then she rushed to Ted Langley’s room. She hoped his mood was still as buoyant as it was when she left. Indeed, it truly was. She still couldn’t read his thoughts, but he was hustling about the room like an over energetic child.

When he heard Chara, he pivoted around and grinned ear-to-ear. “I’ve got it!” he said, with obvious elation. “I know how to bounce back from all of this. And do you know what happened just about the moment I figured it?

Chara shook her head. How infuriatingly frustrating! She really didn’t know what happened because she couldn’t read his mind. Come on, Chara, her mind was telling her,

isn’t it at least a bit exciting now knowing what’s going through his mind.

“Are you breaking out of this place?” she asked him.

“No, not yet,” he said, “I’m looking for a pen and some paper.”

Chara handed him a pen. “I don’t have any blank paper, but I can go back to the nurses’ station and get you some.”

“Would you do that for me?” he asked. “That would be great. I want to get all of these ideas on paper before I lose them.”

Chara found herself caught up in the moment. She discovered how contagious unbridled enthusiasm could be when it hit her from out of the blue – like with Ted Langley.

She returned and he began to outline his plans to her. Suddenly he stopped in mid-sentence. “Oh, I’m sorry,” he said. “You probably don’t have the time to listen to this – nor are you really interested.”

“Well, you’re batting five-hundred. I am truly interested because it has literally changed the status of your health around. But, I’m a bit pressed for time. I do need to check in on a few more patients,” she told him.

“No problem, sweetheart,” he blurted out.

Chara sat there and stared out him. *Sweetheart? Where did that come from?*

“Oops! I’m sorry, I got carried away in the moment.”

Chara laughed, “That’s fine. I’ve been called a lot worse names than that by my patients.”

“I would love for you to know what I’m planning though,” he said, “but only if you could find the time before they spring me. I’m hoping they do it soon.”

“By the looks of it, they’ll be kicking you out soon. I have no doubt of that. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Chara said.

And she meant it. She was growing to like Ted more every time she spoke with him. There was no doubt as his enthusiasm level grew he became better looking, even handsome.

She promised herself she would check back with him as soon as she could.

Chapter 10

That evening after work, Chara visited with her mom.

“Chara, there’s something bothering you isn’t there?” Chara laughed.

“For someone who doesn’t read minds, you should do a good of deciphering mine.”

“I’m your mother. It’s been my job for as long as you’ve been alive. There’s very few things you can hide from me. So you might as well open up and tell me about it. Are you still upset about Jake and the Omelet Incident?”

Chara loved the way her mother would classify episodes in their lives. Several years ago, she and her mother had a disagreement with the cashier at the local Dunkin’ Donuts. To this day, her mother referred to that as the “Dunkin’ Donuts Fiasco. It was their private shorthand for what had happened. They didn’t need to say anymore. Both mother and daughter knew exactly what she meant and were able to share a laugh over it.

”No, it’s not Jake,” she said, looking into her mother’s blue eyes. *It would be so much easier if Mom could just read my mind and I didn’t have to explain it. It’s so difficult to put into words.*

“Just start at the beginning,” Chara’s mom said.

Her daughter did just that from the conflicting thoughts – along with those stubborn unreadable French ones – of the doctor to the totally blank slate of Ted Langley.

“Why are you laughing at me?” Chara said after she explained her day. “Am I that pathetic?”

“No sweetheart, but you do realize you’re describing the typical day of most people when you call Ted Langley ‘a blank slate.’” She paused a beat hoping her daughter would sincerely give it some thought. “I can’t read the thoughts of anyone I meet. To me, every person’s mind is a blank slate. I work from scratch.”

“Well, I thought the doctor was total sexy and would have – or how I hate confessing this to my mom – gone out with him on a date in a heartbeat. Then he kept flip-flopping about his true intentions.”

“That didn’t mean he didn’t want a personal relationship,” her mom said.

“Well, I don’t want to be hanging on his every word just to be used.”

Chara knew from her mother’s thoughts that she couldn’t argue with that. She didn’t even attempt to.

“Can I confess one more thing, Mom, and you won’t make fun of me?” Chara, of course, knew she could – and not because she could listen into her thoughts. Rather, she was confident, because she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt her mom loved her and respected her.

“It’s about Ted Langley, actually,” Chara said. “The man gets more attractive – even handsome – the more enthusiastic and excited he gets about life. I would be tempted to go out with him if he would ask me. Of course, he hasn’t asked me.”

“Why would you even hesitate to accept?” Her mother asked.

“I can’t read his thoughts. How would I know what he thought of me? I’d be taking a big chance going out with a man whose only interest in me would be to have sex then drop me.” Since her mom didn’t say anything, Chara continued.

“Think about it. What if I invested my time and poured my feelings into him and he didn’t feel the same way about me? What if I were only a girl he wanted to fill a slot while he waited for his true love?”

Once again, Chara’s mom laughed. “Chara, have you ever heard of the word ‘trust’?”

“Mom, don’t be silly. Of course I have.”

“How long have your father and I been married?”

“Forever!”

Chara’s mother moaned. “Not quite that long, but you’ve helped me make my point.”

Her daughter just shook her head so she continued.

“Can you read his mind?” Chara’s mom stared at her as she waited for an answer.

Chara shook her head.

“Can he tell what I’m thinking?”

“Sometimes I think he can, but not quite in the same way I can.”

“Exactly. So if I couldn’t read his thoughts before I went out on a date with him, let alone promised my life to that man, what do you think I worked from?”

“I have no idea,” she said, “I’ve thought about that a lot at times, believe it or not.”

“It all comes down to one word: Trust. I had to trust your father that what he told me were his true feelings. I had to trust him that throughout our marriage that when he left the house every day he wouldn’t cheat on me. I had to trust him that when he told me I was the only one for him, he was telling the truth.”

Chara looked shocked. She had never really given any thought about how dangerous it could be to enter intimate relationships without knowing certain things. Now that she thought about it how did people know that the other even wanted to date them.

“Wow! I never really gave that any thought before, Mom,” was all she could say.

Silence filled the room for a moment. Then her mother spoke again. “For all of the wonderful things you’ve accomplished with your gift it has hindered you in at least one way. It never made you trust another person. It never made you take a step into the unknown and put your heart on the line.”

“What if it gets broken?” Chara asked.

“What did Ted Langley just do? His fortune is gone, his wife left him and the entire world knows all about it.”

“By the end of the day he was starting all over again,” Chara said.

“Exactly. And that’s exactly what every person who can’t tell what people are thinking does. It happens every day to thousands, if not millions of people. They start from scratch.”

“Without knowing what the next person they encounter is thinking?”

“Without knowing, yes. That’s what trust is all about. Sometimes people break your trust. But when you’ve invested your trust in the right person, you’ll discover it was worth putting your love, your heart, your life on the line.”

Chapter 11

The next morning, Chara felt the change in the energy level that emanated from Anita Kendricks room. Instead of the dark, painful energy that had fogged over the space, dragging Chara and the rest of the staff down as they passed it, the positive energy burst from it, filling the corridor several rooms down in either direction.

Chara was sure that she wasn't the only one who felt the difference. She was also convinced that the positive vibrations helped her neighbors in the adjoining rooms as well.

Chara popped her head in the doorway before fulling entering the room. "Good morning," she said. "Are you feeling any better?"

"Please, come in, Chara," the patient said, nearly singing her words. "I can't tell you how even two meals on the new diet has helped me."

Chara asked if she were pain free. "Not yet, and far from it. But it's the first ray of hope I've had in months. If this keeps up I'll be up and out of here before you know it."

Chara agreed. "All we need to do right now is to teach you about your new diet and we'll be able to release you. But it's important that you stay on your diet and you don't cheat."

The nurse had been looking over the patient's chart. "It seems those pains the doctors' tried to explain away as being all in your head were really quite a severe case of celiac disease. You really were in some tremendous pain by the looks of these numbers. But I'm sure the doctors have talked with you already."

"They've mentioned something, but we haven't discussed anything in length," Mrs. Kendricks said.

Chara could barely hear Mrs. Kendricks talk as accented thoughts boomed throughout her mind. Dr. Jean Renault alert, she thought. The sensual delight she drunk in from his thoughts and flawless body the previous day were replaced with an expectation of dread.

Yes, dread. But she couldn't figure out why she experienced it so strongly. She knew he was conflicted. One moment he thought of her as a possible romantic partner, the next she was nothing more than a stepping stone to use for his own promulgation to bigger and better things. She never expected herself to react so violently to him.

"Why, Chara," the doctor said, even before talking with Mrs. Kendricks, "fancy meeting you here. Checking on our favorite patient, are you?" Chara not only thought she heard an overtone of sarcasm in his humor, but she clearly knew what lie behind those words. "She even performs follow ups with ease. She'd make the perfect partner for me. I hate following up on patients."

Slowly, she was beginning to put together the jigsaw puzzle of his mind. Today, he was also thinking about a position he saw posted at a larger, more prestigious hospital which was looking for a skilled doctor to be its administrator. Accordingly to his thinking at the

moment, Renault felt the position suited him to a tee. But he needed to prove himself in the realm of patient relations.

Chara got involved in reading his mind, to the point of excluding the conversation he was conducting with the patient. It appeared he had left his last position because they had suggested he polished his patient skills – his bedside manner as it were.

The good Dr. Renault took offense at the constructive criticism and immediately began a serious search for a new hospital. Chara wasn't in the least bit shocked to learn this. In this short time she had known him, not much about this physician shocked her.

The bottom line, Chara suddenly thought, was that she was actually repulsed by this man. The full portrait of him was slowly coming into focus. He was witty and animated and he appeared on the surface to care about his patients.

As she learned today, even while he was talking to Mrs. Kendricks, he was using her pain and suffering to help get him to the next level of accomplishment he wanted. He didn't seem to care in the least bit for this person as a human being. She was nothing more than another statistic he could stack to help his CV look good for his next job.

"Excuse me, doctor," Chara said, nervous about interrupting his talk with Mrs. Kendricks, "I'm going to check on my other patients if you don't need me for anything at the moment."

"No, no, go ahead, Chara," he said, barely looking at her. Between his demeanor and his selfish thoughts, she felt he was patronizing her. "We'll catch up later. I want to discuss several issues with you, if I could, and get your opinion on them."

"Doctor, I can't tell you what a wonderful nurse this young lady is," Mrs. Kendricks interjected.

"Oh, I know Dr. Renault said, "I know." He finally looked up at Chara and smiled. It was the most insincere smile she had ever experienced in her whole life.

Chapter 12

Chara's was off to check in with Ted Langley. She found herself to be a bit more eager than professionalism demanded to see him. Did he keep his enthusiasm for starting anew? She certainly prayed he did.

Every time she saw this man, he was more handsome than the last. That was something she couldn't say about the new French doctor. In the first few minutes of meeting the doctor, she thought he was the most gorgeous specimen of a man to walk the earth. Now she couldn't even stand to be in the same room with him.

As she walked down the corridor she kept her ears open for the faint thoughts of her other patients in their rooms. She wanted to ensure that no one needed anything immediately. Their thoughts, as well they should be, she decided, were centered on getting well and thinking about reuniting with family and friends. No one seemed to think they were in a "crisis mode," as Chara and several other nurses called it.

Another advantage of reading minds, Chara thought. If I were in the vicinity, I could take care of any urgent matters immediately. This surprised many of her patients who hadn't even pressed the call button and found Chara next to them.

Chara peeked into his room before announcing herself. It was evident that Langley had, indeed, kept his enthusiasm. He was busy gathering his belongings. "Excuse me, Mr. Langley," she said. "But what exactly are you doing?"

She hadn't seen on his chart he was being released that day. The room was quiet. No stray thoughts bouncing off the walls. She knew in her heart that Langley had to be thinking something, but she was surprised to find herself as frustrated as she was with not being able to know exactly what that was. Was that a part of the sexual attraction she felt for him?

Wait! She did a double take at what just ran through her mind. She usually didn't have the luxury of reviewing her own thoughts except at the end of the day when she was alone.

She admitted she was sexually attracted to Langley. Before this went any farther, she admonished her mind, we've got to stop talking like that. We're standing here talking with one of the most influential businessmen of the age. And we toss the term sexual attraction about like we're referring to the neighbor next door.

Her mind immediately countered even the hint of thinking about him that way. Even if he were interested in her, it was far too dangerous to get involved with him without knowing what his intentions were. Her mind traveled back to her experience with Dr. Renault. I can read his mind, she mused, and it's too dangerous to get involved with him. *Perhaps this so-called gift prevents me from having a satisfying romantic relationship with any one.*

"Are you talkin' to me?" Langley asked jovially. "They're springin' me from this joint, schweetheart," he said. He gave her a big boyish grin and added, "That's my best

Humphrey Bogart impression as poor as it might be."

Chara laughed, the remark catching her completely out of the blue. He then nearly ran up to her and asked. "Got a minute? I've got to tell you what I've been up to since you talked to me yesterday."

He held her by the shoulders. Chara felt an electric charge race through her body. It struck her like a bolt of lightning. She hadn't expected this type of reaction from him or from her. What was she feeling? Normally, she braced herself for moments like these. She could do nothing to protect herself from the shock of his touch. Langley gently sat her down on one the ugly green chairs visitors used.

She couldn't decide if she were horrified at his actions or honored at his familiarity. At the same time, she was still trying to assess her own responses. Up until that moment, she hadn't realized how much of her previous romantic relationships she could predict, simply because she could read the man's mind – even if he thought of something only seconds before he acted.

It was a new feeling for her and tremendously more exciting than she ever could imagine. She looked into his eyes. Her mind couldn't fathom a single thought of his, but right at this moment she didn't even care. She was lost in those eyes. Drunk on the crystal clear universe she found there, uncluttered by any words bouncing around her mind.

"Chara," he said, interrupting her own thoughts, "I have the most exciting projects I'm working on when I get out of here and I owe it all to you."

"Me? Why me?" she asked as if he were accusing her of a crime. His remark astonished her. Is this what people without the gift deal with on a daily basis?

Up until this moment, Chara felt a pang of regret for those people who couldn't read the thoughts of others. But now, she was wondering if she were the person who had been missing that vital piece of the puzzle all these years. Not knowing what to expect. Getting lost in his stare. Wondering when he would touch you next and where.

"Yes! You!" Langley's excited voice brought her out of the bedroom and into the hospital room again. "You inspired me."

Chara looked at him quizzically. "I didn't think I had such a profound impact on your thinking. I know I didn't say a thing you didn't already know." Okay, so she really didn't know this for sure because she couldn't read his mind. She was quite positive, however, that there was little a nurse – any nurse for that matter – could tell an industrialist like Langley about success that he didn't already know.

But she sat there, silently mesmerized not only by his actions, but every movement of his muscles. Obviously, he had tossed his hospital gown aside because he was dressed in a tight pair of jeans and a tight polo shirt. The man had a set of abs.

"You told me that plenty of people did it every day," he said.

"Uhm, and that would be doing what, every day?" she asked. Her inability to read his thoughts even moments before he spoke now frightened her. If he were banking on her

ramblings yesterday to catapult him back to the top of his game, she certainly worried about his future.

“To paraphrase a very wise nurse, ‘pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again.’”

Chara laughed spontaneously. It was truly liberating to be sitting there with a hunk of a man, not knowing what to expect next. He plopped on the bed like a kid.

“I thought about what you said. Instead of counting everything I didn’t have anymore, I began to list what I did have,” he said so fast his words practically ran together.

“Well … “ Chara began, “don’t leave me hanging. I can’t read your mind, you know.” It seemed awkward and strange to be uttering those words – and really and truly meaning it for a change. It was usually a line she gave people when she had just read their minds.

“After giving it much thought I discovered that the assets I thought I valued most – my money, my businesses, my real estate – weren’t the most vital one. The most important asset I have for rebuilding my business is my network of colleagues. You see, I don’t necessarily need the money. I can raise more of that. I’ve learned there’s an abundant supply of cash in the business world. You just have to know where to look. Then you basically just claim it as your own.”

He paused gazing into Chara’s eyes. She wondered, for the first time in her life, what someone was thinking of her. “So I made a few phone calls yesterday, just putting a few feelers out. A few more calls today, contacting some old buddies of mine who, well I must admit, do owe me favors.”

Ted paused for a beat, but just to catch his breath. Even though Chara couldn’t tell what would come out of his mouth next, she was she he was talking at the speed of his thinking. By the sound of it, his mind was traveling at least a mile a minute, if not faster.

There was not a person among those that even hesitating in offering me the venture capital I needed to make my new project a reality. They even told me with my track record, they had no qualms at all about the deals. Who knew it would be that easy? It was just a matter of asking.”

Chara felt her own level of excitement growing as he talked in depth about his future business plans. She felt an uncontrollable desire to know more. She knew she wouldn’t understand it all, but if it made this man so happy, so utterly complete, then she needed to know more.

“So what kind of deals do you have in mind?” she found herself asking.

Before he could answer that Dr. Renault walked into the room. Chara was enraptured by Ted’s plans, his actions … okay, I’ll admit it, she thought, every movement of his body too … that she had blocked out all other thoughts and couldn’t hear those of the doctor’s as he entered the room. Until it was too late.

The energy in the room plummeted. Chara, for whatever reason, felt the need to jump out of the chair. She couldn’t tell if Ted felt the same things, but he too, bolted off the bed.

Perhaps it was he had been surprised at being interrupted. She could never understand why doctors had the right to think they could enter a patient's room without knocking first.

"We meet again, Ms. Ferguson," the doctor said, "We've got to stop meeting like this. People are beginning to talk." He paused a beat and then asked, "I'm not interrupting anything am I?"

Suddenly and without knowing why, Chara felt extremely awkward and … exposed. Even though it was a talk about Ted's future business plans, it felt intimate to her. She felt as if he were baring his soul to her. Renault had no right to interrupt that.

"Here you go, sir," Renault said to Langley, "just sign at the "x" and you're free to go home."

Ted practically grabbed the paper out of the physician's hands. "I never thought I'd see this day come," he said. "Thank you, doctor, for everything you've done." He paused and shot a quick glance at Chara.

"But what I'm really grateful for is the wonderful nurse you have at this hospital, Chara. It was her words of encouragement that helped me out of my slump, completely transformed my thinking and then took that emotional and physical burden from my heart. I don't know how I'm ever going to thank her."

Chara waited. Still, no thoughts from Ted bouncing around. She found herself forced to take him at his word. Surprisingly, she not only accepted it, but felt quite humbled by the complement.

"Yes, Chara is a remarkably intuitive nurse, with an amazing way with patients."

Ted handed the release forms back to the doctor, who immediately turned them over to Chara. "You know what to do with these," he said casually. The two men shook hands.

The nurse quietly slipped out of the room.

Sitting at the nurses station later that day, Chara inputted all the information concerning her patients into the computer. She found that her mind couldn't focus on her rote work. She kept fantasizing about Ted Langley.

She imagined how incredibly romantic and exciting it would be to live with a man like Ted, never knowing what he would be up to next. Always eager to know about his next project, never knowing what he was thinking. Every moment of every day would be new and refreshing, she would never know what he was up to. She would greet each day anew, always surprised by the next moment … and the next moment … and …

She sighed deeply, totally caught up in her own thoughts, only recognizing the intruding thoughts of others, when she heard a collective gasp from the other nurses. She could barely separate one thought from the other and really was at a loss of what was happening when she looked up from her work.

Ted was at the nurses' station and he had apparently had just asked for her. "Oh, I see her,"

he said, and without seeking permission, just walked behind the desk. The nurses made a weak attempt at stopping him, but to no avail. Apparently, when this man made a decision, no obstacle stopped him. Chara knew that their curiosity had gotten the better of them. They wanted nothing more but to see this scenario played out.

He walked up to Chara's desk, gently touched her hand and then pulled her out of her chair. The gasps grew louder and longer.

"Chara, I can't thank you enough." He looked into her eyes. Chara thought she would melt, the feeling totally shocking her. Then he kissed her on the cheek.

The entire area broke into applause. Someone shouted, "Encore." That was all the encouragement the man needed. "He gave her a bear hug and whispered in her ear. You work tomorrow?" Chara nodded.

"I'll call you tomorrow here," he said. "I promise." He held her wrists and gave her one last long look. "Oh, what the hell," he said, "What do I have to lose?" He held her close again and kissed her passionately. Again, the nurses broke into applause. Chara knew there were the thoughts of the other nurses ricocheting around her mind, but they were inconsequential to what she felt at that moment. Despite all the people who surrounded her and Ted, she knew they were alone in a special moment in time.

Chapter 13

The following day Chara waited her entire shift. She waited and waited. *So this is what a child feels like at Christmas waiting for Santa Claus. Christmas is never a surprise when you can read your parents thoughts and know what they bought you and where they hid it. And her parents were so easy to read.*

Chara wasn't accustomed to not knowing things. She knew lots of things about a lot of people that they thought no one knew. But normally, she had the discretion not to burst out babbling that information to everyone. That, according to her grandmother, involved a major aspect of using the gift wisely.

By the time her shift was over, the nurse was practically in tears. *He said he would call. I had no way of knowing he was lying. So why did I set myself for a fall?*

She had clocked out that evening and standing at the elevator before Eli caught up with her. "Well?" That was all she asked. That was all it took. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Why didn't he call?" she asked Eli. "He said he would."

"The jerk," Eli said, but those two small words spoke volumes. Besides, the true friend that she was, she continued thinking, "I'll wring his neck with my own hands if he hurts you honey. I've got your back."

Chara wiped a cheek and smiled. "Thank you."

"He'll call tomorrow," her pal confidently said. "You'll see. He was so excited about everything he's probably in the middle of several transactions. He'll call you tomorrow, I'm sure."

As much as Chara appreciated the words of encouragement, she also read Eli's unspoken concerns. "The longer he doesn't call, the greater the odds are against his calling. He's gotta call and soon."

No sooner than she had heard those words, Chara heard of series of rapid-fire clicks running down the hall. She quickly pivoted on a heel to see what was going on. The closer the figure got, the more thoughts she could decipher.

"You have a phone call," she said, nearly breathless from her rushing, "and it sounds urgent."

Chara smiled. She knew what Barb had refused to reveal. Darn right it's urgent, Chara thought. She sprinted back to the station, plopped behind her desk. Every nurse there told her what line to pick up. Taking a deep breath, she pressed the line and spoke as casually as she could with every muscle in her body shaking.

"Chara, it's wonderful to hear your voice."

"Well, I could say the same to you," she replied.

He apologized for not calling sooner, but explained he had been bursting with energy and working like a mad man piecing a business empire back together again.

“But I promised to call you today, so I tried to make it before you left for the day. After all, this is the only number I have for you.” Chara knew that all too well.

Despite the late notice, Ted wanted to know if she could possibly have dinner with him that evening. “Like in an hour?” he asked. “We still have an unfinished conversation. I would love to tell you what I’ve been doing all day, if you’d like to know.

“Besides, I would just love to see your face again. You are a special woman.”

Chara found herself nearly in tears again, this time tears of joy. She also was quite aware that every nurse in the station refused to take their eyes off her. God forbid there were an emergency on the floor right now, she thought, I’m not sure anyone would attend to it.

“Well,” Ted said, “are you going to give me an answer or just going to let me hang?”

“Let me think, let me think,” she said playfully. She feared teasing him too much, she wasn’t about to risk losing him over something silly like that. “I would love to.”

He suggested a small diner not far from the hospital. I can be over there within minutes, he said, maybe even sooner.” Chara poured her entire being into the conversation and failed to pay attention to the thoughts of others surrounding her. When laughter broke out, she could hear it, but her curiosity wasn’t aroused. The extraneous noise merely irritated.

Then without notice someone tapped her on the shoulder. This irritated her even more, she swirled around in her chair, “Can’t you see that I’m talking to…?”

Her voice trailed off when she saw who it was. “Ted?” She looked at her phone, back at Ted and then at her phone again. The entire station exploded in laughter. She hung up the phone and he sidled up to her and kissed her on the cheek. Chara blushed a crimson red. The other nurses, however, weren’t satisfied with the small peck.

“Come on,” one said, “you know you want to give her more than a weak kiss on the cheek.”

It didn’t take much to talk Ted into that. He immediately embraced her, pulled her toward him so tight that even if she struggled she couldn’t escape his hold. Any tension that had been in Chara’s muscles melted away. She willingly gave in to the long passionate kiss that everyone seemed to be demanding.

She felt at home in his arms. It felt as if they had been lovers in another lifetime, another setting, another moment in time. When they finally separated, he led her by the hand out of the station and toward the elevator. Then she felt the thrill of him whispering in her ear, “Do you work tomorrow, sweetheart?” She could barely shake her head. Her heart was pounding so fast she didn’t quite know what to say or do.

“Then I may have late night plans for both of us,” he teased her. Was he serious? Chara gave this some thought and wondered how serious he was. They rode down the elevator, each with their arms around the other’s waist. *Instead of wasting my time wondering what he meant I should be celebrating the moments we have together right now.*

Chapter 14

The two of them could have eaten anywhere, from the corner mobile hot dog wagon to the most prestigious and expensive restaurant in town. It didn't matter one whit. Keeping her eyes fixed on Ted, throughout the entire meal, she learned every facet of his new plans. She knew those plans, now only real in his mind, would soon be the basis of the biggest financial and business rebound this country had ever witnessed.

He had told her in the hospital yesterday yet – yes, it was only yesterday. It felt as if she had known him forever – that his greatest asset that couldn't be taken from him was his extensive list of business contacts. She soon knew that he didn't call her right away because he was eagerly working this list. A nudge here. A nudge there. In about twenty four hours, he had pulled in enough money – and more – to start on solid footing.

"I want you to know," Ted said, almost shyly, "that I'm so very appreciative of everything you've done for me. But … " he hesitated. Chara waited patiently. What else could she do? She couldn't read his mind? That was her usual modus operandi in situations like this – dig in and interpret his thoughts.

Would the other shoe drop finally? Was he letting her down easy? No, she thought, he had mentioned late night plans. She was at it again. Letting her thoughts mold her future. Wait for it … she thought. Wait for it.

She wasn't disappointed. She didn't have to wait long. "I see you as much more than just a life coach," he said, leaning toward her and placing his hand on top of hers. "I also see you more than just a friend as well. I see you as someone I would like to share my life with – and least attempt to." He stopped for a moment. "That is if you'd like that. I understand that I'm not the easiest person to be around for the long term. All you have to do is ask my ex-wife."

He's doing that again with his eyes, she thought, staring at me with those penetrating piercing eyes. I wonder if he even knows he's melting my very soul.

Still, a part of her worried. How would she know if he were serious? What if he were just using me like Dr. Renault?

That's when the conversation with her mother rang through her ears. Her mother and father enjoyed a long and lasting marriage without either one reading the other's thoughts. Her mother attributed it to trust.

She took a deep breath and decided that this was the time to trust her heart and ignore the nagging voice of her overactive and overactive talkative mind. She felt as if her grandmother would have agreed.

After the meal, Ted appeared a bit nervous. As far as Chara was concerned the most nerve-wracking part of the evening had passed. "Would you think me too forward," he began as he opened the car door of his Volkswagen beetle, "if I invited you … – he paused again. It

didn’t take a mind reader for her to see he was at a loss for words.

“Would you … could I … Oh hell, would you like to come home with me so we can make love?”

“You certainly know how to make your point,” she said, only mildly surprised at the question. The truth was she was hoping he would ask just that.

“And you’re wonderfully graceful at dancing around the answer.”

Her mother’s words rang in her ears again – trust.

“I would like that very much.”

Chara knew that with those words she took a leap into the great unknown. It may very well have been the first time in her life to enter into any type of a relationship without knowing what the other person was feeling.

How will I know how to please him if I can’t hear it in his mind? Worse yet, what if I do something he totally doesn’t want me to do? How will I ever know? So this is what others go through their entire lives? I wonder if it gets any easier?

Pushing aside her own hesitancy and fear, she readily allowed Ted to take her hand. And wondered how the rest of the evening would unfold.

* * * *

Ted led Chara into his small apartment, cluttered at the moment with papers on his desk, dining room table and chairs and anywhere else there was a bit of room to arrange them the way he needed.

“Pardon the mess. Since I’ve been released, I’ve been working like a madman on this new project. Not only that I’ve been setting myself up so I can slide easily into a new one when this one has been set into motion.”

“Who knew one person could unleash a tornado of a mess in less than twenty-four hours?” Chara stood in the dining room surveying the papers which seemed to sprout from nowhere.

“Creativity is nothing if not messy,” he said as he shrugged his shoulders. He grinned at her and his entire face lit up.

He led her into his bedroom. Reaching the bed, he momentarily stopped, wrapped his arms around her and gave her a long, passionate kiss. If was if his tongue had sought the comfort and warmth of her mouth and used it as a refuge for his entire body.

Chara wondered how those thoughts popped into her head, they certainly didn’t come from him. Yet, she felt certain that was his reasoning for such action. After several moments, she decided she was wasting her time and the joy of the moment, by attempting to create a step-by-step description of the experience in her mind. All she needed to do

was enjoy every wonderful, sexually delightful moment.

Together they fell on his bed, both still fully clothes, but hands frantically searching for the quickest way to undress the other. Every time Ted touched her body, a bolt of lightning seared through her entire body, starting at the spine and extending to her arms and legs.

Ted had no idea what he unleashed in her, a desire to please him, a desire to make his skin feel the same electric jolt that just swallowed her whole. She wanted nothing more than to make him feel like the sexiest man in the world. Because at that very moment he was.

He rolled her over on her back and then laid on top of her. She let out a slight sigh, thinking what an amazing feeling that was. Feeling incredibly desirous, she felt small and fragile compared to him. She allowed, even welcomed, his fingers as they grazed carefully over her stomach – only creating the illusion of her fragility as if she were a breakable porcelain doll.

Vulnerability, she allowed herself to think momentarily. That's what made the moment all the sweeter.

At the same time, he removed his mouth from hers and licked her collarbone. Startled, her body flinched momentarily, but he quickly placed his hands around her wrists and positioned them above her head. "You're not going anywhere, my sweet." His raspy voice whispered into her ear. "Not yet at least. Just trust me, baby. Trust me."

Trust. There was that word again. She was in no position, either emotionally or physically, to do anything but trust him.

Not knowing what to expect next, Chara found her breathing abruptly became shallow as she waited. He lowered his head slightly and licked her collarbone. The warm, wet sensation against her skin sent more shivers down her spine and her pelvic area arched, reaching for the ceiling. She closed her eyes in ecstasy.

Carefully, Ted entered Chara, stretching her opening around his penis. His eyes though were thoroughly and unabashedly focused on Chara. "Open those eyes, baby," he whispered. "Open those eyes and look at me when you come, darling," he told her. "I want to experience every moment with you."

He continued working his penis into her, then when she thought he couldn't possibly go any deeper he went just a bit more, causing her to moan softly. Then, he slowly pulled out slightly, just long enough to see a sweet smile on her face, before reaching the depths of her soul.

Continuing in this slow-motion fashion, Ted refused to unlock his eyes from hers. Then suddenly and quite surprisingly, Chara came in a final gasp. A moment later Ted came. They laid, motionless for a few moments longer each looking at the eagerly and lovingly.

The couple position themselves a bit more comfortably on the bed and Chara curled up around him, her arms wrapped snugly around his torso, her legs around his lower body. There they both fell asleep till morning.

* * * *

Neither of them woke until the soft rays of the sunrise peeked into the bedroom. They stirred for a few moments, neither of them wanting to be the first to break their hold of each other from the night before. Ted kissed Chara's head, stroked her hair and softly whispered in her ear. "Ready for the most delicious omelet you've ever tasted in your life?"

Chara's body cringed at hearing the word omelet. Her mind immediately scolding her for making such a bold move as to trust this two-timing man. Her gut reaction was to wonder who he wanted to take with him. Then she took in several deep breaths finally, fully comprehending that he was asking her a direct question.

She had to ask, though, just to satisfy her mind. "Are you asking me?"

Ted took a quick scan of the room. "Did anyone sneak into the bedroom with us while we were sleeping?"

"No, I don't think so," she replied quietly.

"Why of course I'm asking you," he said, "Why would you even question that?" His face looked puzzled.

"I'm not sure," she answered, "just a moment of brain fog, I guess."

He laughed lightly, not at her, but with her and began to gently caress her breasts. Once again, she was in bliss, placing complete trust in the most wonderful man she ever met.

Chapter 15

Chara's cell phone rang – the caller ID showed her it was Jake. She hadn't really thought much about him and his omelet craving with Denise in quite a while. At the time it happened, she thought she would never get past the pain. How wrong she was! It felt as if that episode occurred ages ago not just a few day before.

"Hello, Jake, how was your omelet the other morning?" Chara may have said it sweetly, but she hoped it would stab a huge butcher knife he didn't see coming into his consciousness. One swift, lethal stab.

It didn't seem to affect his consciousness or his bravado one iota.

"Tonight?" Chara asked. *You have a hell of a lot of nerve.* "No, I couldn't possibly." No, I couldn't possibly. I've got plans… Oh, no, no. Tomorrow night I'm dedicating to my mom."

Chara wasn't sure that was the exactly all that the truthful, but it worked. She inhaled deeply, thought for a second and then thought, "What the hell?" and then blurted out just what she thought.

"You know what, Jake, why don't you just cross me off your list of women who'll jump to see you at a moment's notice? Or who'll spend the night with you, no questions asked. I'm not sure how you kept it secret for so long, but I don't want to be merely a number in your cell phone when you need a good lay and all the other women are busy.

"I really need a man to commit to loving me and me only. And I really can't trust you to do that. Have a good day, Jake."

The Billionaire’s Ex Girlfriend

Heather Royer

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Chapter 1

Looks like he did it. Serena Day walked out of the Miami heat and through the front doors of The Palace. Amazing. The resort was monumental and immediately took hold of Serena's senses. The air was cool and had the soft cleansing scent of a rainforest. The floors were a pure white marble. Chandeliers hung from its vaulted ceilings. The walls were a calming taupe color, yet the artwork was intrusive. One of them caught Serena's eye.

High on one wall, a large abstract mural of a woman was there. She wore a wrap in a dark red sangria shade. It twisted around her limbs and blew in the wind. Her destination was the, the clear blue waters of the Atlantic. The woman looked free. Serena pictured herself as the woman. She supposed that was the point. But Serena wasn't here to partake in The Palace's three pools, spas, saunas, restaurants, bars, the aquarium, nightclub, or beachfront access, at least, not as a guest. Her assignment was to catch a criminal.

The front desk was located all the way at the other end of lobby, forcing its patrons to engulf themselves in the Palace's surrounding. Serena made her way there.

The woman who roamed behind the counter was an old friend. Paris Collins. Serena took off her shades and smiled.

"Serena?" Paris asked as she stepped around the front desk clerk.

Serena thought her childhood friend looked great. Paris was wearing a white blouse and black slacks, and red pumps. The white made her bronze skin glow. The two hugged. "How are you, Paris?"

Paris was in awe. "Serena, I can't believe it's you. I'm great! You look amazing! Does Troy know you're here?"

Serena looked down at her sleeveless black business dress and black pumps. She'd chosen to wear her long blond down and around her shoulders, faint curls in the ends. A light layer of makeup complimented her hazel eyes and olive skin. Serena had gone for a professional look, but the womanly side of her wanted to catch a certain someone's attention.

Troy Cage, a billionaire, and now the owner of Miami's newest and hottest resort. He was at one time Serena's friend, but one week of passion had changed everything. Serena kept her smile in place, not allowing her determination to falter. "Not yet, but I would imagine he's bound to find out

sooner or later.” The three, Paris, Troy, and Serena had been inseparable as kids. Seeing Paris at Troy’s resort let Serena know that the two had kept in touch. Paris informed Selena of such, informing her that she was The Palace’s General Manager. She would stay in Miami while Troy travelled for business.

Paris shook her head. “And I thought my summer would be boring. I’m so happy to see you. We have to hang out before you leave. Can I get you a room?”

“Actually, I’m here to see Elliot Higgins,” Serena replied.

“The Head of Human Resources? Are you applying for a job?” Paris’ brown eyes grew wild.

“No, I’m his personal accountant,” Serena lied. The first of many. In order for Serena to find the miscreant who was sabotaging the Palace, she couldn’t tell anyone the truth. “He’s expecting me.”

“Oh, a personal accountant… Sounds fancy,” Paris picked up the phone and pushed a button. The other line picked up. “Hello, I have a Serena Day here to see Mr. Higgins.” There was a pause and then Paris hung up the phone. “The business offices are around the corner,” she pointed Serena in the right direction. “They’ll buzz you in.”

“Thank, Paris. Hey, let’s hang out tonight.” Serena hated to use her childhood friend, but she knew the best way to get information would be through casual conversation with The Palace’s employees. Since Paris was the manager, she’d probably know something that could help.

“Sounds Great!”

The two exchanged numbers, then with a farewell, Serena walked towards the glass doors that would lead to the executive offices.

Troy Cage hung up his office phone and took a deep breath. That was his assistant informing him of another mishap on the premises. Troy couldn’t understand it. He’d travelled around the world, building and designing some of the world’s most lavish homes, structures, hotels, and resorts. He’d invested into these structures. He believed in them. His creations had all gone well; grand openings had gone off without a hitch. So, why, when he finally decided to build something in his hometown, did everything seem to go wrong?

Mishaps were happening more often than not at The Palace Miami. Things went missing from rooms. The washers in the laundry had

malfunctioned. Room service kept running late. Troy couldn't figure out the cause, but knew that if he continued to let the series of unfortunate events go on, it would only be a matter of time before he'd be out of business. His name and reputation ruined.

Troy stood up and walked into the private bathroom that was connected to his office. He stood in the mirror and fixed his suit jacket. The ivory linen tailored suit was perfect for the summer. He looped a long finger around the silk material of his necktie, loosening it a bit. It's sapphire color making Troy's own blue eyes pop.

He turned on the sink and let the water run. Troy cupped his hands underneath the faucet and splashed his face with the cool liquid. He let it run down his face and into the sink. Troy quickly ran a hand through his short black hair. He looked in the mirror again. He was thirty-two, but in the last two weeks since his latest grand opening, he'd aged.

Who's out to get me? A rival maybe? A scorned woman from his past? Troy knew there were plenty that could fill both of those categories. Troy had strategically built this resort next to some of the biggest hotels in the city, stealing the patrons from all his competitors. The Palace was bigger, better, and had so much more to offer. It had room that started at a reasonable price and then skyrocketed for those you wanted to live the lavish life. It would make sense that he'd pissed one of his competitors off enough to seek revenge… And then there were the women.

Troy had told them all the deal from the beginning. There would be no commitment. There was too much going on in Troy's life for love. What he needed from a woman was animalistic. A sexual release. He always made sure that each of his partners was having as much fun as he was. They'd all enjoyed their time in his bed. What they hadn't enjoyed was being dismissed afterwards. Hurt feelings were not Troy's problem. Troy just wanted to focus on building his empire, nothing more.

But now that he thought about it, he was overdue for a sexual release.

Troy left the bathroom, grabbed his phone, and walked out of this office door. He was heading towards Elliot Higgin's office. Elliot was supposed to find him a private investigator. He'd given the man the assignment yesterday. Enough time for a progress report. Approaching Elliot's office, Troy entered without knocking.

Chapter Two

“Ms. Day, you are exactly what we’re looking for.” Elliot Higgins stood.

Serena stood as well. They shook hands. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to start immediately.”

Elliot beamed. “Eager, aren’t we?”

Serena thought Elliot is a nice guy. He was young and full of energy. He’d been excited to give her the job, even after she’d explained that she’d never worked on a case of this magnitude. To that, Elliot had told Serena a little about himself.

Elliot had approached Troy for the Human Resources position long before a job posting had gone out about it. The resort, back then, had just been a large plot of land with tons of metal. The construction team had been on the scene and Troy’s office had been a trailer at the site.

At first, Troy had told Elliot he’d wanted someone with more experience, but Elliot wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer. Elliot’s previous HR work had been for local businesses around Miami, which gave him some knowledge of the job and he thought himself good at it. Elliot seemed to enjoy telling his ‘underdog’ story. He’d moved about his seat while he spoke. His grey eyes and gleamed.

Serena looked into those silver eyes when she spoke next. “I am eager. I want to get the bad guy and quickly.”

The door behind her opened. Serena turned and stopped dead in her tracks. So did the intruder. Troy. He was more handsome than Serena remembered.

“Serena?” Troy closed the door behind him. He was taller. He’s been just a teenager the last time they’d seen one another. But the boy was all man now. His blue eyes narrowed as if in anger. “What are you doing here?” His voice was deep, rough. Rougher than she remembered.

His rage caught her off guard. Serena didn’t get a chance to speak before he spoke again.

Troy addressed a very confused Elliot then. “You caught her? Is she the one?”

The one? “The one?” Elliot asked, voicing Serena’s own mental question. Serena was lost.

It took Troy three quick strides to reach Serena. His masculine presence overpowered her. He looked down at her, invading her space. His breath warm. His eyes full of hate. He grabbed her wrist. “I’m turning you in,” he sneered.

It took a moment for Serena to catch up, and when she did, her fury matched his. She snatched her hand away from his grip. “You think I’m the one trying to destroy your business? Are you mad? Why would I do something like that?”

Troy laughed a deep throaty sound. “To get back at me, of course! Because I wouldn’t go out with you after we had sex!”

Serena was appalled and a little embarrassed.“You’re crazy. That was almost ten years ago. You didn’t do anything worth remembering, much less anything that would make me want to seek revenge.” Serena was lying about the ‘not remembering’ part, but she needed to knock his ego down a notch. Someone had to.

Nothing worth remembering? Troy scoffed. She was lying. He could see it in her eyes. The touches of green sparks in them had darkened. Her face had turned red. She nervously tucked her plush bottom lip between her teeth. Troy’s eyes went there. She released the lip then. It glistened. She was still beautiful. Even more so, but she was still a liar. Troy was just about to tell her so when Elliot began to cough, intruding on their moment.

Elliot grabbed his briefcase. “I don’t think I should be here during this conversation.” He grabbed some papers from his desk, a few from his drawer, and headed towards the door. “Serena is the hired P.I. My job is done here. Have a great day!” Then Elliot was gone, leaving the two ex lovers alone.

Troy took a step away from Serena. *Serena, a private investigator?* And *she wants to work here?* He’d see about that. Troy went around to the other side of Elliot’s desk and took a seat. He gestured for Serena to do the same. She did.

She adjusted herself comfortable into the seat and then proceeded to rest her arms on the chairs’ arms. She waited. Her eyes still angry.

Troy felt foolish. He shouldn’t have made his statements in front of Elliot. It was unprofessional. He took a breath. Maybe Serena was right. He was losing his mind. “So, you’re a P.I. now?” He asked. He didn’t know he

knew anyone in the profession. Elliot might be is head of HR, but Troy would have the final say as to whether or not he allowed Serena to keep this assignment.

“Yup,” Serena didn’t move a muscle. Her small hands gripped the ends of the chair arm, turning her knuckles white.

Troy sighed. “I’m sorry-”

“You should be,” cut in, becoming animated. “How dare you parade your sex life in front of people? That was none of his business,” she pointed a thumb towards the door, gesturing in the direction Elliot had left through.

Troy wiped a hand down his face. “Serena, I’m sorry. It’s just… seeing you was a shock and at a really bad time.”

Serena leaned in then. “Your really bad time is why I’m here. I’m here to help you, Troy.”

Serena seemed sincere, but Troy just didn’t know who to trust anymore. He didn’t know who his enemies were and who his friends were.

Troy studied her. “Why would you want to help me?”

They both heard the question that was not being asked. Why would you want to help me after what I did to you?

Serena smiled, her face lit up. “You’re paying me right?”

Troy laughed. “Yeah, I’m paying, but what am I paying you for? How do you plan on catching the guy?”

Serena leaned back into her chair. “Well, tell me what issues you’ve been having.”

Where to start? Troy closed his eyes, searching his mind for the first incident. His eyes opened when he remember. “We had a power outage, but luckily the backup generators hadn’t been touched. They kicked in. Then the laundry machines were sabotaged. Someone cut the wires. Kind of hard to run a water resort without towels. Then the computers started to glitch. The list goes on from there.”

“Sounds like your guy knows his way around electric stuff. I’ll need files on all your employees and access to your security system and every camera on the premises. I’ll need a card that gives me full access to all the common rooms and permission to interview anyone in or around the resort that I see fit.” She stood then.

Troy stood as well. “Done.” He came around the desk and held out his hand.

Serena looked down at it. After a pause she took it. His hand was rough, which was very unexpected. It sent a shiver up her spine. She took her hand back. “Let’s get started, shall we?”

Troy led the way.

Chapter Three

The two left Elliot's office and went straight toward the security office. Serena's Security was located in one of The Palace's side towers. There were three and they all connected in a grand design that made The Palace look like a golden crown sitting beachfront. Troy opened a backdoor that led to one of the pool areas and a bar. People clad in the bare minimal ran to and fro. A popular pop song was playing. Children were laughing. Everyone was having a great time, all thanks to Troy.

Serena looked over at Troy. Just looking at her still gave her chills. His looks hadn't changed much, just matured, and hardened. He looked rugged and ruthless. Definitely not someone Serena wanted to make her enemy. "How'd you do this?" She gestured around her, at the resort. "I didn't know architects made this kind of money."

"Well, I started to invest all my own money into real estate. There were many nights I slept on someone's couch and ate microwavable food, just so I could put every dollar into an investment." Troy turned his blue eyes towards her briefly, their clear water orbs drew her in. The connection lost once he turned his head back into the direction they were heading. They made it to the second tower and began to walk down a long hallway, passing a restaurant, classical music flowed from its open doors.

A young Troy passed before Serena's eyes. She remembered him studying Architecture when they'd all gone off to college. Serena had studied Criminal Justice. The last time they'd seen one another had been spring break of their junior year. After that, Serena had avoided him and Paris like the plague.

Troy's deep voice jolted Serena back. "In the end, I wanted to design something for my mother. So, this is her Palace." Troy used a key card to open a door. It led to a cement stairwell. The door's sign had read 'employees only'. He motioned for her to go ahead of him.

With Serena's every step, she could feel his eyes on her, burning a hole through the back of her dress. "Do your parents live here at the Palace?" Serena didn't look behind her. She kept looking forward, trying to seem natural.

"No. They wanted to live somewhere away from all the city lights. I

bought them some land not far from here, but they come to the resort every now and then."

They reached the top of the stairs. Troy came to stand beside her. His clothed arm brushed her bare one. Serena took a breath. She needed to calm down, but couldn't. Serena's mind was stuck back in Elliot's office. Troy had brought up their one week of passion. She'd told him that she didn't remember it, but she did. After all these years, she still dreamt about it. To this day, none of Serena's sexual partners had come close to making her feel the way Troy had. They said friends made the best lovers. They'd been right on that.

Whatever Troy had done to her body, it had touched her soul. It was as if he'd known exactly what she needed. He had known when to be gentle and when she had wanted it rough. Remembering that week was like a sweet mixture of heaven and hell. Heaven until the end, when Troy had set her straight. He didn't do commitment, not even with her.

The small room was dark; the only light came from a few desk lamps and monitors. There were computers screens across one wall. The room was the eyes and ears of the whole show. She walked followed a little to get a better look. Troy followed closely. Two guys sat at the controls. They didn't turn around when they entered, but they threw 'hellos' over their backs. They knew it was Troy. They'd seen them approach on the camera.

"Well, well, well, who do we have here?" A masculine voice asked. Serena turned around and stared into a corner. A man stood in the shadows. He stepped into the computer's light. The screens highlighted his features. He was handsome. He was very tall. Bald. Serena didn't know many men who could pull the look off, but he did. He smiled. Showing a pair of perfect teeth. He was well built and wore a black shirt and black pants. Black boots covered his large feet.

Serena felt Troy's hand wrap around her middle. She got the funny feeling that Troy was staking a claim to her. Serena laughed. No possible. He was probably just being protective. She looked up at him. His eyes were narrowed, focused on the other man in the room. "Serena, this is Madrick Grant. Madrick is the head of security for all The Palaces. He'd down here because of series of unfortunate events that have been happening here. Madrick, this is Serena, the hired private investigator."

Madrick eyes went towards Troy's hold on Serena's waist. His laughter, a strong sound. He crossed his arms. "She's all yours, boss. You know I only want Frenchie."

Troy smiled, releasing his hold on Serena. “You keep calling her that, and you’ll get nowhere.”

Serene looked between the two men. She shook her head. She had no idea what was going on, but she had a job to do. She stepped forward. “I’m trying to find out who’s sabotaging the resort. So, what have you found?”

Madrick’s dark brow lifted. “Not much. We’ve watch all the cameras from all the places that incidents happened. No one was there that shouldn’t have been. They were all interviewed about what they saw. We don’t have any real suspects yet.”

“Why haven’t you guys called the police?” Serena asked.

Troy answered. “It’s kind of hard to run a business what has most of its attractions in yellow tape.”

That was true. Serena went back over to the camera. “I’ll need to review every camera during the exact times of attacks. I’ll also need a list of the people who suspect. Those are the ones I’ll shadow tomorrow.”

Troy leaned in behind her, his eyes looking up at the screen. His body pressed into her side. Only slightly. Not enough to be categorized as sexual harassment, but just enough to make Serena want to back up into him, feel his full body against hers. The smell of his cologne was all consuming, sending warmth to the pit of her stomach and down her legs. His eyes turned towards her then. “Do you think you could have it figured out by the fourth?”

The fourth? Serena closed her eyes to clear her mind. It came to her then. The Fourth of July. It was this weekend. “Not by myself. This is a big place.”

“I’ll help you,” Madrick said.

Serena turned her head towards him, giving him a nod.

Chapter Four

After watching some of the footage, which gave Serena very little to work with, she and Troy left. Once they'd made it back to the main building, Troy introduced Serena to one of the concierge girls and had the girl give Serena an official tour of The Palace. He'd then quickly left the two women alone. He'd need to get away from her. Serena.

She was driving him mad. Seeing her had transported him back in time to their first night. Sex with Serena had been like nothing he'd experienced before. She'd done something to him that first night. It was enough to get Troy to stay the entire week with her, something he never did.

He had to stay away from her. But even as he told himself this, he knew he wouldn't. Couldn't. She had some sort of domination over his mind. From the first time their lips touched, he'd been almost hypnotized by her.

When they'd reached the private staircase, Troy had made her purposefully walk in front of him, for safety, and because he'd wanted to watch her body move. Age had done nothing but enhance her. Hips, legs, the sound her heels made when they hit the ground, it instantly hardened him. Watching Serena had made him wish she wasn't here on a job. Troy was grateful for help, but now he wanted her for something much more intimate.

In the security room, he'd seen Serena take down notes and ask questions as they watched the footage, making the guys rewind particular parts over and over again. Serena seemed like she knew what she was doing. Hopefully she would catch the troublemaker soon, and then he could discuss other things with her. Like if she would be interested in another affair. But honestly, Troy's libido was telling him that he wouldn't be able to hang on too long. He needed her now.

Troy knew it wasn't right. He had no business asking Serena for anything, not after what he'd done to her. He'd seen the way his words years ago had broken her heart. He'd used her. He hadn't meant to, not that first time, but once their bodies had touched, his mind had become fogged, clouded by Serena's sweetness. Just the scent of her, held enough power to make him lose all intelligence. The moment he'd tasted her, he'd become delirious. All consumed. A growing need to take everything Serena had to give took him over.

Troy wanted her again, but knew it was a bad idea. There was so much to do. He wasn't secure yet. Anything could happen. He was a billionaire today, but tomorrow, he could be left without a dime. It was the way of the world. He had to protect himself.

He looked out over her balcony. Troy's Miami residence took up three floors in one of The Palace's towers. He looked down on his domain. This was his. He'd fought long and hard for it. He'd be damned if he let anyone take it from him.

"Are you ready?"

Serena stood up from her seat in the lobby and smiled at Paris. The women hugged again. "I'm starving," Serena told her. She'd skipped lunch. Instead, Serena had locked herself away in the file room, going over everyone's previous work experience. Troy had left her after leaving security. He'd told her that he'd had other matters to attend to, but would check back in with her later.

Paris linked their arms together. "Then let's eat."

They started to walk towards the door that led to the main pool area.

Outside, the air was cooler. Cool enough for Miami in July. Serena had had time to change clothes, but she did pull her hair up into a ponytail. "I saw a restaurant in the third tower this morning. The smell coming from it was amazing."

"Yeah, it's one hundred and fifty dollars a plate amazing."

Serena stopped in her tracks. "Are you kidding me?"

Paris winked. "But it doesn't matter. It's on Troy."

The two locked elbows and headed in that direction. It was as though their connection had been never lost. Paris caught Serena up on how her parents and siblings were doing while Serena spoke about her sick grandmother. Serena hadn't grown up with her parents. They'd both died when she was young. After their passing, Serena had moved into her grandmother's home. It was located in the same neighbourhood that young Troy and Paris had lived. It was there that their friendship had formed. They'd all gone to the same public schools and then played together once they'd got home. They'd always thought that they'd be friends forever, but forever was something

Serena knew nothing about.

A hostess directed them to their table. Paris knew her.

“So, you must know everyone here.” Serena said once their drinks arrived. If she was going to catch a villain by the weekend, she needed to work fast.

Paris quickly launched into little bios about everyone at the resort, but she had bad to say about the people on Serena’s list. For the most part, Paris only had great things to say about the employees that Serena was focusing on. Perhaps Serena was looking in the wrong area. They had just finished their meal when a shadow appeared.

“Mind if I interrupt?” It was Madrick. He was standing over the two women’s table, looking down at them. Actually, he was looking at Paris. He’d changed. He wore a suit. Still all black. Still giving him an air of mystery.

“We do,” Paris answered in mock annoyance. “How did you find me?”

He slid into the seat next to her, uninvited. Bold. His smile never leaving. He wrapped his arm around the back of Paris’ chair. “You know I’ll always find you, Frenchie.”

Paris looked him in the eyes. She was blushing. “This constitutes as stalking.”

So Paris is Frenchie? Serena guessed it made sense. She watched as Madrick leaned over to Paris and began to whisper in her ear. Serena had no idea what the man said, but she saw Paris’ entire face turn to flames. Then her friend melted, turning to putty, which was obviously what Madrick wanted.

He stood then and held out his hand. The music in the restaurant turned to something slow. Paris gave him her hand and they were off.

Serena watched them go, smiling. The two found themselves in the middle of the crowded dance floor. She was happy for Paris. She jumped when she saw someone sit in the seat opposite her.

Troy smiled. “Having a good time?”His voice was low and dominating. His sapphire iris’ danced.

Serena sighed. *Why did everything this man said have to sound like sex?* Maybe it was just wishful thinking on her part. She’d known this would happen. Before taking the job, Serena had known Troy would drive her crazy. “I’m just here to eat, then I‘m going back to work.”

Serena studied Troy in the candlelight. The table was rather large, putting a great distance between them, but there was something in Troy's eyes. It was as if she could feel him on her. His hooded eyes caressed her, touched her, and stroked her body into a fiery heat from across the table.

Serena averted her gaze as she reached or her water. She was happy when she heard him speak. "Remember that time we went to Paris' house for her fifteenth birthday and her parents cooked that huge dinner?"

Serena moaned. "That food was so good. And they wouldn't tell anyone the recipes."

The moan caught Troy off guard. He'd been looking for a safe topic, but damn, he wanted to make her moan again. He shook his head, trying to stir his mind away from his growing member. "You know, I tried to buy the recipes last year."

Serena leaned in. "You didn't." Her rosy lips lifted into a smiled.

Troy nodded his head, returning her smile. "I did. I offered them crazy amounts of money, but they turned me down. They said the secret recipes were only for family."

Serena leaned back. She mindlessly tapped her finds on the table. "Sorry, but your billions can't get you everything." A wicked glee in her copper eyes.

No, Troy couldn't have everything, but he could have something.

"Is that little Serena?"

Serena looked up into a pair of eyes that matched Troy's. His mother and father stood over their table. Troy stood to greet his parents. Serena did the same. Mr. and Mrs. Cage looked great for their age. They'd dressed to impress. Mrs. Eliza Cage wore a dress that showed off her slim form and Mr. Francis Cage in a suit. His jet black hair now had a streak of white. If not for his black eyes, Troy would look just like him. Both men were deadly handsome.

Troy took the available seat next to Serena while his parents sat across. A party of waiters appeared instantly. In seconds, the table looked as though no one had eaten there. Used dishes and silverware was quickly replaced by clean china.

"We don't want to take up your evening," Eliza began. "But we just had to come over and say hello. It's been so long. We use to see you almost

every day. Why haven't seen you?" She fixed Serena with an intense look. Mrs. Cage seemed both confused and probably hurt. Had she missed her?

Serena looked away. She didn't meet Troy's eyes either. It was clear his parents didn't know what had happened between them. No one knew. It was their secret. An embarrassing story Serena would take to her grave. "Oh, I just got really busy with school. I barely had time for friends."

"I don't know what's with you young people, "Mr. Cage began. "I'm surprised Troy was able to hang on to Paris for so long. You all just seemed to get so busy, letting work consume all of your time. If you're not careful, old age will sneak up on you."

Mrs. Cage patted her husband's arm. "Don't mind him. He's just hitting his midlife crisis."

"But it's true," Francis continued. "You have to take time for yourselves." His eyes met Troy's then.

Troy sighed. "I promise to take a break real soon, dad."

"Troy, you've done enough for your mother and I-"

"We don't have to get into all of that," Mrs. Cage rushed in, trying to prevent and argument before it began.

Serena saw a vein in Troy's jaw leap. There was a flash of annoyance before his smile slide into place. "What kind of son doesn't provide for his family when they are in need?"

Mr. Cage's voice was low. "We don't need any more money. *You* don't need any more money."

"But we could use some grandchildren," Mrs. Cage chimed in. She was trying to lighten the mood. Serena didn't think it was working.

The two Cage men stared down one another. Serena was lost. She hadn't known Troy's parents had faced a financial hard time. It seemed Serena wasn't the only one with monetary issues.

"Serena," Mrs. Cage called. "How's your grandmother?"

The question caught her off guard. "Uh, she's alright. She was diagnosed with cancer three years ago-"

"She's sick?" Eliza asked, cutting off Serena's words. Her husband shared in her look of bewilderment.

Serena left Troy turn towards her. She looked at him. He looked at her

in confusion, as though she'd been purposefully holding out on him. "Why didn't you say anything?" He asked.

Serena looked around at the people who'd been like a second family to her. Their concern touched her. Over the years, Mr. and Mrs. Cage had tried to reach out to her, inviting her to birthday parties and get togethers, but Serena had never gone. After her affair with Troy, Serena had basically pulled away from everyone she knew. She'd been ashamed to talk to anyone close to Troy again. She'd fallen in love with Troy and he'd never returned it. Yet, now he looked at her as if she'd done something to purposefully hurt him.

Serena sighed, getting a hold of her nerves. "It's alright. She's doing a lot better now. Chemo and surgery got rid of it. She's recovering nicely. I put her in an assisted care facility. She's getting around the clock monitoring"

"That's expensive." Francis' comment had been a statement.

Serena felt Troy's hand slide next to herself. He grabbed it, locking his long fingers with slender ones. A warm spread through her. She didn't look at him as she spoke. "We manage."

"Well, you won't have to just manage anymore," Troy said. This time, Serena was looking up into his eyes, drowning in them. Their hue changed, as though an inner storm was calming.

Serena tried to look away, but couldn't. "I can't let you do that."

You can't stop me," he said, a hidden smile lit his eyes. The rough pad of his thumb began to rub across the back of her hand, sending shots of warmth between her legs. Serena cross her knees and looked away. Troy was right. She couldn't stop him. She didn't think she could stop this growing need for him either.

Moment later, Troy's parents went to their own table, making Serena promise that she'd stop by their home in the country. She told them they she would. Serena glanced out on the dance floor. Paris and Madrick were gone. Serena could only imagine where the two had ended up.

"Have you been to your room yet?" He watched Serena's eyes widen in shock. He'd caught her off guard. No doubt, her mind was going to the same place his had been since seeing her hours ago. Her manicured nails stopped moving. She tilted her head at him. "No, I've been too busy."

Troy stood up. "Let me show you."

Their eyes held. Serena didn't move. Not one hundred percent sure if

she could or should trust him, she was being cautious. Good. He wanted her to think. He wanted her to know what he was thinking.

Serena stood, still holding his gaze. “Okay.”

Chapter Five

Serena had no illusions as to why Troy wanted to show her to her room. It was the reason she'd like him. The desire. It was clouding Serena's mind, her vision. She wasn't going to be able take down The Palace's terrorist and fight her need to Troy at the same time.

They both stood in front of the executive elevator. Their door had a chrome finish. Serena glanced at his reflection and was immediately caught in the fire that burned behind his eyes. A fire that burned for her. His stare intense. A heat touched her skin. She quickly looked away from him.

Troy laughed. Serena came to stand in front of him, her eyes locked with his. "What's so funny?"

"You are," a laugh still in his voice. "You're acting like I'm going to attack you."

Serena placed her hands on her shapely hips. "Are you saying that you won't?"

A flicker placed in Troy's eyes. They narrowed. He took a step towards her. His mouth took on a grin. He looked the big bad wolf, ready to devour her. Serena took a cautious step back. The elevator chimed. The doors opened. She scrambled inside. Another rich laugh escaped Troy's lips. He calmly strolled into the elevator cart. The doors closed, locking them in it, trapping her with him. Alone.

Serena felt her back hit the glass behind her. Troy had matched her retreating steps. He stood over her now. He leaned in towards her. His body blocking her from moving. Serena could feel his breath on her face. Its heat spread like wildfire, hitting her in her core, an ache began. An ache she was sure Troy was heal. The elevator began to move.

Troy brought his face closer to Serena's. He watched as her eyes slide close, her pink lips parted, ready for his kiss. He would kiss her, but first. He had to know. "What do you want, Serena?"

Her eyes fluttered open. Confusion lit Serena's face. "What do you mean?"

What did he mean? He meant a lot of things. It was pretty obvious what she wanted right now, but what would she want tomorrow? This time, he

didn’t want there to be any mistakes as to what he wanted. Sex. That was all. If knowing that would change her mind about tonight, then so be it, he’d find someone else. Yes, he wanted Serena, but not enough to cause her anymore pain. He reached up and gently touched a finger to her cheek. “You have whatever you want tonight, Serena. But only tonight.”

Serena narrowed her eyes. Her nose wrinkled. Troy found it adorable. “You haven’t changed.”

Troy shook his head. “No, I haven’t.” And he didn’t plan on it.

Serena looked away. Troy backed up, giving her space. He went to stand on the other side of the elevators.

Serena looked out of the glass behind her. They’d come up pretty high. Where were they going? She turned towards them then. He was still looking at her. Watching her. Waiting for her answer. What did she want? After ten years, more than anything, Serena wanted Troy to feel the way she felt about him. She wanted him to love her, but she wasn’t foolish enough to voice it. So what was the next best thing? She wanted him to see her, a stronger Serena, a matured version of the young woman he’d laid with ten years ago. They’d have this night. She would take what she needed and then she would move on. One more night and perhaps whatever spell Troy had her under would vanish.

The elevator chimed. They’d arrived.

Troy didn’t move. He waited.

Serena walked over to him. She leaned her body into his; pressing close to the part of him she knew was stiff. She felt the air leave his lungs. He groaned. His eyes closed right before they opened again. He was looking down at her. His arms went to circle her waist, but she moved out of his reach. She started for the open elevator door. She looked over her shoulder at him. She looked him over; her eyes travelled from his the top of his head to the soles of his shoes. She didn’t say anything, but her expression said it all. Serena turned and headed down the only hall there was. She didn’t turn back, but she could hear him follow, he’d gotten her message loud and clear.

Serena just needed a normal room so that she could stay with all the action, but Troy had insisted on going big. She was glad he did.

Serena stepped into her room and could not find the words to describe it. Breathtaking. It was huge. Large glass windows panelled two sides of the walls. One side showing had the perfect view of the crystal blue waters of the ocean, a few pools, and some of the resorts outdoor restaurants and bars. Outside of the other wall was downtown Miami. Serena loved this city, but had never seen it from this vantage point. It was sweet! It was too much.

She turned to find Troy standing in between the living room and kitchen. The furniture and countertops were pristinely white. The coffee table glass. The floor throughout the space a dark cherry wood. It matched the wood of the cabinets. Serena was in heaven. “Troy, this is too much.”

Troy waved her off. “It’s the least I could do.”

He was apologizing, but Serena wasn’t sure what for. His outburst was in Elliot’s office or crushing her heart long ago. “Thanks,” she said, smiling. What else could she say? He returned her smile. The moment almost reminded her of the way they’d been when they were kids. Before his muscles had started to develop. Before he’d become an ass.

Serena walked over to him. She looked the clear blue depth of eyes. “Thank you.”

Troy grinned. “My pleasure, but you haven’t even seen the best part.”

He walked her over to a door. Serena followed, knowing what lay behind it. He pushed the door open. The bedroom was just a breathtaking as the main room. Serena walked into it. Her bags had already been delivered and sat in the corner. The floor in the bedroom was carpeted. A large bed sat in the middle, its soft white duvet calling her. Serena walked over to it and ran her hand against the fabric. She looked over at Troy. He still stood by the door. His arms crossed. His look arrogant. He had reason to be. The Palace was just that, a Palace. “This room is amazing.”

You look amazing in it, Troy thought. He’d watched Serena walk around the floor. One night in the room was worth more than her daily rate, but he wanted her here. Close. His place of residence took up the remaining floors of the tower. He slept just above her.

He’d missed her. Fighting with her in the elevator up had been like old times. He’d known Serena since grade school. They’d gone everywhere and had done everything together, until college. Troy had started hanging out with the other students in his major, and whenever he’d brought Serena around, they’d did nothing but tell Troy how hot she was. At first, he hadn’t believed

then. To him, Serena had just looked like… Serena. But the more his friends talked, the more he started to see what they saw. She'd been cute back then, but no one could deny how beautiful the woman in front of him was.

He hadn't been able to take his eyes off of her, not since he'd found her in Elliot's office. She was in the room with him, his eyes would follow her. The dress she wore stopped at her knees, exposing his eyes to a pair of gorgeous legs. He'd always loved her color. Her skin had a natural tan. Troy had loved touching her skin. He'd almost felt as though he'd owned it for a moment in time.

He walked over to where she still stood by the door. Troy held out her the key card. "Only you and I have access to this floor. The key will also get you into all the public and employee rooms."

Serena took the key and placed it on the nightstand. She then looked up into Troy's eyes. She caught her breath, their lust so vivid. Serena nervously bit her lip. His eyes went there, staring at her mouth.

Serena took a step back and fell on the bed. "Troy-"

Troy placed a thumb against her lips, cupping her face, silencing her. He tilted her chin up and then replaced his thumb with her lips.

Serena was instantly lost, surprised at her level of want. After all these years. After what he'd done to her. He licked her lips, snuffing out any negative thought of the past. All that mattered was the now.

"Serena," Troy's voice came out in a deep whisper.

Serena's lips parted. He took full advantage. He placed his faces on either side of the bed, sinking into it. His mouth pushed her backwards. Serena's head hit the mattress. A moan escaped her lips.

Troy hands roamed over her curves. Serena sighed as his tongue invaded her mouth. His hand rubbed the material over one of her breasts. His fingers stroked her until her nipples hardened. Serena let out another moan as she began to push herself into his hand. He stayed there for a moment, working her hardened pebble, causing tortured sounds to rip from Serena's throat.

Serena grabbed his head, deepening the kiss. She felt him push a knee between her legs. They parted. He freehand inched up her thigh, uncovering more of her flesh as he did. He reached his target. His finger rubbed once against her sensitive bud through her silk panty. Serena broke the kiss as her

body shot off the bed. He rubbed it again. Serena pushed herself against his hand, wanting more. Troy answered her call.

He slid a finger past her panty line and entered her. The then withdrew it. He held it his drenched finger. He looked at her. A grin on his face. “You’re quite wet for a man you can’t remember.” His grin grew. He’d been referring to her comment from earlier.

Serena tried to push Troy off, but he wouldn’t budge. “Is this a game to you?”

Troy took his coated finger and put it into his mouth. “Not at all.” His eyes grew serious then. Their dark depths making heat pool in Serena’s between her thighs. Troy dropped to his knees off the bed. He placed both of his hands around Serena’s bare thighs and pulled her body to the edge. His face positioned at their juncture, he inhaled her womanly scent. Serena shuddered.

He placed her thighs over his wide shoulders, took her panties in both of his hands, and ripped the flimsy material apart. Serena sucked in a breath just as Troy slide his heavy tongue across her lower lips. Serena’s eyes drifted close as a cry of ecstasy past her lips. It had been so long since she’d felt the way. It was almost too much to bear.

But Troy held her in place, licking up her feminine dew. She tasted good. It was almost like a high. He left light headed, possessed. This was what Serena did to him. She probably thought that he was in control, but it was just the opposite. Her moans, her soft sighs, the way her body purred for him, made rule over his mind. Serena controlled him. It was why he’d had to let her go. It was why he couldn’t commit. No other woman was her and Serena had more power than she knew. He couldn’t let her in on her power.

Troy’s mouth worked her over, tasting her with his tongue, playing with her most sensitive parts. His hands roamed upward. This fingers massaging her as they moved. Her dress ended up over her breast. He trailed his fingers over her black bra’s lace. Using his thumbs, he brushed her nipples repeatedly, waking them.

Serena’s cries grew. She grabbed his shoulders, preparing herself for what she knew would come. With one final flick of his tongue, she exploded, her thighs tightened around his head as she convulsed. When she came down she was out of breath.

Troy stood then. His blue eyes were almost the color of the night sky.

He took off his coat. His shirt followed then, leaving his chest bare to her. He climbed on the bed. As he got close, Serena leaned up and slid her tongue across his nipple. He shuddered. He looked into her eye and smiled. “I see you’ve learned new tricks since we last met.”

Serena locked her legs around his. In a twist of the hip, she flipped him over, straddling him then. Troy’s eyes grew wide. So did Serena’s smile. “Perhaps.”

Her hands went to his belt. She had it off in seconds. The button and zipper followed. In a few yanks, Serena yanked both his pants and briefs off. She held her prize in her hands. She heard air hiss through Troy’s teeth and she began to stroke his velvety skin, the muscle underneath it was strong, causing his large member to stand erect. Just touching him this way was making Serena hazy with need. She couldn’t wait anymore. No more foreplay.

Serena reached behind her and unzipped her dress. The material joined his on the floor. Serena moved up higher over him. Lifting slightly, she angled him at her entrance. She then slowly brought her body down, inviting him into her folds, inch by inch.

She felt so soft. So wet. So tight. It took everything Troy had not to shoot off. He took deep breaths, slowing down his breathing. His sweet little Serena. How could she do this to him? When she finally had him fully imbedded into her, she stopped, staring him in the eyes. Something flickered behind her hazel eyes. Desire? Possession? She did posses him. She just didn’t know.

Troy reached for her hips, but Serena swatted his hands away. Her hips moved then. Small circles at first, then they grew. Soon, she was riding him, sliding her slick folds down over his solid member over and over again. Each time she came down, Troy left a little bit of his soul leave him.

He touched her hips, flipping her over, placing himself in the driver’s seat.

Troy set a fast pace. Loud cries ripped from Serena’s throat with each deep stroke. Troy reached forward, unclasping her bra. Serena breast spilt out. It bounced along with his hammering speed, tempting Troy. He couldn’t resist. He leaned forward, taking one of her erect nipples into his mouth. Serena moans just before she flipped them again, placing herself back in control. Troy’s hand roamed her soft flesh. He felt the build up begin. A fever spread in the stomach, spreading to his lower limbs. He was going to come. He had to stop her. He forgot a condom.

Troy grabbed Serena hips just as she leaned down. She licked Troy across his tender nipple again. His lips parted. He rocked inside of her, coming hard, his hands gripping her roughly as he surrendered, emptying himself deep in her womb. When he was done, he looked into her eyes. There was a grin on her face. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. Panic began to arise in him. Serena climbed up his body and kissed him passionately, extinguishing all thought.

Serena rolled off of Troy's body and skipped to the bathroom. She felt wonderful. Her body hummed with satisfaction. She knew she would. Serena refused to think about tomorrow. Tonight, she felt amazing. In the bathroom, Serena glanced at herself in the mirror. She looked like a woman who'd just been made love to. She turned on the sinks faucet and splashed cold water on her face. She came back up. Her eyes met Troy's threw the mirror.

Serena smiled at him. Troy didn't return it. "We need to talk."

Damn, already? Serena could feel herself coming down from her high. She turned toward him. Troy stood there in bold nudity. He leaned against the entrance, confident in himself. Serena tried to keep her eyes levelled with his. "What's up?" A robe hung nearby. She put it on; as if she could hide in it, cover up her deep feelings in the soft fabric.

"I didn't wear a condom."

Serena heard the statement, but it took a moment to sink in. She sighed and waved Troy off, realizing what Troy was implying. "I'm on the pill."

Troy nodded his head. He sighed. Serena watched the news brighten his mood. He strolled over to her. Standing toe to toe, he grabbed her arms. "Good, because you getting pregnant would have been bad."

Serena tilted her head. Her eyes narrowed. For some reason, his comment made her panic. "Why? What would you have done if I were?"

Troy looked away, giving her words great thought. When he looked back at her, he was still confused. "I honestly don't know." He smiled. "But it doesn't matter. You're on the pill right?"

Serena moved out of his arms. Her heart raced and she felt lightheaded. "Would you have asked me to get an abortion?'

Troy tried reaching for her, but Serena avoided him. His mood grew serious. "Serena, I didn't say I would."

But he didn't deny it. Serena placed a small hand against the marble

counter. She looked up into Troy's eyes, trying to see the boy she grew up with, but couldn't find him. The person that stood in front of her was a man. Probably the same man she'd slept with ten years ago. This was the man she loved? He was so beautiful, but something dark lived inside of him. What had happened? She didn't want to know. She didn't care. "You need to leave."

Troy's head whipped back. Shocked. "What?" He was probably not used to being dismissed. Well, there was always a first. Just looking at him made her sick. Serena started for the bedroom. She grabbed his clothes and headed for the front door. He followed. "Serena, you need to calm down."

Serena scoffed. She swung the door open. "Get out, Troy."

Troy stood there in front of the open door and wondered what the hell had just happened. He didn't worry about his nudity. Only he and Serena had access to this floor. So, he stood there, trying to figure the woman in front of him out.

Troy shook his head. He grabbed his clothes from her, making sure to avoid her hands. "When you calm down, come find me." He stepped out into the hall and heard the door close behind him. What the hell? He quickly dressed and headed for the elevator. He hadn't said he'd ask her to get an abortion; he'd just been honest about not wanting one at the moment. Babies were great, but Troy still had so much to do.

Chapter Six

“We’ve changed the locks and employee key cards. Now, whenever someone enters an administrative room, their name and the time of their entry will go on record.”

Madrick and Serena were sitting on a lounger by the pool, following a valet. The young man had been present at most of the incidences, but something about him didn’t feel right to either Madrick or Selena. The kid was just that, a kid. Could he really have the skills to destroy a resort?

The kid made his way around the pool. He pulled on the collar of his white polo. It was hot. It was Miami. The weather was nothing new.

Serena looked over at Madrick. Today he wore khakis, but his shirt and boots were will black. His entire wardrobe seemed to be a mixture of 007 and G.I. Joe. A pair of dark shades sat on his face. “It’s been strangely quiet since your arrival,” Madrick continued.

He was right. Not one incident had occurred since her arrival. Serena had interviewed everyone that had been on the scene for the incidence. She hadn’t alerted anyone to the fact that she was indeed a private investigator. She’d just come off as a chatty guest, wanting to know the ins and outs of everything. But… “Maybe someone knows why I’m here.”

Madrick’s men were helping, yet we’d all come up empty handed. July fourth was tomorrow and Serena suspected that if someone else was going to go wrong, it would either today or tomorrow. If someone really wanted to ruin Troy, that would be the way to go. If they were able to pull something off while the resort would be packed, then they were sure to dampen Troy’s profits.

“Or, maybe you’re this places good luck charm,” Madrick smiled her way.

Serena shook her head. “I highly doubt it.”

Madrick head was still turned in her direction, but she couldn’t see his eyes. “So, what’s up with you and Troy?”

Blunt much? Serena narrowed her honey colored eyes at him. “I fail to

see how that's relevant to our jobs."

"It's not, but since we're all going to be a big family soon."

Serena looked puzzle. "What are you talking about?"

He'd leaned up on his elbow. "Me and Paris. We're getting married. Did you know?"

Serena laughed. She'd been hanging out with Paris almost every night since her arrival. Serena had asked her friend about her romance with Madrick. The answer had been plain. "I think you've got your wires mixed up. Paris is not marrying you."

Madrick's smile never wavered. "No, but I'm slowly wearing her down."

Serena smiled. She didn't doubt it. She'd seen the way Paris had blushed the night she'd danced with Madrick. "I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

Madrick rose from his chair. Their target was moving. "Catch you later, sister-in-law."

Serena shook her head at his departing broad back. Life was a crazy ride. She couldn't imagine what it feels to have a man like that want her that bad. But she didn't want Madrick, she wanted Troy.

Serena stood up then and went to sit by the pool. Her feet were immediately cooled by the chlorine water. While Madrick was focusing his attention on employees, Serena was now focusing more of her time on the guest who seemed to never leave. There were a few wealthy people who'd looked to have decided to stay at the resort for the entire summer. Serena didn't even want to know how much that was costing them.

"This is magnificent."

"I'm glad you think so," a deep voice responded. A voice that's warmth battled the Miami heat.

Serena didn't have to look over to know where the voice had come from. Troy. She hadn't seen him since she kicked him out of her room. She didn't want to move, knowing it might alert Troy to her presents.

"The Palace is a fine resort, but you're going to have some serious competition once my resort is complete in the next few months. But for now, I'll take one of finest rooms." The man with Troy had a laugh in his voice.

Just listening to him speak, Serena could tell he was older. She looked over her shoulder then. The man was large. Round. Rings sat around his thick fingers. He had serious money. Yet, so did Troy, but Troy didn't need to wear a ton of jewellery to let people know. Just standing in the same room as the man was enough to feel his power.

He wore a suit. White. A light blue shirt complimented his eyes, making them glow like diamonds. His eyes turned towards her. Serena stopped breathing. The man he was with looked her way as well. Without thinking, Serena jumped into the chilly waters of the pool. She swam to the other side, not coming up for air until she was on the other side.

When she turned back around, Troy and the man were gone. She sighed and climbed out.

"Running from me now?"

Serena looked up from her position on the pool stairs. Troy held out a towel for her, she took it, but what she wouldn't take what the bait. Serena wouldn't take about their relationship, or the nonexistence of it. "Who was that guy?" She asked, changing the subject.

She saw a fight build in his eyes before her past. "That's Carl Fletcher. He's building a resort not too far down the strip from this one."

Serena wiped her face with the towel. She looked into Troy's eyes. His face was unreadable. There were no emotions. It was as if nothing had happened between them. She hoped her face showed the same, but doubted it.

She started to walk towards a bar. Troy followed, not saying much. It made her very aware of her state of undress. Her red bikini was simple, but very revealing. "Do you think he could have something to do with what's going on?" They'd made it to the bar. Serena ordered water. For some reason, her throat felt dry.

Troy took one of the bar seats next to her. "I don't think so, but anything is possible. Have you found anything yet?"

Serena sighed. "No, not yet." She, Madrick, and his team had been putting their work in, but had seen no results. It sucked to not have anything to show so far.

Troy sighed as well. "I have a feeling that all hell might break loose tomorrow. I don't want anyone to get hurt. Maybe I should hire more security, just for the holidays."

“Sounds like a good idea.”

There was a moment of silence.

Then Troy whispered low enough for no one to hear. “I would never ask you to get an abortion.” His eyes were very serious.

Serena looked away. “I rather not talk about this here.” She didn’t want to talk about it, especially in a public place.

“Have dinner with me tonight.” He’d said it as a statement, but he was asking. Serena could hear it. And so, she thought about what answer she would give. What was there to discuss? She loved him. He didn’t love her. The end. Case closed. Nothing would change that.

Troy grabbed Serena’s hand. He didn’t say anything until her tawny eyes met his. When her head did turn towards his, he brought his head close to hers. His voice was low. “I miss us.”

Serena’s looked up at him in confusion.

Troy continued. “We were friends longer than we weren’t. Don’t you remember? We shouldn’t have to throw it away because of simple lust.”

Serena looked away. She would have laughed if it didn’t hurt. Troy didn’t know. How could he? She’d never told him. Maybe that was the problem. She looked up at him. “It’s not just lust, Troy.”

This time, Troy’s handsome face held the confusion.

Serena shook her head. “I love you. I don’t know when it started, but it started long before we had sex. I have always loved you.” If Troy had been confused before, he was surely confused now. His mind was still trying to work out the details when he opened his mouth to speak. But Serena stopped him. A single manicured finger pressed to his firm lips. “Don’t say anything,” Serena pleaded. “I just wanted you to know.”

Strangely, a feeling of ease seeped from Serena’s body. It was as though a burden had been lifted off her shoulders. He knew. Her little secret was out. It no longer controlled her, scared her.

She stepped back. Her hand left his lips. She stepped into the sun, no longer hidden in the shadow of the bar’s cabana.

Troy puzzled look hadn’t changed.

A small smile touched Serena lips. “I can’t be your friend, Troy.” Her arms went up in a ‘I’m sorry’ gesture.

Serena turned then, spotting her target. The older woman was on the move. So was Serena. She left.

Leaving Troy behind.

Chapter Seven

Troy watched her go, hating himself for watching the red triangle of fabric move across her tan, plush flesh. He took a breather and retreated to his office. Serena loved him. The news made him feel… stupid. How had he not known? All the times they'd hung out together and he'd never known. He was normally good at catching on to a woman's feelings. Serena wasn't the first person who'd said 'I love you' to him. Over the years, he'd probably heard it or seen it in the eyes of one of his sexual partners around a dozen times. It was the reason that he tried to end relations quickly. One night stands were normally his style. No mess. No confusion. But, it hadn't gone that way with Serena. One taste of her hadn't been enough. He'd spend an entire week in her bed, but in the end, the outcome had been the same. Except, Serena's confession had done something to him.

Troy grabbed his chest, remembering the feeling he'd gotten when the words had left her lips. I love you. The phase was so common that it rarely meant anything, but those three little words had rocked him.

Idly, Troy picked up one of his office trinkets from his desk. He moved the rock shaped object around in his hand. Troy stood there, as a question popped into his head. The question he'd been trying to ignore. *How do you feel about her?*

Anger. Troy threw the rock across the room. It hit his office door, the blow causing a whole. He'd have to get that fixed. But it felt good. How dare she? In one breath she confessed her love. In the next, she's giving him ultimatums. Either love her back or lose her forever. She couldn't be her friend. She was willing to throw away a lifelong friendship over feelings?

Rounding the desk, Troy took a seat. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. He didn't have time for this. There was someone out to get him. He needed to deal with that. Anything else was a distraction that needed to be eliminated. He'd avoid Serena for the rest of her stay. Hopefully, by tomorrow, the mystery would be solved.

Chapter Eight

The hotel was a buzz. The sun was setting. The Palace had officially hosted its first Fourth of July extravaganza. A large party had been held on the beach. The music had set a lively mood. The food had been amazing, and everyone had had a great time. Nothing had gone wrong, but the night wasn't over. As soon as it got dark, the real show would start. Fireworks would light the sky, making The Palace the coastlines glittering attraction.

Serena crossed her fingers hoping all would go well.

She wore a white off shoulder dress. The fabric flowed around her, stopping at her ankles. The lacy fabric had blocked most of the sun, but the material had allowed Serena to still feel the wind. Sandals in hand, she left the beach area, passing by the outdoor hand floor, pools, and bars, heading straight for the indoors. There was a room that held the fireworks. She wanted to make sure nothing went wrong.

Once inside, she breathed in the air conditioning. The indoors were practically bare. Everyone was outside. Walking down an empty hall, she heard voices she recognized. Elliot Higgins stepped out of a room. When he spotted her, he hesitated, but just for a moment. Serena wasn't too sure she saw it. It's been so quick if it indeed had happened, but now his face wore a bright smile.

When she reached him, she glanced at the door. The number read '101'.

"Just checking on a guest is all," he began. "Are you ready for the big show?" His eyebrows wiggled. He was referring to the fireworks.

Serena returned his smile. "Almost. I'm just checking to make sure everything is alright for the night."

"I'm sure it is," he said. Elliot then headed towards the direction Serena had come from. "See you outside." He threw over his shoulder.

Then he was gone.

Serena rounded a corner that brought her to the entrance to the office corridor. Paris stood there, a tablet in her hand. She was not dressed for the beach at all. A man was with her. A construction worker. He was fixing the door. It had been broken into. "What happened?"

Paris shrugged, but panic was in her eyes. “No idea, but someone obviously needed to get into the office space, but didn’t have a key.”

Serena narrowed her eyes. She didn’t want to believe that Paris was involved, but she had to be on the safe side. “Why do you look so nervous?”

Paris stepped away from the construction guy. He hadn’t looked away from his work on the door. When Paris was only a few inches away, she whispered. “I didn’t want to tell you earlier, but bad things have been happening around here. Before you came, things went missing and machines broke down at random.” She looked worried. “I just don’t want anything to happen on Troy’s big day.”

Serena read her eyes. Paris was nervous because she cared. So did Serena. “I’m not an accountant.”

Paris stared blankly at Serena. “I know.”

Serena looked surprised. “You do? How?”

Paris’ look switched to one that was more condescending. “Serena, you hate maths.” Paris rolled her eyes. “You think I forgot? I just assumed you didn’t want to tell me what you really did, because you were embarrassed.” She ended her statement with an eye roll and a smile.

Serena smiled too. “I’m not embarrassed. I’m a P.I. and I’ve been hired to find out what’s been going on in the hotel.”

A sharp brow lifted on Paris’ face. “Now that, I believe.”

The two friends smiled.

“All done here,” the construction worker said. “I even put one of those new fancy locks on it. We didn’t put those in the original construction, but I figured it out.”

Serena looked at the man. She guessed him to be in his late forties.

Paris introduced him. “This is Sam. He was one of the men on site while The Palace was being built.”

Serena shook his hand. “So, you know your way around electric, I guess?” Serena didn’t think he was the culprit, but at the moment, she was desperate.

Sam laughed. “You guys should know. You call our company every few days with a question.”

Paris looked puzzled. “We’ve never called you.”

Sam nodded his head. “Well not you, but that Elliot guy. He’s asked about washers and door locks, and all sorts of things. The guy seems dedicated. Even when The Palace had been nothing but concrete and metal, he was there, asking questions, wanting to learn everything about the hotel.”

Paris found that odd, but Serena didn’t. She turned to Paris. “Who’s staying in room 101?”

Paris looked down at her tablet. “Carl Fletcher.”

Bingo.

Elliot was her guy. He must have been working for Mr. Fletcher all along. Before Serena could voice her findings, a voice came up behind her.

“What’s going on here?” It was Troy.

Serena turned around. She smiled. He didn’t return it. She didn’t care. She hadn’t seen him in days, but none of that mattered at the moment, because she knew that in the next few minutes, Troy would be doing a lot more than just smiling. He’d feel relieved.

Chapter Nine

Troy felt like crap. The Palace was saved, the fireworks had gone off without a hitch, and Elliot Higgins and Carl Fletcher were going to jail. It was the perfect ending to a perfect day. And yet…

Troy saw a shadow move just as someone came to stand next to him. It was his father. The two men stood at Troy's balcony. After the firework show, the party downstairs had started up again. It was past midnight and still going on. Troy's parents had been too tired to drive back to their home, so they were crashing at his resort. Eliza was no doubt asleep.

Francis turned towards Troy. "What's going on in that head of yours?"

Troy laughed to himself, but there was no humor in it. Not really. "I guess I'm just tired."

"I keep telling you to slow down-"

Troy's hands shot up. "Not now, dad."

"Troy, listen to me."

Troy turned his head and looked at his old man. He didn't say anything. He knew that if he let Francis have his say, then the conversation would end quicker. So, he shut his mouth.

Francis heaved a sigh. "The day I filed for bankruptcy… I thought it was the end of the world."

Troy remembered that day. He'd been about to graduate high school. He was going to college to start new life just when it seemed like his old one was crumbling. His parents were broke. The stock market had crashed. Every dollar her father had invested was gone. His mother had never held a job, so they had nothing to fall back on. His parents had lost everything. They'd been forced to lean on friends while they figured out their finances. They'd done that for years.

If Troy hadn't had a full ride scholarship at the time, he probably wouldn't have been able to go to college, but seeing his parents in a state of helplessness had broken his heart. After that moment, he'd become determined to never let that happen again. Troy had become rich. He'd paid back all of his parent's loans, got them a bigger, better house, and even managed to give

money back to every friend they'd ever asked a dime for. His parents would never have to depend on anyone else for as long as he lived.

Francis' words broke into Troy's thoughts. "But, with all of that. If I hadn't had your mother, I would have been lost."

Troy straightened then. "But you couldn't provide for her. Did that bother you?"

Francis didn't blink an eye. "Of course, it bothered me. I'd been the provider for our family for so long. It hurt that I had to ask anyone for anything. But your mother was there for me, Troy. Eliza's love got me through the toughest time of my life. Troy, you can have all the money in the world, but if you don't have love, you have nothing."

Troy thought on his father's words for a moment. He turned back towards the rail. Faint drifts of the music's below reached his ear. The people were having a good time because of him. He'd done it. Normally once Troy had succeeded at something, there was a feeling of utopia. Whether he was closing a deal or won a bid on new project, there was always joy that came with it. The feeling was so good; he could almost reach out and touch it.

But that feeling what's there at the moment and he knew why.

"You and Serena seemed pretty close the other day," Francis began.

Troy never thought he'd have this conversation with his father. It seemed strange. Serena was, well, used to be his friend. "We were," was all Troy said. His father had shared a little bit more about his emotions. No reason why Troy couldn't share a little of his.

"Do you love her?"

Troy ran his fingers through his hair. "Maybe. Yes. I don't know."

"Don't be stupid, Troy."

Francis' anger caught Troy off guard. He didn't allow Troy to butt in before he continued. "I don't know what you did to make the girl go away the first time, but if you lose her again, you're going to regret it. You want to make more money? You want to take on the world? You're going to need an ally. You're going to need someone that still loves you enough to put up with your crap. Serena saved your ass today and if you let her, she'll continue to save your ass. A good woman does." When he was done, Francis just stared at Troy.

Troy stared back.

There was silence.

Francis crossed his arms. “Well, what are you waiting for? Do I have to hold your hand through it or what?”

Troy smiled then. He shook his head. He gave his father one more look before heading out of the door.

Chapter Ten

Serena and Paris were in the party at last. The music was loud and everyone around them was having the time of their life. Out of nowhere, Madrick appeared behind Paris. His hands instantly moving around her hips. His touch made Paris jump, but she was happy to see him, even though her face showed annoyance. But soon, Paris' cold exterior melted. Seemed Madrick had a magic touch.

The couple slowly slid away, leaving Serena alone in the crowd. Sadness settled in Serena just before arms went around her. In shock, she turned.

It was Troy.

His eyes were as intense as the beat of the music. In an instant, she was thrown over his shoulder. The lift, flawless. There had been so strain. Serena tried to remove his arms from around her, but failed. If she were completely honest with herself, she could say that she hadn't really tired. It didn't mean Troy had to know. "What are you doing?" Serena shouted over the music.

He didn't answer her until they were a safe distance from the crowd. He put her down once the stood in front of the doors leading to the resorts entrance. "Why are you mad at me?"

Serena studied him. "I'm not mad at you anymore. Honestly, I was mad at myself." Serena crossed her arms under her chest. "I knew you wouldn't give me what I wanted, but I still wanted you."

Troy took a step towards her. "What do you want, Serena?" He brought his arms back around her, pulling her close. "I'll give you whatever you want."

Staring into his eyes was almost enough to make Serena cry. He didn't get it. "You can't afford to give it me."

"Let me decide what I can afford."

Serena dropped her arms and squared her shoulders. "I want you to love me."

Troy grinned. "Too late for that. I already do love you. What else do you want?"

Serena's copper eyes widened. She was lost for words.

Troy wasn't. His hands moved up her arms and gently cupped her face. "What do you want, Serena?" He whispered. His breath brushed Serena's lips. They parted. Troy placed a soft kiss on her lips. "I already love you. Do you want to be with me forever? Do you want to wake up next to me and watch sunsets in my arms for the rest of her life?" He placed another kiss on her lips. This one a little deeper.

Serena sighed. Her arms gripped his shirt. She didn't understand. Where was all of this coming from? "Why now?" She asked, willing to break the magic that was happening between them. She wanted everything Troy was offering, but didn't understand what had changed his mind. "Do you only love me because I saved your resort?" She had to know.

Troy looked into her eyes and smiled. "No, Serena. I've loved you for a long time. You just scare the hell out of me."

That surprised her. "What do you mean?"

Troy placed a small kiss on her forehead, both cheeks, and nose. "From the first time I touched you, I knew that you would always have a tie to my heart, but I wasn't ready to give any of myself to anyone. I needed to be in control of my destiny. I couldn't afford distractions."

Serena wrapped her hands around Troy's, but she didn't move them from the side of her face. There were tears in her eyes. "Troy, I would never stop you from being successful. I want to help you succeed at anything and everything you set your mind to. You have to know that. It's all I've ever wanted."

Troy stared at her. Serena was right. She'd always been supportive of him. She wouldn't have held him back. She probably would have made him better. He'd wasted so many years without her by his side. He wouldn't waste anymore.

Troy dropped his hand. He then dropped to his knee. "Serena, marry me."

Serena looked down into his eyes. He was serious. The moment was too much for her. She choked. She dropped to her knees then, joining him in the sidewalk. Her arms went around him them. His arms encircled her as well. Serena didn't need to voice her answer. There was only one her heart to let her give. Yes.

The Comparing Game

Escape The Comparing Paradigm And Be Your True Self

Grace Scott

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Introduction

**** Before Reading This Book ****

Please >>Click Here<<

I Have A Very **important Message** For You!

When Albert Einstein publicized his theories of general and special relativity, our understanding of our own universe escalated beyond the wildest imaginations of scientists and visionaries at the time. The reason for this was that instead of trying to explain mechanisms of the universe through an arbitrary process of evaluation, Einstein put the spotlight on all the dynamics of our forces by comparing them to each other. Energy, mass, gravity, and hundreds of other similar physical forces suddenly found new meaning respective to each other. Einstein may have been the genius behind a modern understanding of our world, but the concept he applied to his work is centuries old.

Comparison is the cornerstone on which human beings develop their definitions of success and failure, and it is the scale we all use to ensure that we understand our own actions and desires. The fact of the matter is that our society functions by setting goals that are meant to supersede others. We only understand another person's actions in relevance to our own and we attach personal opinions to everything for this very reason.

This is not the fault of any one individual; it is the foundation upon which entire communities are built. How does an average student hunt for a good university begin? Higher education institutions are ranked according to their compared assets and services. A university is considered 'good' by marking it up to a 'bad' one. High school graduates spend their days attaching their self-worth and goals to a degree that must come from a reputable university. Why? This is, amongst other reasons, to compare themselves with their fellow classmates, friends, and family and on a broader scale, their very generation.

All decisions we make for ourselves are the result of a comparison we make between what we think is right for us and what isn't, and it goes much farther

than that. We chose everything we own by comparing it to what others do. We make our choices based on the methods we believe are best at fitting in to a competitive society and when all is said and done, we review the results of our ‘life’ by pitting them against those of everybody else.

A simple more relevant example here is the recent phenomena of social networking sites, while these sites parade around as a means of contact and friendship; they are actually a method through which people keep tabs on their friends and acquaintances. As soon as a user logs in, they are referred to pages full of latest updates collected from friends’ profiles.

Thus, as soon as one is logged on, they begin seeing and judging what is going on with other people’s lives and immediately compares their own selves to it. People see new photos uploaded by their acquaintances. They see other people post about their recent activities (usually positive) and immediately start a mental checklist designed to breed comparison. It is often said that one should never compare the ‘behind-the-scenes’ of their life to somebody else’s highlight reel, and that is exactly what social media websites are.

People are rarely honest on such social media sites. They are more concerned with presenting an image of themselves constructed entirely of comparison. The major concerns are always that their life may seem ‘uninteresting’ or ‘colourless’ compared to another’s. This is a complex that continues to grow as we become more interconnected with people.

It is no coincidence that society’s issues and concerns have become increasingly unique and frivolous with the advancement of social technology; the more people begins to learn about each other, the more they compare their life’s progress to another. Of course, comparison and contempt are age-old characteristics of human nature, they existed before the dawn of overpowering technology and they will continue to exist beyond. The irony is that everyone is making the same mistake without realizing it.

If we take a step back from social media and foray into real life, we’ll find countless more examples of our own rigid dependence on comparison. Men

are stereotypically seen as car enthusiasts, they are also still considered the original breadwinners of the gendered society despite the onset of second and third wave feminism. So it is natural that the job status of the average man and the car that an average man drives is more privy to public speculation than his female counterparts.

However, times have changed and modern, educated women today are equally concerned and competitive about their career prospects. An individual who is financially secure but employed at a local firm and driving a Volvo has no material reason to be unhappy. Essentially, he/she is fulfilling his/her role by being steadily employed and owning a few assets. However, the Volvo driver might compare himself against his neighbour, who might be two years younger and driving a Lexus while working at a multinational firm. Their lives are not connected in any way. They may not even be acquainted, but they both attach a considerable portion of their self-worth to each other's respective success.

The Lexus driver is well aware of the fact that he drives a Lexus and regardless of personality, he will feel a measure of contentment every time he sees a car less expensive than his own across the street. Both will continue to lead their lives and do little to change the path they are on, but a part of them will stay consistently attached to the fact that despite living in the same neighbourhood, one of them is able to afford a Lexus and the other isn't. The difference in their cars will then go on to represent the difference in their jobs, their financial situation and, eventually, how they perceive their own happiness. Behavioural psychology suggests that the Volvo driver will probably consider his or herself generally less happy than the Lexus driver and for all we know, the Lexus driver is a suicidal sociopath, but then again, the comparison goes on.

Even more prevalent than comparisons of material possessions, are comparisons of self-esteem and physical image. It's the comparison we make most frequently and with least self-awareness. Beauty and admirable physical qualities have become part and parcel of social success. In fact, individuals most influencing our society today are the ones best known for their natural and synthetic beauty. Every advertisement we walk by today features an airbrushed-yet-attractive model. Every actress and singer young girls and boys

admire today have a look that is emulated by fans worldwide.

These are the messages passed on to us by the world we live in, so as certain people take on the responsibility of listening to such messages, comparisons go far and wide. We are obsessed with our appearance and how we come to judge our appearance depends on how we judge others. The changes we make in ourselves are intended to reflect an image that we believe we should have, simply because it reflects someone else we deem more attractive than ourselves. It’s a vicious cycle, and a relentless one.

Chapter 1: Why do we compare?

The Race

Consider the participants at a 1000m obstacle relay race. Everyone begins at the starting line and is required to complete the same task with a partners to hand the relay off to and hurdles to jump over. The objective of the race is simple; the one who comes in first is the winner and everyone else takes their spot amongst the ‘losers’. We objectify our lives according to a very similar set of rules; the term ‘rat race’ didn’t originate from nothing, after all.

We have all been born and will one day die. These are the ‘starting’ and ‘finishing’ lines within which we exist. Despite everyone being handed their own set of obstacles and their own partners and support in life, at the end of it all, we still see ourselves as contenders within a race. A race that must be either won or at least completed without us being the last person to cross the line.

Life is never so simple and not nearly as mundane, but we make it out to be so. The dynamics at play on every level of society are just versions of each other. There are those that are ahead and winning and those desperately trying to catch up, and finally those who gave up a long time ago. Despite the fact that success, failure, happiness, and contentment are all states of being that do not fit any perfect definition, our society places importance on the black and white aspects of life since it is the only way to evaluate our progress. We cannot go in to the mind of others, so we create our judgements by observing what we sees; money, beauty and assets are the instant indicators of

‘happiness’, and it is upon those generalizations that personal evaluations are created.

It is not uncommon or even abnormal to compare ourselves to others, but it is still debatable how healthy a practice it really is. On a certain level, our inclination towards comparison is representative of our desire to be better than we are and to fit into a select group of people that symbolize everything we want to become. Certainly there are those who reap great benefit from trying to measure up to standards others have set, but such individuals are never content and are rarely happy.

Hypothetically speaking, there are no particular measures of potential. Nobody is perfectly aware of what they are capable of achieving, and that is the fundamental reason behind everybody’s constant need to compare. We all seem to think that because we are all born in to the same world, everything we do is comparable to that done by everyone else. We forget to take into account the fact that we all have different raw materials to start with and if there were a correct way to live, it would be to make the most of what we are given.

Fitting In

As mentioned previously, the ‘comparison gene’ exists to help us gain entry in to a group of people. That is what it is all really about; fitting in. We begin wanting to fit in when we become emotionally aware of people around us. We make friends and acquaintances and gain awareness about the various relationship dynamics that exist around us and we subconsciously categorise people into groups depending on whether we want to fit in with them or not.

Once these guidelines are established, our actions adhere to a set of rules; what haircut to maintain, what watch to wear, which brands of food to eat, how much money to spend on clothes, and what grades to aim for. Discipline, grace, and all social graces we pick up are passed down by this fictitious group

of people that has set the standards for society around us. The inner battle we rage against ourselves begins at the playground and stays with us until our deathbed. Every milestone that we consider is essentially just a fulfilment of one more step towards becoming the person we think we should be.

Why do we celebrate our new jobs? Why do we feel happy when we lose a few pounds? Why do we want our children to get the best grades in their class?

More importantly; why do we not celebrate overcoming the flu? Why don't we feel ecstatic when our family tries to cheer us up if we fail an exam? Why don't we rejoice when the plumber replaces our rusty drain with a brand new one?

The answers to these questions are not absolute, but the theory behind them is. We all want our children to receive the best grades because we don't want anybody else's child to be better. We celebrate getting a better job because better employment supplies a greater income and having more money means having more money than *somebody else*, or coming closer to having nearly as much money as *somebody else*. Subsequently, we don't care about getting through the flu because it is not an achievement, being able to recover from minor illnesses doesn't make us better than anybody.

We expect our drains to be perfectly functioning and having a rusty drain doesn't bring us any closer to becoming that entity we so admire. Therefore, we place little to no importance on the minorities of our lives. Little do we know that having a clogged drain may well be a great depressant in the life of somebody far wealthier than ourselves, nor does it matter. The mental checklist that we have carried around through our lives - the one that dictates our supposed success in our minds – is strict, absolute, and the only one we care about.

Our uncontrollable urge to quantify our progress, in time, becomes the controlling force of action on our own personal scale. We begin to measure ourselves against others. In the relay race of life, we spend more time looking

around at the other contenders than focusing on running steadily ahead and moving closer to the finish line. We fail to understand that the finish line exists within our very selves.

Chapter 2: The Negative Impact Of Comparison

Now that we have developed a rather basic appreciation of our motives for comparison, let's move forward and consider the impact(s) of such thought and action. If we are to accept the theory that all actions have consequences, then in this chapter we will operate under the assumption that our thoughts have consequences too. Rather, our thoughts and ideas have manifestations that greatly impact our mental health and emotional wellbeing.

If ever there were a guaranteed no-win situation in life, it would be meaningless comparison. The undeniable truth is that there will always be somebody who is 'better', more successful, more attractive, and more powerful. If our own potential is limitless, then so is everybody else's.

The elementary problem with comparison – and the one we must constantly remind ourselves of- is that it is an entirely fruitless endeavour. There is never going to be a level we will reach that will signify a complete and utter fulfilment of life's purposes. Let us analyze this phenomenon by attaching it to three important personality traits that we all have in differing quantities; contentment, pride, and motivation. We will use these to explain our need to compare. Take a watch for example, a simple item that is used daily by individuals everywhere. Yet, a watch is capable of representing so much more than just time.

Contentment

Contentment should be a personal goal, people should understand what it will take for them to reach a place where they can go to bed satisfied and wake up every morning with a similar sense of satisfaction. However, our current state of affairs is pathetically different; we seek contentment in all the wrong places and are shocked when we do not find it. The relationships, the items and the things we aim to acquire in life are almost always dependent upon what we see around us.

On a small scale, we notice an acquaintance wearing a beautiful watch and immediately begin to covet it because it is better than the one we own, or maybe it is something we don't own at all. If we cannot afford the watch, we will spend more and more time lamenting over the fact that we don't have the means to buy one. If we can afford one, we will spend our time feeling unhappy that we have to stay within a budget. In the event that we actually can buy an even better and more expensive watch compared to that said acquaintance, we will experience temporary contentment until the next person comes along with a better watch.

An item that once brought us great joy in our own finances and abilities has once again reverted to reminding us of our own limitations as compared to others. This cycle may go on throughout our lives. We may spend our lifetime buying more and more watches but will never truly find happiness in the one that we own and will never begin to understand that the first watch we bought told us the time perfectly accurately. Considering its only purpose is to tell the time, our first watch was the perfect one all along.

Pride

Relentless comparison causes us to lose pride in our own qualities, and feel pride over our accidental triumphs. As our self-esteem grows over time, we become aware of our skills and feel confidence in our abilities. Consider the

incident with the new watch, an individual may own a fantastic Rolex -bought after months of hard work and a savings account- and they may flash it in public, show it off to friends or just keep it to themselves under a sleeve, but the minute they come across someone with a newer model and more expensive Rolex, the most immediate loss is that of their personal pride in their own watch.

The individual loses sight of the features in their own watch that attracted them to it in the first place; there is a significant loss of pride. We forget to feel pride over our own worth, the value we place upon ourselves is immediately threatened once something better is on the horizon. It results in a significant loss of self-worth.

Adversely, the exact opposite may happen and cause further damage. When we come across people who have less than us- a friend with an old and scratched watch maybe- we inadvertently rejoice over our own superior item. It is unnecessary for human society to feel pride without achievement, but that is what we experience every time we compare ourselves to somebody. The universal stigma attached to wealthy people is that they are arrogant, this is hardly a coincidence considering that one's' worth is often measure according to what they own. So without much thought, wealthy people are grouped in one pot while others are separate in various different ones. In reality, all this might not be true and the richest of people may be as humble as any other low income individual.

Motivation

Possibly the most emotionally damaging outcome of comparison is the lack of productivity that ensues. Comparing ourselves with others doesn't actually make us better at what we do. It does not yield results any faster and it most definitely does not contribute to our growth as humans. When we see someone more generically successful than ourselves, how often do we actually make a greater effort to emulate them? Men who compare their pay grade to their

bosses rarely begin to work especially hard and earn more money. In most cases they usually begin to fall into a slump of bitterness and develop jealousy towards the others.

Our comparison with others doesn't make us any better or worse. The man with the old Rolex still owns a Rolex regardless of whether it is a newer or better model than the one his friend owns, and chances are that despite comparing his own watch to somebody else's he won't suddenly become motivated to become more productive and earn enough to buy an even more expensive one.

Motivation may certainly be derived through comparison, but in such cases it is important that comparison take place solely for the purposes of self-improvement. Looking up to others and being inspired is surely a step in the right direction, but it is rarely the outcome of the gratuitous comparisons we make every day. We will never accomplish our goals if we are frustrated with our methods. Our value is no more attached to other people's arrangement than it is to our own.

When we fall into this negative cycle of comparing and contrasting, we lose sight of who we are because of our focus on what other people are pretending to be. Our realities are compared to everybody else's presentation. This further endorses our behind-the-scenes comparison with the reel.

When the average person is asked how they are doing, they rarely answer with "I'm exhausted, gaining weight and I make less money than my spouse". That is how they might be feeling, but they won't say it, they will most likely provide the perfunctory response of "Doing well, I've been busy. How are you?" It is frankly saddening to realize that most small talk we make and most conversations we hear around us are based on the complexes developed within most healthy, stable individuals. Going back to the example of social media sites; we see our friend's post new photos of themselves and immediately assume they are having a great time in life while we sit around wasting our days on the internet. Rarely do we pause and realize that others are also on the internet, others are indulging in the same activity but in a different style. Rarely do we feel empathy and joy towards others before comparing it to our

own state of enjoyment/fulfillment/ease.

When we look back on our lives, we rarely remember the passer-by upon whom we bestowed great significance. We will not be able to recall the spectacular belongings others owned that we didn't. We are all responsible for ourselves and our ultimate evaluation will always take into account the way we lived our lives. Did we allow our trivial comparisons to become obstacles in the way of success? Did we spend too much time feeling sorry for not having what others did? Will we even remember the names of all the people we coveted and felt envious towards? Will we know what happened to individuals we used to consider less fortunate than ourselves? The essential focus of our existence should be to meet our own set standards. In the race of life, we will always be on the losing end if we continue to judge ourselves on the wrong scale.

Dietrich Bonheoffer said," It is very easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements in comparison with what we owe others." We can take that one step further; it is very easy to overestimate our own, and everybody else's, achievements in comparison with what we owe ourselves.

Chapter 3: It’s ok to Be Different

Comparison is a manifestation of the thought process; it is an aspect of human behaviour. Being a fairly common occurrence within the human psyche, it is also unquantifiable. Most of the time, we aren’t aware of the fact that we are marking ourselves up against something or someone. There is no way to comprehend why people are prone to comparing themselves with those around them, but it is understandable why people feel the need to do so. Ultimately, it comes down to the realization that everyone is different.

Every individual on this planet, regardless of how many similarities they may have with others, is essentially completely unique. From fingerprints and DNA to personality and idiosyncrasies, we all have that one trait that sets us apart. The anomaly within this realization is that most people are intimidated and uncomfortable with their own originality. As we discussed in Chapter 2, society places more value on categorising people according to similarities, rather than on appreciating them for their differences.

This is where the Comparing Game begins and the point where people forget that it is okay to be different. From the day we are born, our lives take us all down different paths and all individuals on this planet have a unique history and background that moulds them into the person they become. Our thoughts and opinions are based on our own experiences.

According to research done by a group of German behavioural psychologists at the University of Oxford in England, the key to understanding why people are not comfortable with themselves lies in identifying who they compare themselves to. Scientists at the university proposed that we compare ourselves to everyone, but most frequently to those we want to imitate in some way or the other. Based on such assumptions, we can delve deeper into ourselves by

looking in to who it is we admire or envy the most. By gaining knowledge about those others, we begin to identify what it is within ourselves that we need to improve on.

However, the most important data that the German scientist's research yielded was that in all such situations of social comparison, people forget that there is more to the story. Essentially, everyone forgets that individuals constantly evaluate themselves against people from different backgrounds and from different places. Certain people may attain similar things in life, but the stories behind how they get there could be drastically different.

4 Most Common Factors

Based on research results, here are the 4 factors that most greatly affect differences in life standing between individuals over a wide scale of race, age, and social status.

1- Nationality & Country of Residence:

Where we are raised has a massive impact on the life we go on to lead. Research and modern society dictate that individuals born into middle class families in a developed nation are accustomed to a much higher quality of life than those born into developing nations. The opportunities presented to people within a safe and productive environment potentially have more opportunities to grow as an individual.

2- Educational Background:

That is not to say simply university or college education, but all forms of education starting from primary school. The path toward formal education begins in pre-school. What languages students speak, how well they write, and how developed their scholastic skills are may all be important factors in determining how a person's life eventually turns out. It is also very common for parents to provide their children with a similar education and pass down their own values among generations.

Degrees and formal education play a huge role in professional society today. A university graduate will be deemed more valuable by the modern world as compared to a high school dropout. Regardless of natural talent, personality, or ambition, an individual with a better education may have more doors open for them as compared to anyone with less to offer.

3- Financial Background:

Possibly the most common source of comparison and the most common difference between everyone is how much money they have. People most frequently compare themselves with those who they think are richer, drive better cars or live in better houses.

However, they forget to take into account that some people come from money, and others come into money. Individuals born into wealthy families with trust funds never have to worry about gainful employment as compared to those from middle class backgrounds. Needless to say, financial backgrounds affect everything else too; education, class status and even appearance.

Teenage girls from conventionally lower class families often have self-esteem issues because they compare themselves to more beautiful, rich girls. They often don't take into account that with money comes options. Wealthier people

have more access to resources, resources that buy them the products and services to enhance and supplement to what is natural. A teenage girl may believe another girl to be more attractive, when in fact; the other girl may simply be able to afford more expensive accessories.

4- Emotional Background:

Possibly the most important factor of all. The reason we compare ourselves to others is essentially because we feel and think everything around us relative to ourselves. That is also how we grow up and become the unique specimens that we are. People that grow up in a nurturing and stable background usually develop high self-esteem and confidence. They aim for more and are comfortable challenging themselves. However, research in sociology done at the University of Iowa in 2004 suggests that nearly 60% of the global population experiences certain incidents in their earlier life that go on to greatly affect their personal, professional and financial endeavours.

A successfully employed, married man from a big family is an unfair comparison to a middle class man raised in an abusive foster home. The incident, trauma and happenings of their lives would be too different for them to be able to compare themselves to each other. It is possible that the middle class man would consider himself a ‘failure’ compared to the employed, married one. It would be important to consider that his own difficult history plays a major role in the difficulties he may have today as compared to someone else.

Of course, of our 4 factors, we forget that there is one major aspect of all our personalities that makes us different, natural affinity and talent. It is also the most special thing about us, and the reason we must never resort to comparing ourselves with others. Everybody has specific strengths and weaknesses that give them or rid them of the ability to do certain things. We constantly compare ourselves to people with better jobs, but we do not realize that while our job may pay less, we may still be the perfect candidate to do it. A

struggling artist may consider themselves less important than a banker, but he might not realize that he has a talent that the banker does not, and that the banker may have a talent that he lacks.

An excellent example of this is the modern modelling industry. In a Ted X conference in 2012, American model Cameron Russell addressed the fact that women all around the world consider themselves ‘less pretty’ than famous models. Russell talked about having won a ‘genetic lottery’ that developed her capacity to model. She said that since models are generally supposed to be extra tall and slim, the odds of a woman becoming a successful model depend almost entirely on genes. No matter how naturally gifted or attractive a 5 foot 3inches girl is, she will have fewer chances of being selected as a model and it would be highly erroneous of her to spend her life considering herself plain or unattractive compared to the women whose only advantage over her may be genetic.

Most of the generic comparisons that humans make with each other are devoid of logic. We never take into account the unique skills we have. Self-appreciation can only be determined by self-introspection. We cannot spend our lives giving ourselves a hard time over things that are ultimately meaningless. In order to rid ourselves of a tendency to compare (and fall short), we must recognize that it’s okay to be different and that our differences are what make each of us valuable.

John Kabat-Zinn said, “Life on earth is a whole, yet it expresses itself in unique time-bound bodies, microscopic or visible, plant or animal, extinct or living. So there can be no one place to be. There can be no one way to be, no one way to practice, no one way to learn, no one way to love, no one way to grow or to heal, no one way to live, no one way to feel, no one thing to know or be known. The particulars count.”

Chapter 4: You can’t Compare Happiness

What are we all seeking to become? What is the ultimate point of going through life with goals and aims? Tentatively, it may be surmised that finding and keeping happiness is an ambition we all carry with us. Happiness is even more difficult to analyze than comparison and behaviour, but it is a longing common to each of us. This is why when people compare themselves to others, the conclusions they ultimately draw is that the other is either happier or less happy based on certain social pointers.

Taking into account the factors we discussed in the previous chapters, it is safe to assume that happiness cannot be compared. It cannot be analyzed through comparisons, and it can never be understood through mere observation. Just the way outsiders never truly know what is going on in our lives. So we may say that it is impossible for us to come up with an accurate representation of anybody else’s joy or gratification.

Below are two critical examples of how we tend to compare our happiness with others without an appreciation for the internal reality of others.

Real Life Scenario 1 (Matthew and David)

Consider Matthew and David, two individuals of the same age, race, gender and nationality. They are easily comparable to each other based on their basic connection. Matt is a wealthy bachelor, a stockbroker with a flourishing

retirement fund and a liberal lifestyle. Matt is his parent's only child and has always been spoiled and adored. He went to the best schools, received great education and eventually went on to achieve success in all his professional endeavours. David on the other hand comes from a family of 5 siblings and has managed to do fairly well as a junior manager at a local firm. He generates just enough of an income to support his wife and 4 children. They live in a house just big enough for them but cannot afford any major luxuries.

All they see in each other is what is visible to the world. Matt sees an averagely successful man with a big family. David sees a well to do bachelor with many assets. On the surface, David believes that Matt must be the happiest man on earth; he has plenty of money, few responsibilities, and the freedom to do as he pleases and has always been the apple of his parents' eye. To David, Matt is the epitome of what a happily settled life must be. David assumes that his highly mediocre existence pales in comparison to the seemingly glamorous life that Matt leads.

In contrast, Matt is the exact opposite. He has felt lonely his entire life, has never had any siblings to play with or spend time with and has never been able to make friends that he may trust. Even now, Matt envies David for the bustling family that he came from, and the fulfilling and enjoyable life he must be living with a wife and children. Matt sees David as a man with priorities, a man who is unable to save much money but who has plenty of people to spend it on. For himself, Matt sees only loneliness as he makes great money but has nothing to do with it except live a free but lonely life. Matt values the traditions and family that David has and considers David a fulfilled person.

Both are correct in their obvious assumptions, but neither are able to look below the surface and realize that their comparison is useless. Ultimately, they are both unhappy because they keep comparing their life to that of someone entirely unrelated to them. They have separate backgrounds in almost every way, and they both have enough in life to keep them happy, if they chose to do so.

Ultimately, it is up to David to be able to find fulfilment in his life and see happiness there, he will never be able to understand his own happiness in

comparison to Matt's because he will never know what Matt truly thinks and feels, and that Matt is in fact comparing himself to David all the while.

Real Life Scenario 2 (Anne and Ruth)

Two childhood friends meet at a party a decade after graduation from university. Anne has always had a good metabolism, she has always been considered attractive by men and has gone on to become a successful television actress. Ruth has always been the plain one, she has always been self-conscious about being overweight and remembers comparing her beauty to Anne's from the day they become friends in university.

Upon meeting at the party, both friends immediately click again and enjoy their time with each other. Internally, however, they cannot help comparing their life to the one they are hearing about from their friend.

Ruth can only notice that even a decade later, Anne is still slim and beautiful and on the way to becoming internationally famous. Ruth spends the evening assuming that Anne must lead a contented life because she has what Ruth has always wanted; beauty and recognition. Surely rich and beautiful women can never be unhappy, right?

Little does Ruth know that Anne is struggling with the pressure that her vocation lays on her. Anne has developed an eating disorder because she stresses about gaining weight and become unfit for television roles. Anne recognizes that she's more accurately fits society's description of beautiful, but still believes Ruth to have lived a happy life and one free from the prying eyes of fans and critics alike.

The friends continue to spend an evening laughing, talking and hiding their secrets and internal worries from each other. They present altered versions of

themselves because they believe they need to 'fit' into the category that they see their friends in. They will spend a few hours with each other and then go on to analyze their lives in comparison to the others for the rest of the week. Ruth will wonder on about why she never managed to lose enough weight to pursue a career in television. Anne will worry similarly, why did she become so obsessed and vain about her looks? Why did she think it was a good idea to remove all vestiges of privacy from her life and go on to become a public spectacle for many years to come?

Both Ruth and Anne have plenty to be happy about, but both also need to take control of their lives. They need to recognize that only by eradicating their own issues will they find true happiness. They each were so busy putting *up a front for the outside world and feeling bitter about their perceived failures, neither seemed to notice that the other may have been doing the same thing all evening long.*

What do Matt, David, Ruth, and Anne represent? Not failure and not success, but difference. Every life is different, every story is different. Everybody's state of happiness and satisfaction is different. More importantly, people walk around this judgmental society hiding their realities from the world because they are afraid that they are the only ones with something to hide. Happiness cannot be seen in black & white, but rather in shades of grey. What people feel happy about depends on their desires, actions, and ambitions. What we perceive as happiness in others is usually something we believe would become a source of happiness for us. Since such a phenomenon is not comparable, we must understand that while other people may live a life that impress us, our life may be a source of admiration for somebody else.

Psychologist Daniel Gilbert in his book 'Stumbling on happiness' hypothesized that happiness is largely an internal decision and that how happy we are is directly related to how happy we think we are. Gilbert described the science of happiness as a carefully controlled environment in which we are free to make the choices that dictate our perception of our contentment. He also claimed that the most common reason behind our supposed unhappiness is that we forget we are like most people. While uniqueness is a valuable trait to have, most people continue through life with their own set of positives and

negatives.

We are all different from each other, but we are all similar in that we consistently judge only that which is visible to the casual observer. The most important aspect of self-analysis is the recognition that our happiness is our own and that we are the only ones who can change it.

In the end, the point to keep in mind is that regardless of how happy we think somebody else is, comparing ourselves to people will never bring any joy to our own lives. Assuming our long lost friend to be more content will never result in us suddenly waking up filled with warmth and joy. Happiness is a journey, not a destination. Let’s visit the next chapter to better understand the best way to go through this journey towards happiness.

Chapter 5: Self-Reflection

Consider a professional swimmer, in order to swim faster and train for a race, he will have to keep recording his own lap time and trying to improve it. Even though the swimmer will eventually compete in a race against his contenders, the only way he can become the best is by constantly timing himself and working to break his own record again and again. Our life is not much different. The key to being successful in any capacity is to focus on beating our own ‘time’.

Mostly we compete with who we interact with. Students in school compete for top grades against fellow classmates, writers’ biggest rivals are fellow writers, and employees at a workplace have to stand out amongst fellow coworkers. Human perception is such that we compare ourselves frequently to the people who are a regular staple in some aspect of our life.

It is ironic then, that we forget that our biggest competition is the person we spend absolutely all our time with; ourselves. In order to move away from perpetuated stereotypes to accept ourselves, we must begin to reflect upon ourselves and live up to the standards we set for us.

In our final chapter, we are going to use the information we have learned to unlearn the habit of comparing ourselves to others and understand what we can gain from setting up what we call self-competition**.** In previous chapters, we discussed the reasons behind our tendency to compare ourselves with those around us, and we also established certain preliminary root causes of such comparison.

Outlined below are the best methods to adopt in order to help ourselves from stop making unproductive comparisons with others and indulge in habits that

make way for a more positive worldview.

- Analyze yourself: When we compare ourselves with others, we actually focus on them more than us. We relate our life to theirs, but we do not relate our life to ourselves. The key to happiness and self-discovery is introspection. Analyze yourself and recognize what it is that you want out of yourself. Do you want to focus more on your domestic responsibilities? Do you want to make more money in your existing line of work? Do you want to change your career?

Studies in behavioural neuroscience at the University of Toronto suggest that even though people wonder why they are unhappy, most of the time they know exactly what it is that they want to change about themselves. Spend time with yourself and listen to the words you say, the answers you give and the decisions you make. Ultimately, these are the factors that will help you turn towards a more positive lifestyle as opposed to a consistent habit of pitting yourself against the perceived competition.

- Know your story: As we discussed in Chapter 3, everybody has a different background and a different journey that lead them to the place they reach. The people we compare ourselves to have had a multitude of events take place in their life. To get through this cycle of judgement and to become secure in yourself, you need to know your story. What kind of life have you lived so far? What occurrences in your life have lead to you becoming the person that you are? Have things happened to you that have developed tendencies and habits that may be stopping you from achieving your full potential? These are the questions you must ask yourself first and foremost; these are the things that matter. The rich person across the street may have come from a rich background; the seemingly happier boy in your class may not have had an abusive childhood. Between all the factors that affect human behaviour, think about the ones most relevant to you.

- Know your limits: Also in reference to Chapter 3, strengths and

weaknesses are not always learned. They may very well be genetic or natural. Take the example of basketball legend Michael Jordan, Jordan was lauded for the skill and effort he put into his game and the hours he spent analyzing his tactics and learning from his mistakes. While nobody can deny that Jordan takes the credit for his determination and constant success, there were many natural factors that helped him become the star that he did. Michael Jordan was extraordinary tall, a critical requirement for basketball players. He had the flexibility and agility within his body to pursue a career of this sort and his genes played a major rule in training him towards basketball.

Had Jordan been born a foot shorter and asthmatic, the world would never have known him and the game of basketball would have missed out on the greatest asset it ever had. You may want to be the next big thing, the next legend in the world of basketball. Still, you may not have all the critical requirements for it. You may actually be asthmatic, or not flexible enough. If you are determined enough, you will achieve your dreams no matter what. But instead of comparing your own self to Michael Jordan, think about what you have that he may not. Think about what it is that you can do to compensate for the luck you may have missed out on. Knowing your weaknesses is sometimes just as important as knowing your strengths. It is a great learning opportunity.

- Look for inspiration: What we perceive to be better in others is what we look for in ourselves. This is an opportunity to avail that which we envy in somebody else and duplicate it within us. Instead of comparing ourselves to others and thinking that someone else is more successful/happy/lucky, we should focus on being motivated and inspired by the people that we admire the most.

If a student compares herself to the best student in the class, she shifts the comparison to inspiration and focus on working harder to achieve better grades. If a man feels self-conscious about his body at the gym, he should channel that feeling in to an exercise machine instead. Once you have begun to see an improvement, focus on beating your own record. Make yourself the ultimate source of inspiration.

- Set your own standards: Even when we feel unhappy, it is because we feel that we are not contented enough by our own standards. All our emotions are dictated by the preconceived notions we have about ourselves. These notions are the most important weapons we have in the fight against unhappiness and comparison. In order to become better and improve ourselves, we need to set standards that only we can beat. The most challenging race is one in which we have no contenders but ourselves. If your aim is to improve your income, think about the ways you can improve your performance at work. If you aim to lose weight, think about the changes you can make within your daily routine to reach your goal.

- Be proud: Much like knowing your own shortcomings, it is important to appreciate your own skills. Regardless of how small we may feel when we compare our self to someone seemingly 'better', we all have skills, gifts and talents that belong to us and that may aid us in the process of meeting our own standards. By being proud of yourself, you will find that you are less prone to fixating on other people and you will find it easier to feel confident and comfortable in your own skin.

Below is a case study describing a woman's journey of self-growth, from her chronic habit of judging herself against others to the methods she develops to combat this negative cycle. How she begins to change her habits is reflective of the ways she turns herself in to her own biggest competition.

Case Study – Emily

Emily grew up in a large but poor family, she did extremely well in school and despite being accepted in to several universities, she was unable to afford the tuition. She ended up working as a babysitter and focusing on making ends

meet for her family. Today Emily is 30; she feels unproductive and unhappy because she was forced to give up on her dream of becoming a financial journalist. She now works part time jobs anywhere that pays well and feels self-conscious when meeting new people.

Emily has become reclusive; she finds that every time she meets someone new they happen to be bankers or economists or teachers with exciting careers and a future to look forward to. As she begins to fall into a habit of comparing herself to everyone around her, she finds herself to be more unhappy and feels her self-esteem plummet. She notices that her car is an outdated model, she doesn't have any assets, and even her wardrobe isn't impressive enough to keep her in step with the fast paced society she lives in.

With time, Emily begins to feel ashamed about her own self. She dreads anytime anyone asks her what she does for a living. She begins to feel a resentment growing towards her parents for not being able to send her to college. She even starts to believe that no man will ever be interested enough in her to marry her because she has nothing to offer the world anymore. Everyone around her is more successful, married and planning their futures happily. Yet she has nothing to look forward to and is becoming more and more inclined to spend her time alone.

It's a long time before Emily begins to realize that she has lost her ambition and has stopped thinking about herself. She hasn't made any change in her life for years and she has become comfortable in her own bitterness and misery. One day Emily realizes that she used to be the best student in her class, that she was the girl who was admitted to some excellent universities.

Emily remembers that the reason she was the best student in her class was because she never tried to get better marks than anyone but herself. When she did well on a test, she focused on doing even better on the next. When she got perfect marks on a test, she intended to maintain that mark. When she didn't do well, she went home and spent time re-reading her answers to learn from her mistakes. The secret to her adolescent success was her lack of interest in comparing her success to anybody else's.

It is on this day that Emily decided to make a change in her life, to set goals for herself and achieve them. She knows she doesn't have a finance degree to become a journalist, so she applies to a local magazine to get a start as a staff writer. She intends to keep writing until she establishes a reputation to become a trainee at a finance magazine. She has to start small, but there is nowhere to go but up. A minor change in motivation is all Emily needs, instead of seeing more successful people around her, she now sees a successful and ambitious person within herself.

Emily represents everything we all need to be. It is true that human nature is difficult to alter. People will never be able to completely stop the trajectory of social comparison. With the onset of media and the increased contact between people everywhere, comparison has become unavoidable. However, this compression of society has also given us the tools for self-improvement. Today our world allows us to focus more on ourselves. The tools we have been given are the tools we must use. The comparison that can improve the journey of our life is only with our self.

Conclusion

In this book, we have discussed at length the nature of the ‘comparing game’ and gained some understanding of the way it develops through an individual’s lifetime. The habit a person develops, of comparing them self with others is not merely a passing contemplation, it is the manifestation of our innermost thoughts. Our society is highly interconnected, and we are affected by the people around us. We understand ourselves best when we reflect on that which is dissimilar from us.

However, we discussed that while comparison may be a common convention, it is not a healthy one and very rarely a positive influence on our lives. More often than not, comparing ourselves to others creates inaccurate perceptions of ourselves and everything around us. We begin to believe things that do not exist, we make assumptions about other people and we develop most of our opinions despite a lack of understanding of the internal realities of anyone’s life.

Happiness is the most important aim of the average person’s life, the career we pursue, the money we make and the people we befriend/marry are all constituents of the bigger picture we intend to pursue. However, by comparing ourselves to others we lose sight of the fact that our happiness is the result of our own actions and that comparing our own level of contentment with others is not the way to bring more pleasure into our lives.

There are several factors to take into account when we consider ourselves against others, we come from a different background and we are unique in our own way. The element to remember is that being different and being unique in our own way is our greatest quality. Fitting in to the crowd is often important. But standing out in a positive way is always beneficial.

In order to make changes in our life and come to accept and progress ourselves, there are certain things we need to remember and steps we need to take. Most essential is to be true to ourselves and keep sight of our best qualities and greatest limitations. Remember that it is not just that people come from different places, but that people are all going different places. We may not be the best at something because we are simply not designed to be that way. Society, genetics, history, and luck play a major role in the trajectory of our evolution as individuals.

In theory, it can be argued that the habit of comparison is one that should be kicked to the curb effectively. There is very little to gain from constantly trying to measure up to people who are vastly different from us. The habit we need to develop is an introspective one, the only competition we must have in life is our own self.

The key to understanding what we want to change, what we want to improve, and what we want to emulate is to get to know ourselves like we never have before. In order to become that person that you think is happier than you, you need to ask yourself what it is that makes you happy. Spend time with yourself. Read books that move you, take an interest in the society around you and think about the people that bring positive changes in you.

We looked at Emily's evolution as an example of self-growth; Emily became the victim of her own misconceptions about people. She lost confidence in herself and lost sight of who she was. It was only when she regained that recognition that she brought herself back to the path of self-actualisation. Emily realised that she may not have the job that so many others around her did, but that was because she did not have the advantage of a first class education like her peers.

She began to understand that what she lacked in comparison to others, she made up for with the many qualities that were particular to only her. It was when she truly understood that she was becoming her own biggest obstacle that she took to changing her life.

What Emily achieved in the end may not have been overnight success; it was something far more important. She took a great step in the right direction and gained back the assurance she needed to continue on that path. The experiences of a lifetime are what create a lifetime; the past and the future are not exclusive of each other. In fact, our past affects our future. Not anybody else's past but our own, and only our own.

There is no specific moral to this story; this is not a self-help book. This book is an acknowledgment of the truth that exists in all of us; the truth behind the spectacular phenomenon that is human behaviour. Human beings are simultaneously helpless and completely in control of their actions and consequences. In the long run, it is not relevant what we can or cannot control. What we know is that we definitely cannot control is everyone else in the world. What we know we have responsibility for is the expedition that is our existence.

Whether it is Matt, David, Ruth, or Anne, what they all have in common is a power over their thoughts and measures. A perception of the reality that surrounds their life and the ability to put things into perspective. It is the aspect that we need to hold on to in order to avoid falling into mindless comparisons and ruining our self-confidence.

There is no 'best' way to live life, but there is a way to live your own life the best way. It varies from person to person, but as long as there is self-awareness and self-reliance, each person has a certain level of autonomy. Comparison is not a habit anyone can be expected to fall out of overnight. In fact, nobody can become completely oblivious to those around them. However, if we challenge the positive around us into productivity and diminish the negative, we can all accept and be proud that we have taken a step forward along the right path.

The Materialistic World

How to Escape Materialism, Theory of Materialism, Mindful Living, Living with True Happiness

Grace Scott

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Introduction

As the wheels of large corporations turn, everyday new and fancy products emerge into the market place creating a chasm of insatiable wants within every consumer. The desire to buy excessive items and to accumulate more tangible goods has been defined as materialism. The idea is neither new nor particular to the 21st century; rather, this malady has plagued individuals, societies and countries around the world. The desire to have, to possess, to own and to use has been seen in overwhelming proportions in the aristocracy around the world.

For the world as a whole, the distinction between intangible values like morality, honesty, justice and equality gradually became blurred. On the other hand, tangible objects like property, clothes, furnishings or vehicles had taken its place. Things which people could see represented wealth, affluence and status. Part of the reason for this shift in the value system was because material objects fascinated everyone. Be it the gleaming palaces of India, the gold thrones of Persia or the royal crown of Britain, extravagant objects became an emblem for everything that was good and desirable.

Another reason why materialism seeped into the minds was that the economic systems nudged people to be driven towards selfish motives. When self-interest became the rallying call, morality flew out the window. Cutthroat competition, an innate drive to excel and oppose others created distinctions between those who could succeed in this game and those who could not. Wealth is not intrinsically bad. But when people fail to distinguish between their wants and needs, excessive wealth becomes their own undoing.

Having possessions and owning private property provides a sense of security and insurance for most people and from this they also derive a sense of satisfaction and happiness. Happiness is generated directly from the preference satisfaction; if you can get instant gratification by purchasing something you desire for yourself or for someone else then there will be nothing which would make you happier.

Materialism is not merely a psychological condition; it is a state of mind and a state of one’s lifestyle. For materialistic people pleasure is defined by sensory objects. i.e. those which could be touched, tasted, smelled, seen or heard. This is not to say that all

materialistic individuals are devoid of feelings and emotions, it merely means that their epicurean desires drives them farther away from a universe which has highly sentimental and epistemic foundations.

To live a good life and to work hard are the principles couched even in the Protestant Ethic, but individuals are not aware of how to keep a balance in their wants and how to learn to deny themselves rather than plunging headlong into this hedonic abyss. When people become used to living in the moment and indulging their every desire, their wants keep on multiplying and they will transform themselves into a machine that either works for or swindles for the money required to fulfill those wants.

The constraint of money and resources is very real. Materialism numbs people to the harsher truths as they are socialized into thinking self-interest is the most important doctrine. Two major problems have ensued from such corrosive thinking; firstly, the desire for more money has led people to do illegal activities which bring the greatest income in the shortest time. Secondly, the fact that people have accumulated so many assets has created sharp social inequalities for those who still live under the poverty line.

It is odd to think that some people own so many unnecessary expensive items yet millions starve every day. This is only because materialism and self-interest have literally paralyzed their perception to value anything other than their wants. Charity or altruism will not fix these social quandaries because the individual mindset has to change.

Global poverty is not a single person’s fault, but it is his or her responsibility because for every dollar you spend at one place, there are a million other places where it could have been spent. Materialism will not allow you to think beyond the box of your own self-love which is why people cannot learn to limit their desires.

When John Locke introduced the concept of private property, it was only to provide some sense of reward for hard labor. Hoarding relentlessly was considered unnatural in Locke’s opinion. The rule of thumb was to take that which leaves enough for others. The idea was to make people considerate of the rights of every person in the society and not become land mongers.

Since the Industrial Revolution, developed countries have single-mindedly focused towards mass-production and sales. The psychological and human costs were not accounted for in this development race. Ideas like the American Dream had highly materialistic and avaricious roots which set a benchmark for people to aim towards, a standard which emphasized success and affluence. It was not surprising that materialism was synonymous with happiness and prosperity for the longest time.

But real prosperity came in terms of vast social divides and mindboggling statistics of inequality. The hunger to possess more things was basically the fuel for the capitalist machinery. Factories and corporations have made people believe that objects are the true representation for happiness. The mass media and large-scale advertisement, daily feed people images and ideas of things which they ‘ought’ to have but don’t have at present.

However, thinking that the world is our birthright and its riches are up for grabs only instills a sense of plundering and looting until nothing except meaningless objects are exchanged and multiplied infinitely. A materialistic life is chaotic and restless because new desires and wants are created every second of the day and it isn’t humanly possible or spiritually satisfying to hanker after our cravings.

As a result the noise of this continuous buying and selling has ratcheted up to a deafening cacophony where we are no longer attuned to appreciate or feel the finer things in life. According to the Journal of Consumer Research, materialism leads to social isolation and vice versa. This is true because people think that objects can be a suitable replacement for people. Such a form of self-absorption gradually became self-abnegation as people became victims of depression and loneliness.

This paralysis, where we want without thinking or knowing why, has decapitated all or perceptions of modesty and human dignity. Flowery displays of extravagance and smashing demonstrations of opulence have become commonplace. Luxurious mansions, several cars, glistening watches and jewels and numberless outfits make people feel that they are Croesus reincarnated.

An unhealthy reliance on wealth to create one’s social stature makes people believe that they are nothing without their designer bags or shoes. According to a journal, Motivation and Emotion, “As people become more materialistic, their wellbeing (good relationships, autonomy, sense of purpose and the rest) diminishes. As they become less materialistic, it rises.” In the present era, objects possess people rather than the reverse. People define themselves by how much they own and the sort of social circle they move in. Their life experiences, thoughts, reflections and lives are predetermined if they were born in a mansion or in a small shack. We live in an age where slavery has been redefined and the yoke is with our cars, gadgets, and shopping bags.

Materialism is simply a process that dehumanizes people and takes them on a journey of self-destruction where hedonism is more important than ethics. It is also socially repugnant because it divests people of their responsibilities and debars them from broadening their horizons to the intangible pleasures of life. Flaunting ones assets and getting appreciated for it, is not a plausible yardstick to judge a person with.

Humans are multidimensional, extremely capable creatures who contain the potential to move mountains, throwing away one's life and energies over things which won't last even a year seems unreasonable and irrational. In fact, those who pursue wealth and material possessions are the ones who end up feeling less satisfied and experience fewer positive emotions, because there will always be someone with something more and such a comparison will only instill an inferiority complex in people. Furthermore, anxiety and depression begins when there is a deep-seated, unconscious unhappiness. If people keep filling the void of their life with things it will always remain empty and meaningless.

There is a dire need to change the ideals and goals people have set for themselves as a society. This rat's race to collect as much as you can is asinine and time-consuming because people will spend most of their lives collecting things they will never use or need. Filling up shelves, garages, closets or cabinets is not the sole purpose of life. Notions of belonging to a family, having communal ties, being altruistic, reconnecting with nature brings people closer to the things that really matter in this short span of life. Objects would not build a personality or a character but self-esteem and diligence will shape your principles.

Chapter 1: The Consequences of Materialism

To stress on the idea that materialistic thinking is destructive, it is necessary to start this book with a thorough list of the consequences an individual will most likely face due to his or her materialistic behavior. This will help you, the reader, move on from a materialistic point of view to a more profound and non-materialistic appreciation of life. Before the cure for materialism can be discussed, its effects should be laid out:

Increased Debt Due to Heavy Borrowing

Many individuals are struggling to stay afloat now days because they are immersed in heavy debts. Debt is not accumulated automatically; people burden themselves with debts with their own will.

A lot of people are not in debt, yet they have everything they need. They are not necessarily considered wealthy, but they have a wise way of calculating what they need and what they want. They do not borrow money just to buy what they want or what they merely *think* they need.

In the same vein, if you are already struggling because many banks or loaning institutions are asking you to pay off your debts, it is time to take a different and better route.

Materialism will almost certainly pile up huge debts under your name. If the amount of cash flowing out of your pockets is greater than the amount of money flowing into your bank account, high debts are inevitable. If you do not have the means, it is best to avoid buying things that you do not need. You will give yourself a much-needed break from all the credit card bills if you stop buying things that will eventually just make your closet or home appear smaller.

The aforementioned can turn into a continuous cycle, and not everyone manages to get out of it, especially if they have never paused to reconsider their materialistic thinking. You must first accept that you need to stop concentrating on getting more material things, before you can determine the cure for your predicament. Only you can get yourself out of this pit.

Poor Self-Image

Obtaining expensive items may seem to be among the most effective instruments to boost one's confidence, but this is a deception of the mind. Unfortunately, materialistic thinking is greatly misguided and unfounded, despite how convincing it may feel. You can have the best-looking shoes in the room or the best home theater system in the neighborhood; however, these things won't help you develop genuine self-confidence, especially if you consider long-term self-esteem.

You will end up with a worsened self-image in the long run if you rely on material goods to prop up yourself, because you will be basing your greatness on things that can get worn out and are easily breakable. No matter how beautiful an object is, it will eventually get damaged and you might have to buy it again. If this particular object is not a necessity, you will also end up wasting money during this process. Many people try to use money to fill in a void in their identity, but this effort is inevitably in vain.

A time will come when your desire to have everything will significantly affect the way you carry yourself. You may not always have the financial capability to buy what you want, which will eventually give fuel to your frustrations. What if you do not have the newly-revealed clothing line of a world-renowned brand? What if you can't afford to buy brand new shoes to add to your large collection?

If you want to have a better and more beautiful self-image, do not build your confidence on material things. Instead, build your confidence on having a great character and healthy relationships. Also, you should foster confidence by developing yourself in ways that can positively contribute to the growth and happiness of others.

General Dissatisfaction

The term “new” can come to mind when one speaks of satisfaction. Yes, other concepts such as “efficient” and “durable” may also be considered, but many overestimate the satisfaction they receive from something brand new. People generally seek new things—new experiences and new relationships—and it is no secret that most would prefer to have a brand new mobile phone, car, and house rather than a used one.

Materialistic individuals are never satisfied, and this dissatisfaction can easily affect other areas of their lives. If you continue on the path of materialism, you won’t find the satisfaction you are looking for. You will only have this constant desire to have what is new and better. A person may have just bought a smartphone a week ago, but if a new model has debuted since, he’ll be subject to the strong urge to buy another one.

The same goes for people who follow the latest fashion trends. These individuals won’t usually think twice about buying a shirt with a 4-digit price tag if it’s the current trend. Satisfaction will certainly remain out of one’s reach regardless, because materialism does not allow an individual to be satisfied. It just gives you a few drops of cold water as you traverse the hot desert. You simply won’t ever have enough.

Hoarding

Many psychologists say that hoarding is a sign of an unhealthy viewpoint in life. Often, materialistic individuals are also hoarders, because they are not keen to let things go even if these can no longer be used. After all, according to hoarders, “more is better than less.” In most cases, this principle is acceptable and practical. However, if you have a room full of clothes that you haven’t worn for years, it’s time to reconsider your principles.

When you hoard you also waste a great deal of money, which you should have used for other more important projects. Furthermore, you are wasting other precious resources. The air-conditioning or ventilation in your home will have to work extra hours because there are too many things absorbing the cold or warm air. Your utility bills will increase greatly, and once again, you will end up wasting money.

It doesn’t matter how big your home is; hoarding has never been considered by most to be a healthy lifestyle. You have too many closets because you have too many clothes and shoes to keep track of. You may also have nearly every type of kitchen utensil—most of

which you may have not used for quite some time. In this case, materialism is not just about one's wealth or financial capability—it's also about living in a practical manner. If you use only what you need, others will also have the chance to get what they need. You and your family are not the only people in the neighborhood and the world. Share resources with others and you will experience true satisfaction.

Compromised Aesthetics and Healthy Living Spaces

Some people think that a house's aesthetic appeal is not as important as having everything that you need. Quite the contrary; they are equally important. It's unwise to think that beauty must be sacrificed just to meet all your needs and wants. In the discussion of materialism, people are highly discouraged to continue buying or acquiring things that will just take more space in your home, consequently covering up every space. Your living space will become less appealing and, just as relevant, less healthy to live in.

This specific consequence of materialism will quickly impact nearly every aspect of your life. Many people say that "health is wealth," but what kind of health will you have if your home is only healthy for clutter and an abundance of possessions that you most likely do not need? If you think that by acquiring tangible goods you appear to be wealthy in the eyes of others, you are encouraged to think again.

You may have seen many home designs in various lifestyle magazines and noticed that a simple life is enough to have a beautiful home. You can still have everything you need, and some of the things you want, without negatively affecting the health of your family and the aesthetics of your home. Something that at first might seem to be a good indication of one's purchasing power and financial freedom can just as easily make an individual appear desperate and gravely disorganized.

Chapter 2: How much is Happiness?

To support the idea that materialism has more harmful effects than helpful and healthy ones, it's best to enumerate why it does not bring happiness. Happiness is one of the most essential requirements for any individual to live a fulfilling life. Everyone wants to be happy. This is one of the safest assumptions one can ever make. Some may claim to be masochistic, but their goal is to achieve happiness, even if their methods of attaining it are atypical. People look for ways to be happier, and many times they fail to find the right long-term sources of happiness. Materialism is not a viable genuine path to happiness and as you read on, you will discover why.

Someone Will Always Have More Than You

People who are materialistic are always looking for more and better items for themselves. Why? It's most likely because they have met someone who has a better phone, gadget, blouse, or TV than they do. Another probable reason is that the neighbor has more high-fashion clothing and more beautiful and more expensive furniture. The materialistic world is an ongoing war, one which won't end any time soon.

It's a fact of life that someone will always be better than you at something. It may be in the area of academics, corporate world performance, or the acquisition of what is "new" and "trending." If you constantly try to buy goods just to show that you are a better person than some of your "friends" and acquaintances, then you will just wind up frustrated. It's an unending war because it's a type of warfare where nobody wins. In the war of the materialists, no one can possibly win, because there is always something new to buy.

If you associate happiness with having the best and most lucrative goods, you will never be happy. If you somehow outdo a certain individual, someone else will come along and snatch the trophy away from you. Your triumph is short-lived, because you are not

supposed to rely on just having material possessions to be happy. Genuine happiness comes from having the right relationships and being able to live life with passion and freedom. Do not be enslaved by materialism and money. Live your life without comparing yourself to others.

Material Things Get Worn out and are Breakable

You might possess a couple of brand new smartphones and might be very happy. You may even say that you are ecstatic because you have new “toys” to play with. However, what do you think you will happen a few months later? Do you think you will still have that excitement in your heart and sparkle in your eyes? You probably won’t. Your brand new phones will no longer be new.

Material things do not last forever. They do not even last as long as you wish they would. The word “new” is accurately defined by using the word “old.” If you base your happiness solely on an object, then your happiness will have an expiration date. It will neither last nor be helpful to your growth.

Maybe you are thinking, “but the guy at the shop said this phone is water-resistant and dust-resistant.” Well, that may be true, but it can also get stolen. This is why people should never be reliant on objects as sources of happiness and satisfaction. If this is what you are going through, then your own happiness is at risk.

You will Just Wear out Yourself

It is very tiring to keep on buying things, especially if the frequency of purchases is constantly rising and the relevance of the products to your daily life is consistently dipping. At first, you may think it is fun to just buy things without any valid reason; however, you will gradually get tired because it all seems so pointless later on. You have nearly everything you could ever want, but you are not as happy as you thought you would be.

Materialism can never fill gaps in one’s identity, which is why it can never be considered a

good source of lasting happiness. People get tired and this exhaustion dries them up in every way possible. Remember that materialistic people aren't the only ones affected by their excessive spending and frequent shopping escapades. Their loved ones also suffer from their unhealthy inclinations. Basically, everyone gets tired, partly because there is too much stuff at home and cleaning becomes even more taxing.

Another reason why it's tiring to be materialistic is because you are urged to work harder just to fund your regular trips to malls and bazaars. You have to work overtime more often, because your current pay slip may not be enough to buy everything that you need. Do you think this is the lifestyle of a happy and satisfied individual? It's definitely not. Instead of spending your time with family and friends, you spend it at work. Your weekends are spent shopping, not bonding with loved ones. This cycle will wear you out faster than you think.

Your Character Will Be Compromised

People who possess the right character have a higher chance of becoming genuinely happy. It's because they have all the fundamental pillars that support a joyful existence. They see things in a sensible, practical, and positive manner, so they won't easily be beaten down if things do not turn out as they want. Materialistic individuals are far from being practical, sensible, and optimistic. Therefore, one can say that their character also needs to be developed.

Having the right attitude, which is produced by having a great character, is very important if you are after a lifetime of happiness. Your attitude determines how you deal with other people and how you react in various situations, whether they are good or bad. This means your relationships are also on the line as you try and sail the sea of materialism. Although the effects aren't as immediate as some may think, if you continue to focus on getting more and more each day, you will be considered a shallow individual.

Among the primary reasons why materialism should be ceased is its ability to adversely affect an individual from both the inside and outside. You will see cluttered and disorganized homes and offices, an obvious ill effect of materialism visible to any eye, but many lives are affected not because someone is spending too much time shopping, or has a cluttered space. It's simply because that person's changing into someone who's focused on getting things instead of establishing and taking care of his relationships and goals in life. If you have at least one reason to stop this materialistic journey, it's to preserve your character.

Chapter 3: Materialism and the Youth

It might be true that you are not a materialistic person at all, but it may be hard to say the same for your children, or the next generation. Many teens in the US have the financial capability, through their parents, to buy what they need and want. They also have a great deal of energy to shop. You could say that they are in a good shape and ideally positioned to spend money and be materialistic. While not all teenagers have sworn allegiance to materialism, many easily fall into the clutches of a materialistic viewpoint. If you want to know how teenagers are being affected by the strong wave of materialism, this will prove to be the most influential chapter.

Low Probability of Working Hard

When adolescents become extremely materialistic, they tend to lose zealousness and passion for many other things. It's not that they suddenly lose the skills to accomplish the tasks assigned to them, or that they do not like what they are doing. Rather the problem is that, since they are solely focused on getting things, they will only pay attention to issues that can help them get what they want. It could be a new smartphone, laptop, tablet, shoes, shirt, or any other material thing which they consider to be precious.

In general, teens have become lazy, because if they are not rewarded with a brand new "toy" or the latest clothing line, they won't do what they are told. They become overgrown children and they won't be driven enough to accomplish great feats. Even though they are just teenagers, they can contribute positively and significantly to the world, or at least, to their own community.

Once they have acquired what they have been "dreaming" of, they will stop working as hard as they once did. They stick to short-term goals because these are relatively easy to achieve. Since they are behaving in such a way during adolescence, it's likely they will behave in the same way once they are older. They will only exert more effort at the office because they are saving up for that brand new phone or a more advanced laptop or game console. Their finish lines are too close to the starting line, preventing them from

becoming fighters, and rendering them mere 50-meter dash racers who cease to train once they get their trophy in hand.

Low Self-Esteem as the Root and the Fruit

A 2006 study conducted by marketing professors at the University of Illinois showed that children with low self-esteem have a higher chance of becoming materialistic. The kids with low self-esteem use material items to produce happiness, but children with high self-esteem gained happiness through friendships, playing, being great at sports, and by helping others.

Parents can't blame materialism on the advertisers or on the media alone. As parents or guardians, they are responsible for their own children's character-development.

Low self-esteem can also be the fruit of materialism. Even if a teenager was once confident, if he eventually associates his importance or greatness as an individual with the things he possesses, it will be a pretty quick trip to having an inferiority complex. He won't always have the latest or the best, and once he realizes this, he will be depressed and have low self-esteem. Materialism is an evil gardener. It plants a weed that may look like a harmless plant, but this plant will just waste the nutrients in the soil and choke the other plants around it. Materialism will destroy a person's life, and it can ruin a teen's life, even faster as compared to an adult's, as teens are so much more impressionable and sensitive to the opinions of their peers.

Misdirected and Meaningless Goals

Teenagers are primarily focused on fitting in, and not planning on having a great future. They do not focus on performing well in school and in other community programs because they are not going to get that new phone they have wanted. They are concerned about their image and they will do just about anything to preserve and improve that good image. Even at such a young age, these individuals have firmly established the desire for material goods, which is quite troubling.

It's not that most teenagers do not have goals, but the goals they will share with others do

not often appear to be aims that will have a long-term positive effect on their lives and on the people around them. Adolescents need all the guidance and help they can get. Unfortunately, they won't admit that they need assistance, particularly when they are too busy thinking of what to buy next and how they can buy them.

It's the parent's responsibility to make sure that their children's fundamental viewpoints in life are built on a good and sensible foundation. It's not going to be an easy battle to win against materialism. With guidance and awareness, these materialistic young individuals can still be reformed. It takes time and effort, but it's not an impossible task.

Unethical Behavior

The November 2011 edition of the *Scientific World Journal* contained a research paper which found a third of materialistic teens in Hong Kong would actually consider engaging in unethical activities just to get money to buy what they want. Such unethical behavior included being a companion for money. Surprisingly, 34 percent of the survey respondents said they would seriously consider that option. Out of the 34 percent of teens who were already engaging in "compensated dating," nearly 17 percent got into a sexual relationship.

Being materialistic is already considered unethical by the general population, because as we already know that money and material possessions can't give us sustainable happiness. Of course, more unethical behavior will stem from materialistic inclinations and compulsions. This goes for each and every one of us, not only teenagers. In time, the desperation or intense desire to get new things will lead a person to do what he thought he could never do. Ethics and character are thrown out of the window because materialism has entered the house.

Chapter 4: The Remedy of Materialism

Although prevention is better than cure, the remedy for materialism should still be known. Now that you are more familiar with the consequences of materialism and how it impacts the lives of each and every person no matter what age group they are in, you are ready to be receptive to the cure. Indeed, you may have finally begun considering some form of solution to address the problem of materialism. Fortunately, there's more than one way to get away from materialism. The strategies provided below are not only effective, but also simple and easy to do. You will understand the different types of exits you can take as you read along.

Become Environmentally Conscious

The environment has the ability to naturally heal itself. What it can't do, however, is outpace the harmful and selfish activities of men and women. The fast-paced and highly materialistic lifestyle of the world is seriously adversely affecting the planet. You may think this is just another reminder to go green, but the issue of environmental preservation and the elimination of materialistic behavior are closely related. This is why carbon footprints are measured.

If a person is materialistic, his carbon footprint is most likely larger than that of another individual who's not. Your contribution to the planet's deterioration is closely linked to your consumption. The more you purchase, consume, and utilize, the more industries or companies have to produce. Since demand is so high, the production must keep up. This essentially means that the more materialistic people become, the faster the destruction of the environment will be.

Make an effort to recycle or reuse things even if you think that buying a few new things won't make much of a difference. Every small act counts and helps. By having your broken toaster repaired instead of getting a new one, you save money and time. You do not have to go on a trip to the mall just to get a new one, and while there, be tempted to buy

several other things which you may not need. You also help to save the environment by not having so much stuff to throw away. Since your home won't be filled with so many things, you will also avoid throwing a lot of things away in the future, in your attempts to de-clutter. It is certainly a win-win situation; both you and the environment win.

Avoid Watching Too Much Television

When you watch television, you are inevitably exposed to numerous advertisements. Those dreaded home shopping networks really know how to make something look very appealing. Many take the bait and are eventually face to face with a bunch of things they do not really need. Yes, salespeople have one job: to sell a product. There are many people who are quite good at selling things. At times, even if an average guy is hesitant to buy a bottle of shampoo, a seasoned salesperson can effortlessly change his mind.

This does not have to be the case for you, though. You can avoid getting into such situations if you choose to not be exposed to them. Although there are door-to-door salespeople, who are also good at selling various products, you can considerably decrease your chances of making unnecessary purchases if you turn the television off and find other ways to be entertained. Once again, effort is needed in doing this and changing your lifestyle to a less materialistic one, but you will find it is well worth it.

Even if you are not watching many commercials or product presentations, you are still vulnerable to the influence of the media. Businesses will use each and every opportunity to sell their products to you because that's the only way their income can increase. It's natural for them to do their best to make every product as enticing as possible. However, it shouldn't be natural for buyers to immediately respond to every ad with a troubling level of excitement, eager for another purchase. It may be the job of advertisers to promote their products, but it's the responsibility of consumers to be wise, careful, and collected when considering buying a product.

Avoid Excessive Web-Surfing

In essentially the same way as outlined in the prior section, consumers are encouraged to

avoid surfing the web too often. The World Wide Web has increasingly become the top advertising instrument for most businesses across the globe. You will deal with a surplus of pop-up ads, site banners, and online product offers that can easily render the average person's strong will useless. If you are materialistic, internet-surfing will definitely be one of your greater Achilles' heels.

Since globalization is now an apparent reality, even the dissemination of information regarding certain products and the shipping or delivery of said objects has become easier. Unfortunately, this also means that the process of becoming materialistic, or being even more consumed by materialism, is growing ever simpler. The internet is a helpful source of information, but it can also be an ally of materialism. You should not let yourself be exposed to many online ads. Materialism can be cured, and staying away from the internet for a while will help you to do so.

Consider Buying Used Appliances

Garage sales are ideal sources of much-needed furniture, fixtures, clothing, and other things. You do not always have to buy new things, but this doesn't mean you should buy just anything. You will surely need to buy brand new clothes every now and then, for example. Fortunately, you can often find several used (but beautiful and very wearable) outfits at various bazaars and garage sales, lessening the amount of times you have to buy new clothes. Ideally, you won't just be doing this because they are cheaper, but because you are also helping other people out in so many ways.

For instance, the family that's selling their sofa may really need the money to help pay some of their bills. The sofa still looks great, and it's also a good bargain. Materialistic individuals are generally drawn towards new and pricey things, but wise and controlled shoppers buy what they can use without thinking about how much they can brag about its price tag or where they bought it to others. Prioritize function, and then proceed to aesthetics.

Stop Considering Shopping as a Recreational Activity

Shopping is not a sport. You can never put “frequent and fast shopper” on your résumé, because it is not a skill! It’s only an occasional activity. You may shop with your friends and relatives. But still, if you shop too often, it’s a sign of being materialistic. You need to stop considering shopping as a recreational activity.

If you want to cure your materialism, stay out of the mall for a long time and look for other ways to “entertain” yourself. You can opt to do this on your own—soul-searching or a one-person road trip—or with your loved ones. You can have fun, learn new skills, and even meet new people. When you shift your focus from shopping every week, you will start experiencing real joy, which it’s something money can’t buy.

Decluttering

Another important cure that you may require or find useful is decluttering. Decluttering is one of the most liberating things you can do for yourself. It may seem intimidating at first, but it will become easier once you get started and the more often you do it.

Your home or living space directly affects the way you get in or out of a materialistic point of view. A clean home is a clear sign of a healthy family. It’s also an indication that you are very serious about not letting your material possessions consumes you and your family. This is a crucial step, particularly when your home has become one big stock room. Your clothes are filling each drawer, your tools are placed in various odd places, and your furniture can’t even be seen under the piles of things you have bought. It’s time to clean things up and throw away stuff you do not need.

Remember, the more you consume, the more you become enslaved by your belongings. This is also why we should always reconsider when we are purchasing something that is not a “need”.

Chapter 5: Non-Material Forms of Entertainment

This chapter aims to elaborate on the best strategy you can use to get started taking part in non-material forms of entertainment. The things enumerated here may not be considered a complete list of things you can do to entertain yourself in a non-material fashion. These are the top ways in which many people have proven to be effective and quite easy to put in action. You can start doing many of these activities right now.

Nature and Meditation

Nature has a way of transforming an individual, and it's among the most reliable sources of peace and happiness. As you wait for the sun to set, you get this wonderful feeling of accomplishment knowing that another day has passed by and you spent it reveling in life and the blessings you have received. These are not necessarily material blessings, but may instead be the gift of time, energy, good health, and great relationships.

Many people meditate regularly, not merely because they are big fans of Kung Fu movies, but because they are after a greater awareness of what's actually important. Nature can help you see that many things you are after in this life may not be helpful to your long-term growth and improvement as an individual and as a member of the society. Very few realize the truth that material things take much more than what they give. You may have a lot of material possessions, but what about the other aspects of your life?

What about your performance as an employee, business owner, student, parent, and friend? Life isn't just about amassing what you think you need to be happy or about getting what you really want. It's about discovering the frailty of the material and the beauty of the abstract. Simply put, do not focus too much on getting the latest gadget or having a well-stocked and up-to-date wardrobe. Take a look at nature. It's so simple, yet it can easily take one's breath away. The best things in life do not come from the mall or

from the delivery guy—they come from what naturally surrounds you.

Spend time with Your Family and Friends

Spending time with your family will help fill the gaps in your soul, gaps which you once tried to fill through excessive shopping or a troubling degree of materialism. Your family is, and should be, the primary source of your happiness, because that's what they are there for. The time you spend with your loved ones will surely bring about lasting joy, and later on in your life, you won't regret a single minute or second that you spent with your parents, children, and other relatives.

It's likely that no one has ever said on their deathbed that they should have shopped more and gained more riches. When you spend time with your family, it's like you are giving them a well-wrapped gift, which they can never get from anyone else. This present is so unique because it is your time. No one can turn back time; and if you have read Mitch Albom's *The Time Keeper*, you will see that the best moments in life are the ones spent with those you love, not in any bazaar or mall.

Have a serious or fun conversation with your parents, ask your kid what he's been up to lately, or play a board game with other relatives. It's these moments in life that can never be bought by money. These times are priceless and precious. Unfortunately, they do not come as often nowadays because of the fast-paced and materialistic lifestyle many people have adopted. You can change your ways, and can certainly be a better member of your family. You can still buy things in moderation, but make sure that the time you are spending with your family is not compromised.

Read a Book

Reading a book is also a good way to entertain yourself. Many people fail to see the limitless creative and interesting ideas books bring to their readers. Readers become equipped with the necessary knowledge, insight, and versatility to go on with each day and be happy no matter what they have in their hands. Do not belittle the power of reading; most of the greatest minds in recent centuries, and even in this generation, got to where they are through a book.

Books may be material possessions—unless you just borrowed them—but the point here is that they can be used to keep your mind occupied and to keep the creative juices in your head flowing. You will have so much fun flipping through the pages of a good paperback if you just allow yourself to get into the experience. You do not have to spend money on a ton of things just to remain mentally active. If you want mental exercise, and a very fun way to spend a couple of hours each day, grab a good book and read.

Explore Other New Places

The world is one big hodge-podge of different places, cultures, and people. Instead of filling your house, hands, and wardrobe with things that you will eventually give or throw away, just spend your hard-earned money to learn more about the world you are in. Many things can surprise you and you will certainly think that you have spent your money well. Learning about different regions and meeting new friends in your journey will greatly increase the uniqueness of your identity.

You will become more confident as you try and learn how to adjust in different countries or states. You won't need a new high-fashion purse, clothing, or any other material things just to show others that you are great. Your perspective of the world changes and grows. Do not hesitate to explore what's beyond your own back- or front-yard. The world is for you to see because it is your home. Get to know it more and you will definitely be far from becoming materialistic.

Get to Know Your Neighbors

It's somehow silly to think that some individuals do not know many people in their own neighborhood. They have been too busy buying things and strolling around shopping centers or bazaars that they are unable to meet potential friends. As many would say, "No man is an island." Even if you have every single material object you have ever wanted, if you do not have any friends to share them with, life would be quite empty.

Every single day is an opportunity to meet new friends and be more connected in the

community you are in. There will be a time when you will need the aid or support of your neighbors, so try spending some time to get to know them and have some engaging conversations. Do not let them think that you are simply not sociable or friendly. They may think you are just too concerned about getting more things into your home, but you have the chance to show them that you care about them as well.

The more friends you have, the more you will be spending time with them. This means you will have less time running around in the mall every week or every day just to get the latest clothing, appliances, and many other “things”. Since you have more people in your life who can help you see life in a better light, you won’t think too much about getting that new cellphone or that new jeans you saw the other day. Once you are connected to people, you will consequently be disconnected with materialistic things.

Conclusion

The ceaseless accumulation of objects is neither economically nor socially viable because most of the items purchased are never used. Hoarding in such a manner costs a lot as people are determined to buy things which are in fashion so newer and newer models keep emerging to entrap people in this vicious cycle of impulse buying. Advertising makes individuals believe that possessing objects is a symbol of status and if they do not have the latest model of a cell phone, a car or some other gadget they will probably fall down the social ladder. Accumulation of items is then equated to one's position in the society. Not surprisingly, objects are used to inspire awe in others and to further one's way into different elitist social circles.

These items also become a tool for entry into exclusive cliques as the only way people will allow someone to enter is if they possess all the expensive paraphernalia. Exclusivity and the need to maintain a distinction is perhaps the greatest motivation for materialists. Their clothes and belongings give them a distinctive air of grandeur; it makes them feel better about their self-image since these items represent their power and status.

As a result, a materialist can easily gain access into an elite group and interact with others who have similar interests. Materialists would rarely stoop below their illusionary stature to interact with those who do not share similar interests. Therefore, interaction happens with those who possess similar assets, for example people living in a certain highbrow, expensive residential area might only interact amongst each other. Such materialistic individuals interact with those who are 'lower' than their social status in order to extract patronage and appreciation. Praise is almost fundamental in perpetuating materialism since it provides a legitimacy to people's actions and they end up thinking excessive buying and amassing of things is the right approach to build up one's social standing.

Socially materialism is a malady for it is the reason behind such severe boundaries of class and status. It effectively puts people into these compartments of poverty and wealth and society judges their character and worth through the things they own. As a result the people who are at the bottom of the social ladder are consistently oppressed and trapped into this net of poverty because wealth is solidified at the top tiers and it never trickles down to benefit anyone else in the society. Social responsibility and morality are completed undermined by such a behavior. As impulse buying becomes an addiction, people develop a sense of indifference towards the suffering of others. Such heightened social aloofness results in crime and dissatisfaction at every level of the society.

The harsh reality is that wealth is being created only through oppression and exploitation of weaker groups in the society. Low wages, unsafe working conditions and long working days lead to the creation of wealth for the upper classes. Socially responsible individuals would realize how capitalists exploit the poor to benefit the rich, but materialists are so engrossed in their own world of bags and clothes that they cannot comprehend the millions of lives put at risk.

Materialism allows capitalism to pervade every strata of the society. The creation of wealth is unfair because it pitches the 99% against the 1% who own enormous amounts of assets around the world.

Such an arrangement is neither ethically nor democratically fair because the 1% of the globe is effectively usurping the rights of the 99%. It is true that today we have more assets and we consume more than we did 50 years ago, but it is also true that crime, disease, depression, hunger and poverty has increased exponentially. Materialism is economically inefficient because the scarce resources of this world are being used to create things which people do not even use. For running of large industries every day we are using up our natural resources and depleting them only to feed the never ending gluttony of the hedonists.

The global reserves of fossil fuels, clean water and even clean air are being rapidly consumed to feed industrial giants. This makes one wonder if everyone learns to control their wants and to desire what they need then most of the global problems would not have existed. Even politically groups contend to possess more resources and wars are waged for precisely continuing the production process in developed economies.

In consequence it is not surprising why people are still not happy and content perhaps this is because real contentment cannot be derived through objects.

As mentioned earlier one of the most alarming result of materialism is the widespread dissatisfaction it generates.

Materialism closely mimics the trends and fads currently propagated by mass media, therefore, in reality there is no limit to what people can buy and possess during their lifetime but they are constrained by their budget, physical abilities, age or even regional location and this creates an inherent sense of frustration and discontentment. The problem persists because the starting point of an overly great reliance on objects was flawed.

Materialistic people fail to realize that things are merely transient and transitory and that they will not last forever. Therefore, basing one’s life, energies and aspirations on such a

shaky foundation seems asinine. Such people also find it exceedingly hard to deal with the loss of their belongings, for instance, during a natural calamity or economic downturn. People cannot handle issues like bankruptcy, political downfalls or any other loss in their social stature and more often than not they end up mentally ill.

Materialism actually incapacitates people and makes them weaker because they rely on their assets to act as a bulwark against everything. They are not mentally or physically equipped to deal with anything other than luxury. People who build up their self-image on the foundation of objects are committing a grave mistake.

Another interesting aspect of materialism is its synonymy with happiness which is an extremely flawed perception. It is true that the fulfillment of desires makes people happy but this happiness is short lived because the completion of one desire means the creation of another. Such a system traps people into this cycle where they expend their energies in acquiring more things every day. These individuals can never be happy with their present state because there is always some new object in the market which they don't have.

This is physically and mentally tiring for them because they search for the elusive happiness in items which will get worn off or broken with the passage of time. Happiness remains unattainable because no one actually pauses to reflect on what they have and there is no gratitude for all the blessings of wealth and health they possess. Instead these blessings are considered to be their legal right and they can never appreciate the importance of what they have. Similarly looking at others who have more than them also decreases their happiness because they feel a sense of material deprivation.

Materialism is a race in which no one will ever win. The richest person of the world may have nothing more to his or her credit than the amount of money they possess. The scale through which people assess each other is derogatory because it downplays the importance of human character. The goodness of one's self is not important compared to hundreds of items lying in a closet. Ideas like social justice, equality and empathy dwindle in the face of the love for material objects.

Undoubtedly, a society is not held by the amount of cars and cellphones its individuals possess but by the strength and substance of its norms and value. Materialism is therefore, creating a generation of highly indifferent, self-interested and immoral individuals who will be ready to do anything for wealth.

Youngsters are afflicted by this phenomenon where gathering objects is more important than improving one's life and reflecting on the world.

It is extremely saddening that today's generation is devoid of experiencing finer emotions of connecting with the universe, nature and humanity as a whole. Even if they do something good they continuously feel the need to garner praise for it and to preserve it in form of photographs. Materializing everything is their primary aim in life and experiencing sentiments and appreciating the vagaries of this universe is inconsequential. For them life would not hold any meaning as they are searching for it in the wrong place. Most individuals of today's young generation are sadly bereft of the capacity of self-awareness and self-actualization.

In essence materialism is a social, economic and psychological problem which is destroying our reality and rotting our morality. The race to acquire more items must stop because it is a never ending, exhaustive process which will sap us of all higher sentiments. The solution would be to concentrate on things other than objects and to explore different avenues of life like reading, spending time in nature, doing selfless act and so on.

Empathy for others will also help in making people realize that so many objects are not essential to lead a happy life because there are millions of people around the world living with much less. Meditation and reconnection with our spiritual needs will also help bridge this gap of satisfaction.

In conclusion, in order to rid our society of materialism, there is a need for positive role models and a complete paradigm shift. Understanding the problem of materialism and being aware of its serious psychological and social repercussions will make people more responsible in their decision-making. Our choices as individuals or groups should be motivated by ethical and moral rules rather than an impulsive desire to multiply our wealth. The purpose of this book was to demonstrate the negative ramifications of engaging in the self-centered pursuit of materialism, which can ultimately numb one's senses towards ideas like empathy and altruism. It successfully proves that materialism is not sustainable as a lifestyle because we are social beings who are driven by motives that might go against our personal desire for material assets.

The cornerstone of judicious and prudent living is to focus on the immaterial and realize the deeper nuances of the choices we make and their consequences on our lives and lives of those around us. Every time you are driven to possess something, pause and reflect on the number of beneficiaries of that decision, think about the alternative uses of your money and carefully consider the consequences of your decision; taking a comprehensive approach for reassessing your wants and needs will steer you towards healthy living.

The Secret of Creating Your Reality

A Guide to Live a flourishing Life

Grace Scott

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Introduction

In our day-to-day lives, we all face many new situations as well as many familiar ones. We become so caught up in dealing with our problems that we often forget to stop and think about why something happened and what its implications are. Also, we rarely take out time to reflect upon our reactions to these situations. What happens is that, overtime, these things start piling up and begin to affect our thinking and actions in significant ways. It is only when something happens on a very large scale, or when something that personally affects us in a major way occurs, that we pause for a moment and begin to wonder what just happened.

This is the point at which we start to break the event down into smaller portions in an attempt to understand it. We look at these many fragments one by one and then try to piece them together to create a holistic picture. Though this may seem like a good strategy, and it often is, it does not always work. This is because the entirety of the situation cannot always be understood by looking at it alone. The person must take into account many other things that have led up to that situation. They must also see how they have contributed to it and this must be done in an unbiased manner. This is where the real issue stems from: people are not fully aware of who they are and what they want.

They see themselves as people see them and they try to be seen how people want to see them. This is unfortunate because, amidst all of this, their own individuality begins to fade away. Slowly but surely, lose sight of their inner self. Once this process has begun, there is no stopping it until and unless the person makes a decision to do so. This requires a conscious effort and dictates that the person should start removing the influences of their surroundings. Indeed, this is not an easy task, which is why the majority of people fail to live consciously.

This has resulted in a homogenization of beliefs, hopes and goals. Everyone

has started to think in rather similar ways, despite the fact that they are unique to their core. Keeping the above in mind, it is easier to understand how specific assumptions and generalisations concerning people's behaviour came to exist. This forms the dominant opinion and is, therefore, more influential than the inner voice of a person, which may be telling them to do something that does not fit very well into this perspective. We are now in a better position to see why it is so difficult to go against the flow.

So far, we have looked at how this conflict between a person's innate characteristics and the wider world viewpoint comes into being. Still, we have only just touched the tip of the iceberg. There is much more to this than the summarised version presented above. We will now steer the discussion into a more specific direction and go deeper into these issues, which will go on to build the base for better comprehension of the rest of the material in this book.

Let's begin by talking about society. There are two main questions that need to be addressed here: what is meant by society, and how is society significant when talking about creating realities? Throughout the course of this book, you will find that this is a recurring theme, which tends to be repeated in one way or another because there are far too many related aspects to be discussed within just a page or two.

When we define a "society" as a group of people who fall under the same set of characteristics, generally speaking. They tend to have the same beliefs and expect people to behave according to the same principles. This leads us to the question of morality: what is right and what is wrong? Similarly, what can be classified as good and what can be classified as bad?

The answer to these questions are all extremely subjective in nature and vary from society to society. Still, what is important to note here is that within the same society, they can be taken to be relatively the same; each member of that society can be said to subscribe to the same thought process and ideology. What is even more interesting to note here is that the society itself is nothing without the people that form it; without them, it would simply not be able to exist. Thus, these people too must have their own unique approaches, visions and outlooks towards life, just like any other human being.

How is it possible that they would all agree on different decisions, such as what one must do and what one must think? This is where the concept of norms comes in. Norms are those rules and regulations that are an unwritten code of conduct, which people must adhere to if they want to fit into the society that they are a part of. These are all those values that parents, friends and relatives try to inculcate in a person ever since he or she becomes of a reasonable age. Even strangers can be a big part of the process of promoting and instilling these norms. You may be asking how that is even possible but the answer is simple. When anyone does perform an act, others who get to know of this may laud them. Similarly, if the same person were to do something that was against the norm, then he or she would be heavily criticised for it.

It is exactly this pattern of approval and disapproval that establishes social and cultural norms in the first place. When instances such as these take place repeatedly, the concept of what to do and what not to do starts setting into the subconscious mind of a person; even before they know it, it has been internalised completely. Hence, they will begin conforming according to these norms. What is interesting is that norms will always continue to evolve with time and the idea of what is allowed and what is forbidden will change every now and then, owing to social, cultural and economic reasons. Still, the one thing that will remain constant is that people will still be expected to follow them.

Whether or not we agree with the logic behind these norms is irrelevant and, in most cases, people will not go into too much detail to question their existence or enforcement. This is because the notion has been so deeply ingrained in us that we rarely think about whether it is actually beneficial or harmful to succumb to this philosophy. Even more rarely do we ever stop to consider the correctness of these unsaid laws and if they should even exist.

What makes things even more complicated is the fact that norms do not only mean small acts and actions that people carry out routinely; they also include major life decisions. Some universal trends that fall under this category include all the milestones that alter a person’s life forever, such going to school, getting a college degree, and getting married. This is not to say in any

way that these are not essential elements needed to create a good life, but then again it does not also mean that checking all these boxes will lead to a *complete* life.

This is the vital distinction that this book seeks to highlight; the difference between a good life and a complete life is a fine line that is easily ignorable if we are being objective. However, from a subjective standpoint, it lies in the subtleties of practical life. There will always be people there to tell you how you should live and what your next step should be. They may sound very convincing and could light up hope inside of you by pointing you in a particular direction. Regardless, what they can never do is guarantee the fact that you will find happiness at the end of it all.

People are always telling each other to be grateful for everything they have from the biggest blessings to the tiniest ones. This is very true and it is, indeed, valuable advice; however, it is not all that easy to apply. This is because we all live in communion with one another and, therefore, see our lives relative to others. This is why we are constantly ranking ourselves as compared to others. It is basic human nature to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence and this is what makes people so competitive sometimes. It also brings out another side of people, which is self-pity. This leads them to play blame games that help them to come up with hundreds of reasons as to why they have not been able to reach the goals and dreams that they have always wanted to.

This is one of those typical things that people do, which prevent them from creating their own realities. Now that we have seen how people, processes and environments go hand in hand and how they influence one another, we are in a better position to understand why people are unable to live up to their own potential.

The main reason is that people do not know themselves as well as they think they do. Most of us have a fair idea of what we want to do and where we see ourselves in the next six months, if not the next five years. However, this is, more often than not, just an amalgam of what we want and what society expects of us. This includes the influences of your parents' hopes and

aspirations for you, as well as what you want to do to keep up with the same level of success as your peers.

Thus, what we have at the end is an aim that is representative of many different needs and wants. While they may feel like they have accomplished something by achieving these goals, they may not necessarily feel content or satisfied. This is something that can only be understood when people go through it personally; this marks the turning point in their lives when they start thinking about what it is that would truly make them happy.

People are unable to mould their ideal realities because they do not focus on what they want for themselves. Instead, most of us become tangled up in what we want, what we need, and what we should do. In all honesty, this cannot be completely avoided and neither should it be. A balanced life requires a person to be able to juggle all of these approaches. The key here is to not forget about yourself as a person while trying to do so.

This requires people to be focused on their priorities and their first priority should be to discover themselves and make sure that they remain true to their unique selves. That means they must not become one of the herd; the only way this can be avoided is if they regularly evaluate their thoughts to remind themselves of what is of utmost importance to them. Throughout our lives, we will all be faced with many situations that place us at a crossroad. It is important to reiterate here that one should remember the difference between a *good* life and a *complete* life. In addition to that, they should also be aware of what is good and what is bad at all times.

This is not quite the same as being right or wrong. One can be right to do something as it provides them with a gain but it may not necessarily be good if it means that that the benefit is coming at a cost to someone else.

Another reason that stands in the way of most people and their realities is their internal belief system. They may feel that they do not have the skills or ability to do what they want to. They have a natural tendency to be afraid of the unknown as well as a fear of failure, which holds them back and prevents

them from testing the waters. They never experiment and allow themselves the freedom to try something new and exciting.

Sometimes the environment within which a child has grown up can affect their confidence. If they have been surrounded by negativity during their formative years, then they are more likely to grow up into adults with low self-esteem. Whoever came up with the phrase “mind over matter” really did make a strong point; an individual really is just as strong as their thoughts and beliefs.

There are more than what meets the eye when it comes to determining what your reality should be and how you should create it. The mechanisms involved are complex and intricate all at the same time, which can make the entire process quite confusing and sometimes even frustrating. In order to be successful at building your own reality, one needs to be in tune with the society and themselves, as well as constantly being at war with the two. This is one of life’s biggest paradoxes but it’s actually quite easy to figure out if we put just a little bit of thought into it.

There are a few concepts that one needs to develop a thorough understanding of before they can get started. They must know what it means to *create* your reality and they must know how this is done. They should also be able to distinguish between what the herd mentality requires them to do and what their intrinsic capabilities and interests tell them to do. They must also strive to be patient as this is no easy task; it involves innumerable large-scale and small-scale decisions, which can be very difficult to make, especially if they wish to stick to their principles regarding what is *right* and *wrong* or *good* and *bad*. That being said, it is definitely not impossible and is very well within the reach of absolutely everyone, just as long as they keep their eyes on the prize and make a solid effort to work towards it.

Chapter 1: Herd Mentality

Herd mentality, also known as mob mentality, is the phenomenon in which people are influenced by their peers to adopt certain actions, behaviors or trends. We may like to believe in our strong conviction to stand our ground and avoid being wavered by anyone else's views, but one would be surprised to see how easily that façade peels away in the face of certain situations. People tend to follow the behavioral patterns of others, sometimes without even realizing it. In extreme cases, when people get together, they end up doing bizarre and nonsensical things that they would usually never even dream of doing; these things could turn violent or dangerous, and may be unlike the general disposition of the people in question. This phenomenon is referred to as herd mentality. After indulging in herd mentality, one is often left pondering, "What on earth was I thinking?"

Herd mentality is usually seen as a negative phenomenon, as can be corroborated by its alternative phrase: "mob mentality. A mob is typically associated with mob lynches, mob riots, mob rallies and mob violence, which is what the "mob mentality" usually results in. There have been many incidents in our ancient and recent history where mob mentality led to widespread pillages and plunders in various communities. Herd mentality has the potential to infuse damage of epic proportions to people, as well as society as a whole. Examples of mass suicides, stadium trampling, Klu Klux Klan lynching, and widespread rioting are all testament to mob mentality.

The behavior exhibited via herd mentality is often studied by social psychologists; they also refer to it as "crowd hysteria." The studies pertaining to herd mentality are used to analyze the scenarios that are created from issues during public excavations to large gatherings that turn awry and brutal.

History of Herd Mentality

The origins of herd mentality can be traced all the way back to when people tended to create tribes, migrated in groups, and formed communities. In the 19th century, the idea was introduced by two French social psychologists, who were called Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon. They were both hailed as the pioneers of crowd psychology; however, it was not until quite later when their ideas gained credence. Sigmund Freud also took up this concept and described it as a process whereby people behaved differently than they would individually. It has also been described as the alignment of multiple ways into one, where everyone then thinks in a similar fashion because of the marring of individual differences and how insignificant they suddenly seem in a large group.

Wilfred Trotter (1872-1939), a famous British neurosurgeon, wrote about herd mentality in his famous work titled: *Herd Instincts in Peace and War.* Similarly, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), an American economist and sociologist, wrote a renowned book called the *Theory of the Leisure Class*. In this book, he discussed in great detail how the working class members of society attempt to emulate the elite class via their purchasing behavior. In recent times, many fields of science, such as finance, economics and marketing, make use of this phenomenon in order to anticipate the mechanics of rational and illogical behavior of consumers.

Prominent Examples in History of Herd Mentality

History is peppered with some accurate examples of herd mentality and its devastating effects onto property, people, and the community as a whole. Some notable examples are:

Salem Witch Trials

This is one of the oldest examples in the whole history of herd mentality. The Salem Witch Trials are part of a notorious incident that dates back to 1692. This incident accurately depicts what a deadly collusion of religious extremism and mobs can do to a society. The events of this time were so deadly and brutal that even after 320 years have gone by, people still refer back to the terrible circumstances and tortured victims. The phrase “witch hunt” was coined as a reference to the Salem Witch Trials, and are used to imply a futile or unjust search.

The incident itself involved some women in the town of Salem, who suddenly began acting bizarrely and had uncontrollable fits and contortions. They blamed witches for this inexplicable behavior and raised accusatory fingers at some specific women in Salem who were not even remotely connected to the disturbed women. When doctors confirmed the diagnosis as being possessed by witches, the religious and superstitious town went into overdrive with passionate rage. Salem officials began arresting suspected witches by using flimsy pieces of evidence. Scores of these accused women were murdered brutally, either by being burned at the stake or crushed under stones.

Stock Market Movements

This may be a more subtle example of herd mentality, but is still one that drives finance analysts and stock market experts to study the predicted movements of the stocks. What drives herd mentality, and results in people acting in a certain common way, is fear and uncertainty. In simple terms, when people believe the economy is performing well, the stock prices rise, and when they fear the economy will take a downturn (via rumors, word of mouth and the media), that is when they stop purchasing stocks. This results in the economy experiencing a downturn, as expected; this phenomenon is referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy. To make matters more complex, people rely upon experts and professionals to guide them or to give them some cues as to what direction the stock market would take. By the time the herd jumps on the bandwagon, the advantage is lost and there are no more gains to be had. Hence, the herd is in a self-perpetuated bubble of vulnerability as it fruitlessly attempts to reach the pinnacle while letting other people cloud their

perceptions.

Stampedes at Sporting Events

Large sporting events are a breeding ground for herd mentality. Typically, people become wrought with emotion, passion and determination, which are provoked when rooting for a favorite side at any major sporting event. This can trigger a herd mentality show of action. Within large crowds, spectators become more riled up and vivacious as they cheer their teams in a boorish manner, which they normally would not do if alone. This is the result of taking in the collective moods of the majority of the audience and replicating that same behavior in order to blend in.

For example, in the Accra Sports Stadium, Accra, there was a huge commotion as a crowd started acting violently after the league match ended between Accra Hearts and Asante Kotoko. The chaotic stampeding got so out of hand that the police had to intervene and use tear gas to dispense the rowdy crowd. The resulting damage and commotion led to a tragic death of 127 people who were mercilessly crushed. This was the worst recorded stampede incident in the whole of Africa.

Why Do People Indulge in Herd Mentality?

In order to set yourself apart from the very imminent phenomenon of herd mentality, one needs to answer the following questions:

Do you regard yourself to be separate from a crowd?

Do you feel proud and confident when you stand apart from a crowd?

Is your decision-making process influenced only by your own views, or do you also factor other people's views into your decision?

Do you care a lot about what is in fashion or not?

Do you consider yourself so morally strong that your moral compass can never waver in a large group of people?

Do you strongly believe that you would never indulge in herd mentality?

Research suggests that our brains are wired in such a way that we would tend to conform to what the crowd or large group is doing or saying when faced with such a situation. However, one can wheedle their way out of such a situation by simply saying no, which is the first step to maintaining one's own stance. We all have taken part in herd mentality in small ways or the other. For instance, have you ever been to a stadium where there is highly charged football match going on, and you observe a handful of fans cheering wildly? Gradually, more people will join them in their cheering. Soon enough, the majority is doing the same, and you stand there uncomfortably, not knowing exactly how to react. Eventually, you also begin to cheer and clap like the rest of them, so that you do not look or feel like the odd one out. This also makes you feel like you're blending in with the crowd. This sort of behavior truly reflects the age-old motto: "if you can't beat them, join them."

Fashion trends and statements are another very common example of how easily people are sucked into herd mentality. It is a common sight to see teenagers wear baggy pants with their jeans hanging dangerously low, some with their buttocks half-showing. There was a time when this so-called fashion trend was considered stylish and anyone not following it was considered ancient and outdated. For this reason, everyone followed it as much as they could at the risk of becoming a social outcast or committing a fashion faux pas. Fashion trends change at lightning speed and keeping up with all of them is being part of the phenomenon of herd mentality.

A recent study conducted at the Basel University, Switzerland, by Vasil

Klucharev made use of an MRI machine to observe and scan the brain patterns of an individual as they were asked to rate the attractiveness of general faces. Once the results were in, the participants were informed that their answers did not corroborate with the “average rating” of each face, and they were scanned again. This time, an “error signal” was triggered in the brain; the majority of the people altered their opinions, illustrating that brains may be wired to conform to “the herd.”

Another study to examine herd mentality was conducted by Chris Frith and Daniel Campbell-Meiklejohn in Aarhus University, Denmark. The reward centers of the brain would be activated if a particular pop song was rated the same by an expert as well. Hence, this implies that shared views are seen as a power or a craze that people crave.

There are scores of examples of how herd mentality is used in various walks of life. For example, at military academies, the recruits are taught to be conformists and incline towards herd mentality to strive for their cause. According to Tamara Avant, the Program Director of Psychology at the South University in Savannah, people tend to lose their self-awareness when they are surrounded by a large crowd; they lose their individuality. It becomes easier for them to be vulnerable and be swept up in the general atmosphere and wave of emotion of the large crowd of which they are a part. The larger this crowd, the more their self-awareness is foregone.

Causes of Herd Mentality

Even though herd mentality seems like such an irrational and nonsensical notion, and people would strongly claim that they would never indulge in such behavior, we are actually wired to act as conformists.

Some triggers and reasons behind herd mentality are as follows:

De-individuation: This is what was discussed in the aforementioned paragraph; in a large crowd, people lose control of their self-awareness.

Emotions: In a group, it is easier for people to feel more vulnerable. The wave of emotion that overtakes the entire group is what affects the individual as well, which is why he or she acts like the surrounding people.

Anonymity: Within a large group, there is a sense of security and anonymity. This implies that whatever you do, it will rarely be seen to be linked exclusively to you by others in the group. Hence, the person easily lets go of their sense of responsibility.

Identity: It is very easy for people to lose their individual sense of identity when part of a large group of people.

Delegation of responsibility: When people start acting unreasonably in a large group, it is not seen as irrational as it would have seemed if done individually. If a crowd begins to behave violently, it would not involve individual blame and it would seem like a situation of "group responsibility."

Fear: Research has shown that the brain section that is responsible for the emotion of fear is called the amygdala, and it is what causes the response of fear. This response center goes into overdrive and causes an adrenaline rush when fear kicks in. Similarly, the fear of uncertainty, anticipation, and standing out can cause the person to act in ways that they would never imagine were possible.

Many researchers claim that herd mentality is a response to fear and unpredictability. Scientists have further discovered that the herd mentality that arises from fear is far more powerful, as compared to the herd mentality that stems from greed.

Firstly, people most likely to become swept into herd mentality are adolescents who have had a troubled past and who already feel helpless and hopeless.

Those with no sense of self-awareness and identity are the most vulnerable to give in to herd mentality. They are likely do this simply because they feel like they finally belong somewhere and the group they spend time with cares about them.

Secondly, young children who are disillusioned, impressionable and breakable in their beliefs are also likely to be victims of herd mentality. Thirdly, people who are in dire situations with regards to financial woes and health issues are also more likely to indulge in herd mentality in desperate times. Fourthly, children who already have weak ties or bonds with their family members and are generally antisocial are more likely to become victims of herd mentality.

Ways to Evade Herd Mentality

We all can relate to the concept of herd mentality, as we all have encountered a situation where we conformed to the public opinion. This kind of behavior is likened to animalistic behavior, for instance, how ants form a large crowd when there is a tasty morsel on the ground, how bees hover over their hive, and how birds flock at once when migrating. Hence, there are strong parallels between animal behavior and human group behavior. The phenomenon of herd mentality is a very useful tool that is used by stockbrokers, financial analysts, sales professionals and retailers. They use it to decipher consumer behavior and incline an individual to purchase certain goods or services, just because everyone else is doing it.

There are ways to avoid herd mentality in a way that does you no harm and helps you maintain your sense of identity:

Take time to consider a particular decision: This basically implies that you need to stop being on a constant autopilot where you are always on the go and do not have time to even consider your options, views and choices. Prior to taking a particular decision, such as when buying a product, conduct your own research and give less emphasis to the opinions of others. Once you make this a habit, you will become prone to

making more conscious decisions.

Make an effort to form your own individual opinions: Relegating to the opinion of others without even taking the time to consider your own can be very damaging. Educate yourself on making the rational and well-informed choice or decision on your own, and then stick to it. Don't sway your opinion to align with another individual's views.

Creativity is key to enforcing your own self-identity: Being creative implies that you are not constantly running off to others for thoughts on how to do a certain task. You are imaginative enough to make your own logical decisions and trust your own opinions.

Have reachable goals in life: Goals provide life with much needed meaning, ambition and direction. If a person has realistic life goals then it would take much more than a herd to alter their mindset. Instead of the herd directing you where to go mindlessly, it will be your goals, desires, needs and ideas.

Say no when required: Never hesitate to say no when a situation demands it. This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with a crowd mentality in which everyone is telling you to do one thing that you do not want to do. Remember that it is okay to stand out and not do what everyone else is doing. Do not be afraid to refuse.

Do not be skeptical of standing out: Numerous studies have shown that those who lack social acceptance are more likely to follow a herd and go along with whatever the crowd's purpose is. This advice is not only to avoid a herd mentality but also to become successful. Successful people do not hide behind crowds; they dare to be different and stick out of the crowd, which is what sets them apart from the masses. It is very important for a person's self-esteem, self-confidence and personal identity to not allow anyone else to make you feel bad about where you came from, or to let them dictate how you should feel, think and express.

Take time to evaluate options: When you are in a hurry, you are more likely to get pressurized and let others decide for you. Do not let that happen. Give yourself the time and space to make reasonable and thoughtful decisions.

Chapter 2: Emotion Is the Compass

The Human Mind – A Complex Web

The human mind is a powerful organ. More often than not, we tend to ignore or deny the kind of grasping hold our mind has on our personality, the kind of lives we lead and the sort of situations we are in. Some individuals suffer from the constant case of negative thoughts, while others are undeniably positive. The case of pessimists, optimists and realists – it all suggests that there are different mental patterns and thoughts.

Emotional Intelligence

There is a need to achieve emotional intelligence: striking a balance between our rational mind and our impulsive mind. Our emotions, and our thoughts, are delicately interlinked and they both alter and affect the lives we lead. We often fail to understand just how strong is the force of our emotions and thoughts and how it completely alters our choices, actions and personalities. Our thoughts tinted with negativity, single-handedly provoke us to do things that might be considered destructive and negative. On the flipside, thought, positive thoughts motivate us to do things that are constructive, positive and progressive.

Pessimism

The worst case scenario is the constant case of negativity. Often our minds are too perfectly programmed to follow a set pattern of negative, constantly

pessimistic thoughts. Individuals suffering from this are in constant state of agony, anxiety and self-destruction. Every situation is viewed from a very constricted, negative point and the result is always painful. Such individuals are known as pessimists are known for their undying need to view everything from a negative point of view, to always find the downside in everything and to always focus on the negative aspect. In this case, the mind becomes your worst enemy.

Many of us are slaves to our minds. Our own mind is our worst enemy. We try to focus, and our mind wanders off. We try to keep stress at bay, but anxiety keeps us awake at night. We try to be good to the people we love, but then we forget them and put ourselves first.

Entrapped Minds

Individuals who are constantly enslaved and entrapped by their negative thoughts are classified as pessimists. Pessimism, defined objectively, is a state of mind which basically involves the constant occurrence of recurring negative thoughts and feelings which convince an individual to always focus on the worst case scenario and the shortcomings. Human beings often create a comfort zone in their minds and refuse to break the barriers.

Sometimes we are too afraid to hope, to dare to believe that things might not be half as gloomy as we might perceive. More often than not, the blanket of pessimism is worn by humans as self-defense; to protect us from feeling the pain of disappointment, heartbreak and disillusionment. Therefore, we do not even try to go beyond the bounds of unflinching negativity. We do not even allow ourselves to look beyond the set ideas of pessimism in order to cushion us from the impending disappointment and pain. We often experience pessimism when we desire something; we constantly tell ourselves it will never happen, so we do not get crushed when our worst fears are confirmed.

Hoping Against All Odds

We cannot deny, though, that in the hearts of our hearts, we know that we hope, against unbeatable odds, for something inexplicably great to happen to us, but we dare not let it show. We keep it concealed and trapped underneath layers and layers of negative abstraction, lack of enthusiasm and thinly-veiled pessimism. We become so used to the way we think; it becomes difficult, often impossible, to crack down the fences of customary negative thinking patterns. Our minds begin to function along the lines of convoluted ideas of self-preservation which dictate that if we always expect the worst to happen, we will save ourselves from disappointment.

Optimism

On the flipside, some people resolutely follow the ideas of sheer optimism, positivity and unwavering belief in all-things progressive. Optimists are individuals who exhibit conscious selective focus on positivity. Optimism, quite like pessimism, is a state of mind which alters the viewpoints of different individuals on different matters. Despite worsening conditions and all factors pointing towards negativity, optimists find a way to hope against all odds.

I suspect the truth is that we are waiting, all of us, against insurmountable odds, for something extraordinary to happen to us.

Action and Reaction

In a way, we are all exposed to similar experiences; the only difference is how we choose to react. Some gravitate towards pessimism, while others soar towards optimism. Psychologists suggest a midway: realism. Realists keep in mind both aspects of negativity and positivity and focus on the most real, most rational approach. Different researches propose various benefits of following the realistic methodology, while others advocate the benefits of pessimism and

optimism, respectively.

Core Life Values

Aside from different psychological states of mind, all individuals possess core fundamental values that shape their life and personalities. These core values function as guidelines and guiding principles which color the course of human behavior and action. It is important to realize what core values are we following as individuals. These core values and guiding principles are ingrained in our minds and etched in our personalities while we are still impressionable and young. Circumstances, and situations vary and individuals grow up with different core ethics about life. These essential ideals involve ideologies and moral principles regarding family, honesty, ethics about professional life, and personal relationships.

Self-Knowledge

Often, we follow different ethics, values and ideologies without really knowing that we are practicing them. While we are still young, certain values are relayed onto us through different life experiences and we carry them with us all our lives. Mostly, we lack the realization and, thus, it is extremely important to recognize ourselves and to understand fully where we stand morally. The process of formulating core life values does not stop when we grow old or when we are mature; in fact it deepens and becomes more wholesome and has a lot more meaning and value than ever before. Therefore, it is extremely important to gain this vital self-knowledge. In order to do that, it is essential to know and to be aware of your values so you can conduct yourself more confidently in personal and professional life as an adult.

The Rarely-Visited Field of Self-Discovery

If we set aside all the things that life throws at us, the everyday life situations that consume us, physically and mentally; if we, for a moment, set all of that aside and pause and really question ourselves, and if we really truly stumble upon the rarely-visited field of self-discovery, how much do we really know about ourselves? It is a daunting question and is often met with mixed feelings of doubt, confusion and, more often than not, regressive ignorance. Questions about personality, core values and ethics are categorized as vague concepts of absurdity and abstraction. We often display such lack of interest because are we too afraid to realize that we are often living in conflict to our values. How, one might ask, does that occur? It does not have to be a ground-breaking foray from your core values, a simple example could be continuing day-in and day-out, a job that you have no interest in, thereby, denying the reality and refusing to accept that you are living in conflict to your real values. It is a complex phenomenon; living a life forever impersonating someone else to impress the people we do not even care about for reasons that do not even matter.

Emerging Out of the Shadows of Obscurity

It is beyond the realms of common sense; living in a constant state of lie, to go on living as an imposter. We must not conform to the soul-crushing standards of life; it is important to create a space for yourself, to let yourself in and be who you are, without any inhibitions. We must not, under any circumstances, try to edit ourselves, or to keep ourselves in check to be a part of the mob. In this day and age, it is more comfortable to be the wallflower, to blend into the background and to never stand out. However, we must urge ourselves to look deeper into our hearts and to find the courage to be who we are and to let others know and fully see our true self. There is no gain in being a by-product of lack of confidence and self-shaming; we are all given a single chance to live and we must make it worth our while. There is no use living a life which is based upon broken shambles of herd mentality, and conforming to mob-rules, we must soar to the heights of being our true self, no matter how ridiculous, unique or diverse we may be.

Getting to Know Your Inner Self

We make so many acquaintances, so many friends over the course of life, however, we often forget to get to know the real us. How many of us truly understand our true selves? These questions do not include mundane likes and dislikes, like your favorite color or your much loved song or movie, or what are your preferred pizza toppings; these questions involve the fundamental, base values that our lives are based upon. It is very important to unfold into the person that we were always meant to be. So often people do not live up to their potential; we hear that so often. What does that really entail? We lack the realization and we lack the connection with our inner selves and, therefore, we never really achieve what we were supposed to. Knowing yourself or understanding yourself on deeper, base levels is what entails true form of self-discovery.

So many times, we discard the ideas of self-discovery and self-exploratory journeys to fictional concepts and ideas. We must understand that asking ourselves what is important in our lives is not a matter of a fictional, abstract concept; it is a matter of coming face-to-face with your deepest, innermost insecurities and fears which we keep bottled up inside for far too long, pretending they do not even exist. All the while, we morph into someone else entirely and completely steer clear off the path to self-discovery because it might be a little painful to understand ourselves.

Asking yourself what is important in life entails understanding your weakness, and your strengths. It is a question of your core values, beliefs and principles which your personality is based upon. It involves fundamental questions regarding your passions, your aims, dreams, your limitations, ideologies and opinions. If you attempt to answer these questions, you gain your purpose in life.

Unfolding Realities

All said and done, it is necessary to understand that our mental capacities affect our lives; if we put ourselves in certain situations, our personalities will unfold accordingly. It involves the simple concept of action and reaction. If we push too hard at something, it will either bend or there will come a point that it will break. Therefore, if we expose ourselves to situations that are too negative or too far destructive, our human minds and personalities will not bear the brunt for too long; we will either come out of the searing experience all too-negative or completely broken. It can be further illustrated through the concept of that if we jump into water; what do we expect? We get wet. That is the most natural, most obvious outcome.

Similarly, if we place ourselves in a healthy, positive environment, our mind will blossom and develop positively. We, as individuals, will be much happier. We reap what we sow and our minds soak up the negativity or positively form any given situation. It is all a fragile web; our thoughts, our emotions and our surroundings; they are all inter-linked in the most, complex of webs and it is important to master our mind, in order to master our emotions and ultimately, our lives.

Creating Unique Human Realities

There is no set pattern to a perfect human being or a perfect set of core values. There is, as always, a certain level of objectivity and everything must be taken in with a pinch of salt. Somewhere beyond the ideals of concrete rationality and subjectivity, there is a field of untainted emotions which are pure and unadulterated and they form the most wholesome reflection of truly unique human realities.

Chapter 3: We are the Creator

Thought Power and Creating Our Reality

Many people are unaware of the fact that we are responsible for the realities that we create. It is often overlooked that our realities are always in our own control. What exactly is controlling our realities you ask? Our thoughts of course! Our thoughts have immense power and control over us and we often overlook the fact. It is the way we think that influences our life and creates our realities.

If we can always remember and get it etched in our mind that our thoughts are our controllers, we can greatly improve the quality of our life. The reason why the majority of us unconsciously create the same or negative realities is because we want proof. Our minds are programmed in a manner that demands proof, in order for it to come to a conclusion. We will not think a certain way unless our mind accepts logical proof for it. Whilst it is not the case with everyone, many people fall victim and unconsciously create their realities and this process repeats repeatedly. However, the problem is that truth is a subjective term. It can vary according to various perspectives.

Let’s take a simple example. Water is poured in a glass until it covers half. Two people are looking at the same glass. Person A sees the glass as half-full, whilst Person B sees the glass as half-empty. Both people have come to their separate conclusions in terms of how full or empty the glass is but the way the people think reflects the kind of people that they are and how their thoughts control their realities. Person A and Person B are both correct because the glass is half-full but it is also half-empty. However, Person A thought optimistically and hence saw the glass being half-full. On the other hand, Person B thought pessimistically and saw the glass being half-empty. Both are right in their own way but their thoughts greatly differ and reflect their

personalities. Our thoughts have the power to make us or break us.

The key to creating our reality is thought power. In order to create a rewarding destiny, one must have full control of their habitual thoughts and their nature. The nature of your thoughts attracts the kind of life that you live and once you can monitor your thoughts, you can easily work your way towards living a better life. Many people are unaware of how powerful their thoughts actually are and end up becoming victims of depression, procrastination or wasting time.

The thought power cannot only limit one's mental ability but physical ability too. A small thought can attract another thought that will in turn attract another one and the cycle goes on…The result? A person's mind flooded with thoughts (that may even be meaningless) and the person feeling helpless or in a state of mental distress. In order to stop thoughts from wasting your time, it is important to understand thought power. Here are a few aspects that can help you and should always be remembered.

Always remember that outside effects are correspondent to inner causes

"Circumstances do not make a man, they reveal him." The effects that we witness in our physical world reflect our inner thoughts and mentality. This is the ultimate essence of the power of our thoughts. One is responsible for the various conditions experienced in life since they are the result of one's collective beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, if you're down you can easily put up a show but if you are truly not happy from inside, it will reflect in the way you act and talk to others. People can judge your thoughts by the way you act and talk.

Majority of the people have the misconception that they are prone to thinking a certain way due to their circumstances. They don't even realize that it is their very thoughts that lead to the circumstances that they face. Whether those circumstances are good or bad, their thoughts are responsible for creating them. Creating your reality is an inside job that requires understanding. You can only create better realities and a better life for yourself, provided that you

can change the way you think and take responsibilities for your thoughts. It isn't as easy as it seems and it is even more difficult for a person who thinks negatively. However, with a little bit of knowledge, understanding and assistance, one can create a better life for themselves and can help others in polishing their thoughts.

The Herd Mentality

Another important aspect that has the power to affect our reality is the herd mentality. The herd mentality is something that can destroy your mental strength without you even realising it. Having a herd mentality refers to accepting a certain way of thinking just because the majority of the people think that way. People can be greatly influenced by the thoughts and beliefs of others and can unconsciously have them take over their ability to control their own thoughts. This is very damaging since one's mind is trained to accepting what the majority think and then it considers it as valid or a truth. This way, others actually become the controller of your thoughts and decisions and hence, the outcomes are always limited or not exactly in your favour. An example of the herd mentality include being superstitious. A black cat will not necessarily imply that you will have bad luck but because the majority associates black cats with superstition, your mind will naturally be prone into thinking negative.

There is No Limit to the Power of your Thoughts

The mind is very powerful, more powerful than you could imagine. It is responsible for every thought and every corresponding reaction. There is no limit to the amount of thoughts going through a person's head. Each person's thoughts will vary according to their nature and ability to perceive things in a certain way. A creative person will be able to create far more thoughts and mental scenarios as compared to a person who is not creative. Whilst this can be an advantage at times, it can also be a disadvantage.

Let's take an example. When presented with a problem, a creative person will be able to think of multiple solutions. In this case, being creative and having a

better thinking power is advantageous. On the other hand, the same creativity can cause the person to become a victim of meaningless thoughts that can prove to be a problem. These unnecessary thoughts can leave a person feeling very negative and hopeless about things. When a person can understand that they can be carried away by their thoughts, they can learn to control them and limit them to an amount that is healthy for their lives. The mind is very powerful and once a person can comprehend that they have the power within them, it can help them towards creating better realities.

All Thoughts do not have the same Power

According to the law of attraction, like energy attracts like energy. How does this affect our reality? It's actually quite simple. When we think positive and are happy, we attract positive energy and stay happy. On the other hand, when we think negatively, we subconsciously give off negative energy attracting the negative energy around us. A person that is feeling positive and happy will be more likely to see the good in things; whereas, a person who is down will be prone to seeing the negative side of things. We attract what we feel. Our thoughts, beliefs and mental attitudes will formulate consequences according to their nature and hence, understanding the law of attraction will help in attracting only good things for ourselves.

All thoughts are alive. How? Well, everything around us is energy and that energy has an effect on us. Even if those thoughts are meaningless fantasies, they are alive and have the power to affect us in one way or the other. Every time we think of something, it causes the emission of a certain frequency that in return, reflects to what we feel. Therefore, being aware of the fact that our thoughts are alive will help us in controlling them. When we know that each and every little thought will affect us, we will naturally try to focus on the quality of our thoughts. This is very important and can help a great deal in the way we think and can help us in keeping realistic expectations.

Our thoughts have different power depending upon the energy given to them. Our habitual thoughts are far more powerful and have a greater influence on us over thoughts that are not habitual. What we feel from day to day has far more power than we can imagine and can define us unknowingly. The more

energy that you give to a certain thought, the more power that thought has over you. Therefore, if you become a victim of thoughts that end up controlling your life, it is your own fault since you have given those thoughts too much energy and attention.

If you want to keep thoughts from affecting your life, you must limit the amount of energy that you give to them. This can be effectively accomplished by keeping one's self busy. If you are a person who is prone to feeling miserable due to constant negative thoughts, simply focus your attention on other things. For e.g. when you feel that you are falling into a whirlpool of negativity, get up and do something that diverts your attention. You could read a book, cook something or watch a movie. Whatever you do, the idea is to get your mind off those thoughts.

Programme your Mind and Change your Life

The subconscious mind is responsible for creating our reality. If we truly wish to attract only good in our life, we must train our mind to do so. This can be thought of as a programming session. In order for us to be able to change our life for good, we must programme or rather re-programme our mind that has been working on default. We must programme our mind to think only of what we want it to think. This can be achieved through creative visualisation. Creative visualisation is a technique involved in creating realities. It involves the use of thought power to create the realities that we wish to witness. It is accomplished by creative imagination. The imagination powerfully transforms the thoughts into mental images. These images then correspond to what one feels in the physical world.

In order to make the most of thought power, one must take control over their habitual thoughts and learn to transform them. However, it does not imply that each and every little thought is taken seriously and needs to be worked on. Otherwise, it will take away from the effectiveness of controlling one's thoughts. You must be aware of your thoughts but not obsessed about them. If you are going to be obsessed with each and every thought, you will only give them more power over you. Instead, focus on replacing those thoughts if they

are not helping you grow. Replace every bad thought with a positive thought to cancel it out. If something is making you feel miserable, think of a good memory or something funny that can take away the power of the thought that was bringing you down. *"What you plant now, you harvest later."* Focus on replacing your thoughts today and it will help you work your way towards a better future.

You must learn to tame the thoughts that have the most power or control over you. The dominant thoughts are the ones that need to be worked on since they affect your reality. Do not waste your time stressing over every thought. Monitor your feelings and analyse the thoughts that are responsible for creating those unwanted feelings. It is those thoughts that need your attention. Once you can effectively tame your dominant thoughts, you will naturally be able to improve the quality of your overall thoughts.

Negative Thinking and How to get it Out

Negative thinking is horrible. It can do a lot more damage to you than you can imagine. Negative thoughts have too much power and when those thoughts are given more energy, they can instantly have you falling into depression. Too many people are becoming victims of depression and it is due to negativity that is given the power to control one's life. One must remember that life is not going to be all-smooth; there will be ups and downs in everyone's life. To think negative or to experience times of distress is completely natural however, what matters is the way we respond to that negativity.

When we think negatively, we are giving off low vibrations. These negative vibrations or energy attracts other similar vibrations. In return, a person ends up feeling more negative. What we put out, i.e. negative energy, we get it back and hence, unconsciously become victims of creating realities that are doing us no good. If we don't get hold of these negative thoughts and control them, we turn those thoughts into habitual thoughts. These habitual thoughts gradually become dominant ones and turn into vicious negative cycles that repeat time after time.

Even if we are not generally negative-thinkers, we can easily fall into the trap when we decide to give power to our negative thoughts. Just a single negative thought can lead to a network of negativity and have one feeling depressed. In order to let go of negative thoughts, we have to first acknowledge that they exist. Acknowledging that they exist is a better step than working to instantly replace those thoughts. People that are depressed or feeling down due to negativity cannot just let go of negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones straight away. It isn't that easy. Rather, one can acknowledge those thoughts and then think about gradually letting them go. This process is more practical and easier for one to manage.

Let's take a closer look at how negative thoughts can be controlled and managed effectively.

The Importance of Staying Calm

Whenever we experience negative thoughts, we are often unaware of their impact. Those negative thoughts build up without us knowing and we later realise that we wasted the last 30 minutes on useless worrying. When we can become aware of our negative thoughts, we can work on controlling them the instant that they arrive.

Negative thoughts can have us instantly responding to them. Those responses that are a consequence of negativity only add more negativity. These negative thoughts can cause you to react and feel regretful for reacting in a certain way. Therefore, it is very important to stay calm before reacting straight away. If you cannot let go of negative thoughts altogether, consider changing the way you respond to them.

Assess the Thought

There are countless thoughts that a person experiences but are exactly all of them valid or even true? Many a times, people end up giving power to thoughts that may not even be true or may be useless negative scenarios that a person has unconsciously created in the mind. These thoughts have negative

consequences and when one learns that the thought was not that much of a concern, the feeling of regret makes one feel pathetic! Therefore, assess the thoughts and limit the contemplation period. Do your thoughts even deserve the amount of attention and time that you are giving them? The answer is usually “No.”

Instead of having the negative thoughts building up and turning into a grand scenario of negativity, focus your attention on thinking positively about those thoughts. For every negative thought or feeling, tell yourself that it may be for your betterment. You can even think of it as a lesson learnt and then focus on moving on. The idea is to change the way you respond to a negative thought by training your mind to think positively. When you think positively, you ultimately take away the power of your negative thoughts.

Why wait for the first negative thought to attract more negativity and cause you distress? Catch the first thought and control it before it spreads. If you can catch the very start of the negativity, you can control it before it grows into a bigger issue. Therefore, kill the first negative thought by diverting your attention elsewhere. It can help a great deal!

Do Not Blame Yourself

As mentioned before, it is completely natural to become a victim of negative thoughts. However, the worst you can do is blame yourself by entering a mode of self-sympathy. Remind yourself that everybody thinks negatively at some point in their life but you will not let that negativity get in your way. As long as you can understand that feeling negative is human but you can master your mental ability by accepting and moving on, you can easily start to live a happier and healthier life.

In a nutshell, the thought process has a major impact on reality creation. As long as an individual can understand the power of the thoughts, they can work their way towards creating better realities for themselves. Always remember that your life will reflect the way you feel. Therefore, if you want to live a happier life, you can only achieve that if you are internally happy. Once you

master controlling your thoughts, feeling and emotions, you can change your life in miraculous ways! As the famous quote states, *"Change your thoughts and you change your reality."* Try it today and you will instantly feel the positive affect that it has on you, not just mentally but physically too.

Conclusion

Do what makes you Happy

All that matters in the end is doing what makes you happy. This is a proven fact. You need to completely disregard what others think about what you do or how it will affect the amount of money you make. If it makes you happy, you need to be doing more of it. Whether it's a job, a certain activity, a passion or even if it means being silly and having some fun, if it's lifting your spirits, it deserves more of your time. It can be easy to neglect the importance of happiness in this fast-paced world but you need to change your priorities. You must follow your emotion and do what makes you happy. Your happiness should always be your first priority. Even if you get a well-paying job, what use is that job if it is providing for you but taking the happiness away from your life? Wouldn't you prefer a job that pays you less but gives you time and allows you to be happy? Whether it means getting to spend more time with loved ones or simply being able to enjoy the job responsibilities, being happy about something is always going to be more rewarding. The rewards will not be just for that time but also for the long run.

Doing what brings you happiness will change your life in a way that you never imagined. Many people restrict their happiness because they feel that they are not allowed to feel that way or that it's not worth it because it may not bring monetary benefits. Others may not follow their emotions and passions because they feel that they cannot make a living out of it or simply do not have the time. What's worse is when people are aware of something that makes them happy but choose to distance themselves from it because they feel that their money-making lives are more important. Well, to make money and earn a good living is important but what about your happiness? Are you sure you are going to live long enough to reap the rewards of your hard work? Are you sure that you are going to have that job for forever and not be kicked out randomly one fine day? What guarantee does your life give you that you will have time

for happiness later on if you sacrifice it today?

This does not imply that a person starts wasting their time on useless activities because they are told to be happy and having a job means that their happiness will be put at stake. Rather, it reflects the importance of understanding that everything must be balanced in life. You cannot be working hard all the time and not enjoy yourself. You cannot just have a job because it pays you well but is causing you to be depressed because it's too much of a burden. You cannot just distance yourself from happiness because of the mere thought of what other people will think. You only live once and you deserve to live a life that pleases you and keeps you happy. Therefore, learn to balance that life by changing your priorities. When you learn to follow your emotions and do what makes you happy, you create rewarding realities.

It is always better to consciously create your realities instead of waiting to see what happens. When you are aware that your mind is the ultimate power source that controls the way you feel, think and react, you naturally start to become more conscious. So why not consciously create and create for good? All it requires is some practice but it is not impossible to achieve. Regardless if it takes you a week or a month to get you started with consciously creating realities, it will always be beneficial for you and your loved ones. Not only will you see an improvement in your mood, your happiness will reflect in everything you do.

If you're depressed, you will be plagued by negativity and your entire day will be ruined. This causes you to lag behind and miss deadlines. This not only ruins your day, but it also has an adverse effect on your mental and physical health. Your mood and your perspective defined the type of day you have, if you maintain a positive attitude then no matter what goes wrong in your day, you achieve the strength to overcome those obstacles. However, if you adopt a negative attitude you find yourself unable to tackle even the simplest of problems. Your attitude towards something defines how good you are at it, so don't let your negativity dictate your life. In fact, be positive and everything will fall right into place.

If you are happy and you cook, the results will be better because you would

have enjoyed what you cooked and would have done it with love. If you are happy and you hear a joke, it can surprisingly seem funnier. Similarly, everything around you will make you happy because your mind will subconsciously be giving off positive vibes. Happiness is so powerful that it can make you see the sunshine even when it's dark and gloomy outside. That internal feel good factor is so powerful that it can create realities that you've always wanted and can improve the quality of your life.

In order to consciously create realities, you must take time to sit down and analyse your thoughts. Ask yourself why something is a certain way and whether it's the result of your thought power. Imagine your life by picturing what your life would look like if your thoughts were different and happier. How would it affect you and the things you do and how would they help you in the long run. When you can visualise your life in a better state than it currently is, you will begin to realise that your future and your realities are in your own hand.

Start by thinking of the job that you have. Are you happy with it? If yes, great! If you're not, think of why you are not happy. Is it because you are not being paid well? Is it because it is taking too much of your time? Is it because it is miserable due to the staff at work or is it because you simply just don't like your job? Ask yourself why you are still doing something that is not keeping you happy and understand that you deserve better. Not only do you deserve better, better yet… you can create better realities. How? Simple! Change your job, follow your emotions, and do what makes you happy. Earn a living through your passion and witness it transform your life in miraculous ways. You'll instantly start to notice that your priorities will not be money because the rewards that you'll get from your happiness will feel so precious.

Why wait for the stage of regret when so many years have passed and you've earned well but have missed out on the fun? Imagine living a life when you can finally rest and want to enjoy yourself but you don't have the energy? Isn't it scary? Is that what you deserve? No! Anybody can consciously create realities and live a better life. Regardless of your age, profession or goals in life, you have the power to transform and enhance your life through the creation of realities. Nothing just happens because it's meant to be. You have the power within you to create the realities and that power has always been

there.

Now is the time that you need to make use of that power and allow it to transform your life for good! Get hold of your thoughts by learning to control them and minimizing their negative impacts. Know when it is time to let go or indulge in activities that are mentally helping you to grow. Get out of your bubble and take better risks, risks that allow you to do what makes you happy. *"Change your thoughts and let them change your reality."* Now is the time to stop worrying about what people will think and focusing on the things that will make you happy. Remember, you can shape your realities the way you want. You can choose to entertain negative thoughts and have them leaving you depressed or you can choose to be happy by doing what you love and thinking positively and therefore, living a life that you enjoy and appreciate. You'll just be better at anything and everything that you do!

Let's look at simple ways that can help you do what you love and shape better realities. When something does not make you happy…

Change it:

If something is not making you happy, change it. Of course, it's easier said than done but you have to understand that the power is always within you. If it's a job, consider changing your job. If it's a friend who's continuously bringing you down, consider having another friend who can make you feel better. Regardless of what it is that is bringing you down, changing it will help you get out of the negativity. Focus on what makes you happy and like Nike always say, *"Just do it."*

Ignore it:

Another great way to do what makes you happy is to ignore your negative thoughts. You can be in the mood to do something but the thought of what

others will think or other negative thoughts can have you changing your mind and putting your happiness at stake. Don't fall into the trap that can easily take your happiness away from you. Whether it's other people or other priorities, ask yourself if they actually deserve the status that you have subconsciously given them. Simply ignore the negativity and continue doing what makes you happy. As long as you're happy and are not doing anything wrong, why even entertain the negativity?

Replace it:

This one's simple. When a certain thought is keeping your happiness far away from you, replace that thought. It's easy. The moment you can become aware that a certain thought is doing you no good, you must focus on replacing that though with a better one. If you love chocolate, get hold of a bar. If you love to read, go grab that book. Any thought that is better; even if it's a good memory…it will do the trick. The idea is to get your mind off the thought that was not letting you be happy.

Learn from it:

It's normal for us to make mistakes and ruin our own happiness. Instead of sulking over why and how things went wrong, consider it a lesson and progress forward. Life is too short to sit down and allow your thoughts to constrain your freedom to be happy. Simply allow the experience to help you in growing mentally and move forward in the direction of your happiness.

See it with different lens:

You can also do what makes you happy by changing the way you look at something that isn't making you happy. Sounds confusing but the essence is simple! Simply change your perspective about whatever is keeping your

happiness away from you. If you're working in a call centre and handling a multitude of customer calls every day, think about how many people you are helping. All those calls…think of how many lives you are making easier, even if it means helping them solve a basic technical problem. When you can learn to see things differently, you can do what makes you happy.

So whether it's a job, a decision or aspect of life, if it isn't making you happy, you are not growing. When you're not growing mentally, you are unconsciously creating realities in default-mode. Get out of the herd mentality and get it etched in your mind that you are responsible for the realities that you create and you have the power to change them. Creating realities is no rocket science. Anybody can create realities that are more rewarding and they can effectively accomplish it at any stage of their life. All it requires is some awareness, dedication and you're good to go. Start creating better realities today and live a rewarding life- a life that you deserve!

The Art of Inner Beauty

A Guide to Reveal Your True Beauty, How to Embrace Your Birthmark, Scar, Body Image or Appearance

Grace Scott

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Introduction

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.

Children's saying

You've no doubt heard this saying recited on at least one playground while you were growing up. As a child you may have even repeated it. I know I did. I said it more times than I care to admit.

Unfortunately, I never did find much solace in it, because quite frankly words did hurt me. Not only that, but they also created wounds that took a long time to heal. Some of them, in fact, never did heal.

When I was in the third grade I was riding my bicycle and hit a bump. I flew over the handle bars and my face hit the ground hard. So hard that the fall took the skin off it in several places and I walked around with a black eye for a long time. Looking at me today you would never know it. The scars on my face that as a child thought would never heal finally did. And there's no physical evidence of the accident.

I wish I could say the same thing of the verbal slings I received in high school. To this day, decades after they were uttered, I'm not only carrying those scars with me, but the pain as if they had just been spoken to me.

Why? Why couldn't I ignore them? Why didn't I know enough to allow those words bounce off of me like bullets bounce off Superman?

If you know what I'm talking about then you probably have a good idea why I can identify certain people from high school by the level of the "verbal sticks

and stones” I received from them.

I’m not alone in feeling this way. I’ve talked to many others who feel as I do. And by the number of times this subject appears as themes in various television shows, it’s probably even a more common problem than I could ever imagine.

You’ve no doubt watched at least one television show that dealt with this. The main character meets a bully from his high school days. While all he remembers are the scars this person inflicted on him, the other character never knew how his words had hurt.

Why Allow Words to Hurt?

That’s a good question: Why did I allow those words to hurt? And more importantly, why did I allow it to hurt for all these years. Thankfully, I’ve finally figured it out. It’s because as a child I didn’t believe it when adults tried to convince me of my inner beauty. I truly believed that those attempts were just some words my parents used. I didn’t realize they really meant it. As a youngster I couldn’t even begin to fathom what inner beauty was. As an adult I slowly pieced it together. But, it took me years to actually believe it for myself.

Sure, I could see the “inner beauty” in others – the indefinable something that gives certain people their essence. It’s a group of characteristics that a person possesses that aren’t visible to the naked eye.

They are, however, readily felt and recognized by all around you. Probably two of the biggest traits that give a person inner beauty is kindness and compassion. They’re closely related. If you can recognize one of these traits in a person, then you can find another. Inner beauty also comes from a sense of inner peace.

But did I have it? How could I possibly claim such wonderful character traits for myself? So I've added one more trait to inner beauty – self worth. If you can't love yourself, it's difficult to attract others to you. But by the same token, it really is difficult to believe all those good traits – traits that can't be touched or recorded in photos. It gets even more difficult when you're still trying to heal from the emotional wounds of those "verbal sticks and stones."

So I set out to search for individuals – from celebrities to my circle of acquaintances – who I believe possess inner beauty. What traits did they have in common that contributed to their inner beauty?

Those individuals who I identified as having inner beauty were those who accepted themselves just as they were. They made no apologies for their weight; they made no excuses for their imperfections whatever they were. In fact, not only didn't they apologize, but they actually celebrated the traits and mannerisms that made themselves unique.

They weren't afraid of rejecting the mold society wants us to fit in that stereotypically defines outer beauty. The truth of the matter was that they loved themselves – in all their glorious physical, mental and emotional imperfections.

Then suddenly I woke up and realized that I would never feel as if I had true inner beauty until I accepted the fact that I deserved it. That meant, that I had to not only accept myself as I am, not only celebrate my own diversity, but more than that I had to love myself. What an eye opener that was!

Until I could deem myself worthy of inner beauty it could never be an apt description of me. I could never exude you like others.

Inner versus Outer Beauty

Now don't get me wrong there isn't some battle going on between inner and outer beauty. Plenty of people have both. Below is a great definition of inner beauty by one of the most outwardly beautiful women in the world, Sophia Loren:

"Beauty is how you feel inside, and it reflects in your eyes. It is not something physical."

Some of the most beautiful women and handsome men are not only endowed with a physical beauty, but that inner glow as well. It may be the outer beauty that initially attracts people to these individuals, but it's their inner beauty that makes so many people stay, befriend them and clearly *want to be in their presence.*

Just as people are attracted to those with an inner beauty, they are "turned off" and avoid being around people who lack this inward endowment. These people tend to put themselves and their needs first. They don't know how to treat others with kindness and compassion. They either don't care or are too preoccupied feeding their egos to care about the feelings of others. While generalizations are usually dangerous things, you can almost be assured, those who lack inner beauty are the ones busy slinging the hurtful words at others.

Do you Want to Develop Inner Beauty?

The most miraculous aspect of inner beauty is that anyone can learn to acquire it. Yes, believe it or not even you can develop it. If you're tired of words damaging you, if you'd like to cultivate that inner beauty and be the person to whom others are attracted, then this is the book for you.

Inside the pages of this book, you'll not only learn more about the traits of inner beauty, but how to acquire it. You'll also discover specific actions and steps you can take – right now – to wake up your inner beauty.

- You’ll discover why your inner beauty can’t glow if you’re not physically healthy.

- You’ll learn how following your dreams and passions can make your inner beauty shine.

- You’ll also find out how to talk to yourself that can charge you with enthusiasm and confidence.

- Forget yourself! This might be counterintuitive thinking, but the moment you step out of your own troubles and worries, your inner beauty will grow.

- You’ll also learn other ways to techniques to cultivate your self confidence, self worth and love for yourself.

How to Use This Book

It only goes to reason that not all the ideas in this book will resonate with you equally. You’ll recognize the ones you do, indeed, need to work on. You may decide that volunteering is a great way for you to get beyond yourself and start cultivating your inner beauty.

You may want to turn to that chapter first then. In fact, upon second reading, you can pick and choose the chapters in any sequence you like. More importantly, read them in the order you believe you need them the most. Which chapters attract your interest? Then study that one and decide how you can put it to use in your own life.

Once you’ve finished a chapter, then take the time to implement the

suggestions and tips you believe could benefit you most.

Are you ready to cultivate inner beauty, peace of mind, love of yourself and all the benefits that go along with these traits? Then follow me to chapter one where we'll talk at length about the real differences between inner and outer beauty.

Chapter 1: Recognizing the Difference between Inner and Outer Beauty

Peer pressure. Societal pressure. Prejudice in one form or another.

Society – including friends, family and neighbors sometimes – judges you by your looks. Most people know this. Just ask anybody who's ever been overweight and then lost it. People in general treat you differently. A woman who has lost weight suddenly catches the eye of men who never have paid attention to her before.

"Where have you been all my life?" they ask as they approach her. How tempting it is to say, "Right under your nose but you refused to see me for what I am.'

Perhaps there's been no time in our society, generally speaking, that the pressure to be "movie-star" beautiful has been greater. Similarly, it seems fewer people than ever before care or even notice one's inner beauty.

In some ways, that may be true. But you need to know that despite the temptation to separate the two, your inner beauty from your outer, you really can't. You can have outer beauty that may initially attract people to you. But they won't stay with you long as friends or even acquaintances if you don't have even bit of loveliness within you.

Difference Between Inner and Outer Beauty

So exactly what is the difference between these two? How can you tell when someone has inner beauty?

Perhaps the simplest differentiation between the two comes from Dr. Michael Roizen, M.D. He defines it succinctly: “In essence one is looking beautiful while the other is feeling beautiful.”

Additionally, the two types of beauty are derived from different sources. You receive your appearance, your physical characteristics, through genetics. Your parents passed specific genes to you which made your outward characteristics what they are today.

What lies within you emanates from you – more specifically from your growth in consciousness. Simply put, this type of loveliness that you project comes from how you feel about life, about how you treat others and probably most importantly, how you treat and feel about yourself.

Because the last point is so essential to true beauty, let’s paraphrase it: Inner beauty depends on how you treat and feel about yourself. It’s hard to radiate peace and positive energy to others when you can’t face yourself in the mirror every morning. It’s hard to radiate a glow of loving kindness to others when you can’t find it within you to love yourself.

Have you ever been attracted to another person based on their looks? Go ahead you can admit to this. We all have. As human beings, it’s one of the first ways we get to know people. But after you get to know them, you realize they aren’t the person who you thought that were. That’s because their inner beauty didn’t align with the outer.

The opposite scenario is also true. You’ve seen people who are beautiful, but for some reason you’re immediately attracted to them. Perhaps they dress in a manner that society says looks “eccentric.” Or they have a birthmark or a scar that can’t easily be covered or hidden in any way.

By society's standard they would be far from attractive, but yet you very much attracted to them. That's because you've recognized their inner worth, value and beauty. Your attraction is strong enough to overcome what society as a whole superficially values.

This occurrence is a true testament the power and magnetism of inner beauty. When what within you overpowers your outward appearance – whether deemed beautiful or not by society's standards – it's reflected outwards in some way. It can't help be happen. Guaranteed.

Can Inner Beauty be Developed?

While you may not believe you've been endowed with inner beauty, that may only be because you haven't attempted to find it. Unlike your outward appearance, which can only be altered with plastic surgery, you can develop an inner beauty that others will find appealing.

Sure your outward appearance can be modified through the proper use of makeup if you're female and the clothes you wear. And these two actions alone will go a long way in improving your image.

In fact, there exists a relationship between such actions as those and your ultimate inner feelings. We'll discuss that as we delve farther along in the process of developing and harnessing your true inner light.

But changing your outward appearance isn't a prerequisite for cultivating an inner glow. Consider for a moment, the person who has a birthmark. For the sake of this example, let's call her Helen. She looks in the mirror daily and the first thing she sees on your neck is that birthmark – "that hideous birthmark" in her words.

If you were to ask her closest friends and admirers about the birthmark the

majority would ask, “What birthmark?” Her inner beauty is so radiant that those who know her best don’t even see it. They see Helen as a loving, caring, compassionate person.

Marlene was a new student at a high school. All the students she met, commented on the beauty of Jane, another student, whenever they passed her in the hall. Marlene couldn’t understand why everyone thought her appearance was so special. She, actually, was physically quite plain.

Then one day Jane and Marlene met in the bathroom. Jane immediately introduced herself and began asking the new student questions about herself. It was at that point that Marlene began to understand Jane and realized that the attraction wasn’t really about her looks at all. Rather, people who knew Jane well weren’t seeing her outward appearance or even referring to her outward attractiveness. They were seeing into her soul and viewing her inner beauty.

So far we’ve talked about how inner and outer beauty seems to be at odds, at least on the surface. You may feel that those who don’t have an attractive appearance are immediately blessed with a lovely inner serenity which they radiate toward all.

You may also assume that if you are attractive outwardly, you’ll never be able to rise above your looks to be that individual others seek out because just standing beside you makes them feel special.

Neither of these is necessarily true, though. The fact of the matter is that the two aren’t mutually exclusive. Not only that, but those who possess true inner beauty aren’t the least bit jealous when they meet those who have the physical traits that much of our society deems important.

The real truth, in fact, is that those who have an inner light that shines brightly also appreciate the outward attractiveness that society values so intensely. If you’re trying to cultivate that inner light, you’ll soon discover that you’ll end up appreciating instead of envying those with that outer beauty.

The end result? You'll ultimately feel more confident in all of your relationships and, most importantly, more relaxed and confident with yourself.

Are you ready to take the first step toward developing your inner beauty, increasing your self worth and at the same time enjoying more than ever before relationships with everyone you encounter, your friends, family and even those who've only recently met but were fearful of getting to know better.

In the following chapter, we'll tackle what many consider to be the most difficult step of them: loving yourself.

Chapter 2: Where to Start: Loving Yourself

You need to know even before you embark on your journey toward loving yourself that your inner beauty – and yes you do possess it – is unique to you and you alone. There's no other person on earth quite like you. There's not a person alive today that could take your place if you weren't here. There would, indeed, be a vacuum, that no one could replace.

For many individuals and perhaps you're one of them, this is difficult for you to believe. So it's highly improbable that you're actually honoring, let alone celebrating your inner self. Some individuals refuse to even acknowledge themselves, love themselves and celebrate their inner light because … well, they fear it.

What makes you tick inside?

The moment you begin to see yourself as others see you, is when you begin to love yourself, even if you don't realize it. It's also the moment you begin to recognize that you indeed do have inner beauty.

The question is, what is that first step you take to begin to love yourself. Below are several simple ways you can start to love yourself and thus increase your self worth as well as your self confidence. Once you start practicing these steps, you'll then notice that your inner light shines brighter and you'll begin the process of seeing and feeling your inner beauty.

By the way, did you notice I called these simple steps? The fact that the steps are simple to perform doesn't necessarily mean that their easy to accomplish. Some of the suggestions below you may have to repeat several times in order to get yourself to truly believe you have a self worth, an inner beauty. The key, however, is not to give up. If you continue to have compassion and love for yourself, you'll begin to see how easy it is to let your inner beauty shine.

1. "How do I love me? Let me count the ways."

Make your first step toward cultivating that inner beauty by creating what many describe as an "I love me" list." This is a list of all the good qualities you believe you possess that don't relate to any of your physical characteristics. These can be simply traits such as "I'm kind to animals," "I love being with children," "I'm a good listener," or whatever positive traits you feel you possess.

Take your time. You may find initially that you can't think of a single trait. If you're struggling at first listing items, you may want to ask someone close to you who does love you – and whom you trust.

Explain to this person what you're doing and ask them what your non-physical positive points are. This will help you begin to see how special you are. The fact that you're writing down these traits (and yes, by the way, it's acceptable to even call them strengths) provides you with tangible evidence that inner beauty is tucked away inside of you.

Before you realize it, you'll have a long list of amazing characteristics and

traits that you never really considered nor had given yourself credit for before. As the evidence mounts, even you'll be hard pressed to deny your inner beauty.

2. Read your list of inner beauty characteristics daily

At least once a day read the list to yourself. If at all possible read it out loud. By doing this you reaffirm your self esteem. Don't worry that if you repeat it too frequently that you'll become egotistical. In order to cultivate your inner beauty this is exactly what you need to hear right now.

3. Be as compassionate to yourself as you are to others.

Admit it. If you're anything like many individuals, you are your own worst critic. Think of it. You make your friends feel better when they fall short of the mark. Yet when you fall short, you berate and belittle yourself. Is that any way to treat yourself?

Why trample on your feelings like that? Make a pact with yourself that the next time you're tempted to be too hard on yourself, think about what you would say to your best friend in the same situation. Say exactly that – out loud if you must – to yourself.

The bottom line: treat yourself as gently as you would your children and friends.

4. Make of list of your emotional needs.

This list includes items and feelings that are important to your well being. The

list may include the fact that you get upset when others (or you) do or say certain things. Perhaps your feelings get hurt when others don't listen to what you're saying at times. Or perhaps you feel emotionally deprived If someone doesn't provide sympathy when you're hurt. On the flip side you feel slighted when a good friend fails to rejoice with you when you're celebrating a success.

Perhaps one of the items could be something as being loved and being treated with kindness without even requesting it. As with the first list, don't rush through this. Take your time and make sure you cover all bases.

Essentially what you're doing with this exercise is creating a list of boundaries. An emotional boundary, much like a physical one, divides one thing from another. What you're doing here is dividing what is emotionally acceptable from what is unacceptable.

What? You've never considered that you could say an action or the words that come from your friends are unacceptable. Think about it. You no doubt honor the boundaries of your friends by not saying things you know would purposely hurt them. Why allow anyone do this to you?

5. Speak up when someone crosses the boundaries.

If you've made a list of your good inner qualities and are beginning to believe you do have them and if you've listed your boundaries, you're now ready to put this into action. When you feel someone has crossed that boundary by saying or doing something that hurts your feelings, let them know.

Many times people say things that hurt you because they don't know their words are wounding you. Most of the time, in fact, people don't realize they're injuring us. They can't read our minds. If you hold that type of hurt inside of you, your friends will continue to do and say the same things.

Once they know how those words wound you, they'll more than likely apologize. You, then, have to do your part. Sincerely accept the apology and move on. In the future, they'll learn to be more careful with their language.

If you've done all of this and they continue to cross the boundary, then you need to take action of some sort. A good example of this is a friend who never listens to you. Perhaps she's too involved in her own life to hear what you're saying. In this situation you have two choices to make. You could resign yourself to the fact that this person isn't the friend you share certain things with. If you decide to continue this relationship, you then don't speak of about these topics. Instead, you find another friend to share these feelings with.

The other choice is to sever the relationship. If she's continually crossing that boundary you've established, even after you've informed her of this you owe it to yourself to not get your feelings hurt. Isn't this the advice you'd give a friend if someone did the exact same thing to them? But, don't allow yourself to hang without a confidant. You probably have any number of individuals with whom you can discuss this type of subject matter.

These five simple steps to loving yourself may not seem like a lot of advice. The truth of the matter though is that these are powerful steps that can transform you as quickly as you allow them to work.

If you practice them diligently and persistently it won't take a lot to start yourself on the road to loving yourself. The secret to being successful is to be consistent about your behaviors and your thinking. The moment you feel yourself slide into your old patterns you need to stop yourself.

When you find yourself falling into that old habit of complaining to your inner self that your spouse isn't listening to things you deem important, stop yourself. Instead, remind him that the kind of language he's using hurts you. It could be that he just fell into an old habit. Don't necessarily assume he's out to hurt your feelings. Remember that you are worth loving. Don't be afraid to take action.

Work on these while you learn in the next chapter why health is a critical aspect of inner beauty and how to either get healthy or maintain your good health.

Chapter 3: Good Health and Inner Beauty

I'd love to concentrate on my inner beauty and self-worth, but I'm too busy dealing with all my health issues. Just thinking about them makes my depression worse and my stress level soar.

Are you one of those people who have a multitude of health problems or even stubborn minor problems that you feel prevent you from concentrating on your inner worth?

Go ahead, you can admit it. You're among friends. If more people were honest with themselves, they could probably name any other number of minor or major health problems that stymie their self esteem and in turn their inner beauty.

If you're plagued by even one health concern that you feel is blocking the improvement of your inner beauty, it's time to take control of the situation. You probably agree but where do you start.

Simple changes at first. That's the best way. But don't take my word for it, why not embark on an "experimental" health program to see if it helps improve your inner beauty and empower yourself to treat yourself better.

Start an exercise program

This sounds overwhelming, especially if you've been inactive for any length of time. It really isn't, though. Simply start with one small step to test the results. It's a proven fact that the best way to start any major change in your life is through small, incremental steps. Don't listen to that voice inside you or

even well-meaning friends that you have to start with a gigantic, exercise program combining all sorts of techniques.

Many medical experts recommend beginning simply by walking. It may initially sound like a highly ineffective and inefficient method, but don't allow appearances to deceive you. The American Heart Association lists the following benefits of walking 30 minutes a day, three times a week:

- Lowers the risk of you developing coronary heart disease
- Improves your blood pressure
- Normalizes your blood sugar levels
- Helps you lose weight or maintains a healthy weight
- Reduces your risk of developing obesity.
- Improves your mental well being

What's especially intriguing is the healing effect walking has on depression. This is of special interest to those who are trying to boost their inner beauty. It's hard to focus on your good characteristics when you're depressed.

A recent study performed in Australia reveals that walking actually improves the quality of life for many middle-aged depressed women. In fact, just about any form of moderate exercise can help. If walking doesn't appeal to you, try golf, aerobics classes, swimming – try even line dancing.

Those individuals who walked or performed other moderate exercise approximately 200 minutes every week, felt emotionally better, and socialized more. They didn't feel limited by their depression.

The marvelous aspect of this study is that the effects lasted up to three years of these activities.

In other studies, many conducted in the United States even credit walking with being a more effective treatment for depression than prescription drugs. Think about this. It's difficult to keep your mind on developing your inner beauty when you're depressed. In fact that's probably the most opportune time for negative thinking to attack you. You're more vulnerable to accept these thoughts as gospel. You also probably have less energy to try to fight them. You merely accept them as given facts.

If you believe your inner beauty can shine more brightly with any exercise program, even one as simple as a walking regime, be sure to consult with your health-care provider before you begin.

Meditation and Inner Beauty

You may be wondering exactly how these two concepts are even connected. But if you think about it you'll understand that ideally, the two may, indeed, be intimately so. You now know that inner beauty is not only something that you can't get through clothing or make up or through any other external source. The source of your own self worth, your self esteem doesn't depend on anything going on in the physical, material world around you. It depends solely on yourself.

In fact, it comes from a deeper understand of yourself and a deeper knowing of what kinds of activities, words and acts of kindness and compassion you require not only from others but from yourself as well. Hopefully, you're still working with your list of your good characteristics that are non-dependent on your looks.

That's exactly why meditation has been so popular of late. It's an excellent way to get to know yourself better. When you settle into a quiet room with no outside noises and no distractions, then you can go deep within yourself in order not only to find inner guidance, but that inner beauty you may doubt you even have.

Meditation also provides the perfect opportunity to take that list of boundary items and take this concept one step further. You'd be surprised at how many individuals meditate on a daily basis and, in fact, find it calming. They also discover that through this technique they can make peace with themselves. Isn't that what inner beauty is about? Making peace with yourself?

Meditation, perhaps more than any activity, can help you find and enhance your inner beauty. Interested in building a meditation but don't know where to start? You could buy books on the topic or borrow a few from the library. You could even take a class.

But if you've never meditated before and are curious about its effects, you could also start right now. Simply go to a quiet room, close the door and ensure you won't be interrupted. If you have an alarm on your smart phone, set it for five minutes. This is the goal of your first meditation session. If you don't reach it, don't worry.

Sit comfortably, preferably in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, You may, however, feel more comfortably by sitting on the floor in a cross-legged position. Now close your eyes and begin to relax your body.

Now, you try to clear your mind of all thoughts. You try to empty your mind so you can discover the real you – your inner beauty – inside. Every time a thought enters your brain, simply and gently tell it to leave. This is especially true of your negative thoughts. Don't allow thinking to occur that tells you that you're not beautiful on the inside, that you're not a person worthy of self esteem.

As simple as this sounds, clearing you mind of all thoughts is a difficult process. Don't even believe for a moment that you're going to sweep all thoughts. You'll soon learn, through meditation, just how beautiful and precious your life is – just as you are.

If you become interested in meditation, you can always gain more guidance

from it and experiment with the varieties of the activity from mindfulness to guided imagery. In this constantly busy and noisy world, spending quiet, quality time with yourself is priceless.

Just as a side note, you'll also be increasing your overall physical health as well. Study after scientific study has revealed that those individuals who meditate are at reduced risk for developing a long list of degenerative diseases, from arthritis to cancer to heart disease and diabetes.

We've already mentioned that any activity that can maintain or improve your health can also enhance your sense of inner beauty. Why not give meditation a try?

Eating well

Physical health and inner beauty, so you've been shown, go hand in hand. It's difficult, if not impossible, to have one without the other. And there's no better way to improve your physical health than by eating well.

Ah! You may be thinking right now, "But I do eat an excellent diet." Do you? "Well, as can be expected considering the frenetic pace of my life. Between the requirements of my job and the demands of my family obligations, I do the best I can."

This is what most of us think. And perhaps if you scan what you eat daily, you do. What would happen, though, if you really scrutinized your diet? Most individuals who have done this have been shocked. They've discovered that their diets aren't nearly as healthy as they initially believed.

For starters, just ask yourself how much sugar you eat in a day. In addition to any you may put in your coffee or tea in the morning, what about those quick sodas you pick up, those so-called healthy juices you drink as well as that fast

food dinner you gulp down from one errand to the next?

And when you do eat sugar, notice how you feel about yourself? Is there a difference in your thoughts toward your self worth when you eat sugar? Many individuals use food as a way to make themselves feel better. How many times on a television show have you seen a character run to the refrigerator to grab a quart of ice cream when they are emotionally depressed?

What follows that initial comforting activity is a long period of regret because he or she succumbed to the temptation of not only overeating, but eating the wrong kind of foods. Then we all know what happens next. Your feelings of self-worth and by extension your belief in your inner beauty plummet.

Even without these occasional binge periods of eating – and we all have our trigger points which set us off on a binge — If you were to seriously keep track, you'd discover you're eating far more of less-than-healthy foods than you originally thought.

Where to Start? Better Eating Habits

The first step to developing a better diet, whether you simply want to feel better about yourself, lose weight or even gain weight, is a commitment to eliminating processed and packaged foods. There's really no way any health practitioner or public health official can even attempt to justify these foods have any merit.

Yes, they are convenient. Yes, they are the backbone of the "Standard American Diet." But that doesn't necessarily make them healthy. Take a good look at that phrase, standard American diet. Its initials spell the word "sad." That's what many public health officials believe. It's sad that it doesn't provide Americans with a sufficient amount of vitamins and other nutrients. It's sad that many of the ingredients found in these processed and packaged foods contain additives that can even destroy your health.

Tossing such foods out of your kitchen is the first step in improving your diet and building your inner beauty. But it's just the beginning. Your next step is to replace them with healthy, wholesome foods. Start with fresh or frozen fruits or vegetables. Sure, at first you'll miss your old diet, and you may not appreciate the inherent taste of vegetables, but soon, you'll discover that you're feeling much better.

If you're seriously considering this approach to enhancing inner beauty, you may want to start with what's called an elimination diet. There is plenty of information on this concept on the web. Your doctor can also help you if you think you might like to try it.

Essentially, this diet eliminates all processed and packaged foods as well as well as sugary drinks and simple carbohydrates like potato chips. This is the approach that many doctors suggest to their patients with attention deficient disorder in order to determine if the health issue stems from diet. One of the consequences you may discover (because many people do) is how clear your thinking becomes after a very short time on this diet.

You may want to remain on this segment of the diet for two to four weeks before slowly replacing certain foods one at a time to discover how your body and your mind react to what you've added. You'll probably discover at least one food that affects how you view your self-worth and assess your inner beauty. Knowing this, you now can steer clear of it.

If you decide to do this, you're well on your way to discovering the diet that's perfect for you. One sure way to begin your perfect diet is by including an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables. Most public health officials now acknowledge that a minimum of five to seven servings of fruits and vegetables are necessary in order to maintain your health. Many doctors will also tell you to steer clear of white, refined breads. Before you begin any new dietary program, be sure to consult with your health care provider.

Now that you know that a healthy body does indeed, promote inner beauty,

you may find you have a more urgent reason to improve your health. Once you begin to realize your body is suffering from less aches and pains and you eating a diet that gives you more energy and lifting your depression, you'll discover the fog that hid your inner beauty is now lifting.

Chapter 4: Pursue Your Passion: Your Beauty will Shine

Do you know anyone who has discovered an activity or a calling that they believe is the overriding purpose in life? These individuals may be volunteering for a specific cause. They may have discovered early in life what inspires them to wake up every morning and head off to work with a smile on their face.

Have you noticed, additionally, that these individuals are unusually happy with their lives, more upbeat than others and always seem to find the good in every situation and in every person?

Undoubtedly, these individuals are pursuing their passion and in addition they're sharing their inner beauty with you and every other person they touch every day.

One of the most important methods of discovering your inner beauty is by discovering your passion in life. When you can actually put your inner desires to work in the world, you'd be amazed at how your entire demeanor changes.

When going to work every day in order to work at something you love, you discover that you view the world entirely differently – and those around you will certainly notice.

If there were any doubt previously that you hadn't connected with your inner beauty, all of those will be removed. You'll know immediately when you connect with your passion and you'll pass your pure bliss that's a consequence of that on to others.

How do you find that passion?

It may take some digging inside yourself to discover it. Some individuals are lucky enough to find it early in life. Others shuffle through several occupations before they find what truly makes their inner beauty shines. Some people actually never make it their job, but play for hours with it because it's their hobby.

If your inner beauty isn't shining the way you think it should be, perhaps you haven't found your passion yet. Something that makes your eyes shine when you talk about it. An activity that gives you added energy when you believe you couldn't take another step.

So, exactly how do you discover your passion if you don't have a clue? You start with this moment. How would you describe your inner state right now? What does your body feel like? How would you describe your emotions? Deep down in your soul, in other words, what's happening?

Now when you put all these feelings together what happens? Do you feel like a whole person? Do you believe there's something missing from your life? If you feel as if something is still missing, then you probably haven't found your passion in life.

If you're living with what feels like continual anxiety, a chest full of resentment or any other emotions that zap your energy and your happiness, then your body and mind may be dropping you some subtle hints. Perhaps it's time to analyze your life.

Consider this Alternative Scenario

Perhaps you know exactly what your passion is. And you'd like nothing better than to follow it. But …

Here's where you suddenly your inner beauty becomes disjointed from your true inner desires. You throw up a handful of "buts" around you and box yourself in.

- "But, I couldn't possibly make a living following my passion."
- "But right now is not the time to start the business that I feel I could succeed in."
- "But who would take of my children if I went back to school and got that degree I so desperately want?"
- "But I'm too old to do something like that right now. My time has passed."

Excuses. Excuses. Excuses.

There is certainly a time and place for everything and that may include following your dreams. But… if you really want something and you dug deep into your soul, you'd probably find a way to overcome each and every one of your long-held beliefs that prevent you from doing achieving – in some cases even pursuing – your dream.

Did I hear you say you've already tried writing once and your submission was rejected? So? Write again, submit again. Did you know that Stephen King's work was rejected so many times that he was ready to call it quits. Actually, he did call it quits. As the story goes, he had thrown what he considered to be his last rejection into the garbage when he learned that yet another publisher rejected it. His wife, however, was not so quick to give up.

She retrieved the manuscript her husband threw away from the garbage when she came home from work that afternoon. She convinced him to try just one more time. He did and his manuscript was accepted. His advance for the book

was only $250, but he didn’t care. He had found a way to align his passion with his daily life.

You can start right here and right now to change your attitude toward your vision and move ahead to follow your bliss. No, I’m definitely not talking about quitting your job tomorrow and randomly seeking a purpose. There’s a method you can use to seize this golden opportunity in your life and take well-ordered, prepared steps to discover your soul’s purpose and allow your inner beauty to shine.

If you follow the following seven steps to bliss I guarantee that you’ll experience that inner glow that you find so appealing in others.

1. State your vision clearly.

Don’t be wishy-washy about your vision. If you aren’t concrete about how you express your passion, the odds are against you in it manifesting in your life. It has to be clear enough in your mind that you can see it even before you’ve attained it.

You’ve no doubt heard the saying, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Well, throw that saying away and replace it with “I’ll see it when (and only when) I believe it.” Why do you think they call it a vision? See it in your mind’s eye and never let it out of your sight.

2. Write out specific goals to attain this vision.

There are two distinct clues in the previous sentence that are vital to your success. The first is the term “write out.” Don’t just trust your memory to how you’re going to accomplish this. Write it out. Then look at these goals frequently. These terms are nothing less than your tickets to success, your

blueprint to a shining inner beauty.

By doing this you'll be keeping them in your consciousness. You're far less likely to let them fade than if you merely write them out and stick them in some file folder.

The other part of that sentence that is vital to your success is the word "specific." Again as in step one, you need to know exactly what you want. You need to know the goals necessary to get your vision realized. Don't be vague. When Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa, he didn't say I want to paint, uhm… a woman or maybe a man or …

No. He knew exactly what he was going to paint and the odds are good, he already had a copy of it in his mind's eye.

That's how you need to be about your vision and your goals.

3. Make sure the goals you set are yours and not someone else's.

Remember this is your passion. While you may consult with friends and family you ultimately control your vision. After all, this vision is what's going to release the inner beauty within you. It's not going to affect your mother's inner beauty or your best friend's passion.

While they may certainly make suggestions, the final decision comes down to you. And only you. In fact that only way you can turn your vision into your passion is by following your heart's desire.

4. Release any goals that don't lead you directly to your vision.

You may have thrown some random, stray concepts in the listing of your goals. Review them to make sure that each of the steps you plan on taking to realize your vision don't lead you instead to something else. Also double check to ensure that, as we talked about in the last paragraph, that all the goals are yours and not what a close family member wants for you.

If your goal is to write a novel, keep those goals that have your working on your piece of fiction. Don't clutter your life or fritter away your precious time pursuing ideas that have nothing to do with the piece of fiction you want to write. If you splinter your time and your concentration in that way, you'll never discover your bliss.

5. Set a deadline for the completion of each goal, then work out a time line.

This is probably the most complicated part. It involves being able to estimate when you're going to be able to reach any number of goals. Most of us have a hard time doing this. You may discover when you get this all down on paper that you haven't given yourself enough time for one or more goals.

Don't get upset. Just be flexible. If you've misjudged how long one or two activities take simply adjust your timeline. It may be that one of goals may take longer than you thought. But on the other hand, as you work through these stepping stones, another one materializes much quicker than you thought. Flexibility is the key to success.

Don't be afraid to change your goals in the midst of your pursuit of your passion. Just be sure that as you do so you're still laser focused on your prize.

6. Practice persistence

There may be valid reasons why you may need to adjust your timeline or extend a goal. But there are no excuses why you can't reach your goals in pursuit of your passion. This is so vitally important to your success let's read it again. There are absolutely no valid excuses why you can't reach your goal – any goal.

The point is to never give up. We talked about Stephen King a bit earlier in this chapter. Can imagine what would have happened if his wife hadn't retrieved that manuscript out of the trash? The obvious answer, of course, is that no one would have heard of King. He'd be doing some anonymous job in his home state of Maine.

But beyond that, imagine what a loss that would have been to millions of readers and movie goers who have been thrilled and horrified by such books as ***The Shining,*** **Christine** and **Pet Sematary,** to name only a few.

If you give up on your dream, you'd be depriving not only yourself of its manifestation, but countless numbers of others your concept will certainly affect.

Many people have dreams which they truly believe are beyond their reach. Others begin to doubt themselves as they begin to create it. Even when they believe they're pursuing something great, they stop and ask, "Who am I to do great things?"

The answer to that comes from inspirational speaker and teacher Marianne Williamson who simply states, "Who are you not to do great things?"

7. Stay laser-focused

Regardless of the obstacles you may encounter in pursuing your passion (and

you’re bound to stumble along a couple) don’t ever give up. In fact, always keep your focus at the final outcome, your dream.(Have you noticed a pattern in the theme from the last step?)

When you do this, you’ll discover that some of the boulders in your path disintegrate, the hurdles seem to fall to one side and allow you to pass and those hills you thought you’d never reach the top of aren’t that tall after all.

Ask any person who you admire for their inner beauty. They’ll more than likely all tell you that they have a passion and pursue it fiercely. For some, it could be a love of animals and they pursue it by volunteering at an animal shelter or perhaps they even breed dogs.

Other individuals may be pursuing their passion of writing and have a vision of a novel they’ve written being on The New York Times bestsellers list someday soon. Whatever their passion is you’ll know when they begin to talk about it. Their faces light up, their countenance change, they may even have a certain glow about them.

Got a passion? Get one and let your inner beauty shine.

You’ll discover that those inner beauty often employ a trick to keep them thinking and feeling upbeat and optimistic about their passion as well as life in general. It’s called positive self-talk. Want to learn how to do this so you can remain focused on your inner beauty? It’s all outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Develop Inner Beauty with Positive Self-Talk

Here’s an interesting fact: most individuals have an average of no less than 65,000 thoughts run through their minds daily.

Here’s another interesting fact, albeit a bit sad: the vast majority of those thoughts are limiting, negative thoughts.

Surprised? Or did you think you were the only person plagued by doubts and worries? Not by a long shot. The difference between you and the person whose inner beauty can cut through all that self-doubt is that they’ve learned how to dismiss the doubts and replace them with positive, encouraging, kind words. And more importantly, positive, optimistic thoughts.

Not only does this allow your inner beauty to shine, it also creates a healthy physical body as well. The question on your mind now is undoubtedly, “How in the world do they do that?”

That’s exactly what we’ll take a look at in this chapter and present several ideas of how you can do the same thing. It may seem like an unreachable goal at the moment, but once you develop a few of these tricks, you’ll be relying on your positive thinking more and more.

No doubt, you’ve been around individuals who, for lack of any better words, are experiencing “happiness high.” It may be the person who just reached an exercise goal, a bride at her wedding or the proud parents of a newborn infant. As with anyone who is displaying their inner beauty, there’s a certain glow

about them.

Research has recently concluded that the “happiness high” is a vital part to maintaining or restoring your good health. According to the prestigious Mayo Clinic, positive thinking, as many people call it, has been “scientifically linked” to a stronger immune system, a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and much lower rates of depression.

Along the same lines a separate study of college students discovered that those students who rated their self-worth solely on their outward appearance, their performance in school or any other number of outward factors experienced more stress, complained of relationship problems and even performed poorly in school.

Those individuals, on the other hand, who judged their self-esteem on inner factors, like integrity or meeting their own personal standards were happier and their lives seemed to flow more easily.

What was the difference? How they talked to themselves. Once you stop accepting and dwelling on those negative thoughts flying through your mind, the sooner your inner beauty will peek through.

Changing a Long-Held Habit

You wouldn’t be reading this book right now if you weren’t at least a bit interested in changing the way you view yourself. Perhaps there’s no more effective method of change than to start giving yourself pep talks instead of mentally beating yourself up daily.

If you think this is hogwash or an old wives’ tale, think again. It’s actually the basis of the scientific theory behind the long used cognitive behavior therapy. It’s widely accepted today as an effective form of treatment.

You could find a good doctor to treat you with this type of therapy. And perhaps at some point you may, indeed, want to eventually. But it's also a practice you can begin right now that can help your inner light to shine.

Are you ready to embark on this amazing transformation?

You've probably been ready all along, but didn't know where to start. Here is a quick-start guide to allow you to take the first few steps toward inner beauty through positive self-talk.

1. Eliminate negative self-talk.

Okay, so this seems like a real no brainer. But it's really needs to be said. With what could be called an overwhelming amount of thoughts – especially negative ones – floating through your mind every day, this may seem like an impossible task. But it really isn't.

That's because you're not going to deal with all of those 65,000 thoughts at one time. Holding this advice in your consciousness, you remain as vigilant to negative inner talk as much as possible. When you find yourself expressing negative thoughts, you stop and replace them with a positive statement.

When you consciously do this throughout the day, you'll be surprised that it won't take as long as you previously thought.

Don't worry right now about catching every thought. You won't and you may never be able to do that. But the goal is to stop enough of them that you'll begin to think more positive thoughts naturally. In other words, the more negative thoughts you sweep from your mind, the more room you'll be creating for positive ones. At some point in your efforts you'll be able to say

you’re spending more time dwelling on positive than negative thoughts.

Not only that, but in the process, you’ll discover that positive self-talk will eventually become a habit. For now, the idea is to practice recognizing one negative thought at a time.

Yes, you’re right. It is a slow change. But it is a change you’ll eventually notice if you’re willing to do this consistently.

2. Do a “dress rehearsal” of this swapping out of thoughts.

What? Why, that doesn’t make any sense at all.

What I mean by a dress rehearsal is that you prepare yourself for this swap out. Have you ever been in a conversation where the other person says something to you and you don’t have a comeback remark? You’re left standing there trying to find an answer to the question, or at the very least a snarky remark. Instead, you’re left utterly speechless.

That’s exactly what happens to many of us when we encounter a negative thought. We either accept it as the truth or have no comeback remark. The last thing you want is to stand there and listen to your inner self talk trash to you. Show your darker, negative side that you’re finally fed up with it bullying you around, trying to make you believe you’re incapable pursuing your passion or allowing your inner beauty to shine. Your dress rehearsal is to provide yourself with several all-purpose positive thoughts you can utilize on the spot.

Write them down if you have to. These positive thoughts could be used to talk to yourself or to another person who is trying to find fault with you unnecessarily.

Your responses will depend on specifically what thoughts are attacking you. If

your thoughts are accusing you of not being bright enough to start a business, then reply with something like, “I am mentally ready and capable of starting a business.” After you say a few positive statements like this, it will be almost second nature to refute anything your mind has to offer

Check out some of these responses: you could use:

Your mind says: “You’re not worthy of that raise.”

You reply: “I work as hard as anyone in the office and deserve a raise.”

Your mind says: “You won’t be able to lose that 20 pounds. You’ve been trying to do it for a good five years.”

You reply: “I am resolved to losing 20 pounds and keeping it off for good.”

Your mind says: “You’re too old to go to school. Those youngsters will run rings around you.”

You reply: “Age is no limitation when it comes to going back to school. I am quite capable of completing the course work and getting good grades.”

3. Realize you’re not mistake proof.

Some people expect negative thoughts to pop into their head when they make a mistake. They actually believe that when they do make a mistake they deserve that kind of judgment from their inner thoughts. Because they expect this type of thinking, that’s exactly what occurs.

First, you need to know you’re not mistake proof. No one is. In fact, I, personally don’t ever want to work with individuals who claim never having made mistakes. These folks have either never done anything in their lives or they won’t admit their mistakes. Either way they make poor co-workers and even worse friends.

Instead of expecting perfection, accept that you'll eventually make a mistake or two, accept it and vow to learn from it. If you find yourself beating yourself up over it, pull out one or two of those positive thoughts you've been practicing that seem appropriate to the situation.

When you become good at swapping negative for positive thoughts, you'll eventually learn to celebrate your mistakes and your failures. That means you're challenging yourself to move beyond your comfort zone. It means you've got the inner courage, self-worth and, yes, inner beauty to step out and see your true light shining through.

4. Move beyond yourself.

You may not actually eliminate all the negative self-talk, but here's a sure method of forgetting about it – even for a short time. Move beyond yourself. Focus your attention on the needs of someone else. While you may not be able to leave immediately for the homeless shelter or the food pantry, your actions really don't have to be that large or extravagant.

A great place to start is by simply making another person laugh. The laughter will not only help the other person, but you'll be doing yourself just as big as a favor. When you do this, you'll be surprised at how soon the vibrational energy in the room rises. Before you know it, everyone is feeling and thinking more positively.

Your moving beyond yourself could be calling a person who needs to talk. You could send someone a card or simply say a kind word to the cashier who checks you out at the grocery store today.

It doesn't take much effort and the results help you and those around you. Indeed, you're creating the best of both worlds.

Create Positive Affirmations

So far we've talked about positive self-talk as a substitute for the negative thoughts you have sweeping through your mind all day, every day. Now we're going to take that idea, rearrange it a bit and shower yourself with these powerfully positive thoughts throughout the day.

We're going to take that concept one step further with a technique called positive affirmations. Perhaps you've heard of the concept. You may even have tried it. A positive affirmation is exactly what the name implies. It's a sentence that avows a positive aspect of you. It's a special form of self-talk that you not only repeat silently over and over again, but you also repeat it aloud, much like a mantra in meditation. You can also repeatedly write it out.

It is, in fact, a method of instilling your mind with positive self talk. Below are some examples of positive affirmations you can repeat:

- I am beautiful just the way I am.
- I radiate beauty through all of my actions and speech.
- Persons can see my inner beauty every time I smile.
- My creativity is my gift. I am open to it or I will be led.
- I am a good person just as I am.
- Every day it becomes easier to love myself.

You can use the ones that are here or you can create a few that are personally tailored to your needs. There are very few rules. In fact, there are really only two rules. The first is that it must be a positive statement (no surprise there) and it must be written in the present tense.

You should never create an affirmation that effectively affirms what you don't

want. For example, don’t repeat all day long, “I am not fat.” Even though it’s technically a positive affirmation, your energy is more drawn to the word “fat” than any other part of that sentence.

I’m not sure why this occurs. Some individuals insist that the “universe” can’t hear or won’t accept the word “not” or other negating words in affirmations. In any case, ensure that you write and repeat exactly what you want in as precise, positive language as you can.

Writing it in the present tense, furthermore, means that you believe that this affirmation describes you in the here and now. You may be reciting affirmations written in the future tense, “Someday I will be beautiful inside.” While that may be exactly how you feel at the moment, affirmations written like that are not effective. For your mind to truly believe it, you have to tell it you are beautiful now.

All you do when you write an affirmation in the future tense is to delay you receiving your good into some future day yet to be determined. The ultimate possible extension of writing a positive affirmation in the future tense is that you could be waiting forever to see the change in yourself. How tiring would that be?

Meditation in Action

Yes, we have talked about meditation before. And it can be an extremely valuable and an exceptionally effective way of quieting yourself long enough to realize that there’s more to you than your outward physical beauty. Meditation is highly recommended not only by those who are spiritual, but by many members of the medical community who now fully realize its many benefits to your overall health.

In its most popular form, meditation is a way to empty your mind of all thoughts in a quest to get in touch with the very essence of yourself. This simple statement presumes that as you’re gently asking all thoughts to leave

your mind, you're including the negative ones as well. That very fact alone makes it a wonderful staple to a ritual that seeks to banish negative self-talk from your mind.

But this same type of meditation also allows you to recite a mantra while you're in that silent, sacred place of your inner beauty. This makes it a highly appropriate time to recite a mantra that lifts you up and celebrates your inner self. Many individuals use the word "love" as their mantra. Some use a word or phrase that holds a deep, spiritual meaning to them. Certainly you have a word or short phrase that you could silently recite during this time.

Meditation works, by the way, because it seems to be the quickest way for your subconscious mind to begin to transform your thinking. With that thought in mind, you may want to perform even a short meditation session right before you retire for the evening so those loving thoughts you're soothing your soul with actually have a chance to soak into your mind. This speeds your ultimate transformation.

Banishing all negative thoughts from your mind and negative and belittling words about yourself from your vocabulary is your ultimate goal. Once you can do this your inner beauty will shine forth like a highly polished diamond. Don't worry that the task appears overwhelming.

If you simply take this task, one day at a time, one thought at a time, you'll discover what a wonderful person you've been hiding inside of you all these years. What's even more important is that you'll be able to share your beauty with others.

Who knows how many people are waiting for some with your inner beauty to shine a light on them?

Chapter 6: Inner Beauty and Self-Respect

Think back to when you were a child. You never thought for a moment that you needed to justify how you deserved to eat that piece of chocolate cake your mother placed in front of you.

You never once doubted about whether you were worthy enough for an impromptu stop at a roadside ice cream stand. And once you and your family did stop, without even being asked, you told the person behind the window what ice cream you wanted – and without exception it was always your favorite (okay so your favorite ice cream flavor changed from day to day). But you were never asked once by anyone surrounding you what you did to deserve that.

Why you were a child. Period. That was reason enough to enjoy ice cream or that stuffed animal at the store.

So why now after all these years you feel you have to explain why you "deserve" the good in life that's naturally and rightly yours. You don't have to think about whether you deserve to live in a house that nice or drive a car that nice. Your only explanation for getting it is because you want it. Just by being you is justification enough.

Knowing that you deserve all the good the world is waiting to give you and then accepting it with open arms will occur only when you discover your inner beauty. And that by extension will only occur once you begin to respect yourself.

That's right, Aretha Franklin had it right all along when she not only sang about respect, but emphasized it by spelling it out: R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Others

know immediately whether you respect yourself or not. Once they realize that you, indeed do respect yourself, you'll notice an immediate attitude change toward you.

But more importantly there will be an immediate change in yourself. You'll stop wondering whether you deserve to start that business or write that novel or even go to the spa and get that massage. Like your child-like alter ego, you'll step up to that ice cream counter and request your favorite flavor. And you won't feel the need to defend your right to either that flavor or the ice cream itself. Perhaps the writer E.E.Cummings said it best:

once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.

Sounds great! But there's just one catch, you ask, how do I regain that self-confidence and that self-respect?

Believe it or not, you're already well on your way of demanding self-respect from yourself and the respect of others around you. If that sentence doesn't make you stand just a bit taller, it should. Simply by seeking to improve your self-confidence, you'll find your inner beauty has taken a giant step forward. You may not have realized it at the moment, but when you took that first step toward self-confidence you signaled to the world your desire that it not only respect you, but your need to finally respect yourself.

But beyond that there are several vital actions you need to take in order to gain self-respect.

1. Banish fear of failure or rejection.

Let's return to that ice cream example we used. It never occurred to you that when you stood at that counter and asked for a cone the cashier would even

consider telling you no. Your mind didn't run through a scenario that went something like this, "If she tells me no, I'll be so humiliated, so ashamed of myself for being undeserving of that ice cream cone."

Just listening to this line of talk feels absurd, now doesn't it?

So what's changed since you were a kid? Stand before that ice cream counter of the universe and declare your favorite flavor, never doubting for a moment that you'll get it

And by Jove, the world will gladly and nearly immediate respond in the affirmative.

2. Take control of your thoughts.

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood we relinquished control of our thoughts. As toddlers many of us dwelled in magical, mystical imaginary world, where we merely thought of having a tea party with friends and there they were, a group of imaginary friends ready to sip tea and keep you company.

By the time you reached your college years, you sought out guidance from the gurus of academia, perhaps, who dissuaded you from making certain career choices because, quite frankly, there either was no money associated with that profession or you didn't display enough talent to "hit it big."

From this moment on, vow that while you'll listen to advice and take the suggestions of others under consideration, you'll never let their analysis of your talent or intelligence as a limiting factor in your success.

Only you can judge your talent (along with your desire to succeed). Only you can predict how much money you can make through a certain career path. If there is even one individual in the world making a living doing what you'd

like to do means that's it possible. And if it's possible, then you can do it, too.

3. Whatever it is you want to do with your life, prepare yourself for it.

If you know you're going for a job interview, the experts would recommend that you learned as much as you can about the company that's considering hiring you. What's the first thing you would do in this case? Why do some research about the firm, so you can impress the interviewer and give you a leg up on the job.

What makes your life any different? Earlier in this book, we outline steps on how to reach your goals. None of those steps said "just dive in blindly, flail about some and pray that you'll succeed."

So why would you go through the most important parts of your life without any prior preparation? If you want to respect yourself, then take your dreams, start preparing and dedicating yourself right now to fulfilling them. Your self-respect will soar.

4. Don't be embarrassed with small, baby steps

The television shows and internet talking heads will tell you something totally different. If you listen to enough of them, they'll tell you that only way to succeed is by taking "quick and massive action." That may be so in some cases. But if you want lasting success, the type that passes the test of time, don't be afraid to take small, incremental steps.

5. Set your sights on solutions, not problems.

If you really desire to gain self-respect, then quit keeping your eye on the problem, regardless of how big you may perceive it to be. Instead, keep your eye on the solution to the problem you're encountering, regardless of its size. Once you do this, you're far less likely to wallow in self pity and far more likely to start taking steps to resolve it. The bonus to this way of thinking is that it empowers you because you're taking some type of action. The moment you take action is the moment you begin your journey of self-respect.

6. Practice being grateful every day.

This suggestion is not new. In fact, it's bantered about so often it might even appear trite already. Every expert on every subject, it seems, includes this piece of advice. Why? Because it's so unbelievably effective. It's one thing to step up to that ice cream counter of life and tell the cashier exactly what you want. It's quite another thing, however, to say "thank you very much" after you're holding the cone in your hand.

What you'll discover is that the more you say thank you, the more the world will provide you with the good things in life. By extension, the more your inner beauty will shine.

Take a moment right now to think of five things for which you're grateful. Go ahead, do it right now, we'll wait for you. If you can't think of anything else on this surprise, impromptu exercise, think of those family and friends closest to you. Don't forget that roof over your head, your job that allows you to buy groceries and for that matter, the groceries themselves.

See, it isn't that difficult at all. And your gratitude list doesn't have to be splattered with lavish items. The moment you start appreciating what you do have, the more self-respect you'll develop and that inner glow will shine more brightly than ever before.

7. Complete on item that you've procrastinated.

There’s nothing more empowering or will improve your self-respect quicker than by finally completing that project you’ve been putting off. Procrastination is a sneaky action. It attacks self-esteem, self-worth and self-respect slowly. Initially, it’s easy to rationalize not doing one item or another.

In fact, you may even have valid reasons for not doing something today. It may be you need just one more important piece in the puzzle before you can tackle that project. Or you may delay the whole endeavor until tomorrow because you ran out of time. Those are all legitimate reasons for the delay.

But there’s come a point where delaying the project for legitimate reasons turns into the sour taste of procrastination. Have you ever put off doing something for so long, you’re even afraid to start it? We’ve all done that.

But if you can buck that fear and even just start it, whether “it” is going back to school, starting your own business or even something as simple as cleaning out that closet, you’ll discover the fear of starting was the worst part of the project.

But something completely miraculous happens when you complete it. As you stand over it, wiping your hands, figuratively speaking, victory of finishing puts another stripe on your shoulders that improves your self-esteem and self-respect. By tackling a project you’ve put off for a while, you’ll discover that your inner beauty will be glowing brightly.

Try this with just one project you’ve procrastinated doing. The next thing you know, you’ll be searching for more. Guaranteed.

Self-respect is an essential facet of inner beauty. How in the world can you as others to respect you and credit you with accomplishments when you fail to respect yourself and in essence even wonder if you’re worthy of their respect.

Just keep in mind that ice cream cone from your childhood, you never doubted for a moment you deserved it. Think of self-respect as the adult version of your favorite ice cream flavor.

Conclusion

Inner beauty is multifaceted and at times as an elusive as a butterfly gently flittering through the air. It’s as shiny as a diamond and far more priceless than any diamond you could buy.

While many individuals search the world over to discover it – some travel to India to practice meditation, others search out gurus to lead them to nirvana – it’s ultimately not found in any single spot on the globe.

Instead your inner beauty is carried deep within you. You can travel the world over if you like. But remember this, if you step on the plane to make your worldwide tour, you’ll never return with inner beauty if you didn’t get in touch with your feelings and emotions while traveling.

For inner beauty isn’t defined by the number of travels you’ve taken, the miles you’ve journeyed and really, not even by the minutes or hours you’ve spent in meditation. Instead, it’s defined by the power within you, the amount of love and respect you have for yourself and how you perceive the world and treat those around you.

Inner beauty isn’t necessarily something that only comes with age and wisdom. It comes ultimately through the power of love – the power of loving yourself just as you are.

Thank You!

I just want to start off by saying thank you for choosing to read one of my books. I know there are millions of other books out there and how valuable your time is so I am extremely grateful that you took the time out of your day to read this book.

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The Perception Transformation

How to transform the reality by understanding our perception

Chris Smythe

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Introduction

How do you know what you see is real? Well, quite simply put, you do not. Your mind tells you that what you see is in fact real, but there is no way to prove it. With respect to those around you, there is no way to be sure if you see, or rather ‘perceive’, the same things that they do.

The point being made here is that even if your senses receive something, a certain sight, sound or smell, how can you tell if it is real, if others do not sense the same thing? Well, actually they do. But they ‘perceive’ it differently. What does that mean? Perception is different from sight. It is on a different level from our senses and it, ultimately, shapes our reality. It tells our mind what we see and what we hear.

When our senses gather information from the world, it is really in the form of facts. A sight we see is a combination of colors, a mixture of light and darkness. Smells and sounds are vibrational and molecular signals carried by the air to our nose and ears. The surface texture and feel of a particular object is a sensory signal which is transmitted by our nerves to the brain, and particular signals which come in contact with our tongue are received as taste.

But after these signals have been received, the senses are no longer important. What becomes important, is our perception. The sensory signals are interpreted by our mind, based on our memories, knowledge and our understanding of the world around us from past experiences. The information our senses give us is translated into something meaningful, something which we understand and something which triggers our emotions.

It can sometimes be difficult to understand the true meaning of perception. One would first have to understand the meaning of reality. Debates in Experimental psychology have aimed to answer these questions, but here we take a much simpler approach. Reality is the state of things as they actually exist. That is, of course, in the present state. Or you could say, at the time at which our senses gather information.

But since the information which our senses send to our brain, is altered and manipulated in a way which we fail to understand, what we see as our reality is actually our perception of the world, and not the world as it actually is. This is not to say that what we see is completely different from what others see. It simply means that each person sees the world slightly differently from what it actually is and from how others see it as well.

Perception is a powerful force. It affects everything in our reality and, in fact, it constantly changes our reality as we go through experiences in life. Emotions are what follow perception, and they could be negative or positive. Experiences give rise to memories, which give rise to emotions, which change our perception, and this changes our emotions again. And so, a dynamic cycle of how our perception influences our reality is put into place from the moment we begin to experience life as sentient beings.

Now that we have established a definition of reality and seen how it is affected by our experiences, we can start to take a closer look at perception. It is useful to learn some basic terms which psychologists use. The object, sight, sound or smell etc., which our senses detect is called *distal stimulus* or *distal object.* Our senses then transform the detection of this stimulus into a neural signal, through a process known as *transduction*. The neural activity is called the *proximal stimulus*, and once the brain receives the neural signals, it recreates the *distal stimulus* in the sub-conscience. The process through which the brain

does this is called *precept,* and the resulting reconstructed images are known as Perception.

Consider a man crossing a road. A brightly colored car approaches swiftly from one side, honking its horn as it comes towards the person. The person sees the car, and hears the horn. He moves aside to let the car pass, instead of trying to cross the road.

In this case, the car is the stimulus. The light reflected off the car, and the sound of the horn, are detected by the person's senses of sight and sound, respectively. They are then converted into neural signals, called the proximal stimulus, and transmitted to the brain, through transduction. The brain recreates the image of the car in the person's mind, and his memory and experience tells him he should move aside or the car will hit him and so he does. This is perception.

Of course, perception is affected by opinions. Our experiences in life are either pleasant or unpleasant. Experiences affect emotions, and since emotions affect perception, our perception mould's our opinions about certain situations, people, objects, and of course sights and sounds. The process of forming opinions is described by psychologists as follows:

- We encounter a previously un-encountered situation.

- There are no experiences and no memories which can drastically affect our perception, but we do have certain informational cues.

- As curious creatures, we want to learn more about the subject.

- As we try to gather information and learn, we recognize certain familiar informational signals, which allow us to classify the subject.

- Finally, we become adamant in the way our classification process progresses. Any information, or signals which go against our initial recognition, is immediately ignored, and more cues related to the same classification strengthen our theory. An image or opinion is formed.

Once an opinion is formed, we carry it with us for a very long time. We view the world through the lens of our experiences. Furthermore, opinions continue to influence perception, until substantial compelling evidence is presented to us which completely shatters our initial opinion. And, of course, since everyone has different experiences in life, they have different opinions, and thus, different perceptions of the same things.

The same subject (or stimulus) can be perceived by various people, differently. Again, this traces back to their experiences. It can also be linked to people's knowledge, beliefs and their expectations. It is also linked to their efforts and motivations. This concept is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 2, but we will touch on it here as well.

Consider a person who lost a loved one due to a complication during heart surgery. When someone else close to him develops a similar illness, which forces them to undergo heart surgery as well, the person's perception of his past experience comes into effect. He may view the surgery as a risky and complicated procedure. He may even discourage his loved one from undergoing such a treatment.

Before he lost someone close to him, perhaps he believed that surgery was a good option, and that a medical procedure would improve their standard of

living. But instead, in his case, it made matters worse. He feels let down, and thus his opinions on heart surgery have completely changed. If the person, who needs the surgery now, actually improves his health after the procedure, this may slightly change the opinion of the person under scrutiny here. This would also be an example of how drastic events can sometimes change our perception. Then again, that depends entirely on the person and his/her obstinacy.

Social guidelines such as justice, equality, kindness, and vendetta, are also very important in shaping our perceptions. The two most important theories which describe how our perception of ourselves is influenced by others in our society, are the Attribution Theory and Social Comparison Theory. These will be explained in much greater detail in a later chapter of this book.

Undoubtedly, we let the perceptions of others affect ours as well. Sometimes, the effects can be good, and sometimes they are not so good. Regardless, we have an innate tendency to try and understand the behavior of others around us. This is our effort to try and become more acceptable members of society. We let the words and actions of others influence our views on situations and objects. Their memories influence their opinions and their perceptions, which then influence us.

Ultimately, the experiences we go through in life, from childhood to adulthood, become memories. These are both good and bad memories, and they stay with us for a very long time. Some stay with us forever. The emotions which are forged in our minds through these memories are also either good or bad. Like their associated memories, we carry these extremely powerful emotions with us for a lifetime.

Opinions are formed through these experiences and emotions, and opinions affect our perception of everything we see from then onwards. Thus, what we

think is reality, is actually our perception of the world. In the next chapter, we will look at some powerful experiences, i.e. scenarios, which will help to further clarify how our experiences shape our perception of the world.

Chapter 1: 3 Mind-blowing Real Life Scenarios

In this chapter, we will present some real life examples which will attempt to clarify how our perception of reality is affected by our experiences in life.

Scenario 1 – Two Girls and a Dog

Consider two girls, Jane and Sarah. Both are quite young, maybe ten to fifteen years of age. They are good friends, and are taking a walk together in the park on a Sunday morning. They have both had their own experiences with dogs.

Sarah lives outside the city, and has been around dogs her entire life. Her father has kept dogs of numerous breeds around the house since before Sarah was born. Ever since she learned to crawl, walk and talk, her family dogs have been her companions. She is not afraid of them at all. She truly loves dogs, and considers them harmless animals that only want our love and attention.

Jane lives in the suburbs of the city, and had a neighbour who owned a Doberman Pinscher. One day, when playing outside on her own front porch, Jane casually strolled onto the curb of the road. While she was outside, her neighbour was walking his dog. He guided his dog in the direction in which

Jane was playing, because he could not see her from far away.

As he and the dog came closer, Jane suddenly emerged onto the curb. The dog became alarmed, and immediately began pulling on the leash, and barking furiously. The neighbour could not restrain him, and let go of the leash. Jane was so frightened by the dog's barking and its fearsome appearance, that she screamed, and dashed for the door of her house. The dog chased her across her front porch, but she managed to outrun it. She locked the door to her house, and spent the entire day in her room, fearful and in tears.

Now we come back to the girls while they are walking in the park. As they walk, hand in hand on the stone path, they see a woman with a Labrador Retriever on a leash approaching. Labrador Retrievers are very friendly and docile dogs, and they seldom behave aggressively towards humans. Upon seeing the dog, both girls exhibit very different reactions. Sarah, who has been with dogs her entire life, is happily surprised at seeing the Labrador. She becomes very excited and rushes towards the dog, in an attempt to cuddle the animal. Jane, however, behaves very differently.

Having had a rather traumatic experience with her neighbor's dog at a very early age, Jane is apprehensive, even afraid, of the approaching dog. She abandons her companion and retreats to a safe place close to a nearby tree, where she believes she will be safe.

The scenario described above is a classic example of how our past experiences influence our perceptions. Jane was frightened by a dog at a young age, and although the circumstances surrounding the event were unique in that the dog itself got alarmed at her sudden appearance, Jane's views on dogs remained firm. She continued to believe that they were harmful animals, and she feared them terribly.

When we look at Sarah, however, we see a loving affection towards dogs. Since she spent her early life in their company and never experienced an event similar to Jane’s, she believes that dogs are friendly animals, and she is not at all afraid to pet them.

Now we will examine another scenario, which will help to explain perception of a slightly more complex kind. Our general views on life, and the people around us, are influenced by our experiences as well. In the case of some people, these effects can be very strong, and can often completely warp their perception.

Scenario 2 – Same Place, But Different World

Consider Walter and James. Both are old men, in their eighties, and both live in the same old age home. They have become good acquaintances over the years, mainly because of the solitude which these homes provide. However, there is more to each of them than the observer can tell just by looking at their withered and fragile bodies.

James was born to a life of luxury. His father was an investment banker, and his mother was a dentist who owned a private clinic in a big city. James spent his childhood school days at a private boarding school, away from home. He was a very bright student, and as he grew, he developed an interest in the legal system. He decided to pursue a law degree at Columbia University, from where he received a scholarship.

During his time at Columbia, James excelled in his academics. On graduating, he obtained employment with a prestigious law firm. He made good money, and soon bought himself an apartment and a car. At the age of thirty, James married a woman he had fallen in love with. They lived together and she gave birth to a boy and a girl. Both children were as bright as their mother and father. The girl went on to study medicine, and the boy studied physics.

As James grew older and his children went to college, his mother passed away. He and his wife sold their apartment and moved into James' childhood home. His children married, and had children of their own. Eventually, James' wife passed away. His children, who all lived lives of their own, found a very

decent and peaceful old age home, and decided to have him placed there. The house was sold, and James now lives in the old age home. His children and grandchildren come to visit him every week.

Now we consider Walter. Walter was born into a broken home. His father died before he was born, and he lost his mother at an early age as well. From then on, he was cared for by his uncle and aunt. He was not very good at school, trying desperately to skip classes, and always getting into trouble with other boys. As he became older, he decided to enlist in the military.

Walter fought in the Korean War; a war which had severe effects on those who participated in it and lived to tell their tales. Walter was one such person. As a soldier, he experienced the horrors of the war. He saw the bloodshed, he saw his comrades and best friends fall to the bullets of the enemies, and he carried their injured, and sometimes lifeless, bodies back to the barracks for treatment or burial.

After the war ended, Walter came back home a changed man and found a job as a truck driver. He married a few years later, and had three children. Although his children lived successful lives, Walter never moved out of an old house that he bought together with his wife. When she passed away, his children forced him to move to an old folks' home, so that they would not have to take care of him.

Now both men are in the old age home. But their attitudes are very different. James is a very pleasant person, who greets anyone who meets him, kindly. He is respectful towards the orderlies and the nurses, and he truly enjoys seeing his children when they visit.

Walter is different. He has been scarred by the harm which he has seen being committed in this world, and he has become indifferent towards other people, as an effect of the hostile attitude of his own children towards him. He absolutely does not enjoy the company of others and is very rude to the nurses and attendants.

In the above example, we saw how the experiences of a lifetime have an effect on our perception. James' views the world as a pleasant and wonderful place, while Walter resents everything about it.

In the final example, we will show how our environment and our culture have an effect on our perception.

Scenario 3 – Sun and Rain

The United Kingdom is notorious for being an extremely damp and rainy place. It would not be unfair to say that people there are generally sick of the weather, which remains cloudy and rainy for most of the year. Only during a very short spell in the summer months does the country experience a brief glow of the sun's warmth and shine. During that time, people enjoy sun bathing, outdoor activities, and chilled drinks. Soon after that, the autumn and winter seasons arrive, and are marked by cold showers and frosty snow fall.

On the other hand, consider a hot, dry and arid country-like Senegal or The Gambia. They recently experienced droughts, which brought about a massive famine. The general population starved, and the heat and dryness did not help make matters any better. Most people in the country would be unfamiliar with a UK-like winter.

Now consider someone from The Gambia travelling to the UK. He would probably be pleasantly surprised and very happy with the country's weather. He would thoroughly enjoy himself, and the rain, which he rarely sees in his own country, would be a refreshing boon to him. His native counterparts, on the other hand, would be quite fed-up with their own natural misfortune.

Thus, we have seen how our experiences shape our perception, and, therefore, how different people can have different views of the same situation. In the next chapter, we will take a look at some of the reasons of our varying perceptions of the world.

Chapter 2: Different Perceptions In The Same Experience

There are several factors which affect our perception. In the previous chapter, we looked at some general examples which showed how different people view the same event or scenario differently, based on their past experiences. In this chapter, we will examine the factors which affect our perception in more detail.

Past Experiences

We have already seen several examples of this. An early tumultuous encounter with a dog scarred a girl for life, while a childhood spent among the animals kindled a loving attitude towards them, in another. The psychological wounds of war are carried by people all their lives, while privilege and fortune can make a man see the world as a bright and shining place. Past experience is perhaps the most important factor which affects our perception of our reality. Its effects are the most visible, and most people carry opinions shaped by experience their entire lives.

Parents, Teachers and Friends

Our parents are the first people we see in this world. They are our guardians until we learn to take care of ourselves. It comes as no surprise then, that they have an immense effect on our perception. The way they treat us, care for us, and nurture us, all contribute to our understanding of the world, and our perception of reality. The same can be said for our teachers. They give us the knowledge which allows us to become confident, successful individuals. We see them as our role models, and they have a big influence on our perception. Our peers also contribute to our understanding of the world. Their presence gives us hope and courage.

Religion

Our religion is a major part of our upbringing. It directly affects who we are as people. It influences our morality, our judgement and our view of the world. It teaches us compassion, justice and equality, and it allows us to focus on goals which are of a different category than our worldly desires. Depending on which part of the world you are from, and your ancestral lineage, your religion could be very conservative or quite liberal. Of course, this affects the way we learn to live our lives, the way we view other people and how much value we attach to material desires.

Financial State

This is another very important factor which influences our perception. We saw in the second example in the previous chapter, how a difference in financial upbringing creates differences in the way that people see the world and others around themselves. People, who grow up in wealthy families and receive adequate education usually, view the world as being full of opportunities. They want to explore it and become wealthy and successful. Others from less

privileged backgrounds generally view the world as a cruel and inconsiderate place. Even though they also sometimes become successful, it is through a different set of desires altogether.

Type of Residence

This is, of course, directly tied to the previous factor, i.e. financial state. Our lives are centered on our home from the moment we take our first breath. It becomes a place of peace, comfort, relaxation and solace. Our home is a very dear place to all of us and the kind of home we live in has an effect on our perception of the world. The vastly wealthy, with their immense estates, have a different view of the world from someone who lives in an apartment, or a trailer. Similarly, some people do not even have a home and live on the streets. This obviously changes their perception of the world.

Family Background

We have already established how important the effects of your parents are on your perception of the world. Generally, your entire family and upbringing has an equally important effect. The sort of lifestyle you lived as a child, or even as an adolescent, influences your attitude towards life and what you believe the world is like. If you come from a broken home, i.e. if you have divorced parents, or one of your parents is deceased, then that will strongly affect your outlook on life.

Abuse is often linked to the development of psychological abnormalities in

children who suffer from it and can lead to a bleak view of the world. Some children grow up in homes where parents might be addicted to drugs or alcohol. In these cases, it is quite likely that the children will learn to take care of themselves. They may begin to see the world as an uncaring and unwelcoming place, where one must struggle to survive. Children who grow up watching their parents do drugs might begin doing the same at some stage in their lives.

The importance of home has already been discussed, but the area of town where you live is also very important. The type of people vary greatly, depending on what part of town you live in, and you may be influenced by their standard of living, as well as your own living arrangements. Early exposure to crime, prostitution, drugs and other illegal activities can have severely detrimental effects on a child in some cases. Children learn to think of these activities as the only way to make a living and when they grow older, they may become involved in them.

Media

The media has an extremely powerful influence on our perception of the world. Not always, but quite often, the truth is stretched and altered slightly by the digital and print media, before it is presented to the people. This obviously affects what people see and what they believe is the truth behind the events occurring around the world or in their own community.

Someone living in a first world country would hear a news broadcast that a roadside bomb in some country in the Middle East has killed twenty people and start believing that the entire Middle East in an unsafe place. Tabloids continue to report celebrity headlines on front page articles and people begin associating themselves with these celebrities and their jet-setting lifestyles.

Chapter 3: Getting Inside A Thought

In this chapter, we will attempt to explore the process of forming a perception and how it relates directly to the way you think, i.e. to your stream of thought. By understanding the thought process, you can start to improve the way you think, change your perception and thus, change your outlook on life.

We have already established how your reality is, in fact, your perception of the world and others around you. This is a very important conclusion, since a positive or negative perception can affect your outlook on life. People with positive perceptions tend to see the world as a place full of opportunities, hope and happiness, albeit with its fair share of struggles and worries. These people generally tend to see things through a kaleidoscope-like lens. They see the beauty in the world around them and they are quite optimistic about their life and experiencing new things. A positive perception encourages a healthy and happy lifestyle.

On the other hand, people with negative perceptions are very critical about the world and the people in their lives. They see the world as a cruel and unforgiving place, where the struggle to survive is marred by the unkindness of the people around them and the distressing events in their lives leave scars which are carried around for a lifetime.

We have already seen, in the second scenario presented in the first chapter, how different the perception of Walter was from that of James. Again, the root cause of this difference in perception lies in the events and experiences which one goes through in early life. It may also be rooted in one’s genetics,

upbringing and social/financial state. Generally, however, a negative perception rises out of a combination of several of the above mentioned factors, having an unhealthy effect on the mind of a person.

A negative perception can have severe effects on a person's state of mind, particularly if the person's outlook presents to him a world which is bleak and malevolent. A resigned and pessimistic attitude towards the world can be very distressing for an individual. If your perception is not helping you achieve happiness and success in life, then you need to change it. The first and most important step, in changing your outlook is the realization that you need to do so.

Without realizing the need to change their perception, a person cannot begin to make changes for his betterment. However, since the cause of a negative perception is deeply rooted in a person's experiences, genetics, finances and all these have a cumulative effect, it can be very hard to realize that you need to change. Individuals who have developed set skills of perception find it very difficult to change their views on objects, people and events, particularly if they are in their middle age. A mind-set used to observing scenarios from a particular point of view will not be able to vary that point of view after years and years of experiences.

However, the strength to change lies in your heart and your will power. If you firmly believe that you need to change, then believing that you can alter your perception is really half the battle already won. Once you start believing, you can start to understand your own thoughts. You need to understand your thought process, the way your mind works and the way you reach conclusions, in order to change your perception.

Once you learn to observe your own thoughts, you will start to see patterns emerging. You should pay particular attention to how you reach important

decisions, which affect your life. This is quite difficult for most people, but again, it all depends on your personal strength. A good way to understand and observe your thoughts is to imagine a scenario that has a certain moral, personal and social importance to you. Imagine conversations you would have with people regarding the subject, and record your immediate thoughts and responses.

Once you start to understand your stream of thought, you will start to see how you reach decisions. Try and understand the factors which you consider when making decisions. You will almost definitely consider your chances of success by making the decision and how it will help you achieve that success. You will also consider how your personal confidence will be affected by the decision, as well as your social standing and image.

You can then begin to understand the root causes behind your decision. Could they arise out of childhood experiences? Are they the effects of your education, or your parents or teachers? You will then learn to understand why you perceive things the way that you do.

An awareness of your perception is one of the most important steps in improving your outlook on life. As we have seen in the introduction section, the process of perception is very complex. It may take a lot of time and effort before you begin to understand how your mind works, and notice patterns in your stream of thought. Some people consult therapists and psychologists, in order to explore the depths of their mind and learn more about themselves.

Finally, another very important part of improving your perception, and to make better decisions, is to observe successful people, who are happy with their lives and make good decisions. Pay attention to their attitudes, their demeanour and their mannerism. You can learn a lot from them, particularly from the way that they make decisions. Read the biographies of some of the

most successful people in the world. Billionaires, philanthropists, scientists, inventors and revolutionaries all have led very interesting lives, and you can learn a lot from their experiences.

Through a proper understanding of your thought process, your decision making abilities, and the causes deep seated causes behind your actions, you can learn to change your perception. Only through an understanding of your perception, can you change your outlook on life.

Chapter 4: The Perception Transformation

Your perception is the way you see the world. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, a negative perception can have pernicious effects on your life, and a positive perception can be a liberating and beneficial thing. Therefore, changing your perception could be the best thing you do in your life. In this chapter, we will attempt to explain changing one's perception and the motivation behind bringing about this change. We will look at techniques and methods that can help you achieve this, so you can adopt a positive and healthy attitude towards life.

There are several reasons why you would want to change your perception. However, the most obvious and overwhelming factor is that a negative perception makes you very unhappy. It forces you to live an unhealthy and unproductive lifestyle, and hinders you from living life to the fullest or achieving the success that you deserve. Sometimes, you may not have what one would call a negative perception, but you may want to change the way you think and make decisions, if your current perception is not helping you accomplish your goals.

Regardless of what you feel your need to change your perception is, there are ways that you can begin to understand the process of forming one and then alter it. This has been described in the previous chapter; it mainly involves an understanding the thought process and how you eventually reach conclusions or form opinions.

You may be unhappy with yourself in your present lifestyle and the outcomes of your decisions. You may not be achieving financial success, personal satisfaction, social appeal, mental peace of mind or a generally healthy and prosperous lifestyle. However, you may also feel that certain factors beyond your control, which are mostly generalized as the pressures created by a vibrant social atmosphere, are causing your unhappiness. In this case, realizing that your perception is the root cause behind your disappointments can be very difficult. People seldom believe, or rather want to believe, that there is something wrong with them, instead of the world around them.

The bottom line here, is that your perception could be making you very unhappy in life, and therefore you should definitely change it. When we looked at the causes behind the development of one's perception of events and objects, we saw how it was deeply rooted in that person's experiences. These experiences could be based in one's childhood, adolescence or even their adulthood.

Failures tend to affect a person's outlook and thought process the most severely, and we carry our failures with us for a long time. Although it is good to do that, because we learn a lot from our failures, dwelling too much on them can warp our perception in an unhealthy way.

Equally detrimental can be the effects of dwelling on one's successes for too long, as well. This may also change one's perception in an unhealthy way. Finding the right balance, and allowing certain events to affect you and others to not, is very difficult for most people. Furthermore, as a person approaches adulthood, changing one's mental attitude is a very complex and stressing endeavour, but one which eventually comes down to the person's strength of character and will.

Thus, we see that many things can affect our perception and therefore,

changing one’s perception can be very difficult. Our minds are attuned to viewing certain events, objects and individuals as positive and others as negative. Thus to change one’s perception would require to open one’s mind and allow it to form completely new opinions which are unaffected by previous experiences and events.

When we spoke about observing others people’s behaviour and their decisions in the previous chapter, the idea being conveyed was that you allow yourself to understand how and why they consider certain scenarios as positive and others as negative. If the majority consider a certain event as positive and you think of it as negative, ask yourself why.

Sometimes, you may need to force yourself to think of something as positive, even when your gut instinct goes completely against this. You will eventually begin to see the bright side of things, even those which are negative. This is the beginning of a change. Once you start to see how even the most devastating failures have a bright side, you will know that your perception has taken a turn for the better. As you go on in life and continue with your positive thought provoking practices, recording your thoughts and learning to transform your negative perception into a positive one will become much easier and you will notice a change.

When dealing with failure, you must realize that although failure in any aspect of your life will invariably cause scars, you must learn to rise above failure. You must rise above the anchoring effect that failure has on your drive and start seeing how your failure will help you become a better person. Any failure, or any bad experience for that matter, teaches you a lot. The important thing is not to let a single bad experience severely affect your perception.

Perhaps the simplest example, which demonstrates the veracity of this claim, is when you go out to eat at a restaurant that you have never eaten at before.

You do not know what the food is like, so you go there to experiment. When the food arrives, you find that it is well below your expectations and in fact, when you go home you get mild food poisoning.

So you decide never to eat again at that same restaurant. What you should not do is to stop eating at restaurants altogether, just because you had one bad experience. Keep your mind open, allow yourself to experience new things and learn to see the positive side of bad things. You will now know that that particular restaurant serves bad food, so you will never eat there again.

If you can learn to change your perception, you can focus on exactly what you want to see in a certain scenario. You should also avoid ‘filter thinking’, which means hearing only want you want to hear when something is communicated to you. Another very common mental compulsion is what is colloquially known as ‘catastrophizing’. This means that you should avoid thinking that everything is going to end in a distressing conclusion. This is very devastating and can cause you to resign from making any effort before you even begin.

You need to focus on the positive things. First of all, you need to ask yourself what is it that you want to see. The answer to this would generally be that you want to see how even the bad elements of a scenario are beneficial to you, so that you can learn to be positive about them. But that is easier said than done. So how do you focus on the positive side of things which your perception would normally make you think of as negative?

The simple uplifting truth behind any failure, or any bad experience, is that it will help you become stronger. It will enable you to make better decisions and become a better person, but only if you allow it to do so. If you let your failures change your perception, so that you resign from your endeavours and lose your drive for achieving success altogether, then you will be very unhappy with your life. Getting back up after a failure is one of the hardest

things you will ever have to do in life, but if you manage to do it, you will feel better, stronger and move closer to achieving success. The words of Maya Angelou capture this best of all.

"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."

History presents us with its own examples of people who failed at first, but then they rose above their failures, and achieved true greatness. J.K. Rowling, renowned author of the Harry Potter novel series, was rejected by numerous publishing houses before her books were finally published. She was also divorced, unemployed and raising her daughter on her own.

Henry Ford, the great automobile magnate, watched as the early business of his company forced it into severe bankruptcy. Today he is considered one of the greatest entrepreneurs of all time. Winston Churchill was a terrible student in his early days, failing the sixth grade. As a politician, he was defeated in every public office role which he contested, but later went on to become the British Prime Minister. Albert Einstein was considered a slow student by his teachers and professors. However, his contributions to the field of Physics won him the Nobel Prize in 1921.

Had any of the above mentioned people thrown in the towel when they first failed, the world would have been a very different place, for the worse. Thankfully, they did not. They looked beyond their disappointments by continuing to struggle and think positively. The fruits of their efforts are evident from the way their achievements changed the very fabric of human thinking.

You must try your best to avoid what is known as ‘black and white’ thinking. In this type of thinking you only consider things as either good or bad, i.e. there are no shades of grey. In order to open yourself up to new opinions and experiences, so you can see the bright side of things, you must embrace these shades of grey. They will keep your mind from generalizing or reaching quick and rash decisions.

Another aspect of changing your perception, is taking responsibility for your actions. After all, your thoughts are your own and nobody else’s. This again, is very hard for a lot of people to accept, but it is a truth that you need to deal with. This does not mean that you should think that if anything goes wrong, it is automatically your fault. There are a lot of things that go wrong in our everyday lives, and if you start blaming yourself for every such event, you will make yourself even more miserable and paranoid.

Positive thinking will be directly advantageous to your lifestyle. You will take control of your life and your mental and physical health will improve. Aside from that, positive thinking has been shown to be linked to an increased life span and lower depression. Believe it or not, a positive outlook on life has also been shown to improve your resistance to diseases such as the common cold! A positive perception allows you to deal effectively with stress, and become more pleasant towards your relatives and friends.

We have already discussed how you can understand your thought process. You do this by recording your thoughts. This can be very therapeutic if you are trying to think positively. Keep a diary in which you record your feelings and can reflect upon them later. By doing this, you can see exactly how negative thoughts and perceptions arise in your sub-conscience, and then you can gradually begin to eliminate them from your stream of thought. You can do the same with stress. Notice events and thoughts which cause your stress levels to rise.

Conclusion

In this book, we have looked at how we form perceptions and how we can start to alter our perception if we are unhappy with ourselves. The process of forming a perception is very complex and our perceptions are built into the very fabric of our personality. They take form when we are very young and evolve as we grow older.

Your willingness and strength of character are perhaps your biggest tools for attempting to change your perception. This change will not be easy and you may feel like quitting at some stage. The seeds planted in us during our childhood and early adulthood are very difficult to uproot, and you will find it difficult to change your long held opinions and perception. However, as we have stressed in the previous chapter, it all depends on how much you want to adopt a happy and healthy lifestyle.

Learn to study your thoughts. Understand your thought process and try to reach the root cause of your unhappiness. Then open yourself to new ideas, by scrapping old ones. Focus on the things which you really need from life, the good things, and the things which will help you achieve success.

As with any new endeavour, which is meant to bring about drastic change to one’s lifestyle, changing your perception takes time. You will undoubtedly become impatient when you try to change your view of the world, events, people and general ideas. Adopting a positive attitude and perception is a skill which takes time and dedication to develop. Again, this is linked to your upbringing.

Do not let your negative perception affect you through your failures. Instead, you must learn to accept your failures and rise above them. Keep yourself engaged and positive by saying positive, constructive things to yourself. This will keep you emotionally pleasant and encouraged. You will be happy with yourself and your accomplishments. Praise yourself for the things you do well and do not dwell on those you are not accomplished at.

Be open to new experiences. This is perhaps one of the most important lessons you should take away from this book. Keeping an open mind is a large part of opening up to new opinions and a whole new perception. You have a long and prosperous life ahead of you, and if you begin to negate new people, places, objects and events by having a narrow worldview, then you will never be able to enjoy the beauty and wonder of things.

Avoid generalizations and learn to appreciate new things. Eat at a new restaurant, go and visit a new city (or maybe even a new country), take acting or dance classes in order to relax, read new books, learn to play a musical instrument and learn a new language. All these will open you up to new experiences and hence, new ways of looking at the world.

Be aware of your thoughts. Once you have understood your stream of thought and your pattern for reaching the decisions that provoke a negative perception, you can avoid detrimental thoughts. Sometimes, a negative perception is formed when one tries to create a shield around oneself against bad experiences and feelings. Try and open yourself up, and always be aware of your how you perceive things around you.

Meditation is a very powerful and effective technique. People all around the

world use it to achieve mental peace and reduce their stress levels. Try taking up meditation, if you have the time. Even if you do not, try making time in your day for a quiet and relaxing meditation session. It only takes 10 to 20 minutes, and you will feel amazingly relaxed. Do it in a quiet place, where there are no distractions and no one can disturb you.

As a form of meditation, start reading books. This can be very therapeutic and it will undoubtedly give you mental peace. Read biographies of the great people or classics in fiction. When you set aside a certain time of the day just for reading, you will see that it will allow you to reflect on your own thoughts, while simultaneously encouraging creative contemplation. Books will stimulate your imagination and give you precious peace of mind. Travel books will open you up to new cultures, adventure books will encourage your creativity and the classics will allow you to explore your ideas and opinions on critical topics. Reading may also spark your creativity and encourage you to start writing!

Do something creative. Perhaps there is something that you have always wanted to do, but you never gave much thought to it because you thought you were too busy. Now is the time to start doing it! Maybe you are interested in photography. Get yourself a camera and let your imagination run wild. Or, maybe you want to learn sketching; is so, then take up amateur art classes. The point is that you should allow yourself to exercise your imagination and creativity. This will be a liberating experience.

Spend time with people who are successful and who take on the world confidently. Learn from them and their attitude to understand their perception. Get to know them and allow their failures to teach you as well. Try and find out how these people keep themselves motivated, and then adopt an attitude that will allow you to be as motivated and successful as them. Avoid taking antidepressants or any other sort of medication without first consulting a psychiatrist. They are very harmful to help if taken in the wrong dosage or without proper instruction.

By adopting the changes and attitudes described in this book, you will definitely change your perception about life, people and events. This change might be subtle at first, but the key is not to give up. Adopting a positive attitude, opening yourself to new experiences and seeing the bright side of things will be very beneficial to you. Allowing yourself to develop a positive perception is a crucial step on the way to achieving happiness in life.

The Power of Opportunity

Aware of All Wonderful Opportunities in Life

Chris Smythe

The Power of Opportunity

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Introduction

In a world flooded with competition, be it in finding the right life partner, right job or learning to have a sound connection with your family and finances, one can be stripped off opportunities. Yes, there are plenty of opportunities to go around but what if you are the unlucky one who is not getting them? Why should you sit there and sulk? Why should you be waiting for an opportunity to find you, when you can get up and actually create your own?

Gone are the days when you could depend on your luck and wait for opportunities to knock at your door. Life moves at a fast pace and sometimes there is no looking back to decisions taken in life. Wise people know and understand the importance of creating opportunities and through this book “The Power of Opportunity”; you will be provided with the knowledge that can help you master the art of creating opportunities. When you learn and make yourself capable of attracting the right people and energy, you open magical doors of opportunities for you and for others around you.

There are countless people out there, uninformed and unaware of the wonderful opportunities surrounding them every single day. Instead of recognizing and utilizing these opportunities, they end up heading in the wrong direction. This is due to the lack of awareness that they have and wrong attitude towards thinking that they cannot get anything better. When you do not make use of opportunities and cannot create them for yourself, you waste your time and energy with people, jobs and decisions that will do you no good in life.

So why should you be amongst the unlucky ones when you have the perfect chance to change your life? Why should you be the unhappy employee stuck with the same job for life? It is never too late to learn the importance of creating opportunities. Presented in this book are the best methods through which you can be an opportunity magnet. If you follow the guidance and understand the essence of keeping the right mental attitude, you will soon find yourself with wondrous opportunities that you never even imagined having.

Your Attitude Determines How Successful You Can Be

Not everyday is the same; every moment brings with it a fair share of happiness, joy, grief and sadness. Unfortunate as it may be, that is the number one rule of life. Waiting for happiness to knock at your door, or waiting for the tides of grief to subside, is not how it works. Struggle is the keyword here, if you want to achieve anything in life, or simply move on from a current state of mind, you need to buck up, hold your head up high and "strive" through thick and thin in life.

In order to reach anywhere in life, you need to develop the right attitude. You ask what is the right attitude? The right kind of attitude cannot be objectively determined; it can have various interpretations, depending on the situation at hand. It may simply mean going for a jog to clear your head or standing up for what you believe in, even when the winds are in the opposite direction.

If you want to weather any kind of storm in your life, you need to have the right attitude. The right attitude not only helps you focus and get out of a certain situation or predicament, it also helps you identify opportunities, which might open up doors to self-improvement and enhancement, if nothing else.

As they say, opportunity never knocks twice; try to make the most of your present; soak in each moment as it is and grab each opportunity that comes by. Live in the present; learn from your past and start preparing for your future, but also know that nothing in this world will last forever. Having said this, living in the moment does not imply that you become ignorant about your future. The right approach towards life, in general, is to be as proactive as possible and to foresee any changes or evolutions in the future.

Evolve as a Human Being

Develop the Right Attitude

Having elaborated upon the importance of developing the right attitude, it is crucial to identify the nature of the attitude. According to various optimists, adopting a positive outlook towards life is the right way to perceive life. If you are wondering how to inculcate positivity in your life, give the below a good read:

Happiness is a Choice

Engulfed in an ocean of troubles, sorrows and grief makes it increasingly hard for you to re-surface and acknowledge the existence of a lifeboat or an island, by the corner. This simply means that whenever you are depressed or troubled, you tend to ignore that tiny flicker of hope and fail to consider happiness as an option for you. This is where having a positive attitude would help you and make you realize that happiness is just around the corner. But only if you are ready to embrace it.

You need to find the good in the ugly, a light in the darkness and a rose in a bush of thorns. The process of treating happiness as a choice and then pursuing it is no piece of cake. It requires a tremendous amount of perseverance, self-resolve and most of all, the willingness to dust yourself up. However, you need to realize that happiness hardly ever comes as an uninvited guest. Just like everything else in life, you need to strive for happiness and, many a times, this struggle might turn out to be the most difficult of all.

Learn to Prioritize

Prioritizing your life, in terms of the most and least important tasks, not only gives you perspective, it encourages you to think positively. The outcome of prioritizing is always beneficial for you and the people around you. Thus, prioritize your life in the following way:

Reinstate Your Purpose

Time and again, you need to keep reminding yourself of your purpose in life. Years of pain and suffering might have blurred your sense of purpose, but you need to try to rekindle that flame. Try to redirect your life to a time when you truly felt happy and then reassess. Try to question yourself, what changed and why? Try to assess your situation and try to carve a way forward.

Identify Your Purpose

Having reflected upon your actions and words should give you sufficient food for thought to identify your sense of purpose. Start by prioritizing your responsibilities and see where your loyalties should lie, at work or at home. Chalk out a list of positive attributes you wish to develop with time and think of various ways to accomplish them.

Visualize Your Future

Form a clear picture of where you want to see yourself in the next 2 to 3 years. Hang on to that visual picture; if nothing else, it would motivate you to become what you aspire to be.

Look For Positivity Around You

Believe it or not, there is a speck of positivity even in the most negative and darkest of all situations. You might not be able to discover it with the naked eye; you need to use your inner eye to see beyond all the negativity. Faith and belief should be the two constants in your life and they will help you see the light at the end of the tunnel. Whatever happens in your life is a learning experience and take upon every hardship as a challenge, only to resurface as a survivor, stronger and more powerful than ever before.

Listen to Your Inner Voice

No matter how many motivational sessions you attend, unless you listen to your inner voice and talk to it, you will never develop the will to power through. Having said this, do not let your inner voice dominate you and try to reason with it.

Remove Negativity From Your Life

If you are trying to be positive, you cannot afford to surround yourself with negative people. They will simply discourage you and dampen your spirits. Moreover, try to rid yourself of negative thoughts, actions and things. The aim is to build a positive aura around yourself and not to let any unnecessary negativity seep through.

Looking at the Bright side

What is the bright side? Have you ever really given it a thought? Some people simply cannot acknowledge the greener side of the pasture, especially when they are buried under the rubble of troubles and sorrows. What they fail to understand is that the hope of a brighter side is going to help them survive and wage all of life's battles. Even when you see no light at the end of the tunnel, you need to believe that it exists and the only way you can get there is by being optimistic.

For those who have given up hope and are finding it extremely hard to get out of their current predicament, looking at the bright side is not at all easy. For such people, the following tips might come in handy:

Accept Life

The fundamental step towards a happy and contented life is to embrace life with open arms. Instead of whining over petty issues and your current state of affairs, learn to accept each facet of life, no matter how ugly or unpleasant it may be. Things just do not happen, the sooner you realize this, the better it will be for you. If you want to change your life, you need to take control and take the necessary steps to right all the wrongs. Always remember that time and tide waits for no one; your fate is in your hands.

Remind Yourself that You are Capable

At times, we don't know just how strong we are, unless being strong is the only option we are left with. You need to remind yourself, over and over again, that you are capable of dealing with whatever comes your way. Do not let your caste, profession or your relationships define who you are. Your inner potential is hidden and only you can truly exploit it, especially during times when you are tested. Ignore the voices around you and assess yourself, then only can you truly determine the power and strength you have within.

Disregard Others' Opinions

We spend too much time fussing over what others think about us. This only makes us weak and dependent on people and soon enough, we start looking at the world from other people's eyes. Always remember, you are who you want to be and you can never become

a figment of someone else's opinions, unless you let them control your feelings and emotions. Analyze your inner strengths, weaknesses and disregard what other people think of you. At the end of the day, you are your best judge and the way you know yourself, no one else does.

Stop Comparing Yourself to Others

The brighter side of life will cease to exist for you, if you keep comparing yourself to others and complain about the blessings they have and you have been deprived of. If you have a habit of comparing, do it with someone who is less fortunate, so that you can count your bounties and become grateful. As for the voids you feel in your life, roll up your sleeves and strive to fill the gaps. What you need to believe is that your struggles, your faith and your capabilities are more than enough for you to strive through your life.

Love Yourself

At times, when your faith is shaken, you tend to bury yourself under a pile of complexes and try to hide from the world. You need to realize that you need to start loving yourself, before you can love others, be it people, your work or your external environment. Accept your weaknesses, bask in your qualities and try to love yourself, just the way you are. You need a reality check, every now and then, that whatever you are and whatever you have is enough to struggle through rough patches.

Keep Your Calm

Do not let others influence your behavior and no matter what they say or do, try to keep your calm, at all times. You do not want to find yourself in a situation where you end up acting irrationally, due to a nasty or ugly remark from a friend or family member. Always remember, you have everything at stake, you have everything to lose, not the other person. Therefore, be mindful of your behavior because, at the end of the day, you are the only one responsible for it.

Treat Life as a Journey

Do not yearn for the perfect destination in your life. Your entire life is a journey and it needs to be undertaken, one step at a time. Accept whatever life offers you and make the most of this journey, even if things do not work out the way you want them to. They never

do, do they? Try to live in the moment, knowing that nothing lasts forever. This will make you appreciate the little things in life and give you the strength to tackle obstacles along the way.

Share Happiness

Share happiness and it will multiply. Ever heard this phrase? It is not only restricted to books of philosophy; it has a deeper meaning in life. Try to develop a positive outlook towards life and share that positivity with people around you. The aim is to share happiness and inculcate a feeling of mutual sharing and appreciation between your friends, family and colleagues.

Keep the aforementioned tips in mind and try to implement them in your life, regardless of whether you are weathering a storm or contented with your life. Positivity doesn't develop overnight; it takes considerable time and patience to look at the brighter side and to maintain that outlook, even during hardships and difficulties.

Always remember that life does not stay the same, all the time. Change is the only constant in life and the sooner you learn to be positive, the easier it would be for you to embrace the bitter reality of life. A little patience, perseverance and faith would go a long way. Rest assured, being an optimist would surely pay off, if not now, then in the long run.

Step Out of Your Comfort Zone

In order to achieve anything worthwhile in life, you need to make an effort; there is nothing like a "free lunch" in life. Yes, good things come to those who wait, but opportunities do not knock on those doors, where people are too comfortable with their current way of living.

The first and foremost rule of accomplishment is to step out of your comfort zone, do things which you never thought you were capable of, say things which were never said before and tackle obstacles along the way. You cannot expect your fate to do marvels for you, without even twitching a single muscle and making the tiniest bit of effort. If you are truly determined to achieve something, make that your aim or goal and give it all you have got.

If nothing else, stepping out of your comfort zone would expose you to a different facet of life and will enrich you with such a learning experience, the likes of which cannot be found in textbooks or motivational lectures. Life is surely a gamble, you need to play your cards wisely and always remember that risk and certainty is part and parcel of the game.

If you are wondering how to step out of the safety shell that you have built around yourself, here are a few helpful tips:

Embark on a Different Journey

If you truly want to step out of your comfort zone, try doing something different and ambitious. Until now, you might be used to doing activities and tasks, which were aligned to your personality. This puts a cap on the nature and type of experiences that you are exposed to. Try to do something which contradicts your personality and is a little demanding, so that you can experience something new and exciting. You never know, you might end up surprising yourself or the people around you.

Embrace Your Fears

The fear of a bad outcome or the fear of failure usually stops people from stepping out of their comfort zones and striving to accomplish something meaningful in life. If you want to approach a certain loved one and express your feelings, the fear of rejection and being let down might stop you from entering the battlefield, with your head held up high. You need to face your deepest and darkest fears and embrace them, as a part of life. Failure to do so would impair your ability to bring about significant changes in your life.

Many people have such strong fears that it becomes next to impossible for them to overcome them. Having said that, this process cannot be completed overnight, it takes a lot of time and dedication. The trick is to take one-step at a time and let yourself get used to the fractional changes, instead of drastic ones.

Involve People

Before embarking upon a new journey, involve a friend or loved one. You would be surprised to find out how much that would help. Having someone by your side, one who is facing the exact same things that you are, is soothing and comforting, at the end of the day. However, if your journey is all about self-exploration and self-assessment, involving

a third person would fail to do the trick. Several journeys are meant to be embarked alone, so that you can truly capture the essence of the experiences you face along the way.

Make New Friends

Many a times, when you are desperate to step out of your comfort zone, the best way is to stop hanging out with your current group of friends. Try befriending someone, with diverse interest and hobbies and you will see a noticeable change in your thoughts and actions. A person's company plays a vital role in his/her personality development and what better way to change your perspective towards life, than to make a new friend.

Think of Positive Memories

Stepping out of your comfort zone usually means focusing on the positives and ignoring the negative voices inside your head. Before delving into something completely new and different, think of the last time you stepped out of your comfort zone and try to relive the positive memories of that specific incident. Negative thoughts would automatically perturb you and would distract you from your main goal and/or purpose. Do not let them get in the way of trying out something different. Adopting a tunnel vision approach would probably work best here. Therefore, eyes should be on the prize and the only way you can get hold of the prize is by thinking positive.

Do Your Homework

Sometimes your imagination becomes your worst enemy and tries to paint a gruesome picture of whatever you are delving into. Being double minded is completely natural, but you need to exercise a bit of self-control over your thoughts. Try to do a bit of research on whatever it is that you want to try and experiment. Try to track down various other people who have embarked upon the same path and gauge their experiences, thoughts and reactions. Rest assured, a positive word of mouth would benefit you greatly.

Other Techniques

Stepping out of your bed of roses always requires a high level of control of the mind, over your body. In order to reach such a level of control, you need to soothe your emotional state of mind. You need to have faith; you need to believe in yourself and your inner capabilities. The following might help you stabilize your emotional state of being:

- Use your imagination to your own advantage and try to let it wander in a positive manner. Try to form a rosy picture of how exciting and thrilling it would be to try something new and different.

- Food for thought is as important as food for the soul. Music is the most effective way to lift your spirits and helps you gain perspective.

- Practice a few breathing exercises on a daily basis, you would be surprised to find out just how effective they are.

- It’s also helpful to take meditation classes and learn the various arts of meditation, yoga being the most popular one.

Five Ways to Be More Proactive

Do you know what it’s like to be proactive? Have you ever given this nine letter word some thought? There is a popular misconception that being proactive is strictly restricted to taking an initiative and making an effort. However, a proactive person plans our each action, every step of the way and takes full accountability and responsibility of the decisions he/she makes along the way.

It is a shining attribute of a proactive person, not to play the blame game and to handle all the success and failures that come along. A proactive person knows that failure is not an end, it is a means to an end and it only helps you realize your mistakes and prevents you from repeating them in the future. Being proactive gives you a renewed sense of purpose and teaches you not to blame anyone else for your actions and decisions. Life in general, and the various challenges along the way, become easier and manageable once you become proactive. If you want to become a proactive person, it is never too late to learn; follow the five essential ways listed below.

Prioritize Your Life

The most important step towards being proactive is to prioritize your life, each and every step of the way. You need to list down your roles and responsibilities, in order and evaluate the relative significance of each in your life. Try to strike a work/life balance and take into account your most valued relationships. Prioritizing your everyday tasks and relationships would, in other words, help you allocate your time and attention, ranging from the most to the least important task on your to-do list.

However, priorities tend to change over time and you need to accommodate them in your everyday life. For many people, their family is the top most priority and for good reason. However, as your life changes, your priorities tend to change and you need to be flexible enough to make room for new people or responsibilities in your life's equation. It is advisable to schedule your life around your priorities, in order to do justice to yourself, your work and the people related to you.

Make Your To-Do List

Make it a habit, before sleeping every night, to draft your to-do list. If nothing, it will certainly give you a sense of purpose and direction. Chalk out all the activities, be if personal or work-related and write down their respective deadlines. Closely twined with the above point, making a to-do list makes you prioritize your life in a better and more efficient manner. A to-do list is practically a graphical representation of your mind map and lays down what needs to be done and when.

From a psychological perspective, it helps you plan for the near future, in a more constructive manner and helps you predict black swans along the way. What are black swans? They are giant, winged creatures, but not according to the current context. In truly marketing terms, black swans are referred to as events which cannot be predicted in the future and are outliers to the individual or business. The only way one can truly avoid them is by being proactive and planning out every single detail of his/her life.

State Your Outcomes

Failing to plan is planning to fail, right? This might sound as a cliché but has a profound meaning, especially when it comes to being proactive. An inherent part of planning is the process of objective and goal setting. After prioritizing your life and making a to-do list, you need to be clear about your goals and ambitions.

Ask yourself, what is it that you are trying to accomplish? How would you want to see yourself, say at the end of this week or month? Even if your priority is to join the gym and lose a few pounds, your outcome at the start and end of the time period should be clear and well defined. Try linking your objectives to your priorities and accomplish each, in the order of their relative importance. Paint a mental picture and try to use your imagination, in order to successfully define and implement your goals.

Determine High Payoff Activities

Setting your outcomes is always the toughest task and once you have established clear-cut objectives according to your priorities, you are now ready to start with the screening process. Assess each activity on your to-do list and question its importance and role in achieving the respective outcome. Tasks with greater importance and relevance should be included, whereas redundant ones should be crossed off your list.

After identifying your high payoff activities, you should focus on allotting a specific date and time to them, so that you do not end up doing something else in that time slot. Again, your high payoffs are dependent upon your priorities; the greater priority a task has, the higher would be the payoff.

Share Your Plans

The last step in being proactive is to share your plans with people- not everyone, only the ones you truly trust. It can be your spouse, your manager or even your boss. This is the time to reflect upon whatever you have worked for in the past week or month. Give them the accountability to question you on your daily or weekly progress, so that you can reflect on your actions and gauge the relative success or failure of your proactive behavior. Try to identify points of weaknesses and loopholes in the plans and take necessary steps to rectify them in the future.

After discussing the five most crucial steps towards becoming a proactive individual, the relative importance of adopting this concept in your life should become clear. A proactive person is better able to deal with various unforeseen events, as opposed to a reactive person. A reactive person hardly plans and waits for the calamity to strike, before actually taking steps to rectify it. The choice is yours, at the end of the day: if you want to be prepared for the future, even to the slightest degree, being proactive is the way to be.

Extraordinary Life Plan

There are two types of people in life, the ones who occupy front row seats and watch their lives unravel, savoring the happy moments and reacting to the gloomy ones. Others, on the contrary, take charge of their lives, develop the script and try to control the events in their lives. The former are usually categorized under reactive, while the latter is grouped under proactive people.

Give it a thought; where can you classify yourself? Is your approach towards a reactive or a proactive life? Or better yet, what do you aspire to become? The choice is truly yours, but before you make a decision, you should be aware of the pros and cons of each.

For those who plan each and every detail of their lives and wish to take charge of it, a life plan comes in handy. What is a life plan? A life plan is, in simple words, a dream churner for various people. Everyone has the right to dream, but only a few fortunate ones have the willingness and ability to turn their dreams into a reality. A life plan helps you achieve just that, a direction and a way forward, so that you can embark on a journey of self-fulfillment and self-actualization.

Various critics often question the importance and the need for developing a life plan. These people usually belong to the school of thought, which believes that plans never work out and life has a sinister way of surprising us, at various points in time. What they fail to consider is that life plans are made for a person’s need for obtaining a direction in life. Typically, life plans help an individual in three main ways. Life plans provide clarity, in terms of the nature of the route to take in life, they help you juggle between various spheres of your life and most importantly, they provide you with peace of mind. Knowing that you have a certain degree of control over your life is, at times, oddly comforting and reassuring, especially from a psychological perspective.

Develop A Positive Vision

Do you have a vision in life? It does not have to be an elaborate one; a simple mental picture would suffice. A vision is generally a visualization of where you would want to see yourself, say a few years down the road. A vision is an accumulation of various aspirations and dreams. In a nutshell, a vision is a preferred way of life. Nobody can stop you from dreaming, but that does not mean you become a day dreamer. Convert your dreams into visions and then give it all you have got to materialize it into reality.

Vision Board Sessions

One of the most creative and constructive ways to motivate yourself to accomplish your visions and goals is to create a ‘vision board’. Have you ever heard about vision boards before? They are widely used for corporate and entrepreneurial purposes, but can serve to be extremely helpful in shaping your future. A vision board is a visual illustration of your experiences, achievements and aspirations. You can place it either at your work station, at home, or somewhere you can see it every day. A vision board acts as a constant reminder of your goals and ambitions and to urge you to accomplish them.

Is a Vision Board Session Effective?

Research reveals that approximately 90% of how our brain works is stored in the visual part of your memory. Think of it this way, if you are planning a vacation to the Bahamas, you are more likely to develop a mental picture of the beach and the sand. These visions are generally at the back end of our brains and a vision board helps to extract these images and refine them in a sequential manner. Since a vision board is so illustrative in nature, it often extracts visions from your subconscious mind. Try designing a vision board and, if you are lucky, you will discover long lost visions, which you once used to cherish.

How It Works?

A vision board session is not only about collecting magazines and pasting relevant images on a board. While cutting and pasting pictures, you should ask yourself of why you made a particular choice. This will provide you with the opportunity to voice out your visions, goals and ambitions and will further help you filter each of them, in order of their importance in your life. Meanwhile, you will also be able to identify the various obstacles, which have prevented you from achieving and fulfilling your aspirations.

Who are they For?

If you think that vision board sessions are only for creative and artistic people, you will be surprised with its results for even the most basic of things. Vision boards can be for anyone looking for a sense of purpose and direction in life. Vision boards are specifically useful when you are going through drastic changes in life and when your priorities alter, over time. It might also be a good idea to develop a vision board during the start of a new year, so that you can plan out your life, based on your new year's resolutions.

So, what are you waiting for? There is a plethora of vision board sessions being conducted, almost all over the world. Try to find out the nearest one and enroll yourself. However, if there aren't any classes being offered in your vicinity, there are various online sessions available. All you need to do is book them in advance. Tryout a session, chances are you will experience a renewed sense of clarity and purpose in your life. A vision board will not only help you focus on your destination, it would also help you figure out how to get there. Take life as a journey and its obstacles as challenges, you would be surprised to discover your inner strengths and capabilities. For what it's worth, a vision board can be a fun and exciting experience.

Prioritize

You cannot be the Jack of all traits in your life. Even when you feel that you are swamped with chores and activities, you need to realize that all tasks and responsibilities in your life cannot be positioned on the same tangent. Some are less important than others and need to be prioritized accordingly.

Prioritizing your life is never an easy task and it always involves opportunity cost. This simply means that you must learn to forgo certain tasks or elements such as time, cost or resources, in order to accomplish your goals and ambitions. With respect to prioritizing, follow the tips highlighted below:

Is Everything Equally Important?

The first and foremost question that you need to ask yourself is whether you think that everything is of equal and unrivaled significance. An effective way of answering this question is to ask the people involved and those who would be affected by this process. Be it your family, colleagues, subordinates or friends, you need to ask them if they need any help or if there is any work that needs to be completed on an urgent basis. If nothing, this

would help you chalk out your calendar dates for the next week, to say the least.

Another crucial way to answer this question is to work back, towards your deadlines and assess the hours of work they require and prioritize them on the basis of due dates. This would provide you with a sense of direction and purpose. Tasks or projects which require the maximum amount of input from your end can be prioritized first on your to-do list, followed by the least important and demanding ones.

Organize Your Tasks

You cannot just randomly decide to perform a specific task every day, there needs to be a properly laid out guide or manual. For your own sake, you need to have a system of accountability and productivity in place; otherwise, you would end up either repeating tasks or skipping the important ones. For starters, try to make do with to-do lists and later on when you get the hand of it, progress to advanced methods such as Gnatt charts or Asana. However, make sure that you are comfortable with your current methods, or else you would hardly use them later on.

Follow the Triple Constraint Model

From a project management perspective, the triple constraint model would be of particular importance, not only for project managers, but also for anyone who wishes to prioritize their day-to-day activities. Envision an equilateral triangle, with the three sides denoting time, cost and scope. It is practically impossible to reach all three sides of the triangle- this is where opportunity cost kicks in. If you increase the time to perform a specific task, its cost and scope would naturally increase.

In order to effectively prioritize your tasks, you need to work around the triangle and try to find the optimal combination of the three elements. This can be quite a demanding and difficult task, but with practice you will eventually get the hang of it. Of course, a lot depends upon the situation at hand. If your task is time critical, you would probably focus more on getting it done in a timely manner, paying little or no heed to the cost and scope implications.

Delegate

As mentioned earlier, it is practically impossible for you to perform everything. Therefore, delegation is often referred to as the essence of prioritizing. You need to delegate the

slightly less significant or pressing tasks to co-workers, subordinates or even friendly, who are willing to help. Delegation is crucial for your project or task's success or failure, since it allows you to focus on the more demanding and pressing issues in your life.

Challenge Yourself

Assess your life, try to analyze it's worth. Ask yourself, do you like the same, old monotonous way of life? Do you want to do something to make it better? Or are you too afraid to step out of your comfort zone and try to bring a change in your life?

Challenging yourself every step of the way, is the single most effective way to bring about necessary changes in your life, don't you agree? Life is a challenge in itself and if you truly want to get out of the web of the same, old obligations and responsibilities, just step out of your cocoon and embrace life for whatever it has to offer. Whenever you are faced with a challenge, do not shy away from it, follow the tips listed below to make the most out of it.

Stop Shrinking

Various challenges come and go. Some people embrace them with their head held up high, while others simply choose to shirk their roles and responsibilities, until the calamity gets washed away. Instead of meekly entering the storm, enter it head first, all the while, preparing yourself for the worst-case scenario. You should know that life has a bitter and ugly side and the sooner you accept and acknowledge that fact, the better it would be for you.

Fight Fear

Fear is the most natural emotion your body can ever feel, especially during challenging times. Running away from fear would simply multiply it, embracing it with open arms would help subside it. Fear usually acts as a signaling mechanism and warns your body of the danger that lies ahead. However, what you need to realize is that, sometimes, all it takes is a major breakdown, for a breakthrough to occur. Always remember, fear would always be there, there will come a point when opportunities will cease to exist.

Remember Your Accomplishments

Your achievements and accomplishments shouldn't just be in the shape of a medal or trophy, forgotten on the shelf. They should be a constant reminder of the various challenges you faced and the emotions you experienced during that journey. Try to remember how nervous and afraid you felt at the start of it, but also assess where it eventually got you. Take pride in your achievements and learn from your failures that is the true essence of life.

Avoid Over-thinking

It is not that you do not have the capabilities to tackle a challenge, it's only because of your attitude that you end up suffering. Many of you make the mistake of over-thinking and only see the daunting task that lies ahead. Your focus should be on breaking down the task into a series of achievable targets. The trick is to take one step at a time and deal with the obstacles that come your way, one at a time.

Learn From Your Mistakes

You know what's as real and sure as death? Failure. No matter how capable or successful you might be, at a certain point in your life, you will have to deal with failure. Many people take failure as a sign of discouragement and as an end, in itself. You will fall down, you are bound to stumble, but the greatness of a person lies in dusting himself up and standing up for what he truly believes in. At the end of the day, when you look back, failure should only be taken as a tool to learn from your past mistakes and prevent them in the future.

Limiting Beliefs VS Creating Opportunity

Belief. Hope. Faith. These are the three bold words, which are always easier said than done. It is said that beliefs alter a person's outlook towards life and in troubled water, when the world shows you a cold shoulder, faith is what determines whether or not you reach the shore.

What is faith? Faith is looking at the darkness and spotting a speck of light, faith is taking the plunge, not knowing whether or not you will splash in the water or fall flat on the

ground. Faith is that little voice inside your head, one that urges you to move forward, leaving behind the demons of your past.

Having said that, some people have what it's called "limiting beliefs" and these people need a bit of extra push to take a life-altering plunge. There are quite a few limiting beliefs that actually prevent you from being positive:

Different People are Weird

When you are used to a certain way of things or certain types of people, accepting diversity not only becomes difficult, at times it becomes impossible. What you need to understand is that not everyone is alike and life, at the end of the day, is not perfect, in any sense. You need to develop a degree of acceptability, so that you can give them a chance, you never know they might present to you the opportunity of a lifetime.

People are either "good" or "evil"

Some of you either filter out people and place them on a pedestal, or they simply position them on the lowest levels of morality. This means that they only have two measuring criteria for people, good or evil. Life does not work that way, every individual has a flair of good and bad, the degree of each varies and in certain instances one outshines the other. You need to give people a fair chance and let them prove themselves, before making hasty generalizations and making poor judgement.

Thoughts are an Indicator

People with limiting beliefs are usually unhappy or pessimistic, which is why they are always consumed with negative thoughts. They take their thoughts at face value and do not stop to fight off their feelings and emotions. For example, if they are getting a sinking feeling about a particular decision in life, they would take that as a sign to abandon that particular endeavor.

Control Comes With Love

Negative people usually believe that when they love someone, they are automatically given the right to control them. On the contrary, true love does not really demand authority and control; it is based on the foundations of trust and loyalty.

Want for More and More

Chasing after money, power and status lead you nowhere and makes you lust for more and more. This constant chase often makes you greedy and robs you of your inner peace and happiness. This simply means that no matter what you accomplish, you can never be truly happy and satisfied and you will keep yearning for more, all your life.

All the Bad Things Happen To Me

If you think that all the bad things happen to you, you are surely a victim of self-pity. Self-pity is such an unsettling state of mind that it simply erodes away all traces of joy and happiness in your life. Therefore, even if an opportunity comes by, such a person will not realize it, amidst the cloud of negative thoughts.

Create Positive Energy

Believe it or not, all of us produce and emit energies or vibes; these determine our personalities and how we behave under various circumstances. The energies intrinsic to your personality are usually channelized and externalized by your thoughts, feelings and actions. These, in turn, affect the people around you in either a positive or negative manner.

Various kinds and types of energies are around us, how you interpret those energies varies entirely from person to person. In order to develop the right kind of attitude towards life, you need to create an aura of positive energy around you. If this doesn’t help, try to surround yourself in a positive and elating environment so that the positive vibes can rub off on you.

Ways to Obtain Positive Energy

If you think positive energy represents rays of sunlight shining upon you, think again. Positive energy is nothing but a state of mind, it is how you interpret changes around you and translate them in your personality. If you wish to create positivity around you, try to

make a list of things that make you feel good. Therefore, the meaning of positive energy is a subjective concept and differs from person to person. Categorically, the following things might help in flooding your life with positivity:

-Close proximity to nature

-Yoga

-Swimming

-Reading

-Maintaining a diary or journal

-A vacation

Tips and Tricks

Positivity cannot be bought off an auction; it takes considerable time and effort to build a sphere of positivity around you. However, the following might help you think and feel positively:

- As soon as you wake up, resolve to have a good day. A positive attitude really helps, especially if you develop one early in the morning. Always remember that only you have the power to turn things around and make them happen for you.

- There are plenty of soap operas out there; you do not want your life to become one, do you? You should manage your relationships and try to reduce the number of emotional encounters with your partner. At the end of the day, you don’t want more emotional baggage.

- You need to understand that no family is perfect; each has its own set of differences and problems. The sooner you make peace with this idea, the better it would be for you. Embrace the shortcomings of each of your family members and try to work around them, if you truly want to be a source of positive energy.

- Embark on a journey of self-improvement and self-assessment. You can do this alone or ask a friend to accompany you. This journey can be as simple as taking a foreign language class together with your friend or spouse. Know that you are not alone; you have all the emotional support system you need. This would really help you appreciate people for the positive role they play in your life.

- Use your imagination and form a rosy picture of how you want to see yourself, later down the road. Visualizing a positive, future state of affairs would probably motivate you to convert that image into a reality.

- Everyone has their own set of issues in life. If you truly want to be the source of

positivity for yourself and people around you, helping a friend in need is at times the best thing to do. Helping someone out in times of need would make you feel a lot better about yourself and will clear your head. You would be able to focus on solving your problems in a better and more effective manner.

Identify Blocks

Life is a never ending road, or so it seems but it is in no way a smooth and uninterrupted path. You will not cruise through this path all your life. Always remember that good things never come easily in life, you really need to put in all you've got.

Before you embark upon any journey, prepare yourself for various obstacles and blocks along the way. How you tackle these challenges truly depicts your inner strength and capabilities. These blocks are not always physical in nature; they usually come in the form of mental demons, ready to pounce from time to time. Broadly classified, almost everyone faces the following obstacles, at least once in their life:

Failure to Set Goals

Some people simply cannot set goals and targets in their life, which makes it difficult for them to reach a particular destination. Having nothing to achieve in the future is a serious mental block, especially when you lose focus and direction in life. Like it or not, you need to list down your goals, so that you have a way forward. If you are afraid of setting goals because you think you might not be able to achieve them, you need to realize that everything in life is a gamble, it is completely up to you, how you wish to play your cards.

Fear

If you think that fear is a multi-headed monster, standing in your way, preventing you to succeed in life, so be it. Imagine yourself as a dragon slayer, ready to look at fear in the eye and slash it in two. Fear is the most natural feeling you can feel, especially when you face obstacles along the way. The truest greatness of a person lies in embracing his fears and taking life as a challenge.

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but *rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."* – Ambrose Redmoon

Demons of the Past

Everyone has emotional baggage from the past; some keep it hidden behind doors, while others simply act as if they do not exist. The most constructive way to deal with such demons is to face them and let them out of your system, for once and all. Holding onto your past would only stop you from moving forward and achieving success in life. The trick is to rid yourself of all the negativity of the past and make peace with what the future has to offer.

Distractions

During the course of your life, you will face many distractions, which might turn into obstacles if you get derailed from your original mission. Your eyes should be on the prize and any distractions that come your way should shortly be disregarded. Do not try to find comfort in unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking or drug consumption. Life might present many shortcuts to you, but always remember that opting for them might prove to be highly destructive for your future, dreams and ambitions.

Bad Company

A man is known by the company he seeks. If you surround yourself with negative people, you might never be able to achieve your goals in life. Nothing can be as big a block along the way, as bad company. Your friends play a major role in shaping your thoughts, feelings and actions. If the people in your life are unsupportive of your beliefs and goals, you need to find the kind of people who believe in you. Emotional support is crucial and even an ounce of negativity from a loved one can act as a boulder on your path to self-fulfillment.

Worst-Case Scenario

When life gives you lemons, what should you do? Most people would say make lemonade but shouldn't you instead save them for rainy days? Either way, life will give you your fair

share of troubles and sorrows. The question is, how are you going to deal with it? Will you face your troubles with your head held high or will you run for cover and wait until the storm abates? Research reveals that the best way to deal with your fears is to confront them. Know that you control your fears and it is not the other way around. The most proven method for doing so is to mentally form a picture in your head. Imagine the worst-case scenario that you could have to face in a situation that you fear.

When you come to terms with the worst possible thing that can happen to you, you automatically prepare yourself for whatever you are about to face. The worst-case scenario can be anything. It could be a modification of your past incidents or an imaginary or hypothetical situation that is created around the characters in your life. You learn to accept life as it is, for its bitterness and ugliness and consider it as a true test of your capabilities.

In other words, you take up life as a challenge. You are willing to put in all that it takes in order to come out as a survivor. Thinking of the worst-case scenario gives you a will to fight back, knowing that you have nothing to lose and realizing that you have gambled everything that is dear to you. In such a situation, fear becomes an ally, not an enemy. In return, you come to terms with the idea of conquering fear and fighting off your demons.

Health is Wealth

You've probably heard the common phrase that "Health is wealth". It's not just a phrase that mothers use to make their children eat. A healthy body really guarantees a healthy mind and does away from ailments such as stress, depression and gloominess. Primarily, health is of two kinds, physical health and mental health. Both kinds of health are intertwined with one another. Stated below are the benefits of each kind:

Physical Benefits

Being physically fit requires you to maintain a healthy and balanced diet, regular exercise and most importantly, a positive outlook towards life. If you can manage to do that, you can benefit from a plethora of various benefits. Better yet, if you adopt the above mentioned habits in your life from an early age, you can manage to fight off diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol issues. All of this eventually adds up to a more energetic and effervescent you. The more energetic you are, the more productive you will be in your life.

Mental Benefits

Mental health is equally, if not more, important to physical fitness. Rest assured, eating a healthy meal and exercising regularly can contribute towards a more relaxed and peaceful state of mind. Whenever you are stressed or feeling down, always remember that you need positive energy to pull yourself from your current state of mind. The energy is required by your body to enable you to fight off the negativities in your life.

You will barely get the strength and motivation to fight off your stress with an empty stomach or with insomnia kicking in your system. You need to bring about certain changes to your daily routine, from a health perspective. Start off by doubling your water intake and devoting a few minutes from your daily schedule towards quality time for yourself. Incorporate the use of exercise and you will notice your mental health significantly improve.

Design Your Ideal Workout

When you reach a certain point in life, where you seem to have achieved most of your major milestones, you start craving for mental peace. The struggle we call life, is an endless journey that promises everyone their shares of bitter and happy moments. You can either take the back seat and enjoy the show, or take control of your life and know that you are responsible for it.

However, all the struggles in your life are bound to break you down. The only way you can get back up on the horse is by keeping yourself motivated and refreshed, especially during rough patches. Various psychologists recommend regular workout routines for their patients suffering from depression or any kind of crisis in their lives. Being physically fit clears your perception and broadens your horizon, not to mention the clarity and focus it gives you.

Follow the steps listed below to help you design the ideal workout routine:

Set Goals

Before you get to it, you should develop realistic and achievable goals. Ask yourself, why do you want to work out? Is your goal to lose weight or simply to keep yourself occupied? It is better to be clear and precise in terms of establishing your goals. Focus on specific aspects of your body.-If you want to work out for relaxation purposes, start aerobics classes, followed by yoga. Moreover, you also need to define your current level before starting your workout routine. Your goals and routines would vary, depending on whether you are an amateur, intermediate or have progressed to the advanced level.

What is Your Workout Frequency?

Based on your routine and everyday tasks, make a workout plan and allot specific hours of the day for each type of workout. Depending on your goals, this would give you a fair idea of how much you would be required to work out. The trick is to create the perfect blend between your routine tasks and your workout sessions. If you want stability in your life, keep moderation in your tasks. You do not want an excess of each, balance is something you should strive for.

Hire an Instructor

If you are just a beginner, it is advisable for you to hire a workout instructor. The instructor can help in suggesting various exercises and techniques, which would be suitable for your current weight, age and goal. It is really important for you to lay out your weight training intensity, which would only help you manage the exact specifications regarding your workout routine.

Do Not Over Burden Yourself

Designing your ideal workout does not mean filling up the empty slots in your schedule with excessive workout routines. If you overburden yourself, you will lose the motivation for working out. Only opt for those exercises, which you can bear to do, not the ones that completely drain you off your energy.

Chalk Out a Diet Plan

Your ideal workout would be useless without a carefully drafted diet plan. Here is where your instructor would come in handy. Equipped with the right experience and knowledge, your instructor would be able to draft a well-integrated diet plan, one which would complement your daily workouts.

Eat Well, Eat Right

When beaten down by life, many people cope with it by starving themselves to death. What they do not realize, is the fact that not eating will not help them deal with the situation at hand, it will only worsen it.

On the contrary, some people adopt the opposite attitude towards coping with grief or stress. They start binge eating and find comfort in foods like chocolate, cheese or ice cream. This is a graver situation than the former because it exposes your body to illnesses such as obesity or other side effects of an ill-balanced diet.

After a depiction of two extreme situations, the importance of eating well and eating right should be clear. However, if you have any more doubts, give the following benefits of a

healthy diet a good read:

Mood Lifter

It is a well acclaimed fact that adopting a healthy and balanced diet, coupled with regular exercise not only improves your physical well-being but does wonders to your mental state of mind. Research reveals that physical activity has a profound effect on your mental health and stimulates brain cells to act in a more productive manner. It works well for those people who are conscious about their physique and gives them self-confidence and a sudden boost in morale.

"Another healthy habit that leads to better mental health is making social connections. Whether it's volunteering, joining a club, or attending a movie, communal activities help improve mood and mental functioning by keeping the mind active and serotonin levels balanced", says the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Helps You Lose or Maintain Weight

Eating the right kind of food, in the right quantities, is what determines your physical and mental health. One of the perks of eating healthy is shedding off the excess weight around your belly or thighs. Soon enough, you will notice a reduction in your weight. You surely cannot attach a price to the happiness you get, when you manage to fit into your old jeans.

Gives Instant Energy

If you think that the best way to cope up with stress is to stuff your mouth with comfort food, you couldn't be more wrong. Junk food, especially that rich in sugar, sucks up the remaining energy in your body and leaves it in a state of fatigue. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables, containing a high amount of fiber is what gets you going and gives you instant energy.

Fights Off Diseases

You probably have no idea how much a balanced diet can help you fight off even the most life threatening of diseases. By incorporating the most essential proteins and carbohydrates in your diet, you can avoid diseases such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and various other medical ailments. Put your guard up and implement upon the phrase- "Prevention is better than cure".

Release Stress, Meditation for higher awareness

Stress is perhaps, the single most disastrous emotion one can ever feel. It literally gnaws you from the inside, devoids you of all positivity and leaves you hollow from within. Needless to say, stress is one bitter reality and life has its way of giving you its fair share of worries and miseries- there is no escaping that.

Having said that, there are various ways that can help you reduce, if not eliminate stress from your life:

Meditate

Make meditating a habit. Before or after a hectic and stressful day, devote a few minutes of your time to meditating. You will soon realize that it will do wonders for your mental, as well as physical state of being. You need not follow a lengthy meditation routine, all you need to do is close your eyes, rid your mind of all negative thoughts and keep repeating positive statements such as, “I can do this”. The key is to divert all your attention and energies to thinking positive, so that you can power through.

“Research suggests that daily meditation may alter the brain’s neural pathways, making you more resilient to stress,” says psychologist Robbie Maller Hartman

Be Present

When life seems meaningless and the future seems a distant reality, hopelessness and helplessness engulf you. However, you can step out of it by simply focusing on your present. Treat the present as a gift from God and try to see his greatness in all the little things. While taking a walk, take a moment to appreciate the sunset or the sunrise. Let the cool breeze caress your face and allow yourself to soak into the moment.

Regular Breathing exercises

Stress, in various circumstances, is a major reason for different mental and physical

illnesses. You should never let stress take over your life; instead, you should be the one to control your life. Every morning, practice some breathing exercises. All you have to do is close your eyes and inhale and exhale deeply. Do not expect a significant change overnight, give it a few days- you will notice how refreshed and exhilarated you feel at the start of each day.

"Deep breathing counters the effects of stress by slowing the heart rate and lowering blood pressure," psychologist Judith Tutin, PhD

Vent it Out

You probably don't know yet but sharing your troubles and worries with your loved ones does a world of good. Even if the world turns its back on you, there would be that certain someone you can truly count on. Try to reach out to the people you trust and be receptive towards their input. After having talked to someone that you trust, you will notice an improvement in the way you feel.

Focus on Your Body

You need to analyze the extent of the influence that your mind has over your body. A stressful person is never a healthy one, the sooner you realize, the better it would be for you. Therefore, what you need to do is re-examine your body, for changes or alterations, especially in the way each body part is functioning.

"Simply be aware of places you feel tight or loose without trying to change anything," Tutin says.

Professional Life

Life is a stage where people come and play their respective roles. Who knew Shakespeare could be so pragmatic about life in general? This simply means that a person's circumstances never remain the same. While he performs his role and lives up to his character, he also exits the stage soon afterwards.

Similarly, you cannot always be a child or a student. Life moves on and before you know it, you have stepped into a puddle that people call, "professional life." Professional life is probably the first official reminder that life is anything but a bed of roses. The struggles, obstacles and dilemmas you face in your professional life, define your role in this world and in the lives of others. At the end of the day, given that you learn from life's invaluable lessons, your professional life makes you stronger and more confident than ever. Professional life is not only about pursuing your career and making a name for yourself; it is about making the right decisions, taking risks and defining the future course of your life.

Learn New Skills

If you think that graduating from a top school, with top notch grades and a medal of excellence is enough to last you a lifetime, you couldn't be more mistaken. This does not mean that your education is not important; it simply means that one should continue his/her learning cycle throughout their lives. You can never be too old to learn; at least that is what the experts say.

When it comes to stepping into the professional world, you need to keep in mind that your resume needs constant modification in terms of your skills enhancement. There are probably a million others out there, with the same set of qualifications and grades. Amidst this clutter, what employers are looking for is something out of the box, something unique that enables you to stand out. When it comes to skills and capabilities, there exists two generic forms:

Hard Skills

Hard skills are those set of skills which are taught and learnt over time. A person isn't born with them and these skills include learning a new language or acquiring training in Six Sigma.

Learn a New Language

You know how rewarding it is to learn a new language? From a business perspective, you should be well versed in Chinese, French and English, if you haven't learned it yet that is. Rest assured, this might be an extremely valuable addition to your existing resume and might get you the job you never even dreamt of. If the scope of your work requires you to stay up-to-date with new technology, you can also learn a new programming language. Try to learn the ones that are currently in high demand, so that you have a diversified portfolio, one that singles you out from the rest of the candidates.

Six Sigma

Ever heard of the terms "continuous improvement?" Six Sigma is a Japanese concept, which focuses on teaching techniques aiming to improve the quality of operations and processes. If you have an accreditation of Six Sigma on your resume, it will definitely help you get you to the right places. Organizations especially send their staff for Six Sigma training- if you are already trained, you can get into various huge conglomerates.

Soft Skills

On the contrary, soft skills are more innate and relate to an individual's personality. A person can either be born with them or the skills can also be nurtured. These skills include interpersonal skills, communication skills or even personal skills like self-esteem and integrity. Through learning, these skills can also be transferred from one person to the other.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are perhaps the most critical and crucial skills, not to mention a must-have on your resume. You need to possess the necessary people-skills, in order to get into almost any profession. If you think you are an introvert and are reserved by nature, take up

a few classes and brush up on your interpersonal skills. Do not just add this skill on your CV for the heck of it; train yourself to talk to people in a confident manner.

Management Skills

Whether you want to apply for a management position or not, you should be equipped with the relevant managerial skills. Every position, no matter how menial, requires you to take decisions, lead people and communicate with them. Management skills help you avail the basic qualifications that help towards a better management of work force. These skills can really help you excel in your professional life.

Organizational Skills

Again, an employer wants someone who has prior experience or knowledge of coordinating and organizing people, resources and projects. In today's competitive corporate environment, organizational skills are no longer optional, they are pretty much considered as mandatory.

Evaluate Your Goals

Goals, plans and ambitions, are these only words to you or do they really mean something? Have you ever set goals in your life? How did that work out for you? Setting goals and targets doesn't really turn out as expected for many people. This makes them wonder where they went wrong. If you think that setting goals alone is a guarantee for your success, you couldn't be more mistaken.

Yes, setting accurate and realistic goals is extremely significant but the process shouldn't end here. You need to go back and evaluate your goals every once in a while, to determine whether or not you are on the right track. You can evaluate your goals by implementing the following:

Measure the Intensity of Your Aim

Try to determine the intensity of your ambition. If you want to become a painter, ask yourself if it is temporary or are you truly determined to achieve it. Your goals should

have sufficient long-term backing; otherwise, you would just be wasting time and effort. An extremely clever way of monitoring this is by reverting to your goals, after a specific period. If you feel the same intensity and a stronger urge to achieve it, you should devote all your time and effort towards it.

Make Them Concrete

Concrete goals do not have to be written on stone, they just need to be written in black and white. Write your goals on a piece of paper and stick the paper somewhere where you can see it every day. If you want to be really creative, draft a vision board and get creative. Cut out an image from a magazine or newspaper, one that closely represents your goal. If going to Istanbul for a vacation is your goal, cut out a picture of any monument and paste it on the board. A visual depiction is at times better than a written one. However, it is advisable for you to make them more flexible, so that you can tweak a few things here and there when required.

Test Them

Make sure your goals are measurable, if not in monetary than in non-monetary terms. Simply stating out a desire is hardly enough; you need to make an action plan. The only way to test your goals is to compare them to your original targets and measure your progress.

Inconsistency is Out of Question

While making a list of your goals, make sure one goal does not contradict another. For example, if you want to take a vacation and reduce your debt at the same time, there is bound to be a conflict of interest. Learn to prioritize your goals in order of preference and practicality.

See the Value in Others

“No man is an island”. This applies to personal life but has greater implications when it comes to professional life. If you think that you can manage everything and take your company to heights of success, without any help whatsoever, that is definitely not the

case.

If you want to make something of your career, you need to involve the people around you.. The captain alone cannot steer the ship, likewise you cannot take matters into your own hands. You need to learn to delegate tasks and above all, learn to rely on other people. This will help you see them in a different light and probably enable you to value them more. Collaboration is the key, especially in a workplace environment. If you want to master the art of collaboration, follow the steps below:

Clarify Expectations

When working in an organization, it is extremely important to lay out what is expected from everyone- be it your supervisor, co-worker or subordinate. Everyone should be aware of their roles and responsibilities along with their respective contribution in a project or task. There should be a reliable system of accountability and reporting, which would really help highlight the required expectations to achieve desired results.

Get Everyone on Board

If you are a project leader, you should make sure that all people in your team are on board and well aware of how things work. Essentially, everyone should work towards the desired goal or target. Never adopt a tunnel-vision attitude towards your project, make sure all team members are working towards the betterment of the project and have no hidden motives.

Be Honest

Confrontation is the first and foremost rule of collaborating with your coworkers and supervisors. If you have a problem with the way things are, confront them and be honest about your issues with them. By holding back, you are simply turning your back on your issues and not giving them a chance to be resolved.

Meet Regularly

If you want to collaborate with your people effectively, the key is to hold regular meetings. This would allow regular and timely progress updates and would also provide you with the opportunity to meet and discuss issues. Make sure the meeting time is used constructively and should not be for pointless jibber-jabber.

Work on Your Social Life

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. Does this ring a bell? Having a career and indulging in your professional life does not mean you cut off all social relations. It is ideal to have a balance in your life and work your way around it.

Look at it this way, the more you interact with people, the greater your social circle will become. This can do wonders for you, if you know how to make the right connections.

Take Charge

Do not sulk around and wait for people to make plans. At times, all you need to do is take an initiative and approach someone. Plan a movie, dinner or even a date. You can even host a party or a game night and call all your friends over; you never know how exciting this might be. Do not let the fear of rejection come in the way of taking charge.

Try Something New

You know it’s never too late to learn a new skill, or try something new. Try a new sport or join a club membership that will allow you to meet new people.. Interacting with new people is something that can be truly rewarding and can open up various avenues for you- in terms of varying opinions and perspectives.

Prioritize

Just because you have become too busy with your work or in your married life, doesn’t mean you give your friends the back seat. Make it a point to call them or meet up with them, at least on weekends. Be it a brief meeting for a cup of coffee or a movie plan, spare some time and make sure it’s worth it.

Do not Hesitate

Turning down and declining every other plan can really put off the other person. If you continue to do so, you will not be left with any friends. Even if you do not want to make new friends, at least try to retain the existing ones. All you need to do is say yes every once in a while.

Value People Around You

At times, we tend to take old friends for granted. It will not take much of your time or energy to call an old friend and check on him/her, would it? Meet up with old friends and dig up old memories, you don’t know how refreshing that can turn out for you.

Relationship

Positive Vibe

Positive energy can do wonders in creating opportunities. Everyone likes to be around people who carry and give off positive energy. This is because positive energy is attractive and can surprisingly be contagious. Positive energy can really make a difference in your life. It can enhance your spirituality and improve your general and mental health. In return, it enables you to move faster towards success and helps you in polishing your relations with people.

Your energy is essential, not only for you but for all others around you. If you are having a bad day and you meet a person who's giving off positive energy, you'll be feeling good in no time! Positive energy can help you create opportunities whilst negative energy can actually destroy your chance of creating opportunities. Let's look at two examples of differences in energy and how they may affect a common situation

Imagine you get a call for an interview. You dress appropriately, have confidence and are mentally ready for the interview. You arrive for the interview and greet the interviewer with a smile on your face. You answer all questions with confidence and use your sense of humour (decent) wherever applicable. Chances are that you'll make the interviewer's day and he or she would want to select you, just because of the positive energy that helped liven and brighten up the intense situation.

Now imagine you arrive for the interview. You are appropriately dressed but are nervous and hence mentally not ready. The interviewer asks a range of questions but you are lacking in confidence and therefore you look in distress. Without knowing, you'll actually be giving off negative energy and it will affect the situation. This will only make the interviewer feel less keen in hiring you. Always remember that regardless of the situation,

positive energy will always help.

People that are positive, naturally make others feel good around them. They give off positive vibes that make them warm, welcoming and appealing to others. Positive energy allows people to interact with you comfortably and hence, you are more likely to make new friends and relationships that can change your life for good! Always remember, life is full of ups and downs and sometimes you may be prone to depression. However, positive energy will help you fight any difficult situation and will help all others around you too.

Start being a little bit more positive today and you'll be surprised to see the positive changes in your interactions with people and vice versa. Eliminate the stress from your lives by thinking positively and being optimistic. Let go of the negative people in your life that are not helping you grow. These negative people can really affect your chances of having opportunities. Their pessimistic nature will always get in your way and will make you think negative too. Take inspiration from good books and spend time doing what you love. Enjoy life and you'll be giving off positive energy before you even know it.

Meet New People

Meeting new people is a wonderful and easy way through which opportunities can be created. The more people you know, the more your social circle starts to enhance and expand. New people in your life will help you grow, they may help you learn and see life from a different perspective. They may be wonderful positive energy carriers that can help you with better opportunities be it at work, in a relationship or in general. These new people may have the ability to change your life!

You may not even be aware but a new person around you may be carrying an opportunity that you can really make use of. What use is that opportunity that is being wasted because of your lack of good communication skills? This is where good people skills can really lend a hand. In order to be able to meet new people, you must start by focusing all of your energy to being positive. If negative thoughts are cluttering your mind, you will never be able to meet new people with ease.

So how can you stay positive? Simple! All you have to do is think positive and good thoughts. Keep a smile on your face and do not worry about the outcome of the meeting. When you are smiling, you will come across as friendly, therefore giving off positive

energy. As a result, people will notice you and you will become more approachable and easy to get along with. Not worrying about the outcome will help you stay relaxed and will allow you to be yourself without any worries.

Search for new people in places of your interest. People that are present in your place of interest are more likely to get on with you since you share a common interest. If you are single, you have a chance of meeting your life partner here. On the other hand, you can also try new places and meet individuals who you share nothing in common with. This can help create opportunities. A sense of curiosity in something can actually help you learn and grow since you are likely to inquire more on the topic being discussed.

There may be somebody around you, who you want talk to but are not sure how to. The use of some good conversation starters can really get you going. You may want to simply compliment the person or kill the boredom with a brief introduction of yourself. If you are at an event, inquire about how they know the host and how they heard about the event. Depending on the situation and how you connect, you can ask about their occupation, family etc.

When meeting new people, always keep a smile but don't over-do it. You want to come across as warm, welcoming and respectful. Avoid distracting people that may be busy with a phone call or another activity since it can tend to make you look rude. When meeting new people, keep the conversation general and avoid going into too many personal details. You don't want to come across as nosy and make the other person feel uncomfortable. Once you have set the pace for the conversation, things will get easier and you'll actually start to enjoy knowing the new individual.

Quality People and Opportunities

Quality is a subjective term and hence there can be no one definition to define quality. However in people, quality can generally be described as having quality features that make people more attractive to you. These may be people that are successful and live happy lives and people that enjoy their work and know how to inspire others. It might even be people that are funny and good at making you smile. Being around people like this can help create opportunities for you like never before.

Interacting with people that appeal to you, are successful and have a lot of good

knowledge to share can inspire you and make you see life from a new perspective. These people can help you in making wiser decisions in life and can hence be a reason for opportunities being created for you. The more quality people in your life that you interact with, the more opportunities created for you. Let's explain this with a general example:

Imagine you are single and looking for a life partner. Your ideal life partner would be somebody who appeals to you and shares similar interests. If you have a vast social circle of friends, you have a good chance of finding a life partner amongst them. People from your group of friends will always be easy to talk to and you can get to know more about them without coming across as intrusive. The more people you know, the more you will be talked to and talked about and hence you have a higher chance of being asked out.

However, as mentioned earlier, it is important to socialise with quality people. People that you find qualities in should be the ones that you are friends with. Quality people will naturally appeal to you and your chances of interaction will always be more. On the other hand, people that do not appeal to you should be avoided socialising with. Some people can be so negative that they can drastically affect your positive energy and well-being just by their presence.

You always want to interact with people that can help you grow and inspire you to be better and feel better about yourself. People who are appreciative and have a respect for others are wonderful individuals to be around. Whilst interacting with quality people can help your personal relationships, it can also help enhance your business relationships. If your business has a team of quality employees, you will attract other businesses to interact with you. In return, you polish your business image in the business world.

In order to create quality opportunities, you must always present yourself in a manner that is going to attract quality attention. Be kind, friendly as well as professional. It won't be long before you start to turn heads. If you hesitate when it comes to talking to new people, you can make use of some of the tips mentioned in the previous section of "meet new people". Only when you are able to interact with others comfortably, will you be able to make the most of the interaction.

You are the Sum of the 5 People Closest to You

There is a wonderful quote by the motivational speaker Jim Rohn that states, "You are the

average of the five people you spend the most time with." When you look into what is actually being said, you will come across a powerful finding. The people in your life, the people that you spend most time with and who you are the closest to, have a great impact on your life. They ultimately influence the person that you will become. And they surely do! Who you spend time with can enhance you as well as bring you down.

Take your friends for instance, imagine a friend that is always whining and unhappy with their life, it will also affect your happiness and optimism towards life. On the other hand, if you are having a bad day, an inspiring and cheerful friend can cheer you up and inspire you to stay positive. It doesn't only apply to your friends and affecting your happiness. The people around you can also drastically affect your personal success thereby affecting the opportunities that you may have.

Regardless of your intelligence, talent, skills, background and ethnicity, your success will always be dependent on the people that you surround yourself with. Good people that have qualities that appeal to you will help you be a better person in general. Their personalities and ways of dealing with different situations can enhance your well-being and help you make wiser decisions. Therefore, it is important that you are aware of the people that you hang out and socialise with.

The notion is fairly simple, yet it can be overlooked most of the times. In order to analyse the people affecting your life, start by asking yourself a few questions. Who are the 5 people in your life that you spend most time with? They don't have to be exactly five in number. 3 to 5 people are fine. Analyse the hours spent with them. These 5 people may include family, co-workers, best friends and your life partner. Then you want to go into a few more details regarding this group of people.

Ask yourself who those people are in your life and how they are living their lives. Keep their career and success in mind. How are these people in terms of personality? Are they ambitious? Do they inspire you? If you end up getting more negative answers than positive, it is time that you analyse the affect that they are having on your life. The people should be able to enhance you and help you move towards your goals. If they are not helping you grown in anyway, should you really be around them for so long?

You can also think of the people in your life that have qualities of being inspiring, helpful and thereby creating opportunities for you. If these people are not in the list of the 5 people closest to you, maybe it's time that you include them in that list. Always remember that although the people closest to you will affect your life, you will also be known by the company that you keep. Hang out with the people that have qualities that you will want to be known for.

Conclusion

Creating opportunities is very important in life. You must create opportunities and not wait for them to find you. Creating opportunities not only helps in our personal relations, but also greatly assists in shaping our career and enhancing our well-being. Our success in life is greatly dependant on the opportunities that we have and hence we need to ensure that we can create them for ourselves.

The ability to create opportunities is an art that can be mastered, if you follow the guidelines given in this book. Simple alterations and enhancements in your day-to-day lives, letting go of limited thinking, stepping out of your comfort zone, challenging yourself, creating positive energy, learning new skills and interacting with new people can all help you move faster towards your goals.

Our relations with people have the ability to influence us in a powerful way. These relationships with people need to be right. Knowing the right people and interacting with them in the right manner, can do wonders for your life and can create opportunities for you that you never even imagined. These people can help you find the ideal life-partner and job to ensure that you are successful in life.

Since we all are unique in our own way, we need to strive for excellence in everything that we do. Why wait for opportunities? Making smarter decisions can enable opportunities to be magically created for you.

Minimalism

How to Find a Life Balance in Minimalism

Chris Smythe

Minimalism

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Introduction

“Happiness depends upon ourselves.” ~ Aristotle

Minimalism is a lifestyle designed to provide individuals the tools they need to live a less commercial and materialistic life. The philosophy behind minimalism states that by clearing the physical, mental and emotional material clutter from your everyday life, you can concentrate on the real and important aspects of your existence that includes: health, relationships, passion, growth, and contribution.

In the middle of the 2007-08 financial crisis, minimalism became highly popular. Fashion, art and music said farewell to the extravagant and brought back the simple. People began to evaluate their lives and discover what is important. Consumers began to stop compulsive buying and spending and hoarding stuff. The started to clean out closets, rooms, drawers, and their own thoughts and emotions.

Over the last few years, minimalism has ebbed and flowed as the economy grows and financial rehabilitation takes over. With the memories of job layoffs, low wages, and less work still painfully in the minds of consumers, minimalism is again becoming a trendy philosophy. Families and individuals are determined to never again feel the pain of losing possessions, jobs, and esteem. To this end, minimalists are volunteering to unclutter their lives, work less, and take on a smaller amount of emotional baggage in order to be safe within the society.

To further explain the theory of minimalism, you must keep the things you most value and remove everything else that distracts you from that value. Being a minimalist means you live intentionally. You know where you are going and are actively planning to get there.

A minimalist is a focused person. They favor a moderate approach to achieving in employment, obtaining stuff and spending money. Everything a minimalist does is geared toward a nominal policy, style, technique, and lifestyle.

Minimalists are un-attached materially. These types of personalities are deliberate about what they own and only keep the things that are necessary. The stuff they keep is of high quality and expected to last for a long time. With less stuff cluttering up your life the premise is you have less stress and more time. You own few physical things that need maintenance, and you have more time for meditation.

Being priority centered is a minimalist lifestyle. You know what you are doing and what is important to you. You live your life based on what is important to you. All of this sounds very altruistic, but really, minimalism is all about "you" and can be essentially selfish.

The very real danger of being a minimalist is one-upmanship. It is intensified self-absorption. Oddly enough, minimalists summarize the one-upmanship life they originally sought to avoid. Now they are "one-lowmanship" and trying to be the one with the fewest shoes, the least collected items or the simplest accessories. They feel guilt when they own more than a given number of things, or drive a car, or own an entertainment system. Although it is a given that most people in "rich" countries consume far too much, how do you reconcile the attitude that "less is more" is better than to "have and to hold?"

Once you have begun down the path of minimalism, and you have less physical and emotional stuff, and you begin to question society. You disagree with everyone who has excess, luxury and duplicate stuff in their homes. You refuse to listen to advertisements and you won't to be tricked into holding and purchasing possessions. You love intangibles, simplicity, and feel your lifestyle is the only way to save the environment.

The theory and philosophy of minimalism is an awesome concept, but it is not for everyone. There are definite downsides to minimalism just as with any

obsessive behavior. As you strive to get rid of all your possessions, you find yourself in a cycle of continually cleaning things your of your life. You tire of cleaning out physical possessions, and determine that you need to clean out your thoughts, and get rid of emotional baggage. Getting rid of baggage has definite good points, it can also be devastating on relationships, families, and friendships. You are seeking the essential “me” and forgetting that others are not so focused.

Thoughts are possessions, too. To be a true minimalist, you must free yourself of chaotic and unimportant thoughts, and get rid of stressful emotions. Clear your life of everything but experiences. You get rid of your home base, pack your minimal belongings in a knapsack, and search the world for involvements.

As a minimalist you no longer worry about others, you have little emotional attachment to stuff or possessions. You are now a single entity moving toward your definition of happiness. You have become a true minimalist and nothing is cluttering up your life.

It may take you a lifetime of to get rid of possessions, thoughts and emotions. You will drive yourself crazy along the way as you continually seek to find physical stuff, emotions, and thoughts to jettison from your life. You become annoying and urge others to follow your example. You have developed into an obsessive and compulsive personality type. You feel you will never be truly happy until you have nothing left to clutter up your life or mind. You become almost manic in seeking to eliminate everything superficial from your life. You might become pale and sickly from stressing over getting rid of stuff.

Is this really a way to a happy life? Perhaps it is to you, but instead of trying to clear up everything from your life, realize that happiness is an attitude. Possessions, both physical and mental, may not make you supremely happy, but neither will being a minimalist bring you that ultimate happiness.

Happiness is not a life without possessions or problems or emotions, but the strength to overcome the difficulties that exist in everyone’s life. There is no

such thing as a totally clutter free life, and difficulties are unavoidable. It is how you react to situations and experiences that bring on happiness.

Happiness means feeling loved, secure, and good at what you do. Possessions do not totally fill these requirements, and neither do lack of possessions, thoughts and emotions.

Minimalism was intended to be a tool to help you travel to a goal of being totally happy. Possessions are also tools for happiness. If you believe getting rid of possessions will lead you to a happy life, then eliminate material things from your life. On the flip side, if you need a new house, big car, boat or other belongings to be happy, then go out and purchase these goods and be joyful with your choices.

Step back and look at what you are doing. Stop trying to get rid of possessions to be happy and content, instead find happiness wherever you are and with what you are doing. Let go of the expectations that a minimalist lifestyle will lead you to paradise; you are already there if you are willing to see it.

Chapter I: Not Just Another “Minimalism” Guide

“Simplicity, clarity, singleness: These are the attributes that give our lives power and vividness and joy as they are also the marks of great art.” ~Richard Holloway

Minimalism is a lifestyle philosophy that places experiences and personal well-being above the materials things cluttering up your life. It is designed to simplify every aspect of life from your closet to your obligations. Minimalism is designed to make you think about how many relationships, acquaintances, and friends you can take care of at one time. It is streamlining your life and maintaining a low impact on the world. You only own what you need to survive, and you avoid spending money on replacing or maintaining items. Minimalism advocates simplicity, even if this means taking income and a prosperous future out of the picture.

According to dictionary theories, minimalism “removes the meaningless to make room for the meaningful.” Minimalism means living with only the things you need. Having only a few possessions is a popular concept and leads one to avoid the stress caused by trying to out-do your neighbors and friends. With minimalism, you have a clarity of mind that you are living a fulfilled life. Minimalism’s philosophy is a great precept if taken in the right spirit.

Minimalist bloggers remind us daily that plainness is not a religion, it is a great approach to simplicity, but it is not the answer to every problem. Minimalist lifestyles can have legitimate motivations, but sanctimonious anti-consumerism of the dogmatic minimalist isn’t a motivation. Showing off how little you have is counterproductive; you are cluttering your mind and emotions with “I am better than you” attitudes that come from decluttering your possessions and living sparingly.

Austereness is a trending style that is also popular in music, art, and design. In the arts, minimalism emphasizes extreme simplification of form and the use of monochromatic pallets of primary colors and basic shapes. You can also ascribe minimalism to music or a reductive style that uses only simple rhythms, patterns, and simple sonorities. To put it simply, minimalism is characterized by extreme sparseness and simplicity. If you are a minimalist, you are one who favors restrictions and often sets goals to a minimum.

Difference between Minimalism and Simple Living

Although the two terms, minimalism and simple living, seem to be interchangeable, there is a noticeable difference between the two topics. Minimalism is a catchall phrase for those who are attracted to externally paring down to the minimums in their life. Phrases and single words often used by minimalists to describe their lifestyle are austerities, de-cluttering, anti-consumerism, getting rid of stuff, and eliminating as much as possible. When thinking about minimalism discipline becomes a watchword. There is nothing wrong with those terms, but it does make one want to stop and think about lifestyles.

Extreme minimalism seems to attract those who are young and male. This class of people tend to be able to work through thoughts and emotions with a sense of purpose. Women who are often fascinated by minimalism are those who are aware that a lifestyle of minimalism is practical in this age of overconsumption. Women have specific items they love for comfort, and they often surround themselves with the stuff that provides emotional release.

Simple living embraces life much more gently and internally than does minimalism. A simple life means integrating uncomplicatedness in every area of your life. Living simply does not focus on total stuff elimination, making lists and de-cluttering, simple living is identifying the things that add value and joy to your life. Simplicity means freedom to be yourself, natural, living

authentically, and caring for the environment. Simple living is contentment.

Those who love simple living appear to be experienced, concerned with family, and established. After you have worked and lived for years and been a part of the consumption and consumer lifestyle, there is an awareness of how much you to turn to a simpler life.

Simple living is more of a family or community approach. It is not, however living in a commune, and gardening for the rest of your life while sleeping in a monk's corner. It is finding a way to continue learning, doing things you love, and finding experiences and memories that are important.

The differences between simple living and minimalism are not black and white. Minimalism and simple living do complement and strengthen each other and can be considered as two parts of a whole. As you move through your life's journey, you may find that both minimalism and simplicity will evolve into something totally different. Think about smart living and practicality. Live simple and involve some of the traits of minimalism. Be a consumer, but be smart (Gottberg, 2015).

Types of Minimalist

There are different definitions of what minimalism is. Reading through these different types of minimalists, you may find yourself reflecting a certain minimalist type. Don't panic; it's all good.

The creative minimalist is resourceful and artsy. They feel that minimalism is a way to express themselves. They are found looking through other people's trash and turning it into art, donating stuff to thrift stores, and their homes are very minimal. The furniture they use has been repurposed, rebuilt and refinished. They love simple art; pieces that emphasize primary colors.

The traveling minimalist is a bit on the extreme side. They are usually

outgoing and adventurous. They often have a smile on their face, and a mission in their heart. They usually own less than 100 items and live out of a duffel bag. You can recognize a traveling minimalist by the worn out shoes they wear and a sweatshirt tied around their waist. A traveling minimalist may also live in a tent. They cook outside and carry all their possessions. They are usually nature lovers and spend very little time with attachments, relationships, or emotional entanglements.

There are minimalists who are intentionally homeless. They seem somewhat happy with their lifestyle and are free of attachments, stuff, and responsibility. They have to worry about a bed and board but carry out their lives by being a super-tramp to staying exclusively in hostels. Some intentionally homeless minimalists are even business men. There is a consultant who works in a New York firm who is intentionally homeless and prides himself because he only owns 15 items. He does make a nice living however and hoards his money in his backpack.

The next time you see someone on the street with their belonging in a grocery cart, you might want to ask them if they love their minimalist life. You will probably find out that they would rather have a nice home and stuff in one place.

The tiny house minimalist is an off-shoot minimalist movement gaining popularity. Living quarters are set on someone else’s lawn, a small bit of land, or living quarters can be mobile. These homes are so tiny that they require no planning permission, no mortgage and have little overhead. These homeowners might have electricity and hot water, but very little else. You can find these minimalists and their tiny houses on country parcels. Google “tiny houses” to see examples of tiny house minimalists.

The accidental minimalist is one who became a minimalist by force rather than choice. This type of minimalist may have lost their job, become divorced, have no family or friends, and have no options left, but simplicity and minimalism. They may be homeless or living very sparsely in a small apartment.

An accidental minimalist might also be someone who is just tired of stuff. They stand in rooms they don't use and look at all the stuff around them. They stub their toes on stuff and finally decide enough is enough.

A professional minimalist is difficult to live around. These are the working professionals who have lofty goals to simplify their lives. They are the ones who have attitudes of superiority towards those who have stuff. Often a professional minimalist is driven to declutter to prove a point. They sometimes turn to the homes of their friends to try out their de-cluttering ideas. This attitude can lead to having few friends. Professional minimalists claim they are getting ready to travel, but they never seem to leave.

The original minimalist has always been a minimalist. They love their simple lifestyle and can almost be called an urban minimalist. They are down to earth, loving, grow their own food, and sit on their porch in a rocking chair contemplating the universe, or perhaps trying to determine the next thought to clear from their minds.

The curious minimalist is not really a minimalist by definition. They want a simpler lifestyle and they may dabble in simplifying. They have a simpler lifestyle, but are not really ready to scale down too much. They love their stuff and do want to become organized, but they only talk the talk instead of walking the walk (Sanger, 2014).

The small holdings minimalist lives in an eco-community and escapes to the country. They live very simply and farm the land only for what they need. They do not ask for much and work hard for basic comforts. These minimalists embrace a lifestyle that is built around sustainable practices.

Often these are carefully planned neighborhoods that reflect simplicity and efficiency. It is a simple life and sometimes not all that comfortable.

If you have ever been to a huge and highly populated city, you will note that there are many people living in very small places. They intentionally live in the attics of larger homes or apartment houses that have minimal corner rooms. Most of these minimalists' homes have unique architecture designed to maximize the space. These minimalists, who choose to live in these miniscule flats over larger homes, love their small spaces. The overhead is less expensive; they enjoy simple spaces, and their lives can be very sparse, but unique.

Dogmatic minimalism is similar to a professional minimalist. They own only 100 items or less. If they own a car at all, it is older and barely runs. They urge you to get rid of your television and live a life of meditation. Reading is a great pastime and this type of minimalist believes in reading self-help books. Dogmatic minimalism states you should not any type of distraction. If you have books keep the organized and in set places. Dogmatic minimalist demands an uncluttered home and mind. Dogmatic minimalists do not have many treasures, but they do have experiences to share.

Dogmatic minimalism can be a dramatic lifestyle change. An extremely good minimalist has no clutter and confusion in their thoughts or actions and details are never offered. They tend to answer questions with one-word answers.

What do extreme or dogmatic minimalists do when they want to cook

meals at home or need a tool to fix a door? They typically borrow items they don't have. They often share living space with others and generally have very simple eating habits. That's all well and good, but if they need to borrow to exist, then aren't they really being irresponsible and bothersome?

A practical minimalist is one who doesn't have to count stuff. You just subscribe to minimalism as a practical means to a simple, but comfortable existence. You don't believe it is a good idea to throw out all of your stuff immediately. You let others live their life of commercialism, and you join them in their buying sprees at times. You make the transition to being a "real" minimalist at your own pace and in your own time. In the meantime, you enjoy your stuff.

Minimalists are proud of their trendy progress. They tend to bring their friends and family into their homes and proudly show how little they have. What little they have includes the clothes their closet, cupboards, and seating arrangements. They often act self-congratulatory and obnoxious. Being a minimalist does not make you a better person.

There is more to minimalism than just de-cluttering things and throwing out the physical stuff. Minimalism demands that you clear out unused and irrelevant thoughts in your mind. Take away emotions that get in the way of simplicity. Those who embrace minimalism state that in its purest form minimalism is "the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts from it." Minimalism forces change. (Becker, 2015). A big question asked by those who do not understand minimalism, how do you determine what is most valuable physically and emotionally? How do you determine what is important?

To answer that question, minimalism seeks to bring freedom from the overwhelming passion to possess things. It stops consumerism in your life and forces you to seek happiness inside yourself. The value of relationships, experiences and taking care of your soul is at the heart of minimalism and the center of living a good life.

Simplify your life and become a minimalist by contemplating these ideas, but beware of being too caught up in your minimalist lifestyle changes that you lose focus on what is important to you.

Too many material possessions complicate lives. They drain your bank account, energy, and attention. Possessions keep you from the ones you love and prevent you living a life based on values.

Your lives are too filled with time commitments. If possible release yourself from time commitments that do not line up with your values.

Reduce your goals. Reducing your totals down to two or three major wishes should improve your focus and success rate. Use the list tactic to write down what you want to accomplish in your life.

Negative emotions are useless. Get rid of resentment, hate, and jealousy. Smile all the time and take responsibility for the thoughts going through your mind.

Reduce your debt. Do what you can do to get out from under the weight of debt. Sacrifice luxury and duplicate items.

Use fewer words. Keep your speech plain and definitely avoid gossip and lengthy explanations. Mumble when needed.

Avoid artificial ingredients in your diet. Reduce your consumption of

over-the-counter medicines. Let your body heal on its own.

Get rid of constant distractions. That means all your electronic devices.

Stop multi-tasking. It reduces productivity. Do one thing at a time, but do it well.

It is true that consumers are all too hurried, too rushed, and too stressed. You work long hours to pay bills and gain more possessions. People blast from one activity to another, multitasking along the way and never seeming to get anything done. Most of you are in constant connection with your jobs and others via cell phones. You have no real relationships; only electronic friends.

Will simplifying and getting rid of your possessions make you less stressed? Or is it a Catch-22 position? Would you rather have nothing to do and deny your children, friends and family the opportunities to choose for themselves? Should you continue your consuming ways and be a very busy, but contributing person?

Minimalism can be great if you go about it the right way. Note that stuff does not really go away. For example, if you declutter your desktop with a new computer and move your files, CDs and all your books plus your paperwork to the computer, you have not created a simpler lifestyle. You have just moved things around. (Most people will save their CDs and DVDs in storage boxes in case they need to use them again.)

Paring down your clothes to the point they all fit on one rail is great, but what happens if you have given away a piece of clothing that you need? Do you go out and purchase another item that is just like the one you just discarded or do you feel cheated and stressed because you no longer have the items you need?

Becoming a Minimalist?

It is not easy to embrace a minimalist lifestyle. Even though removing the meaningless details and possessions in your life to make room for the significant can be very appealing. You load up your excess possessions and drop items at the Goodwill. Everything you think is excessive and non-essential you sell on Craig's List or eBay. Now you have few possessions, and you wonder, "Now what? Was there a point to this de-cluttering?" You stand in the middle of your barren room and shake your head.

Removing the physical excess is an important part of minimalism, and to many they believe the major goal is to get rid of material possessions. However, let minimalism be the tool that takes you beyond your possessions and gives you the determination to make room for the most important intangibles of experiences, emotions, and time. Sounds incredibly wonderful doesn't it?

Minimalism is essentially an instrument to help you find freedom from worry, fear, overwhelming responsibility, and guilt. You no longer have multiple possessions to take care of and worry over. You are free from the depression of the trappings of a consumer culture in your life. Stress is gone, and you smile all the time and wonder why your family and friends find you a bit strange.

After all is said and done, becoming a minimalist just sounds tiring. Getting rid of all your possessions, governing your thoughts and avoiding gossip is awesome when talked about, but in the end are you really going to get rid of the lifestyle you now live?

Getting Rid of Thoughts

Minimalism is getting rid of thoughts that are destructive. Live a simpler life and create more space in your mind and forget those feelings that cloud up your vision. Apply the same principles to uncluttering your mind as you used to unclutter your living space.

Begin by realizing positive thoughts and a negative thoughts cannot occupy the same space in your mind. Two opposite thoughts cannot co-exist together, or there will be confusion. Begin to choose thoughts that have meaning and value. Get rid of the thoughts that cause you remorse, stress, and unhappiness.

> Move out of your brain space worries, fears, bad memories, questions, yearnings, and more "stuff." Just like your physical space you are going to clean out your mind, and move to a clean and open space.
>
> Carefully choose what thoughts you are taking with you. Take only those thoughts that you plan to use in your minimalist life. Use the memories that are good and thoughts that are positive.
>
> Find a place for everything you want to keep. Your thoughts have to occupy a space and remember no two thoughts can occupy the same space at the same time.
>
> Apply the rule to live clutter free. Apply this to your mind. Positive thinking is the goal and decluttering your mind is the tool. You have the choice to take either a good memory or a worry, fear or courage, denial or acceptance. Choose wisely.
>
> Trying to declutter your mind is a process. It takes adjustment, but it works if you sincerely let it (Becker, 2015).

Awesome words of wisdom, but very difficult to follow. Most thoughts are chaotic and jump from "room to room." If you can control your thoughts to follow minimalist ideals, you are amazing.

"Thoughts can be your worst friends", states Buddhist Monk Matthieu Ricard,

“and your worst enemies.” You mind has a path of its own and taking control of your thoughts and emotions to become less stressed and better equipped to solve problems is the goal of minimalism and decluttering your life.

When purging thoughts from your mind, pause where you are at, and take a deep breath. Literally tell yourself to stop thinking chaotic thoughts and focus on breathing. It takes 90 seconds of neurochemical triggers to fade from your brain and return you to happier thoughts.

Remain in the moment. Constantly thinking about the past and believing that you have no power to change your distressing thoughts will make things worse. Live in the moment. Thinking about right now will help to promote inner peace and clarity.

Think without judgement. Stick to objective, concrete facts and get rid of quality thoughts that could cause problems. Write down your thoughts and read them back to yourself.

Take action to address your thoughts. Develop a plan to address your thoughts and worries. Make a plan to separate your anxious thoughts from your happy thoughts. Remember that two thoughts cannot live in the same space.

Place yourself in a comfortable environment as you de-clutter your mind. The outside world affects your inner world. If you are in a place where you feel uncomfortable or out of control, then move to somewhere where you are happier.

Unclutter your thoughts by doing another activity. Go for a run, watch a movie or talk to your significant others. Let them help you move thoughts out of your mind and into another place.

Above all, if you are trying to de-clutter your thoughts, do not try and choose your thoughts. Control them as they come into your mind. Think about controlling and moving your thoughts as they arrive rather than repressing

them.

Chapter II: Why is Minimalism so Popular?

“The movement is growing … almost every day.” ~ Joshua Becker

The essence of minimalism is detachment. Detachment from physical stuff, ideas, thoughts and damaging emotions. It is not about having less or decluttering or even downsizing. These are the results of minimalism but are not the heart of it. To understand more about what minimalism is, look to the internet or your local bookstore.

New books, blogs, and forums are appearing almost every day concerning simplistic and minimalist living. More and more people are attracted to the lifestyle and adopting certain principles of a minimalist lifestyle. Why minimalism is growing so popular can be summarized in these ten different reasons:

Worldwide financial turmoil includes rising unemployment low wages and falling stock prices. These problems are bringing families and individuals to the realization that they need to evaluate what possessions they hold and what items they need to purchase. Tighter budgets are the result of worldwide financial chaos and families are seeking ways to cut their budgets and expenditures. They sell their excess goods to have money for primary existence.

Environmental concerns are part of the minimalist life. Using less equals less of earth’s natural resources being destroyed. More and more people are standing up for the right of the environment to remain viable and breathing. Commercialism means digging into the earth for resources to make useless goods. The earth is being destroyed because of commercialism.

People are becoming less impressed by the new things your friends have. Since you can’t afford them, you tend to claim that you don’t want them. You quickly develop the habit of not caring what others have, and you let them know that you do not care.

Personal debt or living beyond your means brings you to the realization that you need to stop purchasing “stuff” on credit. Debt is definitely a growing trend. Listen to Dave Ramsey, he advocates a cash based rather than a credit based life. An awesome thought, but what does it have to do with minimalism? You just spend cash rather than plastic for the things you want.

Minimalism needs to convince people that buying less is a worthwhile trend. Think about what you need before you make that next purchase. Consider, is it a want or a need?

The realization that there is more to life than just possessions. Consumerism is alive and well, and advertisers continue to bring new and better products to the market claiming each item is a step towards fulfillment and happiness. There is a growing trend of people, however, who are tired of trying to “keep up with the Jones’” and are finding happiness through relationships, social causes, and life’s significance.

Technology is making the world smaller and bringing on a desire to live a simpler life. People turn to minimalism as they realize the poverty in the world. The question is, are you really giving away your excess to those in poverty? Is the money you saved by becoming a minimalist money helping these people live better lives? One can only hope.

Personal computing advances make minimalism easier to live than ever before. Computers have replaced the need for paper files, photo albums, calendars, and calculators. Computers, smartphones, and tablets have taken away books, phone books, magazines, and newspapers. Paper no longer clutters up your counter tops and furniture. How sad that the feel of tangible paper books and magazines is going away. If you love paper, you might have to go to the public library.

Minimalists can indoctrinate more and more people to their lifestyle via electronic and internet social media. Extreme minimalists make the lifestyle sound almost like nirvana; a happy place; and an exceptional existence. Just Google the word “minimalism” and you will find millions of articles on how to live simpler. It almost gets confusing.

Consumerism is still alive and well. Advertisers tell us that we need the next and best purchase, and this will bring us satisfaction. There is a growing trend of people who are seeing through the advertising hype and challenging this climate. They want to be different and get rid of possessions that are not making them happy. Minimalism is well and good, but what if you want a particular item? Will your minimalist conscience make you feel guilty, cause stress, and eventually bring on a nervous breakdown if you choose to acquire this item? Something to ponder.

Is Minimalism for You?

As noted in a previous chapter, simplicity and minimalism are different sides of the same coin. It is good to realize that minimalism is not the equivalent of living in a cave and eating berries by a fire, but it is a lifestyle when lived in moderation that can be helpful. Simple living is gentle and resourceful. It is not getting rid of clutter for de-cluttering’s sake, simple living is real and internal.

Do you have stuff that you rarely use? Unnecessary clutter sends negative impacts on your life. Box up your duplicates and unused stuff.

Be simple.

Do you have excessive debt? Try not purchasing more stuff until you have reduced your debt. Getting out of debt is practicality.

Do you long to own a nicer car, house or other stuff? If your car always breaks down, or you are envious of the neighbors, you need to sit back and think about where you are going. Materialism is the name of this "disease."

Are you busy, but your life lacks meaning? Everyone has days filled with activity and can end with feelings of emptiness. You might want to look into minimalism to remove excess to make room for meaningful activates. Pare down and live simply.

These realizations do not necessarily mean you are ready to become a minimalist, but that you are human and concerned with your lifestyle. Perhaps you do need to declutter and make your life simpler. You can organize and declutter your life without subscribing to the minimalist philosophy that demands you live with less.

House, Car, Cellphone and Jewelry

If you want to learn to detach yourself from your stuff, try this technique. Think of one item in your life that you love. It might be your car or computer, your television, or your wardrobe. Take that item and break it down to its core purpose. Your car is for transportation, the television is for entertainment, and clothes are for wearing. Think about the downsides of your one item. Your car is expensive, your television encourages laziness, and your clothes make you anxious.

Consider what your life would be like if you don't possess that expensive item. Would your life be noticeably different? Write down the item, think about it, and draw a picture of how you would be without that item. If you are

truly dedicated to a minimalist lifestyle, you will draw a picture of you being happy. If you have no desire to minimize, then draw a picture of you being sad. At this point, don't get rid of your stuff. There is no reason to be sad over getting rid of your possessions.

In today's modern culture, it is emphasized that the good life is found in possessions – and as many as possible. Happiness is shopping at the mall and filling your home with useless, but awesome accessories. To some people, this is the ultimate happiness. The joy of finding a bargain or just something that makes you giddy is happiness. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this type of lifestyle. Do not let your minimalist friends thumb their noses at you as you ride off on your ATV's, camper or boat. You are making memories with your stuff, and that is the best thing in the world.

Commercialism and materialism are the driving force behind manufacturing, jobs, and the economy. The stuff that comes from productivity is the stuff of dreams. Keep dreaming and consuming.

Minimalism as a Tool for Happiness

Minimalism should be used as a tool or a guide to a happier and simpler life, but it can be harmful to you, your family, your ambition, and your business. Minimalism is the emerging philosophy of having less physically, emotionally and intellectually. "Freeing yourself from commercialism and getting rid of passions and the drive to work hard, will lead you to becoming supremely happy," so claims proponents of minimalism.

Minimalism is a trend. It is today's "less is more" mantra. The days of opulence and semi-opulence in fashion, homes styles and arts are no longer in vogue. Minimalism in makeup, naked eyes, and hair that looks slept in, and clothing that is comfortable, interchangeable, and wrinkled is the new modern. Minimalism is clean lines, shoes and dresses with no fluff. It is a color palette that subscribes mainly to neutrals. It is the inclination is to develop a capsule wardrobe and pare down stuffed closets.

Minimalism is trying to live a more intentional life. By focusing less on the material goods, there is more time to focus on the meaningful – experiences, travel, play time, and relaxation. Possessions, so it is said, weigh you down. When you have less clutter in your life, you have room for experiences. Forget purchasing that handbag, use the money for something else that will bring interest to your life. Break away from your job and head off to the mountains; you can finish projects later or better yet find a new job. Sub-lease your apartment, rent out your home. There is nothing in your home or apartment that anyone can steal or break. You have gotten rid of everything. By not purchasing stuff on credit, your credit card limit is high and you can take off on a road trip. Run up the credit card gathering experiences and memories. Take off on a road trip. By having less; you live more.

Seems a bit of an oxymoron. How do you get these fun pleasures if you have a laisse faire attitude about your job and just take off whenever you want? Sounds delightful and highly irresponsible. Spontaneity is wonderful, but the business world and the economy does not work in that manner. Most people need to plan, save and be responsible.

Minimalists use this philosophy to justify becoming obsessed with hunting down every double or unneeded object in their home. They go from room to room looking for items that are unnecessary. Items are swept out from under family members, roommates and users by the minimalist saying, “You don’t need this.” Minimalists continually deny themselves and become crazy in their new found philosophy of “less is more.” They urge everyone they meet to become as obsessed as they are.

Minimalism is not the goal. It should be a tool to learn how to declutter, organize, and clean-up. The true minimalist has learned how to push down emotions that came on when you throw out items that are keepsakes. One young man was cleaning out his home on his trip to becoming a minimalist and threw his grandmother’s Japanese vase from WWII in the trash. It was found by an antique dealer who valued the vase at $10,000.

If you regret tossing out your stuff, minimalists say, “so what, tamp down the emotions.” Your decluttering is a way to happiness, and your spending ban is leading you to nirvana. If you lost valuable items in your frenzy to clean out your home, it doesn’t matter. Your clutter is gone, and you are happy.

Is it Popular to be Happy through Minimalism?

Happiness is thought of as the good life and freedom from suffering. It is flourishing, having joy, prosperity, well-being, and contentment. It is the pursuit of trying to find what makes us happy. Researchers have made the study of happiness an entire sub-culture. There is still little definitive definitions about happiness. Defining happiness is elusive, but psychologists say that it is necessary to study strengths and what makes us happy. By better understanding human tendencies we can learn how to prevent disorders, learn to become happier, and develop the ultimate lifestyle for happiness.

Happiness is intangible. If you want to be happy, you must learn to thrive in whatever lifestyle you choose. Strengths, positive emotions, and resilience equal happiness. The more we understand what makes us happy, the better we can understand the need to live a simple life of minimalism or a life full of possessions and stuff.

A study conducted in the 1970s attempted to determine the level of happiness in people who thought their lives were perfect. Psychologists discovered that those who had won lotteries and had tons of money were no happier those who just meet their basic needs. It was determined that money and possessions can buy short term happiness.

Social experts also state that once you have a level of happiness due to financial gain, you are now in a materialistic cycle. You try stay happy through the constant purchase material items.

This cycle may be true for some but there are also countless other people who have good jobs, high incomes, possessions, and know when their belongings make them happy. A nice home, good car, money to travel, and giving their family advantages can make them happy. Do they strive for more? Possibly, but that striving for more makes them happy.

This same study discovered that participants who spend money on others experienced great happiness. They had feelings of euphoria, contentment, and altruism. Money made them happy; possessions were awesome.

Minimalists who have little money to spend on others, tend to be on the selfish side. They are thinking only about their minimalist lifestyle, their own well-being, and achieving simplicity in their lives. They may physically help others, but giving material wealth is out of the question.

Trying to determine what lifestyle will bring you the most happiness can leave you in a very interesting situation. Do I declutter and give everything away, or do I work hard, earn money, and help others with my wealth? What will give me the greatest sense of happiness?

> What will lead to happiness and fulfillment?
>
> Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, stated that 80% of happiness comes from 20% of lifestyle activities. To follow Pareto's experiment, pinpoint what brings you fulfillment and happiness. Maximize your time and resources to that 20%. Break down what makes you happy and follow what lifestyle makes you happiest.
>
> Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that we need to find a way to become motivated to make a difference. Is minimalism this answer or can you help others with the possessions you have. One extraordinary family built a large cabin. They filled it with all the things they loved and enjoyed. Their philosophy? We will allow others to use this cabin and enjoy our possessions. We open up our home to underprivileged children, friends who need a place to "get away from it all", and

those who cannot afford to have an experience in a cabin. Getting rid of their possessions would not give this family the opportunity to serve others.

“You are unique because of your individual traits, skills, experiences, aptitudes, interests and attitudes. You are not the sum of your possessions, but those possessions can give you joy if you share them with others” (Jolibois, 2015).

Wealth does not necessarily provide any guarantee of a good life. What matters is how you spend it. Giving money away might make you happier than just spending it on yourself. If you have money and possessions, you are happier when you use them for experiences. If you are a minimalist, you do not have the financial ability to provide different and happy experiences. It is awesome to walk through the park or breathe in nature, but what if your happiness is having a Minecraft tournament, or a swimming expedition, or even a trip to a sunny island. How can you live and enjoy extraordinary experiences without planning, saving, and involving stuff?

Studies over the past ten years have shown that life experiences do give us lasting pleasure, but many people believe that material possessions offer better value than simple experiences. Happenings without props are fleeting. Material goods last longer and provide meaningful experiences and emotions. You can provide significant experiences if you have possessions to share and enjoy.

On a camping trip last summer, a neighbor cleaned out their garage and found old inner tubes. They had the tubes repaired, filled with air and took them on their camping expedition to the river. Three little boys had the time of their life tubing down the river, racing and splashing one another and eating steaks around the campfire after their river experience. What experience would they have had if the

inner tubes had been de-cluttered from the garage and their father said, “Hey we don’t need these old inner tubes. Let’s get rid of them in the landfill.”

The trick is not to live for your possessions. Use them to make you happy, but also foster appreciation and gratitude for what you have. You can be equally happy as a consumer by using and taking care of your possessions. Keep a daily journal of happy experiences and express your gratitude. Minimalism does not guarantee that you will maintain this attitude. Minimalism could, in fact, make you angry, unsatisfied, and very unhappy.

Chapter III: Minimalism Is a Double-edged Sword

“Minimalism is downright harmful to you, your ambition and our business.” ~ Peter Shallard

Pundits state that minimalism is more than living with less and radically reducing the amount of things you purchase and own. It is freeing you from modern “keeping up with the Jones’” attitude, and continually trying to acquire more than you can possibly use. Freeing yourself from possessions comes down to living from a cardboard box, or a home with little in the way of décor. Your life is seeking experiences over objects.

Minimalism is looking for that elusive feel-good anti-commercialism vibe. However, as you dig deeper into minimalism, the philosophy can become dangerous and destructive. Seeking to have less is a reverse snobbery attitude that can ruin your relationships, family life, and if you are a business owner, it can ruin your business.

Minimalism is Toxic to Businesses

The minimalistic philosophy specifies that you get rid of stuff that cause clutter, stress, and distress. Perhaps you believe your marketing program needs revamping and de-cluttering. You begin to skimp on marketing. You don’t bring in customers, and you can’t earn the profits you need to stay in businesses. Minimizing on what you think are useless marketing strategies will put your business in the red.

When employing minimalist tactics to your business, maybe you should get rid of those perks that lift up employee morale. These perks are expensive and take away from the simplicity of your company. Your employees quickly lose

their job satisfaction and loss of job satisfaction will break your business. Low morale and loss of perks can translate into reduced productivity, higher health care costs, and high turnover. But you have lower employee costs and your business looks much more streamlined.

Minimalist business practices mean you might operate unethically to streamline your inventory. You no longer go into work as often, and you begin selling expired products, refuse to update, and stop carrying enough inventory. You do other unacceptable things that will tarnish your company's reputation. All streamlining and de-cluttering are in the name of minimalism.

You begin to become very lazy, and this is one of the worst habits you can develop. Laziness affects motivation and your willingness to meet deadlines. Productivity suffers, and you are not able to meet clients' demands. In fact, you don't care. You feel your clients are too materialistic, and they need to adopt a minimalist attitude.

You do not take the risks that you need to move your company beyond your competition.

As a minimalist, you refuse to reinvest. You keep the profits you have made and hoard them. You do not reinvest in your organization; you do not fix what is broken, and you let vital equipment fall into disrepair. An unsuccessful business is what can happen if you try and employ minimalist tactics to your business.

Minimalism can be Lethal to Your Relationships

If you are determined to be a minimalist, you need to invest time in certain relationships. Determine who is worthy of your time, and who you consider to be lethal. The entire precept of minimalism is to de-clutter your life including your mind, relationships, and emotions. Minimalists say that the process of becoming spare requires a change in perceptive and determining what people contribute to you quality of life.

When considering minimalism and relationships you need to determine how to be generous and kind to others but at the same time distance yourself from those you don't want to be a big part of your life. It is easy to develop a connection with a coworker or roommate or someone who is always there, but these may not be the people who had value to your life.

Everyone has had a "friend" or someone who doesn't deserve to be in your lives. They drain us of emotion, and are high maintenance. There is always someone in your life who isn't supportive and who takes and takes without giving back to the relationship. Those who contribute very little and prevent you from growing needs to be decluttered from your lives.

In the world of minimalism people and relationships are the most important part of the plan. If minimalism does not help the relationships and causes more harm than good, it needs to be used in a different way.

When developing a minimalist attitude and need to decrease the tensions try these simple ways:

Change yourself first. Be positive and focus on things that you are yours fist. Forget their stuff or stuff that is both of yours.

Explain your way of thinking. Discuss how it will benefit your relationship. For example, "When I get rid of all my computer games I will have many extra hours just for us. Might work if you are a game-aholic!

Time changes people in different ways. Let the other person take the time they need to be okay with getting rid of their stuff.

Make it a team effort. If you are trying to minimize an entire family, it needs to be a team effort.

If your relationship or friendship is suffering because of your minimalist attitude, the relationship should win.

If acquaintances react negatively to your new lifestyle, then they can be de-cluttered from your life.

Try to explain your reasoning in a very clear and concise manner. List out the pros and cons of your new lifestyle. Chances are others are considering the same lifestyle or live a minimalist life and you don't even know it.

Owning Stuff

Minimalism claims that you must own less stuff. Sounds good, but why do you own stuff in the first place? Owning stuff is awesome. From the beginning of time, people have sought to own stuff – tools, fire, animal skins for clothing, etc. It is a natural tendency to create better tools for living. Where would we be without our ancestors seeking to own stuff? "This means we've all evolved from the proto-consumers who had the best tools. Our ancestors loved their stuff!" (Shallard, 2015). Ask yourself, "would you be comfortable living in a home without stuff?"

Getting rid of stuff has its advantages, and minimalism stresses that there are three areas that will profit from getting rid of stuff:

Environment. By reducing consumer habits, there will be less impact on the planet's resources. Man's footprint will be reduced by you buying less, manufacturers making less, valuable resources being left in the ground, and poverty increasing.

To provide the environment that minimalist long to promote, consumerism seeks to find new ways to keep the environment clean while developing materials and efficient energy. People are not going to cut down on owning stuff, and there will always be demands on the environment. The key is conservation and finding ways to safely

dispose of waste. Minimalism by its very philosophy demands you declutter which adds to the landfills.

Financial. If you consume less, you don't need as much money. You won't need to work as hard earning money and will have time for other pleasures. You won't however, have the money for movies, quality food, and travel.

The economy depends on the law of supply and demand. When consumer demand is high and corporations produce huge quantities of products, jobs are created and the economy flourishes. Not purchasing products can have a devastating effect on the economy. Without goods to purchase people be unable to purchase goods, have choices, pay their rent, or buy food.

Seeking more and trying to live a commercial life keeps the economy growing. Perhaps if consumers had adopted a minimalist mindset decades ago, the economy would be in a less wasteful shape, and there would be no need to de-clutter lives.

Learning, working, innovating, and wisely using the earth's resources gives us the opportunity to learn more, to create, and to explore. Minimalism equals stagnate learning and stifling creativity.

Aesthetic. Reducing physical possessions will provide you with a clean and manageable living space. You can clean your home in under an hour. Now, what do you do?

Where are you going to dispose of your unwanted possessions? Decluttering equals landfills that are environmentally poor options. You load up your garbage can with unwanted items, take them to the curb, wait for garbage day and watch your excess stuff head off to the landfill.

Minimalism also claims that its purpose is not to dispose of beautiful or user things. Minimalism supposedly prompts you to determine what is of value and what isn't. It urges you to get rid of those things that are useless in your life. Where do these unwanted items go? To the Goodwill so others can use them, to the landfill to get them out of the way, or to the incinerator to cause more air pollution.

Minimalists state, “If something is available in a shop, it has been ‘permitted’ and is therefore unlikely to be worth owning. Subscribing to libraries and tinkering with free hobbies make us rich. Owning things makes us financially, spatially, intellectually and spiritually poor” (Wringham, 2015). What a scary premise. Are we all spiritually poor because there is consumption, hoarding, purchasing, and re-consuming?

Commercialism

Commercialism is the manufacturing and consumption of “stuff” that is geared toward personal usage, methods, aims and free enterprise. It is intended to generate profits. Materialism and commercialism to some people are the successes and progress you achieve; the highest values in your life.

Minimalists claim that commercialism is a question of belief. It is a simple idea that focuses on material things as opposed to the spiritual or intellectual. You live in a world surrounded by having and holding possessions. It is claimed that you become distracted from intellectual pursuits by material things, and yet you continual to invent, innovate and produce measurable goods. This is a cycle of creativity, production, and usage that would be lost if we tried to live a minimalistic life.

There is an old saying that money can’t buy happiness, but money gives you the opportunity to provide your family with experiences.

Commercialism or holding possessions is not as terrible as the minimalists claim. Commercialism has definite redeeming values since the world’s economy is based on physical goods.

Materialism

Materialism is holding possessions for physical comfort, but having stuff is

meaningful. Like it or not, finding meaning in stuff is important, and finding stuff you love is important. Citizens find creation through possessions. Mankind has always been on a quest to find and create meaningful objects. Possessing and creating is what inspires human achievements. The human mindset always quests for stuff - magic rings, beautiful artwork, the Golden Fleece, and so much more. Without materialism, there would be no creativity.

We thrive in a materialist society. Children learn and flourish when they live in a steady home with their possessions around them. Their possessions give them psychological security. Having things around provides a comfort zone. You can rest and recharge your batteries and energies when you own physical items that are significant to you.

Of course, materialism, as well as commercialism, has problems. Obsession with stuff tends to make consumers hoarders. It forces you to seek continually for something better, more fulfilling, and emotionally satisfying. You look for instant gratification in purchasing and holding stuff. Perhaps the clue to keeping materialism from taking over your life is to determine when enough is enough. That is not minimalism, however, but practicality.

We live in a world surrounded by composed stuff. C.S. Lewis once said, “God … likes matter. He invented it.” It is natural to become distracted from spiritual pursuits by seeking to have possessions, but it is equally as spiritual to use your material possessions to obtain happiness for yourself and for others (AllAboutPhilosophy, 2015).

There is nothing wrong with having and holding possessions. The Bible is full of stories of those who own much. How do minimalists reconcile God’s riches with a desire to live a minimalist lifestyle? “God’s home, the Temple, was adorned with gold beyond imagination” (Ps50:10).

Minimalism vs Materialism

Becoming a minimalist and living an intentional lifestyle can be difficult. Before committing your stuff to the garbage, you need to determine why this counter-cultural is for you. Think through the impact that minimalism will have on your family and their lifestyle before you begin on a journey of randomly de-cluttering.

As an example, one young husband decided that his small family would become minimalists. His wife disagreed with him. She had no problem with decluttering or organizing, but she put her foot down on doing away with family valuables, hobbies, and expensive children's toys. The young husband insisted that minimalism would save their lives. The family could not come to a consensus of how to de-clutter, what to discard, and which lifestyle was best. The family split and went their minimalist and materialistic ways.

There are those who have become minimalists because of constant blogs, newsletters, suggestions, and arguments. One author finally determined that the trend to be a minimalist was the right path for her.

The author decided to declutter her life. She gritted her teeth and cleaned out her possesses to the point where her house was very sparse and very minimal. After finishing this task of de-cluttering, she looked around and realized that minimalism was not who she was. She wanted to be surrounded by things; stuff that moved her to create. Tabletops piled with books and candles, mantles filled with pictures and treasures, and a china closet with all the wonderful keepsakes from her childhood. These were the things that defined who she was. She frantically began searching for her lost goods and let possessions back into her life. Her home is no longer clutter free but filled with wonderful stuff that defines who she is (Roth, 2011).

> Minimalism is more than just throwing away possessions and doing away with clutter. It is a journey that could just turn you into a miserable miser.

> You must first decide within yourself why you have been keeping stuff. Discovering the reasons for minimalism is an emotional process. It could

be very painful. As in the previous example, stuff defines you.

> Minimalism is bringing to the forefront the things you most value and getting rid of those things that are nonessential. Prioritize your essential values and write them down. You will probably come to the conclusion you are much happier with possessions than without them.

The world was intended to produce, promote and invent material possessions. These inventions were intended for the good of society. By giving away all your possessions and refusing to acquire things, you are acting totally selfish. You deny invention, production, and employment to others who need to create, invent, and produce.

Once you have set on the path of minimalism, you will rock friendships and relationships. Minimalism will become a topic of conversation and people will initially be intrigued by your new lifestyle. They will ask you how you got to this point of giving away possessions. You will definitely enjoy speaking about the positive impact this decision has made on your life, and you will try to inflict this lifestyle on others. People will not be impressed; they will be irritated.

Think about becoming a minimalist. If you find that really want this lifestyle, then by all means become a minimalist. If you want to be a citizen who follows trends, avoid trying to convince those who love their possessions to take on your new lifestyle.

Materialism and owning possessions are not a complete source of happiness, but they aren’t a cause of unhappiness. When the man on his deathbed says, “I wish I spent more time with my family instead of working so hard,” is not claiming that material possessions are unimportant. He is expressing that his obsessions with material things was wrong. Money and material stuff are quite neutral. Stuff is a very powerful tool in achieving happiness if you take care not to let accumulating wealth hurt those you love.

Take another example of a family with a cabin. Every year they take a long

vacation to their cabin. They form great memories and are happy. They get to know each other and learn to play together. The cabin does not make them happy, but the experiences shared at the cabin do. Their trick was not letting work get in the way. It took extra sacrifices to build their cabin, but family relationships were not one of their sacrifices. They worked together.

Most people love their possessions – their families, homes, cars, and careers. Where would we be without our summer bbq on the patio or going out to eat or to the movies? Personally, having things makes most people happy. The statement, “Money can’t buy happiness, but it can buy marshmallows which are sort of the same thing,” is tongue-in-cheek, but it is real. Money can buy stuff that makes one happy.

Minimalism can drive you Crazy

Let’s be honest; minimalism can drive you crazy. Following the full philosophy of minimalism means you have no compulsion to plan for your future. You give away all your belongings, save nothing for retirement and end up living in a cheap apartment and in a very poor area of town. Your books, music, and art are things of the past. Being a minimalist will not give you the joy in taking a road trip or planning for a happy life. You have no car, little money, and no way to travel.

There would be nothing to help you feel secure. You would essentially live a bohemian lifestyle with very little on the walls of your home to prove that you really existed.

Minimalism makes you complacent. You own less therefore you do less.

You look to find happiness with very little and this in turn forces you to strive less to upgrade your life. Finding happiness in having little sounds intriguing, but what you are doing is checking out of the race of life, and stifling ambition. You no longer want to win the race; you just move as simply as you can through the years.

Minimalism is squandering your opportunities. You have the ability to have anything you want, but you throw it away in the name of minimalism. Life is meaningless unless you have little. Those who are minimalist due to circumstances think you are crazy for actively shunning all of your opportunities. Those with little would gladly give you their poor and meaningless life to have the opportunities to own something significant.

Minimalism encourages short-term thinking, a loss of investing, and an eventual destruction of the economy. Minimalists claim that possessions should not define who you are. But that is exactly what possessions do; they define you. Are you known as the guy with the awesome car? That is a possession and a definition. Are you an artist with a studio full of incredible art? Or are you are the corporate ladder climber; that is your definition, and who you are. Living a minimalist lifestyle would demand that you get rid of your car and your art or even give up your high-powered job. Go ahead and give up these opportunities and things. You are now without your identity.

Balance Minimalism with Materialism/Commercialism

A true minimalist counts their possessions. They are honest about what they own. They believe you only need a few things you frequently use. This lack of possessions, say minimalists, will ultimately give you an appreciation of what you do have.

Not really. In fact, trying to get rid of possessions will ultimately throw you into a competition with other minimalists. You try to get rid of more than they do. It becomes a cycle of who has less.

Try literally counting everything you own. Counting includes the clocks in your home, your toothbrush, photos, the trash under the sink and the salt and pepper shakers. Count your cooking utensils and the rack that holds your cleaning supplies Count your furniture. Group your underwear, clothing, hangers, and food. Count your books. Just keep going and you will fill up pages and pages of things you own. Now take this huge list and start paring it down.

Throw out duplicate items, the things you found that you no longer use. Determine what you will need and what you will give or throw away. Throwing out stuff and trying to determine what is valuable is a great exercise. It is also highly time-consuming, and depressing.

You can be a “minimalist” without throwing everything away. Live within your means and learn to live with possessions that can shield you from economic shocks and instability. Appreciate what you do have and strive to make your life better by consolidating and decluttering. There are always possessions you don’t need and can get rid of to make your life richer. Determining what is needed and what is not, is not minimalist living; it is being practical.

As minimalism grows in popularity, more and more people are turning to minimalism. They have bought into the philosophy that focusing less on possessions and more on experiences will bring happiness. It also is a philosophy that leads to the mediocre. “What is the least I can do and still get by?” Use that statement as a tool in the core parts of your lives. You have now succeeded in becoming boring, unfulfilled, and unexceptional. Minimalism is a mindset and can quickly become a habit the swings out of control. It is a principle that is never ending. You are always trying to do

the least you can do to get by. “What is the least I can do and still get to heaven?” “What is the least I can do to keep my job?” (Fallible, 2014).)

Minimalism breeds a lack of passion. It is a character disease and the enemy of excellence. “Minimalism is a cancer on society,” Matthew Kelly, *The Rhythm of Life.*

Procrastination is minimalism at its worst. For example if you are not disciplined and trying to get things done, you make up for it by doing the very least you can do. You cut corners and get though using easy and minimalist ways. Being a minimalist and doing only the basics or wanting only the basics brings on the mindset of wanting the fruits of a job or position, but avoiding the work.

Minimalism can be bad for your health. Take for example the minimalist who has very little furniture, but what he does have is polished to such a high gleam that it resembles a show home. The kitchen is so spotless you could operate in it. Such cleanliness and minimalism discourage normal human activity. If you cannot act like a normal human being in your own home, then abnormal behavior takes over. Mildly obsessive or even compulsive obsessive behavior will not allow you to enjoy the fruits of your labors.

Minimalist decorating believes that your furniture must remain shop-worthy, and floors touched by only clean bare feet. Don’t let this happen to your home, scuffs and stains are signs of a life embraced and enjoyed. Trying to be minimalist so you do not have to continually clean and pick up causes anxiety (Carver, 2011).

Cons of Minimalism

How you approach your lifestyle will determine the best way for you to live. There are awesome aspects to minimalism, but there are just as many downsides.

Get rid of your television and you have freed up several hours a day. Now you have more time to spend on iPad games, doing nothing productive, or wandering the streets looking for other simple people.

You will have few houseguests. Your home is too quiet with no radio or television, you have nowhere for them to sleep, and you have little food in the house.

Get rid of stuff and declutter. However, the downside is becoming obsessed with counting your stuff and trying to subtract it from your life. You become almost manic in your lack of possessions. You search for more things to get rid of and finally end up getting rid of your happy life.

Who wants to live in a boring house? When you reduce your stuff to the bare essentials, you have nothing to make you happy, pleased, or passionate.

As you live with less, you gain more confidence in experiences and living with less. The downside to this philosophy is the arrogance you develop. You live with less and look down on others who work very hard to have possessions.

Slow down, get rid of the cell phone, find a way to limit activities, and become less stressed. Easy to say, but how do you tell your children that they can no longer play soccer, baseball or take swimming lessons. What will you replace these activities with? Mindlessly trying to remove more possessions from your home?

People will think you are about to commit suicide. This is a shocking reason, but when you quickly get rid of stuff, people think the worst.

You will be blamed for the unemployment rate rising because have less

stuff, you buy less stuff, and therefore you cause people to lose their jobs. This is the Law of Unintended Consequences. (This law is the unintended consequences caused by the action of people. It is maintained that each individual seeking only his own gain or lack of “gain is led by an invisible hand to promote an end that was no part of his intention” (Norton, 2014).

Everyone you know will tell you to hold on to things “just in case.” They you’re your to spot throwing away stuff. You feel just the opposite. You want to get rid of stuff and their ideas cause you anxiety.

If everyone cut their consumption, the economy would all apart. The jobless rate would rise. More people would be unable to buy food or pay their rents and mortgages. The economy should serve us, but we make the economy what it is. Without commercialism, there would be no economy.

If everyone created and no one consumed, creativity would quickly come to a standstill. Minimalism as well as materialism hinges on the law of supply and demand. Demand for stuff is high right now so more stuff must be created and produced, creating more jobs.

Minimalism states that stuff needs to be thrown out. Where does it go? Most goes to landfills, some is reused and other stuff is recycled. Consumers, and this includes minimalists, are lazy. They toss garbage into the trash bin rather than consciously recycling. The trash goes to the landfill and causes environmental damages.

Running children to ball games, swimming lessons and play dates are family’s entertainment. What is more awesome than cheering for your Little League Team or being a part of a swim meet? Would you deny your children these experiences so you can live a minimalist life? Your pace of life has slowed down considerably since you have cut the excess from your life. It is less stressful for you, but everyone else in your family is miserable. You really need to get real and understand that life is

not about being simple. Life is complicated, full of activity, and fulfilling.

Duplicity exists in everyone's world. You have one life that is surrounded by friends and family, another life that is dependent on your co-workers, and another life that is your solitary life. You play a different role depending on your where you are at the moment. Minimalism stresses taking all these parts of your life out of the picture. You lose the variety that makes you, you.

People always become someone different as circumstances change. You need to learn how to be compatible. Being a minimalist prevents situational changes. As a minimalist, you are required to be the same no matter where you are. You have no opportunity to be different, learn and grow. Minimalism demands you get rid of duplicity, but now you are a one-dimensional person.

Minimalism does call out for one to be simpler and quieter, and that is good. Do slow down, consume less, but enjoy more. Continue, however, chasing the dream ring that is just out of reach. Striving, chasing, and searching for dreams gives you personality and excitement. Most people realize that life is not movies, books, or celebrity magazines. It is simple and touchable. Becoming a minimalist, however, means you let go of your questing for something better and become flat and boring.

Minimalism is completely achievable. If you desire few possessions in your life, then discard them. Just remember that unless you totally rid your world of possessions, thoughts and emotions you will never be a true minimalist. You will just be confused.

Chapter IV: Minimalism is Not For Everyone

“It’s quite simple: to be a minimalist you must live with less than 100 things, you can’t own a car or a home or a television, you can’t have a career, you must live in exotic hard-to-pronounce places all over the world, you must start a blog, you can’t have children, and you must be a young white male from a privileged background.” ~Millburn & Nicodemus

Minimalism is not for everyone. It is not a lifestyle you should pressure your family and friends into trying. Minimalism may provide benefits, and some people have never found a negative in minimalism. In fact, minimalism can be a decent lifestyle, but if you are not committed to minimalism it can be devastating to our life. Instead of throwing things out willy-nilly, take stock of what possessions are important to you.

Minimalism has many parameters. Going from owning 10,000 things to only owning 7,000 can be minimalism. Cleaning out your closet to contain only one t-shirt may be minimalism to you. Your lifestyle is a totally personal choice. If you have a particular personality trait, however, you should never consider minimalism. For example:

Collectors. If you own a collection of items and these possession bring you joy, this collection is part of your personality. No one should talk you into throwing away you collections. You will be miserable and come to resent your newfound way of life. For example, a good friend down the road has a collection of over 1000 salt and pepper shakers. If she were to throw them away, a part of her life would be thrown away with her collection. Perhaps she should stop purchasing more salt and pepper shakers, but this stuff are her memories from her world travels.

Fashionistas. Fashion is a part of a personality. If it fits and you love it; keep it. It is your choice what passions to keep. When your job or career depends on how you dress, keep all the fashions that match your job. You never know when you will need a piece of clothing for a project. Organize your closet to keep you fashions easy to find.

If you are a photographer, you should never throw away equipment. It does not matter if you have a plethora of cameras and lighting equipment; they are important to your well-being. Keep them, organize them, and love them. The same with photographs, you should not let the minimalism lifestyle dictate what pictures you throw away and which ones you keep.

Mechanics need stuff. What would happen if you threw away your tools to make room for experiences? You would shortly be out of a job and a great deal of money.

If you are on a relationship break, it might not be a good idea to throw out every item that reminds you of your ex-significant other. You never know when or if you get back together. If would be so devastating to the

other partner if they discovered you had thrown away that Oriental vase they so lovingly bought for you.

Children should not be forced into a minimalist lifestyle. The possessions they hold are their security nets. Children's rooms are their havens and to them minimalism is just a word. Children will eventually de-clutter their lives. Let them make the choice between minimalism and materialism when they understand the terms, and when they are much older.

Your loved ones may support you in your minimalist lifestyle, but they have their own preferences and experiences. They are on a different path and materialism may be their preference. Sharing an opinion and offering an option about de-cluttering, organizing and simplifying is great, but demanding that your loved ones join you on the minimalism journey is not good. Conflicts between family members and heated arguments can happen.

Don't force your minimalist ideas on your roommates. If your roommate wants to purchase hundreds of shoes, music or cooking utensils, that is awesome. Preferences are what makes a person.

If you are a family man or woman, minimalism is not a good idea. Giving up all your possessions will take away a place to call home. The things you are quite attached to will be gone, or you will have to rent a storage unit.

> A highly competitive person can be dangerous with minimalism. Mankind has a deeply-rooted drive to compete with each other and advertising capitalizes on this impulse. What do you take pride in? Purchasing the newest thing gives you the right to belong to the club of consumers. You are measured on what you have. For a moment your life's problems are gone because you have stuff. Now turn to minimalism. You are that person who looks down on everyone who owns things. You compete with your neighbors to see who can get rid of stuff the fastest. You don't think about what you are doing; only the end result. After the "game" is over you sit and look around you. There is nothing more to get rid of and your life is empty. Now you start the competition again. You begin to purchase what you threw out. A vicious cycle begins all over (Smith, 2013).

> If you want to give your children an awesome future and if you are a minimalist, it will be difficult to save for your children's education or even help them when they need a place to stay. Making sure they learn without being bullied for their lifestyle or clothes requires a nesting place and stuff.

Life is a balance and taking minimalism too far disturbs that balance. "Flowing too much in the direction of simplicity could lead you to feeling deprived" (minimalismissimple, 2015).

A good point to make, "When you call yourself a minimalist, everything you do will be instantly be steeped in irony" (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2015). Do you really want to have people think of you as a hypocrite? They will if you have more than one pair of shoes or drive a car or own a blowdryer.

Find a balance in living that becomes you. You don't need to reject every item that is given to you to keep your life simple. Instead, carefully choose what you will allow into your life. Thinking about what to purchase and what ideals to follow is a good motto to follow in every aspect of your life. If you deprive yourself, you may find that you are unsatisfied and

unhappy. Unhappiness could lead to splurges and a vicious cycle of minimalism versus materialism begins.

Keep your possessions. Materialism and having possessions is a decision. It is a choice to live in today's culture. Advertising, marketing campaigns, and corporations exist for you to consume, collect and purchase. Every message heard in advertisements promotes being happy if you have the latest and greatest in appliances, cars, homes, furnishing, and fashions. The world's economy runs on materialism.

Suddenly discovering you need to get rid of possessions may enact a terrible price from you. You have always known where your recycling bin or garbage can is, but you still have your possessions. Decluttering is good for the soul, but only if it is your decision. Being forced to get rid of possessions hurts, and who wants to hurt?

Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things you value and removing anything that is a distraction from your life. You will need to identify the essentials and prioritize those essentials. Minimalism will demand that you come to the realization that you have spent much of your life pursuing things that are not that valuable. Materialism will help you justify keeping those possessions.

Do you really want to rock your view of society, you lifestyle, your relationships or areas of your life that you never thought possible? Or do you enjoy what you have? The world invents, produces, promotes and purchases material possessions to keep the economy running. We love stuff. Stuff is security, needed to impress neighbors and prove your worth. If you want to change your view of possessions, become a minimalist, but if you are happy with your view of society, culture, and its messages stay where you are.

People who have become minimalists have said that they wish they had never taken the step. Testimonials from Melissa, Di and Christine say "l live without means and I don't get to live life as freely as others. My

family and friends are non-supportive. There are times when I thought I'd never survive. Being a minimalist complicates my life. I need my things back."

Try and have an open mind when someone is talking to you about minimalism. They might love their perspective, but not everyone is interested in living the same lifestyle, and that's what makes life interesting. If a minimalist constantly tells you what is wrong with your possession filled life, just let them talk. Do support them in their lifestyle, but remember that you are happy owning stuff.

Practical minimalism might be your means to a comfortable and fulfilling existence. Downsize your stuff if it will make sense for you and your lifestyle. Avoid throwing away and decluttering without thinking through the issues, and never get rid of your stuff when you are angry. If you would like to live a simple lifestyle that is awesome, but take the "religious fervor" out of the movement and make the transition at your own pace.

Chapter V: Minimalism versus Frugal Living

"*Extreme minimalism is akin to extreme frugality: It works for some people, but robs others of life's dear enjoyments." ~ J.D. Roth*

Being frugal is not the same as being a minimalist. Frugality is being careful with your money. Minimalism is decluttering and getting rid of stuff. The two concepts do intersect, you save money and de-clutter at the same time, but they are not the same thing.

Minimalism is not living like a monk; it is simple living with less. You have thrown away the stuff in our home and in your mind to make room for values and experiences. Minimalism is not about being thrifty; it is a tool to help you change your lifestyle. The entire idea of minimalism and frugality joined together is to live a more intentional life. Focus less on the material things of life, save money, and do not own more than you need and can use (The Everyday Minimalist, 2010).

There are similarities and differences between frugality and minimalism. Decluttering and minimizing possessions are philosophies used in both lifestyles, but how does a minimalist justify the frugal practice of purchasing in bulk and storing for a rainy day?

Frugality is thriftiness and moderate or even slightly pious living. A frugal person will cut corners to save money, make adjustments, and understand the cost-per-use and the longevity of purchase. They do have possessions and value what they have. Possessions contribute to their frugality and may be sparce and minimal.

Minimalism is about embracing and maximizing the important things of life

and distancing yourself from the less important things around you. “Minimalism is a tool used to rid yourself of life’s excess in favor of focusing on what is important so you can find happiness, fulfillment and freedom (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2015). Minimalism is designed to add value to lives by clearing the clutter out of your life to make room for health, relationships, passion, contribution, and growth.

A minimalist would not purchase an expensive pair of shoes just because they are well made and last longer, as would a frugal shopper. A minimalist would not even purchase an additional pair of shoes.

Frugality

Frugality is living a lifestyle where luxury is rare and hedonism, or pleasure-seeking, is completely unheard of and discouraged. Socks are darned rather than replaced, holes in jeans are patched up and hand me downs were in everyone’s closet. Meals are basic and everything is saved. Definitely a truly frugal lifestyle can be closed and uncomfortable, but it is not minimalist.

Being frugal is all about saving money and spending less than you make. Frugal living means being prudent or economical in the consumption of resources and avoiding waste, lavishness and extravagance. Reduce waste, curb costly habits and suppress instant gratification by means of self-restraint. Frugal living seeks to find efficiency and stays well informed about local circumstances. A frugal life is one that avoid products that are “for the moment”. The premise is to gain the most from money.

Learning to live on a modest income, shop at yard sales and thrift stores, and being adept at stretching out dollars are the keys to frugal living. Living frugal does not mean getting rid of possessions. In fact, every possession is important. Thrift is important, and low cost entertainment is a way of life.

Frugal people are not necessarily minimalists. Many thrifty people have no desire to be minimalists. They believe that holding onto things “just in case” is being frugal. Holding on to stuff in order to avoid purchasing the same item is smart. Shopping bargains is a way of life with a frugal lifestyle, and shopping thrift stores and estates sales is a hobby.

Choosing Your Lifestyle

Minimalism is getting rid of excess, decluttering, and living a simple life. The philosophy of minimalism stresses having less to deal with in the way of possessions and living a less complicated life.

Minimalism and frugal living are similar in the viewpoint that buying less reduces the amount of items that are overproduced. Thinking about excess stuff causes you to repurpose and re-use what you already own.

Minimalism is similar to frugality by emphasizing savings through having less. Buying less frequently means spending less and having fewer possessions to take maintain. As you pick and choose what is important to you, you also have less wasted time.

You can live simpler in a modern world by utilizing frugalism and minimalism. It is also possible to live a happy and simple life by being a consumer and finding ways to increase those things that make you happy. If you want to live a simple life and sit on a lake enjoying nature, that is an awesome dream. So is sailing on a lake in a sailboat or running through waves on a water ski. A neighbor recently said, “I live a minimalist life in my cabin

by the lake. Only the bare essentials are there and I am supremely happy. I can also choose to stay at home in my suburban home that is full of all the amenities that I love, the television, my hot tub, and my hobbies." How awesome to change lifestyle whenever you need a change of pace.

There are things you can do to simplify your life, be frugal and minimalistic, and still enjoy possessions.

Get a basic cell phone. Just use it for emergencies. However if you need one to take pictures, text, and search for places to go, you smartphone is your frugal investment.

Cut the cable cord. You can save a ton of money without cable or satellite. Instead use free sites and add a steaming service. Not only is his frugal and minimalist, it is smart – you can control what your children watch.

Get rid of credit cards if you are seeking a simpler life. However, if you have an emergency it is a good idea to have a credit card on standby. That is smart and frugal living.

Declutter your home. Okay, you don't need three brooms and having a multitude of the same tools is a bit overdone. You could get rid of duplicates and find space on shelves and in drawers.

If you don't use your gym membership, mobile internet service, or milk delivery service, it is smart to get rid of them. This is the hallmark of a frugal life – getting rid of excess to save money.

Track your expenses and time. See where you are wasting money and time. This is a concept that can make life simpler and still give you the opportunity to be a consumer.

Living a smarter life is not necessarily becoming a minimalist or adopting a frugal lifestyle, it is keeping the things you love, purchasing the things you need, and living a sensible life.

Chapter VI: Minimalism and Your Diet

“Minimalism means not trying to improve perfection.” That includes diet.
~Bryant McGill

It might seem strange to combine minimalism and diet, but if you are getting rid of physical clutter, you might as well go all the way and take food out of your life that is unhealthy for you. Being a true minimalist does mean turning toward a diet of little meat or becoming a vegetarian.

A minimalist does not complicate their diet any more than they complicate their life. They do have a few essential rules the follow to stay minimally and healthy.

Food that consists mostly of plants and unprocessed food is definitely good for anyone – minimalist or materialist. Eat an abundance of vegetables like avocados, spinach, broccoli, and anything else that is green. These foods will make you feel wonderful. Put fish, nuts and seeds into your minimalist/everyday diet. Keep the portions on the small side, or minimal.

Completely eliminate from your diet, breads, pastas, sugar, gluten and meat that is not fish, avoid bottom feeding seafood like shrimp and crab, and stay away from most dairy products. Do not purchase or eat

anything that is processed or packaged. If you are contemplating a minimalist lifestyle think about giving up those candy bars and sugary sodas. A minimalist believes that you need less protein than you think.

Fasting is great if you are a minimalist. Dogmatic minimalists eat only two meals a day and stay away from snacks. During the fast a minimalist diet is water, herbal, tea or black coffee. You definitely will lose weight. A minimalist diet does not include breakfast.

This is contrary to dietary recommendations. Breakfast is the fuel of the day. Whether you are a minimalist or not, never skip breakfast.

Keep your sugars to a minimum and your water and liquids to a maximum. With a minimalist diet you do need to take supplements. Multivitamins, vitamin B-complex and fish oil will need to be purchased so make sure you have the resources on hand to buy these ingredients for your minimalist diet.

Exercise is on the schedule of a minimalist. Minimalists don’t spend a great deal of time, effort or focus on exercising. They walk since waking allows plenty of time to think and de-stress. They sometimes work out for fifteen minutes. Minimalists are not concerned about building vanity muscles, they are only concerned with how they feel in the moment.

If you have a gym pass, keep it simple and use it. You don’t have to follow the minimalist ideal of exercise; do what you think is best for your own lifestyle and body.

Sleep is important to a minimalists, just like it is important for anyone. A minimalist tends to sleep less because they only need five or six hours of sleep. Do get as much sleep as your body requires and turn of the alarm clock. You don’t have a stressful job anyway, so why hurry and get up.

Less stress is the result of a minimalist diet, sleep, exercise, and lifestyle. You can tell a minimalist because they do not shallow breathe, never frown, and

make an effort to be aware of the triggers that bring on stress. Minimalists learn to change their breathing patterns when they feel overwhelmed. One trick to being less stressed? Look in the mirror and smile at yourself.

Steps to a Minimalist Diet, Even if you are not a Minimalist

Apply minimalism to your diet by:

Minimizing portions. Eat small portions. Eat half your meal when at restaurants and use smaller plats at home. Avoid second helpings. This is a great way to control your food, but somewhat wasteful. Eat half your meal when at restaurants and throw away the rest? Maybe just order less. What about second portions at thanksgiving or family dinners? Do you really want to insult your relatives by not taking a second helping? And really, what does not taking a second helping have to do with minimalist living?

Minimize eating unhealthy food. This is actually good advice. Reduce the extra sour cream and bacon on baked potatoes and eat the skin. Add more fruits and vegetables to your diet.

Avoid snacking. Choose very small portions when snacking. If you have a minimalist near you when you are snacking take after them and eat only one nut. This idea is somewhat sarcastic, but when you are minimalist snacking, it is a great idea to follow the “less is more” mantra.

Water should be everyone beverage of choice. Drink more water and cut down on the sodas, sugary fruit juices, and caffeinated drinks. This is great advice for anyone living a material or a minimalist life.

Empty calories have no nutrition. Avoid them. Applying minimalism to foods and drinks means eliminating toxins and junk including artificially flavored or colored beverage (West, 2015).

Eat when hungry. Schedules are obsessive and make your life complicated. Simplify your life and eat only when you are hungry. “If the tank is still left with fuel, minimalists are simply not obsessed with filling it up. They know Eco is the trend, they wait till it’s nearly empty, then get it refilled” (Xuan, 2011).

Stop when you are full. Whenever they eat, a minimalist won’t stuff themselves. Their motto is enough is enough.

There are tasty foods everywhere you look. You can never eat them all and a minimalist will not want to get involved in craving foods. They pass up great looking food to keep themselves simple. Nice idea, but if you love food, it is okay to indulge once in a while.

When a minimalist eats, they eat with full attention to detail. They savor the flavors and textures and eat slowly and joyfully. They experience their food rather just fill themselves up. Nothing is eaten in a hurry. What a great premise! Eat for enjoyment rather than gorging yourself.

A full and tight stomach is something that a minimalist will not tolerate. Minimalists keep themselves light in food, as well as their furnishings, thoughts and emotions.

Minimalists claim that by simplifying their lives they have more time to get into shape. No matter what lifestyle you are living, getting into shape is a need rather than a want; it is not “a should, but a must.” Use minimalistic principles to get rid of life’s excess so you can focus on what’s important. Take this same motto to heart.

Chapter VII: How to Become A Hybrid Minimalist

“Owning less is better than organizing more.” ~ Joshua Becker

There is a very definite cycle in the modern world. You work hard, make tons of money, and purchase all the things you have dreamed. Now you work harder to keep all your possessions in good order. You are trapped in a job you don’t really like, but you need to pay for the lifestyle you have become accustomed. You are determined to make your life work which causes stress, ulcers, back problems, and unhappiness.

Another scenario, you work hard during the week at a job you enjoy. The weekend or days off come, and you are able to use the stuff you have worked hard to purchase. You love your life of owning a boat, a nice house and an awesome car. You know possessions are fleeting, but they give you pleasure and contentment.

Everyone has a different way to be happy. We value different things and what we own aligns to our own personal ethics. Materialism or minimalism, it doesn’t matter. Look at your life and see whether the way your life is in position with your values, your wants and desires, and your happiness. If you find that stuff is crowding your life; pare it down. If your inner peace asks you to rejoice over your next big deal, then have a party and celebrate your “stuff”. Your inner peace, or the state of being you create within yourself, is what is important. It should not matter what philosophy is trending or whether or not people think you are materialistic (Logue, 2015).

Extreme or dogmatic minimalism involves living with very few possessions; often less than 100 items. Forming your minimalist life makes you happy. You long to follow the premise of getting rid of material possessions and uncomplicated your life. You believe that your stuff drains your bank

accounts, your energy, and attention. Possessions keep you from enjoying the ones you love and living a life based purely on values. This type of minimalism would be difficult for anyone to follow unless you are unattached and jobless.

At the same time you are trying to keep your stuff under control which causes you to become a slave to minimums. Your life and lifestyle becomes unfulfilling and stressful. Are you any happier than the individual who works hard and purchases stuff?

The answer lies in moderation. Many minimalists turn to rational or balanced minimalism to reconcile their needs and wants. Rather than the term minimalist that conjures up images of barren walls, destitution, and empty cupboards, a rational minimalist balances what they have. They organize, de-clutter, and put together a plan for simplicity. A minimalist family who lives a minimalist lifestyle, owns a television, couches, family photos, and chairs. This family has more than one coat to wear and t-shirts overflow drawers. There are books, crafts, and toys in different rooms of their home. What they do have is an organized home and items that are not duplicates. They define what a minimalist lifestyle means to them – having only the essentials and determining themselves what those essentials are. They have established a life that is not identical to anybody else's; it is their life and theirs alone, and they call it minimalism

Becoming a minimalist or following a materialistic lifestyle requires that you develop the style to fit your needs. Ask questions, and identify what you most value. Be humble enough to change when necessary. Every practice of minimalism must look different from anyone else's. If you are a collector of antiques, stamps or salt and pepper shakers and you love music and movies plus sports and books, you can keep them in your minimalist lifestyle. Minimalist living should be based on your values, passions, and desires. Be rational.

The world of work feeds your desires for ambition and wanting more. How do you balance your ambitions, have a successful career, without losing your contentment and getting drawn into a cycle of purchasing, maintaining, and

hoarding? One answer would be finding a job you like, one are good at doing, a job that pays well, and a job that brings out satisfaction, and friendships.

Finding balance in minimalism takes teamwork. Don’t be dismayed if you make many mistakes along the way. Balance what you have with what you need and remove those unneeded things from your life. Find space to promote the things you most value; remove distractions. Learn to balance your life between the extremes of consumerism and extreme minimalism.

Balance minimalism with having stuff and keep your attitude to yourself. Yes, minimalism has become the new rage, and it is trendy to say, we don’t have a TV.” How often have your heard this statement said with a haughty attitude. Yet, you see these same minimalists allowing children to play in the street.

Forced minimalism is when you are coerced into minimizing because of a job loss, divorce, legal action or homelessness. You give everything away to the point that all you have, maybe, is a bed and one blanket. Forced minimalism will not make you happy; it is not a good situation.

Not everyone who embraces minimalism takes the philosophy to the limit. You don’t really have to sacrifice your precious stuff. All you need to do is take advantage of all getting rid of excess and having an attitude of living with only what you need.

Minimalism advocates experiences. No one disputes the idea that experiences are long lasting, but what if the things you purchase are what makes the memories? Everything you own and value should represent something: memories, happy times, family get reunions and learning, achieving and receiving.

This lifestyle might work well for a single person who travels quite a bit and has no permanent home, but it is much more difficult for a family to practice extreme minimalism.

Balance your life by getting rid of items that are of little or no use and keep items that are useful in a day to day life. Cleaning out stuff is the beginning of living a balanced but minimal life.

Equalize your life by being practical. Being a practical minimalist means you still have stuff, but you think about what you have. You make tangible choices and think about what you are doing. The result can be a weight lifted from your life. Declutter mindfully and slowly. Don't let the change overwhelm you or your family.

A Balanced Materialist Lifestyle

Live your materialistic life. Your possessions may define who you are, and that's okay. Have an awareness of what is around you and notice how things really are. Just avoid worshipping materials things, possessions, and money. Let your stuff work for you instead of against you. You can use your material possessions to experience life and do the things you love and value.

Society urges us to be consumers. You become a working class citizen to make enough money to enjoy possessions. To balance this concept, you don't need to become a minimalist, you just need to be smart. Purchase what you need and want and take care of it. Avoid worshipping stuff. Stuff is just stuff, and it can be replaced.

Buying stuff is not a bad thing. Purchasing runs the economy. If you enjoy spending $150 on a pair of leather shoes that will last you at least years, then this is your happiness. If you need to have a smart phone, video games or a television to be happy, that is your bliss. The whole idea to living a minimalist lifestyle is to find a way to stop giving so much meaning to your stuff. Again, let your stuff work for you, not the other way around.

Balance materialism with the things you want. Make all the money you can. Money is important, and use that money not only for materialistic things, but to maintain a balance with spirituality and giving. Money is important for happiness. It may not be the most essential component of happiness, but could

you really say that a homeless beggar is truly happy even though he is living a minimalist lifestyle?

Everyone wants to succeed, do better, and improve their lives. Minimalists would be liars if they denied wanted to improve. Their whole life depends on improvement and change.

Every year that technology increases you purchase bigger and better things for you and your family. You experience them, use them for good, and are proud of what you have purchased. Would you really like to turn the clock back one hundred years and live a minimalist lifestyle without the conveniences of a modern, materialistic life?

Materialism is also an attitude. Learning to balance minimalism with materialism means you get rid of things that you don't use anymore, and you pass your stuff to others who can use them. Repurpose, recycle, and reuse. The joy of minimalism is hanging on to your precious stuff and memories, but letting go of past items that bring your distress.

Refocusing your life off of materials possession and workaholic actions, to your family. Avoid maintaining all your stuff; get rid of things that re not useful. Minimalism states, when the unnecessary stuff is gone, you have less maintenance, and you can focus your time and energy on those possessions and people that are important to you.

Balance materialism and having stuff by getting rid of the stuff you don't use and trade it in for items you will use. For example, if you have a boat sitting in the driveway that is costing you in registration and maintenance fees and you never use this boat, sell it. Purchase something that will bring joy and experiences to your family.

Simplify your workload. Think about every project and obligation you are asked to do. Don't pile work on top of work. Make a choice in the projects you take on before agree to more obligations. Drop those useless things that do not mean much in your life. Letting go of extra activities can give you more time

to pursue your passions, and get the most of your life.

Get rid of toxic and boring relationships from your life. Surround yourself with people who think like you and have substance. Get rid of those people in your social media lists who do nothing for you. Spend time with the people you love who enrich your life. Balance your stuff with your emotions, friends, and relationships. Find equilibrium between living as a minimalist or a materialistic life. Do this by determining what is important to you.

Learn to love what you do for work and money. There are many people who have high paying jobs that they love. They don't squander their money on stuff that is meaningless. They save for the things they want and are happy saving and planning. There are many more people who know how to organize, live simply, yet hold stuff.

Balance in Decluttering and Organizing

The problem with decluttering and turning to a minimalist lifestyle is the stuff just doesn't disappear. The results of your de-cluttering and cleaning up needs to go somewhere. There is no way to decrease or increase the matter in the universe. Stuff just rearranges and moves to someplace else. You are not a minimalist when you just toss our stuff into the trash. You have now selfishly rid yourself of possessions, and placed this stuff somewhere else. Perhaps the answer to becoming a minimalist is to seek to move things that are out of place to where they might best be used (Rich, 2011).

In the book *Simplify* by Joshua Becker (a minimalist blogger), there are seven guiding principles to help anyone declutter their home and mind. While it is true that getting rid of clutter is awesome, what do you do if you have gotten rid of items that you occasionally need? Recently a new minimalist was looking for a great cut class bowl to take to a party. Of course, since it was not used or needed, it had been discarded. It was at the moment the minimalist realized that the bowl had significant value both in money and sentiment. Minimalism can kill your heritage.

Homes are drowning in stuff. Most of you take in more and more and never find the opportunity to discard. Your homes fill up with duplicates and more stuff. You want to organize and keep everything. You purchase bigger containers and organization tips and tricks, but never organize stuff. Organizing possessions is an action that needs to be taken all the time, and this is not a minimalist attitude.

Balancing between minimalism and stuff is getting rid of stuff you no longer use so you can purchase things that will bring you happiness, be more useful, and bring more efficiency to your life.

Organizing is rearranging; remove excess stuff before purchasing more stuff. You can be an awesome consumer by following these few tips and tricks:

> If the stuff you have sitting on a shelf benefits no one, throw it away. Give it to friends who might use the item.
>
> If you have stuff that does not solve debt problems; sell it. Don’t build storage closets or shelters just to house your stuff; get rid of it.
>
> Organization does not prevent you from purchasing items that are duplicate items. Get rid of things you don’t use.
>
> While rearranging your stuff, you might want to evaluate why you have

this stuff. Removing possessions from your home forces you to question the useful value of our stuff. Decide what possessions are truly most important and valuable to you.

Organizing provides a temporary lift to attitudes. It clears rooms and cleans out your mind. Now throw away duplicates and pave the way for major lifestyle changes. Think about where you are going.

Minimalism means decluttering. However, you should not let this philosophy turn your home into a monk's cell. There are tips and tricks to decluttering that will balance minimalism.

Organize first and buy second. It is not necessary to go out and buy storage pieces and supplies when sorting through your home. Avoiding purchasing storage pieces; this combines both frugality and minimalism. You don't need those pretty boxes and bins if they don't fit the space you have. Hold what you need these storage containers to hold and make sure they function for your particular space. Clean out first, assess what you need and then purchase a few things. You can always add mores storage bins and items, but you don't want to purchase storage containers to clutter up your home.

Do not set aside the entire day to minimalize your home. No one has the energy or focus to spend all day organizing and decluttering. You will become frustrated and less efficient. Spend a few hours on one project or space. By working in small bites, you will not get burned out by the process. In addition, you will not throw away valuable times just to follow a minimalist philosophy.

Finish each decluttering task completely before moving on to something else. Once you have decided where something is going to go. In other words, never keep bags for charity or things to go to a friend in your home to deliver later. Do it right the first time. Take the bags and boxes out to the curb or recycling plant immediately. If you are donating things put the items in your car and make sure you deliver them the same day.

Complete the deal or you will find yourself pulling stuff out of bags and boxes and keeping it.

Do not think once you have decluttered your space you are done. You have created a new and efficient system for processing and managing your stuff. Once you have decluttered, use the frugal approach and do not think about purchasing the same item again. Do regular clean up, but do not become obsessive compulsive. Avoid minimalist thinking that everything must go. Be practical and keep those items that you will need now and in the future. Avoid duplicates; that is the balance.

Be sensible. Your space will never look like those magazine pictures of awesome storage and decluttered places. If perfection is your goal, you will be disappointed. Your goal is to set up a space that works for you. Success is putting your hands on your hips at the end of the day and feeling satisfied with your work.

“Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from it” (Becker, 2015). Don’t let the term minimalist bring up images of destitution, small homes, barren walls, and no food in the cupboard. No stuff is not the way to enjoy life. Become rational and unfussy and keep the things, and the stuff, that is most valuable to you.

Look for a lifestyle that works for you. Use your imagination and find a style that is not cumbersome, but frees you based on your passions and desires. Your ultimate happiness does not depend on “less is more” or “keeping up with the Jones’.” It is your attitude about what makes you secure, happy, and fulfilled.

Conclusion

“Choices are the hinges of destiny” ~ Pythagoras

There is a definite downside to minimalism. Everything has a cost, and everyone has needs, things that need to be done, duties and the need for stuff. Those that choose to keep only 100 possessions or less and give up their cars, phones, and homes are actually shifting their burdens to those around them. They are becoming more reliant on others instead of themselves. This seems to be counter to one of the rules of minimalism – take care of yourself.

The less stuff you have, the more likely you will have to borrow someone else’s stuff. Now you are relying on someone else not be a minimalist so you can borrow what you need. You have to rely on others for rides to and from work.

A minimalist means you are dependent on others, and they expect something in return for their generosity. You promise to do something for them, but you don’t since you are minimalist and forget what is going on. Being reliant on others is not simplification. It is stressful and frustrating on both parties.

Keeping your possessions to a bare minimum makes it very unlikely that you will be prepared when disasters strike. Again, you are taking from others to serve your own needs.

It is not practical to cut yourselves off from the world by getting rid of technology or your cell phones and computers. Even people in third world countries have cell phones. If you use technology properly, you will keep your independence.

Severely limiting what you own makes it difficult to get anything done.

You don’t have the tools to work, you end up wasting time, and you are unproductive. The job doesn’t get done properly. This is frustrating to you and on your friends and family.

You will never get others on board with a minimalistic lifestyle when they see how you live. You are constantly borrowing, being unreliable, and some-what self-centered. Being a minimalist is an uphill battle in today’s image conscious world. Minimalism in its extreme form is not good for anyone. Take a more balanced approach to minimalism if you must.

Minimalism should never be entered into without a great deal of thought. Minimalism can be good for you, and you may never regret following through with your decision.

Minimalism is a choice to live in a counter-cultural. Your life has revolved around the need to consume and collect. Now, once you have become a minimalist you reject those consuming and collecting messages and choose to live a simple life instead.

A minimalist lifestyle places experiences above stuff. It is, however, more than just throwing away clutter and organizing. It is a journey that takes part in your mind, soul, and heart. Choosing to be a minimalist will affect your entire world. Your emotions will need to be re-evaluated, and your values will be rocked.

At its very core, minimalism in the intentional decluttering or putting aside the things you most value. It means for you to remove anything that detracts you from the valuable emotions, thoughts and experiences in your life. As you ponder becoming a minimalist, you may think that you have spent too much of your life pursuing things that are not all that valuable. You are now stressed because you have spent your entire life pursuing stuff. You begin to be plagued with “what ifs” and “whys”. Minimalism can drive you crazy with these thoughts.

Minimalism denies the world that invents, produces, and promotes. Everyone loves their stuff. Stuff is security, who you are, and how you think about yourself. When your mindset has changed to simplify, society will be somewhat unforgiving. Culture looks much different when you get rid of stuff. You may think you will be happy and not regret your decisions to get rid of stuff. But people are creatures of habit, and acquiring stuff is what people do. You will soon regret that cell phone you tossed, your lack of furniture, and your old job, friends, and possibly some of your family.

Minimalists state that you will have more time, more freedom, more money, and much less stress. Your lifestyle will change. You will get out of debt, work less, travel more, and be one of the thousands of bloggers writing about minimalist. Really? How do you travel more without funds and stuff, how will you get out of debt without a job? Or the possibility of promotion? You simplify your life to the extent that you are not passionate about what you do; you go nowhere in your career.

Becoming a minimalist will cause you to be an anomaly. You will love telling people about your decision to radically simplify, and they will find you unattractive, different and weird. They will step back from you at neighborhood and friend parties, leave you out of their plans, and treat you as too unusual to be around.

You have removed the stuff in your life now it is time to simplify your commitments, your goals, your diet, and your relationships. The decision to become minimalist will affect your entire life.

Think about the real downsides of minimalism before you jump into the fray:

> Craigslist, eBay, and Goodwill are you friends. They own more of your stuff than you do.

> No longer do you browse shopping sites and you have no reason to go shopping. Now, what do you do with your spare time?

You might have enough money to travel so you grab your carry-on. As you enter customs, officers are a bit suspicious that you are really staying in their country for a month or more. This is a true scenario. A minimalist couple traveling overseas was stopped by customs for having too little luggage for their intended stay.

You friends will continually tease you since you only have two shirts. You are a joke among your friends and acquaintances.

No one asks you to go on road trips, to bars or out to dinner anymore. They know you will not offer to pay. You will expect everyone else to pay for you.

You sneak into malls and are very afraid that your acquaintances will see you and judge you as a hypocrite.

You don’t have a television, and now you have to find other things to do. You can read or exercise. You will miss out on all the latest trends in fashion, food, and fun.

You don’t buy gifts for the family or your friends anymore. The real downside, you don’t get gifts either.

You will be accused of being trendy. People will wonder what a minimalist is and why you would want to be one.

Your clothes become frayed and faded. You are no longer welcome in good restaurants or at parties with friends.

When you have visitors, you get antsy about all the stuff they are bringing into your home. You want them to leave, and you get cranky and irritable.

When you visit other people's homes, you mentally start clearing out their rooms.

If you have children, there is no way you are a minimalist.

People will feel threatened by you. They believe you are criticizing them for their materialistic lifestyle. You friends no longer show you their new technology and heaven forbid if you find out they have purchased a new car.

You don't have a car. You can no longer do your share of giving rides and helping out when others are stranded. Also, people will think you are poor and jobless. If you are continually asking for rides, your friends and family will soon tell you to take the bus.

To be or not to be a minimalist. That is the question. Minimalism is very difficult to define precisely. If you believe minimalism is defined by cutting back, consuming less, and being more thoughtful in regards to value, it is a great premise.

Materialism or holding on to stuff is also important. Ignore the definition that materialism has a tendency to worship material possessions and physical comfort more than spiritual values. Not so! People enjoy their comforts. It his were not so would you strive to live in a nice home, have awesome stuff around you, and snuggle up in a fuzzy blanket when you need comfort? There is nothing that says you can't be materialistic and spiritual at the same time. Take the example listed before, "There is nothing wrong with having and holding possessions. The Bible is full of stories of those who own much. How do minimalists reconcile God's riches with a desire to live a minimalist lifestyle? "God's home, the Temple, was adorned with gold beyond imagination" (Ps50:10).

Do take a long and hard look at your life. You can cut back in places that don't

really matter. You can be intentional, but avoid getting rid of all your stuff just to be “trendy”. Live a simpler life, but keep what is important to you even if you crowd your space a bit with stuff.

It is true that most consumers do have way too much stuff, and much more than we need. It is an awesome thought to simplify. Stand back and examine what you can do without and where you can cut back. Balance minimalist with practicality. Be sensible in what you try to do without.

Think consciously about what you are doing when contemplating minimalism. Think about how you will spend your time. Minimalizing is pretty terrifying when you are trying to get exactly where you want to be. It is much easier to fill your life with distractions. Balance your stuff with experiences, memories, and value. Take a good hard look at where you are going with your lifestyle and be happy with who you are.

The Smart Passive Income Guide

How to Successfully Create Passive Income Streams With A Growth Mindset

Bruce Walker

The Smart Passive Income Guide

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Introduction

Earning a passive income is something that a lot of people dream of. We all have heard myths about how we can easily make a lot of money without having to do a lot of work. We will jump all in to products or programs people advertise online and hope that everything is just going to work out for the best. With this kind of mentality, we will end up failing pretty quickly. It is not the fact that making passive income is impossible; it is more the fact that most people who are drawn to this idea are not prepared for the time, investment and work that they need to put in.

This guide is a wakeup call to those who are looking to make a passive income. It is not necessarily meant to scare you away from attempting to earn one, but rather it is intended to tell you the truth and to let you know what it actually takes to achieve success. Many people think of passive income as an easy stream of money that they will not have to do much to get. While you can make some good money in the process, it is a lot of work and will continue to be a lot of work. This guidebook discusses this in some detail and is meant to educate you before you decide to take the plunge on this exciting income source.

This guidebook will inform you about the mindset of those who are able to work successfully with passive incomes. There are a lot of people who are able to make a passive income work and they never have to go back to a “9 to 5” job again. On the other hand, there are those who are just trying to make a quick buck and who do not want to put in the work. They are the ones who are the most likely to fail. To prepare you for success, this guidebook explains what a passive income is, who can make a passive income, and some of the traits of those who are successful in making a passive income.

There are many common thoughts and misconceptions surrounding the notion of passive incomes. Most people think that having a passive income means

that they have an easy job. They believe that they will make a ton of money without having to do much work. These thoughts are wrong and those who believe that are often the first to fail. For this reason, this book is intended to give you a realistic picture of what working for a passive income is like.

Earning a passive income is hard work and will require a lot of effort and time from the individual. To be successful, you have to be ahead of the curve and able to think outside the box in order to achieve the great benefits that you are anticipating. However, a passive income is not always just about hard work; there are a lot of benefits that you will be able to get if you are just willing to put in the effort. As well as being realistic about the challenges of earning a passive income, this guidebook also describes some of the benefits of this mode of money-making, such as being your own boss, having the potential to make a lot of money, more time with family, and more flexibility in hours.

Simultaneous to all of these delightful perks, there are some pitfalls of making a passive income. By explaining some of the pitfalls that you may experience with a passive income, such as losing money, losing the steady paycheck that you were used to in the beginning, and not having health insurance and other benefits, this book aims to make you prepared for these potential problems. You need to be informed about why a passive income can be dangerous and why you cannot take the term too literally, or you will lose out on all of your business.

Building a passive income business is a difficult process, and this book will help guide you through this in a practical and helpful way. If you have decided that you are up for the challenge and are still excited about this opportunity, then this book has the tools to kick off your new venture. You will need to do some research, such as knowing market demands and choosing the business that you would like to work with. You need to do this with the capability of sticking with it for the long term. This book will introduce you to some of the popular passive income markets where you will be able to make some good money, such as Kindle publishing, YouTube videos, and even blogging.

In order to give you some ideas about where to start, this book also includes the top 5 passive income options that are currently out there. These are options

that have a lot of potential to help you to take control of your life. Some options that are discussed in this chapter include: peer to peer lending, selling an informational product, and dividend investing. Being informed about these popular choices will give you a real basis in making your own decisions about your passive income business.

A passive income source is a great way for you to make some good money, but it is not as easy as you may have been told. Many companies will try to take your money and promise you the moon, but you have to be able to put in the time and the effort in order to make it big. This guidebook is not meant to scare you away from the idea of making a passive income. Rather, it is intended to help you to have all of the information you need, and to be prepared so you actually stand a chance in order to make a great income with this source. Use the information in this guidebook in order to make the right decisions and get started on the right path to passive income today.

Chapter 1 : Do what Successful people do

Making a passive income is something that many people dream about. They have heard stories about how passive income earners are able to just sit back and make money with very little work. And this is where a lot of people end up getting stuck; they believe these stories and are not prepared for all of the actual work they need to put in to make the money they want. This first chapter is going to spend some time exploring the idea of passive income, explaining who can make a passive income, and identifying some of the traits that you will find in those who are successful in making a passive income.

What is Passive Income?

To start this guidebook, we need to look at what exactly a passive income is in order to understand what is being discussed. A passive income is one that is received on a pretty regular basis, but one that is not going to require as much effort in order to maintain it. This does not mean that no work is going to be involved and, especially in the beginning, you will be putting in more work than many people do for their regular incomes; you will also be taking a big risk. And even when the income is secured, you will still need to put in the work. Many people think that passive incomes just involve a few hours of work and that is it for them to start making their millions. This is where they are going to fail and run into issues because they are not prepared for all of the hard work. At the same time, a passive income is different from a regular income in the sense that the money is not earned through your constant, active participation in a particular form of labor or service.

According to the IRS, passive income is defined as coming from just two sources, even though it is possible to earn it from other sources as well; these

are just categorized under other sources when it comes to tax time. The two sources are trade activities in which the person does not materially participate and from rental activity. Other governmental institutions recognize passive income as the income that is obtained with capital growth. Either way, the money you make from passive income is still going to be taxable just like other income sources you come across.

There are many different types of income that could be classified as passive income. Some examples include:

Any income that you make off of your property. This could include rent from apartments, several units, or even your home; farming; or leasing out your land.

Earnings that you might get from a business where you are not directly involved as the owner. You might own the business, but someone else is running the business and dealing with its day-to-day running.

Interest that you make from your bank account. Usually this is not going to be high enough to be taxable because you will be lucky if you make a few dollars from the transaction. There are a few banks that offer higher rates and if you invest wisely, it is possible to make more.

Royalties—this can be from a patent, publishing a book, making a software product or other intellectual property, or even writing a song. You might have put in the work to produce the piece, but you are not actually doing work while the money is being made, so it is considered passive income.

Earnings from posting advertisements. This is kind of a confusing one. To do this you need to own a website where interesting stories, pictures, and other information is posted. If you have a large enough following,

other businesses may pay you to put an advertisement about them up. You will have to keep up the content of your website, but you will not be doing any work on the advertisements, so you are making a passive income.

Interest that comes from sources such as bonds or stocks. These can offer you a lot of good income if you make good choices about them, but there is always the possibility that you might suddenly lose a lot of money in the process as well.

Any of these can be considered passive income. As you can see, you are still going to need to put in quite a bit of work in order to make this kind of income. Yes, you can make money off of royalty checks, but you would have to put in the work to write a book, find a publisher, and market the book in order to make any money. You can make a good income from rental properties, but you have to worry about filling the buildings, cleaning them, upkeep, and going around and purchasing new properties if you would want more income. It is all going to take some work! Overall, it is the method of getting the money, as well as what happens when you get the money, that will determine if it is a passive income or not.

Who Can Make Passive Incomes?

In all honesty, anyone can make a passive income, but a lot of people are just not suited to the risk, hard work, and the time that needs to be committed in order to be successful. Many people who attempt to earn a passive income find that they fail with it because they are just not prepared to do the work or invest the money. They think that just a little bit of their time will be sufficient in order to get the money that they deserve, so that they can go sailing around the world and live the life of the rich and famous. While this is a nice little dream,

it really is not a reality.

The people who make a good living on passive incomes are the ones who are willing and ready to put in the hard work that is required. They are not the ones who sit back and expect the money to just be handed to them, and they are not the ones who will be duped into giving up all of their money by flashing lights and a lot of big words on a webpage. They are the ones who can think outside the box to the bigger picture, who will put in the work, and who will take the chances that no one else is willing to take in order to make a good income. They are also the ones who realize that they are never going to be able to take a break from their work, but that the reward, as well as the freedom, are so worth it. Theoretically anyone could be like this, but the truth is that most people are either not hard enough workers, have trouble thinking critically, or just do not have the ambition to get the work done in order to make the passive income that they are looking for.

How Successful People Make Passive Incomes

So now that you know a little bit more about passive incomes, you might be curious to find out who the people are that are able to successfully earn money in this way. It sounds like such a great idea, but if it were so easy to do, then everyone would be on the bandwagon hoping to make their millions. And while many people do try to get a passive income, most of them are not ready for all of the work entailed in order to be successful. When they hear about passive income, they think that they will just put in a few hours of work and then sit back while the money just rolls in. As explained above, this is just not the way that these things work, no matter how much we might wish it was. This section will look at some of the key character traits and mindsets of those who earn a successful passive income.

Go Getters

The first trait that you will notice in successful passive earners is that they are go-getters. They are not the kind of people who just sit there on the job and hope that good things will come their way, or complain when things go wrong. They are the ones who are out there getting their hands dirty, who like to work, and who are able to take control when opportunity strikes. Earning this kind of income is sometimes scary in the beginning for a lot of people because it is not always guaranteed. Many people might not like working for a boss they do not like, but they do like the predictability that comes with going to work each day and bringing home a reliable paycheck that can help support their family. This is not something that can be promised with a passive income.

This is a part of the tradeoff. Yes, you have to give up some of the predictability that you love with your regular income, but with some hard work you might be able to bring in a lot more money than you would from your old job, plus you get to be your own boss. There might be a lot of strange hours, but you would have more control over them and could make it to the big games or the concerts that you used to miss due to work. Even though the possibilities might seem wonderful, it is a big risk for a lot of people and it does not always pan out the way that it is promised. This is what keeps people at their regular jobs doing the same thing over and over again.

For those who are ready to jump in and get a passive income, this is a risk that is worth taking. They want to see the big rewards and are not worried about the risk as much as others. They will see the opportunity and they will jump right at it. They know that they will achieve the success that they want as long as they keep working hard and follow the right leads.

Independent Workers

If you are not able to work on your own without a lot of guidance and hand-holding along the way, you will find that a passive income method is not the

right way for you to make money. When you are working to make a passive income, you are pretty much your own boss. This means that you do not have someone breathing down your neck telling you when the due dates are and where you need to be. You get to choose the hours and the work. Some people like this and others will find that they are lost and do not know what they are doing. If you are one of the latter, you should really stay away from this kind of work because those who are not able to keep themselves motivated and working hard will not be successful with this method.

There are some pros and cons to this kind of income source. First, you will be making your own money and will not have to share the credit with anyone else. This is appealing to some people who are tired of doing all of the work for a boss who takes all of the credit. You will also be able to keep all of the money that you earn without someone else dipping into your pockets. The issue is that when a mistake is made, you will be the one who is to blame and you will not be able to share that blame with someone else. To some people, this is hard to do and so they would rather just stick with their current job.

Passion

You have to love what you are doing and the freedom that it can give you if you are looking to be someone who is successful at passive incomes. Anyone who is looking to be an entrepreneur is going to be really passionate about the things that they are doing and this is a big reason that they are so successful in their work. When you are passionate about something, you are more likely to work hard at it. You want to see how far you can take it and you will always be able to find something new and exciting that will draw you towards the work again. Those who are working with streams of passive income are going to have a lot of the same passions as other entrepreneurs, since they will also be striking out on their own. The passion is the thing that is going to keep you moving forward, even when things get a little rough, you lose a little money, or when the work is not always that much fun.

Self-Motivated

When you are making your own passive income, you are not going to have a boss looking over your shoulder telling you what to do all of the time. You will not necessarily have clients who are telling you what they want done either. You are going to be the one who is in charge of getting the work done. While you may not get in trouble if you forget to do something or don't finish the work, you will not make the money that you were hoping for and this can be just as bad.

Whether or not this is a problem is going to depend on the type of person you are. Some people love to be on their own and to be their own boss. They love how it feels when they get to do all of the work, figure things out for themselves, decide when they work and how much they make. They are motivated enough to keep on going through it all, even when they are unsure of how things will turn out. Other people might like the structure of having a boss. They might not be able to stay motivated without someone there to tell them how things work and where they should be all of the time. If you are one of the former, then making a passive income might be a smart move for you; if you are one of the latter, it is probably better if you stick with the job you are currently in.

Basic Computer Skill

This does not mean that you have to be an advanced IT person who can hack into any system and take over a government, but it sure is an advantage if you know your way around a computer and understand how it all works. The computer is going to be your best friend when it comes to making a passive income and if the idea of using one makes you break out in a sweat, it is probably best to stick with your 9 to 5 job or consider learning some computer skills. You should at least have some of the basic computer skills handy that

you would have learned in school such as searching, composing notes, emailing, and browsing in order to get things started. Being able to build your own website and a few other advanced skills can also really help, depending on the form of passive income that you are going for. If you do not have any experience with using a computer, you are really putting yourself at a disadvantage.

Problem Solvers

When working for a passive income, there are going to be times when you will need to be able to get out of a tough situation and figure out the best solution. The issues that arise are going to depend on the kind of passive income stream you are going for. You need to not get caught up in the work or start to get anxious and worried when problems arise, because this is not how you will get things done. When bad things happen, you need to be able to jump up and take care of the issue the best that you can before it gets any worse. If you are good at taking initiative and fixing issues in this way, then a passive income may be an ideal income source for you.

Can Predict the Trends

Those who are really successful with making a passive income are the ones who are able to predict what is going to happen next and what will be successful. Often those who fail with making a passive income do so because they are jumping on a trend that has actually been around for a while and money has already been made off of it. To be really successful, you need to be ahead of the game and to be able to see things in a new way in order to jump on new trends.

When it comes to many of the passive income options, it is pretty important

that you are able to correctly predict how people are going to purchase things in the future and what a good idea looks like. For example, affiliate marketers might be able to guess what will sell the best over a few quarters and then make a profit, but if they guess wrongly, they will lose out on making some good money. Take a look at the trends in the market that you are going into and decide what is most likely to happen in the future ,so you can expand upon and make money from.

They Have Knowledge

Some of the people who go into passive income jobs will just naturally have a lot of knowledge, either in general or about the market they are trying to go into. This does not mean that you will not have success if you are not naturally gifted with prior knowledge. It is still possible to get some success in this stream by learning on-the-go. Either way, you need to have some knowledge in your field and to be able to see what is going to come in the future. You also need to be able to identify if something is a good idea or not. You should not be making a lot of guesses in the field you are choosing; while you might be able to get some lucky breaks, this is not a good way to run a business and you will find that you are ultimately going to fail in a big way. Sure, you might make some mistakes, but you should be working towards building your knowledge in such a way that these mistakes are minimal.

Before you get started on a new passive income stream, you should make sure to get as much information as possible about it. If you grew up around this kind of thing, such as having parents who rented out apartment buildings and you are going into rentals, you are at an advantage. If you do not have any past experience, get out there and learn as much as you possibly can. Read online, go visit the library, talk to someone in the field, look around at available apartments in your area, and pretty much do anything that you can think of to become an expert in the field.

These are just a few of the traits that are noticeable in the people who choose

to go into passive income fields. It is a great way to make some money and be your own boss, but it is not always as easy as the advertisements and other people might try to lead you to believe. You will have to have the right mindset, be willing to take some risks, and be ready to put in the hard work to see success. If these personality traits sound like you now, or may be the kind of person you are willing to put in the effort to become, then passive income may be the right choice for you!

Chapter 2 : The Truth about Passive Income

Many people have heard about passive incomes. They hear the stories about how people are able to become rich in no time and often they think that very little, if any, work is involved. Honestly, these are the kinds of people who get taken advantage of when it comes to the passive income game and often they will be the ones who get in a lot of trouble and lose all of their money. These beliefs are prevalent in so many people that the market is becoming saturated with new people who are excited to make the money. However, since many of these people are not ready for the work and investment involved in earning a passive income, they will soon drop out and just those who are serious about the work will stick with it.

This chapter is going to talk about some of the common thoughts about passive income that most people have, but which are usually way off the mark. It will then go into some of the realities about passive income and the hard work that is involved in the process.

Common Misconceived Thoughts about Passive Income

As mentioned above, there are a lot of different thoughts which people have when it comes to earning a passive income. They may have heard some things from their friends or family about passive income. Often this information is from a friend of a friend, so it may not be based on first or even second-hand experiences. The fact is, this is actually better than the information many other people are going on; they might be relying on something they heard in a

YouTube video or from a website about all of the benefits that come from passive income. This is dangerous because most of the claims made on these kinds of mediums are false. They lead you to believe the work is easy, but often they are just trying to take your money.

Because of all of the confusion about what passive income is and how it works, there are many notions about it that are false. This section is going to look at some of the misconceived thoughts about passive income that might be the reason why so many people fail when trying to gain one.

Easy

The first thought that most people have about passive incomes is that they are easy. This might be a combination of the things they have heard in the past, as well as connotations that are brought up by the name itself. Most people have the idea that when they are making a passive income, they will take a few hours to do the work, pay a little bit of money, and then they will be all set to make a lot of money for the rest of their lives without having to do anything else except receive their checks each month. And this is the reason that so many of them get taken advantage of by the flashing lights on a website.

Passive income is more like an alternative way for you to make money. It does not mean that you will not be working in order to get money; you just will not be going to a traditional 9 to 5 job in order to get a paycheck. You have to be able to multi-task, problem solve, and see trends in the market in order to get ahead of the game and keep the money coming in all of the time. The work will never be done—this is another reason that a lot of people fail. They are not ready for the risk, the dedication, and the time that they have to put into the entire process in order to make it big. Learn from their mistakes and you will have a much better chance of success.

Very Profitable

One reason that a lot of people will get into passive income is that they think they will be able to make a lot of money in a very short amount of time. While it is possible to make some good money with a passive income, it is not going to be something that will make you a million dollars overnight. It is something that will take you a lot of time and effort before you can even make a little bit of money. In fact, you might find that you will need to invest some of your own money to even get to that point.

It is important to remember that you need to be careful about what you are investing your money in when trying to earn a passive income. Yes, there are times that you will need to input some money to make a profit, but this does not mean you should not think it through and just hand out money left and right. For example, if you stumble across a website that you have never heard of which promises to give you the secrets to making millions a month if you just give them $200, you should probably stay away. They are just going to take your money and send you a video to convince you to send them more. They have found a good way to make a passive income by becoming rich off the desperation of others without being willing to put in the work like you are. On the other hand, if you want to start making a passive income on apartment buildings, you will have to put in some money to purchase a property, advertise the space, maintain it, and so on. Both situations involve money being spent at the outset, but one is going to make you money while the other is just going to lose you money.

If you are willing to put in the time and effort that is needed, it is possible to make a very good income by doing this. But it is not just going to happen overnight, and you will have to work quite a bit to achieve it. Plus, the work will continue and you will still have to show up and do something in order to make the passive income. For example, let’s go back and look at the apartment income option. You cannot purchase the apartments, clean them up, fill the vacancies, and then walk away and still make money. You have to go in and fix things if they break, answer questions and complaints, keep it looking nice, and fill up vacancies when someone moves out. Or you could get away with not doing this work by hiring someone else or letting the apartments fall into

disarray. However, choosing this option is just going to end up with you having empty apartments you cannot fill and which are a money pit.

As you can see, it is possible to make quite a bit of money from passive income, but it is not a get rich quick scheme and it is something you will actually need to work hard at in order to achieve. However, it is a way to get some freedom and earn some financial success if you are able to do it in the correct way and work hard to get ahead.

Little Work

This is one of the areas where people are most likely to fail. They might be ready to dedicate some of the risk and some of the monetary investment, but they just are not ready to put in the time. They might have heard from someone that making a passive income is easy and that other than a few hours of work, they are not going to need to do anything for the paychecks to keep coming in. They think a passive income is like a hobby or something they can just spend some time on when they want to. When they get to actually doing the work, they are amazed at the effort they really need to go through in order to make any money. In some case, it’s much less money than they were promised.

There is a lot of work that will need to be done in order to actually make the income you are looking for. It is not as easy as you might like and you will find that it might even be harder than the work you are doing. Plus, with the risks so high, you may not be able to make the same kind of money. It takes a certain kind of person and a certain kind of situation in order to make it big with a passive income, and although it would be nice to just go home and have a big fat check waiting for you without having to do the work, it just is not a reality that most people get to live with. If you want to make the money, you have to do the work.

The Reality of Making Passive Income

As you can probably imagine by this point, the realities of making a passive income are not as nice and rosy as many companies would like you to believe. If you find a company that is offering to help you make an easy passive income or tell you that there will not be much work involved, it might be in your best interests to run the other way! Anyone who has actually done passive income and who is not trying to steal all of your money will be able to tell you that it is a lot of work and that you will need to put in the time and effort in order to make it all come together.

There are some realities that will come with making a passive income. Most people do not start to realize these until they have started on their project. Once they get started, they realize it is more work or money than they are willing and able to do or pay. Here are some of the crucial realities that come with making a passive income which you should know and understand before you get out there and start. These are not meant to put you off trying for a passive income. Rather, these tips are a way for you to understand what is actually going to happen with this stream of income, so that you can get those thoughts of easy money out of your head. It is possible to make money, but it is not going to be handed to you. If you are not ready for the risk, investment, and hard work, it is better to know that ahead of time before it ends in heartache.

Some of the realities you should be prepared for when it comes to passive income include:

It is not always easy — you will have to work hard in order to get the things that you want out of this source of income. The money is not going to be handed to you and you will not be able to sail away on your boat while others do all the hard work. If someone is telling you this,

they just want to make money off you and you are the one financing their expensive trips all over the world. You have to be dedicated to the work and ready to put in the hours. Think of it as your own little business; you wouldn't expect the business to be done and earning money in a short amount of time, and neither will your stream of passive income.

It is hard work — get ready for the long days and late nights. Unlike your regular job, there are no set hours and if something needs to be done, you have to take care of it. This is not a good venture for someone who just wants to be lazy or have things done for them. Sure, you can do it this way, but you probably will not be that happy with the results you get.

There will be an investment — this can mean many different things. You may need to invest your time, your energy, your money, or all three. But please be careful where the money goes. Just because someone is asking for your money does not mean you will be given everything as promised.

Risk — there are a lot of risks that come from making a passive income, and this is not always about the loss of money, although that could be a factor. It is risky to give up your current steady stream of income in order to make something happen. It is risky to give up the security you are used to, a job in this economy, and the health benefits or retirement fund you may have at your job. You may fail at the end; many people end up not seeing the results they were looking for. You have to realize that there is a risk in this kind of thing and without the right confidence and the right knowledge about the subject you may increase your risk of failure.

Potential of high income — you may be able to make some good money from getting a passive income, but not everyone will. Some people will back out before any money is spent. Others will lose a little bit of money in the process, while some will lose it all. Still others are going to find that they are making a little bit of money but not really enough to give

up their other jobs or to get far ahead. It is those lucky ones who are able to plan ahead and make things work that are going to be able to potentially make a lot of money from all of this. Making a good passive income is going to take work. It is not always going to come to everyone who tries, but it is something that can happen.

As you can see, the realities of a passive income are quite a bit different than the thoughts and notions most people have about it. As mentioned above, these are not meant to scare, but to give you have a clearer idea on what a passive income entails so that rather than relying on the wrong information given by others, you will be more prepared for the work and for making the decision on whether this is the right income stream for you to pursue in the first place.

Chapter 3: Passive Income: The Easy Way to Make Money?

As explained a little bit above, a passive income is not always what it seems. Many of the people who fail with doing this kind of income will do so because the work is completely different from what they expected. To start, they may have thought there was hardly any work and been amazed that others did not jump at the opportunity to make a lot of money without a lot of effort. This chapter is going to look at some more of the realities about making a passive income. First it will address some challenges that come with a passive income and then there will be a nice uplifting part about how you can actually make a profit or succeed with a passive income if you put in the time and effort that is needed.

The Emotion Requirements For Making Passive Income

Making a passive income is not something that is always the easiest. You should know that by now. This section will spend some time explaining some of the more difficult aspects of earning a passive income.

Hard Work

First, making a passive income is a lot of work. This cannot be reiterated

enough. In reality, it can be quite a bit more than the work you are putting in at your current job. There is no room to have many days off. There is no room for you to have a lazy day where you do the bare minimum. You won't have the option of pushing the blame off onto someone else or asking another coworker if they can help you out if the work is not getting done. Sure, you can have days when you slack off and don't get as much done as you should, but all this will do is harm you in terms of the amount of money you are able to earn. You can slack off as much as you want, but doing this too much will mean you might have to go back and beg for your old job in order to earn any money!

Instead of being as easy as many people believe it is, a passive income is going to take a lot of work and dedication on your part. But if you can put in this effort, you are sure to see the results in the form of a good income.

Time

When you are going into the field of passive income, you need to be prepared for the amount of time you will be spending at work. Many newbies to this income source think they just have to put in a little bit of hard work in the beginning and then they can sit back and relax. This is something you can do, but it is going to backfire. Soon the competition will have gotten the better of you and you will have lost your source of income.

Let's look at a few examples. First, we will look at rental properties. You have to put in the work in order to find the buildings, buy them, get them fixed up so they look nice and are ready for people to live in, and then you need to advertise and make sure you can fill them up. But the work is not done there. You will have to keep working to make sure the buildings are maintained, that you can answer tenants' complaints, collect the rent, fill up buildings when someone moves out, and even purchase more properties if you would like to make more. The process is never ending and if you just stop after the tenants have moved in, you will soon find that the income source is gone.

Here is another example. Say you have decided to go with Kindle publishing in order to make the passive income you want. You may have found a niche that no one else has gone into and written an amazing book. The work is not done yet. You have to market the book, make sure others know about it, and even write another book to keep the momentum going. You have to do all of this because soon others are going to come out and write even better books on the same topic and the market will be saturated in no time; then there will be no more money for you to make.

Both of these examples show it is possible to make a passive income, but the work is not going to be easy. You have to work hard and keep working in order to keep the income coming in.

Think Outside the Box

Finally, if you want to make some money when you are working with passive income, you need to be able to think outside the box. If you are doing something that everyone else is doing, you will never make any money in the business; it is likely that the market is all filled up and there is no more money to be made. You need to come up with a good idea that you will be able to make some money on, and you need to be able to think outside the box to do it.

One reason a lot of people fail at making a passive income is that they are not able to think outside the box. They are not sure how to come up with a good idea to keep things going with the income or they just go after an idea that has been around for a long time, unable to make any money. Figure out something that is new and exciting and you will be amazed at how much you are able to make through passive income.

Passive Income: Benefits of Having Passive Income Streams

By this point, you are probably wondering if there is anything good you will be able to get out of a passive income. You may see that there are a lot of pitfalls or maybe you think the work is too hard. You might have actually been scared away by this point! If you are that scared so quickly, then passive income is not the right choice for you. On the other hand, if this is still something that interests and excites you, here is the part you have been waiting for. Here are some of the benefits you can receive when you make a passive income.

Potential

There is a lot of potential for making money when you go into passive incomes, as long as you are smart about it. Just handing over your money to someone who promises you a big fortune or blindly following a bad idea is not going to make you the money you are looking for, but some hard work is sure to help you reach the point that you want.

There are a lot of people who have been able to make a good income from working with passive income streams. They are the ones who were able to think outside the box and come up with an idea that made them rich. The great thing is that once you start to make a good income from this source, it is easy to roll it into some more income-making options. For example, once you get established with some apartment buildings, you can roll the money into purchasing and filling up more or you can use that money to try out a new way to make an income.

Be Your Own Boss

Many people are tired of going into work each day and making money for someone else. They feel like they are underappreciated and someone else is getting rich off the work they are doing, while they themselves can barely make ends meet. Many of the people who fit into this category are the ones who find the idea of a passive income to be the most appealing. They like the idea of being their own boss, taking control of their lives, and having the ability to make as much money as they want.

There are many benefits to being your own boss. You no longer need to answer to someone else or put up with a bad boss like you used to in order to get a paycheck. There is no longer the need to meet their deadlines, take the heat when they do something wrong, or deal with a horrible person who never should have been promoted. When you gain control of your job, it is much easier to have freedom and do the things you want.

Those who are going to be successful with passive income are going to find that being their own boss is a huge perk. They like being in charge and they do not need the guidance of someone else to get things done. If you are scared of taking charge and doing your own thing, this income source is not the right one for you. On the other hand, if you crave excitement and freedom, you should check out the options available for you.

Flexible Hours

When you are working on a passive income, you might find that some of the hours are more flexible. This of course does not mean that you can just pick to work an hour on one day and then take the rest of the week off, but it does provide you with a little more wiggle room than what you will find with some of the other sources of income.

The hours of a passive income are unique. In the beginning, you will find that you are working a lot more than you probably did at your original job in order to keep up and get everything done. Even with these intense hours, including a lot of hours that can go late into the night, you can still manage to find time to move things around and be somewhere else. For example, if your child has an appointment in the middle of the day, you might find that, while earning a passive income, it is easier to stop and go to the appointment and pick up the work later if needed. Often your regular job will not have that kind of flexibility, causing you to miss out or have scheduling conflicts.

As you get your passive income source going, you will find that the flexibility is even more present, especially if you have done your job right. You will still have to put in the hard work, but you will be able to change around the hours in order to spend time with your family or get other things done. You will not be able to walk away from the job for long periods of time, but it will be possible to have a life outside of work.

Time With FamilyAnd Friends

Everyone wishes they could spend more time with their families. They do not like missing out on important conversations, fun events and milestones, or even just the day-to-day things that occur in their family. But this is a reality that a lot of people have to face when they are working a regular job. The work might come home with them and get in the way rather than them just doing the work and then getting to go home when they are done. For a lot of people, work takes up a large part of their lives and this can really cut into their family life.

When you are working with a passive income stream, you will have more of the time you need and want in order to hang out with your family and the others you love. Your life will no longer just be about your job, even though you will need to spend a lot of time working hard to see it succeed. You will

have more time to think about other things now, and that includes spending more time with your family.

With passive income, you are the one in charge of your own destiny. You get to decide how hard you want to work and when it is time to take a few days off and see your family. The more successful you are with the endeavor and the better you plan it out, the more likely it is that you can start to choose your own hours and make them work for your family's needs. If you are tired of doing work for someone else and never getting to see your family, a passive income is a good option for you to consider.

Choice of Career

Sometimes the thing that you want to do for the rest of your life is not as cut and dry as going to work for a company. There are a lot of career choices, but there are even more when you look into a passive income. It is difficult to be a writer in a regular 9-5 job, but with a passive income, there are a lot of opportunity to write self-help books or other genres for eBooks and such. You could own your apartment buildings and make money that way. You could purchase land and turn around and sell it. With a passive income, it is much more likely that you are actually doing something you really love rather than relying on some other company to notice you and give you a paycheck each month.

Opportunities

And finally, there are a lot more opportunities when it comes to making a passive income. The real world does not have all of the chances you may have been told about when you were growing up. Sometimes having a college education is just not going to be enough in order to get the things that you

would like out of your career. When you take a different approach and try out a passive income, you may be surprised by all of the opportunity that comes your way. You can actually find something that goes along with your skills, and if you do the right research and work hard, you might find that your income becomes substantial, which will make the work itself even better!

As you can see, there are a lot of benefits from making a passive income. Understanding both the good and the bad and figuring out what they all mean for you can help you to make the best decision before jumping in. Use the good aspects of a passive income as a motivation to put in the hard work needed to avoid the problems that can arise with this source of income.

Chapter 4: The Pitfalls of Making a Passive Income

As you know by this stage of the book, it truly is critical to enter into your passive income venture equipped with a practical and realistic mindset. It is easy to get carried away by the buzz surrounding a passive income. Many of us have spent countless hours daydreaming about a way of earning money that allows us freedom and the ability to follow our passions. As described above, a passive income can provide you with this kind of lifestyle, but you need to be prepared. Don't be one of those foolish people who rushes in, jumping on the bandwagon unprepared, wondering why they didn't do this years ago and why only a few people are actually going after it. These people are ill-informed and nowhere near ready for the hard times that will befall them when they are not able to make money or they lose out on their life savings. This chapter is going to talk about some of the pitfalls that come with working on a passive income so you can avoid falling into these traps. While there are a lot of benefits, like what was discussed in the previous chapter, it is not all fun and games and a lot of other things can happen that you were not planning on. With this information in mind, you can be a success story rather than a cautionary tale!

Pitfalls of a Passive income

With the many great benefits of getting a passive income, there are also some things that you will need to watch out for. Here are some of the most common pitfalls of making a passive income that you should be wary of.

Might Lose Money

Yes, it is possible to lose some money when you are working on making a passive income. This is not something that will always happen, but it is possible. Sometimes this will just be the money that you invest into a new idea, such as purchasing some land or property before you sell it for a profit. Other times it is going to be because you were taken advantage of and you will never see that money again. Let's look at both of these situations to get a better idea of what this means.

First, let's look at investing money before you make a profit. If you are purchasing property, land, or even materials in order to get started on the idea you have at hand, you will still be losing some money, especially if the idea fails. These are not necessarily bad moves to make, though. It is usually a good investment to put your money in real estate, but if you purchase in a bad market or pay too much, you could end up losing out on the money that you just spent and you could even end up in an even bigger hole. It all depends on the way you approach it and if you are smart enough to make it work.

Many people are scared about the money they might lose, even if it is in a legitimate way. They are worried that they will never get it back, which is always a possibility if things do not go the right way. They just might not be cut out for losing this much money on this big of a risk or they might be willing to do it but don't have the financial means. For example, if they have a family with kids, it is not likely they have thousands of dollars laying around for their venture.

Before you start on a venture like this, you will need to make sure you have a little bit of money stowed away. Some of these options involve a big investment, such as purchasing property, and if you are going full speed ahead with the idea, you may not have another income source for a while in order to pay the bills or make it through. Saving up the money, or choosing another

option that does not cost as much, is often the best way to ensure you are on good footing when you get started.

Second, you may be taken advantage of. This is a bad situation and one you should be especially careful about. While it is possible that you can lose out on a lot of money in the first situation, that is more likely to be because you did a poor job or did not do your research rather than the idea being a bad one. With this second example, you are taken advantage of right away because someone fooled you or you just did not listen to your own intuition. A smooth talker can convince lots of people! There is no shame in falling into such traps if you're innocent or unaware of the possibility. Luckily for you, you are now informed about this possibility and should be aware of those trying to take advantage of you. Listen to your intuition, do your research, and you should be able to avoid this kind of encounter.

Remember, in reality, you do not need any special tools or information that cost money to make it with passive income. All of the information you need will be available at a library, from a few books, and from talking to someone who has done it. Spending hundreds on a special kit will never help you out and is just going to get you into a cycle of losing more money.

Bad Ideas

Another pitfall you may come against is that you may have a bad idea. We know you're smart, but you're also inexperienced, so some mistakes will be made in the learning process. If the idea you are using for making a passive income is not good, it does not matter how much time, energy, or money you put into it. You are going to end up failing in the long run. It is better to take the time to find out a good idea and think it all through. Otherwise, you are really just setting yourself up for some hard failure. When you are doing your research, take the time to figure out where others might have failed in the past and which ideas may not be as profitable as you would have thought. This can help you to avoid coming across the same issues in the future.

No Steady Paycheck

While you are working on getting the passive income stream set up, you are likely to have no steady paycheck. Some people are able to keep up with their regular income source and work on the side with the passive income depending on the idea, but this is usually not the norm. You might have to completely quit your current job in order to devote yourself to the new endeavor, or at least find a new job that is often lower in pay and hours in order to pursue your dreams. There are a lot of issues that can come with not having the steady income you are used to.

For some people, this is the main reason they will not choose to pursue a passive income. If they have a mortgage, bills, debt, or children and a family to take care of, it is usually not possible for them to take the leap and try to make some money through passive income. You might have to go a bit of time without an income source and just live off your savings or the income of your partner if you have one. This can often be difficult, and when unexpected expenses come up, you may be at a loss for how to cover them. For this reason, many people choose to just stick with the secure job they have, even if they are really passionate about the idea and think they could make it.

No More Blaming

When you are making a passive income, there is no one else you can blame if something goes wrong. If you make a client mad, you cannot hand over the blame to your supervisor or another employee who might have been working on the project with you. If you have someone who is not satisfied, you have to deal with it. If things are not going the way you want, you have to be the one to change things. If you do not get the work done, that is your problem, and if

it is not going to get done, you will not be paid. You have to take the blame, but of course that also means you get all the credit when things go the way they are supposed to. Some people do not mind being the one in charge, while others need to have that supervisor or other person in charge in order to make it through the day.

No Health or Other Benefits

Just like with the paycheck, you will need to give up the health benefits and other perks of having a full time job. Many positions in companies offer you a good health package for the family, retirement plans, vacation days, and other benefits in addition to the security of a paycheck. When you give up your job in order to pursue a passive income, you will also be giving up other benefits you are used to enjoying. You might decide it is not worth doing this in order to make the passive income because these benefits are nice to have in life. You might also determine that it is worth going without those benefits in order to be your own boss or get ahead in the game. It is up to you to decide which is the most important, as long as you understand how this will be affected when you are working on passive income.

The Trap of Making Passive Income Passively

In some circumstances, having a passive income can be difficult and even dangerous. This occurs when this mode of income stream is not the right fit for your business. Some of the danger is going to come from the fact that most people think a passive income means they can just passively sit by and still make money. For those who know this is not true (which should be you by now!), there is no danger because they will continue to work hard; on the other hand, those who believe this will run into trouble, even if they initially work hard or had a good knowledge of the work to start with. Being aware of the potential dangers that could arise as a result of using a passive income in your business will help you decide if it is the right move for you.

Being passive does not put you ahead

If you want to stay ahead of the competition, you are not going to be able to be passive. While you are sitting back and hoping the income is coming in, you will see that the competition is coming onto your turf and actively going after customers; and they will be winning. Even if you come up with a new idea that no one has thought about yet, if you do not stay on top of the game after a little success, someone is going to beat you to the punch line and create a better product. You cannot just sit back and hope the whole thing is going to work out for you. Instead, you need to always be working, creating, evolving, and doing what needs to be done in order to be ahead of the game, or the competition is going to beat you.

Keeping Customers Takes Work

Your customers are finicky and they want to be wooed. If they think you are ignoring them, they are going to feel neglected and could easily betray you for another competitor who promises to be there for them. Yes, this might seem like a lot of work, but it is something you have to do in order to keep your loyal customers and keep the money coming in. It is not possible to sit on your butt and hope they will keep handing you money. When there are so much competitions to fight against and so many markets, you might only be able to make money by offering customers your time and your attention. Remember, the customers are the ones who pay your salary, and without them, you have nothing.

Money Doesn’t Just Show Up

If you think that money is going to just show up, you are too passive. A passive income still means you need to get out there and do the work, but most people forget about this memo. They might spend a little time developing their talents, and then hope it all works out in the end. Often it doesn't and that is when things can get bad. You have to be actively working at all times.

Purpose and Passion do not come from Passivity

One of the best ways you can get customers to choose your product over another is to show them the passion and purpose you have for your business. Have you ever been around a salesperson who shows no interest in the job they are doing? They might try to sell you something, but you can tell they are not into it or that they just do not care. You might purchase the product because you really need it, but often you might walk away or find someone else. On the other hand, when you are near someone who really loves the work they are doing, believes in themselves, and believes they are able to help out others, it is almost impossible to walk away without the product.

You need to be like the second person. It is up to you to get out of the rut and not be passive, but active. Be the second person, the one who can convince almost anyone to purchase their product and hand over their money. When you are not able to do this, it is hard to make a living and you are more likely to fail. There is a passionate reason why you got into the passive income business, so use that original spark to keep things going and convince customers you are the very best at what you do.

While passive incomes are not always exactly what people think they are, there is still a lot of potential that comes with them. Staying in touch with your passion and the reasons you got into the passive income game in the first place will help you to remain active and be successful at what you do in order to reap the rewards.

Chapter 5: Building a Passive Income Business

If you have determined that doing a passive income is a good idea for your needs, then it is time to get started. You have to be in the right frame of mind and know what is going on in order to build up your own business and make the passive income that you desire. This chapter explains how to build a passive income and some of the things that you should consider when getting started.

Knowing Market Demands

The first thing you will need to do is know the market demand in your area of interest. This is important because you need to be able to tell what a good idea is and if people will actually purchase your product. It probably is not a good idea to write another diet book, unless you have some extraordinary information or a new diet plan, because there are just so many diet books already out there.

Let’s start with the basics. A market demand is the total purchase amount of a product within the specified demographic. You can split up the demographic according to things like gender or age. Being able to assess the market demand for your given niche is important because it is going to help you determine if it

is a good idea and if you are going to be able to grow in the industry. If you fail at putting together this important piece of the puzzle, it may mean that you are going into a market where you will not make any money and that you have more of a given product than can be sold. Without any profit, you will find that you will have to go back to your regular job because you are not able to survive on no or a loss of income. As you can see, getting to know market demands is critical if you want to actually be successful in your new career.

The way most people will evaluate the market demand is to implement an analysis of market demand. In this process, you will try to identify the consumers who are going to be attracted enough to purchase your particular product. This could take some time, depending on the product you are using, but it is actually going to help you out a lot. As a part of this analysis, the research will help you to figure out how large the market will be and if the idea is actually worth your time so you can determine if you will be able to start the new business.

This process is not something you will be able to do just once and be set. Market demand can often change. For example, think about this: if someone has already purchased your product, how likely is it that they will be willing to purchase it again? You need to constantly watch the market demand of your product. This will allow you to see when the trend is going down and when you might need to try something new or go a different way. For example, if you are in the line of selling lawnmowers, you might find that a special line of lawnmower blades can make a difference in the number of sales you are getting.

Not only will this process help you to figure out if your idea is any good, but it can also help you to predict trends. This allows you to beat out the competition and make even more money. This can also save you a lot of money because you can cut back on things if you think they are going to lose popularity and start switching over to something else in order to stay ahead of the curve.

Choose One Business and Stick With It

When you are in the business of passive income, it is important that you pick a business you like and stick with it, even if it starts to get difficult. There are a lot of people who feel they should be able to jump between as many endeavors as they want. While this is something you can do, it is not the best idea if you want to maximize the amount of money you will earn from this endeavor.

If you are not able to stick with just one kind of business, you will find that you are just stretching yourself too thin. You will have too much to get done and too many people trying to get your attention and it will become difficult to do it all. When you are spread out too thinly, it can become hard to do anything properly and all of the ventures might end up failing. To have the best results with a passive income, you need to just pick one kind of business and then stick with it. It is better to do one business properly than fail at several, after all.

Popular Passive Income Markets

There are many different ways you will be able to make a passive income. Each of them is going to call on different strengths and you may find that some are better suited for what you are able to do compared to the others. Here are some of the popular passive income streams that you can try out to make money.

Kindle Publishing

Kindle publishing offers a unique way to make money, especially if you are looking to become a writer. Anyone is able to publish with this company, as long as the book is formatted the right way. You can also write as many books as you like and publish them on this site. But just because you are writing a lot of books does not necessarily mean you will be making a lot of money. There are many other competitors out there trying to make money with this method as well. The trick is not necessarily to make a ton of books, but to find a few niches that do not have a lot of competition and go after them as much as you can. This involves writing quality content before the rest of the competition does and marketing the product better than others. Kindle publishing gives you the tricks that you need in order to get started; you just need to learn how to use it in the proper way and get ahead of the competition.

Making YouTube Videos

Another way you can make some money is with YouTube videos. These can be a lot of fun if you have a bright and bubbly personality and like to do things with video. YouTube allows anyone with a Gmail account to use their services. If you sign up with YouTube, you can make some money off the videos you are posting. People will often set up their own channels and use these as a basis for their moneymaking.

When you are making your YouTube videos, you need to be at the top of your game. You are not going to get many viewers, or much money, if you just go through the motions and put something together in a few minutes. Even on YouTube people are expecting some effort to be put into the videos they are watching, and if it feels cheap and lacking in quality, people will choose to watch something else. Take the time to think about good content you can put into the video that people will find valuable, find a good camera that can produce high-quality video, try a few different angles, and use the best keywords in order to find the viewers who would get the most value out of your video. If you are able to make a good video, and then turn it into a good series, you will find that it is a lot easier to make some money with this method.

Blogging

Another thing you can do in order to make some money through passive income is blogging. Blogging has gained a lot in popularity in the past decade, but it is still possible to make a good income from it if you work hard and go about it in a smart way. The best way to make some money from this is to find a niche others have not explored all that much. For example, there are thousands of blogs about parenting out there, but if you are able to find a new angle on this that others have not explored, such as gluten-free parenting or something like that, you may be able to gain an interested following looking for this kind of information.

For the most part, you are not going to be making that much money in the beginning with your blog. This might be something you should do on the side of your regular job at first because it can take some time for the money to begin to roll in. You have to write articles that are of interest to the reader and then you need to advertise yourself in order to let others know you are there. Even when you have done that, you will need to keep the content interesting; you will not make money if you write ten articles and then never write anything again. Your audience is will not any reason to stop and read again, so you will not get any fans or make any money from this.

Over time, if you do this right, you will start to build up a regular readership of people who will keep coming back every week or so in order to see what new posts you have. The type of people who come can vary between those who check back each day, those who know when you upload new content and check at that time, and those who will check up whenever they need some of the advice you give. You will need to get a strong readership before you are able to make some good money from this endeavor.

Once you have the readership, you will find that the rest is much easier. You will be able to go to various companies and advertisers and show them the

numbers you have. The higher the numbers you have, the more likely they are going to be willing to pay you in order to advertise for them. This could include things such as billboards on the webpage or even getting you to write some articles about their products for the consumer. Blogging can turn into a pretty good income, but you have to keep your blog interesting and have decent writing skills.

Affiliate Marketing

Finally, another way you can make some money with passive income is with affiliate marketing. For this method, you will be helping other companies sell the products and services they have. You will be able to pick which products you would like to sell; there are many opportunities available, even with big companies. The company will give you a link that you will then need to disperse in various ways so others will see it. You can put it on your blog, on social media, on other websites and so on. When a consumer clicks on your particular link and purchases the product, you will make some of the money from that purchase.

This idea takes a lot of time and commitment because you will have to post the link on a lot of different pages and hope you stand out from the rest of the crowd. It might seem obvious that you should pick the most popular product to sell, but there are going to be hundreds of others selling that same product and you only make money if the consumer clicks on your particular link. Sometimes picking a product that is worth less money or that is less known is a better way to go.

So there you have it, these are just a few ways that you can make some good money with passive income and get away from the 9 to 5 work. In the next chapter, we will look into 5 of the best ways to earn passive income. Those 5 ways of making passive income are efficient and easy to get started. I highly recommend them. I will also provide you some pros and cons of which type of passive income streams, so you can easily get started no matter what your

strengths are.

Chapter 6: 5 Best Passive Income Options

And now it is the time that you have been waiting for. If you have made it this far in this guidebook, you understand the way passive income works and are still interested in making this work for you. You like the idea of being your own boss and getting to choose the way that you live your life while still making some significant money. You might have a couple great ideas on how to get started and understand there are some big risks involved but it's also possible that you can make it big at the same time.

For those who are still interested in making a good passive income, here are the 5 best options that you can take in order to get started on the right foot.

Dividend Investing

The first option you may want to consider for making a passive income is dividend investing. This is a particular strategy for making money that is based on building up a nice collection of stocks that are considered safe. These stocks are not only safe, they are also ones that you will be able to make a considerable amount of money on through the whole year. Those who do this kind of investing in a wise way will be see a lot of cash go into their accounts each month on regular basis.

You will get the money from these dividends based on how much the company

which issued them makes. They will take from their profits and pay back the shareholders based on the amount that you have purchased of the company. The company will usually not disperse all of their profits. They might put half back into the company for uses like advertising, expanding, or other projects to make more money and then give the other half to their shareholders.

This is a great way to make a passive income because you really do not have to put in much work other than handing over some money to the company. But there is a reason that not everyone will do this; there is a high risk involved and you could easily lose all of the money and more that you put into the company if you do not choose wisely and are not paying attention to the economy and the company you purchased from. If you make smart decisions and pay attention to what you are doing, this is a good way to make a lot of money without having to do as much work. Just remember, high payouts mean high risks, and you could easily lose out more with this method than when compared with some of the other options explored in this guidebook.

You need to be a smart consumer when it comes to doing dividends. Many people fall into the trap of just purchasing the stock that has the highest dividend because they think that they will make the most money with this idea. While that might make sense on paper, you really need to do your research. Often the companies that are offering really high dividends are the ones that are having problems. For example, the business that is offering the dividend might have a ratio of paying out that is so high that it is threatening future growth, so you will lose money in the future, or a ratio of debt to equity that is so high that the company is going to sink, taking your money with it. It does not matter how high the dividend is if the company goes under and you do not make any money.

There are a few things that dividend investors should think about in order to determine if they are a good investment or if the stock is going to be a waste of their time. Some of the things that you should consider include:

- High dividend yield— although we just warned against investing in companies with too high a dividend yield, it is worth trying out a few

with higher yields because they can be useful ways to make more money. There are plenty of reputable companies who will offer you a good investment if you give them a chance. Just make sure to do your research to ensure that you are making the right decision. Look for stocks that have a dividend that is higher than the interest you will make on treasury bonds through the United States government, to make it worth your time.

High dividend coverage— this is a process that you can use in order to determine if a dividend is actually safe for you to make money from or if there is some danger of you getting cut. You can ask yourself a few questions to figure out how safe a particular investment is. Ask if the business earns their money from a large pool of businesses or does it all come from just one business? If it's the latter, this could mean that your money could be harmed if something happens to that one business. You should also ask how much of the company's profit is paid out to you and how much they are investing in themselves or putting back. It is a general rule that the amount of profits paid should not be more than 60 percent.

Qualified dividends— you will need to be aware of how the stock you are purchasing will be taxed, or you could lose money. Those who are just in it for the profit and quickly buy and sell stocks will find that they can be taxed pretty heavily. The government is looking for investors who will stay in the market for a long time so they tax less on those who remain in the market and more on those who are making a large profit by going through stocks like crazy. You can sometimes find stocks that will be taxed less by the government if you stick with them, which means more money in your pocket.

Basically, dividend investing is an excellent opportunity if you are looking for a way to make some good money either on the side or in place of your current job. It is important that you are careful with which companies you invest in. Your profits are going to be tied to the company, so the more money they make, the more you will make, but it also works in reverse, and you can lose out by quite a bit. Doing your research and understanding the market and its trends can help you to make the right decision for your needs and to make

some money from this strategy.

Kindle Publishing

If investing does not sound like something that you are interested in or you are worried that you would not be able to understand it all, this next idea might be the one that you should consider. Many people have been taking advantage of Kindle publishing in order to make some good money. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are looking for books on a wide range of topics, and if you are able to read the market and keep ahead of the game, you might be able to give them the material that they need. The earlier you get the information out, the more money you can make until the competition catches up.

Kindle publishing works on the basis of the simple idea that you will write and publish your own books for sale online. You can write on any topic that you would like, and you do not have to worry about finding a publisher or even printing copies and hoping they will all sell. Kindle will do all this for you, so the biggest investment of time is going to be in writing the book.

While this sounds easy, you will have to put in some work to make sure it is profitable. There are a lot of people who choose to go with this method of making money, so being ahead of the competition is critical if you want to achieve success. But the process of doing this is pretty simple; write the book and edit, format to the Kindle publishing specifications, put it on the site, and market to make money.

Here are some of the ways that you can make money using Kindle publishing:

> Take a look at the books— before you get started, go and look at some of the popular books that are on Amazon right now. These can be in

either printed or online format. You should look at the prices that are charged as well as how long the books are. You can then go through different blogs and other things in order to figure out what is popular right now. Next, choose one of these topics to write about and maybe make it a bit longer and for a lower price than those offered on Amazon in order to attract the audience to purchase. If you are not interested in writing a book that is already done, you can take some time to find a topic that is popular but that has not had many or any books written about it. This will put you ahead of the competition because you will be one of the first to offer it and can make a lot of money from it.

Learn the formats— you have to make sure that any book you write for Kindle publishing is in the right format. Kindle requires that you use a certain format because it fits into their e-readers better and makes the book more enjoyable for the customers. You need to make sure that you are using the right format and appropriate fonts so that customers will enjoy your book.

Promotion— if no one knows anything about your eBook, you are never going to make any money from the endeavor. You need to be able to come up with the right keywords so that customers are able to find you. It is important that you post information about your book anywhere that someone would be interested in it might visit. This might include places like websites, blogs, YouTube and so on.

Choosing Amazon— you may be curious why so many people want to use this platform in order to make their money online. Amazon has made the whole process easy to use, and since it has such a great reputation, you will be able to make a ton of money without doing as much work as on the other platforms. The key is just to stay ahead of the competition and work hard, and you will find that you can actually make some money with this endeavor.

Investing in Rental Properties

Next we will talk a bit about investing in rental properties. This is something that a lot of people will choose to do, but you have to be really motivated and organized in order to get it to work out for your needs. There is a lot of money that can be made with rental properties; many people are not able to afford a new home or can't get it because of their credit scores, but they still need a place to live. They are going to turn to rental properties and, depending on the size, the location, and the market, you can make a good amount of money from these.

In order to start, you need to go and find a property that is for sale. Sometimes there will be some that are already rentals and that are in a good area. You could purchase a property that already has tenants, and this can save you some work at least in the beginning. Just remember the nicer the location, the more expensive it is for you to purchase it, but the more you can potentially make in the process. On the other hand, you could purchase a piece of land and make your own rental property. This will require more work because you will need to entice the tenants to you in order to start making money.

Once you own the property, the work is not done. You will need to keep the place maintained and answer any complaints that come in from your tenants and fix anything that may be broken. When a tenant moves out, you will need to get the apartment ready for the next tenant, advertize the vacancy, and get it filled. You will also need to collect rent and possibly start the eviction process if things do not go the way that you would hope. It is also important that you are a good landlord if you want to keep people in the apartments and not have to pay the bills out of your own pocket.

That is just the work that you need to do to keep up with the properties that you have. If you want to expand, you will need to find new properties, purchase them, and then keep up on all of the work that goes into each one.

Some landlords will pay a property manager to help them to keep up on everything. This is usually not worth your time or money if you just own one

or two apartments, but if the business grows really large, you may want to consider it. This might cut into your profits a bit, but you are not able to be everywhere at once, and the manager can help you to get things done around the properties so that money will keep coming in.

Peer to Peer Lending

Next on the list for making money is peer to peer lending. This is a practice where you will lend out money to your peers, or others who are not related to you, without having a bank or other financial institution involved. This kind of lending will often take place online through various companies who will set it all up. Many of these companies will offer different platforms for lending, as well as ways to check the credit of those you are lending too. This works because you can lend money to someone who needs it but who may not be able to afford to get lending through other forms and you will make money on the interest that they pay back to you.

Some of the characteristics involved in peer to peer lending include:

-It is done so that the lender can make money.

-There does not have to be a relationship between the borrowers and lenders before the process happens.

-There is usually a lending company available for help if needed.

-The transactions will occur online.

-Lenders will be able to choose who they will lend to.

-The loans will be unsecure, and there is no protection from the government.

-The loans are securities, which can be purchased by other lenders.

This is a great way to make some extra money because you will not have to do as much work day-to-day. You will need to make sure to do your research

though; if the other person skips out on the loan and does not pay you, it is your own fault and you are out of the money since there is no protection from the government. But if you do your research and find the right person, you can end up making a good profit from this method.

There are also some great advantages, but also some criticisms to do with this kind of lending investment. These would include some of the following:

Interest Rates

One of the biggest advantages for the borrowers is that the lending rates will be less than that at a bank. This is going to entice a lot of borrowers to the idea, which means that you could have a lot of potential for making money. The advantage for you as an investor is that there is a higher return possibility compared to other investments and from savings accounts.

Socially Conscious

This is a way for investors to not only make some good money, but to help out others who are in need. This is a break-through for many borrowers because they are able to do the things that they want for prices that are lower than what is offered at the bank. You are giving these borrowers a break, and you are making money.

Credit Risk

Those who choose peer-to-peer lending have often been turned down by a bank or other option because of their credit scores. This is something that you will have to pay attention to because past performance is often indicative of future performance. If someone has not paid their bills in the past, who is to say that they are going to pay them in the future? When the borrower does not pay money back, they end up being a huge risk to you because you will not be able to make any money. Take a look at past credit history and determine if it is a good idea to invest in a person and if you will get your money back.

Protection from the Government

Unlike banks and other lending institutions, you will not be getting protection from the government if the loan falls through. This means that all of the risk is on your shoulders, and if the person does not pay you back, you are left with no help at all.

While peer to peer lending is a good way to make some great money, you need to do so in a smart way. Do not just jump into the idea thinking that you will make a ton of money in no time, because that is just not going to happen. You have to do your research and make smart investments in order to see the best returns.

Sell your Own Informational product

There are a lot of people who have a talent or know a craft, and they are able to use this expertise in order to make some money. It is possible to sell your product and the information that you know in order to make some passive income. If you have a talent or information that others do not have, you can find an audience and help others. Here are some ways that you can sell the information that you have to make an income.

Make a course and sell

In some cases, you could sell a course to make some passive income. Have you ever seen those infomercials for great new exercise programs that are out there or the programs for learning a new language? There are many different niches that you can explore and best of all; it will be all about the skills you already have and are passionate about. If you know how to speak a language

well, you can create a course to teach people how to speak it. If you know how to do different hairstyles, create a course in order to teach people how to do them. There are even people who will create courses on how to be more confident or how to make more money!

First off, you will need to figure out what skill you have that people would want to know more about or do better. You can then develop the course. Sometimes this will be done through an eBook process so people can read about it. Other times you can make a video series, similar to a lot of those workout videos, and then sell that. The idea that you come up with is going to determine the method that you use in order to get that information out. Sell the idea to others with some good marketing, and you can make some good money.

You have to remember that with this mode of passive income, you will constantly need to be updating and adding value to the customer. No customer is going to purchase your product more than once, so if you want the money to keep coming in, you need to come up with new information to add into it.

Sell your services

In addition to selling your own informational product, you can also sell your own services. If you have the secret to making a lot of money quickly, you can sell your services by doing keynote speeches to others for a price. You can open a consulting firm to offer help with advertising services or for helping with investments.

Even if you do not have an informational service to offer, you can still make a passive income from you skills. Sell some of your other services, such as cleaning, giving rides, or writing books for other people. These are great ways to make some money, and once you get your name out there, you will find that it is a lot easier to keep going and turn this into your new income.

Sell your hobby

Do you have a product that you can make that will help other people out and make their lives easier? If this sounds like something that you can do, and even a hobby of yours, you will find that there are a lot of people who are really interested in these kinds of things. Making crafts and other things with your hobbies is a big thing right now, especially if you are able to make objects that are unique and no one else has thought of before. While you are going to have to work hard in order to market your product and put the product up for sale, it can be a lot more fun to do something that is your hobby rather than making someone else rich.

These are the top 5 ways which I highly recommend if you are just starting out for making some passive income. They are definitely ones that you should check out if you have decided that making passive income is the right choice for you.

Conclusion

Making passive income is definitely a great way to get out of the rat race and to have all the time and freedom to do the things you love. However, passive income is not permanent income. Some types of passive income may last a few years. Other forms may keep going for decades or even for centuries across multiple generations. But all forms of income can eventually dry up for one reason or another, so it’s important to keep up the work and be aware of the market’s demand, especially if you are planing to build an online business.

While it is possible to make a significant income from passive income, it is always a good idea to remind yourself that earning passive income takes a lot of hard work and dedication, so you won’t just give up when you are not seeing progress. Building any form of passive income takes time. Do not expect to see instant result within a few week. Also, providing value is the key to sustain a passive income business. Make sure the work or the product you provide is outstanding, and you will achieve success in no time.

This guidebook is not intended to scare you away from making a passive income, but rather to help you understand the true nature of passive income, so you can have a growth mindset to deal or overcome any kind of obstacles when you are trying to build passive income streams. Please use this guide to make an informed decision on earning real passive incomes. If you have the patience and the desire to succeed, the results will come.

Habits of the Super Rich

Find out How Rich People Think and Act Differently

Bruce Walker

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Introduction

“The rich get richer, while the poor get poorer.”

“If you’re not born rich, you’ll never get rich.”

“It’s impossible to be successful today, there’s just too much competition.”

Have you heard – or even repeated – any of these adages? If you have, you’re not alone. All of us have felt that way at one time or another. But if you take them to heart and say them day after day, they become ingrained in your subconscious and you begin to believe them. These words, which seemed harmless enough when you first started saying them, may have now become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When that happens, you think that everyone else is successful, regardless of how you define your personal success, but you. The ironic aspect of this is that you can try all sorts of measures from investing in the stock market to online marketing to multi-layer marketing, to – yes! – even playing the lottery. None of this works. At the end of the day, month or year, you haven’t seem to make any more money or be any more successful in your career than when you first starting working toward your goal.

Actually that’s not surprising. Some individuals call the use of this mantra so that it’s part of your belief system a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” It’s also known as a “poverty” mentality. They don’t have the ability to see themselves as being successful. We all know people like this. Regardless of how hard they work, just they seem to have “bad luck.”

Those who have even worked hard in order to work up the economic ladder find, at times, that their mindset holds them back. Imagine the single mom with several children who worked three jobs just to make ends meet. As they grew and she was able to she took courses to become a registered nurse. Today she makes a great income, but still hoards her paycheck and won’t pay a utility bill until the companies send a representative to turn off the utility. She has never recovered from her “poverty mentality.”

Then there’s the other end of the spectrum: the individual who seems to be able to make

all the mistakes in the world and still come out successful. No matter what he does he ends up “smelling like roses,” as they say.

The Difference Between The Rich and The Poor

In one word: habits!

You can set all the goals you want. To earn $125,000 a year or more. To get that promotion at work. To become a New York Times bestselling author. But unless you have established good habits you’ll never reach those goals. Unless you establish the habits of “the rich and famous” you’ll forever be chasing success and it will be just slightly out of your grasp.

The real truth is that you can have all that you can have all the riches and success – however, you define them – you wish. There really are no limits to what you can achieve. All you have to do is change your “poverty” mentality to one of success. All you need to do is change the habits that keep you chained to your current lifestyle and your current salary. Swap these habits for better ones, for habits and thoughts and insights that will make you as rich, as successful, as happy as you care to be.

If you’re serious about climbing the rungs of success at your workplace, in any online venture or in the entrepreneurial world, then you can do it. And you can accomplish this simply by turning a few bad habits into a few good habits.

The Power of Imitation

That’s where this book comes in. This book can succinctly and easily help you recognize and implement that habits the rich and famous use in order to achieve and maintain success. Consider this volume your personal “how to” manual to getting what you desire out of life.

This book is actually only one in a long lineage of classic self-help books. Books like this have been published for years. Probably the most famous is Napoleon Hill’s ***Think and Grow Rich*** or more recently Jack Canfield’s ***The Success Principles.*** If his name sounds familiar, it should. He was one of the editors of the wildly successful books, the first of which was called ***Chicken Book for the Soul***. Since then, he and his co-editor Mark Hansen have built that book into a franchise.

Think and Grow Rich author Hill was commissioned by Andrew Carnegie to discover the

common habits and traits of the highly successful industrialists of the early twentieth century.

The truth of the matter is that if you visit a bookstore or go on any web site that sells books, you'll discover a myriad of self-help books all promising to make you rich.

So why does the world need another book on this topic, this one specifically? Because few, if any, of the reputable books on this topic are written this succinctly. This well-written book gets to the crux of the issue, not only letting you know what the best habits are, how they work and how you can use them to help you "think and grow rich" yourself. In a conversational tone, this volume explains why habits are so very important and how you can effortlessly adopt them.

Not only that, but this book is easy to keep near you, either on your computer desktop, on your ebook reader or both. This means you can refer to it whenever you find your spirit sagging or a dark cloak of pessimism trying to smother you. In these cases, it's easy to pull out this book for inspiration. Before you know, you'll back on track, practicing the good habits all successful individuals do – and knowing that all the universal laws are working toward your success.

It incorporates all the ideas of the classic writers as well as the best of the ideas from today's motivational speakers and books.

What you'll Discover in this Book

This book will show you the habits of the successful and help you put them into practice so that they'll become second nature to you. Not only that, but along with those habits, you'll learn why these habits work, starting with the Universal laws of success. They come in many forms, including the recently celebrated Law of Attraction. Many of you may already be familiar with this from the movie and book, ***The Secret.***

In addition to the law of attraction, there are several other laws that go hand-in-hand with it that can solidify your successful for you. These laws a bit less well-known, the laws of detachment, allowing, abundance and gratitude – to name just a few.

You'll also learn the science behind why these habits and perfectly enmeshed. It all starts with the subconscious mind. Equipped with this information, you can go out and initiate any good habit and within the period of your choice, have it become a part of you.

Still don’t think any of this is possible? Do you still believe that only the few, the privileged deserve success? If you still think you’re “condemned” to live an ordinary life yearning for more, then you need to start reading this book right now.

In the first chapter, you’ll vividly see the habits you choose to use can either make or break your success. Why not dig in right now and begin your well-deserved journey to success?

There’s no time like the present to change your thinking from “the rich only get richer” to “I am prosperous beyond my wildest imagination.”

Chapter 1: Habits of the Rich and the Poor

Jim and Zach had been friends since high school. Both were straight A students. In fact, they graduated sharing the honors as co-valedictorians. There was only one major difference between them, though. Jim didn't need to study. His talent was natural and he soon discovered that a quick look at his lessons was all he needed to get his "A." After that, he turned his attention to recreational pursuits.

Zach, on the other hand, worked hard to keep up with Jim's natural abilities. He found that he needed to study in order to get his good grades. He naturally searched for, developed and perfected habits to help him do just that. Zach knew when to say no to a social invitation in order to study for that important exam, even though it meant missing the good times of a few social engagements.

Throughout their high school career, Jim chided Zach in a good natured tone about his apparent discipline and the acquisition of his many study habits. Jim took it all in stride saying, "I'll do whatever it takes to get good grades."

Then the pair went off to the same college. It was then Zach's turn to tease his best friend Jim/ Zach was able to take the same habits he had developed in high school and apply them to his college courses.

It's not that Jim was a bad student. Not by any stretch of the imagination. Especially during his first two years. He was able to breeze through the courses, just as he had done in high school.

However, as he got into upper level coursework he had a bit of trouble here and there. Zach, could see that Jim's academic career may be in danger if he didn't adopt some solid positive habits – and soon.

When graduation day came, Zach had a higher grade point average than Jim. Not by much, but by enough.

As luck would have it, Zach and John received job offers at the same corporation. They worked side by side for several years. But now the tables were turned. Those positive

habits Zach had developed in high school and used in college were now the same ones that he needed to prove himself at work.

Jim, though, found it difficult to adjust to the business world. He had not created any substantial good habits during his educational career. In fact, in college, he probably adopted more bad habits than anything else.

Can you guess which proved the better employee? Bingo! Zach. Even though he had to work at everything he did, his habits, by this time, came so naturally to him, that it didn't seem like so much work.

What was worse was that the bad habits Jim had acquired in college carried over to his professional career. Little by little he discovered that he was on a downward spiral.

Bad Habits and the Downward Spiral

If you've never heard of that notorious downward spiral before, think of it as that "slippery slope" so many individuals love to talk about. Let's take the habit of "punctuality," or showing up on time for work. We all can point to someone who is chronically late – to church, to social events, to appointments. While that's irritating, being late to those events aren't career threatening.

Then there are those who are chronically late for work. These are the people who are most at risk of experiencing that downward spiral. You wouldn't think one small habit like being on time could possibly be that crucial in a job. But you'd be surprised where even one small, unassuming bad habit could lead.

If someone were late for work every morning even by ten minutes, his supervisor would eventually note that. Perhaps he may even issue him warnings about it. His supervisor may overlook it, if the person were outstanding in his job. But, what if, the individual had the same bad habit of being late in meeting deadlines at work? Turning reports in late, being late to vital meetings – even those that kept important clients waiting.

There's only so much an employer will tolerate. Before you know it, the employer has fired this individual. Think that's the lowest down a spiral can go? Think again. The journey continues. During the time he's off work, he can't find a job, he has trouble meeting his bills and, well, it only goes downhill from there.

All for the lack of one good habit: punctuality.

Let's now look at the flip side of that single habit. Let's assume that this employee, instead, came to work on time every day. How would his career have changed?

Had he done this, his employer would have no need to even give him a warning.

Additionally, if this employee had practiced punctuality, he would have naturally been on time – perhaps even early – for all meetings, turning in all reports and especially for those vital meetings with the company's most important clients.

The Upward Spiral

In the end, he probably would have been a shining example of a model employee and would have been in line for a promotion. With just that one small change in habit, he could have gone from his modest position to a much more lucrative and more responsible position.

There's no need to tell you that as part of that upward spiral, his budding career would have included several salary increases along the way. This means that his personal life also would have been on an upward spiral of a larger house and everything he and his family needed and wanted to create the ideal family life.

Punctuality is just one habit successful people have. If you study the habits of the successful, like the authors Napoleon Hill and later Steven Covey did, you'll find that they hold many of the same good habits.

If you feel as if your life is stagnant and you haven't had the joy of the upward spiral – or worse yet, you recognize you're on that downward spiral — you may be motivated to seriously scrutinize your habits – right here and right now.

Changing the Direction of the Spiral

Some of us have the mistaken belief that those individuals who have struck it rich and succeeded beyond belief have done so using "dumb luck." That couldn't be farther from the truth, if you scratch the surface, what you discover just below their shiny success, are years of their practicing ingrained good habits.

The good news is that you too can adopt the same habits which made them wildly successful – and become as successful as you desire.

Before you say that it’s impossible to change your habits, let’s move on to chapter two, which talks about the miraculous power of your subconscious mind and how, with even just a bit of effort, it’ll help you not only stop the downward spiral you may find yourself on right now, but actually help you turn the tide and start on an upward spiral.

Chapter 2: Turning thoughts into reality: It All Starts with the Subconscious Mind

The ancestor of every action is a thought.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jim and Zach, our friends from the first chapter, were talking one day. By this point in their careers, Zach was on the fast track – his upward spiral – toward an upper management job.

Jim, on the other hand, was experiencing a downward spiral – and he seemed to be plummeting down that rabbit hole quicker than Alice in Wonderland.

For his part, Jim was in shock, wondering how he could have gotten himself in such a position. "Can I speak honestly with you," Zach offered. After receiving his consent, his pal outlined exactly what he saw.

Jim took a deep breath and said. "It looks pretty hopeless," he said.

Zach immediately corrected him. "It's never hopeless. That is if you're willing to put in some time and effort." Jim immediately agreed.

“Once you take the first step, your subconscious mind will help you the rest of the way.”

It’s a very simple concept, but one that we tend to overlook. It’s one, though, that our friend Zach seemed to know.

When we do acknowledge it we simply underrate it. But it’s true. Every building constructed, every book written, every business created first began as some one’s thoughts.

Many individuals believe that there’s no understanding the subconscious mind. They know ideas pop into their heads, seemingly miraculously, in the middle of the night. They also know that if they don’t write them down they seem to dematerialize into a thin cloud of smoke never to be remembered again. The workings of the mind are a mystery, they believe. It’s a magical, mystical mystery tour.

Ask anyone who thought with great confidence that they would surely remember this life-changing concept that woke them up without warning at two in the morning. They smiled, simply rolled over and went back to sleep. When the alarm woke them up at 7 a.m., they were so close to recalling the idea … but couldn’t.

What is the Subconscious Mind?

Your subconscious mind is the repository of the myriad of information that flies by us every day even if we’re not aware of them. Our mind catches them in mid-flight and files them away. It’s amazing how much information the subconscious mind stores for us, even if we aren’t aware we have it stored away somewhere.

But here’s a secret about the subconscious that few know. It works best when we’re not aware of it working. It’s at its most efficient when we aren’t alert. That’s why we wake up with those wonderful ideas at times. When we sleep we don’t have a clue as to what that portion of the mind is doing.

Similarly, it works its magic when we are doing something totally unrelated to what we’re working on. How many times have you walked away from a problem or a glitch in a project to have the answer flash in front of you?

No doubt you're well aware of those moments. They may differ from person to person, they may even differ for you depending on the problem and the situation. That's why the eureka moment hits you when you're taking a shower, watching television or even driving a car.

Ever get in a car and drive through an intersection wondering if you really stopped at that red light? Or maybe while you're driving you actually forget to turn on the proper street. That's your subconscious mind working out the details of a project or problem for you.

Ask just about any writer and he'll tell you he gets his best ideas as soon as he opens his eyes in the morning.

Remember those days in grade school and high school when the teacher admonished you for daydreaming? The implication was that you were wasting your time. These days you probably should be doing more of it. Yes, daydreaming is a wonderful way of exercising your subconscious mind. Others find they can put the subconscious mind to work through hypnosis.

The secret about the subconscious mind that all successful people know is that you can use this portion of your brain to your advantage instead of being at the mercy of its seemingly whimsical nature. Through the deliberate use of the subconscious mind you can use your mind more effectively to influence not only your motivation, but your will power as well. In fact, once you begin to train yourself in the proper procedure of using this portion of your mind, you'll discover that there's not much you can't do.

How Successful People Put the Subconscious to Work

The following are facts every successful person knows about the subconscious mind. Not only does he know these facts, he works within their bounds so he can make the most of this awesome power.

Subconscious Mind Fact #1: The subconscious mind has no agenda of its own.

This layer of your mind has no will of its own. It doesn't have a "hidden agenda" that is trying to persuade you to its side of an argument or perspective. Its one and only one function:

The subconscious exists solely to produce ideas according to the beliefs and the images you place in it.

Unlike other areas of our brain, such as the ego or the conscious mind, it doesn't judge these images, beliefs or thoughts. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? You might be thinking right about now that it should be your best friend.

Indeed it should. But then you have to learn that because it doesn't judge, it will manifest anything you place into it. That means it will as readily give you the lack of money you've been thinking about as well as the prosperity you desire. The subconscious mind will hand you illness as quickly as it will hand you health.

To put it in more concrete terms, your subconscious mind is essentially working off the blueprint of your life that you're feeding – whether you realize it or not. It won't stop to examine your thoughts and censor out the negative ones then chastise you for thinking them.

The subconscious mind receives all that you feed it, then begins to bring them to life. Think about it! It could be an awesome tool. If you're thinking prosperity, visualizing the life you dream of, it's not about to judge you. Instead, it quietly goes to work bringing it about. In this way, Emerson was right on the mark. A thought really is the ancestor of every action.

The opposite of this is true as well though. If you go to bed at night – or spend the best part of your day – worrying over your debts, affirming that you live from paycheck to paycheck, then what do you believe your subconscious will deliver you on a silver platter. Exactly what you've been thinking about: more debt.

Instead of finding that fact depressing, you should view it as liberating. Just by changing what you think about – especially right before you go to bed at night and as soon as you wake up in the morning – can actually be the catalyst for the successful life you've been hungering for.

Napoleon Hill knew this when, in the 1930s he wrote ***Think and Grow Rich.*** After interviewing the most productive and most successful business people of his day, he recognized how to use the subconscious mind to produce the success. In his book, he speaks about manifesting "riches" into your life, this same six-step process, based on the

nonjudgmental actions of the subconscious mind, can work the same type of magic in your life that it did for others – bring them untold success.

Napoleon Hill's proven Six-Step Process to Success

1. Decide on the specific amount of money you want

This is a very important step. When Hill writes "exact amount' he means it. The more specific you can be in your mind, the better. Don't be wishy-washy about this. Don't waffle. Just decide on how much you want.

Notice I didn't say "need." Don't make the mistake many individuals do at this point of the process. They don't decide on enough. Catherine Ponder a motivational speaker once said, "It's as easy to manifest a button as it is to a castle."

Do yourself a favor from the very beginning, never settle for the button when you really want the castle.

2. Decide what you're going to give in return for receiving this money.

Many people expect at this point money will just rain down from heaven for them, just like in the Old Testament story of the Hebrews in the desert and the manna or bread. Don't expect that you're going to receive your riches through hitting the lottery. Be prepared to start working on an idea – if you haven't already.

Are you going to start offering your services as a writer? Or are you going to start an online business? Now is the time to follow your passion.

3. Establish a deadline.

Go ahead, don't be afraid. You're not going to insult your subconscious mind by presenting it with a deadline. If you don't do this, you'll discover that these "riches" or whatever you desire will always be just out of your reach.

4. Make a detailed plan of action.

Again, don't expect these riches just to fall from heaven. Don't expect your business plan to materialize in front of you with the wave of a magic wand. Instead, you'll want to write out in detail how you plan to carry out your business or your services.

Remember, every good business person started off this way. Think of it as a map. You're here, where "x" marks the spot. There's no use decrying where you are at the moment. Just accept this is your location and your resources for the moment and know – without any reservation of doubt – that you will get to exactly where you'll want to be.

You want to be here, where the map indicates the "treasure" is waiting for you. Besides, a well thought out business plan is the first thing any bank asks for when a person requests a business loan. Where do you plan to be in the next five years? How do you plan to acquire your riches?

That's right. Get a pen and paper. It's better, by the way, to do this initially in long-hand instead of on a computer. This makes it seem more of a serious commitment. Make sure when you do this you include all the necessary facts. This includes the exact amount of money you intend to manifest in your life. Give it a deadline, then write down what services you're going to provide in return for this money. Not only that, but accurately detail the plan you have for bringing all of this to fruition. At this point you may believe you're done. Not quite.

6. Read this statement twice a day.

Use the power of the spoken word and spend time reading your written account twice a day. Make of a habit of doing this first thing in the morning, before you place any other ideas in your mind and again in the evening, so it's the last idea you think about before going to bed.

But here's the catch. When you do read it, visualize it in your mind. Feel the excitement of success coursing through your body. Believe that the riches you desire, the business you're willing to build to receive it are already manifest in your life. In other words believe with all the fiber of your body that you already have the money.

TRUTH #2 – The Subconscious can't tell the real from the imagined

For such a potentially powerful organ, the subconscious seems to be "naive." It can't tell he real from the imagined, it only "lives" in the present and understands the present. When people first learn these facts, they try to deny them. After all, your mind is so miraculous, it seems incredulous you can manipulate it so easily.

Think about what was just said. "You can manipulate it – the subconscious mind – so easily." Again, this is difficult to believe. But once you can overcome your disbelief, you may begin to kick yourself. After all, if this is true, then why didn't you learn this earlier in life? It seems like a fairly simple method to help kick start your success.

As we learn to work with this portion of the brain and learn habits of the rich and famous, you'll discover how important this concept is to your own overcoming bad habits, acquiring good ones and marching forward to success.

TRUTH #3 – The Subconscious only understands the present

The key to true success lies in the "present tense." When you start giving instructions to your brain, you're always going to talk to it in the present tense. When you write out your affirmations, they'll always be written in the present tense. Have you gone through Napoleon Hill's six steps yet? If you have, stop right here and review them. Make sure everything you want is phrased in the present tense. Don't use the future tense.

By now you can probably guess what that would do. That would mean you can see your riches, but they would always be just beyond your reach because you keep asking for them in the future. The future never arrives. By the time it gets here, we call it today. Again, the subconscious is a literal creature.

How Did you get to this Point?

Let's take a step back here for a moment. We should rephrase this. Theoretically, it should be easy to manipulate your subconscious. The problem for many of us, if not all of us, is that others have already manipulated it before we even thought doing this was possible.

Or perhaps you've had a hand in manipulating it yourself and now you have to undo the "damage." What do we mean by that? Perhaps you've been told by your parents growing up that you're not going to succeed in a certain occupation. The competition is fierce and, quite frankly, you're just not smart enough. Think about the field day your subconscious mind had with that statement.

The results? Two possible ones could have manifested. First, you may have avoided that vocation all together believing that you would never succeed. Or perhaps you were smart enough to ignore your parents and enter the occupation of your dreams only to find yourself failing desperately in it. Why? Because your subconscious mind was already imprinted with the thoughts of failure.

TRUTH #3 - Habits Are the Footprints of the Subconscious

This is an elaborate way of saying that all of your habits are dictated by your subconscious mind. Depending on your point of view, this could be good news or bad news.

Habits are just actions that have been ingrained into our system – some of them since childhood. Think about the habit of brushing your teeth. When you were a youngster your parents probably drilled into you the necessity of that habit. It wasn't something your mind told you to do. But one day, after your parents reminded you for so long, something in your mind clicked. Your parents no longer needed to remind you – and it became a habit.

Ask any person who works at home for a living. These individuals had to establish good habits in order to keep on track every day. These activities are dictated by their job. If it weren't for these "work habits" they never would have been able to sustain such a thriving business.

The truth be told, habits drive all successful people and the subconscious mind drives habits. In order to change your bad habits into good ones, you'll have to manipulate your subconscious. We've already seen that given the attributes of the mind, what may sound difficult, may actually be much easier than you think.

Exercises to Direct the Power of your Subconscious

The beauty of the power of your subconscious is that it is easily trainable. For the longest time, the majority of individuals seeking success were unaware of the power of this awesome aspect of the mind. We thought our bad luck was just that “bad luck.” We thought our limited income was somehow dictated by the gods of prosperity or by some fundamental lack of currency in the world.

Neither of these concepts would be further from the truth. Are you ready to start training your subconscious mind to work for you, to bring you your deepest desires, including success in your career and the prosperity that accompanies that, great relationships – both professional and personal – and the power to dictate your moods?

If you’ve personalized the six steps of Napoleon Hill’s found earlier in this chapter, congratulations. You’ve already take the first step. But just like exercising any other muscles, you have to perform a variety of exercises to create the habits you’ll need in order to get what you want.

The following three exercises will help you reach your goals. You can start using these immediately, while you’re reading and studying the rest of this book.

Subconscious Exercise 1: Create Your Vision of a Successful life

Prior to reading this book you probably didn’t realize you were the person responsible for the financial or emotional state of your life at this very moment. You may have wanted to blame it on being in the wrong place at the wrong time or a lack of money or even a lack of love.

As we move forward in these chapters you’ll learn about the law of abundance. Succinctly this universal law states that there is no lack in the universe, but only an abundance. And it really doesn’t matter an abundance of what. You can live the life you’ve been dreaming of without depriving someone else of their abundant and rich vision of their live. Once you quit thinking that this life is a competition among every one else you meet or even a rat race, you’ll be amazed at how doors, once locked, open easily to your touch.

Even before you learn the workings of this law, you can put it to use. Simply visualize the life you want. That’s right! Instead of dwelling in the vision of your life as it is now, begin to imagine the life you want to lead. See it now: the ideal career, the ideal house, the ideal family.

But don’t just see it, feel it with every fiber of your body. Get excited about what you’re seeing. Feel as if you were living it right now.

Start this visualization process now, and when we talk more about this in a later chapter you’ll be that much farther along in the process and, of course, closer to your goals.

When is the best time to visualize? Right before you go to sleep at night and as soon as you wake up in the morning.

Exercise 2: Write Your 10 Goals Daily

Imagine this statistic. Less than three percent of Harvard University students have set goals. At one of the most competitive schools in the nation, that seems to be a small percentage of the students.

Yet, we know that one of the most effective ways to get where you want to go and to enjoy your success, is through the creation of goals. If you’ve thought about setting written goals, you should consider it right now.

Do more than just consider it, though. You should write them down. Think about all the daydreams you’ve had since you were a child. Consider what you would be doing today if you knew you couldn’t fail. If you knew that you could take that leap of faith and succeed, what would you be doing with your life?

Take ten of these goals and write them done. Now, read these out loud several times a day. You may already be a step ahead of me knowing that two of these recitations should be before you go to bed at night and when you wake up in the morning.

Now, take the first step toward one of these goals. You’ll see almost immediately your subconscious working perfectly in sync with the universe as events unfold that facilitate you manifesting these long-held desires.

What can’t be repeated to many times at this point of your planning is that you must take the first step. You can take it tentatively and hesitantly, that’s fine. You can take action with a small measure of doubt that you’re actually taking the correct action. The truth is as long as you take action it’s the right action.

If it should be the wrong step, your subconscious mind and the universe will work together to set you on the proper path. Guaranteed!

Exercise 3: Use Positive Affirmations to Nourish your Subconscious Mind

This exercise practically goes hand in hand with the previous one. Using those goals you've written, write out positive affirmations that will help you achieve those goals. You're going to create affirmations that, above all, are written in the present tense even though you may not have seen these goals met yet.

For example, I have a friend who has one affirmation is simply: I am a New York Times Best Selling author. She isn't, not yet there. But as you recall her subconscious can't tell the real world from the imagined world. As she recites these words throughout the day, she visualizes what it would feel like to be a bestselling author.

The combination of spoken and written word as well as projecting her emotions into the situation will eventually propel her to that status.

Decide on one or two areas you'd like to work on first. Review your list of goals and create a positive, present tense affirmation to suit your specific needs. This is now yours. Write it out daily and be sure to speak it daily. Yes, especially in the morning when you wake up and in the evening as part of your ritual before you retire.

Believe it or not, you've now created another habit of the successful person. Continue to do this. You may only want to concentrate on one or two affirmations at a time so you can truly focus on them. Congratulations.

In the chapters that follow, we're going to learn more about the laws of the universe, how they work and especially how you can use these to create habits of success and prosperity. But in the meantime begin to put everything you've learned up to now into practice. Your excitement will only mount as you begin to see how your mind is beginning to stir up the long-buried dreams and goals.

Are you ready to continue upon your success journey? There's no time like the present.

Chapter 3: Developing the Mindset of a Successful Person

Really," Jim said to Zach one day, "what good is all this indoctrination. Do you really think that the universe will change its ways just because I've changed my view of it? Do you really think that if I establish these habits that'll make any difference?

"The wheels of my future were set in motion a long time ago. Maybe even before I was born. The universe isn't about to bow down to my way of thinking just because I tell it to. Let's face it, those no magic genie coming out of a magic lamp to propel me to success. I can't change the past.

Jim didn't really know how far off the mark he was. Once you begin using these awesome universal laws, you'll feel as if you're unleashing a genie from a magic lamp. If every any entity had ever said, "Your wish is my command," it's the remarkable energy flow of the universe.

Even if you can't technically change the past, you can turn your present moment around and you'll discover how to use its power to create a better and more successful life – much more quickly than you ever thought possible.

So what are these four rules you need to follow?

1. Take total responsibility for your life.

"Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will – his personal responsibility."

Albert Einstein

I can hear you now. “But it really wasn’t my fault. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Everybody else has done things like that. But I’m the one to get caught. I was born under the wrong stars.”

It doesn’t really matter what argument you’ve decided to use, the bottom line is, your protests are probably merely excuses so you can absolve yourself of at least some of the pain of not creating a success life and not developing better habits sooner in your life.

Over the years, if you’re like most of us, you’ve tried to push the blame to various events. A popular excuse is even the saying of “Life happened while I was making other plans.” It’s such a common excuse (and yes, that’s all it is) that it’s accepted by just about everybody as legitimate argument.

But upon closer inspection, you’ll discover that this is merely another one of those excuses to absolve yourself of the responsibility for your own happiness, for your own success.

If you’ve done this, don’t believe for a moment that it’s not to late to change your change the way your think and some to believe you really do control not only your thoughts, but your actions as well.

In fact, by beginning step by step changing your habits from bad to good, can start right now to take full control for each and every action in your life. Before you even begin to argue, remember that this full confession is one of the most important steps you can take in beginning to feel good about your life.

Besides, if you don’t do this, you’ll go through life believing that you don’t have full control over the events you’re experiencing. Let me rephrase that. You may not have full control of everything that happens to you, but you have absolutely full control over how you react to those events.

This small change in perception can – and with time will – bring about a major transformation about how you view life and the amount of “luck” you’ll need to get through it.

The Power of A Brand New Start

Reassess these events impartially. Instead of blaming luck, analyze them constructively from the viewpoint of what you may have done differently in order to take full responsibility for that situation at that moment.

Once you've done that, and realize what you could have changed your next step is to remember what could have been done and forget about continuing to blame others or the "stars" or conjuring it as a part of fate. Instead, remember what you could have taken responsibility for. Then the next time you encounter a similar situation, be sure to take control of the event.

No one said it was going to be easy. But going forward you'll discover it's worth it. Don't make a big deal of it if you happen to slip up. Everyone does now and then. As soon as you realize you're not taking responsibility for whatever it is, then vow to start again and tighten control of the situation.

Yes, relinquishing your responsibility would be so much easier, less painful and, indeed, much less demanding. It's also a much more comfortable approach. You can just sit back and point a finger at Aunt Katie, or your mother or your friend, Kevin. "It's their fault I'm not a greater success," you can say smugly.

Once again you can end your day by sitting in your living room, watching television while you munch on a bag of microwave popcorn mumbling to yourself, "When will life ever give me a break?"

But think of the power you're allowing others to have over your life. Think of the power you're handing to the "whimsical" fate of the universe.

2. Discover Your Purpose

Those individuals who have a problem taking control of their life and responsibility for their own successes (and failures) usually have another trait in common. They're not sure what their purpose in life is.

Why of course not. You're never going to understand what the Universe wants you ultimately to do with your time on earth if you're constantly giving away your responsibility. Have you ever met someone who constantly says, in response to what she was planning for the day, "I'm going to let the events unfold as they want"?

That's all well and good. Up to a point. It shows some degree of sensibility, but more than that is that it shows a fear of stepping up to home plate, looking the pitcher in the eyes and then hitting that ball he throws at you out of the ballpark.

Every time you allow the universe to unfold and fail to make plans, the universe will find some excuse for you not to do much of anything that day – or get caught up in the drama of others.

The truth of the matter we all have to be attuned to the direction the universe tugs us. But by the same token we need to take responsibility (there's that phrase again) and step out. It's the only way that you'll be able to read the events and actually figure out what it is the universe really wants you to do.

3. Decide What you Want

And, yes that's the next step in the process of using these amazing laws of the universe to your advantage. As you read about these irrefutable laws, you'll discover that you've been using them all along – even if it means it's been to your detriment. Remember that your subconscious doesn't care what you feed it – optimism, pessimism, negativity, positivity – it'll process whatever thoughts you feed it. Then it magically, mystically (so it appears) manifests it into reality.

If you don't know what you want, if you don't think steadily about your "purpose" in life, no wonder you haven't found your purpose yet.

4. Believe that Your Goals and Desires are Attainable.

By now, I've hoped I knocked you out of your comfort zone enough to get you picking up a pen and writing down some goals. Perhaps they're things you've always wanted to do but never found the time. Notice that turn of the phrase: found the time. You'll never find the time. You have to make the time. Again, you must take control.

Now's the time to decide that your goals, your desires, even those fleeting daydreams are possible. Always keep in mind the adage Henry Ford lived by: "Whether you believe it's possible or not, you're right."

Chapter 4: The Universal Laws of Success

As Jim learned more about changing his habits, Zach began telling him more about the unseen laws of the universe that work in conjunction with the subconscious mind. Jim, however, was hesitate to accept the reality of these laws. "Look, Zach," he said, looking his friend in the eye, "we've been friends too long for you to start giving me a load of nonsense. Don't you think if all these laws were real, we would have learned about them somewhere in our education?"

Our friend, Jim, brought up an excellent point. We don't learn about these as part of our education. We're allowed to grow up and enter the real world ignorant of the one thing that may make a gigantic difference in the way we not only view life, but live it as well. And this is where many individuals step in remaining skeptical even after they've been introduced to all the laws – or even the major ones.

Another reason many prefer to ignore these laws is that you can't see them at work as easily as you can see the Newton's laws of physics at work. That doesn't mean they don't exist though.

Depending on who you're talking with, you may notice that they have a different count of how many universal laws exist to work with your subconscious mind. In reality, there is one – and every other law is really a merely a corollary to that. What is the overriding, supreme law which guides every other mental law? It's the Law of Attraction. If you're not that familiar with this rule, here's a quick overview of it.

The Law of Attraction

Just about everyone has heard about the law of attraction these days. In a nutshell. It says that you attract into your life what you think about all day long. You …

You're already interrupting the words and you haven't even read the entire explanation yet. But, it's not hard to guess what you're thinking. You're going to say you think about wealth, money and success all day long and the universe has yet to deliver any of that to you in a sufficient amount.

Consider what your thoughts were really telling the universe. Let's use an example of what happens in your mind throughout the day. Imagine you had a gnome-like creature following you every day, recording all of your thoughts. According to some experts we average approximately 64,000 thoughts daily. If this gnome were to read your thoughts back to you at the end of each day. How many of these thoughts would be positive? How many would be affirming and re-affirming your desire to be wealthy and successful?

If you're much like any of us, you'll say you're affirming your wealth and financial success. But if you scratch under the skin, you'll discover that you're really not giving much attention to wealth, but to your lack of wealth. Oh sure, you're probably paying homage to your affirmations through reciting them and even writing them several times daily. Let's say, for the sake of argument, your spending two hours a day doing this.

While many individuals believe they're using their "power of positive thought" in this process and should be, any minute, attracting what they've been thinking about for that hour or so a day. But the rest of the day, as the transcription gnome testifies, whose been by your day all day says otherwise. You've been spending the other 20 hours to negative thinking. You're still filling your mind with ideas with negativity and the "craziness" of you even thinking you could be wealthy or successful by any standards.

What do you expect you'll manifest in your life? Wealth and success? Or more lack? Bingo! You're right! You'll attract more lack because overall those are your thoughts. Unfortunately, in this case, the law of attraction is busy at work providing you with exactly what you don't want: lack.

The law of attraction, as well as every other universal law works through your subconscious mind. What is the first law of the subconscious? It doesn't judge any thought you give it. This aspect of your mind gives you exactly what you've been thinking about.

When you complain that the law of attraction isn't working in your life, dig deeper to try to decide what you've been feeding it. Instead of blaming the law of attraction try to impartially analyze what you've been thinking. That is probably where the snag is. The mind is providing you with exactly what you've been pondering all day long.

But the bottom line continues to be one of doubting the flow of wealth into your life. Just ask that gnome that's following you around keeping score of your thoughts.

One way to work around this problem is to visualize yourself successful as wealthy . . or whatever goal you'd like to see manifested. But you'll do a bit more than just that. As you see yourself in your mind's eye as successful, imagine what kind of feelings go with that kind of success.

Think what you would feel like the moment you look at your bank account and you realize you really are wealthy. How would you feel? If you're like me, you'd probably be bouncing off the walls. Conjure up the emotions that go with this event in your life.

Now you're giving something the universe it can work positively with. You subconscious mind doesn't work just with your thoughts. It can pick up on your feelings as well.

Remember, too, that your subconscious can't tell the real from the imagined. Think about it and use this fact to your advantage. If you're rich, even if you're not quite there yet, the universe will without a doubt pick on this, not even asking if it's an uplifting emotion from a real event or from your imagination.

That's one way of making a path for the law of attraction into your life. There are several other ways as well. One of the methods is by putting the many corollaries of the law of attraction into work.

The Law of Allowing

Yes, in many ways the law of allowing is much what it sounds like. Many individuals, especially those just starting out using these universal methods find it difficult that they actually work. That, along with the fact, that you may be trying to change ten, twenty years or more of your habit toward believing that you'll never attract the good in your life can remain a barrier to true success.

That's when we have to take a good long look at ourselves and study why we're not "allowing" ourselves to not only pass on some of the greatest moments of your lives, but what we can do to change that around.

When many individuals are faced with making this turnaround in their lives, their first reaction is that they must do something immediately to change their thinking, to change their focus. Tell them, though, when they accept the presence of this law, they need to do little else, they're incredulous.

“You get absolutely nothing in life unless you work for it,” people are prone to respond in these cases. The law of allowing though is actually the easiest way to manifest your needs and desires into reality.

Once you’re visualizing your success and feeling it down to the core of your being, you’ve practically completed your end of the bargain. Of course, you’re going to take action based on these feelings, but even here, the universe will be more than happy to deliver what you need and want.

We’ve been taught (in some instances it’s been pounded into our heads) that we have to work hard for everything we receive in this world. That’s fair enough, but have you ever had “good fortune” just fall into your lap? This is what it feels like to work with the law of allowing.

What you’ll usually find happens during this process is that you’ll take a few initial steps and then – viola! – the universe matches you step for step. Let’s say you’re trying to start a business, but what you need first is an investor. You ask around – taking that initial step – the next thing you know, your friend suddenly remembers that a friend of his used a venture capitalist to help fund his project. Not only that, he’d be more than happy to have you two meet.

The next thing you know, you’re signing a deal. You’re on your way to having your business – your dream – funded. That’s usually how the law of allowing works. If you find yourself working too hard at searching for a funding agent or any other component that you need, take a step back and ask if you’re really “allowing” the powers that be, as it were, to work.

You’ve probably been taught you have to work hard for everything you receive in life. So when something like the above scenario occurs, it’s almost too good to believe. But believe it anyway – and get used to it. Because when you add the law of attraction to the law of allowing – this is exactly what you receive.

Just because you’ve been told you have control over your destiny doesn’t mean it requires you to bang your head against the wall in order to experience it. Just allow it to happen. Think about a sailing boat. Once you’ve lifted the anchor (taken the first step) you don’t go telling the universe which way the wind should blow (or do you?). Instead, you step back and allow the wind to blow you and your vessel in one direction for a while. If you find you need to make some adjustments, you take the rudder and fine tune your ship.

To be completely honest it really is a difficult concept to accept. The human ego wants to take credit for all of our accomplishments and so it wants to be busy “micromanaging” everything we do.

Practicing this law will eventually bring you face to face with the next law of universal good: the law of resistance. You can make an educated guess what this implies. Let’s explore this topic in more detail in the next couple of paragraphs.

The Law of Resistance

So far, the names of these universal laws (which by the way, every successful person knows about) are aptly named for the results they bring into your life. In a nutshell (and in no way to sound flippant about it) what you resist is what persists.

Many individuals don’t understand why that should be. While probably no one really knows for sure, it’s a good bet that if you’re resisting about it, you’re placing a great deal of energy around it. When you do this, you’re working with the law of attraction. And the universe and your subconscious mind with work together to give you exactly what you’re thinking about. Which is precisely what you don’t want.

For some individuals, especially for those who haven’t quite adapted at using the law of attraction, this becomes a sign that they aren’t met to have this. Others, who have encountered this probably before will consider the obstacle a bump in the road and take the initial steps to work around it.

And we all know what happens when we take action – even a little bit of action – the universe will help us out. Guaranteed. So, when you meet this resistance you shouldn’t dwell on it.

Accept that something is blocking you and turn your subconscious mind on to find ways to overcome it. You may want to focus more on your positive affirmations to visualize more, revving up your feelings and emotions. Your subconscious mind will definitely react to that.

Then there’s the one individual who stands in her bedroom, closes the door and yells at whatever powers that be (or herself): “You can’t stop me! I am going to succeed, so you

might as well join me!”

The Law of Detachment

If you’ve ever studied Buddhism or read anything about it, then you’re probably familiar with this Universal Law. It’s a tenant of Buddhist thought. That doesn’t mean, however, that it’s a strictly spiritual law.

In its basic form, this law says put all of your desire into your goal, but then back away and remove yourself emotionally from the final outcome of the goal. This doesn’t mean you don’t care. It’s closer to the idea that you’re neither devastated nor overly elated depending on the outcome.

Before you begin to complain about it, you need to know that many people who never thought they could either enact this law, understand it or carry it through to its finality have found satisfaction in it.

For starters, they say, the law of detachment is liberating. You cast your goals into the ether and then simply let go of it, knowing that the Universe is taking good care if it.

Perhaps the real advantage of this law, however, is that once you let it go, you’re not second-guessing yourself and most importantly you’re not filling your emotions with negative thoughts and doubts. In other words, once you let it go, you can completely bypass that law of resistance.

You’ve already seen how even one negative thought can easily snowball into a couple more and with enough time passed you’re showering your goal with negativity and worry. You know what happens then.

Have you created a goal or two yet? Are you beginning to feel any of the following emotions?

- Desperation
- Emptiness
- Anger

- Longing

If you are, then, you're cloaking your goal or desire with types of negativity. This makes it all the harder for your subconscious to work at manifesting your goal.

Here's a statistic to show why strictly following this universal rule of thumb is vital. Seventy percent of people find it much easier not only to accept the possibility of a negative outcome than believe they'll receive a positive one.

This fact really makes you wonder if as human beings, our brains are not hard-wired to think negative thoughts.

The Law of Abundance

This is one rule of the universe that many of us can't believe. That's because everything we've learned as children and taken to adulthood run counter to this concept. Even our economy is constructed based not on abundance, but scarcity. When people are introduced to this idea, they are a bit taken aback – to say the least.

The law of abundance, as its name implies dictates that there is more than enough of everything in the world to go around. Not only that, but the more of whatever it may be you share with others, the more will eventually be returned to you.

When you were growing up you probably heard the saying "Love is the only thing you can give away and always get more of." Don't believe it. This action, giving away what you have, sharing your possessions, money or whatever with others, is the quickest and surest way to ensure that you'll never run out of that particular item.

If you donate money to a good cause or give it strings free to another person, you'll eventually find that amount – plus more – return to you. It seems like an incredulous notion, but it's, indeed, true. Many people have started out skeptical, but gave it a try anyway and have been pleasantly surprised.

One person who practiced this concept asked one day, "Why do you think we call money currency?" When the other person shrugged his shoulders, she answered, "because it's supposed to flow through us to others. If you do this, as you look upstream you'll see even

more of the current bringing you even more money."

Difficult as it is to believe, you really do need to test this law out for yourself. Discover the satisfaction of giving money to others and the equally delightful feeling of it returning to you in the most unexpected of ways.

You'll only experience the law of abundance in your life when you believe – and not just give lip service to – that you have absolutely everything you need to complete your life and make you happy this very moment. You don't need one more penny for happiness. You don't need your dream home to be happy. You don't need to fall madly in love with your soul mate.

The moment you know deep in your soul that you're complete just the way you are, then the marvelous effects of the law of abundance will cascade upon you.

In fact, according to this rule, you have more than enough to supply all of your needs and wants. Brian Tracy, a well-known motivational speaker puts it simply, "You can have virtually all you need and want." You merely have to take the first step of deciding that this is what you want.

More often than not people make a certain amount of money in life and then suddenly put a limit on that. They believe for whatever reason, that's all they should be making. Some individuals believe they're not worth any more than what they've established in their minds.

To paraphrase Marianne Williamson another motivational and spiritual speaker, too many of us ask "Who am I to be successful? The real question should be "Who am I not be?"

The first step is to decide what you truly want. People become wealthy, so the saying goes, because they decide to become wealthy." It's that simple. Having made the decision to become wealthy, they then act in a manner that will produce that outcome – which includes adopting the good habits that propel them to success.

There's flip side to this concept and that is that those without wealthy are poor because they haven't made the decision to become wealthy yet. Think about it. This type of thinking strips bear any excuses you may have been hiding behind for your present state. Not wealthy? Always blamed it on not getting that "break" that others seem to get? No,

you can’t do that anymore.

Always blamed your inability to make more money than what you’re making right now on the economy or lack of resources or … stop it. Because right now, you know you’re not wealthy simply because you haven’t truly made the decision.

Stop reading this book for one moment and ask yourself this question, “Why aren’t you rich yet?” Now get a pen and paper and write down every reason you believe you’re not wealthy. Check them over carefully. Ask yourself one more question, “Are these legitimate reasons or are they merely excuses.” Maybe up until the moment you began reading this book you believed they were reasons. It may be now you see them as excuses.

Using the Law of Abundance to Your Advantage Right Now

There’s no time like the present! Realizing that, you also need to know that you can start right here and now to implement some of the most effective habits this very moment that will propel you on the road of success using the law of abundance. And believe it or not, it’s much easier than you would ever guess.

Your first step is to imagine that every interaction you’ve ever had with money in some way came your way in order to teach you a special lesson about wealth. That being so, ask yourself what was the most important lesson you believed you’ve learned.

Your second step is to ask yourself what is your largest block in obtaining wealth. Answer this question and then act as if this block doesn’t exist anymore. Eliminate this self-limiting action and the belief from which it stems and you’ll discover how quickly you’ll begin to propel yourself towards the road of wealth.

The Law of Action

You undoubtedly knew that we’d end up talking about action in some form. After all, what are habits but actions you take practically subconsciously. Habits are actions that you do without thinking. So, it only makes sense that a corollary to the Law of Attraction would be one dealing with action.

Unfortunately, many people, have a difficult time grasping the law of attraction and

therefore tend to ignore its corollary. “It all seems too easy,” many say, “What are you telling me? I wish upon a star and all my dreams come true?”

The way the law of attraction has been explained by misinformed people themselves, but the steps you need you take after you invoke have never been clearly delineated. One of the most important steps you can take in manifesting your goals is through action.

That’s why the more good habits of the successful you can adopt the more successful you’ll be. In its simplest terms the law of action says that nothing happens until you take that first step toward your goal. Action, in effect, kick starts the entire process.

Very often the law of attraction is compared to planting a seed. You plant a seed and it grows. If you plant a bean seed for example, you’ll get – you guessed it – a bean. It doesn’t get much simpler than that, does it?

Imagine a farmer sitting on in a rocking chair on his back porch, just staring out at the field, rocking away. Soon, his wife comes outside to visit him. “What are you doing?” she asks him.

“Waiting for my field of corn to grow,” he answered, not taking his eyes off the field.

“I don’t recall you planting corn in that field,” his wife said. “In fact, I don’t recall you planting anything in that field.”

“Nope,” he said, “I didn’t plant anything there.”

“If you didn’t take the initial step of planting, nothing will grow,” his wife said, adding, “isn’t that one of those fundamental rules of farming?”

“I’m visualizing,” he snapped back. “I heard in one of those self-help books that all you need to do is think about what you want out of life and write down your goals.”

His wife got up from her chair and walked inside shaking her head. “It’s going to be a long growing season,” she mumbled to herself.

Ironically, no one asks why corn isn't growing in that field. No seed. No crop. It's just that simple.

Yet many individuals sit in that chair (or on the couch watching television) waiting for a business to grow. Imagine someone visits the person on the couch, asking him what he's doing. "Waiting for my business to grow," he says, not taking his eyes off the television.

"I didn't know you had a business," his friend comments.

"I don't right now," he said proudly, "but I will soon. I invoked the law of attraction. Before you know it I'll be attracting wealth through the visualization I've been doing. Something will surely happen and soon. I hear it's guaranteed. Right now, in fact, I'm engaged visualizing my business."

What do you think the odds are his method of growing a business will actually produce anything – except a greater understanding of the latest crime show.

When you've made your mind up to start a business, it's so much easier to invoke the corollary of the law of action if you've already adopted even a few of the good habits associated with the highly successful.

Even if you haven't adopted any habits, though, that doesn't mean you can't succeed. But you'll never succeed just by wishing it so. You need to take action and the sooner the better.

Create your Very Own Fantasy World …

… And watch it manifest into reality!

As you lay in bed each night, before you fall asleep, begin to visualize what your life would be like if you could spend all of your days doing whatever you want. Right now, no part of your fantasy has to be related to your goals. Just think about what you would do if you could be doing anything at all at this very minute?

Would you be writing that bestselling novel? Or would your thoughts and energy turn to a tropical beach doing yoga? Or just relaxing on that beach? Some individuals opt to wander around their dream home, seeing it in their mind's eye as detailed as possible.

You already know from our previous conversation that you're tapping into the power of your subconscious mind as you do this. You also know your subconscious mind can't tell the difference between reality and imagination. So if you "conjure" up your imagined world, it slowly becomes more of a reality to your subconscious.

This experiment works best when you stay in your fantasy as long as you possibly can. Do this every night and you'll discover that this place of escape will indeed become your "happy place." You'll not only find it comforting, you'll look forward to visiting it. Before you know it, the creation of a fantasy world has become a habit.

Take this Habit to the Next Level

This habit – performed by many of the most successful executives around — in and of itself in invaluable to your future. But what if you carried this out a bit farther? Once you've created your fantasy world, your next step is to take one item you've been worrying about – just one – and think about it. Now visualize the best possible outcome for this worry.

For example, I know one person who worried about a bill that she couldn't pay at the moment. So, one night, she decided that she would use the principle behind this habit to visualize that bill being paid. She imagined not only herself paying the bill but how she would feel once this burden was lifted from her.

She continued creating this scenario for several nights in a row. Before she knew it a combination of events occurred in her life that she was able to pay off that debt. This awesomely effective habit is the best possible example of these universal laws at work. Painlessly and effortlessly.

Now, you're going to learn the ultimate utilization of this exercise. When you turn this underused technique into a habit, you'll be unleashing a resource known at the moment only to those who are the most successful.

Transfer this nightly habit and wake up fully intending your new-found talent for visualizing. Get yourself seating into a comfortable pose, similar to those individuals use when their meditating. In a very real sense, you'll be meditating over your day – with an

eye to giving a positive spin on it.

Once you're seated and your eyes are closed, imagine in as much detail as you can, the events of the day ahead. Where do you start? At the very beginning, with a healthy breakfast if you want. You may want to start envisioning an anger-free commute to work.

Then go through the details of your day as you would like the events to play out. If you have a meeting with an important client, imagine the meeting being beneficial to both of you. Continue playing out your day ahead of time. Think about how wonderful your afternoon will be. Visualize yourself going through all the motions, from answering the phones to interacting with your office.

Here's the best part of the habit though. When you get through imagining through the end of the day, feel how happy you'll be. Feel the same emotions you'd have if your day really went that smoothly. Soak in those emotions for a while before you break your meditation.

Do this regularly. See how this improves your days. Notice if your productivity doesn't increase. You'll be surprised how it affects your mood as well.

Working alone on your goals is a powerful method to carrying out your dream. There is a method, however, you can use to make the power of visualization even more potent. It's called a Mastermind group. If you're never heard about one before you're in for an eye-opening example of the synergistic power of a group.

If you have heard of this classic example of the power of the mind at work, but have never thought of joining one before, I certainly hope you seriously consider find one to join or start your own group.

Ready to learn more about this awesome group? The following chapter is devoted to Masterminding.

Chapter 5: The Powerful Habit of a Mastermind Group

If you have heard of Mastermind groups prior to this, you may have thought of them like a support group. But they aren't. Most support groups are aimed at people overcoming a singular disease, addiction or a trauma. Probably about the most well-known of these is Alcoholics Anonymous. There are also groups that help cancer patients get through their treatments or even groups for those experiencing with Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder.

All of those organizations help people cope with their present situation to help you deal with life as you meet it head on. A Mastermind group differs in that it's designed to propel you forward. It's all about enabling you – and your partners in your group – in working toward a dream or achieving your goal.

Having said that, don't think for a moment those observations about support groups are meant to malign any of them. They are extremely important and in many ways are, indeed, propelling those participants to success. But Masterminding offers a different kind of support.

Don't think it has to be an enormous or even elaborate goal you bring to your group for aid. Some individuals join a Mastermind group solely to work toward their goal of working toward an "authentic" life. In very simple terms the group is designed to propel you toward something in the future, not about healing you from past events.

While this sounds like an easy enough task, this is exactly the reason many Mastermind groups fail. Some members eventually start slipping into a different mindset.

Before you decide to either start one or to join such a group, remember that it requires quite a bit of positive energy. You're not only trying to provide yourself with a booster shot of optimism and positive energy, but you're also holding that same level of energy for

others in your group.

2. A Mastermind group is a “no whining zone”

Seriously, it is. No single person should dominate the conversation trying to conduct a “pity party.” Technically speaking, no person should dominate the conversation at all.

Each individual present should get roughly the same amount of time to present his or her vision of the future to the group. This is the time to quickly talk about your goals, dreams and the challenges that accompany the achievement of them.

The concept behind a Mastermind group is creating a mindset for success. That can’t be done if members are allowed to whine about problems. Remember the law of attraction. What you think about you bring into manifestation.

Before you enter your group, get yourself mentally prepared for an exciting, energy-expending time. Not only will you be excited about the events in your future, a large part of this group is creating and maintaining excitement for your partners’ projects as well.

3. An effective Mastermind group will pull you out of your comfort zone.

If you haven’t discovered this concept yet, creating success is difficult if you refuse to step out of your comfort zone. You can’t build a career as a novelist if you prefer to spend your days avoiding pen and paper or your computer. That’s not going to get you to the level of success you hunger for.

If you’re truly honest with yourself, you’d admit that’s exactly what you’re trying to do – jump out of your comfort zone. You’ll discover during this time you’ll living beyond it, as well as making future plans that should keep you out of it for a while longer. Mastermind groups are potentially effective because they force you to push you past your old limits. They surprise you with how far you can take your new limits.

4. Mastermind is synonymous with accountability

Every time you attend a session, you’re part of a culture of accountability. You become responsible for your own success. You can’t walk in and blame the alignment of the stars for your not succeeding. You can’t give any vague excuses for not meeting your next goal.

You may be moaning about it at this point, but give it a try. You'll discover that it's the best thing you can do for your career and goals.

5. The successful Mastermind group creates ideas and manifests resources

That sounds like almost an impossible task for several people who are all living different lives propelling themselves toward their individual successes. But believe it or not it's true and it has worked for an amazing number of individuals

Don't chalk this up to dumb luck. Because that's not the reason a host of various actions and ideas erupts in these groups. It's the synergistic power of many focusing – even for a few moments – on the dreams, goals and intentions of another person. Okay, it may sound corny. It may sound hokey. Call it anything you like. But the bottom line is that it works.

It's at this very moment that the law of attraction kicks in and connections are uncovered and resources revealed. It usually is not only helpful that individual, but others in the group may have that "eureka" moment and a gem within the conversation that they can mine.

6. There's a mystical element to a Mastermind session.

Person after person has commented on this. There is, indeed, a mystical element to these meetings. You may consider this a bit odd because your group had no intention of creating a mystical or even spiritual group when you formed it.

But the longer you and your partners are together as a group, asking the universe to lead you on your next step to success, the faster you'll discover these requests are fulfilled. It's part of retraining the subconscious mind to listen to you. Another reason your requests seem to get a swifter response the longer you do it is that you're reprogramming your subconscious mind.

Those are the basic tenets of any good Mastermind session. As the steps indicate, you may discover that the group starts off a bit slow. Answers to your requests, manifestation of even the smallest of your goals may take time. But as you begin to work with the group members, your subconscious mind and the universal laws, you'll discover you're not so much requesting as you are positively affirmation.

You’ll soon learn that all you need to do is claim your good. The moment you decide on your path, the universe and the amazing power of your mind go to work in making it happen.

In addition to using the universal laws and building a Mastermind group, successful individuals practice a host of positive habits that help to usher in and sustain their success. In the following chapter, you’ll discover how to create the habits of the highly successful. Once you know how to create and establish these, you’ll find that your journey to success will be kicked into overdrive.

Chapter 6: The Most Effective Way to Build a Habit

Attraction. Intention. Action.

Zach and Jim continued to talk occasionally about what made a successful person. They finally agreed on those three ingredients. "Not that there are so many more ingredients we could toss into this soup," Jim said. But now, he was clearly seeing that the world wasn't going to hand him success on a silver platter like it did to him, and so many others, in high school.

No, he now knew he would have to generate a certain level of enthusiasm and then to take appropriate action afterward. He gave it some thought and said, "Then I need to start creating new good habits that will contribute to my success and not sabotage me for my future goals.

He left the café determined to write out his goals and start creating new habits based on those goals immediately.

Smart man. The best action anyone can take – including you – is to create habits that will not only help you generate your goals, but carry them out for years and years. These habits will become your secret weapons on your journey.

That's great, you say. But exactly how do you not only create a habit, but ensure you're going to still be using them next month, next year and even farther down the road?

You've probably heard that if you take one action and perform it for twenty-one days, it becomes a habit. That's true. But to be truthful that's only part of the story. You need to make it as easy as possible on your subconscious to make a habit. Don't worry that you're making it "too easy" on yourself. Give yourself credit. You're actually asking quite of bit of your mind. Don't worry. It'll perform and excel with flying colors.

But it’s going to take a few more techniques than merely performing one action for twenty one days. That’s what this chapter is all about. You’re about to learn how the most effective and successful business people have done to train their brains to create habits that stick.

Your first task, though, is identifying the bad habits you’ve picked up over the years when it comes to your career and your life. Sure, it’s easy to identify the bad habits that involve your health: smoking, lack of exercise, excessive coffee intake, eating too much junk food, becoming a couch potato at night and not moving from the sofa except to visit the junk food cabinet.

It’s a bit more difficult to identify the poor work habits we’ve accumulated over time and even harder trying to correct them – especially when working alone. That’s why, you were given some information earlier about starting a Mastermind group. You’ll want to include successful business mentors in your group not only so they can help you identify those habits which are holding you back, but to identify the ones you need to succeed and to implement into your lifestyle.

Brace yourself for a bit of concerted effort. While we’re not saying that changing habits is necessarily easy, it will entail you to work at it some and above all for you to be patient with yourself.

Your bad habit didn’t happen one day. It took a concerted effort and months of regular action to ingrain them into your system. It’s going to take some time, effort and above all patience to kick them out and replace them with a habit that will kick start and sustain your success – for the rest of your life, we may add.

Just listen to Christin Whelan, a public sociologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She’s an expert on the topic of habits currently working with AARP’s Life Re-imagined Institute. She’s been studying happiness, human ecology and above all habits.

Making a lasting change in your life may take a few different forms. First, you may need to add an action to your life. Or it could be you need to end an activity you’re currently doing. When you talk about being successful, you’ve got to first consider what it is you need to do.

Add a Habit … Subtract What?

It’s easy to say I want to go to the gym for an hour and a half a day three days a week. But when you make this resolve to you seriously ponder what **is not going to get done during the hours we’re at the gym.** Most individuals don’t think about they’re surrendering in order to add that awesome habit into their lives.

Before you make your vow to go to the gym, let’s say, consider what it is that is not going to happen during those hours you’re there. If you’re like my friend, the freelance writer, you’re taking yourself out of a minimum of two hours a day of what could be productive writing.

The question then becomes, “Is my time at the gym worth more than the loss of several hours of work? Or it may be can I go to the gym at a time when it doesn’t conflict with my productivity. Would I be willing to give up a couple of hours of sleep in the morning for my new-found habit of exercise?”

These are questions you need to ask before you enter into any agreement with yourself about starting a new habit. If you don’t and you realize as my friend did that she really needed that time to write – at least on certain days – then she very well may not continue the habit.

You know what happened after that? She blamed herself for not having enough will power to continue. That really wasn’t exactly how all her habit ended it. She unnecessarily put the burden of a failed habit on an internal flaw of hers. She felt bad enough to begin with, she needn’t start playing the blame game with herself.

How many times have you done the very same thing?

That’s the reason some individuals avoid pledging chunks of time out of their work day, Dr. Whelen explains. Instead, the pledge to create commitment strategies. This may be the best way to establish a habit, she said. They hold themselves accountable, sometimes in public ways.

While this isn’t always the best method of establishing a new habit it does indeed work for some people.

One of the most effective change strategies is to automate the change into your life. The aim of this is that you’re incorporating the new behavior into your life with a minimum of

thought.

After trying to put an effective exercise program into his life and experiencing what he felt was failure one individual hit upon an idea. He, just like every one of us, used the restroom every day – several times a day. He decided every time he went to the bathroom he vowed to do so many sit ups. In this way, he didn't as if were "stealing" anytime from his work, but he was still able to get a good number of sit ups.

He was amazed at how quickly this became a habit and how much of a difference it made in his life.

Another friend of mine started meditating in the evening. She watched television and during the commercials, she muted the television and grabbed several minutes of meditation time during those quiet moments. Of course, instead of closing her eyes, she gazed at the television. When the program returned, she turned the sound back on and continued to watch the show.

She was getting all the benefits of mediation, without having to remember to set aside twenty or so minutes daily. If she added a longer session later in the evening, so much the better.

How long does it take to instill a habit?

If you've rattled off the number "twenty one" you've confirmed what many people think, but Dr. Whelen is a bit more pessimistic about that. She affirms that to truly make a habit stick, you probably need to do it for a minimum of ninety days. The bottom line, she admits, is that you'll be more successful in creating a lasting habit, one you truly don't have to think about doing, the longer you continue to do it.

While this may sound like it's difficult to create good habits, you must remember you didn't fall into those bad habits overnight. The good news, though, is that once you've established this habit, the carrying out of it does indeed eventually become effortless. At some point you'll discover that you're performing this action without any thinking involved.

It won't require self-control on your part or much active internal debate about it. You'll just find yourself doing it. At some point, it becomes a part of you. On those few days you

don’t perform one of your habits, you’ll feel something missing in your day – even if you can’t identify it right away.

Below is a checklist that Dr. Whelen suggests you go through as you add new positive habits into your daily routine:

1. Take tiny steps. Choose one action at a time. Don’t do an entire makeover.

2. Decide not only what you need to add to your routine to make this happen, but what you may have to subtract from your daily routine. Then make room for it.

3. Make sure you’re creating a new positive habit because you want it, not because your spouse, mother or somebody else wants you to.

4. Get a partner, friend or family member to hold you accountable for continuing the habit, especially in those early days when you’re in the position of pondering it.

Is it getting up an hour earlier? Have someone at some time during the day contact you to see if you kept that commitment.

5. If you must, tie this new habit to something you have to do anyway.

In other words, automate it. Like the individual who ties his series of sit ups with his restroom visits, you’ll find it hard not to do after a while.

6. Celebrate your continued success at certain intervals.

What you choose to do is up to you, but don’t forget to give yourself a pat on the back, in some form.

7. Stick with the habit.

The longer you continue to do it, the better the prospects it will become a part of you. Once it does become a routine, you’ll notice when you skip it. But even better than that,

the chances of you just “skipping it,” will dwindle tremendously.

Chapter 7: Become Aware of your Surroundings

Think back for a moment when you were a child. Your parents, grandparents or even your teachers may have said to you at one point, “Don’t become friends with him. He’s nothing but trouble. Did they ever warn you about keeping company with certain individuals because they’ll certainly take you down the wrong road?

They probably worried about who your friends were. For many of us, it seemed so silly.

Your parents knew more than what they let on, however. They were only expressing themselves in good old fashioned terms. But if you’re seeking to be wildly successful at whatever you choose, you should once again be careful about how you choose your friends and acquaintances.

Today, psychologists believe that who you keep company with could indeed spell the death of your success in the business. That may be a bit of an overstatement, but not much. It’s estimated that you are the average of the five individuals you spend the most time with.

Who are five of your best friends? Who in the course of your working hours, you spend the most time around? Who do you spend your off hours from work with? List these five people and examine their attitudes. Are they optimistic or pessimistic or just indifferent to their surroundings?

Are they successful in their endeavors? Do they exemplify good habits?

Maybe in your pursuit of success and attaining your goals, you may want to add spending time with individuals who/ are more aligned with your thoughts, who are liable to more supportive of your goals, and ideally have already been where you are and have turned the corner and are successes in their own right.

If you want to be an online marketer, then make it a point to meet people who have already launched successful web sites. If you can't find any people to meet in person locally, find out where on the Internet people with your interests visit. Make it a point to engage others into conversations and to participate in ongoing conversations. You'll be surprised at how quickly and graciously people will help you out.

If you want to be an author, joining creative writing groups and professional organizations. Here you'll find not only those just beginning in the business, but those who have already published a book. Soon, without you even realizing it you're absorbing and adopting some of the best habits of these individuals.

On the flip side, do you only spend time who think they're doomed even before they begin, who know for a fact it would be a waste of time to even start a business because the odds are stacked against them? Over time, their pattern of thinking may influence more than you'll know. You may, without even realizing it, began to adopt the same type of thinking and belief system.

If you're serious about success, then you really would be doing yourself a big favor if you begin to seek out and spend time with individuals who are already successful. Ideally, you'll want to spend time with those who have attained their goals. Ideally, you need to be spending more time with those who have made it in a career you're interested in.

If you're thinking you need a mentor at this point, you're almost there. These people will be mentors – and this is important – but they'll also at a deeper level become friends. They'll be those you most want to emulate. You'll be in a position to view up close and personal the habits that have taken them from where you are today to where they are today.

Meet Others of Like Minds

One of the best places to discover people like this – a whole roomful of individuals like this – is at a local Rotary Club. If you're a woman, you can also check out a local Business Woman's group. Both of these, and whatever other professional organizations you can discover that fit your niche, would be perfect for you.

At this point, may think you have to dump a specific number of your older friends who have bad thought habits, aren't encouraging and believe that any attempt at making something of yourself is a pie in the sky silly notion. That's just not so.

What you'll find occurring, though, is that as you progress in searching out more encouraging acquaintances, you'll have less in common with those whose thinking doesn't align with yours. It will be more of a parting of the ways because you and these more pessimistic individuals have less in common than ever before.

There's also another, far reaching reason to spend time with professional people more in line with your interests. By doing so, you'll be able to identify two aspects of their actions that you can adopt as your own: their good habits which in turn will shed light on your own bad habits.

At this very moment, you may be saying you have no bad habits. And you may really believe it. It could be, though, you just don't recognize them either. Once you discover the actions, thinking patterns and habits of the successful, you may be better able to turn the light onto your own habits you'd like to either replace or adopt.

Don't take this personally. Every person on this planet has some type of bad habit, even if it's only fueling their energy on caffeine. The odds are far more likely that even that person has more bad habits than he cares to admit. When you think of a bad habit, you only believe it deals with things you're now doing that are blocking your success.

Consider that a bad habit could just as easily be the omission of something you could be doing that would make you more successful. If you're not exercising, you may very well call this a bad habit – even though most people wouldn't say this.

If you're a part-time entrepreneur now and aren't getting up at four in the morning to add a couple hours to your already harried day, wouldn't be called a vice by some. However to an individual who does wake up at four in the morning every day it is.

One of the biggest obstacles many of us encounter when we attempt to break a bad habit is that we attempt, merely just to quit doing it. We don't realize we've just created a void where an action used to exist.

One of the keys to help underline your success is to replace your bad habit with another action. This method recognizes that the laws of physics can't stand a vacuum. When you quit one habit, it's easier to fill that empty space – that vacuum – with some action. We've all met people who want nothing more than lose weight for example. Some who try to quit smoking will naturally turn working crossword or Sudoku puzzles.

If you're trying to quit smoking for example, you may be at a loss, especially at the initial changes of the process, because you don't know what to do with your hands. There are some individuals who recognize this and choose instead of smoking to buy a deck of cards and play solitaire at those times they were smoking instead. Or some individuals merely shuffle the cards, discovering that's action enough.

The key to adopting good working patterns and shedding the bad ones can be summed up in one simple phrase: *become aware of your surroundings.* If you've ever performed mindful meditation, then you know just what we're talking about. The first step is to become aware of them, but not to judge them. At least initially, they'll be a time and place you'll want to kick the bad working patterns to the street. When that time occurs, then here is a way you may like to do it.

1. Acknowledge and identify your bad habit.

As we discussed earlier, they'll come a time when you see that your waking up later than you think you should be is a bad habit that needs broken. Once you realize that, you're more likely to work at establishing a new morning routine that starts earlier in the day. After that it's just a matter of time before you make that happen.

What is one of the most effective ways of acknowledging a bad habit for what it is? You may want to create and work with what many call an awareness log. It's a simple approach composed of a series of personal questions to heighten your awareness of when these habits are occurring. Exactly what kind of questions you ask yourself is going to depend on the habit you're trying to break.

Some of the questions you may want to ask yourself *include* these:

- Where are you when you get the urge to perform this habit? (Time and place)
- Does this urge occur at a certain time of the day?
- What is your emotional state? Tired? Depressed?
- Does this habit occur when you're with specific people? In other words, is the "average of five" kicking in? Are your friends bringing you down?
- Was there some action that occurred right before you got this urge?

2. Give yourself a deadline to begin your new behavior.

That's right! You've read that it's important to set a goal and give yourself a reasonable amount of time to reach it. It's also important, if not more so, to give yourself a target day on initiating the new pattern.

There's a very specific reason for doing this. You must make sure you – and your subconscious mind – are ready for this adventure. If you begin prematurely – especially if you're feeling you're coercing your body into this – then you'll probably setting yourself up for failure. And perhaps scarring your psyche.

3. Recognize the triggers

Many bad habits are triggered by performing other actions. You've probably heard people say they crave a cigarette the moment they have a beer or other drink in their hand. If you've ever smoked or drank, perhaps you have firsthand information about that.

Similarly, some individuals recognize that watching television triggers their desire to munch on junk food.

If you're trying to quit one habit, be sure you're aware that your toughest moments may be those in which you can't avoid a trigger. In fact, many experts tell you to take your time and make a list of those type of activities. In this way you'll be able to identify them beforehand. But don't stop there, you'll want to have a reasonable game plan already in place so you're prepared – at the least not completely blindsided.

4. Work at your own pace.

The tendency when you start a new habit is to give yourself an elaborate new make-over. Many people tend to tackle all of their bad habits at one time. This practice can be exhausting. It can also be setting you up for failure.

Don't think about how many habits you can shed in the shortest amount of time. Think about the habit you believe is the one that's the largest obstacle to your success. You may

want to do away with that one first. Or may want to dip your feet into the water with one of the minor bad work patterns you believe you have. Instead of trying to conquer them all, settle on cutting them down one at a time. Pull them up by the roots, so to speak. In this way, you're sue you've eliminated at least one of them

If you choose a single lesson first, then once you conquer this with relative ease, it'll build your self-confidence. In this way, you're also building momentum for more and greater changes.

5. Be prepared to forgive yourself.

Far too many individuals fail the first time they try to shed themselves of a bad working pattern and are fearful of starting over. Talk to anyone who has ever quit smoking and most of them will tell you that they tried several times before they were successful.

If you don't succeed on your first try, don't get discouraged. In fact, react with the opposite energy – increase your resolve to try again and succeed this time.

Chapter 8: Meditation: A Habit of 85% of all Successful people

Jim and Zach were still sitting in the coffee shop talking about what made successful people. Zach commented that he recently acquired the habit of meditation. "It not only gives me a peace of mind at the end of the day," he told Jim, "but I start off every morning with a twenty-minute session. I can't tell you how much more I can get accomplished in a day."

Jim dismissed this idea as being off the wall. "I thought only the spiritually inclined and the stereotypical aging hippie meditated. Besides I don't believe in all that 'woo-woo' stuff."

Zach just smiled. He was about to let Jim in on the most well-kept secret of all successful business individuals.

In part, Jim is correct. Who among us doesn't associate a meditation with another, earlier generation? After all, it was the famous rock group, ***The Beatles,*** who introduced most of the Western Culture to meditation some forty years ago.

But something amazing has occurred in those forty years since. Science has not only researched it but has certified it as being an effective healing resource. Not only can meditation heal your body, it can help your mind focus and become more productive.

Meditation is proving to be so powerful a tool and so amazingly beneficial, that some of the same skeptical scientists who are studying it are now practicing it themselves. And that's exactly what you want if you're looking to fulfill your career goals.

"Meditation more than anything in my life was the biggest ingredient of whatever success I've had."

You may think that sounds like the Dalai Lama speaking. Or even Oprah Winfrey. We've all come to expect that spiritual side to breaking through her business side now and then.

You'd be wrong on both counts. That's a quote from Ray Dalio. Who? That's the reaction of many. But Dalio is a billionaire and the founder of Bridgewater Associates, the largest hedge fund firm in the world. How's that for a model of a businessman who meditates?

But that's just one person, how about Rupert Murdock the chief executive officer of News Corp., the media mogul.

Today, you're just as likely to discover someone meditating in the boardroom of a Fortune 500 corporation than you are a local spiritual retreat.

Below are just a few more business people who have added the magnificent habit of meditation to their daily routine.

- Robert Stiller, CEO, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Inc.
- Tony Schwartz, CEO, The Energy Project
- William Ford, Executive Chairman, The Ford Motor Company
- Larry Brilliant, former director of Google.org

And we're not even about to list all the television and film celebrities who find it essential to their careers and peace of mind. The fact that so many outrageously successful business executives evidently find it an indispensable part of their daily habits should make you sit up and take notice.

Should you Meditate?

That's only a question you can answer. If you've seriously thought about meditating, this would be the time to start. If you've tried before and failed, don't allow that to keep you from trying again … and again … If you have to. The benefits you'll receive in improving your focus, boosting your productivity and turbocharging your concentration are that impressive.

Researchers have confirmed that the claims many individuals have made for years concerning the benefits of this habit really hold up. What can you expect when you begin

your meditation program? No one can say for sure, but here's how it affects many others:

Greater Focus

For anyone who has already given meditation a try, this should come as no great surprise. That's the primary key to meditating, focusing on your breath. What may surprise you is that this ability to focus in on targets, much like a laser light, stays with you, even when you're not meditating. That focus lingers with us after we sit up and get down to work. Scientists now realize that focus can be strengthened like the muscles in your body. All you have to do is to exercise it.

Anxiety

It's true! The scientific reason for this is interesting and far more complex than can be explained here, but the bottom line is that, as far as researchers can detect, meditation loosens the connections of some of your neural pathways. This results in a more rational reaction when you're confronted with unsettling or unexpected sensations. You're much more likely to look at a potential business crisis with a calm demeanor instead of immediately envisioning the worst-case scenario.

Increased Creativity

Now, here's a trait everyone who is looking for success can use!

Those individuals who practiced a meditation technique called "open-monitoring" meditation, find that they have significantly increased their creativity. This type of meditation is also referred to at times as "awareness of thinking," or mindful meditation. Instead of sweeping all thought out of your mind, as you do in a focused session, you'll sit and be totally aware of your thoughts and feelings. Not only are you aware of them, but you're directed to observe them. Observe them, but don't judge them as either right or wrong, good or bad.

Some individuals believe this popular form quieting the mind allows the person meditating to become a "scientific observer" of sorts of his own mind. This means as you practice this you'll become increasingly aware of which thoughts actually trigger changes in your emotions.

In other words, you'll be able to tell what thoughts make you happy, which make your sad. Imagine being able to dissect your thinking. Then what do you think you can eventually do? You've got it, avoid those thoughts that bring sorrow or unnecessary sadness and concentrate on the thoughts can lift you up.

Once you start to feel the benefits of this wonderful habit, you may want to delve deeper into just how beneficial it can become in your life. If you enjoy the simple, mindful and focused versions of this activity, you may want to learn the more advanced versions, including conceptional and movement meditations. Unfortunately we don't have the room to talk much about these types, but excellent descriptions and directions can be found in books dedicated to meditation.

Right now, let's get familiarized with a simple meditation that will get you up and running with this activity. The quicker you experiment with this, the quicker you'll know if it's an activity you want to adopt as a habit.

1. Select a mantra.

If you're not familiar with meditation, you may not be familiar with the word mantra. This is a word or a phrase you repeat to yourself while you're in session. The mantra is a great diversion to help you think about something else than your thoughts.

In a focused meditation, the goal is to sweep all thoughts of your mind. Your mind will try any trick in the book to try to push thoughts – any kind at all – back into your head.

What kind of phrase should you choose? Before you decide on your mantra, you may want to learn about some of the most popular ones. Some people use "peace" or "love." Some individuals even use something referred to as the "so hum" mantra. This is a sound typically used as a Sanskrit mantra, translated into "I am."

If you're a spiritual person who may have number of words you may associate with peace of mind you'll want to use. If you're more secular, harmony, peace or love may be the most appropriate mantras.

2. Sit in a comfortable seat, in a quiet location.

It’s best to find a quiet location, even if you have to lock yourself into your home office and place a sign on the door stating a meditation is in process. Once you adopt this as a regular activity, you won’t anybody to interrupt. Eventually you’ll also want to find a dedicated space for your sessions.

Right now, don’t worry too much about where you’re sitting. You may want to sit cross-legged on the floor with your back against a wall or on a chair or even a couch. The important thing is that you’re comfortable. You’ll also want to try to keep your spine as straight as possible. There are many individuals who choose to lie down during meditation. You may not want to do that during your initial learning stages. There’s always that danger of your falling asleep.

3. Close your eyes. Take several “cleansing” breaths.

You’re about ready to begin. Close your eyes. Take in a breath, breathing through your nose. Exhale, breathing through your mouth. These are known as cleansing breaths. Once you’ve done this, then breathe normally through your nose. Keep your lips closed to ensure this happens.

4. Repeat your mantra silently to yourself.

The idea is to repeat your mantra silently. Don’t force this repetition. Your mantra doesn’t necessarily need to reflect the rhythm of your breath. If you like, you can connect the word to either your inhaling or exhaling, but that’s not necessary. You’ll recognize a successful meditation session when you’re not forcing anything – no mantra, no breath, and it’s not difficult to sweep away your thoughts.

5. At this point, don’t focus on emptying your mind.

You’re about natural, so don’t get upset. You’ll find there are times when you abruptly realize you’re not reciting your mantra. “When did that happen?” you ask yourself. You discover you really can’t tell when you stopped, but you did.

Stop! We all know what your first instinct is. Don’t go there.

Instead of panicking and berating yourself, simply get back on course. Don’t judge yourself for getting off track to begin with. It happens to everyone now and then.

6. Continue if you can for five minutes.

Ultimately your goal for an effective meditation session will be twenty to thirty minutes. But when you're beginning, that's asking quite a bit of your mind. In fact, trying to sit this long on your first session may well be self-defeating. Your failure at remaining still for that long may mistakenly make you believe you're not capable of meditating. And that's just not true.

Considering the many benefits not only in your productivity, but your health as well, meditation can bring, you shouldn't try it once and give up on it. That's not fair to you. Give it a try for several days, or better yet weeks. Keep in mind that the most recent research reveals that you're reaping all the benefits associated with this habit, even if you don't realize it.

Believe it or not, the benefits "sneak up on you." You may do this for several months and swear it's not helping you much. Then one day, you realize the time you've spent finally has paid off. So don't get discouraged.

Conclusion

“Thanks, buddy,” Jim said to Zach as he pumped his hand. “My new career is taking off. And I couldn’t have done it without you helping me identify and establishing a series of good habits. I appreciate the time you’ve spent with me.”

Have you spent enough time on developing your new habits that you’re off and running on your career? Hopefully, these pages are filled not only with suggestions that you’ll read once, but ideas and concepts you’ll mine and adopt as your own.

If you haven’t fully established all the habits you want, don’t stop just because you’ve finished reading the book. Go back and review the habits you’re still establishing. Review some of the laws that allow you to create the world of your dreams.

If you find your spirits sagging, don’t allow yourself to even think about giving up. Convince yourself that giving up is not an option – because it isn’t. If you open the door to walking away even an inch, you’ll start relinquishing all the positive thoughts you’ve built up to this time. And before you know it, you really have given up, wondering what went wrong. You’ll probably also end up kicking yourself later down the road.

So, keep this book handy, review it often and I’m betting you’ll find new and creative ways you can put even a portion of these habits and laws to work for you. Not only that, but remember: When you’re ready to take action, the universe will match you in guidance, nearly step for step.

But more than that, this book probably will propel you to go on to reading more books on habits and success. That’s great. The more knowledge you have the better equipped you’ll be to continue on your journey.

You’re only Laying the Foundation

Believe it or not, all the work that you’ve put into establishing good habits is really just the beginning. The work you’ve done so far has laid the foundation for future success. To continue your success, you’ll find yourself not only perfecting these habits, but establishing an ever expanding series of habits – one building on top of another – that will ensure that five years from now, you’ll still be a major contender in whatever field you’ve

chosen to work in.

Good habits never go “out of style.” They’ll never fail you. Once you’ve established your routine, trained your subconscious and are working harmoniously with the universe, then your accomplishments are unlimited.

Welcome to the world you were born to create for yourself!

Christian: God is Love

An Introduction to Christianity

John Hoffman

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Introduction

There are two questions that many people are asking these days: **Does God exist and Why Christianity?** Let's look at the first question. Does God exist? Like the wind God cannot be seen but one can sure see the effects of the wind. The trees sway in the wind. Fierce snow that blows off the tops of mountains. Very high walls of water rising high off the surface of the ocean. (Waves and in extreme cases tsunamis) The effects of God's beautiful handiwork can be seen all around the world. The vast oceans which dominate 71% of the earth's surface. Huge mountains that stretch endlessly into the horizon. (Mount Everest the highest peak in the world-29029')The wind like God cannot be seen. The bible says this about seeing God:" **But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Exodus 33:20.**

The wind cannot be tasted or touched but it sure can be felt when it is blowing people down the street at 90 M.P.H.! God cannot be tasted or touched but think about how good a red, juicy apple tastes. How about drinking an icy cold cup of water on a hot, sweltering, summer day. God created both of those delights but He wasn't seen creating them. The effects of these two pleasures can be seen, felt, tasted and touched.

Look at the night sky sometime and one will see millions of stars shining brightly. The stars cannot be touched or smelled but they can be seen. God made all these night wonders invisibly for our viewing pleasure. He cannot be viewed in the night skies but the effects of His creative hand can be seen.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." Romans 1:20

This is what the bible says about not seeing God who made all creation invisibly by His eternal power. His awesome qualities can be understood. Look at the sheer magnitude of the oceans and mountains of the earth and the countless stars in the night sky. Try counting the endless grains of sand that cover the beaches of the world.

Now the second question **why Christianity?** The effects of Christianity on a person embracing it for the first time can be seen. Let's walk into an imaginary person's life who is experiencing Christianity for the first time. They have previously tried every other pleasure under the sun and they still feel empty inside. They have been trying to quit drugs, alcohol and find inner peace. So they attend church and hear about Christianity for

the first time. Suddenly or over a period of time they develop a new inner peace and they quit taking drugs and stop drinking alcohol forever. These dramatic changes took place after they were exposed to Christianity. The God of Christianity brought these changes in them. People didn't see the inward influence of Christianity bring about these changes in this person but they saw the changes in the person's character**.**

Chapter 1: The Power of Prayer

How do I pray to God

Think of it in these terms: Talking to God is like talking to a person one doesn't know and is meeting for the first time. A person might say hello to God; he can explain he doesn't know anything about God. He really doesn't believe that God exists. God will not be offended if a person says these things to Him. **T**he person can ask God to reveal Himself to that person to prove God does exist. He can ask God something like "God if you are really true make it hail on the 4th of July." This sounds extreme but God is big enough that He can do this for the seeking person. So the 4th of July comes along and it hails. God proved He exists; talking to Him can be very powerful. God really is very easy to talk to; it isn't hard at all with practice it gets easier. A person can ask God to do many things for him to prove He does exists, after a while the person will know by experience that God exists. You know prayer is talking to God the most powerful being in the universe. It's simply having conversation with Him like you would with your best friend. God will not disappoint the person who talks to Him with an open heart and He will surprise Him.

How can prayer save my life?

A person who is in a life threatening situation will be pleasantly surprised to know they can call out to God. This simple S.O.S. could save their life. God can turn a life crisis around at the speed of light. People may find themselves in circumstances that are beyond their control and could cost them their lives. For instance, they may be driving in adverse weather conditions in the mountains; suddenly the driver loses control of the car. The car straddles the side of the mountain then swerves toward and over the cliff! The car rolls violently end over end down the side of the mountain like a yo-yo that snapped off its string. Keep in mind none of the people in the car believe in or really acknowledge God. One of them simply cries out, "God I'm too young to die". Somehow everyone manages to get out of the car suffering only minor injuries. They are all alive after surviving an auto accident that should have killed them. God heard that simple prayer and saved their lives.

I don't believe prayer works

God cannot lie and if He says He will answer prayer; He will answer prayer. When one prays whether he has a lot of experience praying or He's approaching prayer for the first time. The bottom line is God cannot be fooled and He already knows what is in a person's heart. When one comes to God in prayer he doesn't need to use big religious words. Just

come to God with no pretense and tell Him what is in your heart. Something like this: “God this is the first time I’m talking to you. This feels really weird for me and I don’t even know if You exist. So if You do exist show me Yourself in a way I can understand.” Simple and to the point and an honest from the heart request. This is the kind of prayer God is looking for. Prayer works and the bible is full of examples of God answering His people when they prayed.

My prayers are never answered

People pray specifically for something and they don’t see the answer right away. They think God is not answering. This is not true it could mean that God is telling them “no” because it may hurt them more than help them at this point in their lives. God could be saying” Wait I will answer yes to these prayers but on my time.” People can realize that God is always answering their prayers with a “yes, no or wait”. Just because He doesn’t say” yes” all the time. It certainly doesn’t mean that He is not answering their prayers. Let’s take an example of what may appear to be God not answering a prayer. A person wants to get a higher paying job with more responsibility. They start praying and asking God to meet that desire. They interview for a job that fits perfectly with their needs. The interview goes very well but the person doesn’t get hired. The natural conclusion is God didn’t answer their prayer. Two months later they find out the company they interviewed with went bankrupt and went out of business! This is a clear case of God saying “no” to their prayer. He protected them from losing their current job and their source of financial support.

Let’s talk to God

There is an easy way for a person who may not believe in God or doesn’t feel comfortable praying to Him to pray to Him. They can find a Christian they can trust and talk to God with them. This can happen in a non-threatening way and in an environment that they won’t feel vulnerable. The more the person talks to God and sees that He is kind and a generous God. The easier it will be for them to pray to Him. Prayer can be looked at like having an intimate conversation with a wife or husband or trusted friend. Prayer can also be just having a chat with God. There is no mystical element to prayer it is a man, child or woman talking with God. Let’s take the fear and mysticism out of prayer. It is talking to God like you would talk to a friend. But keep in mind that God surely deserves our respect when we talk to Him. We need to also remember that He is God.

Christians prayed and still committed suicide

This issue must be considered with great care. Why would a Christian pray for God's help and then commit suicide? People who are exploring knowing God or do not believe He exists could have serious reservations about becoming a Christian when they hear things like this happening in Christianity. They may think being a Christian and committing suicide what! I am better off not being a Christian at least I am still alive. But there is more to this issue of a Christian praying for help and then committing suicide. God or Christianity should never be blamed for the Christian praying then taking their life. It could be the person prayed and thought they were a Christian but they really were not. They felt so hopeless about their life circumstance that the only way they saw out was to take their life. God is a life-giving God and will never direct a Christian to take their life. The Christian could be so depressed or feel hopeless that they figure the only escape for them is to commit suicide even after praying. The Christian still may feel so weighed down by their particular problem. They still may end up taking their life because they just have lost all hope of any type of resolution.

What about Christian's unanswered prayers

People can know that a Christian who really knows God in a personal way, will always know that God answers their prayers. The answer could be "no or wait". God will answer a Christian's prayer every time.

"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." Isaiah 65:24

This bible verse from Isaiah's book tells people that God will always answer Christian's prayers even before they pray or while they are still praying. The Christian may be praying about things that God is answering "no" to. God could be saying "wait". This prayer won't be in your best interest for Me to answer "yes" to at this point in time. Christians who know the love and mercy of God will know that He has answered "no or wait". They will rest in Him because they know that whatever His answer to their prayers are will always be for their well-being. They also know from experience that God will not always answer "wait or no" but in certain seasons of their lives He will answer "yes."

Chapter 2: Why Christianity it’s no better than any other religion

I am an atheist I have no use for Christianity

The phrase **“I am an atheist I have no use for Christianity’** is used today by those who feel the bible isn’t true and therefore God doesn’t exist. There is no God than there can be no Christianity. There is no Christianity than Jesus didn’t die for humanity. Ok, so if Jesus didn’t die for us than we don’t have to be morally responsible to a God who doesn’t exist. What this phrase really means is “God doesn’t exist so a person doesn’t have to be responsible for making right and wrong choices based on an absolute standard-God. So he can do whatever he wants because there is no standard but his own. The only authority he answers to is himself.

The only problem is that people who are atheists really don’t know what is truly right and wrong. They have no absolute standard to base their moral choices. Everything becomes relative and what was defined as “right” this time is defined as “wrong” next time. There is no consistency in what is good and evil. God has inherently put inside every one of us the capacity to know true right from true wrong. Romans says it this way:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) Romans 2:14-15

God has set a “conscience” in every human being. That uneasy feeling one gets when they know what they are doing is wrong is their conscience warning them. They compute that extra hour on their time sheet they didn’t work. The person takes credit for the discovery that the other guy really made. People can ignore their conscience so much that after a while they become insensitive to it. So the reality is that every human being is created with conscience to inherently know right from wrong. There are two standards to prove the existence of God.1) A higher intelligence (than ourselves) created man with the ability to know right from wrong.2) The bible has countless examples of a God who does exist.

So God exists than Christianity is alive and well and plausible. People need the God of

Christianity to guide them in what is truly right and wrong. So Christianity is useful because it shows God created every person with a moral indicator known as conscience. The Christian bible explains that God does exist and He is the ultimate standard of right and wrong.

Don't talk to me about Christianity

Christians who have had a lot of experience in Christianity have heard this statement (Don't talk to me about Christianity) when talking to Non-Christians. Why is Christianity such a volatile topic among people? Christians start talking about an eternal destination to Non-Christians it evokes deeply held beliefs. Humans by nature are spiritual and they have an innate fear of death and who's in control of their lives. Christianity is thrown into the conversation and now we are talking of turning one's life over to Jesus Christ. The subject is brought up that Jesus died for everyone's sin and He can give the Non-Believer a much better life. He will save that person from eternal hell. Some people respond in anger to these truths because they are being asked to deal with where they will go when they die. People know when they die that's it life as we know it is over. People fear death because they really don't know where they will go after they die. Asking people to give their life to Jesus, is asking them to give up control of their lives and destiny. But Non-Christians need to keep in mind that Jesus will take them to heaven if they desire to have a personal relationship with Him. God has given every person a free will. They can reject/accept His gift of Christianity. They accept His gift He will gently lead their lives in the direction He knows is best for them. One thing is clear God will never force anyone to let Him lead their life. He has committed to respect the decision of every human concerning Christianity.

People cry Jesus not Mohammed or Buddha in death situations

Jessie Duplantis, a well-known Christian minster, told a true story of how he was in a plane that was about to crash. He was sitting next to a Muslim and they had engaged in conversation about their beliefs. The man was committed to Mohammed and his teachings. The pilot's voice interrupted their conversation over the loud speaker telling everyone to fasten their seatbelts. They were also instructed to prepare for a crash landing. The plane began to rock violently and descended at a rapid rate of speed. The Muslim man sitting next to him began screaming "Jesus! Jesus!" He screamed Jesus not Mohammed why? It's believed that Jessie Duplantis had also heard Buddhists screaming "Jesus!" instead of Buddha in another plane crash. (Jessie survived 2 plane crashes.) Again why did these people call on Jesus instead of Buddha? Could it be that the reality of Jesus was more real to them deep within than the reality of Buddha or Mohammed? Jesus said, "**The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. John" 6:63.**Imagine these groups of people studied the

words of Jesus and they found true life and spirit in his teachings. To the point when they found themselves in death circumstances they believed Jesus could help them not Buddha or Mohammed.

Christianity is just useless

It has been said that Christianity is full of false claims and the Christian bible is full of errors and it was not written by God through His servants. This being said if these two claims were true then Christianity would be useless. This also means over thousands of years millions have been duped by Jesus and the claims He made about Christianity. Jesus is the founder of Christianity in fact Jesus is Christianity. The claims He made about Himself are recorded in the Christian bible. It is written **"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Matthew 16:21.** Jesus made these two central claims to Christianity. He would be killed and He would be raised on the third day. So if Jesus didn't die and if Jesus didn't rise from the grave on the third day Christianity would be pointless. Jesus did die and He was raised on the third day. The bible witnesses to these to claims being accomplished.

Paul, a Christian had this to say about Jesus in **1 Corinthians 15:14-19, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."** Therefore Jesus did die and He was raised on the third day; so Christianity is vital and true and is a very realistic option for people who want to embrace eternal life. Jesus is the source of eternal life in Christianity.

I don't need Christianity. I don't believe in heaven or hell

First one has to believe there is a hereafter and that heaven and hell are real places. People won't these acknowledge these two facts than to talk about the need for Christianity is pointless. The Christian bible is the ultimate source for the existence of heaven and hell. The proof for heaven and hell must be settled in the person's mind before they will see the need for Christianity. Once the person is convinced of the existence of heaven and hell. They realize they can choose whether they want to spend eternity in either place. Then

they can talk about the necessity of Christianity with an open mind. The Bible has this to say about hell:" **If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out." Mark 9:43, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41** to find more bible verses on hell click on http://www.biblestudytools.com/matthew/25-41.html**.**

Some bible verses about heaven: **My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." John 14:2-4 c**lick on http://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/heaven-bible-verses/ for further bible verses on heaven. Proving the existence of heaven and hell is the basic roadblock to overcome when speaking with people about the need for Christianity.

Chapter 3: The Temptation of Life

My drug addiction isn’t filling the hole

People who feel shy and they are hurting or escaping a tragic loss of a loved one may turn to drugs. They turn to drugs thinking an outside substance will fill the hurt or loneliness caused by that emptiness inside. Mind altering drugs are a common source people will turn to. They think the drugs will change their destructive thinking patterns. When people use mind altering drugs they temporarily escape their negative thought patterns and feel temporarily free from their emotional prison cells. The problem with using these powerful drugs is they are highly addictive.

The initial euphoria and numbing effect it has on their brain will require higher dosages each time to achieve the same mental escape. The drug addiction pulls the person into a self-destructive cycle that just amplifies the emptiness found inside. The person will fill a deeper sense of emptiness anytime they are not high on their drug of choice. The drug addiction can have many adverse effects on the drug user, their family and their finances. The drug addiction will not fill the emptiness people feel. It will only temporarily Band-Aid the hole inside. Ultimately the drug addiction will leave the person feeling deeply depressed possibly suicidal.

Offering Christianity to a deeply hurting soul by sharing how the Christian came out of a drug addiction can be powerful. The Christian can gently but firmly share with the person what destructive effects the drugs had on their lives. How it didn’t feel their emptiness. Sharing the founder of Christianity, Jesus, with them in a manner they can relate to can be life-changing. The Christian can tell how they embraced Christianity and God filled them with His hope and love. This hope and love was the only true way they were filled and healed from their emptiness. This conversation with a hurting drug user can be so powerful if the Christian is sensitive to needs of that person.

Pornography is filling my emptiness

Pornography isn’t thought of as an addiction like obvious ones such as alcohol or drugs. People think they can watch pornography and walk away from it anytime. This isn’t the case because pornography can be destructive and destroy the user and all intimate relationships he is connected to. Pornography brings a false sense of fulfillment and

intimacy which can never be achieved. The initial exposure will bring a rush but that will eventually wear off.

Pornography users would need to attend recovery like people who suffer from other addictions. They need to have their minds healed and re-trained to think normally again. Pornography will alter the mind of the user as the addiction becomes stronger and stronger to break. Once the person is entrenched in pornography they need more and more of it each viewing. They have reached the point of not being able to quit on their own. Pornography can leave such a strong impression on the memory that the user can go months without watching pornography, but the images will still be imprinted on their mind like they just saw them.

Pornography leaves the user feeling emptier then when he started indulging in it. Pornography users withdraw into themselves and isolate from their partners. They become emotionally alienated from human relationships. Jesus of Christianity is the only One who can truly save a user from pornography and heal his mind, heart and emotions making him whole again. Pornography will never satisfy the human soul because the user will need more and more to fill the hunger that pornography never can.

Christians are just as empty as the rest of us

By looking at Christians outwardly people could say they are as empty as anyone. But a person needs to look deeper into a Christian's life to see that they really aren't empty at all. A person who has encountered Christianity for the first time found that Jesus Christ comes to live inside of them. Here is what the bible says about this transaction when it happens:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

Someone who has become integrated with Christianity recently has become "Born-again". Jesus said a person must become born again to see the Kingdom of God and when a person accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior they become a new creation in Christ. This means that God makes them a new person on the inside. God by re-creating their inner nature makes it possible for God to come and dwell inside that person. Thus Christians once they become Christians are never empty again. They now have God living in them which will keep any person full and never they will never feel empty again.

Sex is the Spice of Life

Yes sex is the spice of a loving relationship between a married man and woman. Then the two become one as they share the deepest part of themselves with one another. Sex outside the context of marriage will really never satisfy those who participate in it. It can have many adverse effects that people don't think about before they have sexual relations.

Physical consequences can be many from this union between a man and woman. HIV virus is rampant in the world today and this virus could be caught by those engaging in sex outside marriage. Other sexually transmitted diseases may be the result as well. Hiv can be deadly eventually to the recipient. People think it will never happen to them but they just never know. It is not worth the risk for the momentary pleasure.

Relational damage can occur between couples when they have pre martial sex. How do they know they will ever get married? They do get married will they stay faithful to one another in the marriage relationship. Deep down inside the trust between the couples will never be there again. They had sex before marriage they may have outside sex in marriage. They didn't have self- control before marriage who says they will control themselves after marriage? The intimacy and trust between couples will never develop in a pre-martial sexual relationship.

Last but certainly not least what if the couple have an unwanted child out of their sexual union? They don't want the child or they cannot support the child. Then an abortion may occur and the life of the baby is taken. Now the couple has to face the terrible guilt that will follow from taking an innocent life. Sex outside marriage is too risky and it is not worth all the damage that will occur after the fact.

Who needs Christianity I don't feel empty?

There was a popular Christian song performed by "Plumb" several years ago. One of the lines went something like this: "Everyone has a God-sized hole inside of them." The singer was referring to every person who isn't a Christian has an empty void inside of them that can only truly be filled by Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Today, people think they are filled and they have no need for Christianity. They look a little deeper within and they will find they really are empty. This is why people seek other external things (some internal things) to try and fill that emptiness that lies within their inner beings. They turn to drugs, alcohol, crime, sex and false spiritual journeys. These

activities may bring them temporary satisfaction but it will never fill the emptiness inside permanently. People will spend all kinds of money and travel anywhere in the world to try and find inner peace.

The Bible has to say this about truly finding lasting inner peace:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

Here Jesus was talking about the supernatural peace He gives. Anyone who wants to be introduced to Christianity can have this supernatural inner peace Jesus gives. The world (or everything outside Christianity) cannot give this type of inner peace. Jesus is the only one who can give a person this inner peace that will fill a person with calm and assurance.

Do Christians have addictions?

Yes clearly Christians can bring addictions into their Christianity or they can make wrong choices. Wrong choices that can trap them in addictive behaviors. Choices that will lead them into disobedience to God. Christians have free wills like everyone else. They can choose to start watching pornography or commit adultery or fornication. (Single people having sex before they are married). The Christian can choose to become re-addicted to drugs.

There was a true story about a Christian minister who was a drug addict. He became a Christian and stopped using Cocaine. He loved God very much. He had a loving and dedicated wife. Years into their marriage they decided to move to another state from California. The minister went to work in a vacuum shop. He started hanging out in pool halls then he started snorting cocaine again. His wife pleaded with him to stop his drug addiction but he refused. The minister lost his wife and the never stopped using Cocaine as far as this author knows. The point is that he was a Christian and a minister. He fell back into his old drug addiction .So yes Christians can have addictions if they choose to practice an addictive behavior again or for the first time.

What do Christians think about temptations and addictions?

Christians should think about temptations and addictions like God does. Here is what God thinks about temptations and addictions:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

The above bible verse is very clear as to what God thinks and (what Christians should think) about addictions and temptations. The Christian should flee from the “works of the flesh” which will lead the believer into temptations and addictions. “Works of the flesh” mean any thinking or behavior that doesn’t line up with how God wants Christians to live.

Christians are to think and live in such a way that they don’t get tangled up in addictive or tempting behavior. When they think on a temptation too long or an addiction, eventually they will act out that particular snare. The bible also says this about the proper way Christians are to think:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8

In other words Christians should think about God and His goodness being thankful for all He has provided for them. The Bible is full of positive and encouraging things for the Christian to think about. Christians should meditate on the bible so their minds will become trained to think on the things the above verse addresses. Over a period of time the Christian’s mind (with God’s help) can be trained to not think in destructive thought patterns. They will have the ability to overcome damaging thinking patterns that would otherwise lead them into addictive or tempting behavior. This is how Christians are to think about addictions and temptations.

Chapter 4: Famous Christians who fell

Yeah right Christians are hypocrites

True some famous Christians are hypocrites and they have given Christianity a bad name. But not all Christians are hypocrites some really do love Jesus and obey His commands. The bible says this about being a hypocrite:

“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:5

Clearly a Christian who lives a life without hypocrisy can look at a need in another Christian’s life and correct that Christian in the proper way. The Christian who is without hypocrisy is in a position where they can help other people. Here are two examples of Christians in the Bible who weren’t hypocrites.

Jesus the founder of Christianity never acted like a hypocrite during His life/ministry on earth. He lived what He taught. His actions were always consistent with His words. One looks through the four gospels (Narrations of Jesus life) it will be observed that Jesus never said or did a hypocritical thing in His life.

Paul, the greatest Apostle in Christianity was another shining example. He wrote 2/3 of the New Testament. He was one Christian who lived and walked what he taught. He led a life that reflected no hypocrisy. He was able to point out hypocrisy in other Christian’s lives. He could do so because he lived an obedient and pure life before God.

People cannot judge Christianity by Christians. It is hard to separate the Christian from Christianity. But Christianity stands on its own merits. Jesus Christ the, Person of Christianity, is the ultimate standard to judge Christianity by. He certainly wasn’t a hypocrite. So if a person is new to Christianity they should judge it on the Bible and no other standard.

They say one thing and do another

The true sign of a Christian hypocrite can be found in the type of lifestyle they live. Do they say one thing and do another? How do they act at home? How do they act at church? Are they different when they are around Christians as opposed to Non-Christians?

A true Christian will be consistent in word and deed in all environments. He will live what he tells others. One will find no inconsistencies in his nature. He is supposed to reflect Jesus whether he is at the company party or the church potluck. He loves Non-Christians the same way he loves Christians. He treats everyone the same way. He shows favoritism towards no one. His rich friend and his poor friend are both his friends. He is not embarrassed to be seen with either one.

A Christian hypocrite is one who lives like a chameleon. He acts righteous and prays all the right prayers. He says all the right Christian things when he is at church. He puts his monetary offering for God in the offering plate every week. One looks into his heart and finds a totally different person living there. He may be saying and praying all the right words and prayers. But deep down inside he doesn't believe one prayer he prays. He doesn't mean one word he says. He tells other Christians they should not drink and smoke. You will find him in the popular local bar on Friday night drinking and smoking his night away. He curses every other word. He corrects other Christians when they curse.

The bible says you will know a person by their fruits. (Their actions) A Christian who acts one way and says he lives a totally different way is a hypocrite. A consistent Christian will reflect Jesus every day of his life.

How do Christians overcome temptation?

This is the age old question. What source or power keeps Christians from bowing to temptation when it comes their way? The answer is quite simple. The Christian God that lives inside of His children gives them the power to resist and overcome any temptation.

"So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west and His glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19.

This verse in Isaiah's book clearly states that temptation will come to break down the Christian's door. The Spirit of God that lives within the Christian will raise up a standard against that temptation. Christians face an age old enemy-the devil. Satan is his name. He brings temptation against the Christian from the four corners of the earth. Here is a

common example of temptation for a Christian man:

The beautiful co-worker is young and attractive. She has that shapely body. She likes to flaunt it in the young married Christians face. She is constantly flirting with this young man and inviting him out for drinks, etc. The young Christian man cannot resist the young woman's charm in his own strength. He must turn to someone much stronger than himself. Someone who can give him the power to stay away from this woman and tell her no. WHO IS THAT SOMEONE? God is the source of the Christian's ability to resist that woman and overcome the temptation. This is how Christians overcome temptation by the power of God that dwells in them. They must choose to submit the temptation to God. He will then release His power in their lives and help them defeat every temptation that comes their way.

I thought the God of Christianity helped Christians avoid temptation

You thought right God does help Christians overcome temptation. The Christian has to let God help him or her overcome the temptation. I Corinthians 10:13 advises this:

" No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted[l] beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

God clearly helps Christians overcome temptation. The Christian maybe facing a very tough temptation that hangs around for a while. God will strengthen the Christian during the temptation and then He will remove the temptation from the Christian. Other times God will remove the temptation right away from the Christian. God will also remove the Christian from the temptation. Sometimes He does this after a period of time. He also will do this instantly! So yes God is always a refuge for Christians from evil.

The Christian must also see a bad circumstance coming and steer clear of it. God will warn the Christian of an undesirable situation before it appears. The Christian follows God's lead avoiding the temptation. Christians can also see an obvious bad circumstance coming their way. They should run in the other direction to flee the temptation.

Does God tempt people with evil?

Certainly not God never tempts people to sin. He will never tell a person to act in a way

that goes contrary to His holy nature. He will never put a person in a tempting circumstance. It has to be understood that God is perfect, sinless and holy. Nothing but goodness dwells within God. The bible says God is so pure that no man can look on Him and live.

“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.” James 1:13

This verse in James quite plainly says that God cannot be tempted by evil. He doesn’t tempt anyone with evil either. A person is tempted by evil when the evil confronts them. They dwell on the evil thought, image or picture for too long. The temptation takes root in their heart and they act it out. This is how people and Christians are tempted. God absolutely will never tempt anyone. He has no evil within. He cannot even tempt people with evil. God’s thoughts toward anyone are always good and holy. He never thinks evil toward any human on the earth. It doesn’t matter whether the person is a Christian or not. God will not tempt them with evil. This section closes with this:

” Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8

Chapter 5: The Bible was written by religious fanatics

The Bible is a book of fairy tales

Definition of a fairy tale: A book of spirits, elves, fairies and leprechauns, to amuse children. Strangely enough the bible doesn't mention any of the above fabled creatures. The Bible certainly wasn't written for children specifically. It records human history over the last several thousand years. The books of the bible are directed toward all ages of humanity. Certainly it was not written to amuse children or anyone for that matter. Yes there are humorous parts in the bible but it wasn't written to amuse.

The bible has transformed millions of lives over the course of history and it remains the world's No.1 bestseller. Estimates are there have been over 5 billion copies published. (No not 5million but 5 billion!) No other "fairy tale" book can claim any number near that in publication. The bible has been accurately confirmed through Archaeology, Astronomy and Geology. The bible has supported natural scientific hypothesis not argued against them. The bible has this to say about itself:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Second Timothy 3:16-17

The bible has at least 48 prophecies that have come true about one person Jesus Christ. Probability experts say the odds of this happening are astronomical. Something like one in ten to the 157th power. Only God could breathe that kind of knowledge into history ahead of time. The bible predicted the crucifixion of Christ hundreds of years before it occurred. There is a manuscript connected to one of the books of John that was written within the same generation. 24, 000 manuscripts confirm the Bible is authentic. No other book of antiquity has that many manuscripts confirming its reliability.

No other book has transformed lives or influenced nations like the Bible. Drug addicts have been set free and homosexuals healed from their wrong sexual addictions. This book has changed the nature of untold millions of people over the ages. No fairy tale book has ever had this kind of influence on its readers. The bible is the living Word of God that

transforms any person who opens their heart to it.

Nobody reads the bible anymore

Today people think the bible isn't relevant to our culture. Many people own bibles here in America but few read it.80% of churchgoers don't read their Bibles regularly. Many people say they just don't have time to read the bible. There seems to be a moral decline in America according to some sectors. The reason for this is people don't read the bible like they used to. Another perception is the bible has less influence in America than it used to. Why? There are less people reading their bibles in a serious manner anymore. People read the bible a few verses here and a few verses there. People don't sit down anymore and read whole books of the bible.

Bible literacy seems to be on the decline over the last couple of years. Sadly this problem also exists in graduate schools where people are studying to be ministers. One graduate student was surprised to learn, John the Baptist, wore strange clothes. Bible facts that people are unaware of are just simple basic truths. They are not complex theological issues.

The Bible has an enduring impact whether people read it or not.

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." Isaiah 40:8

God's Word (The Bible) endures forever. It has been here before time began and it will carry on when time ends. People who want to learn about Christianity need to read the bible. It's the instruction manual for life. It shows the way to eternal life found in Jesus Christ. The bible is the infinite and enduring wisdom of God. Christians need to read the bible to answer many complex issues they face in life today. Non-Christians need to read the bible so they can find out what Christianity is really about. The bible will give any seeking heart an unbiased view of what Christianity really means. The bible is too critical for anyone to ignore reading.

The Bible is for weak people who need a crutch

People have a wide misconception that Christianity is for the weak. Hebrews says quite the contrary:

They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated… Hebrews 11:37

Hebrews records people were stoned to death, sawed in two and beheaded…These were human beings who were put to death for the Bible. Only strong natured people could endure these types of deaths. People have been killed just for owning a bible in some places. To say Christianity is a crutch for the weak is not a true statement.

People who have experienced Christianity for the first time have become much stronger. They were weak being filled with fear. They met Jesus of the bible and He healed them from all their fears. He infused them with His supernatural strength which helps them overcome anything life hurdles at them.

People survive beatings, having limbs removed or are slowly tortured until they die. How do they make it through these extremely difficult circumstances? By the supernatural strength God will give to anyone who will accept Christianity as their source of strength. The Bible is not for the weak. It strengthens people and causes them to stand stronger like they never have before.

Christians read the bible for strength not to become weak. Classic examples of people becoming strong from the bible's influence. The Apostles of Jesus Christ were so afraid of the religious leaders of their day they hid in a room. Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would come upon them in about 120 days. Jesus sent His Spirit to the Apostles as He promised. The Holy Spirit came to dwell in the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.

The Apostles from that day forward became bold Bible believers. Formerly they were afraid to go out in public and talk about the Bible. Now they openly went into the public squares and talked about Jesus and the Bible. Peter (An Apostle of Jesus Christ) had denied Jesus 3 times just months prior. Now, he was talking to thousands of people unashamedly about Jesus and the Bible.

The religious leaders arrested John and Peter throwing them in jail overnight. The next day they threatened them and said don't talk about the bible anymore; the leaders noted the boldness of John and Peter. The Apostles ignored the threats and went right on talking about the Bible! People who read the bible do so to become strong not weak! So the assertion that the Bible is only for the weak is simply not true.

The Bible is full of Lies

This is a common theme among people who don't know who wrote the bible. God through ancient believers breathed His words into these authors. God cannot lie:

"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Numbers 23:19

The truth is truth if it is based in reality. Is the Bible true because it's based in reality? Yes because Archelogy has extensively proven the people, places and artifacts mentioned in the bible are true. Noah's Ark found in Genesis has been discovered. The Shroud Jesus died in has been uncovered. Translation of manuscripts over thousands of years have remained consistent and accurate. The biblical thread of history from Genesis to Revelation is coherent, fluid and follows a consistent historical pattern accurately.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called a harmony of Jesus Chris's life. The details and events given in the four books are accurate and reliable throughout the gospel narratives. The Old Testament in many books predicted the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus died in the New Testament. **Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22** predict the death of Jesus hundreds of years before the event ever transpired. These books were written thousands of years before our time. Manuscripts translated from antiquated manuscripts kept the integrity of the death of Jesus for hundreds of years before He died. Jesus died as the earlier biblical books said He would. One reference in the bible talks of people casting lots for Jesus clothes. The actual day Jesus died the Roman soldiers cast lots for His clothes. The bible has been proven true in the physical realm as well. Many discoveries of ancient manuscripts, events and people's articles have been confirmed by history. Click on http://www.grantjeffrey.com/article/article7.htm archeological evidence for the validity of the bible.

I don't believe In the Bible because I don't believe in God

The earth displays evidence of God's wisdom and existence. Here are a few examples: The earth's size holds a thin layer of mostly oxygen and nitrogen gases. This atmosphere is 50 miles above the earth's surface. If the earth were smaller it couldn't contain an atmosphere like Mercury has no atmosphere. If it was larger than there would be free hydrogen in the atmosphere like Jupiter which cannot contain human life. The earth's atmosphere has just the right mixture of gases to sustain human life. The earth is the only

planet in our solar system to sustain life. The earth is just the right distance from the sun. If the earth was any closer to the sun then we would burn up and if we were any further from the sun we would freeze. The earth rotates on its axis so it is warmed and cooled properly every day.

The moon is a perfect size and distance from the earth for its gravitational pull. The moon causes important ocean tide waves and movement of the ocean waters. These cause the waters not to stagnate. The massive oceans never spill over the continents of the earth.

The bible gives clear evidence for the existence of God. Genesis records God creating the universe, earth and man. Prophets (People who served God) predicted the death of Jesus Christ hundreds of years before His actual death took place.

Psalm 14:1 says ”**For the director of music. Of David. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.”** This verse pr**e**dicts the arguments brought against God today thousands of years before they took place. Only God would have the foreknowledge to write, through human instruments, these types of facts that have come true.

The bible clearly states that all scripture is inspired from God,” **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16.** The bible has been verified through countless archeological discoveries (See http://www.christiananswers.net/q-abr/abr-a008.html) for further discussion of these discoveries. The above mentioned examples of archeological, natural and biblical evidence undoubtedly justify the existence of God. The existence of God has been proven therefore the Bible is plausible as well.

Chapter 6: The man who has it all doesn't need Christianity

Money talks Christianity walks

Supposedly money is the power that talks and Christianity is the loser that walks. Quite frankly the truth is Christianity is the powerhouse that talks and it never walks. Christianity and money can co-exist together. God doesn't mind if Christians have money. In fact he delights in the prosperity of His servants:

"Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant." Psalm 35:27

Outside Christianity it's a common view that Christians are a people swimming in poverty. Part of this perspective has been defined by Christians themselves. They are seen driving in old rusted and beat up cars, wearing rags and working minimal jobs. Historically Christianity has taught that Christians cannot love God and mammon (money). Serving money is evil and can never be first place in a true believer's heart over God. Poverty is an outward sign of a spiritual Christian because the Christian puts his priority in the spiritual realm and not the material things of the world. He lives in sparse conditions and has few worldly possessions.

Here is the bible's attitude toward money" **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." 1Timothy 6:10** Notice it says the love of money is the root of all evil not money itself. This verse among Christians has been taken out of context. It has been interpreted that the verse is saying **money** is the root of all evil. No the **love of money** is the root of all evil. The God of Christianity does not view money as the root of evil but the love it. Christians get into trouble when they put money ahead of God in their worship; the love of money is what gets them in trouble. They begin the credit card spiral where they charge everything beyond their means to pay then they run into big time debt. They end up having to work two or more jobs to make ends meet. They could lose their house, job and in the worst case scenario lose their family. They may end up filing bankruptcy. These are the extreme consequences of loving money.

People new to Christianity or looking at having a relationship with Jesus, shouldn't feel guilty if they are financially set and live in an upper income bracket. God has no problem

with them or Christians in general having money. Interestingly enough this is what the bibles says about having wealth: **“But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.” Deuteronomy 8:18.** So clearly God is saying He gives Christians the power to get wealth so a rich Christian is what God desires. Christianity and money talk!

Christians seem to be the poorest people in the world

This is what seems to be the case. God doesn’t desire Christians to be poor**. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10** God wants his will to be ruling on earth as it is in heaven. The bible describes heaven in the following manner**:” The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. Revelation 21:21”.** God has decorated heaven with gates of pearl and the great street was made out of gold. The gold being so pure it was transparent. God has surrounded Himself with such ornate riches in heaven where He dwells. It follows that He would want His children to live with riches and in be prosperous on earth. God gives Christians the power to get wealth. Wealth as in prosperous financially and living abundantly. Christians need to be wealthy to enjoy it but more importantly to finance the preaching of Christianity all over the world. The Christian who keeps God first and wealth second has their priorities right.

Poverty stricken Christians leave a bad reflection for the God of Christianity they serve. What will Non-Christians or people interested in trying Christianity think? They think Jesus is God and He cannot supply Christians with decent homes, cars or clothes. God is pleased when His children have faith in Him. Christians who don’t have faith in God cannot expect anything from God. So Christians who think that poverty is righteous tie God’s hands. God is more than willing to bless Christians with material wealth. Christians stay in poverty because of that “It is holy to be poor” mentality. Truly God doesn’t think that way. God has a rich mindset and expects His children to think the same way.

Some Christians have this erroneous perspective that God is pleased when they live in material poverty and focus on spiritual matters first. Yes God wants Christians to put His Kingdom first but He doesn’t want them living in poverty. He doesn’t want them to live from paycheck to paycheck. He wants them to live life abundantly. Jesus said**,” The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” John 10:10.** Jesus came to give Christians life not to steal it away.

Deion Sanders had it all before he became a Christian

Deion Sanders by his own admission had it all. He was a top baseball and football player. He won super bowls and he was one of the best football players ever. He had millions of dollars and he was famous. He had endorsements and he made commercials more than he could count. He had women, fame, sex and everything a man could desire in life. He had the finest cars, jewelry and clothes money could buy. He drove the finest cars and played for the best professional football teams.

By every measure he was a towering success. He was famous and He could run like the wind on the football field. He was one of the finest defensive backs that ever played football. Despite all this he felt lonely and empty inside. He would do anything to mask the hurt and emptiness that haunted him day in and day out.

1997 was when Deion hit rock bottom despite coming off the best football season he ever played. Depression hit him square in the face. Reaching the bottom he could fall no further. Suicide looked good to him at this point in his life. How does a man who has it all feel so much pain he wants to kill himself? Deion worked up the courage to kill himself. That fatal day in 1997 Deion swerved off the road his car shot up like a rocket and it went over the cliff. By all means he should have flipped the car or nosedived. Instead the car hit the bottom and rocked back and forth, sliding awkwardly down the hill. Deion walked away from the crash without a scratch.

He got a hold of a bible and read these words" **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).** He gave his life to Jesus Christ and became a Christian. Jesus filled his life with love and He healed Deion from his inner pain. Jesus also gave Deion the inner peace he so desperately sought but couldn't find before he became a Christian. Deion Sanders had everything but Jesus when he was a Non-Christian. All that fame, fortune and talent were meaningless to him until he met Jesus Christ.

Chapter 7: Christians do doubt God

This is what happens when bad things keep happening to Christians

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted[l] beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” I Corinthians 10:13

This bible verse is giving God’s perspective of when bad things keep happening to Christians. God is in control of a Christian’s affairs if that Christian has submitted his life to God’s Lordship. God will not allow bad things to happen to Christians without providing a way out for them. They may be having a rough time with a co-worker. The co-worker may be telling atrocious lies to the Christian’s boss about the Christian. The co-worker has pulled both guns out and is firing. Desperately trying to get the Christian fired. The Christian has never done anything illegal or damaging to the company. The Christian is one of the top employees and he has a shining reputation with his boss, other workers and the company’s clientele in general.

What in the world is going on? God is allowing a temptation to come into the Christian’s life that is what is going on. God will not allow the circumstances, at work, go beyond the point the Christian can emotionally handle. During the rough time God will give the Christian grace to handle his negative circumstances. God will immediately remove the Christian from the job situation or remove the troublesome co-worker from the Christian. There are a myriad of ways God will help the Christian out of the rough circumstances.

Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ was in dire circumstances the night before Jesus died on the cross:

Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, “You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?” He denied *it* and said, “I am not!”[26] One of the servants of the high priest, a relative *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” [27] Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed .John 18:25-27

Jesus poured His life and soul into Peter for three years. Then Peter denies Jesus three

times and says he doesn't know Jesus. The rooster crowed after Peter's third denial. Jesus told Peter this would happen. Peter remembered the words of Jesus after the rooster crowed and he hit the bottom of his world. This seems like the end for Peter to be following Jesus. But God wasn't through with Peter restoring him to friendship with Jesus. Peter went on to be one of the greatest apostles in the early age of Christianity.

Job, a godly man, in the Old Testament experienced very troubling times. Job's book (in the bible) speaks of how Job lost all his property, children and his health. God at the end of Job's adverse circumstances restores double to Job. In other words God gave Job double everything he had before he lost it all. So God always gives Christians a way out of temptations.

Christians do believe in God even when there is so much evil in the world

Why do Christians believe in God when there seems to be so much evil in the world? God is a very loving and benevolent God. It's not His fault there is so much evil rooted in the world today. His original design was for man to dwell in goodness, peace and to live forever. Sin entered the world and threw the whole design into disarray and chaos. Adam and Eve the first human couple disobeyed God and let sin enter into the world. Ever since that time evil has been present in the world. This is why there is so much evil in the world today. Christians believe God because He has promised a future and a hope for them**:" For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11** and God also promises the Christian **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28** Meaning God works all things in the Christian's life for good.

Jesus the, creator of Christianity, suffered the most evil death a man could die on the cross. He was buried and with Him, Christians thought, went all their dreams. Israel at the time thought Jesus had come to rule and overthrow the Roman occupation. So Jesus dies and all the dreams of Israel die with him or so it seems. Evil seems to have triumphed over the Son of God once and for all. Evil seemed to have stolen all the hopes and dreams of the followers of Jesus. (Christians) The goodness of God in Jesus won over evil for all time. Jesus rises on the third day and breaks the hold of death and sin triumphing over evil in the world. Evil through the Christian's enemy, Satan, remains in the world until Jesus removes the devil from the earth for all time. The Christian because of Jesus now lives in victory over evil, sin, death and their defeated enemy Satan. Christians believe in God for His victory over the evil in the world won by Jesus' death on the cross.

Jesus promised He would come back for Christians at His second coming. He will take them to heaven with Him to live forever; Jesus will also wipe out evil for all time from the

world. This is another reason why Christians believe in God despite all the evil in the world.

The Loving God Who allows bad things to happen in the world

It was stated in the previous section that God isn't responsible for the current evil that resides in the world. Man is responsible for the sad state of affairs in the world today. Genesis gives this account:

"Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':
"Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field." Genesis 3:17-18

This is the point in biblical history that man disobeyed God. Sin and evil came into the world to rule it. So from that point on the world started to decay and progress into chaos. To this point man didn't know good from evil. They ate off the tree God told them not to. Man became aware of right and wrong and what it was to be separated from God because of sin. Man now had the ability to commit evil actions like stealing, lying and murder. The first murder in history is committed in this episode:

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."[l] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Genesis 4:8

So evil has entered man and the world. It has escalated to the severity it is today. God allows evil in the world because humanity initiated its entrance. Man has a freewill and chose to disobey God and throw creation into disarray. God does give victory over evil to Christians who have believed in His Son Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Evil now will be in the world as long as Satan and sin are existing in the world. God isn't the author of evil and because He didn't initiate evil to come into the world He cannot be blamed for all the evil that does exist in our world today. God allows evil in the world because He cannot reverse the original disobedient act man committed so long ago. God did send Jesus to redeem mankind and overcome evil once and for all. Again those that accept Jesus walk in His victory over evil in the world. People will continue to walk in disobedience to God. Evil and sin and all the effects of evil will remain in the world. Until Jesus comes back to eradicate evil once and for all.

Chapter 8: God is helping people in this evil world

We are sinful without doing anything anyway

Why should everyone pay for the sin that Adam and Eve committed so long ago? Adam and Eve were the first created human beings in creation. They sinned and disobeyed God. They plunged all humanity born after them into sin. The inner nature of man became sinful at the point they ate the fruit God told them not to. So every person is born into sin from that point on.

This is fair and just that everyone be held accountable for sins they didn't commit. Man was given a freewill to choose to follow God or not. He chose to not follow God and therefore plunged all man into a sinful state. Here is the account in the bible:

"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." Romans 5:12 so yes man is sinful from the first day he is born. No one can blame God for introducing sin into the world. Humanity is to be blamed for the bad conditions in the world today. God warned man to obey His voice and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man didn't listen to God and ate from the tree anyway. So we find ourselves in the current sorry state of world affairs. God sent Jesus Christ to die for mankind to reverse and eradicate sin and evil that had gone rampant on earth. Anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord will be free from sin, death and evil in this world. God has done all He can do to remove evil's effect in the world until Jesus comes back.

Innocent people who die for doing nothing

Really no one is innocent and here is why**:" for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23 s**omeone may never commit murder or steal or engage in some other kind of crime. They may seem to be innocent because they have never outwardly committed any crime. They aren't though because inwardly all people have been born with a sinful nature. So no one is really innocent.

Another scenario is an innocent bystander is shot and killed without committing any type

of crime. The person is wrongfully killed and true this isn't fair that they died, but because the way sin and evil reign in the world bad things like this happen all the time. God cannot be blamed for innocent people dying for never committing any outward crimes. The world is a dark place to live in. People are inherently sinful and will make wrong choices by murdering innocent people who gave them no reason to kill them.

People fly in airplanes and die because the plane crashes. Let's say the plane flies into very adverse weather conditions and the plane fatally crashes. Again because all the earth and its surrounding atmosphere and environment were exposed to sin in the fall of man. Everything was thrown into chaos and disarray and sin and evil play havoc with our weather as well. The weather doesn't operate under God's original design so it will never function normally like it was supposed to. The Bible has this to say "

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." Romans 8:21-22

God by His will gave man a free choice. Man sinned and subjected creation to frustration which was not the original intent for creation. God allowed it to be subjected in hope. The hope found in Jesus Christ who died to redeem creation from the effects of evil as well. Again when Jesus wins the final victory on earth creation and will be free from the ravages of sin and a new heaven and earth will appear.

God is not stopping earthquakes and tsunamis

God will hear the prayers of Christians to stop natural weather disasters like tsunamis or earthquakes. God can stop any natural disaster simply because He is God. God created all the physical laws that govern the earth. Such as natural processes in nature. The plates move under the continents and cause earthquakes. Underwater earthquakes cause tidal wave tsunamis to race sometimes thousands of miles to destroy homes, trees and kill people. Why does God allow this to happen? He could stop all these natural disasters from occurring but He doesn't. It is a natural consequence of sin that the natural laws God created will operate out of order and harmony. God originally created the natural laws to complement and work together to enhance the earth and life on it.

The natural outflow of sin in the earth causes plates to build up tremendous pressure than move. The pressure is released causing earthquakes (massive in nature at times.) Tsunamis are the consequences of natural laws operating in a fallen world. God is in control of

everything but He allows natural disasters **t**o occur due to the natural consequences of evil operating in the world. It's this author's opinion that God doesn't cause these natural disasters to happen directly.

God does bring good out of tragic natural disasters that occur around the world. Massive relief efforts are undertaken. Food is lifted into the affected areas in large quantities. Christian organizations flow in and help people re-build their homes and cities after earthquakes, hurricanes or tornadoes have destroyed them.

God did destroy the earth with a flood thousands of years ago because man had become so corrupt.

"For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark." Genesis 7:17-23

God was merciful to mankind in that He spared Noah and His family. Noah and his family re-populated the earth. God also promised in **Genesis 9:12-16 the following:**

" And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

God did eventually stop this natural disaster that covered the earth in water. He also promised He would never destroy the earth again by a flood. God never again will flood the earth with water because of His great mercy.

Chapter 9: Where to begin in Christianity

Talking to God for the first time

The best place to start in Christianity is to start talking to God. A person can come to God because of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't die for all our sins then no one could approach Him in prayer. Sin would have kept us separated from God's presence. Jesus' death canceled our sin forever. We can now come into God's presence because of Jesus. Here is a couple of bible verses about prayer:

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:16

"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." Isaiah 65:24

God is more than willing to listen to prayers even if it's the first time the person has ever talked to God. He loves us so much; He wants us to pray to Him. Prayer is a two way conversation because we talk to God and He talks back to us. There should never be any fear in talking to God (Even the first time) He is so accessible to hear the prayers of Christians.

The first time this author prayed he was rolling in a car down a mountain. He said these simple words" God I am too young to die. I don't want to die!" The author wasn't a Christian yet but God heard his cry and saved his life literally! So a person can talk to God like they are talking to a friend. Anyone at any age can talk to God. He will hear them.

You can become a Christian

Now the key point of this whole e- book on Christianity comes. Anyone can become a Christian by simply coming to God or Jesus and ask either one to forgive that person of their sins. Romans says this:

"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

God has laid out clearly in His Word how to be saved. Anyone who has an open heart and asks Jesus to come into His heart and forgive him of his sins Jesus will. Romans 10:9 says anyone who declares with his mouth and believes in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead he will be saved. Anyone who comes to Jesus and confesses their sins to Him He will forgive them their sins. Jesus died on the cross to set all men free from their sins. A person who wants to become a Christian simply must say a sinner's prayer and Jesus will save Him from His sins and give him eternal life. Eternal life is available to anyone who wants to accept God's gracious through Jesus.

Say a prayer like this for salvation: **Lord Jesus, I come to you knowing I am separated from you and the heavenly Father because of my sins. I confess all my sins to you now and repent from them and I ask you to forgive from me from all my willful and sinful ways. I ask You now to come into my heart and be my Savior. I believe you died for my sins on Calvary and I thank you for coming into my life and making me a new creation in You. I believe in you now in faith. Thank you so much for saving me. Amen**

Say this prayer from your heart and believe that Jesus has forgiven your sins. Jesus will come into your heart and cleanse you from all your sins. You are now a Christian! A child of God who will now live eternally and God has forgiven all your sins in Jesus Christ!

God wants you to become a Christian

Let's start this section right off with a bible verse: **"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 3:10 s**o it is known that before the foundation of the world God created us to walk in eternal life in Jesus. God so loved the world that He sent Jesus Christ (His Son) to the earth to die for all of mankind." **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16**

Think of it in these terms. Man sinned against God and severed his relationship with Him. Man could no longer fellowship with God because his sin separated man from being able to come into God's presence. God already had a plan for this tragic separation. He would send Jesus Christ to earth to die for all mankind's sin. He did and Jesus died for our sins. Now people can be reunited with God and walk in His presence again. But people must accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior to be friends with God again. God loved us so much that while we were in our sins He sent Jesus to us to die for us. Whether we would reject

Jesus or not God still sent Him because of His undefinable love for us. This how much God wants us all to become Christians.

Conclusion

Christianity is not a system of rules and regulations or a legalistic code of moral absolutes. Christianity at its core is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Christianity is not man reaching to God but God reaching to man. God has always desired to have a family.

God created man in the beginning so He could walk and talk with him. He wanted a family He could love and pour is grace out on. God created man and met with him face to face in Genesis**:" Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. [9] But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:8-9**

The man and woman sinned against God and hid from Him in the garden. They heard God walking in the Garden of Eden. So before man sinned against God he was able to walk and talk with Him. Sin separated man from God. God could no longer walk with man in the garden because sin broke their relationship. God knew long before creation this break-up would occur. He had a plan created to restore His family to Himself. He would/did send Jesus Christ His Son to the earth to die for man's sin. Jesus became sin for us. God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day after Jesus died on the cross. Jesus since that time has drawn whoever will come to Him into a relationship. A person asks Jesus to be His Lord and Savior and Jesus forgives his sin and restores the relationship between God and that person. God comes to live inside that person having intimate relationship with them again. This is the essence of Christianity and why every human being should embrace Christianity.

The Smartphone Buyer's Guide 2015

How to Choose the Right Smartphone for Your Needs

Steve Johnson

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Introduction

Since the beginning of time, the world has slowly developed into a global playground for information and accessibility. There is an infinite number of ways human beings use technology to communicate with one another. Various devices connect us to people all across the globe through wireless technology. The thriving advancements of wireless technology have granted us the ability to remain connected to the world.

Wireless communication is a powerful force in present day. Conversely, the influence of this innovative technology was not always as prevalent. Wireless communication has gradually emancipated the modern-day household from the oppression of phone cords and tangled wires.

Because of wireless technology, the rate at which the human race exchanges information is truly mind-blowing. Wireless technology will continue to have a positive influence on the timeliness of important business decisions, the coverage of major world events, and much more.

Through our many wireless devices and gadgets, we have been able to channel tons of wireless technology in the direction that we choose. Wireless capabilities will allow the human race to thrive and maintain itself efficiently. The most powerful and popular device available on the market today, is the mobile phone. Quartz reported that out of the 7 billion people on earth, there are as much as 6.8 million mobile phone subscriptions worldwide. That is almost one mobile phone for each human being on earth.

For over 42 years, the mobile phone has been in existence, since its creation it has repetitively improved. The mobile phone went from being an exclusive commodity, to a pop culture icon that everyone loves. The first mobile phone was merely a chunky piece of plastic with a large antenna poking out the top. Its oversized buttons, sword-like antenna, and pale gray shell only presented consumers with one feature: wireless phone calls. The modern day mobile phone presents a sleek and stylish design equipped with superior technology. These high-tech devices have changed the way we do business, communicate, and live.

The mobile phone market is lucrative, and is overflowing with an impressive variety of mobile phones, phone accessories, phone service providers, and phone applications.

Nevertheless, a market teeming with a vast variety of a singular product can make phone shopping slightly difficult.

The easiest solution would be to buy the phone that currently holds “the popular vote,” or the phone that is trendy and new to the public. However, the excitement and gratification felt by purchasing that new phone will die out, and you will be left with a phone and a bill that you don’t need. The inspiration to exhaust the maximum usage of your phone will never show up. Shopping by trends will throw you into a never ending cycle of phone upgrades and wasted money. Don’t let this to happen to you.

It would be considered most wise to purchase your mobile phone based on your wants, needs, and budget. Resist the temptation to buy that popular, expensive, phone without carefully considering your options. Why? That chic, expensive, state-of-the-art, phone may not be the phone that is suitable for you.

Sustenance of wealth and individuality is important. Individuals that take themselves and their money seriously will make the decision to choose their phone wisely. They understand that their phone must be compatible with their lifestyle and accommodating to their budget. They know that choosing the right phone will give them the highest level of comfort and functionality. However, in order to pick out the right phone, you need the scoop on the phone industry and the many options that you have.

In this book, The Smartphone Buyer’s Guide 2015, you will be given the exclusive on how to effortlessly pick out the phone right for you, you will become familiar with the basic capabilities of the modern-day cell phone. You will also discover some crazy, but intriguing facts about the mobile phone and the development of wireless technology. This eBook will be your access pass into the world of the continuously evolving phenomenon. The knowledge you gain from reading this book will help you get the MOST out of your mobile phone.

From Mobile Phone to Mobile Device to Smartphone: The Evolution of the Cell Phone

Mobile phones have been around for over 40 years. The original mobile phone was an oversized, plastic, shell ornamented by ginormous buttons. It possessed minor capabilities and very limited technology. But back then, mobile phones didn't need to look stylish or cool. The technology housed inside that heavy shell made the phone's appearance bearable.

The original mobile phone came equipped with technology that the world has never seen before. Consumers were presented with options that they never had before. Phone calls could now be placed from any location. No more sending messages by carrier pigeon, no more frequent trips to make a call from your car phone, no more waiting nearly half the day to get home and make important phone calls, and no more loud, jiggling pockets running to the pay phone. This revolutionary and sensational technology outshined the unattractive shell that it was in, because the technology that it housed was pure gold.

In contrast, the current mobile phones are nicely designed. These sleek, slim, and stylish devices contain technology that can outmatch some of the most advanced computers on the market today. The new and improved mobile phone is a portable communication system that can do pretty much whatever we program or "tell" it to do. It is sure to be around and evolve into something better in the years to come.

Smartphones come equipped with carefully developed applications that surpass the functionality of the regular mobile phone. Some of the applications programed into the smartphone can even be found on your regular desktop or laptop computer. Applications and features such as a touchscreen, Bluetooth, Microsoft Office, email access, a QWERTY keyboard, a camera, Internet browsing, a media player, and contact management are some of the MOST BASIC features of the modern-day mobile phone. The smartphone can even be synchronized with your other mobile devices, or even your desktop PC. You can even take a trip back to the past (sort of), and use wireless connectivity to receive phone calls through your car. The only difference is that there will be no wires/cords, better coverage, and fast connectivity. You can even place or answer a phone call without even picking up the phone. The future is looking very bright for the smartphone. Yes indeed.

Developing the Concept

It's hard to imagine what communication was like before the invention of the mobile phone. Sure, talking to a person face-to-face was and still is the most natural and effective way to make an announcement. But what about the lonely grandmother that lives in Timbuktu? I'm sure she is longing to hear the announcement, or to hear from anyone for that matter. Or what about the crazy, daredevil brother that took a year-long escapade to the North Pole? I'm sure he is dying for warm and cozy conversation, or really, anything that will keep him warm. Why should distance cancel them out from partaking in a warming and heartening conversation? Wouldn't it be nice if they could be a part of the moment, witnessing every word without even having a physical presence? With all things being considered, it is safe to say that the earliest composers of wireless technology thought about the same questions and scenarios in a similar of different form.

In 1918, The German Railroad System was the first entity to use the technology of "wireless telephony." They conducted the private testing of the first wireless telephone on military trains traveling between Zossen and Berlin. By 1924, the testing of the telephony equipment went public, and the results turned out to be quite impressive. The success of the testing inspired and founded Zugtelephonie A.G ., a company dedicated to supplying telephony equipment entirely for trains. They began the task of installing telephony equipment on all trains traveling between Berlin and Hamburg in 1925. The use of this wireless phone was limited only to the passengers traveling in 1st class.

Decades later, the United States began to develop a system that would allow the wireless telephone to be available for use in the automobile. As a result, this caused the mobile phone service to be inaugurated on June 17, 1946. This encouraged AT&T Mobile Telephone Service, to become one of the first mobile phone carriers in the United States. Shortly after, a slew of companies arose from the shadows to offer their self-proclaimed, elite mobile phone services to the public. However, the services offered by most of these companies were way past poor. The coverage was not reliable and the service the companies offered were not compatible with most of the mobile phones available to the time.

By the early 1950s, mobile phones were restricted for use only in automobiles. The phones only worked in metropolitan areas and major cities. This was because major cities were equipped with large antennas that were located in the most central part of the city, and these large antennas were assigned specifically to these automobile phones. Automobile phones could only transmit a signal that spanned about 30 to 50 miles.

In 1983, when the Motorola DynaTAC 8000x arrived on the market, things changed.

Developed and invented by Martin Cooper, this phone became the first mobile phone to be sold commercially and was priced at a whopping $4,000, which would be about $9,500 at present day. The phone weighed about 2 ½ pounds, and the dimension of the phone was 13 x 1.75 x 3.5. Although fairly large and expensive, the Motorola DynaTAC 8000x was considered small enough to carry around, thus making it the first mobile phone. After its debut, there has been a steady progression of the mobile phone, radio technology, and wireless technology to transform mobile communication into something that is very different from what it originally started from.

Because of the many technological contributions that have been invested in the advancement of the wireless communication and technology, the cell phone has become a hand-held system that can do virtually anything. From sending text messages, to video chatting, to surfing the internet, or finding the nearest shopping mall. The mobile phone has made life a lot easier with its unmatchable resources and constantly improving capabilities.

From Radio Phone to Cell Phone

Originally, the mobile phone began as a simple radio that transmitted signals with central antennas located in a specific range. This was not very effective, because the system only allowed extremely short-range calls, and coverage for these phones did not span very wide. Also, the maximum number of people that could talk on their phones at once did not exceed 50. Fortunately, a better alternative for mobile connectivity was introduced: Cell Technology.

Cell technology is a very unique, but seemingly simple form of technology that was developed to make wireless communication more accessible through the mobile phone. In contrast to the earlier telephony services, cell technology allows millions of people to use their cell phones simultaneously. The implementation of this innovative technology converted the mobile phone into a cell phone.

The cell phone is considered to be a full-duplex device. This means that the phone uses two separate frequencies to carry-out a phone conversation. One frequency is used for talking and the other is used for listening. This allows the caller and the recipient of the call to talk at same time, and even listen at the same time.

The process of cellular connectivity requires each city to be divided into small hexagon-shaped sections or “cells.” The cells measure up to about 10 square miles, and are equipped with a tower, base station, and a building made to house the radio equipment. Cell phones operate within cells, and they can switch cells as they move around. The

frequencies used by the cell phones are recycled and reused within the confines of the city. This is possible because the frequency will transfer over into the most adjoining cells, but not into cells that are more than one cell away. So, there is always coverage available and calls will rarely be out of range.

Today, cell technology has taken over the mobile phone market, and has boosted the call capabilities of mobile phones and has made connected calls a task of ease.

From Cell Phone to Smartphone

Smartphones are slowly replacing their predecessors. And it's due to their extremely advanced capabilities. It's no surprise that the progressions and popularity of the smartphone is constantly on the rise. These high-tech phones are able to do just about everything a computer can do. They have the ability to handle heavy weight computer applications like Microsoft office. Smartphone are able to sync and manage multiple email accounts, handle large files, and execute wireless capabilities and fast data speeds. These phones can do so much that you almost have to reconsider your personal computer or laptop.

Smartphones are only able to accomplish this because of their advanced operating systems. These operating systems grant you access to an endless world of information and accessibility that conventional mobile phones don't have the ability to do.

Early Years of the Smartphone

Device that integrated computing and telephony capabilities were first developed by Theodore Paraskevakas in 1971. He is the innovator of applying data processing, visual display screens, and concepts of intelligence to telephones, which marked the beginning of the final stages of the evolution of the smartphone. Paraskevakas's first low-tech exhibition, which involved a transmitter and a receiver to displayed various way to communicate through remote equipment.

The earliest device to demonstrate Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) abilities was the IMB Simon. This was only a prototype, but it functioned well enough to complete a very successful demonstration in front of hundreds at the COMDEX trade show that took place in 1992. Two years later, Bell South developed and released a similar model to the public, by the name of Simon Personal Communicator. PDA included faxing abilities capabilities, telephony capabilities, and applications like the address book, scheduler, calendar, calculator, clock, and LED touchscreen. This was considered to be the first

smartphone in history. However, the term didn't become official until 1995.

One year later, the Nokia 9000 Communicator was released. This PDA device contained an operating system that was based on the GEOs V3.0. This operating system was originally used on the Nokia 2110. When the phone web browsing and the QWERTY keyboard were integrated, this became the blueprint for the first mobile device to be marked as a smartphone which was Ericsson R389. It was released in 2002.

The Dividing Factor

There are two small but major developments that sparked the evolution to the conventional mobile phone to the smartphone. The introduction of text messaging, multimedia messaging, and advance mobile operation systems created the grounds for separation between the regular radio/cellular phones to the smartphone.

The Development of Text Messages and Multimedia Messaging

Text messaging or Short Messaging Service (SMS) has definitely developed into something that has become very popular. Most people would rather send a text message before even using their phone to place a phone call. However, there was a time when the only text message that people could fathom, was sent and received through the mail. That all changed in 1933 when RCA Communications of New York sent the earliest documented text message to London through Radiotelegraphy. Within the first year, there were a total of 7 million words transmitted.

German engineer, Friedhelm Hillebrand developed the original concept of text messaging in 1985. His experiments led him to discover the amount of characters needed to successfully communicate through non-voice services. He discovered this by typing out random sentences on his typewriter, and then counting each character. After doing this numerous times, he found that each group of sentences averaged out to 160 characters. This quantity of characters became the limit that would be allowed for communication through non-voice, wireless communication.

In 1992, text messaging was first used by Neil Papworth, an engineer for the Sema Group located in the United Kingdom. He was able to send, "Merry Christmas" to a colleague's phone by way of Vadaphone through his personal computer. This inspired Radiolinja to develop the first SMS phone service to be offered to the public in 1994. The US picked up on this technology in 1995, and this led to Al Gore launching America's first major SMS network, Sprint Telecommunication Venture. Only a year later, international text messaging became available. Text messaging did not become a primary

means of communication until 1998. Presently, text messaging is used by 74% of consumers worldwide.

Multimedia messaging is phone service that is utilized to send pictures, videos, music, ringtones, and other multimedia content. The first MMS was initially developed in Japan, and offered to the public in 2001. The first picture messaging service was offered through J-Phone.

Originally, Multimedia Messaging was developed to provide phone carriers with they call *captive technology*. This means that phone carriers would be able to charge consumers a fee each time they snapped a photo with their camera phone. The first deployments of this service were not successful, so was multimedia messaging service became available to the public. However, the initial deployments of multimedia messaging were plagued by technical problems and extremely unsatisfied consumers. The customers were experiencing problems with the quality of the multimedia messages they sent and received. A large number of consumers were complaining of being billed for sending messages that the recipient never received. Consumers also protested that they were billed for messages that had incorrect format and missing content. One of the main sources of these issues was the lack of MMS capable mobile devices during the early development of the concept. This was due to the underdeveloped technology that this phone feature had. However, in the recent years the MMS has been developed and improved, with the help some of the most elite technology companies in the world.

Multimedia messaging involves using the same technology that is used to send Emails. Whenever you send a MMS, your device will encode the multimedia content in the same format as an MIME Email. Then the message is forwarded to the phone carrier's service center and forward server, or Multimedia Messaging Service Center (MMSC). The phone carrier then sends the message to the MMSC of the recipient. From here, the MMSC will determine if the device receiving the message is enabled to for multimedia messaging. If the content will be accepted by the device, the media from the message is extricated and sent to an HTTP-front end, storage server. A text message containing the content's URL is sent to the handset of the recipient to prompt the device's WAP browser to open and extract the content from the embedded URL. If the receiver's handset is not MMS capable, the message will be forwarded to a web based service. Here the intended recipient will be able to view the content from the message through an internet service offered by their phone carrier.

At present, multimedia messaging has become just as popular as SMS. It is also one of the most used features on the mobile phone, followed by text messaging. Since the development of the MMS, there has been a massive increase in the spread of information, its compatibility with social media websites, email platforms, and other internet-based media sites will allow the MMS technology to flourish.

Mobile Operating Systems

Mobile Operating Systems or OS are programs that are assigned to the modern-day mobile devices. Operating systems are usually running in desktop computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, PDAs, portable media devices, and the list goes on. The ingenious technology of mobile operating systems fuses together the capabilities of a regular desktop computer with the capabilities of mobile devices. This merge of capabilities includes but is not limited to, wireless internet, mobile navigation, GPS tracking, Bluetooth, voice recognition, media player, touchscreen capabilities, video recording, camera, calendar, and Email. The Read Only Memory (ROM) and Flash Memory chips found inside the circuit board or brain of the phone, supplies storage for the phone's operating system and features.

Most smartphones are comprised of two mobile operating systems. The primary user-facing software platform is supported by a secondary real-time operating system. This system operates the radio and other hardware. The first mobile operating system used dates back to 1973. The system was embedded in mobile phones to control the operations of the phone.

Android Operating System – Based on the Linux kernel and developed by Google, the Android operating system has one of the largest installed base on mobile devices worldwide. Most of the applications offered through the Android operating system are free and open-source software. Designed for smartphones, tablets, and other advanced mobile devices, the OS uses touch inputs that correlates with real-world actions. However, most of the Android devices are exclusive to only Android applications.

Apple Operating System or iOS – The Apple Operating System or the iOS is the second largest installed base in the world behind the Android. However, this is the most profitable installed based in the world. Phones that have this operating system are very expensive. iOS is also proprietary and a closed source. The user interface of iOS is based on the idea of direct manipulation. The touchscreen capabilities allow multi-touch gestures. All mobile phones and devices compatible with the Apple operating system are manufactured by Apple.

BlackBerry – The BlackBerry operating system is based on the QNX operating system. The system is closed source and proprietary. Unlike the Android OS, the Blackberry software is limited to the BlackBerry devices. All mobile phones and devices compatible with the Blackberry operating system are manufactured by Blackberry. The BlackBerry brand is mostly used by government officials.

Firefox – The Firefox operating system is an open source and is powered by Mozilla, a non-profit organization that is best known for its Firefox web browser. This is a Linux kernel based operating system exclusive to only smartphones, smart TVs, and tablet computers. The software is designed to supply consumers with an alternative community-based system compatible for mobile devices. This is accomplished by the utilization of open standards and various methods like JavaScript and HTML5 applications.

MIUI – The MIUI operating system is based on Google Android Open Source project. This operating system has a partial closed source. Developed by Xiaomi Tech, the MIUI operating system is installed of the Xiaomi smartphone, but can be found on a small selection of Android devices.

Sailfish OS – The Sailfish OS operating system is based on open source Android libraries. It combines the Linux kernel and proprietary software that has been written by Jolla a smartphone manufacturer. This operating system is exclusive to all Jolla mobile devices.

Tizen – Tizen is sourced by the Linux Foundation and received support from the Tizen Association. Tizen is an operating system based on the Linux kernel that is made for mobile devices, smart TVs, and car entertainment systems. Tizen is an open source system that aims to provide the ultimate user experience for all of its associated devices.

Windows Operating System – Windows operating system is developed by Microsoft. It is closed source and proprietary. It has third largest installed base on smartphones behind Android and iOS. However, Microsoft has a number of operating systems for various smartphones. This phone includes computer based Microsoft applications such as OneNote, MS Excel, MS Word, and Outlook.

The Basics of a Cell Phone: Overviews and How-To's

***** this chapter covers a lot of basic capabilities of a cellphone; if you are familiar with all basic functions of a cellphone, please skip to the next chapter *****

Shopping for a cell phone can be a daunting task, but before you begin your search for the perfect phone, it is vital that you are familiar with the basic capabilities the current mobile phone. By acquainting yourself with the essential software and capabilities of the modern mobile phone, you will be able to make an educated decision in picking out the phone right for you. A plus is that this may help you save money in the long-term.

Overview of the General Phone Applications

A mobile application is a computer program designed to work on mobile devices. Mobile phones are run by various applications. Subsequently, modern smartphones are can be considered computers more than they can be considered mobile phones. In a conventional sense, it is only right that smartphones contain a fully-functional OS of their own. Mobile operating systems make the advanced features of mobile phone available through mobile applications.

When making phone applications, developers have to be conscious of the capabilities of that phone and the inabilities of the phone. Developers must be aware to the variety of phones that are out there on the market. The frequent changes in the mobile operating systems can make it difficult for some developers to keep up. Mobile application development requires use of specific amalgamated development environments. Mobile apps are first tested within the development environment using emulators. The use of emulators offers developers an inexpensive way to test applications on phones that they have no access to.

Developers use mobile user interfaces to help keep the user as the focus of the development and design. The mobile user interfaces grants the developers the ability to mimic how the user's manipulation will affect the developing application. This helps developers give users a user-friendly mobile application.

Some of the first mobile applications appeared on the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) or

handheld PC in 1984. It wasn't until 1994 that PDAs gained the ability to place phone calls. This was the earliest form of the smartphone, because during that time nearly all PDAs had the ability to do what the smartphone of today can do. PDAs offered applications like touchscreen capabilities, a QWERTY virtual keyboard, handwriting recognition, stroke recognition.

Today, the mobile apps development landscape and the mobile app marketplace has sky rocketed. Thanks to the many contributions of mobile operating system developers like Google's Android OS, Apple's iOS platform, Microsoft's Windows Phone, and hundreds of smaller third-party companies and teams that sell mobile applications through the major mobile application markets. Most of the phones on the market today are programmed with some essential applications that are universal to all mobile devices. Let's take a look at some of the most used applications below.

Calculator

The calculator on your phone works just like a generic pocket calculator. The calculator is a free application already programmed into your phone. Even some of the more basic mobile phones contain this application. You can locate the calculator application one your phone's home screen or the phone's application menu.

This phone has the basic capabilities to carry out math problems such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Some calculator apps will be able to handle more advanced math problems like square roots and radicals. However, this depends on the operation system.

If would like to have a calculator that is a little more advanced, then there are plenty of options for you located in your phone's application store.

Calendar

The calculator is a free application already programmed into your phone. Even some of the more basic mobile phones contain this application. The calendar application can be located in the application menu of your phone. Just simply touch the calendar icon to schedule events, set reminders for important dates, and much more.

Depending on the operating system, you may be able to sync your calendar on your phone with your calendars located on your computers and other mobile devices. Operating systems such as Android and Windows are great examples of the syncing feature. Be sure

to check out your phone manual for a better understanding of how the features of the calendar application work.

Cloud Computing Services

Cloud computing services are becoming very popular and have evolved drastically since the 1990s. Your phone's operating system usually has its own cloud service. You will have your own cloud service once you phone is activated. It will be secured by your username/email address and a password. You will be able to upload files, media, contacts, mobile applications, and other important information to the cloud service. This is convenient to users because you will be able to access everything saved to the cloud from any mobile device or computing system. Also if you were to switch phones you will be able to download everything from the cloud service to your new phone with no data loss.

Contacts

Each contact that you add to your contact list will be automatically synced with the Voice-To-Call and Voice-To-Text features on your phone. All you have to do is speak the contact's name into the microphone of the mobile device along with the intended command, and it will begin completing the command. For example, if I wanted to call my brother John, I would pull up the voice command application. Then, all I would have to do is speak, "Call John," into the phone. The phone will begin placing the call.

Global Positioning System (GPS)

This is a satellite based feature that is available to all mobile phones. This system is comprised of a network of approximately 30 satellites that have been placed into orbit by the U.S. Department of Defense. This feature provides clock synchronization which allows the time on your phone to be automatically updated. This is critical for synchronizing its spreading codes with other base stations to enable inter-cell handoff and provision for hybrid GPS/cellular position recognition that is necessary for emergency calls and other applications.

Lock Screen

The lock screen is a security feature of the user interface implemented to mostly all smartphone. Its purpose is meant to provide security to the personal information in your

phone. When this feature is activated, it will require a password to be entered whenever the phone is used after the screen times-out or whenever the phone is powered back on. This feature can be activated under the 'SETTINGS' options.

Media Player

The media player is an application that plays the music, videos, and podcasts downloaded to the phone. You can also receive live stream support through the later media players. Most media players are able to automatically detect the media stored in your phone and on your SD card, and add the media to the library. This application is controlled by commands such as play, pause, skip forwards, skip backwards, shuffle, repeat, and loop.

Navigation

The GPS navigation application is responsible for precisely calculating the geographical locations through GPS satellites. This applications gives you access to step-by-step directions to and from any location of your choice. You are also able to access traffic congestion maps, street maps, and directions via text or speech.

Photo Gallery

The photo gallery is the application where you can view the pictures that have been downloaded, Bluetoothed, or saved to your phone from the camera. Just like the media player, the photo gallery is able to automatically detect the media stored in your phone and on your SD card, and add the photo gallery.

Marketplace/Store

This is the digital distribution platform for mobile applications. Each smartphone has this feature. Mobile Marketplaces mimic the layout of an online store, where users can browse through these various app categories, view details about each mobile application, (e.g. number of downloads, ratings, reviews, etc.), and access applications (e.g. ringtones, games, and any applications that you think would be useful to you and your phone). The applications are offered as an automatic download, and the installation of the application begins. Some marketplaces may also allow the operating system to spontaneously remove an installed application from device the mobile device under specific conditions, to prevent malicious software.

Web Browser

A mobile browser is a web browser designed for use on a mobile device such as a mobile phone or PDA. Mobile browsers are augmented to present web content that is suitable for small screens of mobile devices.

Overview of the Codes Assigned to Your Phone

Every cell phone that you come in contact with has unique, alphanumeric codes that are only assigned that individual phone. These codes are utilized to identify the phone, phone carrier, and owner. Familiarize yourself with these codes below:

System Identification Code (SID)

This is a unique 5-digit number that is allocated to each phone carrier by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). This code is programmed into the phone at the time of purchase. This unique code is used to identify cellular networks in identifiable areas. System Identification Codes are transmitted by several base stations in order to locate the cellular networks. When the phone is powered on it listens for a signal, and once the signal is identified and received, the phone investigates the SID. It compares the SID signal to the SID that is recorded in the phone.

Electric Serial Number (ESN)

This is a unique 32-digit number that is allocated to the phone by the manufacturer. The number is programmed in the phone at the time of its creation.

Mobile Identification Number (MIN)

This is a 10-digit serial number that is allocated to the phone, once a phone number is assigned to the phone by the phone carrier. This number is used to identify phones that are operating in cooperation of TIA (Telecommunications Industry Association) standards and PCS (Personal Communications Service) technologies.

International Mobile Station Equipment Identity (IMEI)

An IMEI is your 14 to 16 digit serial number that will be unique to your mobile device. The use of this number has been implemented to help eradicate the use of stolen mobile devices. This is a unique number used to identify 3GPP, iDEN phones, and satellite phones. This number is normally located inside the battery compartment of the mobile phone. It can also be displayed on the phone screen by entering in '#06#'. You can also find this number by going to the settings menu and looking the phone's operating system.

Inside the Phone

The basic components that will bring your mobile phone to life as follows:

Random-Access Memory (RAM)

The memory in your phone is where the software and programmed into your phone and the data runs. Random-Access Memory is a type of computer storage data that houses the operating system software and the applications on your phone. RAM allows the data in your device to be interpreted at the same rate simultaneously no matter the order the data is accessed. This memory runs at a very fast pace. Mostly all mobile and stationary computer devices have RAM. An increased amount of RAM allows for more complex software to be run on the device.

Antenna

Embedded in the handset case, the antenna is a very important technology component to the mobile phone. The antenna provides the phone with all of its wireless capabilities. The antenna is the base of all wireless communication, and enables the phone to perform at the best quality.

In a wireless system, an antenna converts guided radio wave energy (such as a signal traveling in a coaxial cable for television) to energy that is emitted or "radiated" out into free space. An antenna also does the reverse—it receives radio waves from the air and feeds them into the devices that detect, decode, and amplify them. In a cell phone system, there is one antenna in the handset and another in the base station tower. Both of these antennas transmit and receive waves.

Keyboard/Keypad

The QWERTY virtual keyboard, the QWERTY the keypad, or the keypad is available is the input device on your mobile phone. Here you will be able to communicate message, type in phone numbers, and input other commands.

Microphone

The microphone is the part of the phone that you will speak into. This will be where you will talk on the phone, and send out voice commands.

Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) Screen

The LCD screen will be where you will be able to view all of the actions, commands, and applications to your phone. This is what makes the phone so attractive. However, this is one of the most fragile features of the phone. It is very susceptible to damage, so it is very important to purchase a reliable and sturdy phone case to protect your phone and screen from damage.

Battery

The battery provides electricity and power to your phone. You can monitor your battery life through the icon that will be located at the top left corner of your phone's display screen. Your phone battery will likely be composed of lithium.

Speaker

The speaker is where you will be able to listen to phones calls, music, and hear notifications.

Circuit Board

The circuit board is the brains of the phone. It consists of several chips that translate audio signals.

How to Work the Most Important Applications on Your Phone

These are general instructions. Specific procedures will differ by operating system. Check your phone manual for the instructions unique to your phone

Alarm/Clock

The alarm clock is a basic feature on the phone, and a free application already programmed into your phone. Even some of the more basic mobile phones contain this application. Here you will be able to set the time, and set alarms. You can also see the time on your Home screens by adding a Clock widget.

To set new alarm:

Open your phone's Alarm/Clock application.

At the bottom of the screen, tap the add icon that is usually indicated by a "+" sign.

Enter in the time that you would like for the alarm to go off.

Next, you will need to set the alarm to repeat. Depending on the OS there will be a dropdown menu titled, 'REPEAT' with a list of the days of the week. Select the days that you will need for this alarm to go off.

Then you can choose the ringtone that you would like for the alarm. This option is available under the 'SOUND' menu.

You will then need to label the alarm. Touch the text box located under the 'LABEL' or 'NAME' title. Type in the name you prefer.

Set the time you want, and then select 'OK,' 'SAVE,' or 'DONE'.

Once the alarm is saved, you will be able to view the alarm in a list. From here switch the alarm from 'OFF' to 'ON'.

Dialer/Phone

All mobile phones have the capability of placing and receiving phone calls. This is the most essential feature of any phone. The typical phone call is placed by picking up the cell phone and dialing in the recipient's phone number. This can be done through the touchscreen QWERTY keyboard, or the alphanumeric touchpad. More advanced mobile phones offer the feature of voice dialing. You can place a call through the phone by simply speaking the recipients' name (recipient's name and number must be saved in your contacts) or speaking each digit of the phone number into the microphone.

You will be able to place a phone call whenever there is a paid cell phone subscription assigned to your phone. If there is an interruption is your service, bad reception, the phone is powered off, or if you are out of range of your phone carriers' coverage areas, you will not be able to place a call.

Usually, you will not be able to place a call while the cell phone is busy running another application. However, this rests solely on the capabilities of the phone. Since some phones do allow phone calls to connect while the phone is busy running applications.

The easiest way to place a phone call is to begin at the home screen. Select the 'DIALER' or the application that is used to make phone calls. From here, you will need to make sure that you know the full phone number of the person you are calling.

There are three types of phones calls that can be made from your phone, local, long distance, and international. To determine if the call you are placing is local, long-distance, or international, you will need to check the country code, area code, and/or city code.

To get a better understanding of what these phone numbers will look like, check out the examples below:

To place a LOCAL Phone Call

To determine if your phone will be connected locally, be sure that you have an area code associated with the phone number you wish to call. If there is an area code, check to see if the area code matches with yours or it the area code is out of state. If the area codes are the same, then this will be considered a local phone call. However, the call may still be considered local if there is a different area code. Most cities have boroughs or suburbs that are located no less than 10 minutes from major metropolitan areas. These suburbs/boroughs will usually have area codes that differ from the main city. If this is the case, this will still be considered a local call.

To place a local call, you may enter either the last seven digits of the phone number, or you can enter the full ten digits. For example, if I live in Sacramento, CA *(area code 916)*, and I want to call my grandmother that lives two blocks away, I will need to enter in the phone number as follows:

To call phone number **(916) 555-555** or **555-5555:** *I will first, dial area code '***916***'. Next, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555***'. Finally, I will select 'SEND".*

To Place a LONG-DISTANCE or DOMESTIC Phone Call

If the call that you wish to place is long-distance, out of state or in another city, you will need to enter the full phone number or all ten digits. For example, if I live in Sacramento,

CA *(area code 916)*, and I wanted to call my cousin in Memphis, TN *(area code 901)*, I will need to enter the phone number as follows:

To call phone number **(901) 555-5555:** *I will first, dial area code '***901***'. Next, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555'***. Finally, I will select 'SEND'.*

To Place an INTERNATIONAL Phone Call

If I am placing an international call to a mobile phone, I will dial 011, and then the country code for the country I am calling, the area or city code, and the phone number. However, there is a general rule of thumb when calling international. If I am in America, and I am placing a call to a cell phone that is native to the Phi Phi Islands, Thailand, I will need to type the number in as follows:

To call phone number **(+66) 2-555-5555**:

*First, I will dial, '***011***'. Next, I will dial country code, '***66.***' Then, I will dial city code '***2***'. Then, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555'***. Finally, I will select 'SEND".*

International phone numbers have separate city codes for landlines and separate city codes for mobiles phones. For example, if I live in Lagos, NG and I wanted to call a local land line phone, the city code will be different from my mobile phone even though we live in the same town. Most city codes contain two or three digits. However, some international phone numbers do not have a city code. If you feel that you are not capable of sending a text message internationally, check your phone carrier's website for further instruction, or to find out if your phone carrier has special instructions for sending international calls.

****Poor call quality is a common issue with cell phones. Sometimes calls may have terrible reception, calls may be dropped, or calls be unsuccessfully connected. This problem usually has everything to do with your phone carrier. However, if you are experiencing frequent problems with your call quality, you will first need to attempt to solve the problem on your own.*

To troubleshoot you will need to do the following:

If you are experiencing frequent poor call quality, check the signal strength of the phone. This can be done by observing the signal indicator (usually 4 to 5 bars ascending in size) that is usually located at the very top of the phone's display screen. If the problem persists or you need help with more options for troubleshooting, please refer to: Mobile Phone Signal to be advised.

Email

Setting up your email account on your mobile phone will be very easy if you have an email account associated with the operating system programmed to the phone. Start the email program on your phone by tapping the 'EMAIL' icon associated with the operating systems email provider (e.g. Gmail for Google's Android, Outlook for Microsoft's Window, iCloud for Apple's iOS, etc.). The phone will simply prompt you to enter in your login information for your email service provider.

Once you have entered is the login information, you should be able to access your email easily. However, if you do have other email accounts associated with other operating systems you can either download the email application to your phone's marketplace if it is available, or you can set it up through POP3 or IMAP.

Setting Up POP (Post Office Protocol) or IMAP (Internet Message Protocol)

You can set up email on a wide selection of phones with internet capabilities through POP or IMAP. Here are some universal instructions for setting up email on your mobile phone. Some setups slightly differ from one phone to another, but the general instructions are pretty much the same.

Start the email program on your phone by tapping the 'EMAIL' icon. The email application is usually located in the application menu of your phone. Choose the option to add an account. If you need help finding the email app, use the documentation that was included with your phone or tablet.

Use the following information to help you set up your email.

Email address: Enter in your full email address when prompted (for example, tony@phoneemail.com).

User name: Your user name and email address is the same thing. You may be asked for both or either one of the two (for example, tony@phoneemail.com).

Password: This is the password for your email account.

Incoming mail server settings: These are your incoming (POP3 or IMAP4) server settings.

Text Messaging and Multimedia Messaging

You will be able to send a text message whenever there is a paid cell phone subscription assigned to your phone. If there is an interruption is your service, bad reception, the phone is powered off, or if you are out of range of your phone carriers' coverage areas, you will not be able to send a text message. Usually, you will not be able to send a text message while your cell phone is busy running another application. However, this can depend on the capabilities of the phone.

The easiest and most common way to place a send a text message is to start at the home screen. Select the 'Messaging' icon or the application that is used to send text messages. From here, you will need to make sure that you know the phone number or email address that you are sending the text message to.

There are two types of messages that can be sent from your phone, to numbers that are local, long distance, and international or to any email address. You will be able to send a Multimedia Message Service (MMS) or a Short Message Service (SMS). If your area code is the same as the recipient's or if the recipient lives in the same city, this will be considered a local phone call. If the individual is located out of state or across the country, then this will be considered a long-distance phone call. International calls apply to phones calls that are placed to recipients out of the country.

Check your cell phone carrier to see how much text messaging and multimedia messaging costs, or if messaging is included in your phone plan. If your phone plan does not allow you to send text messages, each message you send or receive will cost about 10¢ to 20¢ per message. For international or roaming the rate may increase.

Sending a Text Message

All mobile phones have the capability to send and receive text messages. Text messaging is one of the essential features of the mobile phone. Phones will in regards to the menu options and buttons, but the procedure of sending a text message is pretty much the same. A text message can be sent by picking up the mobile phone and dialing in the recipient's phone number through the touchscreen QWERTY keyboard or the alphanumeric touchpad

The standard text message or SMS (Short Message Service) involves composing and sending concise, electronic messages that are transmitted between two or more mobile phones, or a computer system. Text messages are usually limited to 140 to 160 characters (numbers, letters, symbols, and spaces). If your text message exceeds the character limit, it is automatically separated into several text messages. Each text message is usually sent one after the other until the entire text message is sent to the recipient.

More advanced mobile phones offer the feature of 'Talk to Text'. You can send a text message by simply speaking the recipient's name (recipient must be saved in your contacts) or speaking each number of the phone number into the microphone. You can then relay the message through the microphone, and the phone will type it out to the best of its abilities. All you will have to do at this point is press or say send.

You will be able to send a text message whenever there is a paid mobile phone subscription assigned to your phone. If there is an interruption in your service, bad reception, the phone is powered off, or if you are out of range of your phone carriers' coverage areas, you will not be able to send a text message. In most cases, you will not be able to send a message while the mobile phone is busy running another application. However, if the phone is still in the process of sending the message, you will be able to run applications as normal.

The easiest and most common way to send a text message is to start at the home screen. Select the 'MESSAGING' application that is used to make send text messages.

To Send a LOCAL Text Message

To send a text message locally, be sure that you have an area code associated with the phone number you wish to call. If there is an area code, check to see if the area code matches with yours or it the area code is out of state. If the area codes are the same, then this will be considered a local phone call. However, the call may still be considered local if there is a different area code. Most cities have boroughs or suburbs that are located no less than 10 minutes from major metropolitan areas. These suburbs/boroughs will usually have area codes that differ from the main city. If this is the case, this will still be considered a local call.

To send a text message locally, you will need to enter the full ten digits of that phone number when prompted. Unlike placing a phone call locally, failing to include the area code will cause the text message to be unsuccessful. It is vital to that the entire phone number is entered in when prompted. For example, if I live in Vallejo, CA *(area code 707)*, and I want to send a text message to my sister that lives on the other side of town, I will need to enter in the phone number as follows:

To send a text message to phone number: **(707) 555-555** or **555-5555**: *I will first, dial area code '***707***'. Next, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555'***. Finally, I will type in the text message that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

To Send a LONG-DISTANCE or DOMESTIC Text Message

To send a text message to a long-distance phone number, you will need to enter the full phone number or all ten digits. For example, if I live in Pasadena, CA *(area code 626)*, and I wanted to call my cousin in Olive Branch, MS *(area code 662)*, I will need to enter the phone number as follows:

To a send text message to phone number: **(662) 555-5555**; *Dial area code '***662***'. Then dial phone number '***555-5555***'. Finally, I will type in the text message that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

To Send an INTERNATIONAL Text Message

If I am sending a text message to an international phone number, I will dial 011, and then the country code for the country, the city code, and the phone number. However, there is a general rule of thumb when calling international. If I am in America, and I am placing a call to a cell phone that is native to London, UK, I will need to follow type the number in as follows:

To a send text message to phone number: **(+44) 20-555-5555**: *First, I will dial, '***011***'. Next, I will dial country code, '***44.***' Then, I will dial city code '***20***'. Then, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555'***. Finally, I will type in the text message that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

International phone numbers have separate city codes for landlines and separate city codes for mobiles phones. For example, if I live in Lagos, NG and I wanted to call a local land line phone, the city code will be different from my mobile phone even though we live in the same town. Most city codes contain two or three digits. However, some international phone numbers do not have a city code. If you feel that you are not capable of sending a text message internationally, check your phone carrier's website for further instruction, or to find out if your phone carrier has special instructions for sending international calls.

****Be sure to check the status of the text message after you select 'SEND'. Sometimes the text message will fail to send and will automatically save to the 'OUTBOX'. In most cases, the phone will be able to send the message on its own after some time has passed. However, if the message fails to send after an extended amount of time, you will first need to attempt to solve the problem on your own.*

To troubleshoot you will need to do the following:

Select 'OUTBOX' from the SMS menu. Locate the failed message and select to review. Once you have reviewed the message, select 'RESEND'.

If the text message fails to send again, check the signal strength of the phone. This can be done by observing the signal indicator (usually 4 to 5 bars ascending in size) that is usually located at the very top of the phone's display screen. If the problem persists or you

need help with more options for troubleshooting, please refer to: Mobile Phone Signal to be advised.

Sending a Multimedia Message

All mobile phones have the capability to send and receive multimedia messages. MMS is one of the essential features of the mobile phone. Phones will in regards to the menu options and buttons, but the procedure of sending a multimedia message is pretty much the same. An MMS can be sent by picking up the mobile phone and dialing in the recipient's phone number through the touchscreen QWERTY keyboard or the alphanumeric touchpad, and attaching whatever media type that you would like to send to the message.

You will be able to send a multimedia message whenever there is a paid mobile phone subscription assigned to your phone. If there is an interruption in your service, bad reception, the phone is powered off, or if you are out of range of your phone carriers' coverage areas, you will not be able to send a text message. In most cases, you will not be able to send a message while the mobile phone is busy running another application. However, if the phone is still in the process of sending the message, you will be able to run applications as normal.

The easiest and most common way to send a multimedia message is to start at the home screen. Select the 'MESSAGING' application that is used to make send messages.

To Send a LOCAL Multimedia Message

To send a multimedia message locally, be sure that you have an area code associated with the phone number you wish to call. If there is an area code, check to see if the area code matches with yours or it the area code is out of state. If the area codes are the same, then this will be considered a local phone call. However, the call may still be considered local if there is a different area code. Most cities have boroughs or suburbs that are located no less than 10 minutes from major metropolitan areas. These suburbs/boroughs will usually have area codes that differ from the main city. If this is the case, this will still be considered a local call.

To send a multimedia message locally, you will need to enter the full ten digits of that phone number when prompted. Unlike placing a phone call locally, failing to include the area code will cause the multimedia message to be unsuccessful. It is vital to that the entire phone number is entered in when prompted. For example, if I live in New York City, NY *(area code 212)*, and I want to send a picture to my sister that lives on the other

side of town, I will need to enter in the phone number as follows:

To send a multimedia message to phone number: **(212) 555-555** or **555-5555**: *I will first, dial area code '***212***'. Next, I will dial phone number, '***555-5555'***. Finally, I will attach the picture or the media that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

To Send a LONG-DISTANCE or DOMESTIC Multimedia Message

To send a multimedia message to a long-distance phone number, you will need to enter the full phone number or all ten digits. For example, if I live in Jackson, TN *(area code 731)*, and I wanted to call my cousin in Orlando, FL *(area code 407)*, I will need to enter the phone number as follows:

To a send text message to phone number: **(407) 555-5555**; *Dial area code '***407***'. Then dial phone number '***555-5555***'. Finally, I will attach the picture or the media that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

To Send an INTERNATIONAL Multimedia Message

If I am sending a text message to an international phone number, I will dial 011, and then the country code for the country, the city code, and the phone number. However, there is a general rule of thumb when calling international. If I am in America, and I am placing a call to a cell phone that is native to the Hong Kong, CHN, I will need to follow type the number in as follows:

To a send text message to phone number: **(+852) 5555-5555**: *First, I will dial, '***011***'. Next, I will dial country code, '***852.***' Then, I will dial phone number, '***5555-5555'***. Finally, I will attach the picture or the media that I would like to transmit, and select 'SEND'.*

International phone numbers have separate city codes for landlines and separate city codes for mobiles phones. For example, if I live in Lagos, NG and I wanted to call a local land line phone, the city code will be different from my mobile phone even though we live in the same town. Most city codes contain two or three digits. However, some international phone numbers do not have a city code. If you feel that you are not capable of sending a text message internationally, check your phone carrier's website for further instruction, or to find out if your phone carrier has special instructions for sending international calls.

****Be sure to check the status of the text message after you select 'SEND'. Sometimes the*

text message will fail to send and will automatically save to the 'OUTBOX'. In most cases, the phone will be able to send the message on its own after some time has passed. However, if the message fails to send after an extended amount of time, you will first need to attempt to solve the problem on your own.

To troubleshoot you will need to do the following:

Select 'OUTBOX' from the SMS menu. Locate the failed message and select to review. Once you have reviewed the message, select 'RESEND'.

If the text message fails to send again, check the signal strength of the phone. This can be done by observing the signal indicator (usually 4 to 5 bars ascending in size) that is usually located at the very top of the phone's display screen. If the problem persists or you need help with more options for troubleshooting, please refer to: Mobile Phone Signal to be advised.

Business or Pleasure: What is the purpose of your cellphone? **Bonus** A Quick Budgeting Guide For Cellphone Buyers!

Whew! Now that is a lot of information to take in about the technicalities of the mobile phone. Now, it's time to come down from a technical level and settle to a more personal level. It's time to think about what mobile phone will work for you, and the mobile phone you choose will serve its intended purpose in your everyday life and business, activities, and responsibilities. This is the part that can be quite confusing and can cause so feelings of indecisiveness with the numerous options that are available.

Knowing what you want

Choosing a cell phone that is just right for you can end up being a very difficult. It's no surprise since the market is flooded with many options. Today, there are over 100 cell phone manufacturers and thousands of phone carriers. With this vast selection, it can be easily understood why picking out a cell phone can be a daunting task. Mobile phones are offering accessible features unlike any device on the market today.

Consumers now have easier SMS and MMS services, web browsing, GPS navigation, and social networking while staying in tact with work and their everyday lives. The smartphones are leading the charge due to operating systems like Windows, Android, and Apple. These phones' advanced operating systems can run many varieties of applications that offer you access to information that are not easily accessible to you.

These phones have helped people become more successful with business, time management, money management, and other important factors that human beings depend on for sustenance. However, conventional or lower-tech phones are not far behind. They offer convenience with their large screens, QWERTY keyboards, and web browsing capabilities. They also contain email applications, but they are not as robust as the email applications that you will find accessible with the smartphone. However, conventional phones offer email applications that are a lot simpler to use.

Hold off on dashing out and buying that new phone, there is still a lot of information to cover before you get to the fun part. It is important to consider a few underlying factors when your decided to purchase a mobile device.

When you're ready to buy a phone, you'll first have to decide which of the two types, conventional mobile phone or smartphone. Choose a conventional model if you mainly need voice and text-messaging capability, and perhaps a music player and camera. Smart phones, with their advanced operating systems, larger displays, QWERTY keyboards, and other computer-like features, are a better choice for people who need frequent access to multiple e-mail accounts, a sophisticated organizer for appointments and contacts, the ability to open Office documents, and Internet-based services. One compelling advantage of most smart phones is their ability to access a host of applications consisting of productivity tools, shopping, multimedia, games, travel, news, weather, social, finance, references, etc.

What do you use your phone for?

When picking out a phone it is very important that you know how it will fit into your lifestyle. Knowing what you will use your phone for, how you will use your phone, and how often will prepare you for the road ahead. If spending money is a science, and planning for something that you would like to spend that money on is Quantum Physics mixed with a serving of Calculus on the side. Thinking about all the things that you may or may not do with your phone will require you to sit down and really think about who you are. Will you use your phone for leisure, for business, or for the basic purpose? These are some of the questions that you will need to ask yourself before picking up that credit/debit card.

If you text more than you talk, why would you buy get a phone plan that's unlimited talk and text and vice versa? If no one ever calls you and you rarely place calls then why wouldn't you get a mobile plan that's suitable for your use? The scariest thing about a majority of consumers today is that most shopping is done on impulse anyway. There is no thought behind their purchases, they just simply buy. Blindly picking out your phone will be just like walking into a grocery store hungry. You will end up finding a lot of stuff that you don't really need. So, sit down and write out the things that you do every day and see how your phone can accommodate you.

You will need to also look at other features like the screen size, applications, and other features of the phone. Ask yourself if this phone will be the right one for you. Ask self if this phone will phone be a distraction, and aide, or a helpful business tool. Are you going through a life changing event such as working from home or retirement? If so, you may need to go for a phone that compliments that transition. If your lifestyle is relaxed you

need to have a phone and a phone plan that is relaxed as well.

Budget

Your budget is affected by a few factors, your shopping style, your preferred phone service, and your needs. You will consciously or subconsciously base your purchasing decision on these three factors. However, to make the budget work the best for you it is vital to be able to channel these factors in the direction that you need to.

There are new and enticing phones being released frequently that offer greater accessibility than previous or outdated models. Even the outdated models contain some appealing features. But to pick the perfect phone, you will need to sort through the available selections, sort through all of your wants and needs, and come to a sound, mature, and responsible decision.

This may seem like a hard task, and many will not know where to start. However, the easiest place to start is to know your budget, the factors that will affect your budget, and what types of strategies to adapt to make your budget work for you. Let's become knowledgeable of the things that will come into play so that you can strategize your purchasing decision. Here are a few basic tips of budgeting that you can adopt and apply to your phone shopping.

Write Down All Expenses

Bills are the heart of your budget, and what keeps us motivated to keep making money. Whether it is a food bill, rent, car note, gas, education, citations, credit card payment, it doesn't matter how big or small the bill is. Bill should have a permanent place in your budget. Adding your bills and expense to your budget will also keep you up-to-date on the due dates as well. Many people are late on bills simply because they forgot about the due date. It not that they weren't can't afford to pay the bill, it's just that there are other things that they would rather spend their money on. To get a good grasp on your finances, include everything that deals with your money in your budget.

It would also help if you categorized all of your bills based on how you spend and life events. For example, birthdays and other special occasions can be something that you set aside or budget. Or maybe you can pencil in a little money to include for that perfect phone that you've been looking to buy. To make the process a lot faster and easy on the eyes, you can enter your budget into a spreadsheet. This will help with organizing the categories of each expense as well, and make looking at your budget less stressful.

Be Consistent

Never stop budgeting. This is the most important thing to remember about budgeting. The rule is to never spend more than you earn. However, many tend to forget this rule even though it's pretty straightforward. Spending more than you earn breaks the cardinal rule of money management, because that puts you in the category of deficit spending. It doesn't matter if you are a middle class citizen or a millionaire, if you are always spending more than you ear, you will always be in debt. Another helpful tip is to add up all of your expenses and compare them to how much money you actually make to determine if your bills are trumping your earnings. If this is the case, then you must reconstruct your budget. You will need to make the must-have your top priority, along with cutting off all of your luxuries and things that you can live without. There should be no shortcuts taken, or you will only be cheating yourself.

Have a Nice Treat

All budgeters know that treating yourself will help the budgeting process go a lot smoother than if there was no treat at all. However, these privileges are planned and added to the budget. They are not just based on an impulsive purchase. Treating yourself within a budget will help relieve the stress of paying bills and sticking to your budget. The best ways to think of these rewards are as treats for outstanding money management. So, when you are making your budget think of something that you would really want that can safely fit into your budget without jeopardizing any of the money for the necessities. Choose the reward carefully and apply it to something constructive, and something that really makes you happy. It could be a hobby, shoes, a dance class, or anything that makes you tick. Just make sure it's budget friendly and modest. So, don't deprive

Plan for the Worst

Those individuals that are keen on budgeting know that planning for the worst is vital. Life brings along many unexpected events and accidents. They are always lurking somewhere waiting to attack. It is the best practice to plan for those unexpected events accordingly, and neutralize the effects of those events that you were never looking forward to. You can do this by maintaining your greatest assets frequently and to the best of your abilities.

Avoid and Ignore the Delusions

To become a master at budgeting, you will have to change your way of thinking and perception of budgeting altogether. What is the first thing that comes to mind when it

comes to budgeting for you? Do you secretly hate the idea because you wish you had more money to spend? Are you afraid that creating a budget and sticking to it will change your comfortable lifestyle? Well, it's time to get rid of those beliefs, and realize that even the richest people in the world budget. Just know that budgets are not as constricting as you think. You can still have fun on a budget, and a carefully thought-out and planned budget will allow you some special rewards in the end. These rewards are your aim. However, it is best to think of your budget as a spending plan unique to you. With this plan you will be able to accumulate the great skill of money management. This will give you a more responsible way of spending money. Having a set budget will cut out impulsive spending, and give you control over your money, expenses, financial goals, eliminate debt, and help all of those bills fade away.

What type of Shopper Are You?

When shopping for a mobile phone it is important to keep three things in mind your budget, your shopping strategy, and your needs. Your budget and needs are the most important of the three. This is important to keep in mind because it is almost inevitable that the phone you decide to invest in will be something that you would want to stick with for a while. So, the best place to start is to know who you are as a shopper, and what type of shopping strategy to adapt to pick the best phone possible.

Let's take a look at the various types of shoppers to determine your purchasing style. Knowing the type of shopper you are will help you decide your strategy when you finally go decide to go out and purchase your phone. This will also supplement your budget and help you determine where you should buy your phone.

Discount Shopper – This shopper is the type of shopper that loves to saves where there is any opportunity available. This person loves to make every purchase budget-friendly. Discount shoppers will always have coupons, discount codes, the latest information of sales, and all price comparison information handy at all times. Hunting down deals is second nature to this individual, and that's a good thing because this person can see all opportunities to save. It's best to adapt to this style if your budget is really low but you want to buy a phone that is much more expensive than you can afford. Since the mobile phone market is so full of options, it won't be hard to find the most budget friendly phone with the most advanced features.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Anywhere and/or Bidding sites (e.g. eBay, Quibids.com, Craigslist, Propertyroom.com, Ubid.com, CowBoom.com, and Listia.com); Pre-paid phone service providers; Stores with marketplaces (e.g. Amazon.com, BestBuy, etc.)

The Researcher – This person partakes in long and extensive research that can last

for months. They are keen to all off the latest and future product releases. They carefully and articulately strategize when it comes to shopping and purchase only when they feel the time is right. They might make a decision to buy something right away or they make wait for months to purchase the thing that they've had their eye for a while. This is one of the smarter and less stressful ways to shop.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Anywhere

The Impulsive Buyer – If this shopper sees something they buy it. However, this shopper is not the best kind of shopper to be if you have a very tight budget. If you adapt this shopping strategy when purchasing a phone, you might end up with something that you will regret. So, if you buy on impulse now is the time to take a step back and think about a different shopping strategy that will work for your benefit. Another option is sitting down and thinking very hard about what you truly want in a phone. Write this information down and take it with when you visit your preferred phone service provider and ask a salesperson for their insight and help.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Mobile service providers or any place where there will be staff to help.

The Negotiator – This shopper knows that no price is every set in stone. Everything is always debatable. Their main goal is to get what they want at the cheaper price by bargaining with the salesperson until they can't bargain anymore. If you think that you have what it takes to walk into any store and talk the salesperson down to a price reasonable for you then go for it! However, this may not work so it will be better to settle for purchasing a phone through bidding.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Anywhere and/or Bidding sites (e.g. eBay, Quibids.com, Craigslist, Propertyroom.com, Ubid.com, CowBoom.com, and Listia.com)

The Loyal Customer – This customer buys everything from the same place. Not only that they have a slew of membership cards, discounts, and reward points. This shopper knows what stores suit their needs and they are going to stick with the store that perfectly meets their needs. Especially since they have all the reward points in the world to save them a nice chunk of change.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Phone service providers, electronic stores the offer reward points (e.g. Best Buy, Walmart, Target, etc.)

Shopper on a Mission – You are more of a get in and get out type shopper. Time and budgeting is your most valuable resource. To make shopping easier, you craft your budget all the way down to amount of sales tax before you go shopping. Your goal is to always match or stay under that budget and get out as quickly as

possible.

Best Places to Shop for a Phone: Anywhere or places where there won't have a long wait time.

Different Types of Phones

As stated before, there are a lot of phones on the market today. This section will help your narrow your options down by breaking these many phones down into simple categories. Take a look at the information below to receive some first-hand information of what the phones are really made of.

Conventional Phones

The phone market is steadily shifting over to smartphones, and conventional or regular mobile phones are slowly being pushed out of the way by their descendants. However, prepaid phone services seem to keep a great supply of these phones. These phones are also very inexpensive when compared to the smartphone. The best features that these phones offer is their compactness and the easy to use keypad/keyboard. Many have cameras and support for wireless Bluetooth headsets for hands-free communication. Many can access high-speed data networks to enjoy music and video-based services. Other capabilities might include a touch screen, a QWERTY keyboard, a full browser, a multi-megapixel camera, memory-card storage for music and pictures, and more options for custom ring tones, games, and other services. If you are searching for something functional, then this phone will be the right one for you. The same advice we gave above about form factors also applies to feature phones. In this case, in addition to touchscreens, sliders, and QWERTY slabs, you'll also have basic voice phones that are either candy-bar shaped with numeric keypads, or flip phones that open up to a larger, more comfortable numeric keypad. Flip phones have the added benefit of not needing a keyboard lock; close the phone and you won't mistakenly dial someone while it's in your pocket. For the accident-prone, some are even waterproof or ruggedized.

Smartphones

Their advanced operating systems give them access to a host of applications: productivity tools, shopping, multimedia, games, travel, news, weather, social media, finance, references, etc. Popular, high-profile models such as the Samsung Galaxy and the iPhone command the highest prices. But there are a massive number of older model smartphones that can achieve most of the same functions for about a fraction of the price. These older smartphones perform much better than the conventional phones, and the offer the appeasing accessibility.

Form Factors

The form factor refers to the position and layout of the phone's major elements, shape, size, and style. These form factors are prevalent in flip phones, bar phones, slider phones, their subcategories, and uncommon models.

Bar Phones *(Also known as: Candy Bar, Block, and Slab)*

This phone takes on the shape of a cube and has rounded edges and corners. It vaguely resembles a chocolate candy bar, thus the name bar. The bar is a form factor this is used by a large number of phone manufactures, and they all have a similar layout. All bar phones contain only a few buttons on the outer shell of the phone. This small group of buttons includes a power, volume, and camera button on the outer left and right edges of the phone.

There are a few buttons located at the very bottom of the touchscreen, the home button, the back button, and the search button. The earphone jack is located at the top left or right corner, and charger jack on either the bottom-center, left, or right corner of the phone. If the charger jack is located on the left or right, it is usually located on the side opposite of the power button. Only the QWERTY virtual keyboard is available with this phone. This is the most frequent form factor that you will see in mobile phones today.

Touchscreen *(Also known as: Slate Phone; Subcategory of the Bar Phone)*

The touchscreen is prevalent in smartphones and all advanced mobile devices. It consists of an onscreen QWERTY virtual keyboard. Nine out of ten smartphones worldwide are manufactured in touchscreen form.

Phablet *(Subcategory of the Touchscreen)*

The name '*Phablet'* is a combination of the words phone and tablet. These are the larger smartphones that can function as both a phone and a tablet. The screens of phablet usually measures to about 5" to 6.9".

The Swivel Phone

The swivel phone is made up of two segments that are connected by a central axis which swiveled past each other in a way that usually resembled a kick. . These phones were made to allow the consumers to have a physical keyboard accessible to them without being too large in size. Some later slider phones came equipped with both a touchscreen QWERTY keyboard and a physical QWERTY keyboard.

The Brick Phone

The Brick phone mainly refers to what will now be considered a chunky, passé bar-shaped phone. These phones usually consisted of a very large battery and an alphanumeric keypad. Earlier "bricks" were accompanied by an antenna protruding out of the top of the phone. However, many apply the brick to older touchscreen phones and other form factors like the slider phone and the flip phone.

The Flip Phone *(Also known as: The Clamshell)*

The flip phone consists of two sections that are connected by hinges that allow the phone to open close just like a clamshell. This design allows for a much more compact and portable phone. When open, the top section of the phone exposed a screen along with a speaker, while the bottom exposed a keypad, a few command buttons, and a microphone. The bottom half is where the battery was housed, while outer top housed a digital clock display.

The Slider Phone

The slider phone is a phone that is made up of two or more sections that use a rail system to slide open. Once the phone slid open the bottom half mainly revealed a small QWERTY keyboard and the top half house the phone's screen, microphone, and speaker. These phones were made to allow the consumers to have a physical keyboard accessible to them without being too large in size. Some later slider phones came equipped with both a touchscreen QWERTY keyboard and a physical QWERTY keyboard.

The Taco Phone

The taco phone was very short-lived. The phone resembled a taco when talked into, due to the microphone being located on the side of the phone. The phone consisted of a display screen on the front center, a keypad of the right, and a group of command buttons on the left.

The Watch Phone *(Also known as: Smartwatch)*

This is a wristwatch with Bluetooth support and full 4 band Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) to allow the user to make a phone call.

Phone Manufacturers

There are many phones on the market today,

Samsung Galaxy

The Samsung Galaxy or Samsung GALAXY is the dominating mobile device for all Android phones. This phone is manufactured, designed, and advertised by Samsung. The Galaxy line of products includes state-of-the-art smartphones, a tablet series, and phablet series. The mobile devices are definitely making a statement, and it's obvious that everyone is paying attention. The Galaxy phones are the runner-up to the iPhone when it comes to the most purchased. However, this phone has had extraordinary success. Due to its selection of over 50 devices, Samsung has been able to break in to all pricing options, every mobile carrier, every country, and every form factor.

The development of the Samsung galaxy began in 2009 with the release of the Samsung i7500 (aka Samsung Galaxy). This was the beginning of Samsung's race into the Android market. Today, the Galaxy is in great competition with the iPhone. Ironically, until recently Samsung had been manufacturing chips and phones for the iPhone. If you plan to purchase this phone, then it would be a great choice due to the level of its accessibility and user – interface. However, be aware of the cost of the phone.

Apple iPhone

The iPhone is a line of smartphones designed and marketed by Apple. The phone was released back in 2007, and has dominated the smartphone market since its release, and it sold approximately 6.1 million iPhone units over five quarters. There is currently eight generations of iPhone, and eight generations of Apple operating systems. The first generation phone was a Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) phone, some of the designs and physical features of the first generation iPhone have been replaced with better features by the newer models. The newest model of the iPhone has a screen that measure to about 4.7" to 5.5". The earlier versions of the iPhone had smaller screens that measured to about 9 cm.

This phone has amazing capabilities that no other phone has on the market today. Features like a talking personal assistant named *Siri* that helps you get all of your tasks done and interacts with you through this outstanding natural speech voice recognition feature. She can also ask you questions if she needs more information about your commands.

The iPhone has been a well-publicized competition with Samsung and Apple seems to winning by the long haul. And now that Samsung is no longer manufacturing chips and phones for Apple, the competition just got easier for Apple. It will be impossible for Samsung to beat the accessibility of the iPhone. Also, just like the Apple computers, the iPhone was built to last.

Brands of Other Phones

Acer
Alcatel
Allview
Amazon
Amoi
Apple
Archos
Asus
AT&T
Beneton
BenQ
BenQ-Siemens
BlackBerry
Blu
Bosch
Casio
CAT
Celken
Chea Comm
Dell

Emporia
Ericsson
Eten
Fujitsu Siemens
Garmin-Asus
Gigsbyte
Gionee
Haier
Hauwei
Hewlett Packard
HTC
Icemobile
i-mate
i-mobile
Innostream
iNQ
Jolla
Karbonn
Kyocera
Lava
Lenovo
LG
Maxon
Maxwest
Meizu
Microsoft
Microwave
Mitac
Mitsubitshi
Modu
Motorola
Mwg

NEC

Neonode

NIU

Nokia

NVIDIA

OnePlus

O_2

Oppo

Orange

Palm

Panasonic

Pantech

Parla

Phillips

Plum

Posh

Prestigio

Qtek

Sagem

Samsung

Seiwan

Sendo

Sharp

Siemens

Sonim

Sony

Sony Ericsson

Spice

Tel.Me.

Telit

Theiraya

T-Mobile

Toshiba

Unnecto

Vertu

Verykool

VIVO

VK Mobie

Vodafone

Wiko

XCute

Xiaomi

XOLO

Yezz

Yota

YU

ZTE

Basic Phone Accessories that will enhance your Phone Experience

There are some essential phone accessories that you must acquire and maintain to be able to utilize all of the features of your phone and keep it running successfully. Below is a comprehensive list that will give some insight on why these accessories are needed for your phone.

Phone Charger

This is will be the accessory that will come with your phone. The phone charger keeps your battery charged. New mobile phones come with a charger that has a detachable USB cord to allow consumers to connect your phone to desktops, laptops, and other devices. This will allow you to transfer files between your phone and other devices. You can also use the detachable USB to charge your phone through other devices.

The Wireless Charger/Wireless Power Transfer (WPT)

Wireless chargers are the new accessories to the market. The technology involves the transmission of electrical power from a power source to the mobile device without the use of any wire connectivity. This allows the phone to be charged when there are times of inconvenience or when there are dangerous circumstances. The way it works is a transmitter that is connected to a power source sends of power to the phone by electromagnetic fields the surface that will or contains the phone. The power will then be

converted into electric power and sent to the phone.

Secure Digital (SD) Card

Most smartphones require an SD card for the ultimate data storage. SD cards are interchangeable between devices and usually come with the mobile phone. SD cards come is different sizes, weights, speed classes, and capacities, and will only fit into matching slots. The size compatible with your mobile device will be the microSD card and measures to about 15 x 11 x 1.4 millimeters and weigh about 0.25 grams. The capacity of microSD cards range from 2GB to 32GB. The microSD card that will come with your phone will have a capacity of 4GB. This card will allow you to store media, contacts, and other applications.

Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) Card

This is an integrated circuit that serves the purpose of securely storing International Mobile Subscriber Identity (IMSI) (used to identify a mobile network) and the related key that identifies and authenticates subscribers the mobile device it is assigned to. These cards are designed to be exchangeable between different mobile devices. For your mobile phone, a SIM card will be assigned to you be the phone carrier to activate phone service.

Auxiliary Cord

This cord will connect your phone to any headphone audio jack that your cord can connect to. You will be able to connect the opposite end into the headphone audio jack in your phone to enjoy music and phone audio through the speakers of whatever you are able to connect it to.

Headsets

The headset is not an essential, but it is a very helpful tool. The most popular headset is the Bluetooth headset. This accessory allows you to talk on your phone wirelessly. This accessory is helpful to use while driving, but many new model cars already come equipped with Bluetooth capabilities.

Phone Case

The phone case protects the phone from damage. This can be purchased through phone carriers and other marketplaces.

The Five Pillars of a Good Smartphone – How To Choose The Right Smartphone

The earlier chapters of this book have given you a thorough introduction to the cell phone and how quickly cell phone technology has developed. Since the original smartphone was introduced, the pace of development accelerated even more. We can look forward to that development trend increasing further in the future. Clearly a smartphone can perform many functions, delivering an incredible amount of utility for its owner. All that utility increases the difficulty of choosing the right smartphone for you.

In this chapter, we will talk about the important points to consider in choosing a smartphone. We referred to these of the five pillars of a good smartphone. These are the key functions that drive overall performance and owner satisfaction. They are also the drivers of cost. In addition, we are going to talk about your personal wants and needs and how they will influence the selection of your smartphone.

- First, we are going to talk about the size and design of your smartphone. You are going to be handling, looking at and viewing your smartphone countless times a day. The design and size are extremely important. If you cannot hold it and operate it comfortably, or you cannot read it easily you will be perpetually frustrated.

- They say that “patience is a virtue”, but our expectations for the performance of the technology is high and our patience is low. We will be talking about processor speed and storage. These capabilities are very important to the usability of your smartphone. If your GPS app, cannot keep up with the speed of your car, it will not be very useful will it? Once you begin to depend on features like GPS navigation, speed and storage are essential for usability and for safety.

- Our third pillar is storage. You will see that this is essential to your personal satisfaction because it relates to using camera features, video functions, listening to music, playing games and overall storage capacity for the information you wish to retain and recall instantly.

- Pillar number four is dedicated to camera functions. These too, relate to processor speed and storage, but can also drive your budget through the roof. Never the less, your picture and video taking capabilities can make a difference in how much fun and utility you get from your smartphone.

- The last pillar is the budget. Hardly anyone escapes being constrained by the straps of the budget. Unfortunately, this is a tricky area to negotiate and can make or break your plans for entering smartphone nirvana.

Getting Grounded

This is not going to be a quick process but it can be easy and fun if you relax and enjoy it. Selecting a smartphone is like shopping for your clothes. It is very personal and subject to your tastes, habits and fit. You have many things to consider and self-examination is required. Nothing else you can buy has the potential to serve you in as many ways as a smartphone. Having a good smartphone is like holding the world in the palm of your hand.

Get your research hat down from the shelf, because it takes thorough investigation to uncover the facts you need to make the many choices at hand. This will be a great learning experience and a good investment in your time. The smartphone market changes so quickly that you will be able to use the experience when you need to replace your smartphone for newer technology.

Choosing is not a sequential process. You will need to do a little work in each pillar area and then switch back and forth between them until you have balanced all your requirements and fit them into your budget.

So take out your favorite journal or pad and finest writing instrument. Are you ready to take notes? Ok, here we go.

The Preliminaries

Choosing a smartphone needs to be placed within the right context.

If you do not have one already, you will have to choose a wireless network provider such as AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, or Verizon. This book is not about choosing a network provider, but it is important, so here are a couple of essential points.

Understand what you need and make the best choice for you. There are three main focal points.

- COVERAGE: Your smartphone needs to work well from home, work, where you hang out, on the highways and byways you use. If you travel a lot, you need to check out how well those destinations are covered.
- EQUIPMENT: Can you buy your smartphone elsewhere, or do you have to buy it from the provider. What is the difference in support and price based on where you buy it?
- PRICING: Understand what components affect the price and understand what your needs are. Do not buy more than you need. You can upgrade later if you need to.

Do your research with the help of knowledgeable sources. Use the Internet to dig for information. There are organizations that publish evaluations and comparisons annually. Check these for starters but searching the internet will get you many more.

WWW.CNET.COM

WWW.PCWORLD.COM

WWW.TECHREPUBLIC.COM

If you do have a wireless network provider already, and you are happy with that provider, then you only need to address equipment and pricing.

The big network providers have the broadest choices for smartphones. The local providers have narrower offerings.

Size and Design

Let me start with size because one size does not fit all. You have to get this right. Here is what is important.

- It must be comfortable in the palm of your hand. This size and shape of your hand and fingers is a big influence on comfort and ease of operation. I have small hands with fat fingers, what do you have? This is a very important item. The only way to evaluate this is a field trip to the supplier, where you can pick it up and handle it every conceivable way. Do not overlook weight and balance. Hold it up to your ear. Pretend to be on a call. How long can you hold it up there? Can you feel cramps developing in your hand? Will you need to operate it with one hand? Try that out. Do you do a lot of texting? Try using both hands on the keyboard simultaneously. How does that change the feel of balance and comfort?
- Where are you going to carry it? If the answer to that question is “in my

purse", your pretty much done with this concern. Otherwise, you had better figure out what to wear or bring on your field trip. Many smartphones will not fit well in pockets due to large screen sizes. Continue your tests. Put the device where you will carry it. Pretend you are receiving a call or a text and retrieve the device. How does it handle when you are taking it out of your carrying location. How easy is it to put it back?

- How big is that screen anyway? Do you actually need a big screen? Devices with large screens can be unwieldy and difficult to store. Also, you cannot effectively replace your TV with a smartphone. So think about what is driving you to want a large screen. Will you watch video on the screen for long periods? Do you have a vision problem? Does your choice of phone support visually impaired display functions? How about the on-screen keyboard? Try it out, especially if you have fat fingers. The keys may look larger, but do they work any better when you try to use them? Fat finger alternatives are stylus pens and voice commands. Those might be better for you and eliminate the higher cost of a larger screen device. With all the graphics and video used today and planned for the future, you need a reasonably sized screen. Most people can live happily with between 4.7" and 5" screen, but never go less than 3.5".

Let us talk about the quality of images on the screen. There is more hype around this than anyone would really care to encounter. What counts is that the screen works well for you. Forget about the technology. Many people have vision problems and are unable to discern subtle differences in image quality. On your field trip, you need to test the phones and compare the screens. You will need sales assistance for this test.

Ask how to put the device in Auto Mode, used for saving battery. Now put the phone through some paces. Look at web pages, pictures, text, video and stare at the screen closely. Do you notice any of the following?

- Reflection
- Dull or artificial looking colors
- Blurry text
- Feeling of eyestrain

If you do not experience any of these, then you are in good shape. Otherwise, keep shopping or consider the need to get an eye exam.

Moving on to design, most designs are for use in friendly environments. Will you be using your smartphone in tough environments? Might it be subject to drops or moisture? You may want to look a ruggedized design. That changes dimensions and weight significantly. However, if that is what you need to get utility from your phone, then that is the way you have to go. Sorry!

Keyboards are important. The touch screens on most smartphones have multiple keyboard style options. However, if you are a large person, you may have trouble with on-screen keyboards. If you cannot interact easily with your device, you will be unhappy. Start looking at tactile keyboard devices immediately. Some manufacturers have done a nice job for folks with large hands and fingers.

Controls for things like volume, should be located on the sides of the device and easily manipulated with one hand. This is another test item for your field trip. Have fun with it. Pretend your significant other or boss is screaming at you over the phone. How quickly and easily can you get the volume down?

Attaching things like earphones and chargers should be easy and when connected, should not hamper your operation of the device. Be sure to check while on your field trip.

Let us not forget appearance. Some smartphones have metal skins and others are plastic. Finishes can be shiny, dull, or textured. They can come in nifty color schemes or just boring black. This might not matter to you if you intend to apply an external case to your phone. Cases are relatively inexpensive and provide a little extra protection. You can put a personal touch on some cases by using your own photos and graphics. If you are interested in this, it will be an added cost, though a small one.

Processor Speed and RAM

A smartphone is actually a computer that can provide telecommunications functions. It is very sophisticated and manages many tasks simultaneously. It can store huge quantities of information within its tiny framework, and needs to be able to retrieve it instantly. It also manages real-time communications over multiple networks, for data, the Internet, voice, video, and positioning. This means your smartphone is running many programs simultaneously.

The number and type of programs you run drives the need for processing power and the number of processors. Each running program is stored in RAM (random access memory) to make it easy for the processor to execute the instructions.

There are millions of applications or APPS you can acquire to run on your smartphone as well. Some of these can place a very large burden on your device in terms of processor power and RAM. For example, a GPS navigation app runs multiple programs that work together. It can be a blockbuster on processor power and RAM. If you were to be using this application frequently, you might want to be sure to have multiple processors.

Your smartphone's basic design has the processor configuration and RAM it needs to provide high performance for all its inherent functions plus an allowance for running a reasonable number of apps. How you personally use your device, will dictate the need for more or less processing power and RAM. If you keep many programs running simultaneously, you will need more processor power and RAM to ensure you get high performance at all times. If you are the less demanding kind of user, you will need less.

Once you become a smartphone user, you will notice that apps are updated frequently to increase functionality and correct errors. As with PCs and larger computers, app design holds little regard for your devices resources. That means the longer you own your device, the more updates you will receive and the more processor and RAM capacity is used. This will likely result in you finding it gets slower over time. To avoid this, consider the following guideline.

- If you feel like you are going to be happy with the standard features of your device and only very few apps, do not worry about the processor speed or RAM. You will be fine.
- If you think owning this device is going to be fun and you are looking forward to all the dynamite apps you can use, consider a 1GHz processor and minimum 512MB of RAM package.

Storage – Internal and External

Storage is a tricky subject. Again, it is going to depend on how you use your device. All devices come with system memory. This is the internal storage. A large portion of that goes to operate the device, but the rest is available for apps and data. Right now, many smartphones have options for 16, 32 or 64 GB of system memory. If your device uses 6GB to run itself, subtract that from the total and that is what you will have left for everything else.

The incremental price of those system memory options is high. An alternative is to find a device that permits removable storage such as an SD Card. This is external storage.

However, do not get confused by the term. The card is actually stored within the device. These cards come in similar sizes to system memory but are less expensive. They are great for storing music, pictures and video that take up large amounts of memory. Buying a device with 16GB of system memory that also supports the use of an SD card, should be less expensive than buying a device with more system memory. Do the math to be sure.

Another kind of external storage is available through apps that specialize in storage. Storage apps keep your information in the cloud, and not on your device. There are two big things to remember about using these apps.

- Your data cannot be stored or retrieved unless you have a connection to the Internet.
- Large data files such as pictures, videos, and music may take a little longer to access than those stored in system memory or on SD cards.

Storage apps are very inexpensive. Anywhere from free to a few dollars a month. They are a great alternative for storing many types of data.

Cameras

Just about every phone has a camera. Smartphones have what I call serious cameras. That is to say, they can rival the capabilities of some high-end digital standalone cameras. This makes talking about this subject a bit cumbersome because digital photography is a broad technology.

If you do not care, much about taking pictures, or only want to take some occasional shots and selfies, you can jump to the next heading. I guaranty anything you need to photograph with your smartphone will come out just fine. Unbelievably, regardless of megapixel rating, any smartphone picture will look great on any other smartphone or computer display.

Before we go further, let us get something important on the table. Do not make photography functionality the primary criteria for selecting a smartphone. They cannot replace sophisticated digital photography equipment. You will end up being disappointed.

Therefore, you shutterbugs, videophiles and semi-pro photography enthusiasts will need to do homework. Start by writing down what you want to do with the camera in your smartphone, how frequently you will do it and in what quantity. Do not forget to note the

conditions you expect to be under, such as high light, low light, reflectivity, indoors, outdoors. Are you going to shoot action stills, videos or whatever? Will you be making prints? What sizes, etc. The more you want, the more you will pay. Here are some things to think about as you do your research.

- Camera functionality can change the dimensions of the smartphone. Most notably, making it thicker and perhaps having a bulge somewhere. This can alter the utility of the smartphone. It may change the way you carry it around with you. It may create an uncomfortable feel due to size and balance.

- The more sophistication built into the camera functions, the more likely that buttons on the device will take on multiple roles. You must get into this in some detail while on your field trip to the smartphone supplier. It is important to understand any difficulty related to the position and use of the buttons. For example, if you miss the button, will you accidentally power off the device, causing you to miss the shot. Another concern might be the tendency to block the lens with your finger, forcing you to hold the device in an uncomfortable position or ruin the shot.

- Camera activation is another operational characteristic you will want to test. How do you actually activate the camera, when in lock mode or unlock mode? How long does it take?

- Other time related actions can make a difference to your personal satisfaction. How long will it take to get your image in focus in auto and manual modes? How quickly does the zoom feature work? How long does it take to change shooting modes, like changing to panorama?

- Some camera features need to be invoked using on-screen buttons. Try these out paying particular attention to whether you can use them easily and without having to look at the screen.

- Test the camera's image quality at various distances. Some cameras will be better close up, or when the subject is at a longer distance. How will you be using the camera and will you get the quality you want for the most frequently shot subjects.

Here are a few more memory joggers to help stimulate your research.

- Larger image sensors are better at light collection.
- Regardless of sensor size, squeezing in too many pixels can make grainy images.
- If prints are important, more megapixels yields larger print sizes.
- Do you want flash capability?
- Do you need auto-focus or image stabilization?
- Do not forget to check shutter speed and frames per second regarding video.

The Internet is your friend for this kind of research. Check manufacturer sites and YouTube. Just don't forget that field testing your alternatives is the most import part of the job.

The Internet is your friend for this kind of research. Check manufacturer sites and YouTube.

Price

Smartphones are telecommunications equipment and require a wireless network services to function fully. Network service providers are the kings of razzle-dazzle pricing. Keep in mind that their objective is to keep you as a customer forever. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Smartphones are expensive and their price is justified based on what they do. The capabilities are very enticing and can get you hooked easily. The question is whether you can afford to have what you want. In reality, smartphones are luxury items but promoted as indispensable by the telecommunications industry. Let me give you some real insight.

On the day I researched this information, you could buy a particular HTC smartphone at a big electronics store, without any wireless network provider services for $599.99. This is not a top of the line phone but a good one. This price is the list price, not discounted at all. Is not the electronics store a discounter? It is because smartphones receive discounts when packaged with wireless network provider services. It is a standard practice in the telecommunications industry. IMPORTANT SIDEBAR: The electronics store is also a re-seller of wireless network provider services. This influences how he sells smartphones. There are other sources for buying smartphones, where the seller does discount the smartphone because he has no affiliation with the wireless network service

providers. CONTINUING: Now if you were to choose to purchase this smartphone in conjunction with a wireless network provider service, you would receive a substantial discount. For example, if you agree to take a 30-month network provider service contract, you could own this phone after 30 installment payments of $14.97 for a total of $449. To sweeten this deal, you can upgrade your phone after the first 24 months, at which point you stop paying for this phone and save six payments equal to about $90. Now the total cost of the phone is only $359.00. The plan also waives activation fees and upgrade fees you would have to pay if you supplied your own phone. Why would they do that? To ensure you renew your wireless network service at the end of the contract.

The above is only one example of a pricing plan. There are many more. None of them is tricky, but the marketing puts emphasis on those things that will draw you in, not inform you of the important details. Be diligent and make sure you understand everything.

Getting back to your budget, you are going to need to cover one-time charges and monthly charges regardless of how you go about acquiring your smartphone. Do not forget your smartphone requires a wireless network service provider.

There will be no escaping the need to conduct thoughtful mathematical analysis as you make your choices. Using a spreadsheet will make this easier. Additionally, carefully examine the fine print of the agreements. Cancelation charges will apply if you need to get out of your contracts. To be thorough, you may want to calculate what cancelation can cost you. It might help reinforce the need to make careful decisions.

Your mission

Your selection of a smartphone is a small project that can facilitate making many positive changes in life. Have fun with your project but be practical. Coming up with a budget that is comfortable for you is most important.

Smartphone technology changes quickly. The simpler your needs are, the longer your smartphone will provide good service for you.

Advances in app development are likely to entice you to add more functionality to your device as the months pass. Remember to create an allowance for those additions.

The five pillars of a good smartphone will guide you in looking at your needs and fulfilling them in a stepwise fashion. It will also help you create a balanced approach to controlling the cost of your smartphone. You can work out trade-offs within each pillar

and then among the pillars. Do not let the volume of options and considerations take your eye off the real needs you have.

- Size and Design are very important. This is a tool you must handle and take with you all the time. It needs to compliment your body, mind, and spirit.
- Processor and RAM work together to ensure top performance. The more you do and the sophistication of what you do are the influences here.
- Storage is a big variable. If you keep lots of photos, videos, and music for instant access, this can be expensive. Ask yourself if you really need those things instantly available all the time.
- Cameras add fun to your life. This will likely be the first time you have a camera available at every moment. You can capture a lot of memories and information. Do you want to create art, or just record memories? It makes a difference.
- Price is what it comes down to in the end. There are many options and you will need to look at all of them. Be sure to do the math.

A Plan that Works! - Everything You Need To Know About Cell Phone Plans

Choosing a Cellphone Plan

Choosing a phone service provider can be quite difficult from the beginning stages; especially, if you don't know the entirety of your options. There are only five wireless providers that are widely advertised, and even less that offer nationwide coverage. Although these phone carriers have superb service and great coverage, there are some phone carriers that offer dependable service. It is best to shop around and research. However, this book has everything for you in one place. The overview of phone plans in this section will give you great information on the options that you have available. You'll be surprised that your options are slightly wider than you think.

Contract Phone Plans

Contract phone services are the most constricted. They usually offer great coverage and great phones. However, the minimum duration of the contract is two years. So, if you are not able to make the payments on time consistently, your credit will take a major hit. And unfortunately, for individuals with bad credit, it will be hard to receive a phone under a contract. The only thing that makes contract phones enticing is the drastic reduction of the phone prices. Purchasing a phone under contract will reduce the prices of some phones all the way down to FREE! Some phones can be reduced by $100.00 to $400.00. Most consumers with a contracted phone plan have to wait to upgrade their phones. It can be considered best to avoid any obligations to pay a monthly bill. So, don't be seduced by the lowered phone prices of the phone. This will be the ideal phone plan for the mission shopper or the researcher, but not the impulsive shopper. There are a number of phone carriers that offer contract phone plans. Check out the list below:

AT&T

CREDO Mobile

Sprint

T-Mobile

US Cellular

Verizon Wireless

Prepaid Phone Plans

Prepaid phone plans offer you the option of paying a monthly fee with no contract. This option works great for those that are not financially able to meet the obligations of a contract, or risk their credit taking a hit. Another upside to this phone service is that when it comes to upgrades, the sky is the limit. You can BYOP (Bring your own phone), or you can upgrade or downgrade to any phone that you like, at any time you like. However, this comes at a price. You will have to pay full price for the phone if there is no contract. If you aren't prepared to do this, then it is best not hold-off on this plan until you have the money to accommodate. Plan ahead for the best phone that you can afford, and if you do enough saving you will be able to purchase the phone that you want. For this phone plan, it would help to adapt to the characteristics of the researcher, the discount shopper, and the negotiator. Impulsive buyers stay away unless you are prepared to pay. Here is a list of phone carriers that offer prepaid phone services.

AT&T

Boost Mobile

Cricket Wireless

Freedom Pop

Freedom Pop

GiV Mobile

Go Phone

H_2O Wireless

Metro PCS

Net 10

Page Plus Cellular

Pay-Lo Talk & Text

Republic Wireless

ROK Mobile

Simple Mobile

Sprint

Straight Talk

Ting Mobile

TracFone Wireless

US Cellular

US Mobile

Verizon Wireless

Virgin Mobile

Walmart Family Mobile

Zact

Pay-As-You-Go Phone Service

This phone Pay-As-You-Go phone plan is another option that does not require a contract. With this plan, you have the option available to pay only for the talking, texting, and data you use. You just refresh your minutes and data whenever they run out. There is no monthly fee, and you are not obligated. You have the same freedom as you would under a prepaid phone plan. This plan also requires that you pay for your own phone or bring your own phone. However, some phone carriers will require a SIM card that you will have to purchase if you want to use their mobile services. Here are a few Pay-As-You-Go service providers below.

AT&T

Boost Mobile

Consumer Cellular

Earthtones

Jitterbug

Kajeet

Liberty Wireless

Metro PCS

Net 10

o2 Wireless

Page Plus

PTei

Ready Mobile

Red Pocket Mobile

Republic Wireless

Simple Mobile

Solovei

Sprint

STI Mobile

Straight Talk

T-Mobile

Total Call Mobile

Touch Mobile

TracFone Wireless

US Cellular

Verizon Wireless

Virgin Mobile

Wi-Fi Phone Plans

Wi-Fi phone services are sort of new to the phone carrier market. The offer no contract carrier-free, Pay-As-You-Go phone service. There is no need to go to a store, because these plans are all enabled through mobile applications. These apps offer free texting and some offer a certain amount of free talking minutes. However, you will be able to purchase a large amount of minutes at a very low price. For example, some applications offer 1000 talk minutes for as low as $14.99 per month, with free talking, and data is free because you will be running off of Wi-Fi. Some of these phone services will even allow you to retrieve free minutes by completing phone surveys and trying out new apps. This phone service may be unconventional, but it is a money saver, and can be very helpful to those that are able to adapt. Here are a few Wi-Fi based phone services.

KiK

Line

Pinger

Ring Plus

Skype

Text Free

Text Now

Text Plus

TextMe

Walkee Textee

WhatsApp

Taps, Clicks, Troubleshooting, and Phone Tricks

This chapter is all about what hidden features your phone can perform, and some of the basic troubleshooting that you can do when your phone is not working the best for you. However, your best resource will be your phone manual.

Mobile Phone Signal

The strength of your phone signal has a major influence on the functionality of your phone. Failed text messages, poor call quality, or slow running applications usually indicate that there is a problem with your phone service. If you run into this problem, review the information below to assist you with troubleshooting.

Full Reception/Full Bars

If the reception bars on the phone are high, this indicates a very strong signal. If you are having difficulties placing calls, sending messages, or using other applications, but your phone indicates a strong signal, follow these steps to troubleshoot:

Restart your phone – Most problems like this can be resolved by simply restarting your phone. There are two ways that you can restart your phone:

Remove the Battery

You may restart your phone by removing the battery and then immediately putting the battery back into the phone. Once you have put the battery back into the phone, you will then power the phone back on. Once the phone is powered on, confirm a signal and attempt to send the text message again. For the best result, wait about 5 minutes before powering the phone back on.

Power Off/Power On

You may also restart your phone simply powering the phone off, and then immediately powering the phone back on. Once the phone is powered on, confirm a signal and attempt to send the text message again. For the best result, wait about 5 minutes before powering the phone back on.

If the problem persists, you will need to check with your mobile carrier to have the problem fixed immediately.

Weak Signal/Low Bars

If the reception bars on the phone are low, this indicates a weak signal. If you are having difficulties placing calls, sending messages, or using other applications, and your phone indicates a strong signal, follow these steps to troubleshoot:

Clear Obstructions – If your phone signal has weakened, you will need to check for possible obstructions (location, trees, tall buildings, etc.) in the area. It's possible that you are not in close enough range to a cell phone tower, or there may an object blocking the signal. These are the most common causes of a failed text message and weakened signal. Once you have determined and solved the problem, and the signal is restored, you should and be able to send the text message.

Restart your phone – Most problems with low reception by restarting your phone. There are two ways that you can restart your phone:

Remove the Battery

Click here to be redirected to the instructions above.

Power Off/Power On

Click here to be redirected to the instructions above.

If the problem persists, you will need to check with your mobile carrier to have the problem fixed immediately.

No Service/No Signal

If the reception bars are replaced with the prompt, 'NO SERVICE' (indicates no signal), you may need to restart your phone or even remove the battery. Once the phone has powered back on, check to see if the signal has been restored. If there is still no signal, you will need to check with your mobile carrier to have the problem fixed immediately.

Check (IMEI) – Sometimes consumers will be sold a phone that has a bad IMEI. This usually means that your phone has been blacklisted in order to prevent use of

the phone due to the chance of it being a stolen phone. Even though your phone is not stolen, this could still happen in error. You can check the IMEI of your phone and unlock it through the internet. There are many websites that offer this service available online. If you are still experiencing issue with your phone, you will need to talk to the phone carrier and the store that you purchased the phone from.

Clear Obstructions – *Click here to be redirected to the instructions above.*

Restart your phone – Most problems with low reception by restarting your phone. There are two ways that you can restart your phone:

Remove the Battery

Click here to be redirected to the instructions above.

Power Off/Power On

Click here to be redirected to the instructions above.

If the problem persists, you will need to check with your mobile carrier to have the problem fixed immediately.

Cool Features

Your phone has some very cool feature many people are not keen to. This chapter will put you up to date on some of the hidden features of your phone. Most people only become aware of these features after they've had their phone for a while. If only they would just read the phone manual. But who really reads those anyway? Luckily, this book is here to give you a speed pass through the essentials of what your phone can do, and some of the cool things that make your phone

Take a screenshot

A screenshot is an image captured by your phone to record the items displayed on the monitor, the LCD of your touchscreen phone. Normally, this image can be taken using a mobile application that you can download on your phone. However, there is no need to do that because your phone already has the capability to capture a screenshot. Take a look below at how to take a screenshot with the most prevalent phones in the industry.

Iphone

To Take a Screenshot with the iPhone:

Press and hold down the 'HOME' button simultaneously with the 'SLEEP/WAKE' button. Once you hear the camera shutter, you have successfully taken a screenshot with your

mobile phone. The phone will automatically save to your photo gallery/photos.

Android

To Take a Screenshot with the Android:

Press and hold down the 'POWER' and 'VOLUME DOWN' buttons simultaneously. Once you hear the camera shutter, you have successfully taken a screenshot with your mobile phone. The phone will automatically save to your photo gallery/photos.

Windows Phone

To Take a Screenshot with the Android:

Press and hold down the 'HOME' and 'POWER' buttons simultaneously. Once you hear the camera shutter, you have successfully taken a screenshot with your mobile phone. The phone will automatically save to your photo gallery/photos.

Your Phone Can Read!

Find yourself multitasking a lot, this feature will help you manage your multitasking efficiently. The Voice over application allows your phone to read what is available on the screen of your phone at the time. Really comes in handy when you are using your navigation application, or when you receive a text message while driving. This feature will help you keep your eyes on the road.

iPhone

Go to the 'SETTINGS' menu, and select 'GENERAL'. Then select 'ACCESSIBILITY'. Next, enable the 'Voice Over' option.

Note: This may take some time for you to get used to. So, feel free to practice before you actually begin using this feature regularly.

Android

Go to the 'SETTINGS' menu. Then select 'ACCESSIBILITY'. Next, enable the 'TALK BACK' option.

Note: You can adjust your Talk Back settings by selecting the Text-to-Speech application through the accessibility menu. Here you can control the speed and volume of your phone's speech.

Conclusion

Hopefully my book, *The Smartphone Buyer's Guide 2015*, has provided you with all the information you need to help you purchase the perfect phone for YOU! There is an endless number of ways that you can use technology to communicate with others. However, your mobile phone trumps them all. It can do everything those other devices just can't do, and even everything that they can. The advancements of wireless technology will allow you get the most out of your new mobile device, no matter how new or how old the phone is.

The information contained in this book is detailed and extensive, but it has been developed to give you the easiest shopping experience possible. There are some very important things to keep in mind. You must know what your phone is capable of as well as know what you will need your phone to do for you. The knowledge you gain from reading this book will help you get the MOST out of your mobile phone. Always keep your budget in mind when purchasing anything, and more importantly your phone.

Should I Quit My Job?

How to Cope with a Dead End Job, Explore All Options Before Quitting Your Job

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Introduction

We all know that a job can provide money and career prospects, but with that comes pressure, tension, and expectations from the work environment. Oftentimes, people take that drama home with them, and let it affect every aspect of their lives. Life would surely be much easier if we could just quit our jobs and leave those miserable workplaces. But, in reality, most of us have responsibilities and a pile of bills to pay, so the idea of quitting just isn’t an option. Quitting a job without planning can negatively impact your career and disrupt your personal life. However, staying in an undesirable situation for too long can be even worse.

In the following chapters, I will be sharing a lot of important advice on preparing to resign from a job, and I will provide you with you different ways of minimizing risk, so that you can cope while planning of quitting your dead end job.

There are many reasons people give for resigning from their positions. Not all of these are legitimate, but they are among the most common reasons provided by people who quit their jobs.

Stress, being overworked, and having an unhealthy working environment are among the many valid reasons given for quitting. These, however, are psychological problems which arise from other workplace issues that may not have been addressed by the employer or company.

Other reasons for resignation include limited growth opportunities and the need for change. These might be some of your reasons for quitting if you have a temp job, or a job which provides little opportunity for professional growth. The job might not provide enough challenge, so you want to find a better position elsewhere.

Additionally, some employees are forced to leave their jobs as a result of company downsizing or mergers that have caused their positions to be dissolved.

Risk management is very important if you are on the verge of quitting your job, you cannot do so without fully justifying your decision to your employers. You also need to make preparations.

Quitting your job should never be a spur-of-the-moment decision, since you could find yourself in dire straits if you quit without giving proper notice, and without a backup plan. Before you hand in that resignation letter, here are some things you should consider:

Can you afford to lose your job at this point? Do you have a financial nest-egg that can tide you over while you are in-between jobs? How will you be paying your bills if you lose your job? If you cannot answer these questions, it might not be the right time to quit just yet.

Is the situation hopeless? Is quitting really the only way out? Have you considered staying on and trying to change things at work? Remember, quitting your job is final and irrevocable; more often than not it is a

last resort caused by unresolved issues at your workplace.

How are your work problems affecting your personal life? Sometimes, the situation demands an immediate resolution, especially if your job is already affecting your quality time with your family, and/or causing you undue stress and psychological problems. If that is the case, you really need to prepare the other aspects mentioned prior in order to leave as soon as possible.

If you are truly set on quitting your job, you must not do it in a negative way that could affect your future employment prospects. Quitting without prior notice could earn you a negative reputation that will reflect on your resumé, perhaps implicating that you were a difficult employee.

There are ways to make a graceful exit from your workplace without antagonizing your employers. You will need to utilize tact and some simple techniques to make sure your decision will result in no hard feelings for you or your employer. The world is very small, and there is a chance that you might have to come back and work for the same employer.

Chapter 1: Real Reasons For Quitting

Behind the common excuses that people use for quitting their jobs lie real and legitimate reasons that stem not from personal problems, but from issues concerning management or company policy.

The following reasons are not things you would want to write about in your resignation letter, but they are definitely excellent reasons for quitting your job.

Low pay

Not all people will admit it openly, but this is often one of the primary reasons why employees quit their jobs. Salary and compensation, after all, are the reasons why people need a job in the first place.

Being underpaid is a legitimate reason for quitting, especially if you are always saddled with a lot of work in exchange for a measly hourly wage. It’s also one of the top reasons why people seek greener pastures elsewhere, somewhere the same workload will get them better pay.

Under-compensation goes hand-in-hand with feeling undervalued, which could in turn lead to a form of personal crisis. When you feel you are not being adequately rewarded for your efforts, you begin to question your worth to the company and whether or not you deserve such shabby

treatment.

This can be particularly frustrating if you've been with the company for years. If you feel that you are being paid less than what you deserve, especially after being such a loyal employee, then your reasons for quitting are fully justified.

It's normal to ask for recognition and praise, both in terms of monetary compensation and morale-boosting. When you don't get both (or either) of those things, it only increases your dissatisfaction with your current workplace, and might snowball into bigger issues as time passes.

If this is one of the primary factors affecting your decision, it might be the right time to accept that your current job has hit a dead end. If you have been asking for

promotions or better compensation, but your requests have fallen on deaf ears, it’s probably time to hit the job-hunting road again.

Lack of challenge

This is actually one of the top reasons people quit their jobs: a job has become monotonous and there are no real challenges to face.

It happens when you become accustomed to the current “drill” at your workplace, and nothing new comes along. Any job opportunity should provide you with a chance to grow professionally, so if you’ve been a temp for a year or so with no prospect

of getting promoted in sight, you begin to feel more than a little frustrated.

Remember, your job should always make you feel a bit challenged, enough so that you can find enjoyment in doing it. If this is not the case with your current job, and there are no imminent opportunities to change things within the company, you should definitely consider bailing out.

Boredom and lack of challenge may sound like personal problems, but often, there is an issue with company policy as well. It’s normal to seek professional growth and development, particularly if you are set on a career that you love.

So, if you’ve been feeling this lack of challenge for some time, you should probably notify your employer and see what

can be done —i.e., ascertain whether a promotion or a change of position is possible.

However, if you have already done all that you can and you still feel the issue of adequate challenge is unresolved, it’s time to move on, before things take a turn for the worst. If left unaddressed, boredom can result in bigger problems, to the point where you no longer enjoy your work and end up hitting a midlife crisis.

Stress and depression are serious psychological problems that could eventually result from job dissatisfaction. So, if you’re no longer happy with your work or you feel bored and think you deserve something better, don’t be afraid to let go instead of holding on to a job that no longer works for you.

No enjoyment

The last, but no less real, reason people quit their jobs is because they are no longer happy with their current job. A number of factors can cause this predicament:

Work-life imbalance. When a job becomes so demanding that it takes away your personal quality time, or when you find yourself taking your work home, it can result in being overworked and stressed. You are challenged to the brink of a breaking point, which can be very unhealthy for many people.

Lack of security. Stress can result from your

current position being unstable, or if the company you work for has been hit by the difficult economic situation and layoffs are being made. You cannot be happy if you are constantly worrying about losing your job.

General dissatisfaction. Menial jobs tend to become wearing as time passes. Even when there is adequate compensation, if the job isn’t really something you enjoy doing, it becomes more of a burden just to get ready for work in the morning.

Workplace issues. An overly competitive atmosphere with your colleagues, and lack of support from management, can quickly lead to an unhealthy working relationship with your peers.

Having a healthy working environment is vital to increasing your productivity, but

if you cannot find that at your current workplace, it can lead to personal dissatisfaction.

These are only some of the reasons you might not find your work as enjoyable as you once did. If you feel you can no longer find happiness with your current employer, then it would probably the best for both of you, and the company, if you hand in your resignation now.

Staying on when you no longer feel satisfied can only be destructive—both for your personal welfare and the company's productivity levels. It's best to resign early rather than do it too late.

So, if you have decided to quit, you need to prepare yourself while waiting for the right time to hand in your resignation. Make sure

you clear out your desk and leave no loose ends hanging. Draft your resignation letter ahead of time, keeping it brief and simple — you don’t need to explain your decision extensively.

If you’re still unsure, however, and you feel you need time to think, you definitely have options you can act on while still deciding. These steps should help you figure out what the final step you should take is.

Chapter 2: You Have Options

Employees should never be made to feel like they've come to a forced end with their current job, one where the only solution to their problems is quitting. However, when the inevitable happens, you should be able to take one of several options to remedy matters.

The first step you should take is to stop feeling down about your situation. Analyze the hard facts before you take the final step — that is, deciding between quitting your job or staying on, trying to mend things. Here are some things you can do to clear your

head enough to decide:

Go part-time

If lack of challenge is the most pressing problem with your job, you could try going part-time, if possible, so you'll have the time to go looking for another job.

This will be your 'trial period' in which you can test other jobs and see if that makes a difference in how you feel. It can also help you make comparisons between your current job and other jobs.

Trying other jobs can also help you put your current job in perspective. It can give you an idea of what you will be facing if you

decide to quit your job altogether. It can also give you an insight on what's missing from your current job, so you can discuss your concerns with your employer.

It's crucial, however, that you don't overwork yourself with different jobs. Make sure you can handle the pressure and demands of having several jobs at a time. It won't be beneficial for you if your job performance drops simply because you've taken on too much work. In fact, it can lead to stress and overload if you don't watch it.

Vacation time

Sometimes, all you need is a break to clear your head, particularly if you are feeling

overworked or depressed. When you're not yet sure whether quitting is the best decision or whether there are other options, you can take some leave and get your well-deserved break.

Use this time to consider your options, and to relax and unwind from all the work-related stress you've accumulated over the time you've been working your head off. You can spend more quality time with your family, or you can choose to take a trip somewhere.

Vacations are a great way to regain your zeal and strength, since too much work can lead to emotional and psychological problems. They are also perfect when you need to distance yourself from your work in order to examine your situation objectively.

Make the most of your vacation. It’s the best time to list all the pros and cons of quitting your job, and your immediate concerns should you decide to quit. It’s also the time to conceive backup plans, and to start looking for alternate jobs that you can apply for before giving up your current job.

If you’re thinking of staying on, then use your vacation to fix your mindset. Make a list of the good things about your work and the things that could be improved. If you want to improve your situation, you can list suggested changes that you can later discuss with your employer, once you get back.

Either way, going on vacation will definitely buy you some time before you make any irrevocable decisions that will change your career forever.

Discuss professionally with your boss

The best approach to take when you feel dissatisfied with your current job is to discuss politely with your immediate superior. That way, you are informing your employer that you value their opinions, and it shows that you want to work things out with them.

Now, it could prove problematic if one of your concerns is actually your working relationship with your boss. If that is the case, you should approach the human relations department of the company to address your concerns. If you feel you have been treated unfairly, now is the time to air your grievances — but only through the proper channel.

Before you approach your superiors to renegotiate your current position, make sure you do the following:

Make a list of your concerns. This can serve as your guide when you are on the negotiation table, so you can avoid veering off-topic and engaging in heated arguments.

Along with your concerns, make a list of demands and suggestions for change. However, remember that when you are angling for a promotion or pay raise, you are entering a flexible negotiation process. You should provide enough elbow room for the management to make their counter-offers.

If you are having emotional or psychological problems such as stress, work overload, or

depression, it’s best if you seek the help of an expert on how to handle the negotiations. This will help you avoid emotional outbursts which could be counter-productive to the purpose of you meeting with your bosses.

During negotiations, keep a cool head and stick to the facts. Avoid making unfounded accusations or emotionally loaded statements. That way, you get to the heart of the matter immediately and see if your case has a chance of being resolved within the company or not.

Quitting your job should never be voiced as a threat to management. Remember, no individual member of the company is truly indispensable, and there will be hundreds of applicants lining up to take your place.

Quitting should only be broached as a last

resort if things truly don’t work out for you, or if the management fails to put your concerns into perspective and address them.

Having an employer who is insensitive to your needs is the worst experience for any good employee. If you have taken all these options and still the management ignores your concerns, then the situation is out of your hands. It’s time to get out while you still can and maintain your dignity.

When you hit that final snag, it’s time to put your backup plans into action. You should now plan your graceful exit from the company and rely on alternate means to tide yourself over as you search for the new career path ahead of you.

Chase after your passion

Perhaps you are burnt out because you feel like you have dedicated your whole life to your job, which you may now feel was not really worth it at all. Due to your demanding job, you have probably given up your personal and social life. Well, it is about time that you reconnect.

Work is indeed necessary to earn a living, but your life should not revolve around it entirely. Whether you are in your 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, or even older, it is never too late to chase after your passion. Take Colonel Harland Sanders, for example. He was already a senior citizen living on his pension when he decided to introduce his original fried chicken recipe to the rest of the world. He eventually pulled it off, and now KFC is

one of the most successful fast food restaurant chains in the world.

Have you always wanted to do something but your commitment to your job held you back?

Have you always wanted to go on a trip but your schedule won’t allow it?

Is there a hobby you have always wanted to explore but you never seem to have time?

Have you been missing out on family events or hanging out with your friends?

Whatever it is that you have in mind or whether you have a list or not, just remember that catchphrase from that famous shoe brand: “Just do it!” Now that you have the luxury of time, go run after your passion and start living outside of your job. Treat this time as a breather from the stress that the

corporate world brings. Its time to be free and do what you have always wanted, implement what you planned, on and know what it feels like to live free!

Start a business

There are basically two types of people. There are the thinkers who are great at planning and yet never seem to move forward because they do nothing but plan. On the other hand, there are the doers. They may not be as good in planning but their biggest advantage over thinkers is that they take action.

Are you a thinker or a doer? A lot of people dream about putting up a business but they

also fear the uncertainty of such a venture. From an employee's point of view, your job could have been holding you back all this time to take action. Now, you do not have any excuse. You can either start looking for another employer or you can become your own boss in your own business.

Do you have a business idea in mind?

What is it that you feel passionate about?

What are you good at?

How much money do you have prepared for the investment?

Perhaps these questions seem overwhelming, but look on the bright side; it is an exciting time for you. To get you started, below are some business ideas you may want to consider. The good thing about these businesses is that they require low startup

capital.

Online retailing

Think about what you can sell that you are genuinely interested in. Start with a few basic products and build your inventory gradually. You do not even have to put up your own website immediately. You can use eBay and other e-retailing sites in the meantime.

Online English Tutoring

All you need is Skype, a website, and a bank

account. Because of globalization, non-English speaking countries are pressured to cope. That provides a low-cost business opportunity for you.

Wellness instructor

Obesity and simply being overweight are still huge problems which is why the fitness business is projected to increase by 29% by 2018. If you have a background in health and fitness, you can help other people get in shape.

You do not necessarily have to invest in gym equipment. Rather, hold classes in the local gym or in the park. Offer boot camps and start marketing your services online. Acquiring a certification will give you more

credibility in the eyes of your intended market.

Party planning

Events and reasons for celebration never run out. If you have a penchant for planning, then you may just be able to pull this off. In this case, you must leverage your network in order to land a gig. It will help if you have managed to build your network from your previous job.

Personal chef or Home catering business

This is a fast-growing industry, having reached $1.2 billion in 2010 alone. This is perfect if you have a passion for cooking or have a background in this kind of work. You can rent equipment first and start investing gradually as you earn.

Tour guide operator

If you like socialize with people or you are particularly living in a place that attracts tourists, this is a good business idea for you. The key is to find your niche. For instance, if you are physically active, then you can promote a biking tour. On the other hand, if you are an art enthusiast, you can conduct a tour through local museums and galleries.

Whatever business idea you choose to pursue, plan it well and do not forget to take action!

Continuing Education

Life is a constant learning experience. If you feel like you have taken a wrong turn in the choice of a career, know that it is never too late to start over again. There are a number of online courses available now so you do not necessarily have to live as you did back in college. The schedules are more flexible so you can take classes on your own time.

Start by reassessing your new career options. Think about your passion, what it is that you like doing, and what it is you can actually

do. Once you have figured those out, the search will be easy.

Most people who find themselves out of work choose to become bums in the meantime. You can do that but you can also make use of this time to take charge of your future. Plan your transition and have a better shot at life.

Chapter 3: Planning For The Exit

Before you quit your job (assuming that you have finally decided to make that decision), there are several things that you should prepare for. It’s never wise to quit a job when you have no immediate plans on how you will survive after leaving your job.

Practically speaking, financial security is your primary concern. Only people who are financially secure can afford to quit at a moment’s notice. For most people, it’s difficult to give up a job no matter how paltry the pay is or how crappy the working conditions are, simply because they have no backup plans for the future.

You don’t need to make a lot of fuss with your resignation. There is a way to ensure you have a graceful exit, without any bitter feelings on both parties. Here are some tips if you want to be able to make a clean break from your current job:

Budgeting

Whether or not you are planning to quit your job in the future, saving up a portion of your pay is a great way to ensure your financial security in case you fall on hard times. That way, you are slowly building up your nest egg, a form of savings you could dip into when your source of income becomes unstable.

Saving for the future isn’t so difficult, and you could achieve it by carefully allocating your earnings around your expenses. Here are some quick tips on how you can save more of your earnings:

- Learn to live within your means and avoid unnecessary spending.
- Use your credit cards sparingly, and set a fixed portion of your daily wage as automatic savings.
- Pay off your debts consistently to avoid bigger interests, and avoid incurring new ones.
- Before purchasing anything, ask yourself first if this is an absolutely

necessary item.

- If you can, get some insurance or retirement plans. Pay these regularly and you will have a sure way of keeping yourself afloat financially.

Your savings will be your emergency funds while in between jobs and you can in fact use them to look for a new job.

Have a plan to pay bills

Financial obligations are a reality for adults. If people do not have to worry about these responsibilities then nobody would care if they are out of work, but the truth is this is something you have to face in case you do decide to quit.

Among the most expensive things that need to be taken care of are house rent and vehicle fees. The last thing you would want is to end up living in the street simply because you failed to plan ahead. So, how do you exactly deal with paying basic expenses?

Taking care of the house rent

Before you hand over your resignation, make sure that you have already thought about your living situation. Your apartment or house may become too expensive when you no longer have your primary source of income, so what is it that you can do to avoid being homeless? Here are a few suggestions.

Have an idea of your monthly expenses

As I mention before, saving up is really important. How long can your savings cover your rent? Keep in mind that you have other expenses to take care of on top of rent. How much really is enough?

This is one of the biggest reasons why you always have to make calculated decisions. How much time do you need to get settled in with a new job or a new business, whatever it is that you plan to do next?

If you think that 3 months is enough time to get you covered, save up for more than 3 months. You never know what could happen in between. So, fatten up your savings before you quit.

Get a roommate

If you are living solo in your apartment, perhaps you can get a roommate. Cutting the rental expenses by half can make a big difference.

Living with someone else may not be something you are used to. However, in these times, you have to be practical. In fact, you do not have to get a total stranger for a roommate. You can ask friends of your friends.

On the other hand, if your abode is only meant for a single person, then you may want to let it go so you can move in and be a roommate in somebody else’s apartment.

You have to plan this ahead of time so you do not waste money and time.

Move in with your parents

Desperate times call for desperate measures. This may mean you would have to swallow your pride, but if that is what it takes for you to regain composure, then you must choose this option.

Think about it. When you move back in with your parents, you would not have to worry about rent at all. While this living situation has its share of downsides such as losing your independence, it does have its perks too, particularly in reducing your expenditures.

Talk to your parents about your plans. If they know what your future plans are, they would not worry that much. Consider this as a setback. Emphasize that it is just a temporary situation and make good on that promise!

Stay with a friend

If you have made generous and accommodating friends, then your friend can save you from the rather uncomfortable feeling of moving back in with your parents. However, do keep in mind that this is supposed to be temporary so do not get too comfortable with the arrangement.

In return for the free stay, offer your personal

services. Do your share of the house chores such as cooking and cleaning. You may also offer to take care of the groceries.

As much as possible, you would not want to take advantage of a friend's generosity. Do not be too imposing. Be an adult and be a responsible even if you're just "crashing" for the meantime. Anyway, this is just an idea and you may choose to take it or leave it.

So, after quitting your job, what route do you wish to take as far as your living situation is concerned? To what extent can your savings take care of you or for how long?

This is not meant to scare you. Rather, it is a reality check. You will have to deal with this matter sooner or later, and the sooner you take care of it, the better off your will be.

Taking care of the vehicle fee

In addition to house rent, another expense you must plan ahead for has to do with owning a car. Sure, there are perks to having your own car, but when it is crunch time with your finances, you better have a backup plan. What exactly can you do with the car expense?

Sell your vehicle

You may have gotten a car for a more convenient way of traveling from your house to where you work, but if you are quitting,

then you may no longer require it. It is good to keep around but just think about the expense of maintaining ownership when you do not have a primary source of income anymore.

Think about selling the car. If you are keeping it, your costs will pile up. You will have to continue paying for it if you have not yet fully paid up. Moreover, there is the cost of insurance. Your monthly premium will not freeze just because you let your job go. The expenses meter will keep running whether or not you drive your car.

Understand that there are a few things you have to let go. Consider it a necessary sacrifice so you can get by. It will not always be this way. You should not feel bitter or lose hope nor should you get too attached to it. It is just a car and you can replace it (or even

buy it back if you want it that much) once you have reestablished yourself.

Take public transport

This time, you have to get used to taking public transport to get to where you need to be. Commuting is definitely cheaper than paying for gas, parking, insurance, and other vehicle-related expenses. People take the train and the bus all the time. It is not big deal.

In fact, you are doing the environment a huge favor by not contributing to pollution since you are saving fuel by not driving your own car.

Get a bike

Another option for transportation is riding a bicycle. A bike is not high-maintenance like the car you own. It does not require fuel – only your good strong legs. Biking can also help you stay in shape without even paying for gym membership!

Other money-saving ideas

The point is when it comes to letting some of your valuables go, it is important that you recognize the bright side of things. Otherwise, you will never consider quitting even if it means enduring a job that you are

no longer happy about. That said, below are a few more ideas on how you can stay financially afloat after quitting your job.

Downgrade your cell phone plan

If you are signed up for a particularly expensive plan, it is time to downgrade. Ask your provider for a cheaper plan. Make sure to get your calculations right and get a plan that you can afford. Giving up your data plan is definitely worth it since there are so many places with free access to the internet.

Sell your stuff

You can either hold a garage sale or post your stuff on Craigslist. The money you collect from sales can help you take care of the expenses you need to have covered while you settle into a new situation. Under this circumstance, you must think of creative ways to stay afloat and avoid eating up on your savings account.

Cancel your gym membership

When you had a primary source of income, it would not have mattered if you are still paying for a gym membership that you do not actually use that often. However, at this point, tightening your belt is essential.

Canceling your membership does not mean

you will no longer be fit and healthy. There are plenty of other ways to ensure your fitness. You can jog in a nearby park or around your neighborhood. You can still get your much needed cardio workout for free.

Cancel your cable subscription

Lounging on your couch may be a good idea for just a few days, but the once comforting couch can get you stuck to where you are. That is the last thing you want. So, you better cancel your cable subscription to resist the temptation of turning into a couch potato.

Resist the temptation of eating out

When you still had the means, you may have become used to eating out. However, after quitting your job, dining out becomes a luxury. It is an unnecessary expense and it will do nothing but drain your savings when you have other more important things to take care of.

The bottom line is you must keep track of your spending. It is always good to be informed with where you are and where you are leading especially in terms of your finances. Pay attention to your spending and look after your savings.

Have a graceful resignation

Just because you're quitting, it doesn't mean you can tell your bosses to go to hell. Even if it may sound tempting to quit with flair and drama, your sudden outburst can come back to haunt you when it's time to look for a new job.

Remember, all your work experiences go on your record, so it's best to quit and still maintain good terms with your current employer, no matter how badly you've been treated.

Here are the steps you should take to make your exit gracefully:

- Before handing in your resignation, make sure you've finished all tasks previously delegated to you. Don't leave any messes for other people to fix.

- Hand in your resignation with at least two weeks’ notice. That way, you are giving your employer enough time to find a replacement.

- When writing your resignation letter, keep the contents brief and to the point. Extensive explanations on a letter might only prove to be a pitfall for you.

- Be factual, but avoid maligning your bosses — those statements can only come back to haunt you, especially since you might need them as character references to your resume.

- You should write only the factors that matter the most, or reasons that are easiest to explain in written form.

- End your resignation letter with a positive note.

- Be prepared to answer your employer’s questions, but avoid making accusatory statements. Try to make your exit as positive as you can.

- Clear out your desk and computer before you leave. If you need to turnover some files, keep them organized in a flash drive for your successor.

Making a clean break with your current employer is a great way to start a new career. That way, you will still be assured of a warm welcome when you ever find yourself back in the company’s doorstep.

Find a new job before you quit

One of the best backup plan you can ever have is to make sure you already have a job waiting for you immediately after you quit.

After handing out your two weeks notice, you should now spend your time searching for a new job. Or, better yet, you should not hand in that resignation unless you're absolutely sure you can survive the next few weeks without work.

This is especially true if you actually have no savings but still want to resign your current job. It wouldn't be wise on your part to quit if your future is uncertain. You want to minimize your risk as little as possible.

It’s okay to take a few days break if you only want to clear your head, but you should be geared to look for new work immediately if your savings are dwindling and you have no other way to pay for the bills.

Conclusion

It’s not that easy to leave your current job, particularly if you’ve had it for years. Most people who seek stability will probably choose to weather it out and hope things pick up in the near future.

However, its crucial to always consider your own emotions and your level of happiness when you are making such an important decision. If there is a lot of obvious signs like depression, anxiety, or just not feeling right about your job, then it might be a good time to think about if you should keep going this career path.

When you've asked yourself the question "Should I quit my job?" several times, it's already an indicator that you should do so. In some situations, quitting is the best decision you could make. You owe it to yourself to make sure you have not only a lucrative job, but a job that you enjoy doing.

Instead of dragging your feet on your way to the exit, prepare for the future and set your priorities straight. Among these preparations include not only writing your resignation letter or fixing loose ends, but also preparing yourself for what you are about to face when you have quit.

When you have fully prepared for it, quitting a job you hate could be the best thing you can do for yourself. With enough time and preparations, you can choose a totally different career path. Just remember, ***"You***

deserve to be happy. Don’t let anyone make you forget that!”

Thank you for reading “Should I Quit My Job?” book, I hope the information in this book can really benefit you to make a better decision on your resignation. If you enjoyed this book, please take some time to share your thoughts and post a review on Amazon. It’d be greatly appreciated.

Thomas.K.Lutz

The Smart First-Time Home Buyer's Guide:

Avoid Making First-Time Home Buyer Mistakes

Thomas.K.Lutz

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Introduction

Buying a home is a staggering life changing decision. The experience of buying a home is intimidating and complex at best. So many things can run through your mind when you think about the perfect home you have always been dreaming of. It becomes even more nerve-wrecking when the prospect of buying this perfect home looms above of you. There are limitless options and there is just about *everything* that you need to decide, re-consider and settle on. The sheer magnitude of the task of buying a home alone dampens your spirits and you begin doubting you could ever buy a home.

However, the admittedly unknown and often daunting territory of buying a home should not dissuade you from getting a home. If you want to avoid feeling too misplaced or weighed down during the entire process of buying a house, zero in on the two basic guiding principles of effective research and abiding thoroughness. Your buying choices must be backed up by an ample amount of research and you must not leave any corner unturned. You must be extremely, hair-splittingly thorough and diligent in the home buying process.

When you stumble across the phenomenon of buying a home, you will find that there will be a myriad of different challenges. Some will be very easy, like picking the right location and then there will be some, which will require professional help and advice, like managing funds and home-buying loans.

With the help of this detailed, in-depth tutorial, the entire buying

process will become much easier. You will know exactly what to expect. Nothing makes something more difficult than not knowing what is in store for you. The element of surprise can take you down more than anything else. Some basic steps which are involved in the home buying process include choosing your preferred location, whether rural or urban, what kind of neighborhood are you looking for, is it a school district, proximity to work, or places to buy groceries, all of these are important factors to consider when choosing a location for your home.

Other factors include the kind of house that best suits your needs, and what is your budget, loan processes and details, finding a good and reliable agent, perusing through the various options outlined, settling on the most perfect option, writing an offer and going through the escrow process, getting insurance, packing, shifting and finally, becoming a satisfied home owner.

Common Mistakes That Many Homebuyers make

There are some obvious hurdles and mistakes that you must avoid when buying a home.

Mortgage Season; a Great Time to Buy a Home?

Often, homebuyers get overwhelmed during the low mortgages season. The housing market are not stagnant, they fluctuate – *a*

lot. Due to many reasons, during the low mortgage season, it feels like it's the right time and you feel sure that this is the prime time to buy a home. However, you must not get swayed by the suitability of the time alone. There are many things that need to be kept in mind when buying a home, even if the time seems incredibly right. Just because the time is right, it does not mean it is the right time for *you*, especially if you will be moving soon. If the prospect of moving is in the near future, investing in a house will not be a good idea.

So Much to Buy – Such Little Money

Always remember that big money is involved when you are buying a house. Extra features, which seem rather extremely appealing, will involve a large amount of money and that added little facet of wooden windows will cost you *a lot*. When you are buying houses, you will feel inevitably scatterbrained and giddy. There are so many exciting new features, a delectable little patio, a backyard tucked in the corner, and a little balcony – it is extremely hard to say no to these. When buying a home, make sure you do not digress. You must know your limit and you should be prepared to seriously invest.

Eyes Too Big For Your Pockets

We have all heard of the phenomenon 'eyes too big for your pockets'; before you decide to be infatuated with a property, make sure you have your financial situation under control. Try not to look at properties which are beyond your budget; you will not only waste your time, you will also make your buying

process increasingly difficult. You will never be able to settle on those that lie within your budget limits when you have your heart set on something which clearly exists within an entirely different realm.

Control Your Impulse

Impulsive and quick buyers should not let their all-too-eager and rash streak run the show for them. Instinct and the sudden whim should take the back seat when you are buying a home. Home buying has a lot to do with your feeling towards the home which you really like, but it also has a lot more to do with the gritty details of the financial investment, budget, and credit.

Real Estate Agents: Dial Back on the Naiveté

First time homebuyers often get so overwhelmed by the whole process of buying a house that they feel ever thankful to the real estate agents. However, it is very important to not be gullible and not fall for the several traps that the agents often line up for naïve homebuyers. It is very important to know where your agent’s interest lies. If your agent has vested interests in the other party, you can be rest assured that everything will not go as you have planned. This often happens in the case of dual agents.

The Constant Case of Free Advice

Take the advice of the agents when it comes to financial matters. However, take the advice with a pinch of salt. They are not professionals on your personal finance matters as no one is a better judge of whether this house is too expensive for you or not. No one can tell you that better than yourself. Remember that at the end of the day, they are looking for the commission and their target is a done-deal. If you feel pressurized into signing something, do not do it.

Do Not Rush Into Anything

Always take your time. This cannot be stressed upon enough. Do not feel pressurized to buy anything or sign anything if your heart is not in it.

Handshakes: No Honor Code Applies Here

There is no integrity in a handshake. Do not fall for the handshake deal. This is not a done deal. Whenever you have to finalize something, get it in writing. You are most likely to go home and celebrate after a handshake deal only to find out the next day that someone outbid you and your cozy little handshake moment disappeared into thin air. Never trust a verbal agreement; it is of little to no significance. In business, verbal agreements mean next to nothing. Even if you try to challenge someone in court, you will realize you have no legal standing. Verbal agreements, gestures, and handshakes are not binding.

Payment Shock

All homebuyers need to understand and effectively deal with a commonly occurring condition ‘payment shock’. Numbers sound just fine when they are spoken aloud, they seem quite all right even in fine print, we shake on it, we sign the documents and we go home. When the time of the payment arrives, customers suffer from payment shock. Nothing seems more palpable and real than actual, real-time money being transferred over to someone else. Nothing seems more solid than this and this payment shock must be dealt with before hand.

Home Inspection

Several new homebuyers skip home inspection. This is extremely vital. Most of the time, the buyers are looking to cut down on the cost. What they do not realize is that if you do not hire professionals to scan and inspect the house for cheap, low-cost construction material, faults in the mechanical rooms, drains, and pipes, you will end up spending way more in the future. You will soon find yourself fixing problems that you did not see fit to fix before you decided to purchase the property. Home inspectors flag faulty construction material, check and inspect attics and basements. Results compiled by the home inspectors also give you a good insight into how to maintain your house you are planning on buying.

Save the Emotions for the Negotiation

It is very important for homebuyers to keep their emotions in check when buying a house or perusing through options. It is advised to not act overtly in-love with the house as this will obviously play up against you when you are trying to bargain and strike a fair deal with the seller or the seller's agent. You should also not get too fixated on the small problems and complain too much as this will also lead to the broker or agent checking you off the list of the probable buyers. It is smart to play up the small problems to your own benefit and bring them up while negotiating.

Brand-New-Everything Syndrome

Sometimes homebuyers, after buying a new home, start living in a shiny new bubble of 'newness'. Just because you have bought a new home, this does not mean that you start eyeing the ratty old lounge furniture and immediately replace it with new ones because it seems better and more suited to the beautiful new home. Homebuyers often drown in debt, right after a huge purchase of buying a house. Once you have bought a new house, take a breather, calm down and let your finances recover from a massive blow. Not everything in the house needs to be replaced to match the new house.

Pay Some Attention to Your Credit Report

It is very important to get your credit report free of any past blemishes and bad-record stains. Before you dive deep into home buying research and begin comparing one house to the other, shift your attention to more pressing matters, like your

credit score and your credit report. Before you can even set foot in a house, you will be required to present the real estate agent with a copy of your hopefully clean and pristine credit card report. You must get your priorities in order before you start perusing through housing options.

Be Realistic

More than anything else, this is what causes most problems. Homebuyers often forget that not everything will be exactly as they pictured. Your wish list might have a plethora of things, all neatly sorted together, which you would like to see in your brand new house but it is advisable to remain prepared for a reality check; not every single thing will be the way you always dreamed of. Prepare to let go and prepare to accept before you decide to start looking at houses. You must not be so close-minded when you are preparing to buy a house.

Other rookie mistakes that homebuyers often make include not setting out enough time to research the neighborhood that their new dream home is located in. it is not just the house that you are concerned with, it is also the vicinity and the locality and it is as important as the paint color of wall of your bedroom. In addition to this, homebuyers often pay too much attention to things that they ‘want’. It is important to focus on things you need and not get swept too far into obscurity by focusing on things you just want.

Considering and keeping in mind the resale value of your home is also very important and many homebuyers often conveniently skip this part, especially if they find themselves to be too ‘in

love’ with a particular home. No one can predict the future so it is always good to be secure.

Buying a home is a life changing decision. It is a weighty and a massive verdict so it must be made with utmost care and precision. It is better to know beforehand what to expect and how to avoid commonly occurring mistakes, as opposed to diving in unprepared.

Finding a Dream Home

Nearly everyone, at some point in his or her life, stumbles across the much-visited alley of ‘finding a dream home’. Everyone has his or her own idea of a perfect home; the flawless windows, the picture-perfect view, and the seamless little road leading up to the impeccable humble *or* not-so-humble abode.

We romanticize and fantasize about virtually the whole house, which we have been dreaming about all our lives, carefully conjuring up the idealistic fine points such as the particulars of the floors and the ceilings.

We, quite literally, break it down to every little detail – all rolled into a delectable little slice of real estate perfection.

Consider your priorities

Finding a perfect home becomes more than just being a desire, it crops up as everyone’s top priority, at least at some point in his or her life. Buying a perfect home is nothing short of an achievement. Everybody has a different idea regarding the most ideal home; once you buy a home, you want it to fit you and your family snugly like a glove – it has to be built just *right*, just for *you.*

The undeniable and the inevitable add-on of the emotional-element makes the purchase and the hunt for a home even more challenging and complicated out of all real estate purchases. If you are fortunate enough, you might get multiple chances to buy

new homes. However, for most people, this is “once-in-a-lifetime” real estate purchase endeavor. The emotions peak, the budget is often constricted, and the dreams and the hopes regarding the future home skyrocket, this is all coupled with the inescapable wish to remain satisfied with the purchase in the long-standing future too.

The Inevitable Butterflies and the Jitters

It is quite an exciting and even a slightly unsettling position to be in – when you are looking to buy your own home. There are so many options to choose from and just about anything and everything matters and is quite close to your heart.

You set out, looking for the perfect home, with one determination in mind: *It has to be perfect. And this where we come in because we have got your needs fully covered!*

Some important tips, which you must keep in mind, when you are beginning the hunt for your house, include budget, size, style, location, rent/buy, and family. It may sound fairly easy and you might just try to tackle every aspect with a sure-fire response, however, it is not that simple. Everything comes, hand in hand, with mind-numbing intricacies and details and, before you know it, you will find yourself tripping on the niceties.

Therefore, it is very important to go into the house-hunt with a clear mind, knowing what to expect and how to deal with important issues first. The first and the foremost consideration, while looking for a perfect home, is budget – no questions asked.

Budget

This is the least fun dynamic of the entire home buying process and, therefore, we try to shove it back down to the depths, covering it up with more exciting details, like, choosing between the fancier wooden floors and the more deluxe interior design. It is a lot more stimulating to flit around between modernizations, upgrades, interiors, and aesthetics and color combinations.

However, the budget concern rears its calculative little head up soon enough once you have figured out all the dolled-up details of the house and the more delayed the budget issue gets, the more rapidly all your hopes and dreams get dashed to nothing. You have to get the numbers right before you build your dream home on a pile of virtual dreams. Some of the important costs that you have to consider, while deciding upon budget limitations and concerns, include the rent rates, mortgage rates, and cost of living in a particular area or location.

Do Not Over-Estimate

A good rule of thumb, when estimating the affordability of your perfect home, bases calculations on your *lowest* annual income. Do not stretch your budget to the farthest limits to fit your lofty ideals and wishes of a home. You must remember that aside from the monthly mortgage payments, there will also be other costs, including monthly utility costs, local taxes, and other society fees, associated with the area that you are living in.

Getting Down to Business

When you find your most preferred home, and decide to make an offer on any given property, which fits all your requirements and seems good enough, get in touch with the seller directly or through a reliable agent and get right down to business. This means that you should get down to the sand and grit of the financial aspects to get things into perspective before you finalize anything at all.

Do the Math

You need to get an accurate and exact breakdown of the monthly and yearly payments. Some monthly payments sound ‘just about right’. However, once you calculate them on an annual basis, you often realize the true impact of the entire lump sum, which may seem affordable, when divided over a period of months.

You also need to keep in mind that your income will not rise dramatically in the future; the most dependable jobs, too, face the dangers of impending retirement, layoffs or any ill-starred incident and all these possibilities need to be accounted for and kept in mind when deciding upon a home. When buying a home, there are several options, which can be considered to suit your particular budgetary situation; you must choose that one house, which allows you to have a breathing space at the end of every month, budget-wise.

Rent Or Buy – The Million-Dollar Question

Other options include renting out a house, instead of buying it

outright. Buying a home is not always the answer – this is extremely essential to fathom. There are several situations in which buying a house will not be ideal, especially if you might be moving soon in the near future, or you are just out of college and feeling good about yourself and have some misguided ideas about busting your entire budget on buying a house that you may or may not need forever after all. It is always a good idea to compare mortgage rates with rent rates and choose the one which suits you the most.

Sometimes renting might just make more sense, so prepare yourself to not get thrown off by the idea. Until and unless you plan to live in a house for at least a period of ten years or more, do not buy it; rent it out instead. This is important because it takes at least a period of ten years for you to break even; real estate property prices, especially when it comes to residential houses, rise about 3% to 4% every year. After at least a decade has passed and a subsequent increase in price and value of the house has occurred, only then you will be able to counterbalance the fees and the commissions, which you bore the brunt of, during the purchase of the house.

Rationalize - Do Not Speculate

However, financially speaking, if you consider waiting too long to see when the prices will fall, you will be doing yourself a disservice.

Often people are so caught up trying to wait for the low mortgage season to swing by that they forget that they will eventually be paying off the difference in the form of high interest rates anyway, so it really is just wasting time. It would

make sense to wait around for the prices of something like *gold* to plummet because that is something we just *desire*, we do not really need it, so it would be okay to wait. Speculators would do that and that would make sense but equating speculation about a luxury as unnecessary as gold to a necessity as indispensable as homeownership is quite irrational. We must realize that nobody *needs* gold, whereas, everyone *needs* a place to live. Therefore, different rules apply. If you find a perfect home and the numbers add up, do not wait around for the mortgage rates to fall.

Home Style

The home style that you choose must be consistent with your personality; it should be the kind of home that you would feel satisfied with day-in and day-out. Your home is not a pit stop; it the place where you will come back at the end of every day and it should be ideal and perfect according to all aspects and nobody is a better judge of that than you are.

Personality Type

Home style refers to the style of living of the general, overall aesthetic of the home or the property. The way your home looks, the outer and the interior appearance is what makes 90% of the home; it is very important. If you have an outward, unrestricted personality, you would be better suited to a single home, which you can customize according to your specific needs and wants.

Condominium Style Living

Condominium style living is preferable for those who want a fine balance between single home living style, in addition to hotel-style facilities; in condo-style living, you will get the best of both worlds. Other home styles include community style living, gated-communities and town living.

The outward appearance, the construction, and the architecture design of every home will differ based on where it is located, whether it is in a community, a town, or in a condominiums building. A modern, single-block condominium will differ greatly from a Victorian lodge.

Home Size

It is very important to come to terms with rationalizing when you are deciding upon the size of your house. Be realistic about how much space you really need. The number of people who will be living in a house and whether even a single person needs all that space can easily deduce the answer to the home size question. Whichever home style you choose, you must keep the size in mind too. If you buy a house, which is too small for your family, you will spend the rest of your life, constantly trying to make space for yourself and your family.

Space Considerations – Extremely Vital

You need to understand how much space you will require and how much space your family members will need. A wise decision in the start will prevent relocating problems in the future. As it goes, it is quite irrational to buy a large, sprawling

house if you have a small family or a single person. You will only be tying up your money in useless concrete that you will probably never even use. Along with a lot of unused space, you will also be adding unnecessary maintenance costs to your budget. It is a good idea to compare the current space you are living in- are all your family members comfortable or do they have to share rooms to make space for each other? Current size is a good estimate of your needs.

Future Family Extensions Must Be Remembered

Newly married couples need to keep in mind the aspect of extending their family in the future so the additional space factor will be important to remember when deciding upon the size of the house. Preferably, you should reach a happy medium – you do not need to get caught up in too much space or get bogged down by too little.

Location

Your House Comes with Strings Attached

Always remember that your house does not exist in isolation. It will be surrounded by others and you need to decide whether it is suitable for you or not. Your house will exist along with other houses, forming a larger community. If you are the sort who enjoys peace and quiet, do not expect that kind of serenity from a bustling commercial housing zone. You need to decide what some of your needs are and whether these needs coincide with the location of the house that you have in mind.

Do Not Get Blinded

When looking at houses, we are often blinded by the sheer number of things that need to be considered, that we tend to forget the importance of the location. We begin looking at the house as a single entity and often exclude the reality of the surrounding location and the neighborhood. The house is only the tip of the iceberg; a great, big beautiful house is nothing if it exists in a run-down locality.

Neighborhood Considerations

What kind of neighbors do you have? Are you willing to put up neighborly noise? Are you okay with the idea of a long morning walk to the bus station? Are you used to running down to the nearest coffee shop to grab a cup of early morning Joe? Do you have all these facilities in the house that you are considering?

Drive Around and See For Yourself

Do not take somebody else's word for this. These important questions need to be dealt with by you, and you alone. It is a good idea to test out the house and the locality that you are considering. Drive around and note the time it takes you to get to places like the bus station, the malls, the local grocery store, and the coffee shops. You need to see what the local nearby parks are like, and what exists at the end of the shiny new road that your house is built on. When considering the location of the

house, it is advisable to take an in-depth tour of the nearby area, either by walking or driving around. Check out the local restaurants and see if you can visualize yourself living there easily or not.

Reminder: You Are Not Living In a Bubble

The location often gets pushed far back as an afterthought. Do not let this happen to you. Try not to see your house as an exclusive single piece of property. Remember when you are paying for the house, you are also paying a significant amount for the neighborhood and the location as well so it must be up to your standards. You must realize that this is something that you can do literally nothing about; if a house exists in a certain location, you cannot get up and demolish the entire area to suit your needs. You can break down and rebuild houses from scratch but locations? Not likely.

Do not be Afraid to Walk Away; There Will be others

When buying your perfect home, do not settle for anything less than what you have dreamed of, especially when it comes to location. If anything at all feels like a compromise, do not force yourself to do it.

Family

After everything has been seen, said and done, do not forget

your family. It is very important to consider who you are going to be living with. Do not spearhead the house purchasing on your own, giving no regard to other people's wishes and dreams. After all, a home's true worth comes from a loving family living together.

Family Discussion is The Key

Take in consideration what the others have to say about the house and what are they looking for. Not everyone views things from your perspective; so find a happy medium and a fine balance. Think about all the things that you wish to do in your home in the coming years. If you like to host parties then carefully consider the layout of the house. It should be spacious and comfortable enough to welcome your guests easily. .

Think about the activities of all the family members- are your children the sorts who lean towards sports or just basic recreational activities? Give a consideration to the outdoor space in addition to the interior of the house, like for example, finding a house with a backyard, a swimming pool or a ground big enough to install nets, swings and enough room to play in.

Personal Space

Realize what kind of family you have; do all the family members require their own personal space? If yes, look for a house with plenty of room so everyone can get their own private space without interfering or causing too much trouble for anyone else. When buying a house, you have to keep everyone happy and that is the exact definition of a perfect home.

Put Your Heart and Soul in It

When all considerations and all factors have been decided upon and the all the numbers and the budget concerns add up and make sense, it is time to take the plunge. Understand that no matter how perfect the house might be, it will always need a fair amount of customization according to your very-own specific needs.

This is where you need to put your heart in the house to make it your perfect home.

Even the most perfect dream house is going to need a little bit of tweaking around here and there to make it resonate with the essence of you and your family. Even if you find all the features that you ever wanted in a house, from your eyes, there will always be room for improvement so make room for that in your mind, when settling upon a house. You will get a perfect 99%, at best, and to bring it up to a perfect 100%, you have to alter it according to your own needs and specifications.

Everyone deserves to find their perfect dream home and it is very much possible with the right kind of guidance and research backing up the entire process. By using these vital factors and guidelines, you can easily buy your perfect home, without stumbling across any hitches. These factors will help you to concentrate on the important elements and, most importantly, these elements will help you to prioritize in the right way. There is no reason that you should wait for your dream to turn into a reality.

Neighborhood Inspection

Choosing the right neighborhood

Choosing a home is much more than just choosing the building layout and the structure. It is going to be a major part of your lifestyle and a major investment. So choosing the right neighborhood is a must. Location is critical to determining the aspects of your daily life, in and around your new home.

Geography

The geographical area in which you buy your home will have a major impact your lifestyle. The climate, the economy, the laws of the state will all have to be looked at closely and carefully to buy a home in a particular neighborhood and state that is right for you. For instance, buying a home in California will mean lots of sunshine and a neighborhood in Nevada might mean future drought and a drop in real estate prices. Buying a home in Florida as compared to Colorado will again constitute different lifestyle choices.

Urban vs. Peri Urban vs. Rural

Do you want to live in an urban neighborhood? Of course, there will be a lot of positives associated with living in the city, like less travel time and good leisure and schooling opportunities. As opposed to that, the negatives of an urban neighborhood will

surely be the high crime rates, high levels of pollution and more noise.

Rural neighborhoods will give you freedom of space, as opposed to the congestion of urban living. Rural areas will also have relatively more peace and quiet. However, such areas might lack a lot of facilities you take for granted in urban living.

Peri-urban neighborhoods in the suburbs give you the best of both worlds. You can experience the peace and quiet of rural areas and have access to most of the facilities that modern living requires, with the city usually just a train ride away.

Safety

Safety plays a key role when determining which area to live in. If your neighborhood isn't safe, then is it really worth living in? You might pay less in order to live in an area where the crime rate is high, but more often than not, you will end up paying much more for crime against you.

Safety and security rank higher for people with families than single people, so the choice of neighborhood might vary according to marital and family status. Another major downside to high crime neighborhoods is the low resale value of the housing. So choose wisely when moving into a neighborhood that is unsafe.

School Districts

Education has always been the cornerstone of society and with increased competition, it has become critical to a child's success.

Choosing neighborhoods with good schools is imperative for parents who have high aspirations for their kids. Paying that extra few dollars might be worth it in the end if that means better schooling opportunities.

Remember that nothing is greater or more important than your child’s future.

Recreation and Nature

Parks and recreation are vital to your leisure activities. Living in a neighborhood with close proximity to these can be a major plus point. You could then engage in outdoor activities and spend quality time with your family. Places near scenic beauty tend to cost more, but also hold immense value. A home on the side of a lake or near the beach all have their perks.

View

The view from the house itself should be appealing. A neighborhood that does not have scenic beauty will tend to sell at lower prices. A view does not necessarily have to be natural beauty- it can very well be a panoramic view of the city. Imagine living in a neighborhood from where you can see the city lights in their full glory. A neighborhood that has great views of the mountains or lakes will be equally pleasing. Aesthetics are a key factor to consider when selecting a neighborhood. A property with a nice view always have an advantage when it comes to reselling.

Entertainment/ Leisure activities

Entertainment and leisure activities are crucial determinants of modern day life. Without them, life would surely be incomplete. A neighborhood that has access to a multitude of restaurants will be a major positive. Neighborhoods that are close to malls, cinemas and other entertainment venues tend to provide a better quality of living. However, these localities cost more money so many people choose to drive to these places rather than live close by and just walk to them. But for those who can afford it, living close to high end shops and boutiques is highly desirable.

Conformity

Does the neighborhood conform to the standards of your house? Most people want to live in areas that have houses that are roughly as old as their own home. They also want to live around people who generally share similar beliefs. Most often than not, people want to live around other people who have similar interests and thoughts. For example, a liberal family might find it hard to live in a predominantly conservative neighborhood.

Apart from people in the neighborhood, similar properties in terms of age value and size are also desirable. No one wants to live in a mansion next to small houses or in an apartment building in situated close to a slum.

Economic stability

You should definitely consider a neighborhood that is

economically stable. These neighborhoods have seen the booms come and go and survived the bust. These neighborhoods have proven their value over the years and stood the test of time. These sort of localities tend to be good investments for the future. These neighborhoods have withstood the artificial price hikes and they have shown consistently that they are worth the money invested in them. Therefore, it is a wise move to buy a house in such places.

Public Transport

These days a lot of travelling is required for one reason or another. Activities like schooling, entertainment and most importantly work mean that you get to travel a lot during the day. Hence, a good neighborhood must have easy access to public transport.

Often, one public transport source is not enough. Desirable places to live mostly have multiple links to public transports like bus stops, railway tracks, subways, sky-trains, mass rapid transits and highways.

When selecting a neighborhood, you might want to look for links to major public transport facilities, but remember, there are downside living way too close to public transportation as well, because of the noise level.

Health services

A good place to live must have easy access to decent healthcare facilities. Your neighborhood must have a basic health unit with

easy access to public hospitals. If you select a neighborhood that is far away from decent healthcare, you are not only risking your life, but the lives of your loved ones as well.

It could cost you extra bucks, but that will be a price worth paying when faced with a medical emergency in which very second might be critically important to save a life. The least that you can look for in a neighborhood is whether it falls under the coverage of an air ambulance service. A service such as this would help mitigate major disasters from taking place.

Jobs

The time you spend on your commute to work directly affects your disposable income, your work quality and the time you have left for family. Living close to the place you work can do wonders for your work and personal life balance.

Whilst looking at houses, look for a neighborhood close to where you’re working so that you can enjoy a higher quality of life.

Proximity to friends and family

The ideal house only becomes a home when you have your friends and family to share it with. So be sure to look for a neighborhood that is close to where most of your friends and family reside. This way, you will have the added benefit of an active and engaging social life in your new home.

Undesirable locations

The following is a list of locations in which you should avoid buying a house. These locations not only reduce the resale value of your house, they also tend to decrease your quality of life. These locations tend to take a lot out of you so try and avoid the following places and the perils of living close to them.

Places with Commercial or industrial land close by will tend to be highly polluted. Pollution is detrimental to your health and reduces the peace of mind you get from your house. You cannot control the people who litter in front of your abode. You will also have to deal with loud noises during the day that constitute commercial and industrial activity. Both these areas will interfere with the peace and quiet that you seek. Air pollution next to factories is harmful to health. It is thus advisable to stay away from neighborhoods which have the above listed factors in abundance.

Neighborhoods near highway, railroad and airport platforms are going to cause you a lot of inconvenience. The amount of noise pollution that you will have to deal with is staggering. Air pollution will also be a major factor as they will all utilize vehicles functioning on fossil fuels. It would be a wise move stay away from these neighborhoods.

Crime ridden areas are to be avoided at all costs. No amount of saving resulting from buying a home in crime ridden areas is worth it. Such a place might end up hurting you. Try and avoid areas that have historically high crime rates. A home is where you and your children feel safe. Do

not destroy that peace of mind by living in a crime infested area.

Economically deprived localities tend to have those people who take zero care of their houses. Such neighborhoods boast of junk cars on every street corner and high gang violence. These areas should be avoided at all costs.

Natural hazard prone areas can prove disastrous. Some people often take the risk, thinking that the chance of a natural disaster hitting is small. When a natural disaster does hit, the effects are usually catastrophic, so it is not worth taking a chance. Moreover, try your best to avoid hurricane and earthquake prone zones. Do not live close to large forest areas where forest fires could easily start. It is also safe to avoid living in snowy mountains where avalanches might be common.

Tips for neighborhood inspection

The following list highlights some inspection tips that you might want to take into account before selecting an area to live. These will help you get a better understanding of the area and prevent you from incurring fraud.

Potential neighbors

Always research and ask around in the neighborhood to get an idea of what kind of people will be living next door. The type of community you move into will determine a lot of your household activities.

Visit the neighborhood during the day and night

This is an important step in order to get a true feeling of the neighborhood. Some neighborhoods feel very safe and welcoming during the day, but have a disconcerting silence during the night. Be sure to sleep on your decision before moving in. Do not judge a neighborhood on how it looks during weather extremes. The best judge is in everyday weather conditions. Moreover, lighting and security at night should be given special consideration.

Look at the statistics

Try and collect as much neighborhood statistics as possible. They will be your guide into the past of the neighborhood on which basis you can determine whether the place will be safe for you and your family in the future.

Price

Look at the price registry databases to get a true estimate of the house. The asking price is negotiable and selling records of similar nearby houses will give you the best idea of what to pay.

Gut feeling

This might sound very simple, but listen to your gut feeling. If a neighborhood doesn’t feel right, it is better not to buy a house there. In the end your peace of mind matters much more than anything else.

Local authorities

The efficiency of the local authorities should be checked beforehand. Look at the schedules of garbage collection and other utilities.

Condition of other houses

Looking at the condition of other houses is a quick and easy tip to understanding the true value of the neighborhood. The condition of the other houses reflects on the class of people that lives there as a whole.

House Inspection

Home requirements

After selecting the perfect neighborhood, you need to search a home that best suits you. The house of your dreams is what you define it to be. Hence, be mindful of picking a house that can best fulfil your current as well as potential needs.

New or Old

Do you require a house that is new or one that is used? A used house may cost you less money but it will have its own problems. A new house can have newer design features that accommodate more features in an efficient manner, but could however end up costing more.

Historic or Modern

Do you require a house that is modern, tech savvy or are you one of the traditionalists who prefer the old school look with a touch of history. Be sure to state your requirements clearly to the agent when looking for a house.

Bedrooms

Be sure to look for bedrooms not only according to your current needs, but future needs as well. If you plan to expand your family, look for one extra bedroom at least. The size and type of the house will also determine the number of bedrooms you can have. A town house, condo or apartment all have a differing number of bedroom options.

Bathrooms

Bathroom needs can vary according to your requirements. Having only one bathroom for multiple users will end up with a long wait in the morning. A family should thus preferably look for a house with more than one bathroom.

Kitchen Design

The kitchen designs these days are available in an amazing variety. You can have anything from traditional American kitchens to having kitchens inspired by Japanese and European designs.

Floor

Wooden flooring or marble floors with synthetic tiling are all available at your request. Be sure to choose the house that has the type you desire.

Interior Design

Architects have come up with very creative designs for household interiors. Special thought is now given to everything from lighting to the colors and space requirements. All of these are governed by how the interior is set, so be sure to look carefully at the interior to judge which house gives you the best possible options.

Pet requirements

If you have a pet, check whether your house is pet friendly. Check whether it has the small pet doors, if it has a garden for them to play in and if it has any objects or fixtures that could pose a threat to your pets.

Inspecting all these elements will lead you to selecting the ideal abode. The house of your dreams will not just appear out of the blue. You will have to be mindful of all these minor details and select the house according to your needs.

Home inspection

Home inspection is basically making sure that the property is safe and inhabitable. This also gives an estimate of what the property is worth and what condition it is in.

Inspection standards

There are a few major kinds of inspections carried out, such as:

Structural inspection: the walls, foundation, paint, drainage and roof are all checked. Major and notable holes and cracks are searched for. This inspection will determine the general structural integrity of the house.

Mechanical inspection: this includes checking for working toilets, heating, cooling, plumbing and electronics.

Miscellaneous inspection: this inspection is carried out to look beyond the structural and mechanical issues. This inspection includes rodent or pest problems in addition to the proper working of doors etc.

Required repairs: Required repairs may be anything from defective paint to standing water. Make sure you get these issues resolved before moving in.

Getting the right inspector

You should always look for the best inspector who carries out the best inspection. He or she should:

Belong to a professional inspecting company

Have carried out more than **a 1000 inspections**

give you detailed written reports

adhere to standard practices

Have proper training

Have a good reputation in the market

Home inspection mistakes

Common home inspection mistakes include;

Not inspecting a new house- whether new or old, inspections are mandatory.

Choosing a cheap inspector: this will not save you money. Rather, it will you in the future.

Not being present when the inspection takes place and missing out on important information.

Not listening to the recommendations of the inspector: this is a major mistake as not listing to experts might cause you big bucks, especially when it comes to resolving major repairs or other problems you should have resolved timely.

Expecting too much out of home inspectors: home inspectors are not supermen. They are bound to make mistakes. Always leave a margin for human error.

Buying a House checklist

Making an offer

Be smart when bidding for a house. You do not want to overpay or be made to look like a fool. Ask around for the prices of similar houses that have been sold recently in the neighborhood. Be sure to conduct a detailed comparative price analysis so you don’t end up overpaying.

Demand clearly what you want and don’t want in a house. The furniture and fixtures that you want to be part of the deal should be stated up front. The color of the drapes and walls should also be revealed clearly. Be sure to make your

preferences known.

Stress on the closing date in negotiations according to your own advantage. If you are not in a dire hurry to move-in, try and delay the time so that you can get the maximum work done and concessions from the sellers as possible. The more you delay, the more you will put the sellers on a back foot, but don’t delay for too long as that might hurt the deal.

Buy a home with a home warranty. This is necessary as a home warranty gives you protection from damages and free repairs for up to a year after your purchase of the house. In the negotiation, try and have the seller buy a house warranty so that you could benefit from it later on.

Mortgage

When getting a house mortgage, try and ask for referrals from the people you know. These might include friends, family or your real estate agent. All of these referrals could help you get to people who will offer you loans at low interest. If you qualify for membership to local credit unions, they will also help you get lower interest rates.

Calculate down payment so that you can save yourself extra costs. If you pay at least 20% of the principle, this will save you from private mortgage insurance. Be sure to save costs from all the places where possible.

Quotes from Multiple lenders. Be sure to take quotes from multiple lenders to get the best interest rate out there. Consult multiple lenders to get an idea of the market rate.

Consult mortgage brokers as well as bankers to get the best possible deal.

Decide on whether to pay upfront to lower interest rates or prolong your interest payments. If you have the capital available, it is best to pay off as much principle as possible in one go. The lower the remaining amount, the lower the interest you will end up paying for it.

Inspection

Qualified inspector: a qualified inspector is an investment. Paying a bit more for a qualified inspector will end up saving a lot on later repairs. Always look for the best inspectors that have at least 1000 inspections under their belt. Look for one that is accredited and has a good reputation in the market. Do remember that quality doesn’t come cheap.

Detailed report: a detailed report is a must for an inspection. Ask for one beforehand with all the details and photographic evidence. Be sure to know any and everything that is wrong in advance. Request a detailed inspection report beforehand.

Additional assessment: sometimes there are houses that are built a bit differently than the standard houses. For these houses it is better to ask for additional inspections. Consult your real estate broker and have the things that seem ambiguous checked out in depth.

Be present at the inspection: your presence at the inspection is vital. Though you are no expert and can’t figure out the

technical aspects, you must be present. You can learn a lot about the house at that moment. Be sure to keep asking questions about the structure and layout of the house. During the inspection, you are sure to learn about the electrical circuits, the gas pipelines and the water system.

Take written estimates from the repairman: these estimates will help you with the house price. Your agent could then give these estimates to the house sellers and ask them to have them fixed or have then deducted from the house price. These estimates of repairs will save you quite a lot of bucks.

Price credit: there is an alternate to having the seller schedule the repairs. You can ask the seller to reduce the repairs price of the house and conduct the repairs yourself at a later time. This is feasible for those of you who are handy with housework and cannot afford to delay the purchase.

Appraiser

Have an appraiser appraise the house: to get a true judgment of the house's value, you should conduct this practice. The appraiser will give you a market estimate, according to what is agreed in the contract. Make sure to make him aware of what is being sold and what isn't. Your money lender will hire the appraiser, so that they can understand the worth of the asset they are lending money against.

Ask for a list of comparable houses: this will help you get a better understanding where your home stands in comparison to other similar houses that have been recently appraised. You will get to judge the improvements to your house as compared to them and identify areas your house is lacking.

Look around for title insurance: title insurance protects you against legal damages to your property. Try and look at the best rates available. You do not have to buy it from the first company that offers it. The coverage difference isn't that much in title insurance, so look for the cheapest option. It will provide almost the same coverage as the more expensive options.

Closing price

Consult an attorney: you should make sure you are not getting fooled. Hire an attorney and have him go through the contract. There are often details in the fine print that might come back to hurt you.

Set your interest rate: have your interest rates locked in a month or so before the purchase so that you are safe from nay fluctuations. It is better to consult a financial analyst if possible.

Obtain detailed closing costs: transfer taxes or other expenses might surprise you later on. Be sure to have the details of all the costs involved.

Be mindful of bogus fees: if you are being charged for mundane services or services that are free, have they

removed from the bill. After all, you don’t want to over-pay.

Final walk-through

Verify all appliances: be sure that all appliances, electrical and non-electrical are in working condition.

Verify all taps and toilets: you do not want faulty plumbing to ruin your perfect home.

Verify all electrical outlets: you should check whether the wiring is all correct and all the sockets are functional and safe.

Verify the air conditioning and heating system: fixing these later on can be a real big problem. Be sure to have them checked and rechecked.

Check for water damage: any seepage or moisture damage will cause greater harm in the future to your house. Check for that carefully.

Check for termite/vermin: these can be a major pain and cause a lot of damage to wooden houses. Be sure that your house is termite and vermin free. Always look in the basement and the attic for these creatures.

If anything is found damaged, be sure to negotiate closing credit before closing a deal. You don’t want to pay for damaged good, do you?

Things Your Broker Won’t Tell You

Negotiable fees: the brokers tend to hide the fact that the fees they charge can be negotiated and the house prices are negotiable as well.

Inspection details that could kill a deal are often hidden by the brokers. Do not trust the brokers and always carry an independent inspection of the facility.

They add contract clauses without legal counsel just to confuse you and try and save themselves from possible contingencies. Having an attorney go through the contract is a good option.

You may not need the broker to make a deal after all. They charge commissions and will make you feel that they got you the best possible deal, but you can directly communicate yourself with the selling party online.

Some houses are kept secret by the brokers for themselves or their special clients. These houses are not advertised to the general public so that the brokers can make underhand profits out of them.

The house price is hiked often enough by the brokers. Try and look at comparable prices of similar property sold nearby to get the best price estimate.

That you could do better with another agent is a secret no broker will tell you. After all, there are brokers with different competency levels so do look around.

That they don’t have complete knowledge is a fact no broker would want to admit. Sometimes the brokers just turn to old selling techniques and cliché sales pitches.

Some brokers won’t tell you how desperate they are. Overeager brokers should be avoided. You shouldn’t feel any pressure and make a decision in your own time and by

considering all facts.

Important home Buying tips

Buying a home is one of the biggest investments you can make. Therefore, it should be done in a strategic and informed manner so as to minimize the risks. This chapter is full of useful tips that will make your purchasing decision easier and help you make an educated and informed purchase.

Looking at budget (own or rent)

What you can afford:

Can you afford to buy a house? Are you better off renting a property?

These questions should be at the top of your list when thinking about moving into a new place. Remember to consult with real estate experts as well as financial analysts. You would not want to buy just before a possible bust in housing prices or at the peak of a boom.

Also, if you are not sure that you can stay in the house for at least the medium run then buying a property is not the right idea. It is much better to rent. If you really want to buy the house then carefully evaluate your future plans, keeping in mind both your family and career.

The next thing to consider is whether you have the finances to pay off the mortgage cost. Also, can you handle all the additional costs associated with purchasing a house?

Make sure to make some financial considerations before

purchasing a house. The following tips are very useful;

Evaluate your credit history and pay off any outstanding debt. This will get you much better terms for a mortgage loan.

Aim for a house you can easily afford by looking at your sources of income.

Get professional financial help. Although you will find a lot of cost calculators on the internet, you are better off consulting a financial expert if you are not sure.

Be sure to consider additional costs. You might incur a lot of hidden charges so be prepared.

Location

The location of your house matters a great deal. It determines much more than what kind of weather you will experience and what kind of neighbors you will have. It will end up affecting your standard of living and quality of life much more than you could ever imagine. Tips for the best location are;

Look to buy your home in a safe neighbourhood. A house should be your sanctuary, so make safety a prime priority before buying a house. Make sure to look at detailed crime statistics of the area before making a purchase. The money you try to save by buying a house in an unsafe neighbourhood can cost you your life or that of a loved one. Set your priorities straight and buy a house in a safe location.

For those who have children, look for areas that have access to top quality schooling. A child’s education should not be compromised in any way.

Look for convenient access to places of entertainment such as malls, cinemas, restaurants and parks. The more these facilities are nearby, the better quality of life you will be able to enjoy.

Selecting a location with a great view makes a home all the more worth living in. Imagine waking to the view of snow filled mountains or the cool sea breeze blowing through your hair.

The access to public transit is crucial. Those of you who have jobs that are far away will highly desire easy access to public transit. Apart from that, an easy access to public transport makes everything more convenient.

Easy access to local fire, police and rescue facilities: Be certain to buy a house that has coverage of all these facilities, but never one that is too close. Just imagine living next to a fire station. The noise would make your life miserable.

Better access to health care is a must when looking for a location to buy a house in. After all, there is no telling when disaster might strike and proximity to a health care facility means the difference between life and death.

Inspection

A proper house inspection will not only make your living easier, but also increase the durability of your house and its resale price. Tips on getting the right inspection are;

Be sure to pick a qualified inspector.

Have the structural elements inspected. These include the

walls, building and foundations.

Have the exterior evaluated. This includes paint, landscaping, drainage and passage ways.

Be sure to have the roof and attic checked. These are usually the problem areas.

The plumbing should be top on the inspection list. Faulty plumbing is a major loss.

The heating and cooling systems should be in top working order.

All the sockets and lighting should be in working condition. The electrical wiring should be in perfect order. You never want faulty wiring to cause major damage.

If your house has a garage, it should be inspected as it is often ignored in terms of repairs.

Home requirements

An important tip when buying a house is to look for one that fulfills your requirements. Your personal requirements are what make your house your home. They are the individual components that will mold your house according to your individual needs. It is often an ignored fact, but before buying a house, you should always take some time to analyze your current needs and the needs that will arise in the future. This way you could look for a house that will be according to what you desire rather than you having to settle for what you get.

Pre plan the amount of bedrooms that will be needed in the house. If you’re expecting more children in the future, then plan accordingly. An extra guest room should be on top of the list for

those people that have constant visits from friends and family. It is better to pre plan, select a house that gives you the bedroom options you desire rather than having to add a bedroom later. That will surely prove to be a rather costly exercise.

A house that is old gives an elegant look and feel. For some people, a traditional looking house is a factor that is highly desirable in the modern. On the other hand, there are those people who have t embraced the new technology and enjoy the modern lifestyle revolution. Try to understand which of these people you are and select your house accordingly. Don’t end up buying a thick walled old house and then wonder why the WIFI signals are so weak.

The bathroom needs are different for different families. If you have more than one child, we suggest you look for a house that has multiple bathrooms. The queue in the morning outside a bathroom could be one of the most annoying feelings in the world. Then there’s the little matter of the bathroom design. If you are into the eco-friendly lifestyle, look for houses with plumbing that is efficient before-hand. Changing the whole plumbing could prove to be an expensive exercise.

For some people, outdoor activities are highly desirable. Playing with your pets, catching practice with your kids or just relaxing on the old hammock are all activities that require a decent sized garden. After buying a house, converting an already built piece of land into a garden will prove to be expensive. Also garage space, parking space and pool requirements should be taken into consideration.

Understanding the monthly costs

The costs of your house are way more than just the price of the property you buy. There are a lot of other costs that need to be understood in order for you to get a true idea of the actual amount of money you will be spending. A lack of knowledge of these costs has led many consumers astray in the past and it is pivotal that you have an understanding of the monthly costs that you will have to incur for years after making that initial purchase.

The mortgage payments, that you have to pay monthly, will have to be looked at carefully. It will depend on the amount of initial principle you pay and the subsequent interest rate the bank sets on them. It is better to consult a financial analyst and get the present value of all future payments calculated so you get an idea of the eventual cost of that house .This will be higher than the principle amount that the real estate agent tells you.

Taxes are something that vary from state to state and region to region. The only taxes you will pay will not be housing tax. As housing tax will be the principle tax you pay, do look into detail on which tax bracket your house will fall into and how much that will cost you. It is imperative that you look into the taxing structure to see if there are any cutbacks that you can avail. Then the local and municipal taxes come into play. Living in very expensive localities will often be paired with paying higher taxes for municipal services. Be sure that those taxes are worth your while.

Insurance costs will end up costing you a lot. First, there is title insurance. Be sure to look at the terms and conditions of the title insurance you purchase so that you don’t end up believing that you have something covered when it actually isn’t. Housing insurance in your neighborhood should be purchased after conducting a comparative analysis, so you don’t pay more than

the market average.

Don’t forget about the monthly maintenance fee if you are planing to live in a townhouse or a condo. Also, Regular fix-up costs are monthly costs that are often ignored when buying a house. Depending on the condition of the house you’re purchasing, the inspection report, the climatic conditions and your neighborhood’s proximity to places of public gathering, you will incur regular fix-up costs.

Living in a locality where there is a lot of snowfall or on beach-side with a lot of moisture will cause damage to your house – all the way from your plumbing to your driveway. Living in areas which are close to public places will eventually cost you miscellaneous repairs. If you have damaged or faulty areas in your house, they will also have to be maintained regularly and might cost you a significant chunk of money.

In the end, the monthly costs should be calculated carefully beforehand so that later on you do not feel the sudden financial pressures of these imminent payments.

Picking the right realtor

Choosing the right realtor might mean the difference between buying a house that you will adore Vs one that you may despise. Getting the best deal possible is dependent on getting the realtor that best fits your requirements. The following are some tips to help you find that perfect realtor:

Meet the agent out in the field and not in their office. This will give you an idea of their quality.

You must have an agent that has closed a lot of deals. That

shows experience. An agent that has experience will never hesitate to knock on doors for you and get you the best deal. He or She will have the knowhow and understanding of the market and have more contacts in the field.

A great tip to meeting agents is to attend open houses. Regardless of the fact that whether you are interested in buying that particular property, attend the open house so that you can meet the best agents there. This will help you further down the road when you want to make your dream purchase.

Referrals from the people you know and love is a great way to get a good agent. After all the people who care for you will never lead you astray and guide you to an agent that they themselves had an excellent experience with.

Make sure you get an agent that has moved into the 21st century. Having a tech savvy agent that is able to text, use email and has a website is crucial to getting the best deal. Most of today's real-estate dealings take place online and on the go. An agent that is not current with the latest trends is sure to lag behind.

Never settle to an agent on first sight. Do your research. Search and interview as many candidates as possible. This will give you an idea of their quality by comparative analysis. Look at the agreement and read it carefully before signing it. Build a trust with the agent- after all it's your future home which is at stake.

Look for agents that can give personal time and attention. If an agent is too busy, you might not a good enough deal.

Look for an agent that has the requisite knowledge. A good salesman with all the sales tips and clichés would be worth

nothing if he doesn’t have the right knowledge. Ask your agent the things you have learned about. If your agent cannot give you satisfactory answers, move on to another agent.

A well respected agent is a must. If he has a good reputation in the market than it is due to hard work and delivering good deals time and time again. Those agents that cannot deliver will not be that well respected in the market.

Look for agents that live in and near the locality. These agents will then have the right knowledge on all aspects of the area. Agents who are new to the areas of your interest will not be the best option.

A good agent should go beyond just getting you a house. He should be able to guide you about mortgage brokers, loan officers, financial analysts and inspectors. All of these references will count in the whole buying process.

Make sure the agent you hire does this job full time. A part time agent might have other things on his plate.

A good agent should have no issues about giving you frequent updates about the transaction

As you are going to be buying a house, it is best if you work with seasoned buying agents. They will have your interests as a buyer in their minds and help you in the best possible way. Seller’s agents will always benefit the seller.

Looking at the resale value

Choosing a home is much more than just a purchase, it is an investment. To make sure you make the right investment, you

have to purchase a property with one eye on the resale value. Since buying a home is a substantial purchase, you have to be sure that you don’t end up losing money.

There are some key tips on making sure that your home will have a good resale value:

Be sure to buy in an area which has had constant prices. Neighborhoods that have experienced booms or busts tend to lose your money, but those which have seen their prices remain stable over a number of years tend to be the better option.

Buy your house in an area that has a low crime rate. Be careful and look at the detailed crime statistics. Keep in mind that the biggest devaluation can often be brought about by high crime rate areas.

Be sure to have the house inspected for problems and have them fixed before selling, so that you can command a higher price.

Buy homes close to large development projects. This will likely increase the price of land over the next few years and will end up making you a substantial profit.

Buy a home with more than two bedrooms. This will increase the buyers’ market for the house in the future. Many couples need a guest room and an office so more space will tend to sell better.

A home with more than one bathroom will get you much better resale. A home without a master bath will tend to sell for less.

Buy a home that has family space. Family space could be anything from a good sized lounge to a decent sized balcony where people can gather to socialize. This is an

attractive resale point.

A house with good storage space nowadays will get you much better resale. Although we live in a time where less is more, you will be surprised at how much stuff people collect these days. Everything from the size of wardrobes to the storage rooms is increasing. Be mindful of that when purchasing a home.

A garage is desirable for good resale. Even if you are looking to buy a house that has no garage, having one nonetheless will give you good resale. A garage can be used for multiple purposes and is highly desirable.

That the layout of the house is structured ergonomically and efficiently is a great advantage to have when reselling the house. Look for well-designed efficient house as they will never go out of demand. Clumsily designed houses with inefficient use of space will always sell for much less.

Buying a house in a nice neighborhood that has easy access to public transport, leisure, entertainment, schooling and recreational activities will increase its resale value. Avoid economically depressed neighborhoods where people are not taking care of their houses and there is a lot of clutter on the streets.

Conclusion

In order for a piece of real estate to be considered a house, you must feel at home in it. Buying a house is a substantial investment, so it is vital that you think before the purchase and make the purchase decision according to your priorities.

Take care in following the guidance and tips given in this book , as ultimately they will lead you to buying a home that is more suitable to your needs and that will give you value for your money. Remember that buying the right home will not only guarantee a good return on your investment in terms of resale value, but it will also give you a better future. So buying the house with the right characteristics is the key message of this book.

The home style will determine the primary layout of the house and you should keep that in mind whilst making a purchase. Go for the style that best suits your needs. If you don’t like stairways, buy a ranch style house. If you’re looking for something elegant and spacious, a colonial home is what you’d like. There are many home styles and all have their distinct characteristics so be sure to understand what they represent before making the purchase.

The house should provide a comfortable space for its occupants. There is no universal standard for the amount of square footage that will give you a comfortable living space. Be sure to take into consideration the amount of people that are going to live and their space needs.

The location of the house is perhaps one of the most important decisions whilst buying a house. The location will not only determine your lifestyle choices, but it will also determine the

nearby access to amenities and entertainment. The climate of the locality and conversely your clothing choices all will be determined by location. Be sure to choose a location that is safe from both natural hazards and crime. A house is supposed to be a sanctuary; if you don’t feel safe in your own house then that would be a shame.

You have to decide on whether to live in the city amidst the hustle and bustle and pollution or quietly in the countryside. A middle ground is provided by the sub-urban lifestyle. This decision will impact the property prices, the insurance costs and the cost of living. Everything from transportation, education and entertainment will be governed by this choice. Be sure to pick wisely.

Whilst looking for houses, stay away from industrial areas and commercial centers. The noise from such areas might affect your sleep patterns .Always try and find a place that is nestled in a well-connected residential area.

Your budget should be the key factor in determining your housing choice. Do not fall into the trap of overspending on your house by taking out large loans or mortgages. If you cannot afford a house try and rent one. The 2007 housing crisis has shown us that the markets are volatile and the bubble can burst. So be cautious of your earning and make your investment wisely.

The housing decision should also revolve around the proximity to your friends and family. Try and incorporate their locations when making a decision. More importantly, remember that there are going to be people living with you. What are their needs, wants and desires? You have to consider them when making a purchase.

The mortgage rates are often riddled with hidden charges and costs that you might not understand. Before making a mortgage agreement, search the market for comparable deals. Look to get the lowest interest rate but be mindful of rates that seem too good to be true. Scams are also out there so you have to be vigilant and its best if you contact a financial expert when making this decision.

The costs of rent, mortgage or taxes aren't the only cost of living associated with the house as is popularly believed. You have to be mindful of all the extended cost of living that will be associated with the location you select. The transport cost, the cost of local utilities, the general prices of the local entertainment and leisure activities are also to be looked at. The lifestyle of the neighborhood and how much it will cost you to be part of that will have to be duly calculated.

The local schools and colleges are a very important consideration. If you have young children, then the quality of the public school system should be top priority. For older children the quality of colleges and proximity to top colleges is a major plus point.

The personal priorities and choices are not to be ignored. After all, it's your house so it should be according to your taste. It is you who decides on whether to go for a modern or a traditional house. You decide on the floors, bathrooms, kitchen design and design of the interior. Make sure you choose what appeals to you rather than what is suggested by the designers.

The most crucial aspect that this book reiterates is the importance of having a proper inspection. Be sure to choose a certified inspector, be present at the inspection and listen and follow up on the inspection results. Whether you're buying a house that is new or second hand, the importance of a detailed

inspection cannot be overstated.

This book will guide you towards making an educated guess and in the end, it is up to you to make the final decision. Choose a home that is according to your needs, the neighborhood that best suits you and the payment method that is easily affordable.

Thank you for reading “The Smart First-Time Home Buyer’s Guide”. I wish you the best on finding your dream home and have a wonderful first-time homeowner experience.

The Smart First-Time Home Seller's Guide

How to Make The Most Money When Selling Your Home

Thomas.K.Lutz

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Introduction

In today's forever-changing world, the real estate market can be a confusing place to navigate for any person, let alone the average first-time home seller. In real estate, there are certain measures one must take in order to succeed and to later, an aspiration of every home seller, emerge financially sound. Selling a house does not guarantee profit, but carrying out the steps outlined in this book will give you the highest chances of making your dreams a reality.

Every market is different and, existing within a digital world connected every second of every day, the world of buyers has evolved from what it used to be. You are about to discover the secrets to maximize your potential to succeed and to advance through each process of selling a house with comfort in the fact that you have taken every preparation necessary. This is not the same age we used to live in. Putting up a "For Sale" sign and posters is not enough.

When selling a home, one small mistake can ultimately end up costing that home owner thousands of dollars. There are legal obligations and necessary precautions to make when selling a house. Being aware of such extremities will save you valuable amounts of time and money, along with unnecessary legal disputes and last-minute hurdles. So how will you know how to

do everything the right way? What constitutes the right way if it is subject to constant change? You have to know who to talk to. You will soon learn how to gain the upper hand in all aspects of every process of selling a home, from preparing your home for new owners to finding the best professional guidance possible to assist you in realizing your goals. The real estate market may change, but knowing the right routes to take and what tools to implement will never change as long as there are people willing to learn.

Knowing how things work and how things change over time is vital to succeeding in most of life's proceedings. If you are able to open your mind and follow directions, you are able to sell a home. This guide will teach you everything you need to know about the selling process and the transformation of your home into, essentially, an entirely new dwelling more fit to reel in buyers. Are you wondering where to begin? What should you put away and what should you keep out? Do you have to replace everything? What details do you need to invest in the most?

Your mind is swimming with questions and worries, all of which are steering you into a cloud of doubt. Before you start doubting yourself, know that as long as you can read these words, you can renovate your home before the sale while keeping a budget in mind.

While budgeting for renovations is important, there are other mandatory investments that aspiring sellers make the mistake of avoiding. Some homes need more work than others. Sometimes the biggest problems are the ones you never see. You have to

spend money to make money in real estate, so the more corners are cut the more detrimental the outcome can be. Closing that deal and meeting your goals to turn the maximum profit for your home can be a daunting task, but with a strong plan of action under your sleeve there can be a happy ending to this story.

Ultimately, you will be the one to write your story in all facets of life. Your chances of success will mirror your efforts every step of the way. Everyone needs help, but many people have forgotten how important it is to ask. Our highest ambitions are as obtainable as we make them.

Often times we miss out completely until a new person with a fresh perspective is willing open our eyes. This is where you will find the fresh perspective you need to sell your home. Triumph is never guaranteed, but having a source like this to organize and augment such a paramount objective is the best way to proceed. You will be able to move forward with confidence while handling your largest financial asset. You are capable of realizing your dreams and, though it may seem insurmountable, your vision of securing the financial freedom needed to start the next chapter in your life is about to be unraveled.

Chapter 1: Making The Decision To Sell – Important Considerations

There are many reasons people choose the permanent solution of selling their homes. Some have too much or too little space to suit their needs, while others feel the need to relocate to be closer to family or friends. Facing financial turmoils and clearing debts are more pressing reasons many find themselves choosing to sell. Sadly, one of the most common reasons is divorce or the breakup of a relationship. Couples find themselves boggled down with attachments to their former partners and therefore need to sell in order to move on with their lives. Perhaps a person's spouse has passed away and that person wants to downsize or has inherited a property to sell for cash. This is known as bereavement. Some people are in very poor health and must opt to sell their homes because it is no longer suitable for them to live independently. Repossession is another reason a person may decide to sell, faced with the peril of clearing the debts they owe. Houses are not all made to last and many overwhelmed home owners find themselves burdened with devastating repairs. They simply have no way to fund the expense, let alone face the upheaval process.

All around the world, people are pushed by happenstance to do things they would never resort to otherwise. When facing the choice of selling your most precious financial asset, swelling emotions can narrow your view of the situation. Sometimes you

can only make sense of the most obvious option that shoves its way into your mind. Before making a major life decision like selling your home, or any major decision for that matter, you have to consider all of the alternatives at your disposal. Rarely is there only one solution to a given problem and the following examples will prove so.

Here are some possible alternatives relevant to their corresponding situations to further support the importance of researching every available resource. If too little space is the issue, consider borrowing more in order to extend your current home. Try expanding out into the garden, down into the basement, or up into the loft space. If too much space is the issue, consider the financial benefits of renting out a room or even multiple rooms. The flip side is that you will have to be cautious and therefore selective about the individuals you allow to live under the same roof. Try to rent to people you already know you are compatible with. When meeting a new potential roommate, never appear weak minded or emotional. Crooks will use every vulnerability against you once they spot obvious signs of insecurity. If you emit confidence and portray a person not to be messed with, crooks will be more reluctant. There is a flip side to everything, but becoming a good judge of character is a life skill to take with you after the renting experience.

If relocation is necessary, consider keeping your home and renting it out. You may be able to obtain a “buy to let” mortgage or, if your current house is mortgaged, your lender may be happy to allow you to rent out, though usually at a slightly

higher interest rate. Similarly, if you have inherited a property this might be a desirable option. It is important to remember that, in addition to your mortgage provider (if applicable), you will need to inform your buildings and contents insurer if you make the decision to rent out your home.

If you are having financial difficulties, consider changing your mortgage, such as extending your current term to lower your monthly payments, or remortgage to release some equity in your home so you can borrow a little more. Talk to your lender and think cautiously before changing your mortgage. Be certain that if you decide to increase your mortgage that you will be able to afford the monthly repayments. If you can, renting out a room can be a helpful accommodation here as well, but keep in mind that any rent you collect may be taxable depending on how much you receive.

For the elderly, having to move can be a detrimental loss. Luckily, if you are older, a lifetime mortgage could be the answer to your prayers. A lifetime mortgage is a certain kind of equity release loan based upon the value of your house. It allows those eligible to receive a lump sum or a regular income, but not without the stipulation of paying interest on the additional loan which is later added to the original loan amount. You still own your home and the loan is eventually repaid when your house is sold in the future. Keep in mind, however, that the interest accumulated is compounding, which means interest on the previous years' interest. There is a risk that the loan could grow to exceed the value of the house. However, any extra value derived from the property after being sold is paid to the appropriate heirs in the event of that person's death. Always

know the specifications before choosing any alternative course of action.

A home reversion loan is another alternative some may find suitable. This allows you to sell all or part of your home to a company in exchange for a lump sum of cash, a regular income, or even both. While under a set lease, you retain the right to live in your home peacefully until the day you die. Usually, you can choose to sell between 25% and 100% of your property, but the amount you receive in return will be considerably less than that of the market value. The amount will depend on your age because the older you are, the more you receive. A beneficial proposal for those unable to uproot and sell through the market.

Some people have the option of “house-swapping” or “part-exchanging”. Today, millions of people are all interconnected via the Internet. An endless stream of information and networking connects people from all corners of the world, allowing new possibilities the chance to uproot and expand. There are swapping websites that specialize in bringing people together who are willing to participate in this interesting way to avoid getting caught in a chain or paying estate agency fees. Technology continues to provide us with more innovative ideas as we strive to solve all of life’s problems, from opening a bottle of wine to closing the sale of a home.

Now can you start to see why it is so important to do your research and to discover what options pertain to your own happenstance? These alternatives only skim the surface as a reminder of the magnitude of information and reliable services

available to suit your needs. You are not alone in this fight and you have the ability to learn the techniques to come out on top. So now that you know what tools exist to help you make a definite decision, are you ready to start the process of selling your home? It will involve hard work and a willingness to follow the provided guidelines vital to success.

So you have decided to sell your home. This is not a task that can be done by yourself. So where do you begin? Before you thrust the gear into full throttle, there are some things you need to be sure about.

Timing is a good place to start. If you are not pressed to sell immediately, you can choose to sell when demand is high to give your property the best chance on the market. Typically, demand is high in Spring, early Summer, and Autumn. If possible, avoid the middle of Summer and the holiday seasons in Winter.

Take the time to soak in the wider picture. Again, this will mean doing your own research to see what is happening in the housing market, both nationally and locally. Take note of what other sellers are doing and study top dollar houses recently sold on the market. Be aware of interest rates and the attitudes of current lenders.

Thoroughly research what is happening locally. Too many “For Sale” signs cluttering your area can ultimately put off potential buyers and drive house prices down. With luck, you may live in a location that appears immune to national trends and has a consistently buoyant market. Though this will not

always be the case, you still hold the power to sway the odds in your favor. You will have to decide whether or not you want to invest in another home. The market will tell you if buying another house is plausible.

If you plan on buying and selling, a strategy most home owners find ideal, you have three main options: buy and sell at the same time, sell first, or buy first. Each will effectively generate a different outcome with different concerns. Timing is an important consideration in the application of any one of these options.

The first and most common scenario is to buy and sell at the same time. Whether you can manage to sell your current house or acquire the home of your dreams first is often a matter of planning and preparation. With a bit of luck, it can be done, but keep in mind that it can be stressful trying to sell and buy at once. Once you have found the house you want, you are going to want to step it up a notch and speed up your sale.

The second option is to sell first. This will allow you to be in a stronger negotiating position when you get around to buying, seeing as you will be chain free and have a clear idea about what price you can afford to offer. However, remember that you may end up having to rent an apartment, or other lodgings, while you are on the hunt for your new property. You may have to move twice and deal with storage payments, as all of your possessions will need to be kept safe while you sort everything out. Remember that prices may rise in the meantime. If renting is something you are unwilling or unable to do, you have the option of specifying to buyers that you will only accept an offer

under the condition that you are able to find a suitable place to buy. This will involve delicate negotiation skills.

The third scenario is to buy first. This can lead to being put under a lot of pressure to sell your home quickly. You want to avoid the sheer expense of owning two homes at the same time and having a bridging loan to pay. Most lenders will refuse to give you a mortgage on your new home unless the other is being sold or you can prove you have the capability to keep up with both mortgages. For most people, one mortgage is enough, so this option is not the most ideal to the majority of home owners.

Be sure to budget for your sale and see where you stand. The costs associated with closing a deal alone are great, so renovating and repairing your home before the sale will require precise budgeting. Do not fret about the details now because this guide is about to explore the secrets to the least expensive, most appealing secrets to draw in buyers with a completely transformed home. For now, here is something to consider first on your journey to flip and sell a home while saving money.

All sellers are required by law to get an EPC. This stands for Energy Performance Certificate. An EPC shows you exactly how much energy a building uses. This helps home owners lower their energy bills and live more comfortably by making their homes more energy efficient. You must contact an accredited domestic energy assessor who will perform the assessment and provide the certificate. You can do this online at www.epcregister.com or through the phone book.

You have to make sure you know how much selling your

home will cost you. Fees vary, but do not underestimate them because they tend to add up quickly. An Estate Agent's fee is payable when a real estate agent sells the property and contracts have been signed. Solicitors' fees are required as well. A solicitor is needed to guide you through the legal aspects of selling your home. This is called conveyancing. Costs vary, so always request a quote and make sure to ask if it is a fixed price because costs accumulate fast if there is a dispute or query on the paperwork. If you have chosen to buy and sell, some solicitors will provide you with a discount for handling the conveyancing for both.

You may also have to deal with current Lender's fees. Be sure to check for early repayment charges or any administrative fee payable provided you repay your mortgage. There will also be Removal costs which will vary depending on the amount you need to move, how far away you are moving, and whether you choose to use a professional firm. Depending on the circumstances, there can be Rental costs, bridging loans, and storage charges as well.

Generally, if you have lived in your home and it has always been your home in the time since you have owned it, you will not be forced to pay Capital Gains Tax on any revenue gained when you sell it. However, there might be some liability if the property you are selling is not your main residence or you have used part of it for business use. Business use such as using a room as your office, taking in lodgers, or letting out all or part of your home.

However, the profit you make upon selling your home

produces capital gains, which are subject to capital gains taxes. Fortunately, a lot of sellers can avoid paying these capital gains taxes all together. Thanks to the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, you can exclude up to $250,000 in capital gains. Married couples can exclude up to $500,000 in capital gains. This means that if you bought a house for $100,000 and later sold it for $300,000, you would have $200,000 in capital gains completely tax free.

The final and most important consideration if you are going to sell your home for top dollar is hiring someone to assist you. Contrary to what others may say, selling a home is not something that should be done solo. Hiring a professional agent will give you the best chances of success. You will be able to sell your home quickly and have the most current tools and professional knowledge on your side.

Chapter 2: Considering Assistance As A First Time Home Seller

Homeowners make the mistake of assuming that by eliminating the agent, they will benefit by walking away with a greater percentage of the profit from the sale. This is not always how things turn out. When you list a property on your own, without the help of a real estate agent, it is referred to as “For Sale By Owner”. The primary intention is to eliminate the middleman, the agent, and to avoid paying any real estate commission.

Unfortunately, FSBO listings have a fatal downfall right from the start. They immediately give off a certain vibe to home buyers. If you see a FSBO listing rather than the more common agent listing, you may automatically think “bargain” or “distressed sale”. You may also think the seller is not serious and is just trying to see what they can get.

Aside from that, the seller who posts a FSBO listing may discover that many interested buyers are just bargain hunters passing through. Many are looking for a great deal because along the way they began associating the term “For Sale By Owner” with “bargain”. This makes sense because it is a more seldom seen listing. FSBOs also have a failure rate of 85% to 95%. Buyers will take you more seriously when listing under an agent and your home will sell for significantly more. Statistics prove that selling your home with professional assistance will generate enough profit to pay for the commission, any agency

fees, and still have extra money to put away.

The Internet makes it instantaneous for buyers to access every kind of property on the market, such as short sales and foreclosures. This creates massive competition. Realtors use certain gateways and connections via the Internet to put your property before the eyes of millions. A Top Realtor will have the tools to do this and much more.

Do not make the common mistake of thinking that all real estate agents are the same. In most places across the United States, there are several hundred or several thousand agents to choose from. Each real estate agent has different personal traits, different selling strategies, different ways to market houses, and different levels of skill. In most communities there are only a handful of top producing agents, a decent amount of average agents, and a lot of bad agents. In most regions, a few Top Realtors will end up taking 80% of the business while the other lesser agents are left with 20%. This only proves just how experienced they are at selling homes. Remember, your Top Agent also benefits when your home is sold for top dollar.

So how will you know how to choose a Top Producer amongst so many lesser prospects? It is extremely important to choose the “right” real estate agent. Unfortunately, it is very easy to obtain a real estate license. You have to know the right questions to ask. Interviewing is going to be your golden ticket to selecting a top producing agent. Swallow your shyness and try to think of yourself as a businessperson rather than a home owner. You are looking for the best candidate to conduct your

business.

How long have you been selling real estate?

This is a very important interview question because, generally, more experience means more sales, along with the probability they have encountered a lot of different situations. However, there are new Realtors that can sell your home better than an agent with more than thirty years of experience.

Are you a full-time or a part-time Realtor?

Do not forget to ask this question because a true top producing Realtor will be full-time. Being a successful agent involves long hours and extreme dedication. Hiring a part-time real estate agent is not recommended because it is very likely that they will not have the time or availability to handle all of the aspects involved in the sale of your home.

What proven results do you possess? How many properties did you sell last year while representing a seller?

You want to ask these questions because many Realtors work primarily with buyers just to trick you. Helping a buyer find a home and representing a seller with the sale of their home are two very different things. By asking how many homes they sold last year while representing sellers, you can figure out whether they primarily deal with buyers or sellers. Top Producers should

possess a minimum ratio of 60/40. This means that sixty percent or more of their sales are representing sellers, while forty percent or less of their sales are representing buyers.

What was the average time from the listing date to the contract date concerning the sales?

When selling your home, especially for the first time, one of the worst fears is the possibility of your home staying on the market for a long period of time. During the interview, ask them how long it generally takes for their listings to reach an acceptable contract.

What was the average listing price to sale price ratio?

To no one's surprise, most sellers want top dollar for their homes. Asking a prospective Realtor about their average listing price to sale price ratio is very important. Do not make the common mistake of hiring a Realtor who "buys a listing". A Realtor who "buys a listing" will suggest listing a home for much higher than normal market value in order to secure a contract, then later continuously "beat up" a seller to lower the price. By asking this question in the interview, you significantly reduce the chance of this happening. A Top Producer should have an average listing price to sale price ratio of 95% or higher.

How many pending transactions do you currently possess?

This question will give you a great indication of a Realtor's level of success. If they only have one pending transaction, it is safe to assume that they are not a top agent. Top Producers should always have ten or more pending transactions.

What marketing and advertising "vehicles" do you use? Do you utilize the Internet for marketing your properties for sale?

There is no doubt that the Internet has had a huge impact on the real estate industry. Realtors who say the Internet is not a relevant part of real estate sales are either ignorant or unable to adapt and are therefore not being truthful. Do not forget to ask how they market their homes for sale online.

Do you have your own website that will come up in search results?

Seeing as there are far too many agents who do not have their own website, it is very important that the right agent has a their own high ranking website. Their website should rank on the first page, or at the very least the first couple pages.

Do you have your own real estate blog?

Blogs today are quite popular in many industries and the real estate industry is no exception. Realtors use blogs to write about questions frequently asked by buyers and sellers, current real

estate topics, and homes they are selling.

Do you use social media?

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram are all social media sites. During the interview, asking the Realtor what social media sites they utilize tells you whether or not they understand the importance of exposure when selling their client's home. The aim is to provide as much exposure as possible and this gives them an edge over other agents who are not active on social media.

What camera do you use when taking pictures of the homes you sell?

Properties that have terrible photos have a poor chance of selling. You want a Realtor who has the ability to take quality photos or has a professional photographer on stand by. They should have a high quality camera with high quality lenses, not a digital one.

What methods do you use to calculate the listing price of the homes you sell?

Realtors use different methods to price homes. Any prospective Realtor should be able to provide an example of a comparative market analysis (CMA) for you to view. Pay attention to the amount of detail used in their analysis to determine how much

time and effort they spend on pricing their homes.

Do you have testimonials from past sellers whose homes you sold?

This is not an unreasonable request. Most Top Producers will have testimonials on hand or on their website. If possible, ask if you can contact any past clients to speak with them directly about their experience.

Which methods do you use to communicate with your sellers and how often?

Lack of communication is a big issue for both sellers and buyers. Find out how frequently they touch base with their sellers so you know what to expect in the future.

How much do you charge for your services?

Because commission is negotiable, it is important to ask prospects what percentage they require. Just because one agent may offer less than another does not mean you are getting a deal. You could be costing yourself a lot of money. Top Producers should be able to justify their commission fees.

Are there penalties for canceling a contract?

Most of time, there are penalties for the early cancellation of a contract. Ask if the Realtor will enforce the penalty. A Top Realtor will have the confidence necessary to get your home sold, so a penalty for an early termination should not be an issue.

Make sure you understand what type of contract you are signing and its length. There are three main types of listing agreement contracts: Open Listing, Exclusive Agency Listing, and Exclusive Right-to-Sell Listing. The best choice for you depends on your willingness to handle certain home selling duties and the real estate market climate.

An “Open Listing” contract involves the use of multiple agents in order to sell the property and get it off the market. The agent that sells the home collects the commission. An “Exclusive Agency Listing” contract means that a specified agent earns the commission if the home sells within a specified number of months, no matter how a buyer is found. An “Exclusive Right-to-Sell Listing” agreement states that the seller must pay the brokerage a commission if, by the expiration date specified, the property is sold, regardless of whether the buyer is found through the agency or not. Even if the seller obtains the buyer themselves, the brokerage still receives a commission.

Asking these interview questions will give you the best chances at fetching top price for your home. You will be able to judge quickly whether or not you are dealing with a Top Agent or an incompetent bungler. If you feel you want to prepare yourself further, research more interview questions you can ask.

There is no such thing as a stupid question. A true agent will be happy to answer any questions you have, from start to finish.

What should you expect from your real estate agent during the sale process? A successful real estate agent should possess certain qualities. These traits separate the top agents from the amateur agents, and having high expectations is key to prevent yourself from being swindled. Show them that you will not be taken for a fool.

Honesty is the first and most important trait. Even though Realtors have their own code of ethics to abide by, not all agents tell the truth. If an agent is unable to provide any testimonials or previous clients' contact information upon your request, they are not being honest with you and they do not have experience.

Professionalism is a trait most sellers assume all agents have, but this is not the case. What actions prove that a real estate agent possesses professionalism? The most obvious sign is a polished image. Realtors should appear well dressed and properly groomed. Buyers will not take agents who wear jeans and sneakers seriously. Being a professional also means respecting other's time and being punctual.

Negotiating skills are very important. The job of a Realtor representing a seller is to get the most money for their client's home in the least amount of time. The right candidate should know what to say to a buyer's representative. They should also know not to send a counter offer from their client to the buyer's agent without any discussion. This is unacceptable, as they are

supposed to be the voice of the seller.

Creativity is a great quality for a real estate agent to have, indicating their level of adaptability and wit. No two homes are exactly the same, so agents need to know which selling strategies to apply. Property descriptions, photo angles, and writing advertisements are all things they must be creative with. This is where a lot of agents fall short. This trait ties in directly with experience and proven results. The more business an agent conducts, the better they are at handling specific situations. These qualities should earn any dedicated Top Producer a great reputation through their company, which is another attribute to assess. Always do your research every step of the way, as word of mouth will not be enough to ensure you have chosen the best candidate for the job.

The next step is the assessment of quality techniques. True professionals align themselves with other great professionals. It is crucial to find out what business connections and services they offer. Upon request, a Top Producer should be able to suggest other real estate attorneys and mortgage consultants for potential purchasers. They should be more than willing to tell you what relocation network they belong to, what movers they can suggest upon the sale of your home, and what preferred partners or vendors they can recommend.

The use of “cutting-edge” technology is extremely important. Ask about what technological tools they use when selling a property. Utilizing advanced technology allows real estate agents to be more efficient, providing them with more time to

spend selling homes. Popular advances that help agents include tools such as digital signature software, iCloud, Dropbox, Evernote, and Buffer.

A comprehensive marketing plan is a paramount technique to consider.

Overpricing is a common mistake sellers make, and it is important to note that an overpriced home will not sell, even with the best marketing strategy. What does a comprehensive marketing plan entail? A real estate agent should use a mixture of both “older” and “newer” tactics in their marketing plan. “Older” tactics you should expect include television advertisements, newspaper articles, and direct mailings. “Newer” marketing tactics to expect include the use of their own personal website, personal blog, and social media profiles. A strong online presence is crucial, seeing as the majority of buyers start their search online.

You can take comfort in the fact that, upon hiring a Top Agent from an established agency, you are protected by a complaints process. This gives the agents incentive to please every client, seeing as doing an unsatisfactory job will hinder their reputation with the agency. Now that you know the right questions to ask and what to expect, you can confidently weed out the right agent to accomplish your goals as a first time home seller.

Chapter 3: Preparing The Home For Sale – First Impressions

Now that you have professional help, it is time to prepare your home for future showings. Your real estate agent will no doubt have an opinion on this subject, but you are about to learn everything you need to know to transform your home. Try to see your home from a buyer's perspective. You must ensure that your home is "show ready" to attract buyers willing to pay your asking price. To do this, improvements must be made. Making a good first impression is key.

First, tackle both minor and major repairs. Maintenance takes up a lot of time, but does not have to cost a lot of money. Clean out your gutters, re-grout tiles, replace light bulbs, fix leaky taps, polish wooden flooring, oil creaking hinges, and anything else in need of improving. This will give viewers the impression of a maintained, well-loved home.

If you want to make a great impression, "Staging" is going to be your best friend. Staging your home involves making a lot of changes, but there are ways to "paint a picture" without going overboard. The aim here it to simplify, rearrange, re-purpose, and "renovate", all while using mainly pieces that were there but were just improperly utilized. You want to create a neutral, updated environment that buyers can imagine themselves actually living in. The first thing to consider when painting a

picture is the disadvantage of too many personal touches.

Who knew that taking down family photos and clearing off counter tops helps you achieve top dollar for your house? Family photos and personal items make people feel like they are invading your space. These are just two secrets to the art of staging. You can clean up, rearrange, and style your home to command top price. This means anything from putting excess books in storage to cleaning up moldy buildup in bathrooms to filling up bare spaces. The goal is to make your home clean, organized, and inviting so potential buyers can picture themselves moving in.

You want to de-personalize your home. If you want viewers to immediately envision themselves living in your home, “you” need to move out by removing personal things like CDs, DVDs, theme items, and so on. You may adore your deep purple walls but viewers prefer a blank canvas they can stamp their own personality on.

A great tip when staging your home is to replace mismatched pictures with chic, artistic photos, along with generally appealing art pieces to accent any bare walls. Be very considerate about placement. Look up examples of rooms staging experts have recreated on a budget. They will usually specify where they found expensive looking pieces for a bargain while re-purposing bigger items for a whole new look. Keep neutral colors, like black and brown, in mind while adding pops of color and texture. Fur pillows and area rugs are a great way to add texture in a room. Try placing a couple of decorative

lanterns on the coffee table for a more modern appeal. A wonderful tip is to add touches that invoke an emotional response in buyers, such as placing a book by the arm chair or baking a fresh batch of chocolate chip cookies. If you are creative and do some research, you can stage your home without spending a lot of money.

Do not take on too many projects, but have fun making a home someone would want to live in. There are a lot of great low-cost projects and tips. Try painting the walls a warm, neutral shade. You can also add an accent wall by painting it two shades deeper or a complimentary color. Repaint cabinets and furniture as needed and replace cheaper items like knobs, light switch covers, and electrical outlets. Buy new neutral colored towels and shower curtains.

Lighting is also important. Try changing lampshades and replacing old light fixtures with colorful pendants. Also, it is important to choose light bulbs that have the right spectrum for a given space. Soft bulbs that emit a yellow or red undertone are best in “hanging out” areas such as the living room. Bright bulbs that emit blue undertones do well in “study” areas such as the office or library. New blinds and curtains add a charming finishing touch, along with molding, trim, and other accents.

Before listing your house for sale, getting a home inspection is absolutely essential. A pre-sale inspection will help you address any larger repairs you were unable to pinpoint so you can properly price and market your property. The inspector’s report will give buyers the confidence they need to make an offer on your property. Fixing the issues will help you get a higher offer.

Home inspections should be part of the preparation process. Too many sellers make the mistake of waiting until later to deal with the home inspection, risking lower offers and scaring away buyers.

When preparing your home, de-cluttering is an important process. Get rid of knick-knacks and clear out any bulk items, such as toys, newspapers, clutter, and so on. Rearrange to create a different flow throughout the house. The idea is to create the illusion of space. A secret technique to do this is the use of mirrors. Put two large decorative mirrors on opposing walls across from each other. The reflections create the feeling of a larger space while drawing in more light. If you have a “junk room”, convert it to a tidy office or study.

Tackle the garage, shed, loft, underneath the stairs, cupboards, and kitchen units. When you are finished it should be apparent what each room is for. Open rooms and welcoming accents, such as a vase of flowers, may seem overly plain, but do not underestimate the value you are adding to your home just by clearing bulk.

You will want to put your bigger possessions, along with any other items you cannot bear to part with, away. You may want to consider renting a storage unit. Alternatively, you can opt to turn your clutter into cash by using online auction sites, such as eBay, or having a garage sale. If you are the giving type, charity shops welcome donations and many will pick up the items for you. You can also give family or friends anything you no longer need.

Now that you have de-cluttered, a good clean is required. Vacuuming, flicking a duster, and spraying air freshener is not enough. You are going to have to deep clean the house from top the bottom. Pay particular attention to the kitchen and bathrooms. Scrub grime and grout clean to make them sparkle. Move furniture, clean behind everything, wipe down the walls, clean the corners, wash windows on either side, and dust and polish everything. Make sure everything is spotless, including appliances like the oven and dishwasher.

The outside of your home is just as important at the inside. It is proven that buyers decide within the first six seconds whether or not they like a home. They are going to see the outside first, so make sure you consider curb appeal when making a strong first impression. It should be obvious how to enter your home. Each side of the doorway should welcome them through and into the threshold. Paint the front door a color that stands out against the greenery, like red, or buy a new one. Give the outside of the house a fresh coat of paint. Clear pathways, mow the lawn, tidy the garden and parking lot, repair and repaint the fencing, and make sure the house number is prominent and the doorbell works. Adding a few tubs of flowers or plants is a big plus point and you can take them with you when you move. Just do everything you can to get the home in excellent shape and be prepared to make some minor concessions at closing time.

If you are not decorative or creatively inclined, remember that your agent can recommend a plan of action to get your home “show ready”. If you can manage to get creative and do your

research, you can save a lot of money while at the same time adding thousands to your home’s sale price. View other show homes online to give yourself an idea of how to present and market a house. Study examples posted by professional stagers from their portfolios. This will also show you what you are competing against and if you need to step up your game.

Chapter 4: Establishing The Asking Price

Your home's first price should be its best price. The number one reason a home does not sell is because it is incorrectly priced. When putting your home on the market, especially if you are living in a region where prices are increasing and buyers are competing for homes, it can be a tempting thought to list at a high price to see if you can get it. This is not a good idea. Sale prices are not based on the owner's needs. When an owner is determined to sell for $300,000 to gain $100,000 to buy their next home, buyers want to know if it is a reasonable price. If similar homes on the market are selling for $250,000, the owner will not be successful. Experienced Realtors will tell you that pricing your home appropriately from the start is critical to selling quickly and for the best price. Most successfully sold homes stay on the market for mere weeks.

Marketing statistics show that overpricing your home and then reducing the price repeatedly usually results in a much lower profit margin than you originally should have received. The longer a home stays on the market, the more discounted the price becomes. You have to price your home correctly. Many homeowners want to set their listing price based on what they originally paid for their home, the balance of their mortgage, or the profit they expect to make so that they can move into another home. In reality, your home is only worth what the market will allow.

Price your home too high and risk buyers passing your property by or simply walking away without making an offer. Some sellers are tempted when selecting an agent to hire the one that suggests the highest price for their home, but this is a mistake. That agent is just telling them what they want to hear. When you price your home too high, you are helping sell other homes in your vicinity that are listed for less. After seeing your top dollar home, buyers may be tempted to get the better deal nearby, even if they liked your home better. A lot of buyers do their research, just as you do as a seller, and many will have a good idea of what homes in your neighborhood are worth..

Homes ultimately sell at a price the buyer is willing to pay and the seller is willing to accept. If a property is priced low, a strategy that involves less risk, the seller might potentially receive multiple offers to bring the price up to market value. Sellers can also lose tens of thousands of dollars if they set the price too low. Follow your expert's advice, but keep in mind that you will need to leave room for negotiation for when the time comes to close a deal. Some sellers price too high in order to leave room for negotiation and run the risk of being overlooked by buyers on a more strict budget. Then there is no one to negotiate *with*. A lot of buyers enjoy the negotiating process and can be smooth talkers. Other more solid buyers appreciate and respect a home priced just right. Have realistic expectations of what your home will sell for, but remember to utilize your Top Agent to calculate the highest price possible in relation to the market.

It is standard practice for a real estate agent to visit and evaluate your home upon request. Your Realtor will be able to

provide the best comparative market analysis and explain exactly how your home should be priced. Your property will have the best chances of selling quickly and for a higher price.

To further elaborate, a comparative market analysis (CMA) includes sales prices for similar homes nearby that have sold within the last month or so. Many Realtors also include prices for homes presently on the market to show you the competition, as well as homes taken off the market that were unable to be sold.

Other data Realtors use to determine a price range include how many days homes spent on the market at what price and the average difference between the listing prices and the sale prices on recently sold homes. The difference between the listing prices and the actual selling prices for homes in your region speaks volumes about the current real estate market. It is a strong indication of which direction the market is moving in. This will ultimately determine your asking price and whether you can get more than you originally anticipated or less. Remember that CMAs are not set in stone. Some agents will under value a home in hopes of creating demand. Others try to flatter clients with overly inflated estimates in order to get them to list but later suggest reducing the price. Conduct your own investigation so you know what to expect when your Realtor suggests a figure for your home upon further analysis.

If you want a second opinion, you can hire an impartial appraiser. An appraiser will help you pinpoint any updates you may have missed that could fetch you a better selling price. Valuating is not an exact science and every appraiser will have a

different opinion. If you are selling to buyers who are getting a mortgage, which is the majority of buyers, the lender will need an appraisal. If comparable home sales over the past months and current market conditions do not support your listing price, then your buyer will not get the mortgage.

It is critical that first time home sellers avoid inaccurate ways to price a home, such as using the home's assessed value or using an online valuation estimate like Zillow's "Zestimates". It is impossible for an online website based out of a certain city to accurately establish the price of a home in a completely different region. Looking up the value of your home online can be confusing because each site may have a different estimate with no date to support how or why they chose that number. Online calculations may include short sales, bank owned sales, or homes not in the same condition. Values can vary greatly. When coming up with a listing price, you do not want to gamble or guess.

The only true way to get an idea of your home's worth and what the list price should be for yourself is to compare your home with other homes in the area. Take on a buyer's perspective when scoping out other houses for sale or that have recently sold. You can use Trulia to familiarize yourself with what nearby homes are listed for and selling for. Just be sure to think of the information you gather as a ballpark guide rather than an exact number. Before you head out the door to visit open houses and compare your home with the rest of the town, you need to know what to look for.

Every house is different, so analyzing comparisons will require some detective work. As a first time home seller formulating your own opinion, you will want to take note of what similar homes have that yours does not, as well as what your home has that others lack. Take note of square footage, as this is important to most buyers. When it comes to pricing, the bigger the house, the bigger the price tag. Note age and condition as well. Newer homes do not necessarily sell for more, but condition relative to age tends to factor into the price. Try to stay within a five-year range when comparing your home with others. The condition of a house can make or break a deal, so you want pay attention to other homes' upgrades to assess how they affect value. Note all of the bedrooms and bathrooms in your home. The number of bedrooms and baths, and where they are located within the home, can have a radical affect on the price. Also, pay special attention to amenities. The more perks you have, the better. Walk-in closets, a gourmet kitchen, and an existing pool or spa add to the value of your home. Be sure to take note of lot size, as the precise acreage of your land correlates to price. Stay within 0.5 acres when you compare your lot with others.

Location is another notable, multifaceted factor to assess. Location relates to your state, city, neighborhood, and the placement of your house on the street. Note whether it faces toward any eyesores or busy traffic intersections. Does it have a nice view? Is there a freeway nearby that produces noise, or is there a tranquil lake behind it to enjoy? You will want to take all of these location nuances into consideration.

While compiling your own research, just observing what

homes are *not* selling at what price will be a great help in determining your own home's approximate worth. You will be better prepared to discuss the analysis and valuation of your home with a professional. You will be more informed and more confident in your ability to follow all of the proceedings your real estate agent will lead you through when establishing an accurate representation of your home's value.

Your Realtor can help you estimate who might want to buy your property and what else those buyers are looking at so you can compare your price against the competition. A knowledgeable Realtor will be able to factor in all of these obstacles in the context of your local market conditions, including whether it is a "buyer's market" or "seller's market" and whether house prices are rising or falling. You can do your research on the side, but listen to your expert's advice so your transaction is more likely to run smoothly and quickly from the beginning. If you have hired a Top Producer, you can take comfort in the fact that you are in the best hands of the business.

Most people have heard of the terms "buyer's market" and "seller's market", but few actually know what they mean and how they are determined. There are many factors that affect the real estate market, such as interest rates, investment growth, legislative changes, employment, and new construction. All of these factors influence the market and its behavior in some way or another.

A market's absorption rate is the best way to determine

whether a particular area is functioning as a buyer's market or a seller's market. The absorption rate is the rate at which homes sell in a given province. The higher the absorption rate, the faster properties are selling. Absorption rate is calculated by dividing the number of homes that have sold in the past month by the total number of homes listed for sale at the end of the month. If a region contains homes within two different price margins, you can determine the absorption rate specifically for homes within your price range. For example, if 6 properties sell in November for between $300,000 and $500,000, and 30 are still for sale at the close of the month, the absorption rate is 6/30, or 20%. If only 1 property sells and 15 remain, the absorption rate is 1/15, or 6%. This is the best method used amongst professionals to decide what kind market a house will be up against. Realtors refer to market types in terms according to who holds the advantage and how real estate is behaving.

A buyer's market is one in which there are more sellers and homes up for sale than there are buyers. Supply is greater than demand, so homes will have lower prices that are more attractive to buyers. This could be the result of high unemployment rates, fear of interest rate increases, or other factors that make people think twice about purchasing their first house or upgrading to a larger home. Buyers have the advantage in this market setting because they can typically take their time and explore all available options before buying. Buyers have more options because sellers are anxious to make a deal. Generally, prices tend to fall in a buyer's market. An absorption rate of 20% or lower is usually deemed a buyer's market seeing as homes sell relatively slow and the number of months of supply is high.

In a seller’s market, there are more buyers than there are homes for sale. Seeing as supply is less than demand, homes will have higher prices that are more desirable for sellers. The factors at play could be consistently low interest rates, high employment rates, or legislative changes that make it easier to purchase property. These conditions influence buyers to think it is a great time to invest in buying a home. The seller has the advantage is a seller’s market. Typically, house prices will increase as buyers are quick to make an offer in order to secure the property. Sometimes buyers will compete or bid for a property, raising the price above the seller’s expectations. An absorption rate of 20% or higher is typically deemed a seller’s market since homes tend to sell quickly and the number of months of supply is low.

Buying a home in a seller’s market is a competitive affair. Multiple offers made on the same house are not uncommon. Many of these offers may be above the asking price. Buyers can improve their negotiating position by having their finances in order, getting pre-approved for a mortgage, being prepared to act swiftly, and making a strong first offer. However, they are still at the mercy of the market’s escalating prices and bidding wars.

If your home is for sale in a seller’s market, this is the ideal time to reap the rewards of price appreciation. Generally, you will have more leverage in the negotiation process. However, keep in mind that, regardless of having a more favorable position in the market, it would be wise to be realistic and

remain open-minded when negotiating. A seller's market does not automatically mean that you will get full price, immediate sale, agreement to all terms, or instant satisfaction.

A "transitional market" is one in which marketing conditions do not necessarily favor buyers or sellers. A transitional period occurs between moves toward either a buyers' market or sellers' market. The market does not change overnight. There is a transitional period in between while housing supply and demand are approximately equal and pricing generally stabilizes.

A market cycle can last for any given length of time. Market conditions can last months and sometimes even years. It all depends on the driving forces behind the transition. Even for the best experts, predicting the timing and duration of changes is a big challenge. The only thing that is certain is that sooner or later the housing market will change. Neither parties can have the upper hand all the time, but accepting that change is inevitable and knowing what market you are selling in will give you an informed advantage as you price your home for the big sale.

Chapter 5: Listing And Showing The Home

After much deliberation, you have chosen to sell through a top producing agent and you have “staged” your home on a budget to maximize its worth and showing potential. You have agreed upon the best marketing strategy set by your Realtor according to local supply and demand, and you have established an appropriate price for your property. You are finally ready to list. You will need help if you are going to gain the exposure you need while listing to achieve a successful sale as a first time home seller.

Top Agents use listing services to gain maximum exposure for their clients’ properties. Your Top Producer will likely use a Multiple Listing Service (MLS). More than 80% of homes that sell are listed on their local Multiple Listing Service. As a home seller, the MLS gives you a lot more exposure to buyers. It is the best and most efficient way to list your home. Many buyers use real estate agents that also use the MLS as their main tool to locate homes for their buyers. If you are amongst the one in five sellers who choose not to sell through the MLS, you are crippling your odds of a successful sale within a desirable time frame.

Once you list on MLS, Realtors throughout the area are notified directly about your property and can start bringing prospects to you. Every real estate agent in your vicinity will be

able to see your home when you list on the MLS. If you choose this route, you will dramatically increase your chances of selling quickly. Keep in mind that if an agent on the MLS is able to help you find a buyer, you will have to pay a buyer's agent commission, which is typically 2% or 3%.

The "MLS" is the database owned by various real estate agents and their regional trade associations. MLS systems are the primary channel used amongst agents and brokerages to publicize listings. Every day, new listings are entered in the database and dispersed to all subscribing agents and services. Active marketing for your home through the MLS usually includes open houses, agent tours, and the inclusion of your property in the MLS's download to other real estate sites regularly used to search for properties.

Listings that are marketed without the benefit of the MLS are called "off-MLS listings", or "pocket listings". An off-MLS listing, as the term suggests, is marketed by a single agent to one or two select potential buyers. The marketing pool can be so shallow that, in some cases, other agents working for the same brokerage may be completely unaware that a fellow agent has an off-MLS listing.

Many real estate professionals believe that off-MLS listings are not in the best interest of the property owner. These listings do not get the exposure that properties on the MLS do, which can significantly decrease the number of offers those sellers will receive. So why do home sellers agree to do this? Some off-MLS listings are requested by people who need to maintain their

privacy or want to limit the exposure of their property to a particular individual or individuals with the financial means to purchase. This includes judges, prosecutors, celebrities, and so on. As a first time home seller, you will want to list your property on the local MLS to ensure it receives maximum exposure on multiple websites.

Once your Realtor has listed your home in the database, people will want to view your home. Showings for your property are essential to the selling process. Your Realtor will handle appointments upon your request, so have a drop box for a key ready. It is time to show off all your hard work, but keep the following considerations in mind.

As a seller, you do not want to make the common mistake of creating restrictions on when your home can be shown. You need to be flexible, even if it is inconvenient. Focus on the prize and be sure to clean and maintain your house before every visit. Buyers who want to view your home are going to contact your agent and expect to see it immediately. Make your home available every hour of the day. Otherwise, within a few days, prospective buyers will lose interest in your home and move on to another one. Also, studies show that buyers feel more comfortable and linger more when homeowners are not present during showings. Be sure to leave the house when buyers visit and let your agent do your smooth talking for you.

When presenting your home, keep in mind the main methods for showing, which include open houses, private showings, and lock box showings. Open houses are great for sellers because

they can be assured that a good number of buyers can view the property, sometimes within a two or three-hour period. Open houses are open to anyone.

A buyer who attends your open house and likes your property may want to see it again privately. This is known as a private showing, which can be challenging for some sellers who are not maintaining the home's "staged" appearance. Try to reserve private showings for serious prospects who need more time to take a closer look. They are making a huge decision, so it is important they are able to investigate without feeling rushed.

Some sellers work during the day or their home for sale is vacant, which can make showing the home much easier. To make things easier for everyone involved, a lock box containing the house key should be installed on the front door. Agents can then use their local MLS key to open the lock box as needed. This is ideal for both the buyer and seller in terms of availability.

Homeowners who are serious about selling their homes should be ready for anything. Always keep your home neat and tidy in its "staged" condition. You want to make a good impression every time a potential buyer steps through the door. Buyers may have ideas for improvements, so inform your Realtor that you are open to suggestions. Showings in general, especially private showings, may be inconvenient, but they may also lead to offers.

Chapter 6: Managing and Settling The Offer

Every strategy you have implemented thus far in this guide has been leading up to this moment. This is the moment you have been waiting for. You have a purchase offer on your property. Should you accept the offer? Deciding on an offer and setting the terms of the settlement are often the hardest parts of the selling process, but they are also the most exciting. You may choose to accept an offer, reject it, or make a counteroffer. When you receive a buyer's offer, the buyer will submit a purchase agreement including some earnest money—a partial down payment—which is refundable if you decline. The purchase agreement will include the price being offered, how the buyer will pay for the property, and the date the transaction will be completed. Upon receiving an offer, you will want to review the following before making a decision.

The bid price. If the bid price is within 3% to 5% of you asking price, you have a great offer. Most agents will urge you to consider accepting such a great offer, unless you have another prospect that might make a higher bid. A buyer's ability to pay is essential. A buyer or their Realtor should be able to provide you with a lender qualification letter that proves the buyer is qualified to pay for the home.

Contingencies are another factor up for review. If a buyer makes an offer dependent on the sale of his or her own home, or

based on something in your house that needs fixing, it is up to you to decide if the buyer is being unrealistic. It is possible for buyer to be particular and ask for too much, so weigh the contingencies against the bid price.

As a seller, you may want to consider adding your own contingencies. Consider loan approval. Sometimes purchase agreements can be made based on the buyer being approved for a loan within a designated time frame. Usually they have thirty days or less. If you decide that you want to help finance the home, put all of the precise terms of your contract in writing.

Also, do not forget the contingency of property. Putting all agreements that involve the property in writing benefits both the buyer and seller. To elaborate, if the buyer stipulates that they will only buy the property if the roof is repaired or the furniture comes with it, you should include this is the agreement. Be sure to include the highest price you have agreed to pay for repairs in the purchase agreement.

Now that you know what factors to consider, how you choose to handle your offer is important. So how do you respond? How do you protect your interests without sending buyers running for the hills? The first thing to remember is that all offers are good due to the fact that a buyer has chosen your home over all others on the market. Any offer should be taken as an extreme compliment, regardless of how high or low it might be. The hard part is deciding if you should accept the offer.

As a seller, you always have three main options. First, you can accept the offer. Second, you can reject the offer, which

effectively tells the buyer off. Or third, you can counteroffer. Many sellers will instinctively want to counter all offers. Wise sellers are more cautious when making this decision.

Many sellers think that making a counteroffer is a natural part of negotiation procedure during the sale process, but what many fail to realize is that they are actually rejecting the buyer's offer and then presenting a new one in its place. The problem with this is, the second you give the buyer a chance to pause and reconsider their proposal, you run the risk of losing the buyer entirely.

Successful sellers have learned to ask themselves if it will be worth it to counteroffer. In many cases, the risk is simply not worth the reward.

If you are forced to make a counteroffer, consider the following negotiation strategies. Strategy consideration number one is attempting to put yourself in the buyer's shoes. Try to understand the buyer's position. A negotiation is never a one way street because there are always different perspectives involved. In order to reach the point of a successful sale, both parties must feel that they are receiving a good value. Learn as much about the buyer as you can, including their background and their reasons for making their initial offer. By doing this, you may be able to find a common ground that can lead to a smooth sale.

The second strategy is to use the "give and take" technique. When making a counteroffer, think in terms of what you want and what you might be willing to sacrifice in order to make the

sale happen. For instance, if you are asking for a higher price, can you help the buyer pay for their closing costs or maybe pay points to help them obtain lower payments? Unwilling first time sellers often make the mistake of not compromising, which costs them the sale in the end.

Thirdly and lastly, emphasize the positives. When you write your counteroffer, you may want to emphasize the areas that you do agree on before you start requesting modifications. Point out all of the details of the original offer you find acceptable. This might include the closing date, the possession date, the price, the down payment, the financing type, contingencies, inclusions and exclusions, or even something as simple as the amount of the earnest money deposit.

Take the time to evaluate each offer and create a negotiating strategy with the help of your real estate agent. An unemotional analysis of the market and of your needs as a seller will put you far ahead of your competition. Your Top Agent will be able to negotiate on your behalf and proceed with a strategy that you approve of, relieving you of unneeded stress if things heat up. There are many opinions out there, so come up with your own negotiation strategy.

Do not make the mistake of letting your ego get in the way when negotiating. Too many sellers take the process personally and lose out on creating a win-win scenario. It is a business transaction, so keeping your ego out of the equation and putting your head back into it is absolutely mandatory for success.

Selling your house is most likely one of the largest financial transactions you will undertake in your lifetime. The decisions

you make when agreeing upon a price with a buyer will have a great impact on how much money you actually walk away with. If you want a more cut-throat strategy, discuss it with your Realtor and see if it would be a good idea based on the kind of buyers you are dealing with. Here are some “hardball” negotiating techniques that will help you achieve top dollar for your home in any market.

Counteroffer at your listing price. As a seller, you probably will not want to agree to a potential buyer’s initial offer on your house. Buyers usually expect a back-and-forth negotiation, so their initial offer is almost always lower than what they are actually willing to pay and lower than your listing price.

At this point, most sellers will counteroffer with a price that is below their listing price because they are afraid of the sale slipping through their fingers. They want to seem flexible and open to negotiation in order to seal a deal. This strategy works in terms of getting the property sold, but it is not necessarily the best way to get the highest price, which is your goal as a first time home seller.

Instead of dropping your initial price to get closer to the buyer’s bid, counter at your list price. A buyer who is serious about purchasing will stay engaged and come back with a higher bid. Assuming you have priced your home appropriately from the start, countering at your list price says that you know what your house is worth and that you have every intention of getting the money you deserve.

Buyers may be surprised at this strategy and some will be

turned off by your unwillingness to cooperate and walk away. However, you will also avoid wasting your time on the buyers who try to low-ball sellers, and who are not so interested in buying your house as they are in getting a deal.

If you really want to play hardball, you can try a negotiation tactic that is more extreme than countering at your list price. Reject the buyer's offer and do not counteroffer at all. To keep them in the game, you then request that they submit another offer. If they are truly interested and you have not turned them off, they will. This strategy sends a much stronger message that you know your property is worth what you are asking for. If the buyer does resubmit, they will have to make a better offer.

Additionally, if you do not counter, you are not tied down or locked into a negotiation with a specific buyer, and you can accept a higher bid if it comes along. For the buyer, knowing that others could come along and make better offers at any moment creates pressure to submit a competitive offer quickly, especially if they really want the house. This strategy can be very effective if house has only been on the market for a short period or if you have an open house approaching.

Another strategy is to hold off all offers until a certain date to try to create a bidding war. After the home is on the market and available to be shown, schedule an open house for a few days later. Refuse to accept any offers until after the initial open house is over. Potential buyers will assume they are dealing with real competition and may place higher bids as a result. You might only get a single offer, but the buyer is unaware of that. On the flip side, if you get multiple offers, you can return to the

top bidders and ask for their highest and best offers.

A good tactic is to put an expiration date and time on your counteroffer. When a buyer submits a bid you do not wish to accept, you counter their offer. You are then involved in a legally binding negotiation with that person, so you are not allowed to accept a better offer if it comes up. In the interest of selling your home as quickly as possible, consider assigning a short expiration date to your counteroffer. This method compels the buyer to make a decision so that you can either get your house under contract or move on.

You do not want to make the deadline so short that the buyers are turned off, but consider making it shorter than the typical time frame specified in your state's standard real estate contract. So, if the default expiration is four days, you might want to shorten it to two or three days.

Sellers must make fast decisions if they hope to close a deal quickly. While the counteroffer is outstanding, your property is effectively off the market. Many buyers will not place an offer when they see another negotiation is underway. If the deal falls through, you have added time to the number of days your property has sat on the market. The more days a home sits on the market, the less desirable it appears. It is therefore more likely that you will have to lower your asking price to reel in a buyer.

Agree to pay the buyer's closing costs, but increase the purchase price. It seems to have become standard practice for

buyers to request that the seller pay their closing costs. These fees generally add up to about 3% of the purchase price, covering what seems to be a lot of frivolous charges. Buyers will often feel financially drained from having to come up with a down payment, moving expenses, redecorating costs, and furniture, so dealing with closing costs becomes unappealing. Some buyers cannot even afford to close the deal at all without the seller's assistance for closing costs.

While a lot of buyers do not have or do not want to spend extra money up front to get into the home, they can often afford to borrow a little more. If you decide to help them with closing costs, the sale may be more likely to proceed.

When a buyer submits a bid and then asks you to pay their closing fees, counter with a willingness to pay but only at a higher purchase price, even if that means going above your listing price. Buyers often forget that when they ask the seller to pay their closing costs, the are effectively decreasing the home's sale price. As a seller, you will be able to see the bottom line clearly.

You can raise your asking price by enough to still get as much as your list price after paying the buyer's closing fees. For example, say your listing price is $200,000. If the buyer offers $190,000 with $6,000 toward closing costs, you would counter with an offer between $196,000 with $6,000 for closing and $206,000 with $6,000 for closing. The only catch is that the price plus any closing costs must be supported when the house is appraised. Otherwise, you will have to lower it later in order to close the deal because the buyer's lender will not approve an overpriced sale.

The key to implementing these negotiation strategies is offering a superior product. The home has to show well, be in excellent working condition, and offer something that the competition does not. This will earn you to upper hand in negotiations. If buyers are not excited about the house you are selling, they will be turned off by hardball tactics and most likely walk away.

When in doubt, just ask your Top Producer. Closing is the final step in this guide and it is so important for you as a first time home seller. If you have made it this far, odds are you have experienced a long journey and have worked hard to implement the appropriate methods described in order to reach the finish line. However, you have not crossed the finish line just yet. At this point in the game, you should have an exit strategy, or a moving plan, ready to go. Your Realtor will assist you with that if needed by suggesting movers. Closing entails a lot, but your Realtor will see you through the process.

A lot of sellers make the mistake of failing to complete a full set of disclosures prior to closing. They run the risk of paying a lot of money because they did not reveal it all. Be upfront and forthcoming about any of your home’s issues. Being honest will save you a lot of time and money, especially if the buyers should end up uncovering problems themselves, and they usually do. Do not forget to complete a full disclosure for your property.

Closing is when the home buyer and home seller fulfill all of the agreements made in the sales contract. A more literal translation would be that it is the transfer of money and

documents so that you, the seller, can transfer ownership and possession of the property free and clear to the buyer. You will pay off all loans you still carry on the house and pay all parties who contributed documents or services to facilitate the sale and the closing.

If you agreed to make repairs to the home or any other improvements, they should be completed before the closing. The exception would be if you and the buyer had a separate contract for the improvements to be completed at a later time.

There are numerous requirements and costs associated with closing that make it much more complex than just buying something at a store. Costs and requirements result from the sales contract, from traditional and local custom, and from local, state, and federal laws. A closing is also referred to as “settlement” because the seller, together with everyone else involved in the sale process, is “settling up” amongst all parties who provided services or documents to the transaction.

Closing usually involves the service of an escrow agent who acts as a third party that both the buyer and seller can trust and who coordinates the activities between each party according to the sale and purchase agreement. The duration of the steps required to close a real estate transaction is known as “escrow”.

Right before escrow is closed, the buyer and the seller receive a closing statement from the escrow agent, who lists the purchase price and all expenses associated with buying the property and how those expenses will be allocated between the buyer and seller. At closing, the expenses that either the buyer or

seller are responsible are called “closing costs”, which pay for closing itself rather than for the property or any bills associated with it. Your closing costs as a seller will include various expenses, some of which are the broker’s commission, the title search, any prepayment penalties accrued, and the certificate of satisfaction fee.

Do not make the mistake of overlooking any fees and expenses at closing. Home sellers throw away thousands of dollars by not requesting and confirming a list of fees beforehand. Your Realtor will review any estimated closing cost statements with you long before it is time to hand over the keys.

The main benefit to closing in escrow is that the parties and their representatives do not have to meet. They can just send the required documents to the escrow agent, who then makes sure everything is in order, then effects the settlement and the transfer. Escrow agents have the right to examine the title to make sure that there are not defects and that all conditions have been met. Once everything is in order, the escrow agent will send the seller the purchase money and record the deed for the buyer, including the mortgage if necessary.

Once all parties are satisfied and the contract is signed, a “closing date” is included. The closing date is normally a few weeks into the future to allow the buyer to get all their affairs in order. This also allows you, the seller, plenty of time to move out and finish any agreed upon projects. Once the contract closes, the buyer has the full rights to occupy the home, so you will need to make sure you are out by that time, or, if you have a problem, negotiate a working alternative recourse with the new

homeowner. Some sellers are able to rent back from buyers. In some instances, depending on which part of the country you are in, the buyer only gives the seller a day or two after closing to move. In any case, before you agree to anything you have to make sure it is in writing.

You will want to prepare by having a checklist ready for your moving plan. As soon as you can, book your actual moving date. Be sure to confirm your moving date, your new address, and establish new agreements with gas, electricity, water, and telephone companies. Book a moving van, or arrange for family and friends to help you move if needed. You should have already gotten a head start on sorting all of your things and packing them away in the preparation phase before you put your home on the market, so pack up anything else you want to take with you. A great tip for packing is to make a scaled floor plan of your new place and use color coded stickers. Use a different color for each room and put the stickers on your furniture and boxes. That way those helping you move will know where everything needs to go and everything will already be in the space to which they belong.

Do not forget to set up insurance coverage for your new home, if applicable. If you are moving into a rented residence, you will have already signed a written tenancy agreement and paid a deposit. Stay alert and be aware of safety issues when moving into any new place. Check all of the doors, windows, and locks. Make sure smoke alarms are functional and you have an emergency escape plan in the event of a fire. You may have covered all of your bases, but others are not always keen on doing the same. Try to have fun and get creative by unpacking

and arranging your things. Bask in your security and relax knowing you have been successful in such a huge undertaking that at first seemed so confounding. Now you know that it is possible.

Conclusion

Reaching closure and achieving maximum profit for your home is subject to many different variables, which is why it is critical that you have someone fighting in your corner. Your Realtor will be able to provide you with the best strategy in each step of the selling process, from how you choose to present your home to how you will negotiate terms and offers at the closing. The best method to achieve the best outcome is subjective to a number of factors, including what situation you are in and what conditions are at play. Use this advice to your advantage and set a guideline as you conduct your own standpoint.

This guide has taken you through all of the essentials involved in selling your home for the first time, including things to consider before you sell, ensuring the house is ready for potential buyers, and what to do to speed the sale of your home. The home selling process can be complicated and confusing, but with the aid of a top producing Realtor and the tips and techniques that have brought to light, it is possible to sell your home successfully. If you follow these professional guidelines, you will put yourself in a better position, giving yourself the optimal chances allowable in this fight. so understand that it will take hard work and determination every step of the way.

Everyone wants to turn a profit, but there are many things to consider that directly influence the outcome of your success in

real estate, including how a home is presented and what kind of market a home is sitting in. The real estate market can be intimidating and unfair, but navigating through it with a Top Realtor using advanced tools to ensure your success will be the best decision you make. Not everyone can sell a home and turn a profit in a particular market setting due to certain conditions, but you can be sure that, if you follow the advice provided, you will receive the maximum price attainable for your home.

As you have been shown, marketing and selling homes successfully requires thoughtfulness, planning, and creativity. The advice, examples, and tools presented in this guide will advance your efforts and abilities as a newcomer in the real estate world. You can continue with your life with a cushion of security to fall on when times are, shall we say, less than favorable. It is a comforting thought knowing that your will is the way. You can settle down in a new house with new neighbors or travel to another land and meet people from an entirely different culture. The choice is yours to make. You can do anything you set your mind to, so you can sell your home with the right information. You now have that information.

Thank you for reading "The Smart First-Time Home Seller's Guide".

I sincerely hope that you received value from this book and gain a better understanding of how you can profit the most when selling your home.

If you enjoyed this book, please take a moment to share your thoughts and leave a review on Amazon, even if it's only a few lines; it would make all the difference and would be very much appreciated!

As a gift for reading this book, I would like to share a bonus guide with you. This guide is about "Five Common Mistakes to Avoid when Selling a Home". The information in this guide itself can help you save thousands of dollars.

I hope you will enjoy it.

Thomas.K.Lutz

Bonus: Five Common Mistakes to Avoid When Selling a Home

Don’t ask for too much

A costly mistake home sellers make is when they list the home for too high a selling price. Buyers usually will not buy homes which are listed above the common market value for homes selling in that particular geographical area. The seller lists the home for 10% above the market price for a home under one million dollars is pricing the home too high. The home listed for 25% above market value is way overpriced and will not sale.

The consequences from the seller’s trying sale their home for too high a price can be very detrimental. The home could sit on the market for months and potential buyers will be drawn away because they will perceive there is something wrong with the home and that is why it isn’t selling. Generally buyers will not look at a home that is overpriced because it is not in their list of wants for their potential dream home; this is another disadvantage of putting a home on the market for too high a price. The house sits for 3 months, 6 months or 1 year. Eventually, the seller will have to lower the price repeatedly and in the end result the house may sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars below the price other houses are comparatively selling in the same neighborhood. Here is an example of this very costly process happening.

This story was taken from **http://homebuying.about.com/od/sellingahouse/a/overprice.ht**
This particular seller, of a Spanish style home, didn't interview any real estate agents before she picked one to sell her home. She picked the first one she saw off the internet because "he looked like such a nice guy." This real estate agent was from another city and he didn't know the prices homes were selling for in the seller's particular market. He promptly listed the home for 1.3 million dollars; the home sat for 90 days and the listing expired. The seller enlisted another Real Estate agent (from another town) who put the home on the market for 1.1million dollars. Months passed and no solid offers were made on the house. Then the house was re-priced below $900,000 dollars and 1 year now passes and the house still hasn't sold. By now the seller is exhausted and calls in the final real estate agent who with the seller lists the house at $625,000 dollars and the house sells immediately for cash. The sad result was other homes in this area had sold for $835,000 dollars but unfortunately this overpriced home sat on the market for too long and the market had softened. Ultimately the seller lost $210,000 dollars in profits on the sale of their home.

Just because a seller makes pricey upgrades to their homes (granite countertops, stainless steel appliances or installing an island in their kitchen) doesn't mean a buyer is willing to pay out the extra money for these improvements when other homes in the neighborhood are selling for lower prices. The buyer will gravitate toward the lower priced home especially when the home meets all their needs and at a much lower selling price.

Another mistake home sellers make in over pricing a home is when they ignore the way Real Estate agents value the selling price of a home. Let's say the seller picks a number just because the number is a nice round figure and sounds good to the seller. They may have read of a home selling for a healthy figure in their area so they figure their home is worth X amount more than this house sold for and list it for that price. Chances are slim they will sell their overpriced home because they didn't do their homework and ask a Real Estate agent or an Appraiser to make a realistic appraisal of the value of their home. They just chose a random number they thought they could sell their home for. Real Estate agents will ignore an overpriced listing when the seller is being unreasonable in refusing to lower the price of their home. Agents will work with reasonable home sellers not unreasonable ones. The Home seller will miss out on the knowledge, expertise and experience the Real Estate agent could have brought to the selling process This is detrimental when the seller refuses to lower the price on a house listed for too high of a selling price.

Don't try and sell the house on your own unless you know what you are doing.

A top selling mistake homeowners make when selling their home is when they try and sell the home without the help of a Real Estate agent. The home seller usually doesn't have the experience of knowing what the going prices of homes are selling in their area nor do they have the experience to negotiate the best selling price for their home when the selling process reaches that stage.

Generally “For sale by owner homes” sell for $41,000 on average lower than homes sold using a Real Estate agent and the homes take 19 days longer to sell. Buyers aren’t willing to pay higher prices on homes that are being sold by the owner because there is no Real Estate agent involved. Unless the seller has sold 6 or more homes or in their neighborhood homes are selling within 1 or 2 days it really is not advisable for a home seller to try and sell their home on their own.

The Real Estate agent can handle problems that come up during the selling process that they have encountered before where if the non-experienced home seller runs into these obstacles they will not have the experience to work through the problems. Another error (when they try and sell their home on their own) is they have to deal with all the potential buyers one on one and this can take a heavy toll on the home seller. The Real Estate agent also has the perception to weed out people who are not interested in buying the home but just want to “look” at it. The home seller may not pick up on these type of “buyers.” Disclosure laws run plentiful these days and if the home seller isn’t knowledgeable in the intricacies of these laws they can take a lot of liability on themselves. Unless the home seller knows a lawyer or a friend who can guide you through the legal process, it would be advisable to hire a Real Estate agent who is very well versed in the disclosure laws.

Selling a “house by owner” leaves the seller in a very negative circumstance because the odds are statistically stacked against the home owner. The owner may perceive they have good

marketing skills and won’t need a realtor. This is not true because the home owner who is inexperienced at selling his home will run into many marketing obstacles (he doesn’t know how to work through) that a realtor has already experienced and knows how to navigate.

This lesson is taken from **http://www.greatcoloradohomes.com/blog/top-5-mistakes-when-selling-your-home.html** this young couple decided to sell their first home with no prior experience. They felt they had satisfactory marketing skills to sale the house they didn’t. They decided to owner finance the house; just to get rid of it. The process ended up costing them much more time and money than they thought. They regretted that decision for years to come.

Don’t neglect to fix things that are broken

The homeowner should never be in such a big hurry to sale their house that they neglect needed repairs that are obvious. Additionally, letting any hidden repairs go will be a big mistake. The homeowner will benefit immensely to fix the repairs in their home before they put their house on the market to sale. The worst thing a home seller can do is to neglect repairs and have potential buyers walk through the house and notice the needed repairs. When this happens the buyer will be unwilling to pay a higher price for the house and he will offer a lower price. He will also ask for credit from the seller to cover the range of the potential repairs and this could cost the seller many unexpected expenses.

The entry hall is the gateway to the rest of the house and is the first area the buyers will notice where repairs have been neglected. Loose door knob, hole in the front door screen or is there a hole in the front hallway wall? These may seem like little issues but these little issues can add up to a home not selling. The buyer will be wondering what is broken behind the scenes and what type of condition the rest of the house is in. The buyer will be looking for other repairs needed throughout the rest of the house. The buyer sees that cracked window and the crack in the kitchen floor he may be thinking there is structural issues in the foundation of the house. The buyer may notice water stains on the bedroom ceiling could this be signs of a roof leak? These repair signs speak (to the buyers) that the house is full of problems and the house repeatedly loses potential buyers because of neglected repairs.

The homeowner should do a walkthrough of his home before he puts it on the market like he was walking through it the first time. He may notice the holes in the wall, the gutters leaking. Those doorknobs are loose and what about the leak under the kitchen sink? The hardwood floor around the refrigerator is rotted and warped. Better for the homeowner to find these repair needs instead of the buyer or real estate agent walking through the house.

The home sellers could find themselves in a situation where they may have to enter into Real Estate repair negotiations with the buyer. Then you get into what is reasonable and not reasonable in repair expectations on both sides. The seller thinks the repair requests are unreasonable and the buyer refuses to enter into a contract because the seller won’t accept the buyers repair

requests. Naturally the buyer will back out of the deal and the sale of the home is lost. The next buyer comes along and enters into a second round of Real Estate negotiations with the seller. This buyer is even more demanding in what repairs in the house he expects the seller to agree to. The seller refuses to agree to these repair expectations. Another sell lost because the seller did not fix the items in the house that needed repair before the house went on the market.

http://www.thestar.com/business/personal_finance/2013/06/09
records a valuable lesson for home sellers to fix all parts of their home before they try and sell it. There was a couple in Canada who had built a home in 1997 and decided to sale it after living in it for seven years. The buyer agreed to buy the home for $1.995 million there were repairs that weren't made to the house before it was put up for sale. The repairs were as follows: there was a broken window, flue caps for the chimney and some minor electrical repairs. But there were major repairs that were needed to the roof. The roof was flat instead of sloped in two areas and the water was pooling in the flat areas of the roof which could lead to leaks. The buyer and seller agreed on a conditional contract that all the repairs would be fixed ahead of time before the house was sold. The house sold and three years later the buyer noticed that there was a leak in the dining room beneath the flat roof. The new owner took the original owners to court and sued them for $20,000 dollars to replace the flat roof with a sloping roof. The judge ruled against the new owner and the sellers were off the hook. But the point is that if the sellers would have fixed the flat roofs before putting the house on the market they could have saved the trouble of negotiating a Real Estate repair contract. They also would have avoided being sued

and having to pay legal fees for ending up in court. They also tarnished their reputation as honest people to deal with in a home selling situation. So it's advisable to have the home inspected before putting on it the market and fixing all the problems that need attention ahead of time.

Don't get emotionally involved in the sale of your home

One of the common mistakes homeowners should avoid when selling their homes-never become emotionally attached to a house when you put it up for sale. Distance yourself by making changes within and outside the home that will attract the most buyers and bring top dollar in your sale. True you created a lot of priceless memories in that house and you put your own personality into every corner of the house. But this doesn't mean the buyer will share in your taste of customized furniture throughout the house or your choice of lemon yellow paint in the bedroom because it's a favorite color. Painting the rooms in neutral colors will go a long way in attracting buyers to your home.

Home sellers may have grown up in a house since early childhood and will have a very hard time emotionally letting go when it comes time to sale their home. There are many drawbacks to not "letting go" of a home when the time comes to sale it. The owners have put their personalized touch in the house over a long period of time and tend to have a hard time detaching from their home and looking at it as a "product". When home sellers insist on putting their homes on the Real Estate market for a higher listing than they are really worth, they

are headed for trouble because they aren't ready to sell their home.

Classic signs of a homeowner being emotionally attached to his homes at selling time will surface when he isn't willing to negotiate with the buyer on the selling price of the home. The seller will not listen to any suggestions the Real Estate agent makes to improve the appearance of the house to increase the chance of selling the home for the highest dollar value. Let's say the Real Estate agent walks through the house with the seller. There are personal photos or sports memorabilia crowding the walls at every turn and the Real Estate agent suggests to remove all these items. But the seller refuses to remove these items because this is their home and they don't want let go of the customized touch they worked so hard to achieve over the years. The seller is refusing to detach themselves from their home and look at it as if the home was a product.

In1996 there a home seller in Colorado, who became too emotionally involved in the sale of his house. The home sat on the market for months with little activity from buyers and there seemed to be no interest in his home. The seller of the home chose this particular Real Estate agent because his company guaranteed if the home did not sale the company would buy it.

The seller was very emotionally involved in the sale of the home and wouldn't let the Real Estate agent do his job. Finally, the home seller was so disgusted with the lack of progress on the sale of the home, that he called the Real Estate agent and told him to take the home off the market and to have the Real Estate

Company buy the home. The Real Estate agent tried to explain to the seller that the company would buy the home for below its market value and the homeowner would lose money on the sale .The seller wouldn't listen and insisted the company buy the home so he could get it sold. The agent finally convinced the seller to leave the house on the market. The home finally sold but if the seller wouldn't have listened to the agent he could have lost thousands of dollars on the sale of his home. He was too emotionally involved in the sale of the house and it almost cost him a lot of money.

Refusing to negotiate on the sale price of the home

The final mistake home sellers make is when they refuse to negotiate the selling price of the home. The seller puts their home up for sale and they list it for the full selling price. A buyer comes along and tours the house and absolutely falls in love with the home. The buyer makes a full price offer on the house. The seller rejects the full price offer and gives the buyer no reason why the offer was refused. The seller will not even negotiate the price of the home. By refusing the full price of the house and not leaving room for negotiating on the price of the home the buyer moved on and the seller lost the sell.

Seller puts an older home on the market for sale. The buyer does a walkthrough of the house and likes the house. The buyer talked the seller down $4,000 on the price of the house. There was an inspection done and the house needed $10,000 worth of repairs. The buyer asked the seller to reduce the price of the house by $9,000 dollars so the buyer could cover the cost of the repairs. The seller refused and told the buyer they would rather

take the house off the market than lower the price by $9,000 dollars. They refused to negotiate anymore with the buyer. The buyer moved on and the seller lost a sale because they wouldn’t negotiate the selling price of the home any further.

This final example of a seller losing the sale of their home because they wouldn’t negotiate is taken from **http://www.zillow.com/advice-thread/First-Time-Buyer-Seller-Refuses-to-Negotiate-on-Price/391883/** this first time home buyer found a home they really liked. The selling price was listed at $119,000 dollars and the buyer made a healthy offer of $110,000 dollars. The seller rejected the offer and came back with a counter offer of $119,000 dollars. The house was purchased for $110,000 dollars in 2009 and had been depreciating ever since. Upon the inspection other issues were detected but the owners still refused to come down from their $119,000 dollar price. They lost the sale of the home because they wouldn’t negotiate with the buyer on the selling price of their home!

Getting in The Right State

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Introduction

Picture this:

While waiting in the patio, you look at the watch on your wrist and see that it's already 5:42 in the morning – over 10 minutes past the time you both agreed on. To accompany you on your morning jog, your friend is supposed to be here. You get flustered, so you end up calling her.

Upon calling her, you realize you're the one at fault. The routine didn't push through because of you. As you weren't in the right state during the phone conservation the other day, you failed to hear her say that you were supposed to drop by her house first.

- ***Starting the Day Right***

How you start your day is vital in achieving the right state. As you behave according to your mind's condition, before officially setting off to reality, why not consider going in the right direction during your first few moments?

Among the things you can do are the following: going for a walk, eating a satisfying meal for breakfast, noting down your priorities, sparing some meditation time, and taking a shower. Especially if you have a number of tasks scheduled, going out of your way to not be in a feisty state for the next few hours is suggested.

Here are three questions that you should ask yourself to be in the right state:

- *“Are yesterday’s problems already resolved?”*

Reason: It won’t be challenging to have a good day if you’re certain that problems from yesterday have already been taken care of. Be glad if you don’t have anything to worry about. On the other hand, if you have a concern that needs your attention, it’s best to be familiar with it beforehand instead of being caught off guard upon realizing it.

It’s fun to start the day with a clean slate. Life can beat you heavy enough even without you carrying all that excess baggage.

- *“What are the things I should be looking forward to?”*

Reason: To be in the right state, learn to be appreciative. Once it hits you that there’s an interesting person who’ll stop by the workplace at 2 in the afternoon, for instance, you’ll have something to anticipate and you won’t easily be bothered by little things.

It’s nice to have something to look forward to each day. It makes you smile upon waking up each morning, and it helps you see the world in a positive light.

- *“What do I plan to accomplish today?”*

Reason: Not being aware of how your day unfolds is a factor that throws you off your game. As you can’t figure out what your plans are, you tend to be all over the place and be frustrated about it. However, if your priorities have been sorted, you know exactly what to do.

Some function better without a structure or without a plan, but that’s more of an exception rather than the rule. Have a plan for each day to be more prepared of how you’re going to face the day.

Your state determines how your day unfolds. You’re the one who conditions your mind as to how you treat other people and you come up with the basis on how you’ll interact with others as well as how you’ll be as a person. Only after seeing how essential being in the right state is will you be able to understand why it’s necessary for you to be in the right state, and how it’ll affect not only the people around you, but yourself as well.

Chapter 1 – What is State?

- Are you enjoying a happy life?
- Are you able to interact with others in a positive manner?
- Are you aware that certain matters are worth ignoring?
- Are you able to discern what's right from what's wrong?
- Are you productive enough to take pleasure in a whole day of work?
- Are you currently in the right state?

These are among the questions you need to be asking yourself to realize whether you're in the right state or not. Before anything else, however, find out more about what this "state" is.

Definition of State

State is defined as a stage of psychological well-being, or the absence of a mental disorder. Looking from the "holism" or "positive psychology" point of view, your state may take into account an individual's capacity to enjoy his or her life and produce a balance between life efforts and activities to achieve a good psychological spirit.

Also, state can be identified as how you express your emotions as well as how you successfully adapt to a series of demands. It includes your psychological, emotional, and social welfare. It has an effect on how we think, act and feel and helps establish how people relate to others, deal with stress, and make choices. Your state is vital at every stage of life, from childhood to adolescence and all throughout adulthood.

Through the direction of your life, if you experience mental state problems, your mood, thinking, and behavior could be influenced. Various factors play a part in mental state concerns. These factors include:

- Biological aspects e.g. genes or brain chemistry
- Family history of mental health problems
- Life events such as abuse or trauma

Problems regarding your state of mind are quite conventional. Remember that assistance is always available. If you need help, learn to be verbal about it and don't hold back from reaching out to others. As people with mind problems can get better, a lot are known to improve fully and completely, so you need to act on the matter instantaneously.

- ## *Five Common Types of Mental States*

1. Attention

Attention, as a cognitive process, is referred to as your ability to acknowledge your resources. It is the relationship between you and your consciousness. The most determining factors of your outlook in life are the matters you choose to dwell on.

2. Contact

Your availability is a mental state that characterizes how you allow yourself to be affected by random situations. If you're unreserved, you tend to be more vulnerable to possible distractions; if you're occupied, on the other hand, you're able to focus more on the current circumstances.

3. One-Pointedness

One-pointedness, or ekaggata in Buddhism, is among the most important mental states. It is your drive to keep up with your priorities. Despite having multiple matters to deal with, if the trait is in you, you won't easily be swayed to an unintended direction.

4. ***Perception***

Your ability to organize then interpret is termed as perception. There may be various factors that come into play without your consent but how they affect you depends on your approach.

5. ***Volition***

Volition refers to your willingness to undertake a challenge. Often, you may find yourself assigned to tasks you feel you could be better off without. In such a case, you make decisions whether you'll be bold enough or be resistant. Either way, it's up to you. If not in the right state, your choice might not be as beneficial compared to when you have a clear head.

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- ## *The Plus Side of Being in the Right State*

There's a plus side in being in the right state. Benefits include being more conscious of your presence along with your surroundings. The number of good things that come with a sharp and conditioned mind is limitless. When you're at your best, make sure that you embrace it.

By being in the right state, some of the things you can enjoy include:

- A boosted brainpower
- A sense of calmness
- An increased number of happy chemicals
- An improved productivity
- An improved self-confidence
- Better relaxation
- Better sex drive
- More creative juices

- Predictable sleep patterns
- Reduced stress levels

These things that you can enjoy won’t be attainable if you’re not in the proper state. Hungry? You can’t relax. Sleepy? You can’t work… among other things.

- ***The Perils of Not Being in the Right State***

Not being in the right state leaves you in peril. It leaves you with additional problems. You’d mistake it as the other way around but actually, it’s your mind that dictates how you’d feel the entire day. If you don’t think your mental condition plays a vital role in your daily activities, that’s where you’re wrong.

By not being in the right state, you’ll be in danger of:

- Addiction (alcohol, drugs, or sex)
- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Cyclothymia
- Dementia
- Over-fatigue
- Schizophrenia
- Self-esteem complications

• Chapter 2 – What Affects Our States?

Endless factors keep you out of the right state. Mostly, all of these revolve around your environment and the people who are with you. Your loved ones, colleagues, and the random passersby you encounter? Their actions are what drive you towards the mentality you're currently in. If they are, your sanity's kept intact. On the other hand, when your mind's laden with a variety of emotions, you are unable to think clearly to the point that when things work contrary to your expectations, you're almost implying that it's your doing.

• *At Home*

When you're just at home, it's important that you're in the right state. As the place is supposed to make you feel liberated in being who you are, you should recognize the little things that could hinder you in any way. Try not to let them get the best of you and cause you to act contrary to how you usually do. You may not have the choice when people in your surroundings affect you but the choice to react with a collected and rational head is yours.

SCENARIOS	THE CORRECT REACTION	YOUR REACTION
1. Your sibling dismisses your attempts of initiating an argument.	You acknowledge the fact that she's not in the mood to argue.	You think it's you who's being either unreasonable or disrespectful.
2. You think you're right as your little brother isn't the elder between you.	You should consider viewing his opinions.	You insist you're right.

3. Your father ignores you so you think he's angry.	To him, confide the fact that you find it strange that he isn't talking to you.	You begin ignoring him.
4. Your mother immediately pins the blame on you.	You propose your side of the story.	You sulk and hold it against your mom for a while.
5. Your uncle suddenly changes the channel while you're tuned in to your favorite show.	Politely ask him to change the channel back as you're watching your favorite show.	You walk away.

Why Are Your Reactions Flawed?

1. Keep in mind that in spite of not being handed the chance to initiate an argument, you're not the one who's at fault.
2. As being older doesn't make you inerrant, you should hear what your little brother has to say first. If he's right, try to be level-headed and acknowledge it.
3. As you're not in the right state, you may think the simplest things that go differently than usual means you've done something wrong. For all you know, your dad may just be busy.
4. Just because your mom says you're wrong doesn't mean you are. Based on previous events, she may have decided that the mistake was yours. With the current situation, however, she doesn't so filling her in is a better approach.
5. Your uncle may not be aware that the show that was on TV was your favorite. He may not even be anticipating a particular one that he had to change the channel on purpose. Rather than feel bad about the incident, talk to him.

- ***During Your Free Time***

Whether it's something minor as embarrassingly humming the wrong words to a popular ballad, referring to your friend, John as Marcus, or losing almost $2500 as a result of providing the incorrect bank account number and other grand things, signs that you are committing avoidable mistakes mean that you're not in the right state. You're not even put under any pressure yet you can't think with a clear head.

SCENARIOS	THE CORRECT REACTION	YOUR REACTION
1. A stranger cuts you in line.	You tell him off and insist that you're ahead of him.	Though he's wrong for doing so, you just let him stay in front of you.
2. As you watch your favorite TV show, you can't grasp what's going on in an episode.	You replay the episode until the events are clear to you.	Despite not grasping what went on, you just proceed with the next episode.
3. During Saturday chess sessions, you're in a losing streak.	You feel bad but are looking forward to another round.	You accept defeat, thinking that sometimes you things don't go your way.
4. The waitress delivers you the wrong order.	You complain and insist that you'll be delivered the right food you ordered.	You just settle for the food given to you.
5. While shopping	You continue looking	You purchase a

for one, there's no shirt that can fit.	for a shirt that fits; the next time around, you'll do it elsewhere.	loose or a tight shirt anyway.

Why Are Your Reactions Flawed?

1. If a stranger cuts you line, politely remind him that as it's you who acquired the place, you deserve to check out your items before him. As you're not supposed to waiver, wrong. Regardless of it being an isolated case, bothering to defend your stand is the better approach.
2. Considering it's your favorite TV show, you should be paying attention and while you're at it, you're supposed to enjoy. By proceeding to the next episode, it's as if you're anticipating the end; you're simply watching how things turn out.
3. Though it's not wrong to lose graciously and be a good sport, there are things that can work in your favor. Regarding some matters, luck isn't the lone element that comes into play; instead, outcomes depend on your strategies. In chess? It sure isn't.
4. Settling for what you're given especially if you specified something else is somehow accepting the faulty order of things. As you paid for the service, you should be served the food you ordered.
5. Mindlessly, you continue with the purchase. You might not even need a shirt that isn't your exact size. Though you had a choice, you chose not to make it.

- ***At Work***

It's best to be in the right state while at work. Not only do you have to deal with colleagues and superiors, you also deal with something that supports you on a daily basis. It's better if you treat everybody the proper way – which you'll only achieve if you're in the right state.

SCENARIOS	THE CORRECT	YOUR REACTION

		REACTION
1. Though you were employed as a typist, your superior makes you clean his office.	Politely, you should question him about it.	You got scared. You clean the office anyway.
2. You overlook financial calculations.	You should modify your previous errors.	You proceed with your progress.
3. Your coworker, who has been dinged for his tardiness, is once again late.	You should bring it to his attention and tell him that he should try being punctual from then on.	You just let it pass; after all, he's the one who'll be scolded, and not you.
4. You failed in following a protocol.	You should go back and fix the mess you've made.	You cross your fingers hoping nobody notices.
5. The instructions weren't clearly relayed to you.	You should be humble and ask for assistance.	You assume and base steps according to what you find easiest.

Why Are Your Reactions Flawed?

1. Your superior may be the one in authority but only if you're in the right state will it dawn on you that assigning you to tasks unrelated to the job you signed up for shouldn't be acceptable.
2. As you know it's wrong, you have to go back and correct your errors. Otherwise, the result will be wrong from then on.
3. Regardless of him confiding reasonable points for his tardiness, remind him that what he's doing could get him fired. By covering, it's almost as if you're passing on some encouragement.
4. Despite the fact that it's unlikely that anybody will notice, it's still your duty to work with integrity. If you're not in the right state, you

tend to go for the easiest route to take.

5. Assumptions often lead to avoidable mistakes. Though you may pose as a simpleton asking questions that seem to have obvious answers, have the courage to dare anyway.

- ***Five Kinds of Personalities When You're in the Right State***

Being in the right state allows you to showcase the best of your personality. In turn, you also see the best in others. You tend to be more accommodating, collected, expressive, and open-minded. Hardly anything can get you riled up. Even if there are minor distractions around you, you're not prone to giving in. As you are not consumed by heavy and negative emotions, you can focus on being as pleasant as you can.

1. ***Convivial***

When you're a convivial person, you're easily desirable. Due to your bubbly and cheery nature, random individuals won't be disappointed upon approaching you. In times of gatherings, you're not likely to be left behind as almost everybody won't forget to send you invitations.

2. ***Indefatigable***

Another good thing about being in the right state is being almost indestructible. You recognize the fact that you have limitless potentials. After discovering that you excel in a feat, chances are you'd want to engage in more challenges.

3. ***Magnanimous***

With a clear head, you are more charitable, forgiving, and understanding, even if the other party is undeserving of your

compassion. You're willing to overlook previous misdoings by making it a point to always do more.

4. ***Urbane***

As you're not focused on the bad side of things, you are well-mannered. You reciprocate the treatment of those who treat you right. In the case of you stumbling upon others, you gracefully tend to back away.

5. ***Versatile***

Apart from recognizing your capability of succeeding in multiple areas, you have no trouble believing that you are bold enough to accept even the most outrageous dares. Though you've already proven that you can participate in many fields, you remain optimistic for continuous learning.

- ## *What Happens When Your State Is Affected?*

Have you ever observed that the manner you see the world is very much reliant on your mental state? Can you still recall how upsetting or even distancing everything around you can possibly be if you are not in the best mood, and how efficient you've become the last time when you were really drained of energy?

- ## Mood Swings

When you aren't in the right state, you're troubled with mood swings. You suffer extreme bouts of emotional ups and downs and your perception of things tends to change rapidly. As you're dealing with a heavy matter, you experience inconsistency with how you behave. While these can sometimes

cause a positive impact on how events turn out, most of these mind swifts can be rather disruptive.

Basic Moods

Basic moods are what you normally feel on a day-to-day basis. It's no longer surprising if you feel one of these moods. However it's necessary to be able to control even these basic moods so that it's easier for you to get into the right state.

- Anger – the mood of being mad
- Anticipation – the mood you're in when looking forward to something
- Disgust – the mood of reaction to unpleasantness
- Fear – the mood of being afraid
- Indignation – the mood you're in when feeling you don't deserve the unfair treatment
- Joy – the mood you're in when you're happy
- Pity – the mood you're in upon feeling sorry for another
- Sadness – the mood you're in when things are going against your desires
- Surprise – the mood you're in when something unexpected happens
- Trust – the mood you're in when you feel confident about something

Social Interactions

As often it's the people you stumble upon that affect your state, social interactions matter. Especially if they are around as you both were put in a similar situation, it's up to you to get along with them. As they are the ones you're currently with, they hold the influence on your actions. In the case of you dealing with heavy issues concerning them, you may have to get over the awkward feeling. If you are graceless with how you face them, chances are you'll end up aloof having missed out on a load of possibly interesting moments with others.

Important Social Skills

- Beginning a conversation

Being sociable means you are being open to the idea of meeting people, especially if you have something interesting to say to a random person. Don’t be afraid to be the initiating end. Ask for that person’s name and don’t forget to be amiable.

- Effectively communicating feelings verbally

If, in a party, for instance, you’re feeling dehydrated, consider informing the host and maybe asking for a glass of water. Keeping your emotions locked up for fear of being demanding or of offending another is only counter-intuitive. Sooner or later, these feelings will be coming out. Instead of making the other end guess, try speaking up.

- Listening carefully to what the other has to say

Don’t forget to pay attention to the person you’re talking to. Let your focus be on what he’s saying and not on what you’ll be saying next. While at it, note that there are perspectives other than your own. By respecting different viewpoints, you are learning to blend with people.

- Understanding the difference between what is right and what is wrong

If an opinion was shared to you, regardless of the opinion-holder being dear to you, you should know better than to recognize it as the correct approach. Though the goal is to be likeable and meet a friend, leading another to the misconception of you believing in him is a different story.

Yes, you can always work alone, but it’s also good to be able to interact with other people. Some may not be too keen on making the first move with regard to socialization, so you might as well take the leap.

- ## According to Evolutionary Psychologists

Psychologists acknowledge the importance of evolutionary psychology in achieving the right state. As defined, the field is a scientific approach that examines a roster of characteristics including language, memory, and perspective. It plays a role in how you interact with others. You react and treat people based on the information you’ve already gathered along with how you were raised to interact.

- ## Random Fact: The Tragic Story of Sylvia Plath

Do you know who Sylvia Plath is? She was an American short story writer, poet, and novelist famous for her literary masterpieces that includes *Ariel, The Bell Jar,* and *Winter Trees*. This famous writer was known to have an affected state.

What caused her affected state? It was reported that she was severely depressed and was unhappy in her marriage. As she refused to seek clinical help, her mental health deteriorated.

Her end game? She was found to have died of carbon monoxide poisoning with her head in an oven.

Chapter 3 – Changing to the Right State

If you've observed that you're not in the right state, don't prolong the problem. As mentioned, not being as conditioned as necessary has disadvantages. Facing the unexpected is daunting. You aren't certain if what's coming is something to anticipate with happiness or is something you need to be worried about. To get past it, you must be all set when offered the chance to let go of any ill practices.

Though daring to brave new feats is far from easy, it's best to find the courage to move along. Moving forward may be stressful but remaining in your place doesn't promise you anything good. As soon as you can, dare to be an improved version of you. It may seem challenging but don't worry; you'll learn to cope eventually.

Reasons to Change into the Right State

If you can change into the right state, it means you can control your behavior. It is important that you are the one who gets to have the final say in how things turn around. Furthermore, you know exactly how to proceed. During the process, you're eliminating unnecessary problems. In cases of you being unprepared to face the obstacle ahead, you'll be troubled less.

- You are more objective.
- Your reasons aren't something you'd want to take back.

What Can Lead Us to the Right State?

There are different factors that can lead you to the right state. The most basic things we encounter are among the instruments we can use for the better. Read

on to understand how each factor can guide you.

- **Appreciation**

Appreciation can lead to the right state as it aids people in experiencing more optimistic emotions, savoring good encounters, enhancing their health, facing adversity, and forming strong relationships. By appreciating even just the little things, you end up getting familiarized with reality. Sometimes, you only have problems if you refuse to recognize the good that has been surrounding you all along.

- **Exercise**

Researchers believe that exercise brings out chemicals in your brain – endorphins – that make you feel happy and good. You tend to be physically stressed when you undergo a series of stretching, running, jumping around, lifting weights, and other activities. However, it's a good kind of fatigue. Frequent exercise can also raise your self-esteem and help you in sleeping, concentrating, looking, and feeling better.

- **Food**

The food you eat not only affects what you feel physically; it can massively impact the manner you feel and perform mentally. How does it affect your state? Simple: If you're hungry and you're not nourished with proper food, you don't function as effectively as you would have been if you were full. Images start to blur, you don't have energy for your usual activities,and you tend to be irrational and forgetful.

- **Loved Ones**

Through intervention, loved ones are given a well-thought-out chance to make amendments before situations get even worse. Even if you don't see them as essential as they are when it comes to your mental well-being, their roles are

actually among the most vital. They affect your state as they interact with you, sometimes as frequently as every day. They help make you feel better, and they have the power to make you feel worse.

- **Meditation**

Meditation works in a way by helping you acknowledge your experiences — and that includes painful sentiments — rather than respond to such experiences with avoidance and aversion. It also helps you accept whatever arises in your consciousness at each moment - including being caring, more assertive, and lenient toward yourself. Though you meditate way before you react to unexpected scenarios, you actually prepare yourself for any incoming complication.

- **Rest**

Proper rest plays an essential part in good health and well-being all through your life. It has an effect on how well you react, think, learn, function, and work well with others. Having insufficient rest will affect your state. You find yourself tired even at times you're not supposed to be. If you're groggy, you can't do your work properly and you end up turning in an output you're unlikely to be proud of.

To have the right state faster, it's best to recognize that there are multiple factors. You'll reap the benefits sooner, and people around you will immediately take notice of the changes that happen within you.

Things to Try

- Be connected. Communicating with other people makes you exposed to various personalities and helps you understand how to deal with them better.

- Be constantly active. Being stagnant won't help you mentally or physically.

- Volunteer for charity work. Being generous has its benefits. For one, it helps you appreciate what you currently have.

- Keep learning. It's fun to acquire new sets of knowledge every day. To add, you learn not only through books, but also through life experiences.

- Stay observant. It pays to be watchful of what's going on around you.

These activities bring a lot of advantages. They make you learn a lot of things, gain new friends, and add more to your list of experiences. You might be tired at the end of the day but the fulfillment and the achievements you'll gain won't be available to you any other way.

Common Therapeutic Approaches

There are various types of therapeutic approaches that help you get the right state. Read on and see which may suit you best.

- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy**

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapeutic medication that helps patients identify the feelings and thoughts that prompt various behaviors. CBT is frequently used to handle a wide variety of disorders that include addiction, phobias, anxiety, and depression.

This form of therapy is generally temporary and simply focused on assisting

clients in dealing with a very particular concern. During the course of therapy, people understand how to recognize and modify damaging or disturbing thought patterns that influence one's behavior negatively.

- **Intrapersonal therapy**

The philosophy behind intrapersonal psychotherapy is that instead of dealing with external forces in your life, you concentrate on your internal formation of awareness. Therefore, instead of dwelling on why people around you hurt you, you take the situational struggle intrapersonally and put meaning to your own choices.

Instead of accusing other people, intrapersonal therapy will let you deal with internal suppressed issues that you may or not be aware of. To add, intrapersonal therapy will permit you to choose a situation and understand why you are shaken by it.

- **Psychodynamic therapy**

Psychodynamic therapy, also referred to as insight-oriented therapy, centers on unconscious procedures as they are revealed in a person's current behavior. The aims of psychodynamic therapy are a patient's self-awareness and comprehension of the effect of the past on people's present behavior.

In its short form, a psychodynamic tactic allows the patient to study unresolved symptoms and conflicts that result from past dysfunctional affiliations and show themselves in the desire and need to abuse substances.

- **Music Therapy**

Music is often connected to a person's state. A particular song can make us sad, happy, relaxed, or energetic. Since music can have such a massive influence on a person's state and wellness, then it should no longer come as a

shock that music therapy has been examined for use in handling a number of medical conditions.

Music may be utilized with guided pictures to come up with modified states of perceptions that help reveal hidden emotional reactions and inspire creative insights. The improvement of children’s language and reading skills can also use music.

Receptive methods require listening to and reacting to recorded or live music. The examination of their responses is considered to help people convey themselves in accepted ways within society and to assess personal issues.

Two Ways to Improve Your Right State

If you find that you’re already in the right state, don’t make the mistake of thinking that you’ll remain that way from then on. Try not to aggravate any circumstance as it may only allow your mind to be introduced to things that it won’t blend well with. Rather than merely letting it be, try to care for your mental health by distancing yourself from anything that will affect it adversely.

Accept a Situation as It Is

Often, you may realize that your grip on things isn’t as strong as you thought it was. For instance, you planned on working on a chemistry project on your own and although weeks ago, you were informed that you’ll be committing to researches by yourself, your professor changes his mind out of the blue by assigning you a partner.

Instead of rebelling and being agitated at the impulsive move, it’s best to begin devising plans that will benefit you for a primary cause. To help you out, you merely have to avoid resisting whatever is bound to happen.

Learn a Pastime

Upon learning a pastime, your focus will be on something other than the little distractions there are. You don't dwell on unnecessary issues – issues that, without you knowing it, can actually consume a lot of your energy. When you're doing an activity you deem engaging and fun, the end game is you are pressured to adapt to stress on any given day.

What Kind of Hobby Is Best?

Crafting/Knitting

Crafting or knitting is actually a hobby that can help you de-stress and assist you while you're on your way to the right state. With a set of yarns, needles, and your selected pattern, you'll simply be sitting down and you're on your way. During the process, your mind will be relaxed as it is kept occupied. Additionally, you can be productive too.

Puzzle Games

Taking part in games that allow you to exercise your mental abilities is an excellent hobby. With it, you're busy being logical. You start to look for all the possible ways to solve a problem. Plus, scheduling a playtime introduces you to a rumble of fun.

Reading a Book

By reading a book, not only is information shared to you; you get to enhance your mental skills, too. Consider making it a habit, even. In a few months' time, you'll realize that you're much more intelligent than you used to be. Especially if you wish to be busy and still get to keep up with academic demands, this particular hobby is suggested for you to try.

- ***The Importance of Being Busy***

Being busy has advantages. If you have way too much time on your hands, the chances are high that you will end up nurturing your own mental well-being. Whether or not you are conscious of it, your ability to reason is improved and you achieve mental clarity. As your attention is directed at something, you eliminate thoughts that aren't going to do you any good.

Better Memory

Studies reveal that if concentration is strategically distributed, the right state is reached. As a result of being occupied, particularly the part of your brain responsible for your ability to recall things, you subconsciously start to be more observant of what's going on around you. You are more logical and you keep up with all the things you are supposed to do.

Stress Reduction

Not having extra time allows you to spare yourself trouble brought about by stress. During moments when you have no choice but to let your mind wander, you are tempted to somehow shoulder unimportant burdens. As you have nothing better to do, you tend to overthink and worry too much about random issues you encounter.

New Opportunities

Being busy entitles you to new opportunities. Contrary to the common belief that being occupied closes the door on possibilities that should enter into your life, you are actually in the process of learning about a passion you weren't aware of at first. As you focus on one thing at a time, you get to discover which among them you prefer doing.

- ***The Dangers of Always Being Busy***

While there are benefits to being busy, it also has drawbacks. It’s beneficial to have your mind occupied but if you let it be consumed by thoughts that are detrimental, you’re in for a lot of trouble. You attempt to be in charge of more than what you can handle. Rather than sharpen your mental abilities, your fate leads you to finding yourself less valuable.

Additional Clutter

Most of the time, the thing that causes you to be a victim of fatigue is the extra set of problems you’ve brought upon yourself. Regardless of their importance, you have to decide to let them go. As much as you want to resolve issues as you’re confident that you can, you have to accept the fact that sometimes, not everything is for you to worry about.

Less Time for People

Do you have sufficient time to ask your family members how their day went? Do you take a moment to sit down for a cup of coffee with your friends? As far as being busy goes, you’re probably too focused on other things. Though they matter too, it would do you well and help you avoid conflict if you spend your time cultivating your relationships with people. You may not be aware of it but you’re actually more functional when your bonds are intact.

Neglect of Personal Needs

If you’re too busy, among the basic activities you have limited time for are brushing your teeth, having a balanced diet, and taking a shower. As a result, you forget about fundamental things. Because of it, it’ll dawn on you that you’re always worn out and you are not in your best condition. You have to bear in mind that you have to keep everything in your life going well.

- ## Do Something Nice

This doesn’t intend to make you sound like the grumpy old troll. It’s simply the message of doing something nice as random acts of kindness can actually increase your happiness in a big way.

Have you tried doing random acts of kindness for strangers? It doesn’t have to be something grand; even just smiling to a person can work wonders. You can also do good deeds for your loved ones: make a cup of coffee, do the dishes, help with someone’s homework. These activities may seem trivial for most, but for some, this can mean a lot. And don’t you agree that being a Good Samaritan can make you smile as well?

Random Fact: Did you know that J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, battled with not problems that revolved around not being in the right at one point in her life? It may be hard to believe that a famous person like Rowling would even consider taking her own life.

She was then a single mother who lived in a cramped apartment. After her marriage got dissolved, she considered suicide but thankfully, she changed her mind after realizing she had to think of her daughter. Her daughter became her inspiration instead

Well, it’s a good thing that she was brought back to her senses. As everybody knows, Rowling’s now the author of a book series that has evolved into a multi-billion dollar franchise.

Chapter 4 – Awareness

To be in the right state of mind, you have to be aware of your presence. Let's say you're sipping a cup of chamomile tea and while you're at it, can you hear your older sister's toddler approaching the kitchen? If you can't, try to listen. Though due to an earlier incident, you're flustered, it's still your responsibility to track what's going on.

Regardless of the emotion you're carrying, remember that it's only by noticing your surroundings that you are kept collected. Rather than be overwhelmed by other matters, be conscious, be observant, and process the current situation as it unfolds.

No More Turning Back

If you're not in the right state, the things you can do are limited. Though there's not exactly a barricade in front of you, you are acting against your rationality. As your thoughts are focused someplace, you tend to be oblivious to the events happening. Rather than react with sound judgment as you'd typically do, the consequences are the kind you'll regret later on. Often, the inflicted damage is too much that you'd deem it irreparable.

- You can't accomplish the simplest tasks accordingly

  Not being in the right state causes you to behave contrary to what you're used to. For instance, though you've made it part of your routine to wake up at 8 in the morning on Saturdays to jog, you spontaneously start the day past 11 in the morning one weekend.

- You make excuses

Pinning the blame on another is a result of not being mentally well. At the state you're in, you avoid negative criticisms, even if you deserve to be given a strike. Because you're letting your mind wander, you aren't conscious of mistakes you've committed. For you, it's all fine.

- You're impulsive

When out of the blue, you submit a resignation letter to express your discontentment regarding a job you've had for over 5 years, it's a hint that you need to be in the right place. Even if truth be told, you really are unsatisfied with your regular work, quitting isn't a matter decided in a snap. Rather, it needs to be thought through.

- You're inattentive

If not in the right state, you're impossible to reason with. Why? You don't listen. Instead, you only hear outcomes that are favorable to your situation. If you haven't totally accepted a proposal, chances are you won't even make the least bit of acknowledgement when it was presented to you.

- You're passive-aggressive

You do things with the intent of not having to face reality. Though you've agreed to show up in church in a few hours, you scoot off to someplace distant as a tactic. In your troubled state, you're likely to disregard mature actions.

If your mind is not in the proper condition, everything – and everyone – is affected. Your view of the world will change. Your view of other people will change as well. Your actions are affected. Sometimes, simply seeing other people is enough to make you irritated and angry.

Of course you don’t want to be in such a negative world. Eliminate these bad thoughts. Exert the necessary effort to be in the right state.

- ***What Is Covert Awareness?***

There’s a term referred to as *covert awareness*. As defined, it’s the knowledge of being informed without actually knowing about it. Unconsciously, you’re aware. At times you try to recall your thoughts but nothing really comes up.

For instance, do you wonder why you aren’t new to using a particular object when, in fact, you’ve just encountered it for the first time? It may seem odd and a bit creepy but sometimes, but your brain is already aware even before you know it is.

- **Two Cases of Covert Awareness**

1. A man who suffered a stroke isn’t capable of making ethical judgments yet, as recorded, his Intelligence Quotient (IQ) remains unaffected.

2. Due to carbon monoxide poisoning, a woman can no longer identify things yet she can understand what each object is for.

Have you heard of *déjà vu?* Déjà vu is a kind of covert awareness wherein someone has a feeling of familiarity without having a certain background on how or why a person is aware of a certain event or activity.

How does it affect your state? It’s by having an effect on your way of thinking.

- ***According to Science: An Awareness Approach***

Feldenkrais, a somatic educational system introduced by Moshe Feldenkrais, is an awareness approach meant to significantly increase kinesthetic and proprioceptive functional movement. As it was found, there have been numerous positive benefits including better focus and an improved general well-being. It is experiential and is a movement pedagogy that promotes the provision of tools for subjects.

- ***The Power of Thoughts***

Your thoughts are essential to your awareness. If you always see the good in things and aren't short of hope, you're likely to be in a better state. If you dwell on the lows, on the other hand, the result is the opposite.

Instead of being consumed by pessimistic thinking, be open-minded and acknowledge the instruments that are just there all along. As they play a role; try to modify what's in your head.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
"I am not ready to take the test but from what I've gathered from my exceptional professor, I just might ace it."	*"I am not ready to take the test. Though my professor is exceptional at his job, I might fail."*
"This book seems informative. I'll read it so I'll learn a lot."	*"This book seems informative. I won't read it, though; I'm uncertain if I'll learn something from it."*
"My brother is an expert at this video game. Since we're a duo, we have better chances."	*"My brother may be an expert at this video game but the chance of being defeated is always there."*
"I think living on my own isn't easy. I'll be with a friend, though, so I'll be okay."	*"I think living on my own isn't easy. Though I'll be with a friend, I may not be okay."*

Being positive needs practice, but it’s still doable. It’s not something you obtain in just a snap, but eventually you’ll get there.

Before you sleep at night, think of what made you happy that day. It could be as simple as staring off into the sunset, seeing an old friend, or maybe a sincere compliment that someone from work has given you. Celebrating the small stuff can also affect you and have a major impact on what your current state is.

- ***It’s Not Monday Every Day***

Don’t adopt the “Monday everyday” mindset. Under this mindset, you feel grumpy and irritable for most of your waking days. This is when your alarm clock makes that awful sound (simply because it takes you out of your deep, peaceful slumber) and you hit the snooze button. It again wakes you up, and what do you do? You hit the snooze button again. It’s the same thing every day.

Why not look at it in a more positive light? By now you would have known that negative energy can eat you up inside and drain you faster than a vacuum cleaner takes in dust. It makes you lose creativity. It makes you lazy and less productive. Even your decision-making skills are affected as you get grumpy.

Compared to being positive, being negative is said to be three times as powerful with regard to affecting your motivation. Perhaps you’re aware that it’s easier to remember the bad stuff rather than the good ones. This is because the brain is wired to recall the bad stuff more, brought by self-protective characteristics. When our ancestors were still gatherers and hunters, they were always on the lookout for threats, and that’s how the negative thinking started to get etched in our brains.

There’s still good news though: negativity might be a built-in element in your brain, but you can always snap out of it when you feel the need to do so. You can always tell yourself to think positively and to be happier each day.

It’s not Monday every day. Be happy; it’s healthier that way.

- ***What You Can Do***

To be in the right state by being aware of your current situation, there are boundless things you can do. Not having troublesome thoughts in your head rewards you with a clear perspective. As a product, you’re more confident in what awaits. No longer will you be held back by the unfamiliar. Especially if you’re used to sitting out challenges, you’ll be caught off guard by your new attitude.

By being fully aware, you can:

- Act on a situation properly.
- Avoid conflicts.
- Commit fewer mistakes.
- Communicate more effectively.
- Control your emotions better.
- Determine your specific needs.
- Enjoy freedom.
- Express gratitude for the little things.
- Find an inner peace.
- Learn to prioritize.
- Make excellent decisions.
- Recognize future goals.
- Recognize what’s important to you.
- Visualize better possibilities.

Being in the right state will offer you a lot of benefits that will help not only you but the people around you as well. Having the right state will aid you in dealing not only with your present situations but also with the circumstances you’ll encounter in the days to come.

Having the proper mental condition makes you face the world with a better perception. Do you think you need assistance in putting yourself in the right state? No need to worry; help awaits.

- # Conclusion

After reading what the right state is about and what being in the right state entails, you should already recognize the importance of mental wellness. Often, the culprit in what causes you to neglect other small yet essential things is brought about by not being as conditioned as you should be. Now that you've understood, it's best to reevaluate and be on your way to a much better self.

Here are the 0071uestions to ask yourself to see if you're in the right state:

- *"According to the lessons here, am I already in the right state?"*
- *"Are there people who insist that I'm not in the right state?"*
- *"How do I know if I am in the right state?"*
- *"What do I need to do?"*
- *"What areas of my personality do I need to correct?"*

State can be seen as the manner of you behaving and expressing your emotions. It also gives an indication of how well you adapt to a series of demands. You can only be as functional as you wish if you're in the proper mental place.

If you need assistance regarding your current state, then you can just remember that help is not far. There are numerous organizations that are just a phone call away. As it's important to realize that you're never alone in your battles, it could really help you go a long way. If you think you could use someone to be there for you, all you need to do is ask. It's actually easier to have these mind conditions treated, especially if they are identified earlier.

Remember that endless factors influence you into being out of the right state. All of these factors revolve around the environment and the people who are there with you. Whether you're at home, at work, or on the road, you usually

encounter events that help you. It’s up to you to recognize the hand they’re extending. Various things happen that affect your state such as mood swings and social interactions.

As discussed, being aware of your situation is important. It’s among the best ways to have solid ground against the battles you’re facing. If you’re in the right state, you can understand your current situation and you’ll know how to deal with it. You won’t easily be baffled by stress, and you can think more clearly.

Thinking Outside The Box

How to Think Creatively By Applying Critical Thinking and Lateral Thinking

Bruce Walker

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Introduction

“Thinking outside the box”.

It’s a phrase that has been used for nearly forty years now. For many in the corporate world, it has become a cliché — so much so, you’ve problem heard it in any number of commercials. That doesn’t mean the idea behind it isn’t a powerfully useful instrument for your daily life, because it is.

Despite its overuse as a term, it’s without a doubt one of the most potent methods you can improve the quality of your life, gain more time — and even begin dipping your feet into the waters of your dream career.

You may assume that since out of the box thinking is such a cliché in the business world that it has no place in your personal life. Think again. Cliché or not it’s still one of the most valuable and necessary assets many of us have — even if we don’t know it’s bubbling just below the surface of our consciousness.

Consider the term “life hacks” which has caught on with people on the internet in the past few years. It’s nothing more — or should we say nothing less - than thinking out of the box. Have a space problem in your home that needs to be solved or you’ll be sleeping on the front porch because you’re out of room in your bedroom? Nothing less than out of the box thinking may help you keep your stash of precious items and allow you to sleep in your bed tonight.

Out of the box thinking implies a marvelous twist of the mind. It levels the playing field between you and the likes of Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, and Thomas A. Edison. We’re not saying you’re about to create the next great computer, the latest revolutionary theory of the universe or something that will replace the electric lightbulb. But you’ll be able to turn your personal life on its head and begin to love life again.

What is Thinking Outside The Box?

In a nutshell, the phrase means to tackle a problem with creative or novel thinking, attacking the situation from an unusual or unexpected perspective. Take, for example, the cliché we've all heard: When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. That's out of the box or creative thinking. Taken one level higher, the thinker who kicks the box to the side of the road is the one who after making lemonade, launches his own multimillion dollar lemonade business.

Some of the nation's most successful industrialists and entrepreneurs have been thinking creatively — viewing problems from a prospective the other business people couldn't or wouldn't think of. Thomas Edison, who nearly single-handedly drove the Industrial Revolution in the early twentieth century once said: "It's hard to think about achieving the impossible, when you're surrounded with people wanting to discuss only the possible."

He probably found more inventions and innovations on the road to creating something else than most inventors or industrialists. One idea inevitable led to another. He, in effect, refused to limit his thinking to the conventional way of doing

Then there's Albert Einstein. Most people don't consider scientists as being very creative. But if anyone could prove that stereotype wrong, it would be Einstein. Asked how he came up with the theory of relativity. He first imagined himself riding a beam of light, travelling at 186,000 miles per second. Have you ever thought of that?

You're sitting back in your chair right now, thinking, "But I'm no Thomas Edison and definitely no Einstein." That very well could be true, but have you ever really put yourself to the test? Have you ever tried to put creative thought into your daily life?

But for your purposes — especially if you're not used to putting such creativity into your thinking — your thought process doesn't need to be such a dramatic change of perspective. Something as simple as repurposing an unused ladder into a unique-looking bookcase is a perfect example of thinking out of the box.

You can use this creative approach to any aspect of your life. Yes, you can. Don't think it takes any specialty education. Don't believe that you have to label yourself "creative" in any way to be able to think creatively.

Many individuals mistakenly believe that only writers, actors and artists are creative. What they fail to take into account that all of us, in our ways, can be creative — whether we recognize it at the moment or not.

There must be something that you'd like to view from a different perspective in your life — from changing your economic position to learning a new set of life skills, to being more content with your surroundings. After all, if you're curious about the idea of "thinking outside of the box," then you're probably eager to give it a try.

How the Phrase Even Came to Be? (9 Dots Puzzle)

The origins of the phrase are fuzzy, but one thing is known. It comes from what's referred to as the "nine-dot" puzzle. Arrange nine dots on a piece of paper so there are three rows of three dots each. Now you can visualize what this puzzle looks like. Individuals were asked to connect the dots without lifting their pencil from the paper *and* ensuring that all nine dots are used.

Most individuals who try this, think that the lines they're drawing must stay within the confines the "box" the outer dots have created. But if you read the instructions again, that's not specified anywhere. Once you begin to think out of the confines of the box the dots created then you can find multiple solutions to the puzzle.

Go ahead and draw those nine dots right now and give it a try. What's impossible when you think one way suddenly becomes easy when you view it from a different perspective.

Are you an "out of the box" or creative thinker? Below is a quick quiz to test your ability to do just that. You'll find the questions first. Following the questions, are the answers with a rough generalization of where your thinking aligns. The answers as well as a rough evaluation of your current level of creative thought are revealed below the quiz. (Don't get nervous! Approach this quiz as a game!)

How Creative Are You? Quiz

1. I have five apples and I take away three. How many apples do I have?

2. A plane crashes on the border of Germany and Poland. Where do you bury the survivors?

3. A bus explodes on the US-Canada border. Where do you bury the dead?

4. In what sport are the shoes made of metal?

    Soccer

    Horseracing

    Badminton

    Basketball

5. John’s mother has four children. Three of them are named April, May and June. What’s the name of her fourth child?

6. Is it legal for a man to marry his widow’s sister?

7. .A man built a rectangular house with a southern view on all four sides. He looked out window and saw a bear. What color was bear?

8. .If you were alone on a deserted house at night and there were an oil lamp, a candle and firewood and you only have one match, which would you light first?

9. A farmer has 15 cows. All but 8 die. How many cows does he have left?

10. You drove a bus leaving Canterbury with 35 passengers, dropped off 6 and picked up 2 at Eversham picked up 9 more at Sittingbourne, dropped off 3 at Chatham, and then drove on to arrive in London 40 minutes later, what color are the driver’s eyes?

Answers:

1 3 apples

2. You don’t bury survivors

3. In a cemetery

4. Horseracing

5. John

6. By definition, if the man has a widow, then the man is deceased.

7. The bear was white. It was a polar bear and the house was built at the North Pole.

8. The match

9. 8 cows

10 You’re the driver.

Evaluate your Score

8 - 10 right. Congratulations! You’re already a creative thinking. You can use this book to help boost your current seemingly natural ability.

6 - 7 You’re not bad at this thinking out of box. Once you start reading this book, you’ll be able to develop this skill even further.

5 and below. You haven’t been called upon to use your creative thinking. This book will help you do a better job of thinking outside the box.

How to Use this Book

This book is easy enough to use. Read through the entire book once, if you can, before you start putting any of the exercises or ideas into action. Of course, if you can't wait to put your new-found creativity into action, by all means, feel free to do so while the urge and desire are ignited.

What will you discover in this book to help you polish your innovation? You'll learn the essential exercises to spark your creative approach to problem-solving and how you can use this to your advantage. You'll be surprised at how many of the successful business people already know — but seldom talk about — thinking outside of the box.

Along those same lines, you'll discover exactly what lateral thinking is and how using this can help you find more creative solutions to your everyday problems — the big ones and the smaller irritations.

You'll also learn that as much as creative or out of the box thinking is required on a daily basis, you can't put it into effect efficiently without using lateral and critical thinking processes alike. That's why there are chapters devoted to reminding you exactly what these.

Are you ready to start a new life — one of being free of "the boxed thinking" that may be holding you back? Then you need to start reading Chapter 1 right now.

Chapter 1: The Invisible Trap of Social Standards

Mary sat with her friends at the cafe. They were talking about their daily routines. "Sometimes I just get tired, believe it or not, of doing the same thing day after day. Don't get me wrong. I love my family and I wouldn't change them for the world. But, sometimes, I just think I need some spice in my life." She paused a moment and added. And I don't mean an affair."

Is that how you feel about your life? Do you look back at your high school days and even college days and think back to how much more creatively you thought back then? If you wanted to pack your suitcase and head for a trip to New York City or San Francisco or just wander aimless for a weekend, you'd do it.

Today, if you tried that there would probably a chorus of a thousand voices telling you socially responsible people just don't do that. You have to plan these things out. You have to make sure you get the right airline ticket price. And God forbid you take your car. What would happen if it broke down?

Even if you haven't yearned to travel you're probably like most of us, you approach it from just about every aspect of your life from "the box." Most of us are rather satisfied with this life. Many individuals refer to this as their comfort zone. It's the area or activity in which they feel at ease.

This is the zone in which we accept who we are in life and where we are. After all, wasn't this the purpose of growing up and becoming an adult, to fit into society with a minimum of disturbance? And having a "comfort zone" is much better than constantly feeling anxious, feeling as if something bad is about to happen, but not knowing when or even why.

Comfort Zone or Stagnation?

But there's also a danger in that comfort zone and it's called *stagnation.* With that content, for some, comes the inability to see life any differently than what it is right now.

There's a theory that you're the average of the five people you associate with. What that usually means is you've adopted the social standards of these people. You've either adopted their interests or sought these friends and kept them because of your shared interests, similar careers or any other number of reasons. Support groups, by the way, are built on this concept.

If your friends are video gamers, for example, you're far more likely to be one as well. If they're interested in crafting, the chances are good that you'll be interested in that hobby too.

And that, is where the "box" comes in. As long as you're following the social standards of the group spend time with, you're probably not thinking outside of the box — you may not even recognize that you're in a box. You certainly don't consider yourself "trapped." Or perhaps you do.

Either way, you're reading this book, which is probably an indication you're interested in jumping out of your box and getting out of your comfort zone. Why is it difficult for many of us to step out of our comfort zone, think outside of the box and think differently from the rest of the group?

When was the last time you stopped to think about what you really wanted — and still want — out of the life? Do you allow yourself to dream about an awesome vacation or starting writing that blog? Do others shoot your thoughts down right away, telling you it's a waste of time? So you return to your comfort zone and working within your box.

You do know it doesn't have to be that way, don't you? You can defy social standards and begin to do the things you've always wanted to do, the way you wanted to do them.

So, what's stopping you — besides those so-called friends? Sure, their intentions are sincere, but ultimately you have to do what you feel is best for you. If you're weary of

playing video games with them, tired of facing another scrapbook party without moaning and groaning about it or even can't take another episode of some "true crime" television show, then it's time to examine what's holding you back.

Here are several reasons why most of us are fearful of looking at life from any perspective than the one we've always have, that is our box.

1. **But we've always done it this way.**

Have you ever seen this sentiment in a poster:. "But, we've always done it this way." That is the biggest reason people resist change. In effect, they're saying that everything is perfectly fine the way it is. You'll hear this same sentiment expressed as "Why change horses in midstream?" This is their way of rationalizing their efforts to stay within their comfort zone.

You may have even heard the saying "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" These people are conveying the exact sentiment. The general opinion is that if something — anything — has served us well for so long, "don't rock the boat.". When you do try to change things or "fix" things, you may be making things even worse.

2. Trapped by your own personal method of thinking.

You along with everyone else around you may be locked into a familiar, comfortable way of thinking. Up until this moment, you may never have even thought about doing anything differently. Why, everyone around you is doing basically the same things and they seemed perfectly satisfied. Your dissatisfaction, you presume, only means there's something wrong with you — not with the social norms.

Because of this, you approach your problems from a limited point of view. Of course, we have always done it this way — who am I to even dream of doing it another way. You can blame your "inner critic" for censoring your potential "out of box thinking."

3. Trapped by your emotions.

Stepping into the realm of creativity — especially if you haven't been thinking in that way for a while — can be intimidating, to say the least. As you've already seen, you find yourself straying from your comfort zone. That leads you into an uncomfortable realm. It's here you're more than likely begin to feel a general anxiety growing. As you begin to

think differently, you're entering an unknown world, filled with "what if" incidents. What if, one of those options you're considering is less than optimal?

Or worse yet, what if you take this momentous step and your friends and family think you weird? What, if after all is said and done, the outcome is embarrassing to you — or even painful in some way?

What you may not realize that all of these emotions are just different ways your body resists change. It's hoping that you'll eventually cave in to these fears and qualms and just plain procrastinate on this concept — whatever it may be.

4. It's hard to be creativity with personal problems hanging over your head.

If you're beating yourself up because you can't, for the life of you, think outside of the box, you may want to stop and examine your life for a moment. Are you going through some personal crisis or problem? It's hard to be creative when you're struggling with a major life change. You may be experiencing financial hardships at the moment or even going through an emotional event like a divorce. At these or similar points in your life, it's all most of us can do to just hold our own with the life we have.

Sometimes, though, this is the time when you may be digging up some of the oldest and deepest held regrets about what you *didn't* do with your life and you begin to daydream about "what might have been."

If this is the case, you still may want to wait to make any type of creative changes in your life. If you ignore these issues and continue to plow through with trying to be creative anyway, you may be just setting yourself up to failure.

5. Searching for the "right" answer

You've probably learned this habit in school. Every question, according the tests you've taken in school, has either a right or wrong answer. Think about the how many true and false tests you've taken and how many multiple choice quizzes you've sat through. After approaching an education in this fashion, you may discover your creativity stilted, at least initially, by considering whether what you're planning falls in one of these two categories either right or wrong.

Without a doubt, there are advantages to this categorization habit, but it does nothing to further your creative thinking. Right about now, you may be thinking that a three-week vacation to New York City is in order. But one of your dearest friends tell you this isn't the right time. That's not the proper decision right now.

Never mind the fact that this might be the "right" answer for you to clear your mind for a while. Or perhaps you've made a decision on some other aspect of your life, but here again someone or your instincts tell that isn't the "right" answer for you.

It hinders your "out of the box" thinking. Once you realize that the vast majority of issues we deal with on a daily basis can't be viewed in either black or white. There is a spectrum of shades of gray that can lead you to happiness. Issues that pop up in real life usually have more than one answer. When someone tries to assign a right or wrong way to a problem or try to impose one on you, they're missing the valued concept that the issue may have more than one "right" answer.

6. Viewing creative, outside of the box thinking as "destructive."

Here me out on this one. Perhaps you don't even realize you're thinking this, it may be so ingrained and enmeshed in your thinking. If you choose a different way of doing even something as simple as changing your morning routine, your subconscious may feel that it's being a destructive force in the world. After all, if someone wanted to point at you and accuse you of ripping the fabric of society as we know it apart, he might be right. "Rules," they may say "are that simple and are created for a reason. Who are you to deviate from them? What makes you special?"

You may believe, at first glance, that this is a block that makes little or no sense. But you'd be amazed at how many individuals follow all the rules, even though they aren't working for them. There's a person I spoke to once who said before she takes any specific actions she asks herself, "How does this serve me?" If it doesn't serve her — make her life better in some way — she tosses that "rule" aside. Step by step, she's remaking her life in a very creative way, by thinking out of your own box.

Have you noticed that that people praise and admire some of the most creative thinkers in the business world? Think about Richard Branson and his marvelous success and the brave moves he made to make it happen. But they refuse to break even a small rule in their life. Perhaps you should think twice before you start admiring someone like Branson — and start breaking some rules of your own.

Seriously. Are you ready to consider not only thinking outside of the box, but actually kicking it wide open and allowing some truly creative thoughts into your life? Then you're ready to move to the next chapter. That's where we'll get the process moving.

Chapter 2: Kicking the Box Open and Sparking your Creativity

Many people get excited about the idea of thinking outside of the box and kick it to the curb immediately only to discover that after years of conventional thinking, it's a bit more difficult than they had imagined. And that makes sense. After years of thinking one way, it's not easy to allow your mind to be "liberated" and allow it to run wild.

Before you attempt to jump into creative thinking, you may want to "exercise your brain." Don't worry, these aren't as tough as you may believe. It's hard to start thinking in a manner you're not accustomed to.

To be truthful, that's not your fault. So don't beat yourself up if the creative thoughts don't flow immediately. Your brain has been used to thinking in a certain manner and it will take some time for it to rewire itself and adjust to another thought process. It'll be slow going at first, but as you continue to do it, your brain catches on and works faster at it. Guaranteed.

Your brain is no different from any other muscle in your body. If you don't use, then it slowly gets weaker. That's the bad news. The good news, though, is that it's easy enough to strengthen this muscle just as you would any other one in your body: through regular exercise.

At first, when your "creative thinking muscles" are initially called into action after perhaps years of unused, you may turn around and find yourself wandering aimlessly through your house, wondering where and how to begin this valuable thought process.

Many fiction writers find that every morning upon arising they need to get their "creative juices" flowing by writing three to five pages of … well, nothing. Their goal is to write anything that pops into their minds. Hopefully, some of this covers what their subconscious minds have unearthed while they slept. But if they can't recall what they dreamed of or any words that came mind then basically, they're instructed to write anything. It may be something as simple as "I need my morning coffee."

Once they clear their minds and got their neurons moving in full speed, they inched themselves out of their box and into their projects, whatever those may be. Believe it or not, it works more often than not.

Best Way to Active Your Creative Thoughts

If you're not by nature a writer, you obviously you won't need to do this (although it still may be a wonderful creative exercise for you as well). But if you're not interested in writing, here are few alternatives that may help channel your creativity more efficiently.

Alphabetize your Words

Okay, they don't have to be *your* words but once you discover this exercise, you may very well become addicted to it. It forces you to look at words in a different light, which can only help you begin to look at not only words differently, but the entire world around you from a new perspective.

Begin by picking a word, any word will do. It may be one you've just noticed on a billboard while you're driving or something you discover on a magazine cover. Now instead of looking at it with your physical eyes, look at it with your mind. What you're about to do is rearrange the letters so that they're placed in your mind in alphabetical order and not as the word is spelled.

If the word is "number," then you'd rearrange the letters like this: b-e-m-n-r-u. This makes your mind use all the information, but just rearrange them. Don't just settle for doing it once a day, though. Remind yourself to do it throughout the day. Consider doing this up to five times a day.

When you first start off, you may want to choose short words. This activity is a bit harder than you may think. As you conquer words that are three to five letters long, then you'll graduate to ever longer words. There's no need to push yourself, you'll discover that if you just allow this to happen, you'll have more fun. And part of thinking creatively certainly involves fun.

Another note for you to think about. No one need to know what you're doing if you don't want to tell them.

Adding a series of one-digit numbers as quickly as you can

This is another exercise that on the surface doesn't seem to have any connection to creative thinking or thinking outside of the box, but after you do this for a while, you'll

discover how your synapses move more quickly. That's a sure sign, you'll be thinking creatively without even having to think about it.

Take a series of one-digit numbers, from zero to nine. Place these numbers in any order you care to. Now, without using a calculator, start adding up the numbers — as quickly as you can. The beauty of this exercise is that it forces you to constantly change the information you're juggling in your mind. As you're adding this total, your mind needs to focus solely on the current grand total — and then as you become faster at this — another grand total quickly. Talk about making your brain agile.

Basically what you're doing is inputting some essential information into your mind and then deleting it — replacing it with another "grand total" as you add more numbers — and so it continues. The perfect time to do this? When you're standing in the grocery line. You can easily add up the numbers to one of the dollar of five dollar bills you have in your pocket or just as easily take the numbers from your purchases and use those numbers — in no particular order.

Before you realize it you're performing this action faster and faster. But the true goal of this exercise is to limber up your creative thinking.

Running for creativity.

Now this suggestion may be the most confusing of all. It is for many individuals. On the surface, it really is difficult to see how the creative process is connected to exercising. But running is wonderful because it stimulates your whole body, producing the chemical called *serotonin*. It's been called the "chemical form" of happiness. Its long been known by scientists and medical doctors to be responsible for that "runner's high" so many individuals talk about.

Once you hit that "runner's high" your mind is capable of seeing things from a different perspective. You're much more likely to see the whole picture of the issue. Researchers now agree that the combination of what many call "the runner's point of view" and the increased blood flow pumping throughout your body actually improves your concentration. This is especially helpful, because your mind is churning out solutions and ideas that only you can perceive.

Carry a notebook

This may be simple, but power habits you can develop to encourage yourself to think outside the box. Carry a notebook. All the time. No exceptions. Have you ever come up with an idea and say to yourself, "Awesome. I'm sure I'll remember this." By the time you get home or to someplace to write this idea down, it's slipped your mind, with no guarantee to return.

It may be that none of the ideas one day are extremely useful. But that "not-so-useful" idea may lead you to another wonderfully useful thought that may be the one to change your life.

Eat dark chocolate and walnuts

You have to wonder how this suggestion can possibly affect your ability to think outside of the box. But, even if it doesn't, it's a tremendous method of rewarding yourself. If you don't like walnuts, don't worry about it. You can eat Brazil nuts or almonds and get the same creative effect.

Why would dark chocolate and nuts increase your creativity? You can thank the rich and abundant supply of antioxidants found in this combination of sweets. These wonderful substances enable your blood to flow to the brain more swiftly which in turn improves your concentration.

Additionally, the nuts are a great source of vitamin E which prevents poor memory and increases your concentration levels. By the way, eating this combination of food also increases your happiness.

Adopt the Beginner's Mind

You may believe you're ready to tackle the world with your out of the box thinking. But there's still one more exercise you'll want to think about while you're using these activities. It's called adopting the beginner's mind. At least that's what the Buddhists call it.

Some people refer to as a looking at life through the eyes of a child. You can call it whatever you desire. The idea is to empty your mind of everything you believe you know about your world and how everything around you operates and look at your surroundings as if you've never seen any of it before.

Remember when you were a child, anything and everything was possible? Think back, too, to when your children were younger, they too saw the world with eyes of wonder. Absolutely nothing is impossible. And that's exactly how you should be looking at your world in order to think outside of the box.

Don't feel constrained by what worked in the past or what gave you grief. Try it again. It just may work this time. And even if it doesn't, it may be the idea that leads you to the one that will actually change your life.

This is more difficult than you may believe and it may be one of those exercises you need to repeat not only daily but several times a week. Eventually, you'll come to every issue with a "beginner's mind," realizing you really don't know anything about the issue. Finding a creative answer is so much easier this way.

Here is an exercise in what it feels like to look at things around you with a beginner's mind. Gather the following items: a coffee mug, pen and paper. Yes, that's all you'll need. To have a real good time doing this you may want to invite a few friends to join you.

Place the cup on the table. Give yourself — and your friends — a specific amount of time. It's best to set a timer, then no one has to stop to watch the clock as the minutes tick by. You know that a coffee cup's purpose is to drink out of.

But what else could it be used for? You've seen people use them as pen and pencil holders among other things. List as many of these uses as possible. The goal is not to limit your thinking. If your first thought is a house for a mouse write it down. The sky's the limit.

Walk Away from the Problem

Seems counter-intuitive now doesn't it? But it works, nearly every time. Walking away — either literally or figuratively — and clearing your mind for a few minutes seems to clear the mind enough to allow your subconscious mind crank some idea out.

Try it and you'll see. This trick works probably for the same reason that you get your best ideas in the shower. You're allowing your mind to clear and busy with an activity that is done by rote memory.

Anything that makes your mind relax and "digest" the problem, as it were, helps you to think creatively.

You're almost ready to apply creative thinking in your daily life. There's only a few more steps you should know about before you can expect great success from your "out-of-the-box" thought processes.

In the next chapter, you'll discover how a thought process called "lateral thinking" can work hand in hand with creative thinking to help you take that grand leap out of the box.

Chapter 3: Lateral Thinking is the Key

Consider this list of statements. Don’t judge them initially, just read them.

Before the earth was round, it was flat.

Before the earth revolved around the sun, the universe revolved around the earth.

Before we all became aware of Einstein’s laws of gravity and his other theories, we were only aware that the universe was operating from Newtonian physics.

What changed? Did some god from heaven decide to change the rules on us? No, our perception — our knowledge changed. And that changed the way we viewed everything. But more importantly, by changing the way we thought about the universe, it opened up an entirely new view of the universe.

In other words, someone, somewhere starting applying lateral thinking and in the process literally introduced the rest of us to a new universe.

Let’s take a quick look at the shape of the earth. Flat as a pancake. That’s what the ancient cavemen thought. For thousands of years, that was the standard norm. How could it be anything else? All you had to do was look around you. Except for hills and mountains, everything around you was flat.

Certainly, you can see why it was so easy to believe the earth was flat. It was the only common sense answer. If the earth were round, then that means someone on the opposite side of the earth of you were standing “upside down.” (Because you certainly weren’t!)

Then, consciously or not, Pythagoras, applied lateral thinking to this fact. He took this fact and his ideas slowly branched off of the facts as the world knew them.

The same laterally thinking was applied to the earth being the center of the universe to the earth revolving around one of a myriad of suns in the universe. Again, that’s lateral

thinking in action.

What? You say you aren’t a Galileo, a Newton or an Einstein? Who among us is? But that doesn’t mean you can’t apply lateral thinking in your own life.

Before you jump total out of the box and think as if no box existed, you may want to test the waters, so to speak, simply by peering over the edge of the top of the box. In many ways, it can be considered an intermediate step between following the status quo and society’s standards in your decisions and jumping outside of the box.

Taking One Idea at a Time

It's true that lateral thinking is a method of solving problems — whether they involve a new way of folding your bed sheets or establishing world peace. What distinguishes itself from the other two form of thought process is that it not only allows for creativity, but also uses reasoning that isn't always that obvious and may not be available if you use the traditional step-by-step logic.

First coined in 1967 by Edward de Bono, lateral thinking is neither the traditional vertical logic we learned in high school and college no the "horizontal" imagination you probably associate with individuals in the more creative imagination. The latter is usually characterized by the individuals being endowed with a myriad of ideas, but not really caring about the feasibility of their implementation.

Lateral thinking also differentiates itself from what's known as critical thinking, which is mainly used in the judgment of the true value of statement or seeking errors in the thought process. By contrast, the more you learn about lateral thinking, the more you'll discover is about learning and revealing the "movement value" of statements and concepts.

You'll learn to discover those individuals who are employing lateral thinking because they're capable of moving from one known idea to branching off new concepts from the known and creating new ideas. Every idea, in this form of thought processing, is creating as a branch of the original one.

According to deBono, the human mind uses four types of thinking tools:

1. **Idea-generating tools.**

These are the tools that actually break into your current thinking patterns, regardless of how long you've been "stuck" in this mind rut. It's the way you generate tools in order to jump start yourself out of outdated routine patterns and other ideas you may be holding about the status quo.

2. Focus tools

These are valuable instruments intended to broaden your search parameters. The focus tools, as de Bono sees them, aid you in *where* to search for new ideas. Sometimes ideas

just come to us out of the blue sky, but more often than not, we need to put some effort into searching for them. As you focus on one action or one invention, you mind suddenly, even abruptly, moves laterally and you realize that something that works for one innovation, can easily be transferred to another project.

3. Harvest tools

These tools are properly named. These instruments of lateral thinking ensure that the ideas you've gathered are "harvested," kept so that they can be used later. As you can imagine, harvesting, as it's called many times, is used at the end of the thought process of thinking session.

Its goal is to "bank" any and all ideas that may prove valuable to apply to the problem later. It's easy to overlook or skip this segment, thinking it's not that necessary. But by ensuring that you harvest the ideas generated you're free to use them at any time you deem necessary.

Harvesting also helps you to identify specific ideas that could be used immediately as well as those that have potential but may need some polishing and refining before you put them into use.

This process also generates some "common sense" thinking into the process. Very often, an individual or group generates excitement around an idea and implements it before its time. By using the harvesting approach, you can stash these ideas away instead of rushing into major commitments. It forces you to look at the long-term so you can make the most of your "yield" of new thoughts.

4. Treatment tools

According to de Bono, treatment tools, in the long run promote and support the consideration of constraints found in the real world. These type of tools also take into consideration the resources with which you have to work as well as the support you may have. One of the most valuable of these tools is an exercise called "shaping."

In this one, you take the raw idea and shape it to the specifications you need in your

project or to solve your problem.

Examples of Lateral Thinking: From Edward de Bono Himself

Edward de Bono himself admits that many of the definitions and descriptions of lateral thinking on the internet today are nothing at all what he intended it to be. For some individuals trying to envision lateral thinking these sometimes conflicting descriptions may cause you confusion — and rightly so.

But de Bono provides you with several eye-opening examples of lateral thinking and what it's not through a series of simple phrases:

1. **You can't dig a hole in a different spot by digging the same hole deeper and deeper.**

Think about it. What de Bono means by this is that you're not going to find the answer to your problem by just pushing harder in the same direction. Some industrialists have said the same thing by saying that the same type of thinking which caused the problem in the first place isn't going to solve it. It may be time to start digging somewhere else or thinking in other directions.

If you're serious about solving the problem or creating a different outcome than what's staring at your right now, you'll need to pick up the shovel again and start digging in another spot.

You've no doubt heard of the story of the man who is under the streetlamp in the middle of the night searching for the $100 bill he lost. A police officer found him and asks what he is doing. When the man tells the officer, the police office, generously offers to help.

After a short time, the officer asks the gentleman if he's sure he lost the money here. The man, with a matter of fact shrug of his shoulders, replies, "Heck, no! I lost the bill over there." He points to a darkened spot on the sidewalk." Then as if anticipating the police officer's next question, continues, "But it's too dark to see anything over there, so I thought I would look here." It's the same idea. The gentleman refuses to "dig his hole" in a more profitable location. Instead he keeps digging under the light, thinking what he's searching for will miraculously show up.

2. You use lateral thinking when you need to change ideas and perceptions.

When you start thinking logically, you obvious begin with a specific set of circumstances and ingredients laid out in front of you. Think of a chess board with all the pieces in their proper places. If you know how to play and you're pinned against another good player, you'll immediately know that all the moves are logical. In fact, you can take your turn and be reasonably sure of what your opponent will do after that.

Many of the best chess players, then, thinking many moves in advanced, based on the logic of the game can outwit their opponent and ultimately win the game.

The problem with this type of thinking, de Bono contends is that the "chess pieces" we assume we have may not even exist. Imagine for a moment, a young toddler who comes upon a chess board and replaces the chess pieces, with his own toys. Now, the rules of the game have changed and the same logic of the traditional chess game don't apply.

And in a very real sense, that's what lateral thinking is all about. It's not about playing the game with the same pieces. Rather it's about changing the pieces and challenging your mind to look at the game differently.

In other words, its emphasis is on the perception of the game, not the actual implementation. The real beauty of lateral thinking is that it allows you to organize the world around you into pieces that work for you — or pieces you need — to be able to process them in a fashion which makes sense.

It might be obvious, but consider this for a moment. Breakthroughs into new ways of thinking are only possible when you toss the old assumptions aside. Once you get rid of "it's the way we always thought," then you can more clearly see how the pieces may fall into place differently. Like the chessboard with all the traditional pieces will produce the same response with us, you'll respond differently if you place the green plastic "army men" of your youth on the squares. It's then time to make new rules.

For example, consider the work of Pablo Picasso. Without a doubt, he broke all the rules of art when he began experimenting with his personal style. To some, his actions were sacrilegious. To others they were brilliant and allowed other artists to think in entirely new dimensions.

If you're like most people, though, this is difficult to do. Your "default thinking" as some individuals call it is still "linear thinking." Don't despair, though, because the "we've-always-done-it-this-way-thinking" can be overridden.

Below are several marvelous examples of how to stamp out linear thinking right in front of your eyes and begin to see the world in more "lateral" arrangement.

Start off by listing all the assumptions in the problem.

Yes, this may seem simplistic, but it gets right to the heart of the problem. I knew a gentleman once who approached every electrical item that didn't work with the same first step: Make sure that it really is getting the electric source it needs to work.

From a computer, to a lamp, to his car, he started with ensuring that whatever was powering that item was working. This was the first on his list of assumptions.

Whenever you're presented with what seems like an unfixable problem, list everything you already know about the situation — then take off from there. Make sure that none of these assumptions are wrong, then you can extend your thinking from there.

Verbalize the problem

Basically, this means ask yourself, how every other person would approach the problem. In this way you're detailing in very specific steps the most obvious solutions to solving the problem.

Look these over and then ask yourself this critical question, "What if I couldn't do this? Then what would happen?"

Now you're beginning to make yourself open to lateral thinking. If you can't solve the problems or get to the core of the idea through normal means, then you'll have to come up with a different perspective. When you first begin this exercise, you may find yourself shrugging your shoulders somewhat puzzled. But after a bit, this approach will become second nature. You'll truly see, at this point, that what others believed was a "problem" has now been transformed into an "opportunity" to see things from a different angle.

Question the original question

Sounds like a conundrum, doesn't it? Perhaps you're not finding the right answer because, ultimately, you're not asking the proper question. According to de Bono your next question should be, "What if I could re-write the question?"

This helps your brain think differently and begin to see things from a different perspective. You'd be surprised how this works even with a simple search on the internet. If you continue to ask the same question into your search engine, you'll continue to get the same sites to review over and over again.

The moment you ask the question from a different perspective or using a few different words, new, sometimes more relevant sites pop up. The next thing you know, you're discovering more ideas. That's exactly what happens when you dare to question the question you're asking about the situation.

Start solving the problem from the end.

What? As crazy as that may sound, that's exactly what you need to do at time in order to implement lateral thinking. More often than you can imagine, a problem is solved by working from the desired solution first.

Engineers often do this when they're making a new invention. They call it "reverse engineering."

What occurs the very moment you do this, you've stripped away all the details (at least the most cumbersome of them) which made you balk at the answer in the first place. Once you start at the end, your tendency to "overthink" the answer melts away.

Change your perspective of the problem.

Have you ever noticed when another person steps in to help solve the problems, somebody suddenly sees the pieces a bit differently. Why do you suppose this is? They are not already filled with the preconceived notions that you have from studying the problem so closely.

Think about how you use lateral thinking everyday in your home life. There's a movement out there that encourages you to start using "hacks." A hack is nothing more than looking at an everyday object and repurposing it. Think about the many ladders you've seen on Pinterest that are now bookshelves. Or fifty-five gallon tubs that are used as containers in container gardening. These are simple examples of lateral thinking.

Recently, someone stripped away the contents of a used book (not a valuable first-edition one-of-a kind book) and hid their internet router inside it. This was a hack to a problem. It was lateral thinking.

Many individuals, unfortunately put blinders on when they're trying to their problems — or even create something new. They believe, for whatever reason that they only have two options. The first is to put your head down and plow on, pushing forward despite the obstacles. Depending on the problem and the situation, the only result you'll get is a headache.

The other choice is to spend as little effort on the problems as possible. This isn't an acceptable choice either. Cutting corners never created any lasting breakthroughs or sparked any revolutions. It barely gets you through the day.

So how do you solve your problems? Try hard work combined with just the right amount of mental flexibility. You have to put in the effort. But you also have to be open and nonjudgmental enough to know when it's time to try something else.

Chapter 4: Applying Critical Thinking to Understand your Life Value

Creativity. Out of the box thinking. Lateral thinking.

You may be wondering if there are any more methods of left to approach a problem. As a matter of fact, there is one more way. That's by applying the concept of critical thinking to you set of problem-solving tools.

No doubt you've heard of it. You may also be tired of hearing of it. For most people, they have heard the phrase since they first entered high school and then moved on to college. It could be, though, that somewhere along the line of it being used repeatedly in your academic life or in your business careers, you've turn a deaf ear to what it really means.

It could be a quick review of the phrase and how you can apply it to your daily values may be in order. Briefly, it's the ability to think rationally and clearly so that you can fully comprehend and grasp the logical connection between ideas and concept.

You may think that you should be the norm for your thinking — or anyone's way of thinking. You'd be surprised to learn that if you left the mind to wander aimlessly, how "uncritical" your thinking may end up.

You'd probably find — as many scientists have — that if you don't apply critical thinking to your thought patterns, many of your thoughts would end up biased, uninformed and sometimes just plain prejudiced — not to mention distorted beyond belief.

You can hear this everyday when a group of people gather for their morning coffee or breakfast. It's in these sessions that the individuals feel free enough to talk openly about their feelings from the state of the world to their spouse's refusal to see things their own way.

While some individuals use critical speaking when they talk, many simply just spill out

their thoughts which have been formed quickly — and you wonder if they are indelibly shaped forever — by their emotions. They hear certain “facts” and simply don’t take the time to check them out.

Instead of speaking from the position of knowledge, they very often speak from their gut. This isn’t always an accurate reflection of the problem and even more often than not a less accurate reflection of any solid solutions.

You can probably see immediately the problem with this. The very quality of our lives and the results of what you do — and everyone else does — with their lives depend quite heavily on the quality of your thoughts. Inaccurate or non-critical thinking is not only costly in so many ways, but it can also cause permanent damage in your life. Long-term, non-critical thinking involving inaccurate ideas that make it almost impossible to tear down. Before you know it, you’re living your life based on inaccurate accounts of the world.

That not only means the physical manifestations you bring about with this thinking may not only be skewed, but may also not be what you want to see in the world. Beyond that, you’re putting your happiness, prosperity and everything that goes along with it on the line. If you want to be able to produce something — anything — that is positive as a result of your life, you need to be able to think critically about it.

Looking at your weight, for example, and doing nothing but viewing it from a non-critical thought process will do little or nothing if you’re trying to lose several pounds. You may end up talking yourself into the fact that it’s impossible to do anything. Or you could have yourself talked into the fact that you are the only person to blame for that. You may also uncritically follow those thoughts to how “bad” of a person you are because you can’t remedy the problem. As a result, you unwittingly contribute to your problem.

In a nutshell, in order for you to think critically about anything in your life, you must be capable of logical reasoning. Critical thinking, therefore, is all about being an active learner instead of a passive, unquestioning recipient of random bits of information you may have heard.

The Internet and Critical Thinking

Your daily interaction with the internet makes critical thinking all that much more vital in your life. Many people tend to start researching the net only to find inaccurate and downright false facts, but fail to question them — even though their minds nag them that something isn't quite right.

That leads many people to pass on these inaccuracies and even hoaxes as serious stories. This, in turn, creates an avalanche of unthinking, unwitting acceptance. People accept these facts at face value and these falsehoods and hoaxes are now spoken as the truth. What's worse, they're repeated over and over as being the truth. The ability to treat all data with suspicion until you get the chance to reflect on them, research the information and think independently about them is the ultimate goal of every critical thinker.

Analyzing Problems without Emotions Involved

At this point, you're may be wondering about that. After all, it's not everyday someone comes up to you on the street and asks that question. If you're at all unsure about whether you currently can think, reason and analyze the problems in your life, read about the characteristics a person who can do this possesses. If you can match your traits up to several of the abilities listed below, you're already performing some level of this form of thought on your own.

You're a critical thinker if you question the ideas and assumptions behind the beliefs.

Before accepting unconfirmed data and the word of others at face value, you need to question the basis of what they're saying and the source of their information. You, additionally, need to question the assumptions behind these statements as they're bandied about. Don't accept them at face value. Instead, see if the statements and the arguments which seem to bolster their credibility actually hold up under scrutiny.

As a critical thinker, you'll consistently search to ensure that the ideas presented to you and the underlying arguments for accepting them represent the entire picture. Ensure the validity before you accept them. Along with this, you'll want to keep your mind open and move on if, for some reason, they don't.

As a critical thinker, you'll not only be able to identify and analyze problems in a systematic way, you'll be able to solve them as well.

The alternative to this is to use your intuition or your gut feelings toward problem-solving. Certainly, there's nothing inherently wrong with this method. Some of the best decisions people ever made have been made from the use of the elusive intuition. Don't ever discard or diminish your intuition. It'll serve you well for the rest of your life. But, if your intuition isn't kicking in and you feel as if it's leaving you stranded or you just want to confirm it, then critical thinking can do this.

Understands the "link" between ideas, in other words, who can connect the dots, as they say.

Hmm. there are those dots again. Remember those nine dots you drew at the beginning of this book. You approached them no doubt from a critical perspective. And that was the first step. Critical thinking.

Far too many people — from business executives to stay at home spouses — can see all the dots, but they don't bother to find what they have in common. Think of the "dots" we've been talking about as facts. Instead of just accepting these facts as independent ideas and concept, begin to align them in such a way that you can form a cogent, logical

argument out of them.

If you can do this properly, you'll be able to "connect the dots" so that you have an airtight solution to the dilemma.

Constantly Search for the Best Possible Conclusion

The bottom line is simple enough once you've stripped away everything else. This form of thinking — very often highly valued in our society — depends on how we view the variables involved in order to create the best solution possible given the circumstances at the moment.

In other words, you can be assured you're a critical thinker if your thought process is searching, scanning and possibly discarding ideas in order to develop the best possible conclusion at the moment.

This all sounds great, you say, but you're still not quite so sure about how to approach this critical thinking tool. Just as with anything else you use in your life — from mathematics, to reading and writing to riding a bicycle — you'll have to use and hone the necessary skills. This sounds much harder than it really is.

You're about to discover that this skills cover a wide range, most of which you already possess and use in your daily life. They include, among other things, observation, interpretation, evaluation, explanation, problem solving and finally decision making.

That may sound overwhelming at the moment, but it really isn't. Here is a short, but comprehensive description of how you can approach any concept or idea and apply critical thinking. It could be you've just never broken the process into separate steps — yet.

Steps to Critical Thinking

If you following the steps outlined below, you'll be certain of applying all of your resources to viewing your circumstances, dilemma or problem with a critical eye.

1. Choose a topic then view it from an impartial point of view.
2. Discern what the various arguments are involved in this issue.
3. Develop a point of view to help you determine the validity and strength of the arguments
4. As you review this, consider what weaknesses or negative points you can identify in this particular way of thinking.
5. Determine what the implications are behind the statements or the argument being made.
6. Finally, provide a structured platform of reasoning and support for the argument you're planning on professing

Let's face it, none of us thinks along these lines every day, seven days a week. Sometimes the situation forces us think in this way, sometimes we're not even sure why we're driven to question some arguments.

There are times, though, when emotions grip you and your ability to view events or situations through impartial eyes disappear into the thick of the night. We could be angry, suffering from grief or even overwhelmed with joy. Your ability to look at events rationally may dwindle. That's fine, as long as you know what's going on.

That's the bad news. The good news is that your capabilities to think on a critical level depend on your current mindset. If your mindset isn't laden with unnecessary emotions, you actually improve your ability to think rationally and critically.

Chapter 5: Activities that force you to think outside the box

These chapters have covered everything to get you started in kicking your creative thinking into high gear. At this moment you're leaps and bounds beyond what most people know about thinking outside of the box and probably light years ahead of most people about implementing that type of thinking into your daily life.

What? You don't feel as if you're ready yet to use this type of thinking efficiently and successful. That's perfectly understandable. Remember that the more you use anything — from the muscles of your body to knowledge — the better you'll get at implementing it in your life.

Thinking outside the box is no different. But beyond that, there are tips, tricks and techniques you can use to jumpstart your ability to thinks outside of the box. That's what this chapter is all about. It's written expressly to show you what you can do to boost this method of thought process.

Some of these ideas are easy to institute, others may require a bit more effort and may even involve some resources you might not have available to you at the moment. Then again, once you start thinking creatively you just might find yourself inventing a creative way to employ those that are "supposedly" beyond your reach.

How to Naturally Start to Think Outside The Box

The following list of activities are mere suggestions that have helped others view their circumstances differently in order to solve a problem or find a different, more efficient way to do an everyday action. Use those that are most valuable to you at the moment, but don't summarily discard the others. You'll never know when you'll be able to use them.

Travel

Expand your horizons. Isn't that what you were always told that travel would do for you? At the time you heard this, you may have wondered exactly what your "horizons" were, but you figured they probably did need expanded regardless.

It turns out, that the scientific study performed in this area, confirms this sentiment. Travelling — especially abroad — does indeed expand your horizons. And just for the record, improves your ability to think creatively. A recent study revealed that college students who traveled overseas scored higher on tests measuring creative thinking than those students who stayed on campus for the same time period.

Specifically this study assessed American college students who traveled to England for a summer-study program. What causes this burst of creative thinking in students who went abroad? The obvious reason is the exposure they received to a variety of cultural norms. Regardless of your age, travelers are exposed to a society which performs activities and views problems differently from what's done in the states. That exposure alone sparks the idea that an act you may performed one way for so long could be done another way.

For some, the way one culture attacks its biggest problems of makes the most of the size of the space they have for certain events may trigger a creative chain reaction in your mind. The next thing you know, you're transferring that approach to your specific situations.

While the study didn't specifically state so, some experts in the field have extrapolated that the same conclusion probably holds true for traveling across the United States. With a country as large as this one, regional differences naturally exist. You may discover that something that you encounter in one city may help you with own personal problem-solving techniques.

So pack your bags and expand your horizons!

Talk to people you don’t know

No one is telling you to put your life in danger and befriend a serial killer or a mass murderer. Talking to individuals you may pass by in your neighborhood coffee shop or restaurant or even laundromat, can help boost your powers of creativity.

Again, just like above, you’ll be seeing the world from another perspective — theirs. Meeting these individuals, as you may well guess, is only the first step, though. The second, and more critical step in this activity, is to listen when they talk. That’s the only way you’ll be able to drink in their unique perspective on the world.

Viewing even mundane matters as political points from someone who has had different life experiences from yourself may help you understand how someone could hold that position. And that in itself may be the catalyst that sparks you to think outside of the box.

Break away from your daily routine

What? You’ve probably spent much effort and time disciplining yourself to create a routine to help boost your productivity. Now, you’re being told to break from that routine that’s worked so well for you.

Well, yes. You may want to break from it, but don’t toss it out the window. If you’re not focused on performing everything you have always done, in the same manner you’ve always done it, then you may open yourself up to new options of doing things.

You may want to start with your morning commute. If you’re like most of us, you tend to rely on the same route with the same traffic lights, making the same turns. You may even be seeing the same commuters driving the same cars on their way to work. And dare we say experiencing the same traffic jams day after day.

Why not start out a few minutes earlier and take a scenic route to work? The different type of landscape and just the need to pay attention to your route may help kindle your imagination. It may occur while you’re driving. Suddenly you see something that can help solve a problem at work. Or you may have a spark of creativity later in the day because of this “creative detour.”

Of course, there are any number of ways to break from your routine either at work or at home. For women of an earlier generation, Monday was always “wash day,” the day they gathered all the dirty clothes in the house and washed them. Similarly, Saturdays for that same generation of women was cleaning day. Floors would get scrubbed, bedrooms cleaned out and sweepers run throughout the entire house.

If Monday night is taco night at your house, why not surprise the entire family with a different menu? And who said that Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day were all about turkey or ham? Why not call the best Chinese restaurant in town and eat Chinese on Christmas Eve? It’ll not only be a Christmas to remember, it may just help you think

outside of the box.

Constrain your thinking

You're presented with another suggestion that tends to be counter intuitive. Normally, the average person thinks "creativity" and immediately associates it with freedom. Instead, go back to the adage that "necessity is the mother of invention."

What if you only had so many options? How could you piece them together in order to create something memorable, solve a problems at home, or help build your business or career? If that sounds impossible, then it sounds as if you need to at least give it a try.

Counterintuitively, it turns out that constraints can actually increase our creative output. This could be due to removing the overwhelming of having too many choices. If you've ever faced the hurdle of a blank page, you'll know what I mean.

According to the writer and actor John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, creativity is as elusive at times as that butterfly passing by you by never landing. It's always just out of your reach, lighting down all around you, but never gracing you with the pleasure of its company.

Surprisingly, research bears out Cleese's observations. Many individuals prefer what scientists call, "the path of least mental resistance." This refers to the act of building on ideas that have already been tried. Another route to this path of least mental resistance is using all the resources they have available, whether they're relevant or not.

When that happens he suggests that you try "trapping creativity." Specifically, he advises, "You have to create boundaries of space and then you have to create boundaries of time." Does that sound like anyone you know? Some of the most creative people claim they work best under pressure.

Many individuals believe for example, that only novels of 100,000 words or more are creative. There's a legend that Ernest Hemingway once bragged he could write a creative short story in a mere six words.

Intrigued, his friends took him up on the challenge. Sure enough, in six words he created one of the saddest tales you'll ever read: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

Dr. Seuss accepted a similar challenge in his writing, although he agreed to use a few more words. Using a mere 50 different predetermined words, Dr. Seuss wrote a children's book. You've probably read it as a child, read it to your children or even bought it for your niece or nephew. It's called ***Green Eggs and Ham.***

While you're probably not writing a short story, you can take a leaf from their book (or story) and think about how constraints on your situation can actually ignite your inner creativity.

How can living in a small apartment and the desire to grow a few vegetables stimulate your outside the box thinking, for example? How could you possibly store all of the kitchen pots and pans you've had when you had a big kitchen now that you've moved into a new apartment with a small galley kitchen? Physical constraints many times are

blessings in disguise. If you view them that way from the beginning, perhaps your creativity will kick in even sooner than it normally does.

Remind yourself that there's nothing new under the sun

What does that mean? It means that if you wait until an original, "never used before idea" sneaks up on you, you'll be waiting forever. While certainly there may be a few genuine ideas out there, but they are few and far between.

That may sound depressing until you realize how that can affect you personally. This means that all you need to do is to view the same "dots" as it were and make different connections. That, in effect, brings us back to the origins of the "thinking outside the box" phrase. Remember those nine dots you were asked to connect. How you connected them reflected the state of your creativity at that specific moment in time. You weren't performing any new or creative activity, you were merely trying to "connect the dots" as directed.

Even one of the most creative minds in the electronics age, Steve Jobs, realized that dependency on brand new ideas could spell disaster to your ultimate creative self. He sized up the idea of creative thinking in this way:

"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something."

The artist, Austin Kleon, said once he is always asked where his ideas from. His honest answer: "I steal them." That's closer to the truth than you may imagine. Ask Twyla Tharp, dancer and choreographer where she gets her ideas from. She's constantly being inspired by a piece of music or something created from someone else, then she connects the dots, so to speak, in her own way. The result, surprisingly, is a new and sometimes revolutionary creation which becomes an icon in its own right.

Think of West Side Story. If you realize it's "just" a re-working, revision and update of the Shakespeare's classic, Romeo and Juliet, does it diminish the magnificence of it at all?

The bottom line to this suggestion is to take ideas from others, pretend they're Play Doh or pliable clay and rework them to suit your needs. The ideas for decor you find on Pinterest may not suit your home exactly, but with a tweak here and a tweak there, the basic idea may work in your home. And viola! By all accounts you're thinking creatively.

Do something you've never done before

You can immediately see why this works to build your ability to think outside the box. If you've never performed a particular task before, you take a step or two back to figure out the best way for *you* to perform it. Sure, you're going to watch videos, ask others for their advice, but the bottom line is that you're going to work out a plan of attack — a creative plan of attack — that works for you. During all of this you're thinking outside the box without realizing it.

Surround yourself with creative people

This may be a no-brainer, but it is, after all, one of the quickest ways to kick start your creative thinking. You're around people who think outside of the box almost by second nature. If you not only surround yourself with individuals like this, but watch closely what they do, then emulate them, you'll be thinking outside the box yourself, before you know it.

Remember that, as we noted earlier, that you're the average of the five individuals you frequent the most. If that's the case, then you can't help but find yourself a more creative thinker when you keep company with those whose thought processes are already finely honed in this perspective.

Listen to music

Yes, sometimes it is that easy. Music of any kind actually stimulates the area of your brain that regulates the motor actions, emotions, and — viola! — Creativity. According to some studies, the best type of music to have in the background is classical. But, many individuals say that as long as it's the kind of music you love, then it should stimulate your creative stream of thinking.

If you do choose classical music, some researchers suggest listening to anything composed by Mozart. For reasons that aren't entirely clear to researchers, listening to Mozart's compositions can help boost not only your ability to think outside the box, but also strengthen your concentration as well as a few other cognitive functions

This simple, unobtrusive, method may be just what you need to add to your tricks to help think out of the box. Give it a try. What do you have to lose?

The activities listed above should work well for you in getting you accustomed to thinking outside the box and applying a creative vision to your daily life. You may want to implement these one at a time, then sit back and see how they can aid you in your thought processes.

It's possible that some may not work for you. Undoubtedly, though, you'll discover at least one, if not more to boost your thinking.

Conclusion

The methods your mind uses to create your world — from enhancing your career to chopping onions more efficiently — is the result of several layers of thought. Many times you employ these layers without being fully consciously aware of them.

While lateral or creative thinking can be the spark that ignites your imagination and sets your passions on fire, you'll still need to implement the other thought processes along your creative journey to piece it all together.

After Einstein used out of the box thinking to visualize himself riding on that beam of light, then he dug in and employed his lateral and critical thinking to ensure his laws of relativity would withstand the critical thinking of his peers.

Without employing critical or lateral thinking, the creativity of Thomas Edison may have been just "wasted" day dreaming.

Even when you go to employ your creativity to problems or changes in your home, you need to layer the types of thoughts you use. All of these different forms of thought processes are needed in order to implement your daily "life hacks" as they're called these days. Sure, that ladder bookshelf sounds like a great idea, but you still need to install it. That's where the other types of thinking are indispensable.

At times, that out of the box thought is essential at the end of a project or a situation. If you read mystery novels or watch crime dramas on television, you will know exactly how this works. The detectives have performed all the critical and lateral thinking needed. They've traced the evidence as far as they could. They've employed logic and then carefully created new ideas and thoughts as they branch off the original evidence.

Yet, they still have hit a dead end. At that point, they take their jigsaw puzzle of clues which is missing one final piece and do something unexpected. They turn the entire puzzle ninety degrees. The result? An entirely different picture appears, usually yielding the big picture allowing the placement of that final missing piece of the puzzle. Now, they clearly see the shape of the puzzle and place it snugly and securely in the hole.

As you become more comfortable with thinking outside the box, you'll become at recognizing when it's needed. In turn, the easier it'll be to call it up when needed.

Thank you for reading this short guide. Now is the time to start thinking outside the box. Try and do your daily tasks differently. Ask completely different questions. Be Creative! Our Imaginations are limitless.

Thank You for Reading Thinking outside the box. As a way to thank you, I have included 2 Chapters of Habits of the super rich as a bonus. I hope you will find it informative when reading it.

Introduction

“The rich get richer, while the poor get poorer.”

“If you’re not born rich, you’ll never get rich.”

“It’s impossible to be successful today, there’s just too much competition.”

Have you heard – or even repeated – any of these adages? If you have, you’re not alone. All of us have felt that way at one time or another. But if you take them to heart and say them day after day, they become ingrained in your subconscious and you begin to believe them. These words, which seemed harmless enough when you first started saying them, may have now become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When that happens, you think that everyone else is successful, regardless of how you define your personal success, but you. The ironic aspect of this is that you can try all sorts of measures from investing in the stock market to online marketing to multi-layer marketing, to – yes! – even playing the lottery. None of this works. At the end of the day, month or year, you haven’t seem to make any more money or be any more successful in your career than when you first starting working toward your goal.

Actually that’s not surprising. Some individuals call the use of this mantra so that it’s part of your belief system a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” It’s also known as a “poverty” mentality. They don’t have the ability to see themselves as being successful. We all know people like this. Regardless of how hard they work, just they seem to have “bad luck.”

Those who have even worked hard in order to work up the economic ladder find, at times, that their mindset holds them back. Imagine the single mom with several children who worked three jobs just to make ends meet. As they grew and she was able to she took courses to become a registered nurse. Today she makes a great income, but still hoards her paycheck and won’t pay a utility bill until the companies send a representative to turn off the utility. She has never recovered from her “poverty mentality.”

Then there’s the other end of the spectrum: the individual who seems to be able to make all the mistakes in the world and still come out successful. No matter what he does he ends up “smelling like roses,” as they say.

The Difference Between The Rich and The Poor

In one word: habits!

You can set all the goals you want. To earn $125,000 a year or more. To get that promotion at work. To become a New York Times bestselling author. But unless you have established good habits you'll never reach those goals. Unless you establish the habits of "the rich and famous" you'll forever be chasing success and it will be just slightly out of your grasp.

The real truth is that you can have all that you can have all the riches and success – however, you define them – you wish. There really are no limits to what you can achieve. All you have to do is change your "poverty" mentality to one of success. All you need to do is change the habits that keep you chained to your current lifestyle and your current salary. Swap these habits for better ones, for habits and thoughts and insights that will make you as rich, as successful, as happy as you care to be.

If you're serious about climbing the rungs of success at your workplace, in any online venture or in the entrepreneurial world, then you can do it. And you can accomplish this simply by turning a few bad habits into a few good habits.

That's where this book comes in. This book can succinctly and easily help you recognize and implement that habits the rich and famous use in order to achieve and maintain success. Consider this volume your personal "how to" manual to getting what you desire out of life.

This book is actually only one in a long lineage of classic self-help books. Books like this have been published for years. Probably the most famous is Napoleon Hill's ***Think and Grow Rich*** or more recently Jack Canfield's ***The Success Principles.*** If his name sounds familiar, it should. He was one of the editors of the wildly successful books, the first of which was called ***Chicken Book for the Soul***. Since then, he and his co-editor Mark Hansen have built that book into a franchise.

Think and Grow Rich author Hill was commissioned by Andrew Carnegie to discover the common habits and traits of the highly successful industrialists of the early twentieth century.

The truth of the matter is that if you visit a bookstore or go on any web site that sells books, you'll discover a myriad of self-help books all promising to make you rich.

So why does the world need another book on this topic, this one specifically? Because few, if any, of the reputable books on this topic are written this succinctly. This well-written book gets to the crux of the issue, not only letting you know what the best habits are, how they work and how you can use them to help you "think and grow rich" yourself. In a conversational tone, this volume explains why habits are so very important and how you can effortlessly adopt them.

Not only that, but this book is easy to keep near you, either on your computer desktop, on your ebook reader or both. This means you can refer to it whenever you find your spirit sagging or a dark cloak of pessimism trying to smother you. In these cases, it's easy to pull out this book for inspiration. Before you know, you'll back on track, practicing the good habits all successful individuals do – and knowing that all the universal laws are working toward your success.

It incorporates all the ideas of the classic writers as well as the best of the ideas from today's motivational speakers and books.

What you'll Discover in this Book

This book will show you the habits of the successful and help you put them into practice so that they'll become second nature to you. Not only that, but along with those habits, you'll learn why these habits work, starting with the Universal laws of success. They come in many forms, including the recently celebrated Law of Attraction. Many of you may already be familiar with this from the movie and book, ***The Secret.***

In addition to the law of attraction, there are several other laws that go hand-in-hand with it that can solidify your successful for you. These laws a bit less well-known, the laws of detachment, allowing, abundance and gratitude – to name just a few.

You'll also learn the science behind why these habits and perfectly enmeshed. It all starts with the subconscious mind. Equipped with this information, you can go out and initiate any good habit and within the period of your choice, have it become a part of you.

Still don't think any of this is possible? Do you still believe that only the few, the privileged deserve success? If you still think you're "condemned" to live an ordinary life yearning for more, then you need to start reading this book right now.

In the first chapter, you'll vividly see the habits you choose to use can either make or break your success. Why not dig in right now and begin your well-deserved journey to success?

There's no time like the present to change your thinking from "the rich only get richer" to "I am prosperous beyond my wildest imagination."

Chapter 1: Habits of the Rich and the Poor

Jim and Zach had been friends since high school. Both were straight A students. In fact, they graduated sharing the honors as co-valedictorians. There was only one major difference between them, though. Jim didn't need to study. His talent was natural and he soon discovered that a quick look at his lessons was all he needed to get his "A." After that, he turned his attention to recreational pursuits.

Zach, on the other hand, worked hard to keep up with Jim's natural abilities. He found that he needed to study in order to get his good grades. He naturally searched for, developed and perfected habits to help him do just that. Zach knew when to say no to a social invitation in order to study for that important exam, even though it meant missing the good times of a few social engagements.

Throughout their high school career, Jim chided Zach in a good natured tone about his apparent discipline and the acquisition of his many study habits. Jim took it all in stride saying, "I'll do whatever it takes to get good grades."

Then the pair went off to the same college. It was then Zach's turn to tease his best friend Jim/ Zach was able to take the same habits he had developed in high school and apply them to his college courses.

It's not that Jim was a bad student. Not by any stretch of the imagination. Especially during his first two years. He was able to breeze through the courses, just as he had done in high school.

However, as he got into upper level coursework he had a bit of trouble here and there. Zach, could see that Jim's academic career may be in danger if he didn't adopt some solid positive habits – and soon.

When graduation day came, Zach had a higher grade point average than Jim. Not by much, but by enough.

As luck would have it, Zach and John received job offers at the same corporation. They worked side by side for several years. But now the tables were turned. Those positive habits Zach had developed in high school and used in college were now the same ones that

he needed to prove himself at work.

Jim, though, found it difficult to adjust to the business world. He had not created any substantial good habits during his educational career. In fact, in college, he probably adopted more bad habits than anything else.

Can you guess which proved the better employee? Bingo! Zach. Even though he had to work at everything he did, his habits, by this time, came so naturally to him, that it didn't seem like so much work.

What was worse was that the bad habits Jim had acquired in college carried over to his professional career. Little by little he discovered that he was on a downward spiral.

Bad Habits and the Downward Spiral

If you've never heard of that notorious downward spiral before, think of it as that "slippery slope" so many individuals love to talk about. Let's take the habit of "punctuality," or showing up on time for work. We all can point to someone who is chronically late – to church, to social events, to appointments. While that's irritating, being late to those events aren't career threatening.

Then there are those who are chronically late for work. These are the people who are most at risk of experiencing that downward spiral. You wouldn't think one small habit like being on time could possibly be that crucial in a job. But you'd be surprised where even one small, unassuming bad habit could lead.

If someone were late for work every morning even by ten minutes, his supervisor would eventually note that. Perhaps he may even issue him warnings about it. His supervisor may overlook it, if the person were outstanding in his job. But, what if, the individual had the same bad habit of being late in meeting deadlines at work? Turning reports in late, being late to vital meetings – even those that kept important clients waiting.

There's only so much an employer will tolerate. Before you know it, the employer has fired this individual. Think that's the lowest down a spiral can go? Think again. The journey continues. During the time he's off work, he can't find a job, he has trouble meeting his bills and, well, it only goes downhill from there.

All for the lack of one good habit: punctuality.

Let's now look at the flip side of that single habit. Let's assume that this employee, instead, came to work on time every day. How would his career have changed?

Had he done this, his employer would have no need to even give him a warning.

Additionally, if this employee had practiced punctuality, he would have naturally been on time – perhaps even early – for all meetings, turning in all reports and especially for those vital meetings with the company's most important clients.

The Upward Spiral

In the end, he probably would have been a shining example of a model employee and would have been in line for a promotion. With just that one small change in habit, he could have gone from his modest position to a much more lucrative and more responsible position.

There's no need to tell you that as part of that upward spiral, his budding career would have included several salary increases along the way. This means that his personal life also would have been on an upward spiral of a larger house and everything he and his family needed and wanted to create the ideal family life.

Punctuality is just one habit successful people have. If you study the habits of the successful, like the authors Napoleon Hill and later Steven Covey did, you'll find that they hold many of the same good habits.

If you feel as if your life is stagnant and you haven't had the joy of the upward spiral – or worse yet, you recognize you're on that downward spiral — you may be motivated to seriously scrutinize your habits – right here and right now.

Changing the Direction of the Spiral

Some of us have the mistaken belief that those individuals who have struck it rich and succeeded beyond belief have done so using “dumb luck.” That couldn’t be farther from the truth, if you scratch the surface, what you discover just below their shiny success, are years of their practicing ingrained good habits.

The good news is that you too can adopt the same habits which made them wildly successful – and become as successful as you desire.

Before you say that it’s impossible to change your habits, let’s move on to chapter two, which talks about the miraculous power of your subconscious mind and how, with even just a bit of effort, it’ll help you not only stop the downward spiral you may find yourself on right now, but actually help you turn the tide and start on an upward spiral.

Chapter 2: Turning thoughts into reality: It All Starts with the Subconscious Mind

The ancestor of every action is a thought.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jim and Zach, our friends from the first chapter, were talking one day. By this point in their careers, Zach was on the fast track – his upward spiral – toward an upper management job.

Jim, on the other hand, was experiencing a downward spiral – and he seemed to be plummeting down that rabbit hole quicker than Alice in Wonderland.

For his part, Jim was in shock, wondering how he could have gotten himself in such a position. "Can I speak honestly with you," Zach offered. After receiving his consent, his pal outlined exactly what he saw.

Jim took a deep breath and said. "It looks pretty hopeless," he said.

Zach immediately corrected him. "It's never hopeless. That is if you're willing to put in some time and effort." Jim immediately agreed.

"Once you take the first step, your subconscious mind will help you the rest of the way."

It's a very simple concept, but one that we tend to overlook. It's one, though, that our friend Zach seemed to know.

When we do acknowledge it we simply underrate it. But it's true. Every building constructed, every book written, every business created first began as some one's thoughts.

Many individuals believe that there’s no understanding the subconscious mind. They know ideas pop into their heads, seemingly miraculously, in the middle of the night. They also know that if they don’t write them down they seem to dematerialize into a thin cloud of smoke never to be remembered again. The workings of the mind are a mystery, they believe. It’s a magical, mystical mystery tour.

Ask anyone who thought with great confidence that they would surely remember this life-changing concept that woke them up without warning at two in the morning. They smiled, simply rolled over and went back to sleep. When the alarm woke them up at 7 a.m., they were so close to recalling the idea … but couldn’t.

What is the Subconscious Mind?

Your subconscious mind is the repository of the myriad of information that flies by us every day even if we're not aware of them. Our mind catches them in mid-flight and files them away. It's amazing how much information the subconscious mind stores for us, even if we aren't aware we have it stored away somewhere.

But here's a secret about the subconscious that few know. It works best when we're not aware of it working. It's at its most efficient when we aren't alert. That's why we wake up with those wonderful ideas at times. When we sleep we don't have a clue as to what that portion of the mind is doing.

Similarly, it works its magic when we are doing something totally unrelated to what we're working on. How many times have you walked away from a problem or a glitch in a project to have the answer flash in front of you?

No doubt you're well aware of those moments. They may differ from person to person, they may even differ for you depending on the problem and the situation. That's why the eureka moment hits you when you're taking a shower, watching television or even driving a car.

Ever get in a car and drive through an intersection wondering if you really stopped at that red light? Or maybe while you're driving you actually forget to turn on the proper street. That's your subconscious mind working out the details of a project or problem for you.

Ask just about any writer and he'll tell you he gets his best ideas as soon as he opens his eyes in the morning.

Remember those days in grade school and high school when the teacher admonished you for daydreaming? The implication was that you were wasting your time. These days you probably should be doing more of it. Yes, daydreaming is a wonderful way of exercising your subconscious mind. Others find they can put the subconscious mind to work through hypnosis.

The secret about the subconscious mind that all successful people know is that you can use this portion of your brain to your advantage instead of being at the mercy of its seemingly whimsical nature. Through the deliberate use of the subconscious mind you can use your

mind more effectively to influence not only your motivation, but your will power as well. In fact, once you begin to train yourself in the proper procedure of using this portion of your mind, you'll discover that there's not much you can't do.

How Successful People Put the Subconscious to Work

The following are facts every successful person knows about the subconscious mind. Not only does he know these facts, he works within their bounds so he can make the most of this awesome power.

Subconscious Mind Fact #1: The subconscious mind has no agenda of its own.

This layer of your mind has no will of its own. It doesn't have a "hidden agenda" that is trying to persuade you to its side of an argument or perspective. Its one and only one function:

The subconscious exists solely to produce ideas according to the beliefs and the images you place in it.

Unlike other areas of our brain, such as the ego or the conscious mind, it doesn't judge these images, beliefs or thoughts. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? You might be thinking right about now that it should be your best friend.

Indeed it should. But then you have to learn that because it doesn't judge, it will manifest anything you place into it. That means it will as readily give you the lack of money you've been thinking about as well as the prosperity you desire. The subconscious mind will hand you illness as quickly as it will hand you health.

To put it in more concrete terms, your subconscious mind is essentially working off the blueprint of your life that you're feeding – whether you realize it or not. It won't stop to examine your thoughts and censor out the negative ones then chastise you for thinking them.

The subconscious mind receives all that you feed it, then begins to bring them to life. Think about it! It could be an awesome tool. If you're thinking prosperity, visualizing the life you dream of, it's not about to judge you. Instead, it quietly goes to work bringing it about. In this way, Emerson was right on the mark. A thought really is the ancestor of every action.

The opposite of this is true as well though. If you go to bed at night – or spend the best

part of your day – worrying over your debts, affirming that you live from paycheck to paycheck, then what do you believe your subconscious will deliver you on a silver platter. Exactly what you've been thinking about: more debt.

Instead of finding that fact depressing, you should view it as liberating. Just by changing what you think about – especially right before you go to bed at night and as soon as you wake up in the morning – can actually be the catalyst for the successful life you've been hungering for.

Napoleon Hill knew this when, in the 1930s he wrote ***Think and Grow Rich.*** After interviewing the most productive and most successful business people of his day, he recognized how to use the subconscious mind to produce the success. In his book, he speaks about manifesting "riches" into your life, this same six-step process, based on the nonjudgmental actions of the subconscious mind, can work the same type of magic in your life that it did for others – bring them untold success.

Napoleon Hill's proven Six-Step Process to Success

1. Decide on the specific amount of money you want

This is a very important step. When Hill writes "exact amount' he means it. The more specific you can be in your mind, the better. Don't be wishy-washy about this. Don't waffle. Just decide on how much you want.

Notice I didn't say "need." Don't make the mistake many individuals do at this point of the process. They don't decide on enough. Catherine Ponder a motivational speaker once said, "It's as easy to manifest a button as it is to a castle."

Do yourself a favor from the very beginning, never settle for the button when you really want the castle.

2. Decide what you're going to give in return for receiving this money.

Many people expect at this point money will just rain down from heaven for them, just like in the Old Testament story of the Hebrews in the desert and the manna or bread. Don't expect that you're going to receive your riches through hitting the lottery. Be prepared to start working on an idea – if you haven't already.

Are you going to start offering your services as a writer? Or are you going to start an online business? Now is the time to follow your passion.

3. Establish a deadline.

Go ahead, don't be afraid. You're not going to insult your subconscious mind by presenting it with a deadline. If you don't do this, you'll discover that these "riches" or whatever you desire will always be just out of your reach.

4. Make a detailed plan of action.

Again, don't expect these riches just to fall from heaven. Don't expect your business plan to materialize in front of you with the wave of a magic wand. Instead, you'll want to write out in detail how you plan to carry out your business or your services.

Remember, every good business person started off this way. Think of it as a map. You're here, where "x" marks the spot. There's no use decrying where you are at the moment. Just accept this is your location and your resources for the moment and know – without any reservation of doubt – that you will get to exactly where you'll want to be.

You want to be here, where the map indicates the "treasure" is waiting for you. Besides, a well thought out business plan is the first thing any bank asks for when a person requests a business loan. Where do you plan to be in the next five years? How do you plan to acquire your riches?

That's right. Get a pen and paper. It's better, by the way, to do this initially in long-hand instead of on a computer. This makes it seem more of a serious commitment. Make sure when you do this you include all the necessary facts. This includes the exact amount of money you intend to manifest in your life. Give it a deadline, then write down what services you're going to provide in return for this money. Not only that, but accurately detail the plan you have for bringing all of this to fruition. At this point you may believe you're done. Not quite.

6. Read this statement twice a day.

Use the power of the spoken word and spend time reading your written account twice a day. Make of a habit of doing this first thing in the morning, before you place any other ideas in your mind and again in the evening, so it's the last idea you think about before going to bed.

But here's the catch. When you do read it, visualize it in your mind. Feel the excitement of success coursing through your body. Believe that the riches you desire, the business you're willing to build to receive it are already manifest in your life. In other words believe with all the fiber of your body that you already have the money.

TRUTH #2 – The Subconscious can't tell the real from the imagined

For such a potentially powerful organ, the subconscious seems to be "naive." It can't tell he real from the imagined, it only "lives" in the present and understands the present. When people first learn these facts, they try to deny them. After all, your mind is so miraculous, it seems incredulous you can manipulate it so easily.

Think about what was just said. "You can manipulate it – the subconscious mind – so easily." Again, this is difficult to believe. But once you can overcome your disbelief, you may begin to kick yourself. After all, if this is true, then why didn't you learn this earlier in life? It seems like a fairly simple method to help kick start your success.

As we learn to work with this portion of the brain and learn habits of the rich and famous, you'll discover how important this concept is to your own overcoming bad habits, acquiring good ones and marching forward to success.

TRUTH #3 – The Subconscious only understands the present

The key to true success lies in the "present tense." When you start giving instructions to your brain, you're always going to talk to it in the present tense. When you write out your affirmations, they'll always be written in the present tense. Have you gone through Napoleon Hill's six steps yet? If you have, stop right here and review them. Make sure everything you want is phrased in the present tense. Don't use the future tense.

By now you can probably guess what that would do. That would mean you can see your riches, but they would always be just beyond your reach because you keep asking for them in the future. The future never arrives. By the time it gets here, we call it today. Again, the subconscious is a literal creature.

How Did you get to this Point?

Let's take a step back here for a moment. We should rephrase this. Theoretically, it should be easy to manipulate your subconscious. The problem for many of us, if not all of us, is that others have already manipulated it before we even thought doing this was possible.

Or perhaps you've had a hand in manipulating it yourself and now you have to undo the "damage." What do we mean by that? Perhaps you've been told by your parents growing up that you're not going to succeed in a certain occupation. The competition is fierce and, quite frankly, you're just not smart enough. Think about the field day your subconscious mind had with that statement.

The results? Two possible ones could have manifested. First, you may have avoided that vocation all together believing that you would never succeed. Or perhaps you were smart enough to ignore your parents and enter the occupation of your dreams only to find yourself failing desperately in it. Why? Because your subconscious mind was already imprinted with the thoughts of failure.

TRUTH #3 - Habits Are the Footprints of the Subconscious

This is an elaborate way of saying that all of your habits are dictated by your subconscious mind. Depending on your point of view, this could be good news or bad news.

Habits are just actions that have been ingrained into our system – some of them since childhood. Think about the habit of brushing your teeth. When you were a youngster your parents probably drilled into you the necessity of that habit. It wasn't something your mind told you to do. But one day, after your parents reminded you for so long, something in your mind clicked. Your parents no longer needed to remind you – and it became a habit.

Ask any person who works at home for a living. These individuals had to establish good habits in order to keep on track every day. These activities are dictated by their job. If it weren't for these "work habits" they never would have been able to sustain such a thriving business.

The truth be told, habits drive all successful people and the subconscious mind drives habits. In order to change your bad habits into good ones, you'll have to manipulate your subconscious. We've already seen that given the attributes of the mind, what may sound difficult, may actually be much easier than you think.

Exercises to Direct the Power of your Subconscious

The beauty of the power of your subconscious is that it is easily trainable. For the longest time, the majority of individuals seeking success were unaware of the power of this awesome aspect of the mind. We thought our bad luck was just that “bad luck.” We thought our limited income was somehow dictated by the gods of prosperity or by some fundamental lack of currency in the world.

Neither of these concepts would be further from the truth. Are you ready to start training your subconscious mind to work for you, to bring you your deepest desires, including success in your career and the prosperity that accompanies that, great relationships – both professional and personal – and the power to dictate your moods?

If you’ve personalized the six steps of Napoleon Hill’s found earlier in this chapter, congratulations. You’ve already take the first step. But just like exercising any other muscles, you have to perform a variety of exercises to create the habits you’ll need in order to get what you want.

The following three exercises will help you reach your goals. You can start using these immediately, while you’re reading and studying the rest of this book.

Subconscious Exercise 1: Create Your Vision of a Successful life

Prior to reading this book you probably didn’t realize you were the person responsible for the financial or emotional state of your life at this very moment. You may have wanted to blame it on being in the wrong place at the wrong time or a lack of money or even a lack of love.

As we move forward in these chapters you’ll learn about the law of abundance. Succinctly this universal law states that there is no lack in the universe, but only an abundance. And it really doesn’t matter an abundance of what. You can live the life you’ve been dreaming of without depriving someone else of their abundant and rich vision of their live. Once you quit thinking that this life is a competition among every one else you meet or even a rat race, you’ll be amazed at how doors, once locked, open easily to your touch.

Even before you learn the workings of this law, you can put it to use. Simply visualize the life you want. That's right! Instead of dwelling in the vision of your life as it is now, begin to imagine the life you want to lead. See it now: the ideal career, the ideal house, the ideal family.

But don't just see it, feel it with every fiber of your body. Get excited about what you're seeing. Feel as if you were living it right now.

Start this visualization process now, and when we talk more about this in a later chapter you'll be that much farther along in the process and, of course, closer to your goals.

When is the best time to visualize? Right before you go to sleep at night and as soon as you wake up in the morning.

Exercise 2: Write Your 10 Goals Daily

Imagine this statistic. Less than three percent of Harvard University students have set goals. At one of the most competitive schools in the nation, that seems to be a small percentage of the students.

Yet, we know that one of the most effective ways to get where you want to go and to enjoy your success, is through the creation of goals. If you've thought about setting written goals, you should consider it right now.

Do more than just consider it, though. You should write them down. Think about all the daydreams you've had since you were a child. Consider what you would be doing today if you knew you couldn't fail. If you knew that you could take that leap of faith and succeed, what would you be doing with your life?

Take ten of these goals and write them done. Now, read these out loud several times a day. You may already be a step ahead of me knowing that two of these recitations should be before you go to bed at night and when you wake up in the morning.

Now, take the first step toward one of these goals. You'll see almost immediately your subconscious working perfectly in sync with the universe as events unfold that facilitate you manifesting these long-held desires.

What can’t be repeated to many times at this point of your planning is that you must take the first step. You can take it tentatively and hesitantly, that’s fine. You can take action with a small measure of doubt that you’re actually taking the correct action. The truth is as long as you take action it’s the right action.

If it should be the wrong step, your subconscious mind and the universe will work together to set you on the proper path. Guaranteed!

Exercise 3: Use Positive Affirmations to Nourish your Subconscious Mind

This exercise practically goes hand in hand with the previous one. Using those goals you’ve written, write out positive affirmations that will help you achieve those goals. You’re going to create affirmations that, above all, are written in the present tense even though you may not have seen these goals met yet.

For example, I have a friend who has one affirmation is simply: I am a New York Times Best Selling author. She isn’t, not yet there. But as you recall her subconscious can’t tell the real world from the imagined world. As she recites these words throughout the day, she visualizes what it would feel like to be a bestselling author.

The combination of spoken and written word as well as projecting her emotions into the situation will eventually propel her to that status.

Decide on one or two areas you’d like to work on first. Review your list of goals and create a positive, present tense affirmation to suit your specific needs. This is now yours. Write it out daily and be sure to speak it daily. Yes, especially in the morning when you wake up and in the evening as part of your ritual before you retire.

Believe it or not, you’ve now created another habit of the successful person. Continue to do this. You may only want to concentrate on one or two affirmations at a time so you can truly focus on them. Congratulations.

In the chapters that follow, we’re going to learn more about the laws of the universe, how they work and especially how you can use these to create habits of success and prosperity. But in the meantime begin to put everything you’ve learned up to now into practice. Your excitement will only mount as you begin to see how your mind is beginning to stir up the

long-buried dreams and goals.

Are you ready to continue upon your success journey? There’s no time like the present.

The First Time Home Buyer

Buying a Condo

Thomas.K.Lutz

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Introduction

This book is your guide to all things condo living.

In it, we will talk about pros and cons of owning a condo, things you need to know when buying a condo and your rights and responsibilities as a condo owner.

We'll also discuss why condos are a great investment and explore the subject of finding and qualifying great tenants.

A lot of people oftentimes use the word "apartment" to describe a private residence in a building. There is nothing wrong with that.

By definition, an apartment is a private residence in a building or a house. The word apartment, though, does not tell you anything about the type of ownership of a property.

When it comes to types of ownerships of private residences in a building, there are condos, rental apartments, and co-ops.

To avoid confusion going further, let's first define what a condo is and discuss the differences between condos, rental apartments, and co-ops.

A condo is short for a condominium. The word condominium comes from two Latin words, "con" and "dominium."

"Con" in Latin stands for "together with." "Dominium" in Latin stands for "right of ownership."

When you buy a condo in a building, you individually own your unit. You own a deed to your dwelling and you pay taxes on it directly to a city or municipality.

A building may come with a property that has swimming pools and other amenities. Common areas, such as hallways and stairs, elevators, swimming pools, barbecue areas, rooftops, parking lots, tennis courts, heating and air conditioning systems are owned equally by all condo owners under an umbrella of an association of condo owners.

Practically, a condo is usually a unit in a shared building. Theoretically, a condo could physically look like anything.

Condos can be usually found in places with very high property values, such as vacation destinations and urban areas. This is because having a separate home in such areas would be extremely expensive. At the same time, condos make a possibility of home ownership available to a much larger pool of people.

A condo association determines an operating budget for the building and its grounds. An association bills each owner monthly for what is known as “common charges.”

When shopping for a condo, you will usually receive a quote for common charges and a quote for real estate taxes.

A “co-op” is short for cooperative. A cooperative is a legal entity in which membership is granted by the way of a share purchase. Co-ops are not considered real property.

When becoming a member of a co-op, you do not own your unit. You do not get a deed for your premises. You own shares in a corporation that owns your unit.

As a shareholder, you are entitled to exclusive use of a certain unit that’s part of the co-op. Generally, the number of shares does not change. You do not pay taxes on your unit separately. They are included in your monthly co-op maintenance fees.

These fees pay for basic operating costs of a building, salaries

for superintendent and doormen, real estate taxes and mortgage, if there's one on the building.

Many co-ops started as rental buildings with landlords later deciding to sell their shares in order to reduce overhead expenses.

Compared to condos, co-ops may have a lot of restrictions. Sometimes co-ops have requirements for who can become a member.

This means that you can't sell a coop unit directly to a third party. The third party will need to go through a board approval process. If granted approval, you will be allowed to sell your shares (that include the rights to exclusive usage of your unit) to someone else. A coop also might have a restriction on unit subletting, number and possibility of having overnight guests, noise levels and so on.

When a unit in a building is not a coop or a condo, it is usually a rental apartment. A rental apartment is a unit in a building where all the units and common areas belong to a single owner, typically a corporation.

Individual units are then leased to tenants. Lease prices for such apartments may vary. Some cities only allow new construction of apartment buildings if an owner agrees to participate in an affordable housing program and rent a certain number of units in the building at prices significantly below market value.

Pros and cons of living in a condo

There are several advantages to owning a condo. Just like with many other things in life, having a condo comes with its own set of pros and cons

Pros

It is cheaper than owning a home

We talked in the introduction about the fact that condos are usually very popular in tourist spots such as Miami and urban areas such as New York, Boston, Washington, DC, Chicago and Downtown Los Angeles.

Real estate prices in such areas are very high. Owning a single family home would be extremely expensive. Buying a condo is a cheaper and more affordable option.

How much cheaper? Obviously, it depends on the size of a home or a condo, property values in the neighborhood and the cost of living in the area. As an example, you can buy a 2400 square foot townhouse condo in a Boston suburb for about $725,000. A similar-sized single-family home in the same area costs about just over $1 million, which is 27.5% more than a condo.

Use of amenities

Most condominiums come with a range of tenant-only amenities in the common areas. This means that you may get access to a fitness center, swimming pool, tennis court and parking garage that you would not be able to afford otherwise. The list of amenities a building may have includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Children’s playroom
- Parking garage
- Basketball courts
- Tennis courts

- Fitness center
- Billiard room
- Sauna
- Steam room
- Media room
- Wine cellar
- Residents’ lounge
- Solarium
- Landscaped terraced
- Rooftops
- Soundproof music studio
- Bicycle storage
- Washer and dryer room
- Wet bar
- Yoga room

Keep in mind, that maintenance for your building’s amenities will be included in your common charges. The more luxurious the building and the more amenities it has, the higher the common charges are going to be.

You don’t mow the lawns or shovel the snow

This is one of the big appeals of condo living. You pay dues to a condominium association and it takes care of everything. No lawns to mow, no pool to clean, no snow to shuffle. If you were to live in a single-family home, you’d be responsible for the

maintenance of the property and your home. Leaky roofs, broken radiators and cracks in the payment would be your responsibility. Not so with condos. Simply pay your common charges and have someone else take care of the things for you.

There is a sense of community

Many homeowners would say this as well. However, condos are usually built in urban areas and condo owners live in much closer proximity to each other compared to suburban residents.

You own your unit and can customize it any way you want

One of the biggest benefits of a condo is that, unlike a share in a co-op, it is your property. You can do whatever you want with it. You can redesign the apartment, paint the walls, and change kitchen appliances. You can invite guests and rent your unit, should you choose to do so.

Location and lifestyle

Condos are usually located in most vibrant, central locations. Often you will be within walking distance or be able to use public transportation to get to shopping centers, movies, grocery stores, theaters, and restaurants.

This fact coupled with the absence of responsibilities when it comes to property maintenance means that you will have more time to spend doing the things you love and will not have to spend time in traffic.

Central location often means that you do not need to own a car, which means reduced expenses compared to living in a suburban single-family home.

Security

Having a lot of neighbors in close proximity all the time means that you don’t have to worry about security when going on vacation. This is also a huge benefit is you have several homes and love to split your time between them. You can simply pack and leave and no one will notice.

If your building has a parking garage, you can leave your car there and not worry about someone paying attention like you would if you were to leave your car for a prolonged time on the driveway in suburbia.

Also, many condominium buildings have a lot of advanced security features, such as doormen, fenced territory, 24/7 surveillance of the premises. Because security costs are split between all members of the association, you are just paying your share, while living in a single-family home you have to cover 100% of the expenses yourself.

Cons

Association fees

You need to remember that in addition to the buying price you will also have to pay association dues. Depending on the number of amenities and location these may range from about $100/month to more than $1000/month.

In addition to monthly charges most condominium associations also have development reserves that condo owners pay for. Development reserves are where condo association gets money to pay for upgrades, such as new elevators or renovating a building’s exterior, and emergency repairs such as bursting

pipes.

If an expense can’t be delayed and there’s not enough money in the reserves, an association might ask you to pay an assessment. An assessment may go up to thousands of dollars. This isn’t very pleasant, but there is no way to avoid these expenses if you own a property. They occur with single-family houses as well.

Lack of privacy

Living in a condo means having neighbors on the other side of the wall, neighbors in the hallway and property grounds all times of day and night.

Hard to sell

Condos are hard to sell because they all pretty much look the same. If you have a few units available in your building, selling a condo will most likely come down to price. And the more units your building has available for sale, the harder it will be for you to sell your unit.

As a rule, condos in small buildings are less perceptive to housing bubbles and fluctuations than condos in big buildings.

However, even in big buildings condos sell quickly if there is a lot of demand and you decide to sell when nothing else in your building is available.

Living by the rules

Living in a condo means you have to adhere to the rules of the management and association. For example, if you would like to install a green energy panel on your roof, you will need your

association’s approval for that. You can’t simply install things outside of your apartment.

Condominiums usually appreciate in value slower than single-family suburban homes. The reason for it is that you do not own any land, which is the biggest appreciation factor. With a condo, you only own a living space.

Privacy

You live in close proximity to others, yet you do not get to choose your neighbors. If you get someone you don’t like or someone who makes a lot of noise, you are stuck with them for a long period of time.

While you do get to use the amenities and don’t have to do the repairs yourself, as a single-unit owner you do not get to decide when these repairs are being made. This might be especially challenging if you work from home and can’t have noise. A leaf-blower or a lawn-mower can be making a lot of noise at times when you need silence.

However, the same can be true for single-family homes, too. You may get noisy neighbors who like to mow their lawns when you need it to be quiet and there is nothing you will be able to do about it, whether you like in a condo in an urban area or in your own home in suburbia.

Buying a condo

Owning a place to live, be it a condo, co-op or a suburban home, is still the American dream.

Today, more than ever, you need help making a decision. Is this the right time to buy? What season or month is the best time to

buy a condo? How can you decide if your condo will rise in value? Is there a way to keep closing costs low?

We will talk about all the questions in this chapter.

If you have finally decided that you want to buy a condo, you are probably excited and nervous at the same time, especially if you are a first-time shopper.

You are probably overwhelmed with questions. Is right now a good time? What will happen to the market?

Mortgage rates are at historic lows. For how long will they stay low?

Housing markets seem to go up and down. When is the right moment to buy?

Truth is, the right moment is when it's right for you. Do not torture yourself trying to predict the market. The time to invest in a condo is when you decide to do so, find a property that you like with numbers that work for you.

If your condo is your first purchase, you are not alone. Homeownership rate in the US in the last quarter of 2015 was 63.8%, just 0.2% lower than in the same quarter of 2014.

Since the 1960s home ownership rate in the US has been rising slowly, but steadily, from 62.1% in 1960 to a high of 68.9% in 2006.

The chief reason to buy your own condo is housing quality. Rental properties are often smaller, are located in poor neighborhoods with low-rated school districts. In addition to this, they often come in not so good physical shape.

A second reason to buy your own condo is financial. According to Numbeo.com, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment

in the United States is $1,168 for urban areas and $881.11 for suburbia, while an average mortgage for a home is $1,061.

When shouldn’t you buy a condo?

If you expect to move in the near future, renting would make more financial sense than buying (unless you want to keep your condo as an investment and receive rental income).

Renting is cheaper that owning because rent reflects the price of housing as living quarters while ownership is a combination of rent-free living and investment expectation.

For this reason, in most cases you can rent a condo for less than the monthly costs of owning it. In addition, you will save a lot in attorney fees, titles fees and closing fees that are a part of the home-buying process.

It makes sense to buy if you plan to keep a property for a long time and either live in it yourself or rent it. If you try to sell a few months or years after you buy, chances are you will not be able to recoup all the costs involved in the home-buying process.

The desire not to be attached to a property and deal with all the costs and home association memberships may take over the financial reasons to buy. If you have a high-paid job, then tax benefits of a condo ownership may be very significant.

However, freedom and lifestyle advantages of not having to deal with maintaining a property may outweigh the financial reason for ownership.

Should you trade up or trade down?

You may get married and expect kids. Or maybe you already have kids and want a bigger place. Or you may be retiring and

you are looking to get a condo to be close to everything. What should you do and what should you pay attention to in this scenario?

Easier said than done, the best strategy is to buy the right home the first time. The reasons for it are simple: when you sell, be ready to pay up to 6% in broker costs and other fees.

Above we discussed the fees you have to pay when you buy. Altogether these fees may add up to 9-10% of the value of your property.

If you decided that you are ready to buy, you probably want to stretch yourself financially a bit. Here's why: your income would most likely be increasing as you grow in your career, yet your fixed-rate mortgage payment will stay the same.

What can you afford?

When thinking about real estate, most people have a gut feeling about what they can afford. A gut feeling is not what you want to rely on when it comes to real estate.

For example, a couple with no kids may be thinking that if they are making $100,000 a year combined, then they can afford a $400,000 condo. Looking at numbers this way, the difference doesn't seem to be so big.

However, if you were to factor your $18,500 car loan, $30,000 in school debts, $23,000 in credit card debt and $5,000 in savings, the picture would look completely different.

Two Most Important Banking Guidelines

First and foremost bankers are interested in your numbers. The numbers they are looking at are your income and your debts.

Based on these parameters a bank will decide how much you can borrow. If you are married and are buying a condo jointly with your husband or wife, both incomes and debts will be added and considered.

Here are the two most important banking guidelines, also known as qualifying ratios:

1. A household should not be spending more than 28% of its gross income on housing costs. These expenses include all housing costs, including a mortgage payment, homeowner's insurance, taxes and homeowner's association fees. Your utility bills are not included in this number.

2. The next number takes into consideration long-term debts. A debt is considered to be long-term if it's 10 months or more. Examples of long-term debts are car loans and credit card payments. This guideline says that your housing + debt payments should not exceed 36% of your gross income.

A lot of people first start looking for a condo they'd like to buy and then start looking for a mortgage. That's not what you want to do.

First, do the homework. Figure out you qualifying ratios. Then, look at the rates the banks in your area are offering. Do all of this before you start looking for a condo.

Ideally, you would like to be pre-approved by a lender. Pre-approval means that a lender will approve a mortgage as long as the condo you decide to buy has a price that can be justified during an appraisal. If pre-approved, you will get a letter in the mail that outlines all the details before you go and start hunting for your new condo.

If your current numbers are not good enough and by looking at your current debts and income you see that you are significantly

over the banking guidelines, here are the four things you can do that will help:

1. Pay off your long-term debt
2. Increase your income
3. Increase your savings and make a bigger down-payment
4. Find a guarantor to co-sign a loan with you

How to pick the right location

You've decided that you want to buy a condo, did the financial math and are now ready to start looking. What factors should you pay attention to at this stage?

It is important to remember that you will be buying into a community and neighborhood as much as you will in your condo. They will have a tremendous influence on your daily life.

Before you start touring the condos, make a list of neighborhoods that work for you.

Be open-minded. You have probably spent a few years living in a certain neighborhood or town. You may have an impression of some other neighborhood the way that neighborhood was a few years ago. When was last time you actually visited there?

Things change. Neighborhoods change. Use your condo hunting as an opportunity to take a fresh look at familiar communities and new places. Misconceptions that have nothing in common with reality can cost you a lot of money and happiness by shuttering down opportunities that you might have had otherwise.

Do you drive? What is the longest commute you are willing to tolerate? Let's say it's 20 miles. Take a map and draw a circle

with a radius of 20 miles around your workplace.

If you don’t drive and only rely on public transportation, do the same with a transit map. Draw a radius from your work or mark train stations or bus stops where you’d potentially be willing to live.

That will be your target market. Next, decide on your choices. What amenities are a “must have?” What amenities would be “nice to have?” See examples of your options in different neighborhoods.

Economic vitality plays a very important role in the future value of your new condo and the conveniences you will have available to you or your tenants after you buy your condo. Find what neighborhoods within the radius from above are growing the fastest.

One of the great tricks is to look at the asking prices and compare them to final selling prices. If the gap is around 5% or less, then the area is considered to be desirable by buyers.

A similar tip has to do with how much time condos spend on the market: in a hot market, properties sell in 90 days or less.

Is your condo facing a park? A real estate agent will probably show you apartments in the day time when everyone is at work.

Stop by that park at 10-11pm on a Friday or a Saturday and in the daytime over the weekend to see how noisy it really is.

You should do the same with the building. Stop by your potential future building at 5 pm on a Thursday to see how busy it actually is. Are all the elevators working? Talk to the tenants. Ask them if they like living there.

What about construction in the neighborhood? Is there any excessive noise, currently or coming in the near future?

Drive around town or walk around the neighborhood sometime. Is garbage being picked up regularly? What about the condition of the roads in the area? Are they smooth or do they look like the town had a dinosaur invasion recently? What about crime in the area?

Next, compare property tax bills from different buildings. Remember that you are not interested in what the current condo owner is paying. You are interested in what amount you'll be paying. This amount can be significantly higher than the present one because some towns use apartment and home sales as an opportunity to do a reassessment of a property. The property tax assessor's office should have all the information about the past, current and future taxes.

Find out everything you can about the school district, even if you don't have children. Good schools usually drive prices up. Even if you don't have kids yourself, schools will be an important selling point when you decide to sell your condo.

There are now plenty of websites that rate schools on a number of criteria. Take a look at the ratings. See what parents are saying. In places where voters have to vote on school budgets, take a look at the results of the votes. Do school budgets get support from local residents?

If you boil your choice down to a few options and everything seems to be the same, but one condo is in a district with better schools, go for that one. Its price will be going up sharper and it will be less influenced by price fluctuations and bubbles.

If you are looking for the best possible return on financial investment, the best way to go is to choose a condo in an up-and-coming neighborhood. The prices for the entire neighborhood will most likely be going up, including your

condo. In this scenario it wouldn’t matter much if you remodel it or make any improvements to it, the price will be going up together with the neighborhood.

Finally, when going to open houses, ask yourself: “Will I be proud to live in this neighborhood and this building?” If you answer yes, chances are that in the future buyers will say the same. If for some reason you say no, try to figure out what is making you say that and find a property that doesn’t have the same drawbacks.

Your rights and responsibilities

Your rights and responsibilities as a buyer or a seller of real estate are regulated by Fair Housing Act. This federal legislation was enacted as a part the Civil Rights Act of 1968. It is enforced by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The act says that no one in selling or buying real estate can take any of the following actions based on race, color, origin, religion, sex or marital status (including having or not having children):

- Refuse to sell or rent housing
- Make housing unavailable
- Deny housing
- Set different terms and conditions based on race and other factors listed above
- Falsely deny that housing is available
- Deny anyone access or membership in a facility or service

In addition, it is illegal for anyone to do the following:

- Threaten, coerce, intimidate, or interfere with anyone exercising a fair housing right or assisting others who exercise that right
- Advertise or make any statement that indicates a limit or preference based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, or handicap (This prohibition against discriminatory advertising applies to single-family and owner-occupied housing that is otherwise exempt from the Fair Housing Act)

If you think your rights have been violated, file a complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

After you buy your condo, your and your homeowner's association (HOA) rights will be governed by the laws contained in various state and local government documents.

You homeowner's association will have a governing body of documents, including its founding bylaws, covenants, conditions, and restrictions (also known as CC&Rs), as well as a less formal set of community rules and regulations.

When you buy a condo, you are essentially agreeing to these rules. This is why it is a smart to find out as much as possible about the rules before you finalize your condo purchase.

Saying after the purchase that you didn't know about certain rules will not free you from having to follow them.

The rules of a HOA usually cover everything you can think of, from when you can play loud music to car parking restrictions to garbage disposal to where you can hang laundry.

If you come to believe that some of your HOA rules are unfair,

you and other homeowners are free to take action and to vote to change the rules.

As a homeowner, you have the right to:

• Participate in the HOA board's voting and decision-making process

• Attend and participate in all membership meetings

• Vote in person or by proxy

• Access HOA's records, financial statements, and governing documents

• Use and enjoy common areas (This privilege can be suspended temporarily for unpaid assessments or violations.)

• Sell or rent your individually owned unit or property

As a homeowner and a HOA member, you are obligated to

• Pay your fair share—via regularly scheduled and special assessments—of the costs of operating the association and maintaining common areas.

• Maintain your personal unit or home in accordance with the association's bylaws and guidelines.

• Be respectful of your neighbors and allow them the "quiet enjoyment" of their own individual units or homes.

Why condos are great investment - finding and qualifying great tenants

As we discussed earlier, condos can be hard to sell.

However, they do have a great advantage compared to co-ops: a

condo is your property and you can rent it anytime to whomever you want.

Therefore, a condo can serve you as a vacation home and a cash cow, providing you with a place to relax and also to collect money when you are not there.

More than seven million Americans invested in vacation homes in the 1980s.

Vacation home sales also boomed in 2014, reaching above the previous peak of 2006. The total number of vacation homes sold in 2014 was 1.13 million, the highest amount since 2003 and up 57.4% from 717,000 homes in 2013.

Your focus needs to be different when you are buying a second property. Are you buying it purely for investment? Is it going to be a part-time vacation spot and part-time investment property?

What is your primary concern? Is it investment values or would you like a place where you children and grandchildren would like to spend time and visit you while you are there?

If investment value is your #1 priority, buy with boomers in mind. For this generation, a perfect vacation spot is roomy, with a few extra bedrooms and low maintenance. Gated communities are very popular, as are amenities such as swimming pools, golf, and tennis courts.

If you are buying a vacation condo that you might be renting, sturdiness is important in its furniture and appliances. You will have friends, family, relatives, kids, dogs, cats and renters.

No matter how much you may like certain areas of the country, do not make a decision to buy based on a few short visits to an area. Try to spend more time there and use the tips you've learned in the previous chapters.

In addition to that, talk to all year-round residents you can find. Learn more about future developments and economic growth in the area.

If it’s a winter resort, find out how quickly your HOA will plow the property. Also, find out how well the city does its job cleaning the streets around your building.

In a beachfront community make sure to not buy a condo on an eroding shorefront. Otherwise, your building might need an expensive retaining wall and your HOA will be paying for it.

Don’t try to find a really cheap building in the middle of nowhere and think that it – or you – will start a vacation trend.

Most likely this is not going to happen. Use your common sense. Your best bet is a vacation spot where people go for vacations already.

If an area appears too pricey, ask an agent to show you more affordable condos. Or simply get yourself a map and visit spots located not too far from hot spots.

Explore the issue of homeowner’s insurance. If you are looking in an area with frequent storms or avalanches, learn from your HOA or insurance agent about how insurance works. You’ll get an idea about typical premiums in the area and learn what your expenses are going to be.

Expect to pay a bigger down payment when buying a second or third property. Banks view these properties as riskier.

Now let’s talk about the good news. There are different IRS tax laws that let you write off your expenses and your income from your second property depending on how much time you spend there and how much time you rent it out.

You are considered to use a dwelling unit as a personal residence

if you use it for personal purposes during the tax year for more than the greater of:

1. 14 days, or
2. 10% of the total days you rent it to others at a fair rental price.

In this case, your vacation home is considered mixed-use and special rules apply.

Finding tenants

Before trying to find tenants, you need to make sure that your condo is in a great shape. You need to do a lot of research to figure out what your asking price is going to be. You also need to know what security deposit is appropriate to ask for.

Setting your rental price is a very important decision in attracting great tenants. If you price your condo rent too high, it will most likely sit vacant for quite some time.

Also, tenants who are willing to pay high rent usually have bad credit or have been forced to move. People with great credit are used to getting amazing deals and are willing to hunt for them.

Find out what comparable units in the building or the area go for. Pick up a local newspaper and do some research on the internet looking for available rentals.

Call local property management companies and talk to a few of them. Set an appointment. Come to the appointment around 30 minutes early. Spend some time in the office and get a feel for how they work. During the meeting pay attention to your surroundings. Are they organized or are paper and documents all over the office? Use common sense. If their office is dirty and

disorganized, then that's how they are going to be treating your condo, too.

Before meeting with any potential tenants, decide what you are looking for first. Do not go with "I'll know it when I see it." In this latter case, you will be more likely to act based on emotions and have a lot of regrets later.

Use the same criteria for all prospective tenants. Make sure you are not violating the Fair Housing Act.

Use specific criteria, such as the following:

- Verifiable identification. Require a photo ID and make a copy of the ID. Require identification for co-signers as well.

- Sufficient income-to-rent ratio. Use the banking criteria we used earlier in this book. Try to find renters who make three times the amount of monthly rent. Ask for current and prior months' pay stubs. When a person is self-employed, ask for the most recent tax return and three months' worth of bank statements. Don't consider applicants with unverifiable income.

- Excellent credit rating. Obtain a credit report on all applicants and co-signers. Don't accept reports provided by applicants, obtain them yourself.

- References. Look for tenants who can provide you with names and phone numbers for both personal references and income verification.

- Reliable rental history. You want applicants who have rented other properties successfully and paid rent on time.

- Stellar employment history. Unless someone is really wealthy and can prove it, you want someone who takes their job and career very seriously.

Your screening process should begin with the first phone call.

During the call obtain preliminary information about the applicants. Don’t forget to provide information about your rental. Put all the questions that you’ll be asking in writing. Ask all prospective tenants the same questions. Make sure to provide directions to your building and your condo when setting an appointment.

Don’t forget that while you do need to pre-qualify, you also need to be selling at the same time. Ask questions similar to

“What are you looking for?”

“What is important to you?”

“What areas have you been looking in?”

“Why are you looking in this area?”

This will tell you about what features an applicant values in a property. It will also give you information on why he or she likes the neighborhood or wants to live in this very neighborhood. If an applicant fits your criteria, use the information you collect to successfully sell them on why they should rent a property from you.

One of the most time-consuming components of the renting your property is the time you spend showing your condo. This being said, you can optimize this process by running it efficiently.

Depending on how far in advance you schedule a viewing appointment, you might want to call or text to confirm the appointment. If you have several people coming to see your condo, schedule them at least 30 minutes apart.

Another option is to hold an open house. For example, you can tell everyone that they are welcome to stop by the property on such and such date and time.

Conclusion

Now you know why condos are a great investment and what makes them different from co-ops and apartments.

Let’s quickly recap them here:

Condo is your property

In a co-op you are buying shares. When you buy a condo, the apartment belongs to you

You don’t have to do any maintenance

Your homeowner’s association will take care of leaves, snow, pipes and air-conditioning

Security

You can travel whenever you want. You can rent your condo or have it sit empty. In the majority of cases no one will notice or care.

It is cheaper than a home

Owning a single family home in a hot spot can be very expensive. A condo is much more affordable

You can choose the amenities you like

See the complete list of amenities in the corresponding chapter of the book

Location

Most condos are located in central areas. You or your tenants

will be close to entertainment and shopping.

Bad Step Brother

Chapter 1

Charlee Bliss

I walked out of the grocery store with two arms full of bags when it happened.

My mother and her new husband had invited me to come live with them because I had just acquired a job in the town they lived in. I knew they had plenty of food, probably enough for a family of four to live on for three months. But I also figured their reserve of food was different from mine. I ate gluten-free and they didn't.

If I had been honest with myself, it was probably my fault.

I was busy thinking about the possibility of any other stores nearby that may carry gluten-free foods. The store in West Fork, Pennsylvania didn't carry a wide range of these foods. And what they did have was rather expensive.

I wasn't about to admit that to the motorcycle maniac who flew through the parking lot like he was involved in some sort of cross-country race.

Some people have no natural regard for laws, let alone for the safety of others.

I don't think I had taken three steps into the lot before this fast-flying motorcycle nut raced through. He was going so fast and he was so close to me that he literally clipped me and sent me falling backwards.

It took me a few seconds of just sitting on my butt dazed before the full realization of what had happened. In that short time I saw out of the corner of my eye the motorcyclist brake hard and skid to a stop, his vehicle literally taking a ninety-degree angle before it came to a complete stop. Any other time I'd be a bit impressed with that trick. Now I wasn't in the least awe-struck.

Immediately jumping off his bike, he tore off his helmet (it was comforting to know that had he killed me, he'd be alive to be tried in a court of law) and stooped down to check on me. He tried to be solicitous as he helped lift me up. He also had a motor mouth, the man couldn't stop apologizing.

Unfortunately, I was in no mood to listen to his apologies. I was too busy being furious. At that point I don't believe any physical part of me was hurt or even bruised, except for my pride. Most people, however, have no idea how tender my pride is. And at this point my pride alone hurt like hell.

Before he went too far, I interrupted him and lashed out. "What the … ?" I began, "Can't you see those diagonal white lines on the cement." I flailed my hands somewhere around those lines. "Those lines give the pedestrians the right of way. At least they do in every other part of the state. I'm sure they mean something similar here as well."

And I'm sure he was forming words to answer me – or apologize again – but I was too

busy ranting and raving. At this point, despite his innate primitive sexual attraction, I was in no mood to listen to this man who probably thought he was God's gift to women.

I was so furious in fact, that I didn't feel it right away, although, I'm sure it started the moment his hand touched me. And I felt it through his leather gloves. He emitted some type of electrical sexual charge. Something I hadn't felt with a man for a long time. If ever.

When I finally got a good look at his face, he was swarthy and dark, with midnight black hair that was a bit unruly – probably due to his tugging his helmet off so quickly. Brown eyes that could melt your soul as quickly as the hot sun could melt a chocolate bar. His shoulders, even under his leather jacket looked wide and … well, hard.

Of course, the moment I thought of that my eyes had to steal a glance down toward his dick. Oh, hell not "toward" it, but directly at it. And yes, could tell in an instant, it that was hard, too.

There was a part of me that said to myself, "Way to go, girl, you still have it." Then I began to wonder if I ever really did have it. Anyway, I was too infuriated with him to look into the matter any further.

He really did try to apologize but I really didn't get him much of a chance. Once he pulled me up off the ground he began to help me brush parking-lot residue off my body. I thought I would swoon when his strong fingers brushing perilously close to my clit, sending pulsating sensual messages up my spine. I could feel my cheeks rapidly heat up and wondered what color they were going to end up.

As much as it felt as sensually pleasurable I knew I needed to retain a level of infuriation to impress upon this … this … speeding motorcycle menace that he was an inconsiderate creep. That was impossible with his strong fingers gently brushing over my clit.

This man was, indeed, handsome and exquisitely sexy. His Harley only made him appear all the sexier, I must admit. But those are usually the most inconsiderate and, indeed, usually the creepiest. I pushed his hands away, trying hard to be irritated, but quite frankly, my level of irritation was now receding. I knew I had to gather these groceries and skedaddle out of there because I was only now beginning to see the humor in the situation.

After creating such a fuss and cussing this irresponsible but sensually alluring man out, I was beginning to see him as a human being. A handsome one, at that. One that I would have dragged to my car, thrown into the back seat and made passionate love to given any other circumstances.

Wow! Where the hell did that come from? That damned subconscious mind. It crops up thinking the most unlikely thoughts at all the wrong times. I've got to learn how to tame it somehow. Of course, I suppose those thoughts would be fine, as long as I didn't act on them.

My only thought as this man, now trying to overcompensate by carrying the groceries to my car, was "Thank God I never have to see him again."

Chapter 2

Roman Donofrio

I drove my motorcycle home, the short trip seeming even shorter than usual. I couldn't get my mind off the beauty I nearly killed in the parking lot. I could laugh after the fact, but when it was happening I truly felt like the muck up all my teachers depicted me to be.

It didn't help any that the irrational woman wouldn't stop screaming at me. She wouldn't let me explain. Not that I had a valid explanation. The only thing I could conclude at the end of it all was that once again, I didn't live up to my expectations, let alone anyone else's.

Before I knew it my motorcycle was pulling into the long and winding driveway up into my childhood home. With the addition of my dad's new wife, I offered to live in the cottage in the back, where at one time the former owner had his servants live. When Dad met and married Irene, he sold the larger house in the more upscale side of town.

My dad and I never had servants and the only time I was allowed in the cottage was when I was a kid and I had a very select group of friends sleep over. He didn't trust all of my friends to sleep there unsupervised, for obvious reasons.

It was my idea, moving into the cottage. I wanted to give my dad's new relationship every chance in the world to work. I was disappointed I had missed the wedding. The two of them ran off to the Caribbean to get married. More power to them, I thought.

I dreaded seeing Dad. I had to tell Dad about my – literal — run in at the grocery store with that woman. If I didn't tell him, he'd find out anyway from half the town. I can hear cell phones now ringing, texts flying through cyber space and even an occasional old-fashioned land line ringing. This town doesn't conceal secrets well. And it appears that the main hobby of most of the people in this town is pointing at me as the poster boy of incompetency.

I drove up to the garage where I could hear my Dad's power saw. I was supposed to be here nearly an hour ago to help him with renovations on the house. Shit! I was so tightly wound up about running into this woman, I had completely forgotten.

Stopping my Harley a little too fast, it kicked up a few gravel stones on the driveway. I pulled off my helmet and carried it into the garage. He looked up and gave me his signature smile. It said, "I know you're late but I also know there's a good explanation for it."

Without even trying to apologize, I dug into the explanation. "You're not about to believe this one," I warned him. He looked at me good-naturedly – as only a father could at a well-meaning, but errant son.

"Go ahead, I'm listening," he said in a tone that I interpreted to mean "What did you do

now?” And listen he did. True to form he didn’t chastise me for cutting through the grocery store parking lot to save time. Much to my surprise he didn’t even raise an eyebrow when I told him I ran a person over.

“Is the young lady alright?” was the only question he asked. “Well, if you were to talk to her I’m sure she’d say otherwise, but I do believe the only thing I injured was her pride. But despite what the entire city of West Fork, may tell you, Dad, I could tell she was fine. She was alive and kickin’ enough to give me hell! Wow! I thought she would never stop her ranting and raving. “

I paused a moment. “You know had she been paying more attention that entire situation could have been avoided. But no, she thought every vehicle in the lot should be looking at her.”

My dad gave me his famous bemused half-smile. It told me that I was about to hear some nugget of wisdom. “Well?” he asked, dragging out the word forever. I knew what he was going to ask me, but I was determined to make it as difficult as possible for him.

“Was she worth looking at?” Hmm. That’s not quite the nugget of wisdom I thought I would hear.

“Dad, I’m not ready to settle down,” I told him.

“That doesn’t answer the question,” he replied, his steely gaze locking our eyes together. “And I know you’re not, son. But I wasn’t ready to settle down again until I found the perfect woman. Then you’ll be surprised how quickly you’ll be ready.”

I shifted the weight on my legs. “Yes, absolutely, but that doesn’t mean she wasn’t negligent …” I was determined to remain mad at this beauty. Her glint of her golden brown hair off the sun almost made it appear as if she had an aura about her.

He only laughed. “It could have been so much worse,” he said.

“I thought you’d be furious,” I told him, “for me being late.” Before he met and fell in love with his new wife, Irene, Dad really would have been. I can’t say how much this wonderful woman changed my father’s outlook for the better.

“Stuff happens,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “Besides,” he said, “as the son as this town’s ‘famous’ restaurateur, your incident will be the topic of conversation for half of the residents of this town. They’ll be sure to chastise you enough for me too.”

Then he paused a beat. “But, let’s face it, Roman, regardless of what you do, you’ll be the topic of conversation.”

“True. Very true,” I said. “I’m just glad I never have to see that woman again.”

Chapter 3

Charlee

I pulled into the gravel driveway of my mom's new home. I guess at first I was a tad disappointed. I thought that the home of West Fork's most famous restaurateur would be … well ostentatious. This home looked so average. It was beautiful, but nothing befitting someone of his renowned.

Mom had told me that when they met, Anthony did have a pretentious home. He had bought it, according to Mom, when he married the wife prior to her. She was into that sort of thing.

When he married Mom, he had sold his other home. I was told that was the ostentatious one. Mom told me she refused to live in it. This house, however, reflected my mom's tastes. I could see her making this a true home for her and Anthony.

Mom characteristically came running up to the car when I pulled in. We hugged. We hadn't seen each other for several months. Then she grabbed my shoulders and – as only moms could – held me at arm's length.

"Oh my God, Charlee," she said, "you look like you've been dragged through a war zone."

Now wasn't that what every daughter wanted to hear from her mom? That comment did stir me to check my hair. I could tell even by a cursory feel that it had to be a mess. When I started out in the morning, I had pulled it back in a nice, neat ponytail. Now I could feel strands of hair stragglers all over my head.

I pulled the groceries out of the car, nearly one by one, because the bags had been torn pretty badly and placed them in my mother's arms. I laughed as I explained to her how I got to look this way and why my groceries weren't packed properly.

"Not a car," I said, "but I was mowed down by a motorcycle."

Mom fussed over me – as only moms could – as we walked into the house. She poured me a cup of coffee without asking if I wanted one. I guess my appearance alone indicated I desperately needed a cup. She was oh so right.

I sat down and continued telling her about my encounter with the crazy motorcycle man. "Handsome," I added quickly, "but definitely dangerous. How he got a license to drive that thing, I'll never know."

As I was venting about being knocked down, my mom called back to her new husband, Anthony, in the garage.

"Oh, Mom, no," I said, "look at me, I'm not really ready to meet him yet."

"He won't care, honey," she tried to comfort me.

Before I realized it, Anthony stood in the doorway. I stood up to meet him. That's when I noticed that there was someone standing behind him.

Holy crap!

Roman

“What are you doing here?” she screamed at me. I tried to remain casual and keep the conversation light-hearted. Yeah. Right. “See, Dad,” I began, “that’s the fury I was trying to describe to you in the garage.”

I could tell he hadn’t put two and two together yet.

“I live here,” the defensive beauty said, with a slight chip on her shoulder, “Well, I will be living here.”

“What do you mean you live here? This is my home,” then I paused. “It’s my dad’s really, but I live here. Okay so I don’t actually live right here in the big house, but I live in the cottage at the back.”

I could tell that she was about to open her mouth to try to defend herself. Her luscious lips (have I ever seen lips that delectable?) began to form words when my dad interrupted. “This is my son, Roman Donofrio.”

I wanted to laugh. It was all I could to keep my lips formed in a small smirk. *Well, that certainly puts this woman in her place. How dare she come into my …*

Then my new stepmom, Irene, put me in my place. She introduced this infuriating, irritating sexual creature as her daughter. “You’re Charlotte?” My mind was definitely having a difficult time connecting this wild woman with the mild-manner young lady Irene was continually talking about. “Charlotte is rather formal,” the younger woman said, “I’m really much more comfortable being called ‘Charlee.’ Feel free to call me that.”

Then, she added, rather sarcastically, “We’ve already have run into each other, in the parking lot of the grocery store.

Once again, Roman ole boy, you are so not politically correct. And not only that, you’ve already made a horrible impression on Irene’s daughter even before she entered the house. Just about every teacher I had in middle school and high school told me that if I didn’t straighten up I’d be nothing but a muck up my whole life. The only person who gave me even a glimmer of hope for my future was my dad.

Even now, he smiled at me, that knowing quirky smirk on his face. He knew that I knew that was not the lasting impression I wanted to make on his new bride, Irene. Running over her daughter. Irene really was the best thing to happen to my dad in a long, long time. I didn’t want to be the “break-up” factor in their relationship. I didn’t want her to leave him. Finally, he was at peace.

“Dad, this is the woman I tried to kill in the parking lot earlier today,” I tried so hard to make a joke out of it. But I really did feel horrible about it.

Ever since my mother left us more years ago than I care to remember, Dad had been an awesome father providing me with everything I could possibly need and many things I just wanted. He worked his butt off to build nothing less than a restaurant empire in this

west central Pennsylvania, an area not usually associated with good food.

But I knew despite his work – and even despite me – something was lacking in his life. When I was younger I had no idea what. When I got older I was beginning to get the picture. Then he met Irene and I knew what he had missed his whole life. A woman to love him unconditionally. And he discovered it in Irene Bliss – who indeed brought bliss into his life.

And here I go, trying to screw everything up for him. Let me rephrase that “I was screwing everything up for him” and I didn’t even have to time. It seemed to come naturally.

Chapter 4

Charlee

Imagine my horror when that motorcycle maniac walked into the kitchen still decked out in his leathers. If he had been naturally sexy in the parking lot as he was running me over, he was even sexier now. Now I could see just how broad those shoulders were and how, with his leather jacket unzipped, that underneath his tee shirt, his torso slimmed down into an incredible waistline. That gave him the hint of muscle and masculinity every man should have, without the over-buff-ness of a hardcore body builder. Who would have thought that he could have appeared any sexier?

I should be furious with that SOB, but every cell in his body was oozing sexuality – and my bruised pride was somewhat healed now. It made me realize even more fully exactly how sexy he was.

I tried with every fiber of my body not to look at him. Every time I did I felt my knees buckle. This allegedly "first meeting" was awkward enough, without me swooning over this man. What would my mother think? What would her new husband think? No I had to keep my primal feelings under control.

I learned a long time ago that nothing particularly good came out of any type of sexual attraction. My mother's marriage blew up in her face long before I knew about the birds and the bees. And the several relationships I had were nothing more than shams. The men only wanted someone to have sex with until they met their true love. But I didn't realize that at the time – and when they up and left me I was truly heartbroken.

WTF? Did I really hear this motorcycle maniac right? Is he really the son of my mother's new husband? And was he really living uncomfortably nearby? How in the world am I supposed to remain cool with him sleeping nearly hundreds of yards away from me?

I wondered if he slept in the buff. Stop it, Charlee.

I had no idea how close this cottage was, but I couldn't imagine it being that far. Oh, what did I get myself into by accepting the position in the mayor's office that put me in the same town as my mother which in turn put my sleeping quarters way too close to Mr. Motorcycle Man?

"What did you say, Charlee?" I heard my mother's voice. Oops! I wondered how much of that I said to myself and at what point I began talking out loud. Definitely not one of my better traits. I'll have to begin working on that again. It wouldn't do much for my career to leak political secrets unwittingly. Since my ultimate goal is to work for a senator and perhaps even a president, I guess I had better learn how to curb it now.

My mother looked as if she were enjoying this encounter thoroughly. If she were fearful

this episode was going to cause a rift in her new marriage, it certainly didn't show on her face.

"Allow me to introduce you," she finally said, slowly enunciating every word, "Charlee, this is my husband, Anthony Donofrio." I slowly extended my hand toward the tall man, who looked like he must have been a carbon copy of his son when he was younger. Or would that be other way around? His son is probably a carbon copy of him when he was younger. Doesn't matter. Without a doubt you can tell they're father and son. "It's a pleasure to meet you," I said meekly.

God! I so wanted to make a good impression on this man. He and my mom ran off to get married so I didn't get a chance to meet him at a wedding ceremony and with me going to school in Boston I never got the opportunity to even meet him once when they were dating. The truth was that my mother got herself caught up in a world wind romance. And even though I was terrified of how it would work out, it appears she's the happiest she ever was. The last thing I wanted to do was to screw it up.

Chapter 5

Roman

Awkward!!

That was the only word that came to mind. I worked nights. She worked days. Yeah, I know I lived in the house in the back and she had a room in the big house, but I came up to the big house every morning about seven thirty to help Dad renovate.

She always got up at that time, going into the bathroom to take a shower wearing the least amount of clothing. But let's be truthful about this. Even in a parka with the hood raised and under five layers of clothing I would consider her sexy. But in that frilly thing …

There she stood, well before seven in the morning the sun already been shining for at least a half hour, the beauty of the sunrise not yet passed. It was that time of the morning when you still knew that everything in the universe reflected a special glow. Charlee was in her mother's bedroom, the light enveloping her in the same natural glow, floating around her. The universe agreed with me – she was nothing less than a magnificent, magical creation.

I could only stand there – speechless – and soak in her sensual energy. Slowly, my gaze made its way down to her legs, perfectly shaped from her right below those firm buttocks down to her incredibly fine ankles. No woman had ever appeared more beautiful. And I was the lucky man this morning who could enjoy her this morning.

Oh, what would it be like to wake up to this beauty every morning for the rest of my life?

It was as if every cell in my body were paralyzed. I knew I had to move, I couldn't stand all day here just admiring her. If I didn't move from the threshold of the room she would turn around and find me admiring her. It was just say I found it "hard" to keep myself under control.

Damn! Before I could move, she turned around. Apparently she was looking for a piece of clothing in her mother's bureau and found it. Obviously, my presence in the middle of the door way startled her. I suppose it would have startled anyone.

I tried to explain what I was doing there, but by the look on her face she wasn't buying my story. But it was true, I did start entering room with the express purpose of measuring. Unfortunately I couldn't explain why I lingered instead of turning on a heel and headed out the room the moment I saw her standing there.

Instead of chewing my ass out, which is what I expected to do, given our recent interactions around the house – like the time I caught her scantily clad bent over taking clothes out of the dryer – she playfully threw up her hands and laughed.

"I don't know why I'm even surprised when I turn around and you're there," she said. "It's time for me to be surprised if you're not in front of me when I turn to leave." She folded her arms in front of her and tapped a foot on the ground.

“I guess it’s time that I just assume that while I’m living in this house,” she confessed, “that we’re going to be ‘running into’ each other.”

Her reference to our first encounter wasn’t lost on me. I knew by the look on her face that she appreciated my laughter.

“While this is probably not the appropriate time,” she began, “considering my attire or lack of it, I want to apologize for the way I reacted in the parking lot that day. You see, it was my first day in town and my mind was preoccupied. I was meeting my new stepdad and his son. I don’t know if you’ve ever been that position.”

We both laughed as she walked – no glided – toward the door.

“As a matter of fact,” I said, “not too long ago I remember flying on my Harley – perhaps a bit too fast – because I had to get home not only to help my dad with renovations to his home but to meet my new stepsister.”

She took a few steps closer. At this point in the program I should have taken a few steps backward, but my body talked me out of it. Instead I held my ground as if I were guarding the Hope Diamond. If Charlee noticed this, she didn’t comment.

She laughed again – and the laughter crescendoed – until she could barely talk. “How did that meeting go?” She tried to get the words out but was bent over in laughter and nearly out of breath.

I, too, began to laugh at the question. If anyone were watching us at the moment, they probably assumed we were two fools, just laughing away.

When I thought this lovely woman couldn’t get any closer and kissed me gently on the lips. She moved back for a moment, looking like she was surprised as she just did.

Her kiss sent chills down my spine. Her lips touched mine softly and warmly. While it could be taken as a harmless act, I knew that there was more passion – much more – behind that action. I wanted to discover the full passion in what lay in her luscious lips. My body and mind now craved to know what passion lay in the rest of this lady.

I took a step toward her, hoping we could continue. Just at the moment, my cell phone rang. I looked at it quickly. It was Dad. Dammit. I had to answer him. That’s just not cool to blow off your father.

She watched my every move. “Hi, Dad … Yeah, I got a little side tracked here in the house. Yeah, I’ll be right there.”

“Sounds like you have to run off,” she said. While her voice implied she understood, I searched her eyes and found the message I was looking for: *I’d love to spend time alone with you.*

That call somehow woke both of us up. “I sorry,” she fumbled for the words, “I’ve got to get to work. I have an early morning meeting at work.”

This time when she ventured to leave the room, I stepped aside. “I’ll see you at dinner tonight I hope.”

“Yes, yes you will,” I mumbled suddenly feeling overwhelmed by the sultry sound in her throat as she asked that.

Chapter 6

Roman

Some actions transcend words.

That kiss that morning was a word-transcending moment. I had been kissed for longer periods of time. I had been kissed more assertively. But never in my life had I been kissed with more meaning, with more intent.

There was an invitation in that sweet moment. The kiss in itself was a bold move from a woman who held tight to her beliefs. The fact that she was willing to give me a chance spoke volumes. She was as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside.

To be honest in that moment, I didn't feel like a muck up any more. I didn't feel like an apostrophe. In town I was always known at Anthony's son. I used to kid I was tucked in between the "y" in his name and the "s" after the apostrophe. I viewed me, in essence, as the apostrophe.

I suddenly had a name of my own and a reason for living. All because of that kiss.

My only question was: Could I somehow convince Charlee I was serious about building a future with her?

Charlee

I practically ran out of the room. What in the world came over me? Kissing Roman like that? Thank God for that phone call. I'm not sure what I would have done next. I know for a fact I was not in control of my actions. I drunk in his shower-fresh scent, his still damp hair. He was simultaneously the essence of raw sexuality making my pelvis pulsate just by looking at him and of a vulnerable young boy.

And he was all I thought about while I was at work that day. If those New Age thinkers were correct and there really was a "law of attraction" at work in the universe, then I shouldn't have been surprised when he ambushed me in the garage at home that evening after work.

His dad was taking my mom out to eat that night. So I knew I'd be spending a few hours alone. What I didn't expect was him standing in the garage, a single rose in hand. With an invitation for wine and cheese in his cottage before he had to leave for work himself.

He looked so smoldering sexy in his button-down shirt with just a tuft of his dark chest hair peeking out teasing my senses. He had his long sleeve partially rolled up hinting at what lay beneath that shirt.

"I was hoping," he said, uncharacteristically shyly, "you would visit my cottage this evening before I left for work and we could share a few glasses of wine and some cheese and crackers together. I feel it's time we call a truce." He paused a beat.

"For the sake of our parents," he added.

"Well, if it is for the sake of our parents," I repeated. "I believe that would be fine."

He handed me the rose and took my hand. We walked hand in hand the few yards to his place in silence.

Chapter 7

Roman

I wasn’t sure how she would react, but I knew that I had to make my move. And by that I didn’t mean some slick pick up line. I needed that evening while our parents were out and that kiss was still fresh on each of our lips, to see if we could possibly begin a relationship.

Would it be a serious relationship? I prayed it would be, but only time would tell. Time and my stupidity. Perhaps I had a chance, if I could just refrain from making any more big time mistakes. Yeah, like running her over in the parking lot. My mind hates to let anything go. Especially negative thoughts.

Before we even arrived at the cottage, I could feel her warmth drawing closer to me. By the time I was opening the door she already had her arm wrapped around my waist.

The moment I closed the door behind us, she turned toward me expectantly. The “bad boy” façade I had used all this time to keep an emotional distance from her melted. I swear she knew this. We embraced and continued the interrupted kiss we had begun that morning. Only now we both were a bit bolder, a bit more assertive and the sexual pot we were simmering all day was ready to boil. In fact, it came to a rolling boil quickly before either of us was aware of it we were exploring each other.

Charlee

I couldn't breathe or wouldn't breathe until we entered his cottage. I remember few details about the way he had the place decorated. In that moment, how Roman Donofrio decorated his him or even his housekeeping standards were of little interest to me.

I do recall that with just a small bit of encouragement I was slowly unbuttoning that shirt. He still smelled shower fresh, he must have taken a shower just before I got home. The mind in moments of passion gravitates to the strangest thoughts.

As I unbuttoned his shirt my gaze involuntarily traveled down his chest. It was even more an exquisitely carved chest than I had remembered from those few glimpses I got when he worked with his shirt off.

Roman was ripped – that was the only word for it. I could feel the blood already rushing, flooding my pelvis area, my thighs tingling. I pulled the tail of his shirt out from under his slacks, making sure that my hands were wrapped around his bare back. Feeling my hands purposely caress his back made me whimper. I try hard to keep it hidden, but I know he could hear it.

He took his hands and rubbed my buttocks without even taking my business suit off. Yet, even with that, my entire body answers his touch, deliberately and shyly at first, but then swifter and with more confidence. His touch extended down towards my thighs. Even before I could engage my brain, I'm trying to use only my legs to take the skirt off. After all, my hands were still providing me with untold pleasure roaming around his back. I could feel his penis grow as he presses closer to me.

He took his hands, moving them up toward my back just a bit. He found the button and zipper of my skirt and tenderly pulled it down. "You're touching me so gently," I finally got the courage to whisper in his ear.

"The last thing I want, my dear is for you to break like a porcelain doll in my hands."

"I promise you," I said, "I won't break."

"I'm not taking any chances," he replied. "I'm not sure how I could explain it to your mom. I was playing with your baby doll and she just broke in my hands. No, that wouldn't do."

That's when he gave me the longest, sexiest kiss I had ever experienced. Now that I was, skirt-free, he splayed his hands from my buttocks to my pelvic area, his fingers pressing into my clitoris, enticing them to bulge with unimagined sexual desire.

He sat me down on the couch. Yes, we hadn't made it to the wine yet, let alone his bedroom and I was ready to come and bring him along. With his body over mine, almost an arm's length away, I quickly unzipped his Dockers, pulled them and his underwear

down and began to rub his dick.

It was already hardening and I realized that he didn't need much more encouragement from me. I wanted to provide that encouragement whether it was really necessary or not.

I touched his organ, he moaned lowly and then he thrusted himself into me. He moved his dick inside me slowly at first. We locked eyes as if he wanted to ensure my pleasure. When he knew he had my full support. "Oh, Roman, oh Roman!" I kept repeating under my breath at first then as he penis moved faster, my groaning grew louder, I'm sure he knew he not only had my full attention, but my full approval.

The growing physical sensation was something I hadn't felt in what seemed like forever and to experience this with him only doubled my pleasure. He whispered in my ear that he was ready, making sure that I was equally as ready for orgasm. "I so want to do this together," he said.

I never would have even thought this moment was possible as little as a week ago. No that's not right. Even last night if some fortune teller with her crystal ball would have told me that I would have laughed in her face. Today it's happening.

Then the moment came. We were both ready and our sensual desires both exploded at once. No fireworks, no music playing in the background, just a profound and serene sense of utter peace.

We laid together on his couch for as long as we could. I knew he had to get to work. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I really can't blow off work. Even for someone as beautifully sensuous as you. Don't think me crude, please."

I laughed as I played with the tendrils of his chest hair. "I knew that when I walked into your house," I told him. "It's fine."

I studied his face for a few moments, getting to know what few wrinkles were in the baby stages of forming on his face. Tracing them with my index finger. I tilted my head and held his gaze. There were no words to tell him what he meant to me. I hope he already knew.

Roman

We were so into each other and into the sexual encounters. We used my cottage because I felt it would just feel weird to do it a few rooms down from where my Dad and Irene were.

At first, I felt as if I were cheating her. We didn't go out at all. We stayed at my cottage, ate there, sometimes she even spent the entire night there. We weren't quite sure how to explain it to our parents, even though we were relatively sure neither of them would be upset.

To be honest, it's almost as if they were practically encouraging us to start a romantic relationship.

After that first, albeit, all too short encounter with Charlee, I knew that I had discovered the right woman. I gave thanks every morning that she allowed me to find her. That she agreed to give me a chance.

Every evening I pleaded with God never to let allow her to leave me. I wanted her to be by my side forever. I saw what Dad had in her mom. I watched how they interacted and how happy they were. I wanted that for myself. And I wanted that for her.

But in the meantime, I somehow knew that other shoe would drop. My screw ups of the past were bound to catch up with me.

I just didn't know how fast that would be.

Chapter 8

Charlee

It was heaven. Several nights a week, Roman would meet me at my car as soon as I pulled into the drive. He'd great me with a long and passionate kiss and then we made the most passionate love a woman could ask for. He was attentive to my every need. He seemed to anticipate when my clitoris needed a bit of encouragement.

He grew to know how biting my nipple makes me moan in that throaty way he says he loves.

I held our encounters close to my chest. I didn't even tell my two best friends in the office. It was no one's business but mine and his. My sex life, after all, was personal. I especially didn't want anyone to know because I was gaining a reputation in the mayor's office for being one of his top aides. He had just handed me additional duties and because there was a substantial raise in pay that accompanied them, I was more than pleased to comply.

Besides I saw beyond his office. He had the talent and temperament to go further in politics. Either he was going to take me with him – because I had become invaluable to him. Or I was going to move on alone, finding a state politician who saw that spark of talent in me. That politician who knew I could become invaluable to helping him meet his goals and make his dreams come true.

We had been together for about six weeks when *she* showed up. I'll never forget that moment. Usually I called Roman ahead of time to make sure he didn't have to leave early for work or his dad didn't need to help a little longer on the renovations on the house. Then I would stop by his cottage even before I entered the big house.

That evening though I knew he was finishing early. Our arrangements for that evening were already set. He expected me. It's not like I just knocked at his door out of the blue. I had imagined he would have or some local micro brewed beer ready for us or perhaps have picked up something for mixed drinks.

It shouldn't have been a surprise then when I knocked on his front door. I should have known something was wrong when he took so long to answer it. Uncharacteristically, he only opened it a crack. Being a detached observer now, that should have clued me in.

No I didn't read the clues and I plowed right in anyway despite his sincere hesitancy to have me come in. Talk about making all the wrong moves. Immediately, I was attacked – at least that's the only word I could imagine would work for those actions– by some crazy woman who claimed to be Roman's girlfriend.

She was half naked. That was the first thing I noticed about her. I turned on a heel to see in what stage of undress he was. No shirt. His pants were unbuttoned and unzipped. I could tell just by that. She had been there for a while.

"What in the world is happening here?" I cried, not only out of anger but out of an immediate broken heart. The one thing that I thought would never happen in this relationship seemed to be unfolding before my very eyes.

Before Roman could answer, the bitch on the couch answered for him. “Why, sweetheart, do you really think he loved you? You were the ‘zero’ in his life. You know that nothing men fucked while they impatiently waited for the real thing to return.

Devastated I didn’t wait for an answer. Had he been wearing his entire wardrobe perhaps I could have blown her off. But not when he was in that stage of undress. No, my timing, for him, may have been bad, but it was perfect for my needs. It told me everything I needed to know about Mr. Donofrio but was afraid to ask.

I glared at the cowardly rat bastard.

Chapter 9

Charlee

This didn't even sound like the same woman on Roman's couch last week. The apparent change in her attitude alone piqued my curiosity. We agreed to meet at a small coffee shop and café not far from the mayor's office.

Luckily the mayor was out of town and in the past week I've been putting in extra hours to drown my sorrow. Nobody would question me, I figured, for taking a little longer lunch than normal if I needed to.

When I got to the coffee shop I recognized her even fully clothed. I still had my doubts if this were the right move I should make. But, at the very least, I thought, it was one way to put closure to the all-too-brief relationship Roman and I had enjoyed. Why didn't he tell me he had been dating someone else?

I tried so hard not to appear nervous. Most of the rage was out of my system. In fact, most of the rage I felt the day of the incident was directed at him, not at her. He was the jerk, the irresponsible bad boy – and this incident had proved it. Now, I needed to get on with my life.

She stood up when I got close to the table she was sitting at and extended me her hand. We shook. It certainly didn't appear to be the start of a shouting match. That was good. I had neither the energy nor the desire to get into one. Especially one so close to where I work.

She introduced herself as Laura VanDeer. She, indeed, had been Roman's girlfriend not too long ago. She had dumped him. Hard to believe, I know. But she had tired of his ego, his being so irresponsible and well, a host of other things. I allowed her to go on for a while. Eventually, she was done venting.

"But then," she said, "I was talking with someone who still had contact with him. She said she noticed a big change in him. He actually had a job that he liked working for his Dad and even though that 'bad boy' persona would pop up every now and then, he had pretty much shed that image."

She paused a beat. The server had stopped by with my latte and asked if we were ready to order. We placed our lunch orders and when the server was out of earshot, Laura continued.

I took a sip of my coffee not quite knowing what to say or actually where Laura was going with all of this. "I guess I thought that we had a shot of getting back together. I must confess, I barged into his home without any thought that he was anything but available. You saw us in a state of … well, let's just call it 'disrobing.'" She picked up her cup and paused a beat. "You really need to know that I initiated everything, while he protested every step of the way. He tried to explain to me he was in a committed relationship, but I didn't listen. Actually, I didn't believe him. Not until you walked in.

"That's when I saw I had made a big mistake. I'm sorry."

“Why do you feel as if you have to apologize to me?” I asked.

“Because I realized that beneath that ‘bad boy’ exterior, lies a gentleman who only wants to settle down and cherish a woman and give her pleasure. In turn, all he expects is what everyone really wants, pleasure, love and loyalty. It seems you fill the bill.”

I tried hard not to act surprised. While I was trying to respond, Laura continued. “Honey, he loves you. There’s no question about it. After you left he threw me out on my ass. I was surprised he even allowed me to get dressed. He was angry. Angrier than I ever saw him.”

“Well … I’m not … “ Laura jumped in before I had a chance to say anything substantial.

“Before you say you’re not going to give him a second chance, think long and hard. He’s madly in love with you. He never cared that much for me and we were together almost two years.”

I walked out of the coffee shop with food for thought. And more confused than ever.

Chapter 10

Charlee

There was no way I could wiggle out of it. I had been in town for a month and a half or so, and two of the women I work with insisted we go out after work. I would have preferred to go straight home, especially after the "Roman fiasco." But …

And because I wasn't vested in the evening out, I wasn't really invested in the bar or restaurant we went to. As it turned out we went to this place called Oysters. I'm not sure why it was named that. Nobody I was with knew either.

"It used to be a real dive," Darlene said, "but someone recently bought it and he's trying to make it an upscale place. It's improved by leaps and bounds, but there are still a few isolated incidents."

The words went in one ear and out the other, as they say. I was thinking about Roman. How totally stupid of me! But I have to admit that his body was addictive. Every time I saw him – with or without his shirt off – I felt this unbelievable charge of sexual power course through my veins. I felt parts of my clitoris swell, by nipples harden and my thighs tingle.

Every time I had those sensations it seemed as if it were all I could do to restrain myself from tackling him, stripping him of his clothes and taking him right there on the floor of whatever room he was in.

Some women just say that. But when it came to Roman, I really meant it. The truth of the matter is that there were times I didn't trust myself to be home alone with him. Even after the discovery of him and Laura half in his house.

My mind and body – usually in consensus – were at odds with each other. My mind told me he didn't deserve another chance. It very well could be that Laura had started to undress him before he knew what was happening. But I find it hard to believe that he couldn't control a woman, without hurting her. No, there had to be a bit of desire for her burning in his heart – and his loins, as they say.

That made living with his presence all the tougher the last couple of days.

How could I not pay attention to him lurking around the house?

He had those broad shoulders, which smoothly worked their way down to a trim waist and eventually powerful-looking thighs. And between those thighs and that waist.

My intuition repeatedly prior to talking with Roman told me he wasn't all bad. My intuition, in fact, told me that there was something simmering just beneath his bravado. Something that only needed a bit of attention and his goodness would boil over. I thought up until Laura entered the scene that I was right. Now I'm not so sure.

These were all thoughts that flew through my mind on the way to the bar and restaurant. Perhaps I was a little bit too preoccupied with this man. Can we say the word “obsessed?” It was Darlene’s voice that finally knocked me out of my reverie.

Charlee Bliss, I’d ask you what in the world you were doing back there being so quiet,” she chided me as she looked at me through the rear-view mirror of her car. “But we can guess. Is there one minute at all you don’t think about that man?”

There were few individuals I’d share my thoughts about Roman with at work, and Darlene and Lacey were the two. “One of the reasons we’re insisting you come out tonight is to get your mind off of him.”

When we arrived, the three of us were led to a table by a gracious maître de. There’s a good first impression. I had to admit, it was a nice restaurant. It really wouldn’t take much more work to make it even better restaurant. You could tell it was still a bit rough around the edges, but you also knew it was still a work in progress. Kudos, I thought, to whomever was trying to improve it.

The server came to the table with a wine list and the girls insisted we order a bottle. Then we got down to the serious business of ordering the food.

Perhaps this was a good idea and I would be able to get mind my off of Roman – even for a few hours.

Roman

I yawned. The position of manager of Oysters was slowly become easier. These days I spent more time making out my employees' schedules than banging the heads of of some of my little-too-rowdy customers together. That was a good thing. It slowly was turning into the type of restaurant I know Dad had envisioned it to be.

I also yawned, because quite frankly, I was tired. Getting up at the crack of dawn with my Dad and doing the physical work of renovating a house takes its toll on a man by the end of the week. But working side by side with Dad help to get his life on track meant a lot to me. I wouldn't want to be doing anything else with my days.

With the possible exception …

Roman, can't you think about anyone else but Charlee? You've dated lots of women before you met her. She's not even opening the door one bit so you can slip your foot in. It doesn't look like she's going to give you a second chance. Just admit you screwed everything up – *again.*

I stood at the threshold of the restaurant. The moment I did that, every cell in my body suddenly went on high alert. I could feel my dick swelling and I couldn't figure out why. The only other times I had felt like this …

No … it couldn't be. The only woman at the moment that could make me come alive like this … well, she doesn't know where I work and if she did I'm sure she would stay ten miles away.

Still, that electric charge I was feeling at that moment had her distinct signature to it.

Yes, I felt her presence before I even saw her. Sounds like some supernatural grade B romance novel, I know. But it was the honest-to-God truth. Still her presence was undeniably somewhere in this building. I could feel it as some men could smell a woman's cologne from miles away.

I scanned the room. Sure, enough, there she was sitting with two other women. By the way they were dressed, I assumed that they were colleagues of Charlee. I wondered if they were just as ambitious in their careers as she was. But I really didn't care about either of them. I couldn't take my eyes off Charlee.

I don't think another woman on earth could look as sensual as she did in a gray business suit. The suit showed every curve that woman had.

As I stood there rapt with excitement, her mother's offhand comment one day to me, "She doesn't realize how beautiful she is." That made her beauty all the more magnificent, I swear. I know I let out a low whimper. I couldn't help it.

I slid onto the first available bar stool I could find and started watching her. The bartender immediately brought me a cola drink. This was pretty much my regular routine. Usually when I do this, though, I'm stalking a potentially rowdy individual. Someone who I could

tell has already had too much to drink or someone who laughs a bit too loud compared to everyone else. Sometimes I sit there when I've overheard some conversation that I thought could turn ugly with a moment's notice.

It wasn't unusual for the bartender to ask me what I was watching. Two sets of eyes after all, was better than one, like he did this time. I really couldn't tell him I had my eye on the most beautiful woman in the building. Instead of confessing, I merely said, "I'll let you know if it turns into anything worth watching."

Anything worth watching? Now that was an understatement.

I watched as her two colleagues went off for a moment – presumably to use the restroom. Sitting alone, this normally self-assured woman sat there nervously, as if she didn't belong in the setting.

That's when I saw him approach her.

Charlee

“I’m headed for the restroom,” Lacey announced as she stood up, wiping her lips with the linen napkin. “Anyone else need to go?” Darlene stood up too. “I really should,” she said.

I couldn’t help but laugh at them. It was bad enough that these two were joined at the hip in the mayor’s office, now they’re going to the restroom together. “You know they say women aren’t capable of going to the bathroom alone. They go at least in pairs.”

“Damn right,” Darlene said, “I always heard there was safety in numbers. Do you ever see one elephant walking alone?” That’s when Lacey glared at her.

“Okay, so that wasn’t a good choice of animal,” she said, “but you know exactly what I mean.”

And off they went.

I wasn’t sitting there alone but a minute when this handsome man approached me and sat down, facing the bar. “I hope you don’t consider me forward” he said, “but I saw you sitting alone.” He sat his drink down and leaned in close.

“You see that man sitting at the bar right over there,” he began. I’m not sure who he was pointing to because the only person I saw sitting was Roman. It was as if he had a spotlight on him.

This was the first time I had seen him. How long had he been sitting there? I wondered. Was he watching me? If so, why? Perhaps the man who had just sat next to me made him jealous? Now there’s a thought. That would be poetic justice, now wouldn’t it? I saw Roman shift his weight in his seat, but he didn’t flinch when he saw me. Could this be the bar and restaurant that he was in charge of?

The mystery man by my side was saying something. I brought my eyes back to him. “I don’t like the way he’s looking at you. I felt he was staring at you like you were prey.”

For just an instant, I thought about leading Roman on, making him think that I not only knew this stranger who just sat beside me, but was romantically involved with him.

“I don’t think there’s anything to worry about,” I began, picking up my wine. I was about to take a sip.

But the following events happened so quickly I couldn’t even begin to pretend he was my romantic interest.

Instead, holy hell broke loose.

Chapter 11

Roman

What a freakin' rat bastard!

That was the only thought racing through my mind. The freakin' bastard distracted Charlee and then when she wasn't looking put a Roofie – the date rape drug – in her glass of wine.

Clever man! Instead of buying her a drink and raising her suspicions, he put the substance in wine she had already been drinking. He made sure she had no reason to doubt anything was wrong.

That's the type of thing I wanted to eliminate in this restaurant. I can't really recall what I did in response to that. I can only recall bits and pieces. But those around me said I went into a blind rage.

I can't actually say with any certainty that I had a chance to call out to the bartenders on duty. I do, however, remember my full-blown sprint to her table. That's about the end of my memory.

The bartenders said that I did a broad jump onto the table. In hindsight, they were quite impressed with my agility. I'm not sure about that, but that table-jumping event would explain a lot of the damage we had to clean up after the fact. It would also explain how I got Alfredo sauce all over the front of my best pair of slacks.

I acted instinctively. That was my job, though. To act now and ask questions later. That was the only way I was going to clean up the place. And in this particular situation, that was the only way prevent that gorgeous woman there, Charlee, from getting raped. I couldn't discount that a large part of my actions was to keep this gorgeous woman protected from that predator.

My drive to protect her wasn't just because she was Irene's daughter and I felt an obligation to keep her safe and unharmed. No, I had to finally admit to myself that in addition to the primal urges of sexuality, I was slowly (or not so slowly) falling in love with her.

What I do remember from that fiasco was knocking the glass out of Charlee's hands and thinking – oddly enough – how furious she was going to be with me. The next thing I know I was wrestling with this jerk.

I toppled him backwards out of his chair and then pummeled him. I was so enraged, it took several bartenders to remove me from being on top of him. Even at that I flailed my arms until they had to loosen their grip on me. As soon as I was free, I grabbed the jerk by the collar and literally dragged his stupid ass to the door and tossed him out. He landed flat on his face, I recalled that much.

The bartenders, thankfully, had followed me to the door and wouldn't let me do any more harm to him. They made sure he got into his car and safely drove off. They wouldn't give

me the chance to throw any more punches.

That was probably a good thing. I never knew how much fury I held inside me until that moment. I realized somewhere in my inner core that if they had not stopped me I might have killed that jerk right then and there.

I stood, momentarily paralyzed, as I watched him get into his car and drove off. Scott, the head bartender, asked if I was okay. I assured him I was.

“Man, Roman,” he said, “I never saw you so enraged before. I’ve seen you prevent creeps like that use Roofies, but this time was different. Something more than a date rape incident was at work.”

As we walked back into the main part of the restaurant I told him that the woman involved was the same one I ran over in the store parking lot. Scott was just about the only person I could confide in. I know, I know. It’s pretty much stereotypical, talking your troubles over with the local bartenders. Trust me, I more than get the irony in my actions.

“You mean, that’s your new sister?” Scott let out a low whistle. “She’s beautiful.”

I quickly reprimanded him. “No not my sister, my stepsister. There is no biological tie between us.”

“Then what are you doing here talking with me?” he asked. “You need to make sure personally that she’s okay.” What he said made quite a bit of sense, actually. Then he added, in a more concerned voice. “I had one of the guys stay with her to explain what was going on. From the look on her face, I don’t think she knew what in the blue blazes was happening. I suppose it isn’t everyday a stepbrother jumps onto the table his stepsister seated at – regardless of the circumstance.”

“First I try to run her over with a motorcycle, then I nearly tackle her in public,” I told him. I could almost see the humor in it.

Chapter 12

Charlee

When Darlene and Lacey came back from the restroom, they found me in tears with one of the bartenders and our server trying to console me.

I was still trying put all the pieces together, but I explained what had happened as best as I could. “That’s when Roman jumped onto the table,” I heard myself saying, “and beat the shit out of him.”

“Your Roman,” I heard Darlene said. My thinking was still hazy and my feelings pretty much numb yet, but I still knew what she was implying when she emphasized “my Roman.”

“No, not ‘my Roman,’” I corrected her, “but my stepbrother Roman.”

Then I heard his deep sensuous voice. I resisted with every fiber of my being of jumping out of my seat, running over to him and throwing myself at him for consolation and in grateful appreciation of what he had just done. But, I restrained myself.

Thankfully, I heard his voice get louder and louder. I hoped he was coming to check on me. I so wanted to feel his touch, to wrap my arms around him, but I didn’t want him to know how much I needed him at this moment.

That’s when I saw him out of the corner of my eye. I prayed that he would come this way. His pace was that of a man on a mission. Could it be at all possible that I was his mission? Regardless of what he thought, I was convinced I needed to be his mission.

The next thing I knew he was standing next to me.

Roman

She sat there, crying. Yes, she almost had as much Alfredo sauce on her sexy grey business suit as I did on my Dockers. I ran to her, not know if she wanted anything to do with me. I figured, at the very least, I'd provide her with the pleasure of chasing me away.

I knelt beside her. I couldn't help myself. Someone had tried to harm the love of my life. Don't think for a moment I didn't do it without some trepidation. All of my fears vanished in that very moment. Charlee didn't chastise me, she didn't push me away either physically or emotionally.

Our eyes locked. Her fears and sorrows poured out and she threw her arms around my neck. Before she had an opportunity to say anything, I whispered in her ear. "I love you, Charlee. I love you more than you could ever know. I'm so sorry for all the stupid things I've done."

She loosened her grip and looked me straight in the eye. "No, I've been the jerk and the irresponsible one. Could you ever forgive me?"

"I have no reason to forgive you," I replied quickly. "You've done nothing wrong. I ran over here to beg for your forgiveness."

A weak smile slowly transformed her face. I took a deep breath. It was now or never, I thought. "Charlee, I love you. I'm not sure if this is the right time. But I want to love you with all of my heart for the rest of my life. Do you think you could love a muck-up like me?"

She burst into tears. "Yes, yes, yes," she whispered in my ear.

Epilogue

Charlee

The next morning we asked mom and Anthony to sit for a moment at the kitchen before they ran off to do their separate things. They looked at us quizzically.

We decided to be straightforward with them. Told them about the incident the night before. I tried to calm my mom immediately. “It’s okay,” I told her. “Nothing happened by getting a drink knocked out of my hand.” I paused a beat. “And getting Alfredo sauce smeared all over my grey suit.” Mom almost smiled at that.

Roman jumped in and said. “We’ve been seeing each other for a short time now … “ When neither of parents responded poorly to that, he continued, taking a deep breath.

“Charlee and I want to try to have the type of relationship that you two have,” he said.

Anthony raised an eyebrow. “With each other?” he asked. Mom smiled broadly and slapped him lightly on his upper arm.

“I’ve been hoping you two would eventually say that. Of course, we could have skipped that whole date rape drug thing.” She picked up her cup of coffee, raised it, saying, “I’d like to make a toast.

”To happily ever after.”

Bad Stepbrother 2

Chapter 1

Charlee Bliss

There we were, Roman and I, snuggled together in the hammock in his backyard. It had been a difficult week at work. I needed this moment more than ever, enjoying this time alone with the love of my life.

It felt good to be wrapped in his arms. We weren't laying there long, swinging ever so slightly and enjoying the fresh smell of spring, the honeysuckle and the freshly cut grass. We could hear birds calling to each other. The calming waters of the lake barely 50 feet away completed the perfect summer day.

I didn't think a summer afternoon could get any better, not until he placed his fingers between my waist and shorts and began to pull my shorts down. His knowing, confident touch swept the sweet spot of my clitoris. His internal GPS had me moaning in pleasure before I even realized what he had done.

"Nothing like starting at my most vulnerable spot," I chided him. "You call this foreplay?"

Without saying a word, Roman nibbled at my ear, then deliberately ran his tongue over it, creating chills that shot straight to my clitoris and beyond. He relentlessly stimulated it. My thighs tingled as if I had been struck by lightning. Momentarily, I found myself paralyzed with pleasure. My breath had been taken away in that instant. This man and his love for me couldn't be described in mere words.

He moved his mouth downward as he helped me take off my blouse. His warm, moist lips teased one of my breasts and then another with his kisses. After several electrifying moments of this, he took the hand that wasn't rubbing my clit and cupped a breast, at first barely touching me but building to an increasing amount of pressure.

As his touch grew bolder and more forceful, I felt the sexual energy vibrate throughout my entire body – from the tip of my head to my toes – but it especially rocketed to my clit, priming my sexual organs for the grand finale.

Having passionate sex in a hammock, by the way, is a delicate art. One I'm not sure Roman and I were carrying it off very well. Oh, yes, the sex itself was exquisite, but with every movement I could feel the hammock sway a bit harder, almost daring us to finish to a satisfying orgasm without it flinging us to the ground.

I'm always up to a challenge, though. I swear that stupid hammock read my mind. I felt the hammock sway more than usual as Roman moved his nearly naked body above mine. "Almost," he said, as we re-positioned ourselves to stay in the thing.

I couldn't keep my pelvic area from pulsating when he was this close. It started so slowly

at first I didn’t even notice it was happening. But the longer and harder he kissed me, the longer his tongue took possession of my mouth – and my senses – pressing against the inside of my cheeks, the faster my pelvic throbbed. My thighs tingled. I knew I wasn’t far from an incredibly satisfying orgasm.

I moved too quickly to reach for his penis. While he had told me that having sex with me turned his world upside down, I don’t think he meant it in the literal sense. But this time, it really happened.

My movement was a bit too swift, and it combined with the pulsating motion of my body, the hammock lost its gentle motion and dumped the two of us unceremoniously, pretty much naked, onto the ground.

At that precise movement, I heard a voice. Looking up, I saw him. Good grief, at first I didn’t recognize him. You know that lost feeling when you see someone you know well, but he’s completely not in the environment in which you normally place him. I wanted to think I was hallucinating. But when I saw Roman’s reactions, then I knew this was not my personal hallucination from hell.

What the world was he doing in Roman’s backyard?

Roman Donofrio

Holy crap!

“Who the hell are you?” I asked as I sat on the ground naked except for a pair of socks. The rest of my clothes were scattered randomly across the ground. It took me a moment before realizing that Charlee was in the same state – nearly naked, I mean. I needed to hide as much of her body as possible.

But then I listened closely. Charlee was actually talking to this stranger as if she knew him. I looked back at her. “Do you know this man?”

She sighed, “Yes I do.” She paused a bit as if she were weighing her options – to introduce or not to introduce. Finally, even in a half-naked state, her manners got the best of her.

“Roman, I’d like you to meet Girard McIntyre.” I could see out of the corner of my eye that as she said that she was putting on her bra. “Girard, meet Roman Donofrio. Girard is an old friend of mine.” With the last half of the introduction, she put her blouse on and buttoned it.

Clearly, she was not nearly as panicked as I felt.

“So this is your new boyfriend?” Girard asked. Was his voice dripping with sarcasm?

I’m not usually a territorial type guy despite what others thought. But this Girard dude was bringing out the alpha traits in me. He had some nerve. He waltzes into my backyard unannounced – almost as if he were spying on us – then gets sarcastic with Charlee. Something is not right here.

And was this guy really staring at my dick?

Chapter 2

Charlee

After a socially awkward introduction, I slowly saw the humor in it all. I couldn't help but laugh. Quietly at first, but then a bit louder and with more ardor.

Roman twirled around to look at me. His back had been to me this whole time. Perhaps laughing was not the proper response, considering that as I looked down he had a hard on.

"Oh, come on," I said between the bursts of laughter. "You've got to see the humor in this. At least from my perspective. " I had to wonder if Roman even caught the pun I so carefully placed in there

"I may some ten years from now," he muttered, "but right now … uhm, no."

"I'm really sorry," Girard said. From the look on his face, it was as if he were finally putting the puzzle pieces together. Didn't take him too long, now did it? He never was the sharpest knife in the drawer.

"I stopped by on my way to Philadelphia." He paused a moment and looked directly at Roman. "I heard through mutual friends that Charlee had an awesome position …" Girard rethought his word choice when I giggled. " … I mean job with the mayor's office here in West Fork."

At the time, I didn't know where he had been, but I had to admit that news traveled fast. At that very moment, I couldn't imagine who had told him. I couldn't imagine that we had many mutual friends left. Regardless of where he heard it, I really did think my job in the mayor's office was darned awesome.

Despite what I first thought was going to be a small Podunk town in the middle of west central Pennsylvania, West Fork turned out to be a more vibrant town than I ever imagined it could be, in large part to the presence of Roman.

The three of us didn't move for what seemed like an eternity. Frozen in a time and place that proved to be awkward for all. I quickly finished dressing while trying to make conversation with an ex-boyfriend I haven't seen for at least a year and a half.

Whether he was doing it voluntarily or involuntarily, Roman sent me vibrations that actually irritated me. While it wasn't my concept of the perfect reunion with my ex-boyfriend, I tried to think of a way to bring this encounter of the naked kind to a swift end before Roman finds a reason to go off half-cocked, no pun intended.

I could understand, though, why he would be a bit perturbed with my involuntary laughter. If I were in a position right now to apologize for it I would. But in the short time I've known him, he always had an intense side. He didn't hide the extent of his anger right now.

Roman had enough wits about him at least to follow my lead by getting dressed. That would at least alleviate one awkward moment. I can only imagine how the uneasiness would increase as we all sit down and talk.

I was affirming, that once all of us were dressed, we could move past this incident as soon as possible. I did have one consolation. After such a chance and potentially explosive first impression, I couldn’t possibly imagine this scenario getting any worse than this.

Roman

I wanted nothing more than to get my clothes on and meet with this guy.

My God, why do I even try to fool myself like that? That's not what I wanted at all. I wanted him off my property … ASAP! That, however, not the socially polite thing to do (even though I do believe "socially polite" after an incident like this was pretty much not an issue). Nor, which was of much more concern for me, was it an option I thought Charlee would agree to.

Once we were clothed and settled on the back porch with beers in hand, I was then reduced to hoping this encounter could be salvaged, even though even fully clothed I was uncomfortable. Charlee and Girard spent a few minutes talking strictly to each other.

I sat there like a toadstool on the lawn, neither of them really taking notice of my presence. They reminisced about old friends and old times. That was quite understandable, I really wasn't interested in any of it anyway. Which, come to think of it, why they didn't even try to include me in it.

As they talked, I tried to gauge what Charlee was thinking. Did she subconsciously want this man to leave as quickly as possible like I did? Was she legitimately being polite or was she willing him to leave like I was?

Even though I wasn't paying much attention to their conversation, I heard Charlee ask Girard, "So how long are you going to stay in town?"

"I thought I would stay about a week. I started early enough to make sure we could spend as much time together as possible. I wanted to surprise you which meant I was taking my chances on even knowing if you had any time for me."

"Oh, brother," I mumbled under my breath as I thought to myself that this guy was laying it on thick.

"What, hon?" Obviously, Charlee heard something I said. Whether she heard it clearly or just as a jumble of words, I'm not sure.

So I just said quickly and stated the obvious, "Well, we all admit that you did surprise, Charlee."

"I had wanted to take you to the best restaurant in town, Charlee," Girard said, "It's a place called Pearls. By the way everyone was raving about it, I'm sure you must have heard about it."

Well, how could Charlee stifle the natural giggle that came out of her? It was one of the restaurants my dad owned. She turned to me, her eyes twinkling mischievously. Evidently, from what I could read, she didn't want to tell him quite yet whose family owned it.

Yup, mine. Dad had several restaurants. You've heard of people who flip houses or even cars. Well, my dad specializes in restaurants. It's just once he gets them operating five-star

service, he doesn’t sell. He keeps them. I guess you can call him both a restaurant flipper and a restaurant collector. In any case, Pearls is one of Dad’s most successful examples of the blending of his strategy and his abilities.

“Wow that’s generous of you,” I said.

“I couldn’t get a reservation, though,” Girard said, his voice low with frustration.

“How sad,” she offered. While her voice sounded sincere enough, there was some tone in those two simple words that told me clearly that she was as tired of his braggadocio as I was.

“Roman, do you think you could get us seated there tonight?” Oh yeah, she was ready to show off a bit.

Girard didn’t catch on to the subtext of the conversation. Of course, it looked like he was too busy gazing at Charlee’s cleavage than paying attention to the tone in her voice. He was missing one hell of an act.

Chapter 3

Charlee

Of course I knew Roman would have no problem getting into Pearls. And by including him in obtaining the “reservations” we needed, I could easily invite him to join us and Girard wouldn’t be able to put up too much of a fuss.

That would help alieve me from spending an evening alone with him. Sure, it’s true he’s my ex-boyfriend, but since we broke up I had heard many, well, let’s just say less than wholesome stories about him. He did try to stalk me for a short time after our breakup, but he soon found another girlfriend, who from what I understand, dumped him even quicker than I did. And not surprisingly, he stalked her as well. From what I was told the stalking got serious and ugly.

Looking at Girard now, I’m not really sure why I was so attracted to him when I first met him. Granted, we shared similar interests in working in politics and the public forum. But physically, he was not the type of man I would even call attractive.

What I don’t think I ever saw until now, was his natural snarl. He always looked like that evil lion in The Lion King movie, Uncle Whatever. But even without that, he had a fair complexion, almost as if we were perpetually anemic.

And I wondered if he hair was always that thin or was that something occurred in the last few years.

I suppose there was a woman out there that would find this man attractive. But, right at the moment it’s not me.

So why was I saw attracted to him? Then it hit me. When we had sex, the world rocked. Who knew such an unassuming man would have such an amazing talent for finding what blew my mind. When we were in bed together, he was one mesmerizing individual. Now, it’s all coming back to me.

But physically – and in all reality sexually as well – Roman had Girard beat in all areas. Sex with Roman beat anything I ever imagined it could be, beating even the best of the best with Girard. Roman, for his part, always took concerns to care for my needs first as I was busy taking care of his. That was a totally satisfying way to love a person.

While I also knew physical looks aren’t everything, Roman’s were certainly unforgettable. He was like some throwback from some 1940s movies. If the truth were known, when I first met him, I nearly swoon, even though he knocked me to the ground in a grocery store parking lot. That’s a story, though, for a whole other day.

Roman had a swarthy and dark face with midnight black hair that at times appeared too unruly. This was especially evident after he strode off his Harley and tugged his helmet off. He cut quite a figure when he did that. He did it so naturally, he had been practicing the movement since he was a young kid watching motorcycle movies, or it really was his second nature.

When I gazed into his brown eyes, I felt my soul melt, not unlike or as quickly as the hot sun melting a chocolate bar. His shoulders were wide and rock solid. Of course, I didn’t know exactly how solid they were until I received an opportunity to caress them.

I guess I had to face it. I was madly in love with Roman. I wonder how he felt about me?

Roman

“So good to see you, tonight, Mr. Donofrio,” the hostess at Pearls said as soon as we made our way through the crowded foyer. Quite early in our relationship I got into the habit of taking Charlee’s hand so we – okay I – can make sure we don’t get separated.

Yes I does that may sound a bit fanatical. But I spent more hours than most people in the lobbies of restaurants to know that sometimes the people there can be ruthless. For one thing, they’re hungry. Sometimes hunger turns into impulsive anger depending on dissatisfied a customer could become. If you don’t buy that argument for my hand resting comfortably and strong on hers was merely because I loved touching her – and in all types of situation.

A wide variety of people filled the foyer at Pearls that day, a direct reflection on the popularity of this restaurant. There were young couples to families to older couples. There was even a 95-year-old couple there.

“I didn’t see your name on the reservation list, Mr. Donofrio,” the hostess said.

“I’m sorry, Julie,” I said, “I didn’t make a reservation. This was a spur of the moment idea. Is this going to be a problem? I can see you guys are really busy.”

Of course, it was no problem and within minutes we were being seated. I could tell by the smile Charlee flashed at me that she approved of my behavior. Truth was, I was doing nothing more than what I usually do at my own restaurant, Oysters. Well, it really was my dad’s. But I’m running it as my own. He stays completely out of it.

This short episode, which I played out because my stupid male territorial instincts kicked in actually gave me a fresh perspective on me – Roman Donofrio, as a real person.

When I walked through this foyer and people were genuinely pleased to see me and chatted with me showed me quite a bit about how the town saw me. I’m not quite sure why I never noticed it before this. But I’m thrilled, nonetheless, to see it now. Every single person talked to me, asked me about my dad and my endeavors.

There’s quite a bit to be said for leaving your hometown and making a name for yourself in the world. But that doesn’t mean if you don’t leave your hometown and you succeed right there around people who saw you grow up that you’re not a success. These people – the ones in the foyer that night as well as others in my hometown of West Fork, Pennsylvania wanted me to be happy and successful as much as I wanted it.

In that moment I had a grand epiphany – and I loved it. I’m the only person who saw me as only “Anthony Donofrio’s” son. The only person who saw me as the habitual muck up was me. And the only one, it seems, who didn’t give me the credit I deserved? Bingo! Me again! Guilty as charged.

As Julie led us through the restaurant, I was still swimming in the sudden emergence of my new self-image. As amazing as this breakthrough was, I knew instantly that there was

one more puzzle piece that finally allowed me to recognize and admit this. And she was sitting right next to me at the table. In silent and private recognition of her endearing patience with me, I tenderly squeezed her thigh.

I wasn’t sure who received the most I couldn’t help but think the love of this beautiful woman helped me to finally see this. Even though Girard was with us – or perhaps because of his presence — I felt for the first time in my life, fulfilled, complete and loved.

And I wasn’t talking about only Charlee. I had to finally admit that my father loved me unconditionally as well.

Chapter 4

Charlee

He was masterful. He was, without a doubt, in his element. Roman appeared to float through the packed foyer, greeting the folks as he parted through them.

He shook hands, patted people on the back when he recognized them and even gave a 95-year-old woman a kiss on the cheek.

When I first met the man, I thought for sure he was an overgrown brat who lived on the reputation and fortune of his father. As I got to know him better – the real Roman who lived alone beneath the surface – I began to know him, to get a slight glimpse into his thinking.

I was even impressed with his personal skills – especially since he continually told me that everyone in town believed him to be a major screw up.

When Roman went up to see if a table were available, Girard and I hung back a bit "Will he really be able to get us a table in the middle of this chaos?" he asked me.

"Absolutely."

As it turned out – and much to Girard's surprise – the hostess seated us unceremoniously and quite quickly. To tell the truth I was proud of Roman.

This, too, was exactly what Girard needed to see. How to treat people – including his girlfriend. Girard and I had dated for several years. I tried hard to ignore some of this off-hand and sarcastic comments. I understood that Girard had confidence issues (Hmm? Do I see a trend in selecting boyfriends?).

After a certain a period, though, being Girard became unbearable. He always had to be right. He had a job similar to the one I'm doing now. I was still in graduate school. He made fun of the time I was spending in grad school. He was sure that my continuing to study and getting that extra degree wouldn't translate into any better job or better pay. I should just drop out of grad school, he advised me, so I could get a jump-start on my career.

Girard always thought he knew what was best for me and would cop an attitude when I declined to take his advice. Supposedly, in his eyes, I wasn't supposed to have any ideas of my own of what was best for me. That's how I felt at least. And the longer we were together the more I felt like that. And that, in a nutshell, is why I broke up with him.

As I sat there between the two men, it was easy not only to see the difference in their personalities, but also their physical appearances as well. In a few words, Roman was tall, dark and handsome. He was at least six feet tall, swarthy with dark thick hair to match.

Girard was a bit shorter, at five feet, eight inches or so. And for as dark as Roman was, Girard was fair with his blond hair, his light fair skin. They were both handsome in their own ways. People who didn't know the dynamics among the three of us probably thought I was a very lucky woman.

And I couldn’t argue with that, but not for reasons they saw on the surface. Right at that moment, my only concern was in an attempt to uncover the real reason for Girard’s visit. Why would he schedule an entire week, if it was only about saying hello on the way to his new job in the east? You would think that he would be excited at starting a new life. You would think you might even arrive several days early to get himself established in a new city.

Am I suspicious there’s more to this visit than he’s revealing. He’ll reveal his true motives soon enough. Either purposefully or accidentally.

After the hostess had made sure we were settled, Roman delayed her a bit longer. “The elderly couple waiting in the foyer,” he said, “would it be possible to seat them as soon as possible. They’re celebrating a wedding anniversary. I’d also like to pay for their meal, but please don’t let them know it’s me.”

“Understood completely, Mr. Donofrio,” she said. “That will definitely be my pleasure.”

When the hostess was out of earshot, Girard finally said something, “Okay, bro, who are you exactly and how did you get us into the best restaurant in town? Not one person in the foyer shot you a dirty look, I was watching.”

Roman

It’s not a nightly event that I walk into my bedroom to discover a naked, dark-haired curvy young woman jumping like a nine-year old on my bed. Of course, she wasn’t built like your average nine-year-old, that’s for sure.

“I interpret your actions here,” I said, “that you feel good about the way the evening unfolded as we entertained Girard tonight.”

“Very much so,” she said.

Then it hit me (sometimes I was a bit slow). This was no time to talk. We could dissect the evening later on that night or even the following morning. I immediately ripped my clothes off. I felt ripples of sexual electricity charge through my entire body. The sensations only increased my desire to throw myself on the bed and slide on my back under Charlee.

This movement forces her to stop jumping and she falls to her knees, as if she’s reading my mind. Sometimes when we make love, I truly believe our spirits meld as one. I move my mouth to her clitoris and my tongue immediately begins to explore every inch of it, slowly licking as if I had never felt anything like it before. She moaned right before she fell on her back.

I can see her one hand moving toward my midsection. She doesn’t need to touch it, the mere anticipation of those gentle fingers roaming my organ had it swelling by the second. This, I’m learning is how every encounter with this amazing woman is how unspeakably satisfying sex is when you know and love your partner with your entire heart and soul. I stop for a moment and look up at her.

Charlee meets my gaze with one of her own full of lust and love. She gives me a half smile and then nods, almost imperceptibly so. I knew her well enough that she’s just given me her permission.

Our mouths meet and that’s the exact moment my penis got even harder something I didn’t even believe was possible. She pulled me close. You’d think at this point I would know better than to talk, but I couldn’t help myself. “What makes me so lucky tonight?” with a single breath.

Much to my surprise, she answered me. “In the short time I’ve known you, Roman,” she said. Oh, God, I loved it when she whispered my name in that sultry voice of hers. “I’ve never told you how much I appreciate you.”

Appreciate?! Appreciate? I wanted to shout back how much I loved her. Loved her with all my heart and all my soul and my physical body. And she could only appreciate me? The words stung like a rock from released from a slingshot.

Then the pain slowly sunk in. It hit me that was all I could legitimately expect her to say. Why should she be the one to set her feelings precariously on the limb?

How could I expect her to say she loved me even if she did without me first confessing my love for her? After some thought, I was happy – hell, ecstatic – with appreciation.

I had been in several romantic relationships. Enough to know that right now, I'm satisfied with being appreciated. But it's time that she knew that I love her. "Charlee," I started, "I should have told you this a while back. Hell, I probably wanted to tell you this the moment I ran you over in the parking lot."

I looked at her and her eyes were flaming with desire. She didn't respond in words, but slowly caressed my dick. I was barely able to get the words out of my mouth, "I love you, Charlee. I love you."

As her small, skillful fingers moved over every inch of my fingers – not in the spirit of an exploration, but in a knowing of what pleased me – I took her hand. I let her know that if we waited any longer I was about to burst. I lowered myself even more and we came in a cataclysmic orgasm. As I fell on top of her, I could hear her sultry voice once more in my ear.

"I love you more than I have loved anyone else in my life, Roman."

Chapter 5

Charlee

In the wide expanse of the universe, I suppose withholding some information from a person — let's say Girard for example – isn't quite the same thing as actually telling a lie?

Is it really so bad that I got such a great thrill from not revealing certain facts from Girard that evening? It's not like he wasn't going to find out for himself later that night. Well, looking at it that way, I convinced myself, I was doing him a favor. I was giving him a surprise. Definitely a well-deserved surprise.

I know that's a display of a petty attitude on my part. But, gosh gee, I've tried to be the bigger person for so I'm the one who tries to make excuses for the outrageous actions of others. I didn't realize how much satisfaction one individual could receive from such feelings of pettiness. It was also amazingly fulfilling it was to wait for the reaction of someone, okay, let's say like Girard. It's not like the man didn't deserve it, mind you.

Lacey listened to me intently. We were on our lunch break and I suddenly felt the need to tell her what I was about to do. Bless her soul. She tolerated me as much as she could.

"You know," I continued, taking her silence as a license to continue talking. "I went to a high school –"

"Stop right there, Charlee Bliss," she finally said. "Of course I don't mind listening to you. But would you mind telling me just one thing?"

"Sure," I said as I stabbed my chef salad and examining it so I have a piece of both ham and turkey. "What do you want to know?"

"What in the hell are you talking about?" I thought I would choke on my bite. After taking a sip of my latte in order to clear my throat, I answered her between uncontrolled bursts of laughter.

As Lacey waited for me to pull myself together, she said, "So how do I already know it revolves around this Girard dude?"

I told her the three of us went to Pearls the night before and how Roman worked the floor like a politician seeking votes.

"Did he kiss a baby, too?" she asked.

"No, but he did kiss a 95-year-old. She and her husband were celebrating their wedding anniversary."

"How romantic," Lacey gushed.

"You do know that at their age they're just lucky to be alive."

"And still in love, I'm betting," Lacey shot back.

I told her that even after we told Girard that it was Roman's dad's restaurant and that

Roman ran his own, the man didn't even have the decency to engage him in a conversation about it.

"I was momentarily upset," I told her, "but then quickly chalked it up to one of two things … "

"Okay, let me hear them," Lacey said.

"Either he was even more self-absorbed than I thought or he was jealous of Roman."

"Or a little of both," she offered.

"Bingo!"

"Since Girard had the chance to ask about Roman's restaurant, but didn't, then I'm not telling him that Oysters is run by Roman. We're going there tonight – Girard and I – because Roman works tonight. Roman and I have it arranged that he'll drop in and sit with us as much as he can. I can't wait to see how Girard reacts."

Even though I paused a beat, I didn't give Lacey the opportunity to interject anything into the conversation. "One of major reasons why I broke up with him was because his self-centeredness, if that's even a word."

"Sometime circumstances hand you the opportunity," Lacey said, "to slap someone in the face – figuratively speaking. Go for it and enjoy the moment." She paused briefly. "Don't be too disappointed if he still doesn't get, though," Lacey added.

"Yeah, that's exactly what I've been thinking about," I said, "Regardless of how successful Roman is, Girard always has to be even better than that. And that means getting me to admire him for his new position in Philadelphia." I paused, thoughtful for a moment. "If he even has a job in Philly. I wouldn't be the first time he's lied about something like that."

"Just be glad he won't be living any closer. From what you've said about his actions, it sounds like he'd like nothing better than to break you and Roman up. And then he'll conveniently be there with open arms to catch you on the rebound."

I grabbed the check before Lacey had a chance to and handed the server my debit card. "We'll see how this all pans out tonight," I said.

Roman

“Son, you’ve been in a chipper mood lately,” Dad said as I held up the Sheetrock as we renovated what was to be my new stepmom’s studio.

“Chipper? Really, Dad?” I chided him. “No one uses that word anymore, Pops,” emphasizing what I considered was an old-fashioned form of dad.

“Perhaps not,” he said, keeping his eyes squarely on the nail. “But it describes your mood the past couple of weeks perfectly. So am I to presume you and your new stepsister have been enjoying each other’s company?”

I chuckled. “She’s not your stereotypical stepsister, that’s for sure. And besides, I had an incredible realization last night,” I said.

Standing on the ladder he looked down at me and asked for a couple of more nails. “Well, are you going to share this ‘realization’ with me or just drop the topic?”

I explained in great detail what I was feeling when I walked into Pearls the night before.

“So you don’t consider yourself my son anymore,” my dad teased me, raising a single eyebrow.

“Now you’re just twisting my words,” I said.

“I know. And it’s so much fun.”

“You better watch how much fun you’re having, Dad,” I said. “You’re in a precarious position on that ladder. It’d be a shame if you should have an accident.”

Then I returned to the topic. I wanted him to know that I had turned that corner in the evolution of my life – and I appreciated (there’s that word, again) his patience. And, of course, how much I love him.

“For the first time in my life, I realize I’m the only person who’s responsible for my own feelings. Now, instead of seeing myself as just ‘Anthony Donofrio’s son, I’m also a rising star as a restauranteur in my own rite. And looking at it like that, I’m proud to be your son.”

“Wow, you did have an epiphany. I hope you know how proud I’ve always been of you. Even when you didn’t think I was.”

I never really doubted that Dad was anything be proud of me. He was the only person who supported me, especially when it appeared that the entire town was against me.”

Chapter 6

Charlee

“Yes, Ms. Bliss, we have your reservation right here,” Melinda said, chuckling as she stood at the podium at Oysters, the restaurant Roman managed. I turned to Girard and shot him a look, hoping he knew what Julie found so humorous. He shrugged his shoulders while he raised his eyebrows.

Luckily, Melinda must have read my confused face and apologized. “You probably don’t know it, Ms. Bliss,” she explained, “but you have a standing reservation. You can walk into Oysters at any time and we’ll find you one of the best tables in the house. No questions asked. Everyone here got a good chuckle when we actually saw you made a real reservation for tonight.”

“I’m glad I was able to brighten your day,” I reassured her and even chuckled myself. Abruptly, Melinda stopped laughing. “I’m sorry, I never meant to offend you,” she said, trying to backtrack. “You should know I would never do that.”

“I’m not offended in the least,” I offered, “I was just wondering what Roman had said. I imagine him telling you guys I’m an incredibly hot-headed witch, who would as soon as lose my temper than listen to a reasonable explanation. While that may be a crystal clear description of me, but … “

“No, Ms. Bliss, of course not.” Melinda leaned in closer to me as if she were preparing to tell me one of those secrets that only women shared. “He had said he thought of you as a very special person who deserved all the respect and the finest treatment that we would extend to anyone in his family.” Then she leaned in a bit closer to continue. “I’ve seen him date a few women in the last couple of years, Ms. Bliss, but he never said anything close to that about them.” She paused – and then added “if you know what I mean.”

As she showed us to our table, she whispered one more thing to me. “I hope you give him even half a chance. He really is a good man.” As I listened to her, I felt Girard’s hand on my back, guiding me to the table, just like he did when we dated. I wanted to tell him so much he didn’t need to do that anymore. But I decided to ignore it.

Instead, I thought back for a moment to the heady days when we dated. At least I considered them that way at the time. I recalled how I totally loved that light touch when we were dating. More than once, goose bumps had flashed through my body instantaneously.

How I used to look forward to that small touch not only for what it did to me at that moment, but as a signal of our personal “hidden foreplay.” I knew when he touched me in that way what I could expect when we got home.

“I know, Melinda. Oh, I know that. Thank you for being so kind to me.” That closed that

portion of the conversation and she returned to her professional demeanor.

“By the way, Melinda,” I said, “I’d like you to meet Girard McIntyre, an old friend of mine.”

As I sat down at the table, I concentrated on Girard’s light touch again. I waited for a few moments after he touched me, pausing to see if that same lightning would strike me. But I felt no such excitement. I paused just a moment more to make sure. It’s hard to believe that some experience I used to take for granted can easily fade away. It makes you wonder what goes into the reasons for sexual attraction.

Girard pulled the seat out for me and made sure I was settled before he sat down himself.

“So why do you get the red-carpet treatment here, Ms. Bliss?” he asked. I thought Girard’s use of the title, “Ms. Bliss,” was more sarcastic than humorous. He was always much better at sarcasm than humor.

“This is Roman’s restaurant,” I said as calmly as I could without missing a beat. I’m not sure whether Girard really didn’t remember or conversation from the other evening or merely chose to believe what others do as worthy enough to listen to either me or Roman.

Once I got seated properly, I got a chance to look around the restaurant. I usually ate here at least once a week. Yes, I dine alone. I came just in case Roman had a few moments to sit with me and talk. I’ve never confessed this to Roman, but I’ve really come to enjoy those brief snatches of moments.

Imagine that! I exchanged a slight touch from Girard for a moment alone with Roman to fill me with sexual excitement. I suppose we all have our sexual triggers.

Roman

I knew the moment she walked in.

I didn't have to see her. I didn't have to hear her voice. If a specialist in the paranormal insisted on calling it a telepathic communication, I couldn't even argue with him on that point.

Today wasn't just the first time either. It happened every time she walked into to the restaurant – the moment she walked into the foyer, to be exact.

I scanned the room quickly. That's when my senses were confirmed and I actually saw them. I knew she had planned to bring Girard and I knew she had no interest in her ex-boyfriend. Even knowing this, when I saw this exquisite jewel, my anger flared. That's when I also saw him touch the curve of her lower back, and I had to fight the urge to march over there and break his hand.

I soon recovered knowing, well, at least hoping, that she didn't feel it sexually arousing. I kept praying since the first day I met her that she didn't have some nostalgic moment in which she wanted to give a serious past relationship a second chance. It continually kept me on pins and needles.

If there were any doubt in my mind about how she felt about me, my lingering thoughts about our love making last night certainly assuaged all of my doubts.

I'm one incredibly lucky and grateful man.

I had mentioned earlier in the day to my best staff members that Charlee would be eating at the restaurant tonight with an ex. I know my guys. If they saw her walk in with him, I was afraid they would give Girard a thought time – to say the least. It may be personally satisfying for me, if they roughed him up a bit or at the very least asked some very tough questions … but it was anything but professional.

And I spent far too much time and energy in taking this establishment from a rowdy bar to a fine family dining establishment. Not only that, my reputation with my father was also on the line. It was not the type of behavior he would approve of.

I gave my best bartender on duty that night a slight nod. He scanned the dining room, saw exactly what I wanted him to see – Charlee and Girard – and then headed toward them myself. I certainly didn't want to invade their privacy …

Okay, so maybe I did. But I also happened to know Charlee had practically begged me to stop at their table if I got the chance – and stay with them for as long as possible. She certainly didn't sound as if she were afraid of the man, but she definitely made it clear she preferred not to be alone with him for any extended length of time.

I didn't ask her what was up with that – it certainly was none of my business. But, I honored her request, like it was a real sacrifice on my part. I knew if I were to overstay my visit with them one of them – or both – would let me know.

Chapter 7

Charlee

“I can’t tell you how relieved I’ll be when Girard leaves,” I told my friend and colleague Lacey.

“Whoa, girl!” she said, “That doesn’t even make sense. You’ve got two handsome hunks of men showering you with attention all week long and you’re ready to shove one out of the picture? Are you out of your mind?”

I sighed deeply and thoughtfully. “I don’t want to seem ungrateful for the attention,” I finally said, “but Girard and I have a long history, most of it not pleasant. I prefer it stays right where it belongs – in the past.”

I had just walked into the reception area where Lacey kept her office. Believe me, though, she was much more than a receptionist. It’s just that cuts had to be made after the last election. Our full-time receptionist was one of the casualties.

Lacey got “stuck” with the job because she was the least likely of any of us to lose a grip with the public. She also knew the phone system inside and out. In this day of cell phones, I don’t know why we just can’t hand out personalized-assigned cell phones like private corporations do. None of us would have to learn that darn phone system then.

Lacey, who had been working on her computer, stopped for a moment and swiveled her chair to look at me. She appeared eager to hear more. “I really don’t feel like talking about it here at work,” I said in response to her silent question. “Someday, if you get me drunk enough while we’re out, I may be so inclined.”

“Today though, I’m expecting Girard to take me to lunch.” I pulled my cell phone out and saw that I still had an hour to fill with worry before he showed up. “I’m not sure why, Lacey,” I said, “but I don’t have a good feeling about this visit.

“I feel as if something is about to go horribly, horribly wrong.”

“There you go again, sweetheart. Visualizing nothing but doom and gloom. Even with your new position and your new man, you’re still, at heart a pessimist, aren’t you?”

I knew that voice anywhere. It was Girard and clearly he had heard at least a portion of my conversation with Lacey. He wore that scowl on his face as he walked over to me. Right before he bent down to kiss me, he smiled broadly.

“Come on babe,” he said, “things can’t be that bad in the mayor’s office, can they?”

I breathed a sigh of relieve. He thought I was talking about something at work. I smiled back and in barely a whisper and shaking my head slightly answered, “You know me. Once a worrier, always a worrier.”

I had been so concerned and absorbed in what Gerard had heard of my conversation, that

it took me a few moments to realize the man was holding a bouquet of red roses and what appeared to be a box of chocolates.

Why did I think that these were not the gifts of a man who had planned to go quietly into the night?

I checked my watch. We weren't supposed to meet for another hour. "Yeah, I'm a bit early," he admitted as he shifted his feet nervously then rolled back on his heels. As quickly as he was ready to scold me for my negativity, he now acted like a little boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"I couldn't wait to see you again. I was hoping you would be able to leave a bit earlier. I was hoping to spend a bit more time with you than we had originally planned. Who knows when I'll see you again?"

I do. Hopefully, never again.

Roman

So I decided to make a surprise visit to Charlee's office. I didn't usually do that. Knowing that things can get hectic, to say the least, I almost always call head to make sure she's not in the middle of some important meeting or stamping out some political fire.

I never would have expected that for such a small town, there were so many political fires. There must be some rule for the number and size of political blunders in relation to the number of individuals.

Today, though, was an exception. Today, was something akin to my independence day. No, I hadn't decided to break up with Charlee. Why would I do something as stupid as that? She was without a doubt the most beautiful, sexiest and brightest woman I had ever met. I was head over heels in love with her.

Few people knew this, though. I think my father had a good idea only because he knows me so well. I don't think that Charlee had a clue about her mere presence in my life had done for me. And beyond that, when anyone tries to talk to me about my relationship with her, I try to blow them off. I play that bad boy act that served me so well in high school.

But before I stopped at her office I needed to stop at the florist's for a dozen roses and then at the local chocolate store for the finest box of chocolates West Fork had. I even whistled as I bought the flowers and the candy, despite what my mood had been like all week.

I walked into the administration building, which housed just about every public service the city offered in addition the mayor's office and his staff. I was determined to make amends with her. I'll come clean. With the exception of that initial evening off "bed-hopping" love making, I didn't realize that just seeing Charlee with Girard would get me so irritated. And I didn't mean to treat her as coolly as I thought I did. Of course, I hadn't seen much of her. She and that Girard dude had spent lots of time together while he was in town.

Initially, the visit seemed to have gone so well. It propped up my feelings not only for her, but also for my self-esteem. I felt like Superman, knowing that I could take any challenge in a single bound, stop a runaway train with a simple motion of the hand … well, you get the idea.

She might not have even noticed it. I know that, rightly or wrongly, Girard had been taking up a lot of her time. She called the other night to let me know that he was thinking about cutting his visit with her short.

The bottom line is, thankfully, I was wrong. I kept telling her that his real reason for visiting her was not because he was passing through while on his trip to Philadelphia. It was to win her back. Of course, she couldn't see that. Now I had to admit the possibility that perhaps it was never one of his reasons after all.

He was to leave this morning. So perhaps my cynical view of the situation was, indeed, wrong. Perhaps he did only want to stop and get caught up on news of mutual friends. It's equally as logical, in my mind, at least, that he come to West Fork looking for Charlee

with the initial intention of winning her back, but when he saw us … oh hell, nearly naked in the back yard . . . he had received his answer even before he had to ask.

As I waited for the elevator to climb to the third floor which housed nothing but the mayor's office and ancillary offices, I fantasized about what this beautiful woman's reaction to my unexpected visit and my gifts would be. I knew that as soon as she took the gifts from me and even before she put the roses in a vase with water, she would throw her arms around me, jump on me and wrap her legs around my waist. She would squeeze them which would in turn get my penis growing.

She would tighten her legs around my waist as she so often did like a hungry cobra wrapping itself around prey. Indeed, in many ways she was a lustful cobra. Her cobra-like strike, caught me off guard when I first met her in the parking of the local grocery store.

In Charlee's defense, I suppose any one knocked down by stranger racing his Harley through a parking lot had every right to be angry and strike out. But her continued rant indicated a deeper pain. At that time, though, I didn't realize it. It's only looking back that I can put the pieces together.

Of course, I always try to assuage my guilty feelings by explaining to myself that I was on my way to meet my new stepsister. Dad had made it clear that he didn't want any excuses why I couldn't show up and I had to be one time. I was definitely under the gun.

The irony of the whole affair is that she – yes, the woman I ran over – turned out to be my stepsister.

I had yet to uncover the source of her anger, though.

The elevator stopped and a few passengers stepped in. I barely noticed them as I was still thinking about my beautiful girlfriend. I gave them a perfunctory nod as they pushed their floor button.

All I know about her pain is that eases some each time we make love. I can't help but think that this jerk, Girard McIntyre, had something to do with it to begin with. But she locks me out of a portion of her life. Almost as if she's ashamed of it. Oh, I knew we just met in the grand scheme of things. But I felt as if we've known each other for a much longer time.

And that's why my being terse with her several times this week struck me so deeply. I prayed to God she hadn't noticed it much. But I found myself less than patient.

My thoughts were abruptly interrupted by a voice of a passenger next to me. "Excuse me," the young woman said quietly, "I don't mean to intrude but I was on this elevator moments ago going up and you were standing here holding those beautiful gifts. Now I'm riding down and you're still here. There are only three floors in this building. From my brief calculations, you've must have covered all three floors several times over."

My face turned a crimson red. "Either you're getting up your courage to give some lucky woman those gifts or she refused to accept them. I'm hoping it's the former and not the latter.

“Thank you so much,” I said. I felt like the eighth grader at his first dance. “I am deep in thought.” I pushed the third floor again. She laughed and said, “By the way, she’d be a fool not to accept them. I always thought roses and chocolate were romantic.” Then she walked off the elevator.

Perhaps I was worried I may be rejected. I purposely lingered in the hallway for several minutes. That’s not typical of my behavior. Not by a long-shot. Charlee had made a changed man out of me. Now, to let her know personally.

Chapter 8

Charlee

I jumped up quickly. Lacey watched as I hurriedly directed Girard to my office. If there were ever a day I was pleased to have a real office with a real door, this certainly was the day.

He handed me the roses and the chocolates. “I’m leaving tonight,” he said, “I decided to leave for Philadelphia a few days early.”

That was music to my ears.

Of course, I had to put on my best game face and act disappointed. The truth of the matter, and what I had so desperately wanted to tell Lacey, was that I knew deep in my soul that Girard’s mere presence in this town much longer was going to create serious and perhaps even reparable rifts between Roman and me. I could feel them already occurring, like small tremors before a major earthquake. You know the “big one” is going to hit, you just don’t know when.

The sad part is that I couldn’t even put my finger on when it began. We were both so sure of our relationship by the time Girard entered the picture. And we were both equally aware that I had absolutely no interest in the little turd.

So, how could a relationship that was so magnificent on Sunday seem to be crumbling before my eyes by Wednesday?

Before I had a chance to respond to Girard, he sat in one of my office’s receiving chairs and grabbed me. He pulled me onto his lap and wrapped his hands around my thighs, pulling them up so they were enfolded around his waist.

It was no doubt a very provocative pose.

I did what any red-blooded American girl would do: I panicked.

My first instinct was to beat him about his shoulders with my fists. “Let me go, Girard McIntyre,” I yelled. Was my screaming going to be loud enough, though, for anyone to even hear me? And if they did, would anyone take my calls seriously?

“The only problem is,” he said, talking slowly enough to scare me, “is that I don’t want to leave this backwater town without you. I miss you, Charlee. And I think you miss me. In fact, I know you do. I don’t know what kind of hold that Roman character has on you, but it’s time I take you away from all of this. You’re so much better than this.”

“So, what’s it’s gonna be?” Girard asked me, referring to Roman. “He’ll always be nothing more than a two-bit restaurateur in a sleepy backwater town in west central, Pennsylvania.

“Come with me, Charlee. Come with me and together we can help run Philadelphia, where

some of the real nation’s movers and shakers will get to see what you can do. Now that’s a real city.

“You deserve so much more than what this town, than what Roman can offer you.”

And at that moment I heard the door open.

Who the hell was walking in on us?

Roman

That nagging feeling that I had all week flooded me from head to toe when I saw the scene.

Charlee had the nerve to sit in her office in broad daylight, her legs wrapped sexually suggestively, I might add, around the waist of that jerk.

I walked in just as Girard was asking her to go to Philadelphia with her. To think, I had trusted her. To think, I had believed her when she told me she not only appreciated me but loved me. And I was dumb enough to bring roses and chocolate to make up for my less-than-congenial mood since his visit.

Then I looked at her desk. She already had roses and chocolates. But of course!

Charlee stared at me as I opened the door. The look of horror on her face at being caught in the middle of … I'm not sure … what should have stung me to the core. The only reason it didn't because at that moment I was too numb with shock to feel anything. Little did I know that the pain and the betrayal would soon set in.

"Charlee!" That was the only word I could choke out of my mouth. I may have even repeated it, I don't know. As I stared, she couldn't dismount that man fast enough. But it was too late.

I was worried that perhaps this week we grew apart the longer this Girard dude stayed, so I was secretly elated when she told me he'd be leaving early. The two events I failed to foresee were this scene here in her office, and the fact that he was asking her to go with him. Well, good riddance to her.

I threw the flowers and chocolates on the floor with all the force I could muster at the moment, hoping all the petals of those damn flowers fell apart. I turned around. By now a crowd stood behind me. I pushed through the crowd, not letting any of her colleagues stop me, even though a few tried.

I was going home. Straight home. It was barely noon, but that mattered little to me. I was having a scotch. Not just a glass, mind you, an entire bottle.

Chapter 9

Charlee

I heard the door open.

It was Roman.

I was totally humiliated. I'm sure this didn't look good. I'm sure Roman didn't even try to view it from anything but the worst possible scenario.

I can't say that I blame him.

I thought I heard him call my name. I struggled to get myself free of Girard. But I couldn't it. It was as if some evil entity had temporarily taken over his mind.

The last straw came for me was when he stormed out of the office. That's when I called into use my secret weapons, my fingernails. I dug them into his arms so hard that I swear his limbs were bleeding.

I tried hard to stay calm and cool. I had restrained myself when he called Roman a two-bit restauranteur. But when he told me I deserved more than what Roman could give me, that's when he really struck a nerve.

I never remember doing this to another human being in my life, but I acted out of a reflex. If there's a God in heaven I hope he forgives me. I raised my hand before I could give it another thought and slapped him across the face.

The crowd went wild. To be honest, up until this point I didn't even see all of my co-workers standing around watching helplessly. I did see, though, Lacey at the forefront of the group and I said with a smile, "Sometimes the circumstances just present you with the perfect opportunity to slap someone across the face – literally."

Her face shone with pride and give me a quick thumbs up sign. Then she ran to my aid. Or perhaps it was to help Girard. Because at that point I lost all sense of awareness.

I let him have it verbally. "That's for calling my boyfriend a two-bit restauranteur again! And don't you ever tell me what he can and can't offer me. You have no idea what my relationship is with Roman. And quite frankly, it's none of your business."

Eric, my best buddy in the office, quickly followed Lacey and came to my defense. "What's he doing to you, Charlee, do we need to call security on him?"

Girard answered before I could. "Aw, come on people," Girard said looking around at the crowd as he rubbed his cheek, "I'm the one who should be calling for security. She packs quite a wallop."

Instead of getting the sympathy he had anticipated, my co-workers laughed. "You don't know Charlee like we do," Eric said. "You should have known better than to get her riled up."

Roman

There was a rap at my door.

“Go away, whoever you are,” I yelled. “We’re closed today due to lack of interest.”

Hmm. Whoever it was didn’t believe me. The knocking continued. When you’re trying to drown your sorrows in a bottle of Scotch the knocking can get quite irritating. Finally, it appeared that whoever was at the door was nothing if not persistent. I relented.

“Enter at your own risk.”

I expected Charlee to walk in begging for forgiveness. I never expected that I just welcomed Girard into my home. Oh, what evil did I unleash in my house?

I glared at him as he walked through the mudroom into my little room set up with a bar, a sofa and a couple of chairs. I was splattered on one of the larger chairs. He tread carefully as he came closer.

“What?” I snapped, not caring if I used any of the social graces. In my opinion, he’s damned lucky I didn’t run over to him and punch him in the face. I sighed. That was my first thought, but I couldn’t even get the energy to do that.

Now that I knew for a fact, that Charlee was no longer a part of my life, a part of not only my present moment but my future plans, I felt an ennui strike my soul.

He sighed deeply. “I’m sure I’m the last person you want to see –“ he began.

“You and Charlee are tied at the bottom of my list,” I said, then took a sip of Scotch. I acted as if I just didn’t care. And right at that moment, I wasn’t too sure it was an act.

“I came over to apologize,” he said, “for all the good that would do.”

I remained unfazed.

“It wasn’t what it appeared, Roman,” he said.

“It appeared to be an x-rated movie,” I said emotionless. “I would have sworn I was watching ‘Charlee Does the Mayor’s Office.’”

“I knew if I came over here I would have a difficult time trying to get you to believe me,” Girard said. “So if you could even try to keep your mind open just a crack …”

“Well, God forbid I make your job any tougher than what it is,” I said, meaning every hue of sarcasm I could paint throughout that sentence.

Despite the impenetrable wall of doubt I thought I had built, I listened to his explanation. He took full responsibility for his actions. He explained that for the better part of the week, he had been seething with jealously.

“From the moment I stepped into your back yard,” he said, “and accidentally saw the …” He stumbled over what to call it.

“Charlee and I call it the ‘hammock’ scene.”

“Perfect,” he said. As he talked more about his own feelings during the week, I slowly began to unwind and was beginning to actually believe him. “I know this is none of my business,” he said, “but from what I can see what you and Charlee have is something special. Please don’t toss it away because of me. There are no excuses for my actions. All I can really say is that I’ll be lucky to leave town without spending time in jail.”

I looked the man in the eye. I’ve done business with many individuals. I’ve observed my father do business with many people. There’s a certain look in a man’s eye when you knew deep in your heart you can trust him. As much as I hated to admit it, as much as it pained me, Girard had that look. I knew that he was sincere.

Chapter 10

Charlee

I can't believe I was standing there knocking at Roman's door.

It's not surprising I ended up here. He lives right next door to his dad and my mom. And I live with my mom. He's constantly in and out of our house. Usually he and his dad were doing some type of renovation.

I'm not sure what I expected to come out of this visit. It sounded like Roman was talking to someone, but I couldn't hear the second voice. He was probably talking to his dad on the cell phone.

Panic gripped me. What if my mom found out about his episode before told her? She'd be hearing the distorted version. Would she be willing to listen to my side after that? She loved Roman like he was her own son.

I closed my eyes and knocked at the door again. This time I got an answer. "Come in," Roman said, "Why not? The more the merrier!"

What an odd way to answer the door. But then all sanity had quickly drained from my life today. I felt like Alice in Wonderland – nothing was what it seemed.

I walked into Roman's small bar room. I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. Girard and Roman sat together civilly, not fighting, not screaming. They even seemed to be chuckling. I looked behind me. Certainly they couldn't be laughing at me? Or could they?

After everything I've been through, they have some nerve to be so buddy-buddy. Girard rose. "I think it's time I go," he said, not looking at me. "Remember what I said, Roman, before you throw anything away."

After Girard left I asked, "What was he here for? Don't tell me he was giving you lessons on recycling."

"No," he said, "they were more like lessons on salvaging."

I raised an eyebrow. Silence ensued. I wasn't invited and I didn't know what to say. To be honest, I didn't know why I was here. I decided to be honest and tell Roman that. Much to my astonishment, he laughed. "Well, your pal, Girard beat you to the punch."

He told me everything that Girard had confessed. "And you believed him?" I asked. Roman nodded. "As highly unlikely as it all seems," he said, "I really do believe him – but more than that." He paused a beat and took a deep breath.

"No matter what happens in our relationship, I always, always trust you. And I should have trusted you at that moment. It will never happen again, I promise you."

He slowly walked over to me, every muscle in his body slowly flexing, seemingly bulging from his clothing. I was more than ready to lose myself in him.

Epilogue

Charlee

“Just keep your eyes closed a little bit longer,” Roman said as he continued holding my hand. I knew he was leading me through his house, but I couldn’t figure out why. He invited me to show me something or so he claimed. With closed eyes, it was tough to see anything at all.

“Okay, you can open your eyes.”

I found myself standing on Roman’s back porch, newly decorated with a beautiful daybed.

“We can use this as a couch when we feel like it,” he said squeezing my hand with his. “And as a bed when the spirit so moves us, if you know what I mean. And unlike that hammock, this sturdy day bed will never tip us over! We’ll never have another ‘hammock’ scene again.”

I looked up at Roman, thinking that he was not only the cleverest man I had ever met, but probably had the best sense of humor of anyone I knew.

“So,” I said, stringing out the word as long as possible. Roman knew full well where I was going, but he wanted to hear it. “… when do we get to try it out?”

“No time like the present,” he said.

And with that we began that remarkable transformation as our two bodies slowly meld as one.

Thank You!

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