

Building Self Esteem Quick Boost Method ~ To Overcoming Your Low Self Esteem..



by Terry D. Clark

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INTRODUCTION

Esteem is a simple word. It is worth and value that we apply to people, places, and situations. It is the amount of respect we assess. We have esteem for our world leaders. We have esteem for places like church and synagogue. We have esteem for an exemplary performance whether it is in sports, acting, or simply doing the right thing.

But the most important place we need to apply esteem is within ourselves. We must maintain our self-esteem in order to place value on ourselves as a worthy individual in the world. Self-esteem can affect every single part of our lives. If that esteem is low, our lives will be dull and gray. Elevating esteem for ourselves could very well be the key to happiness in life.

Most people's feelings and thoughts about themselves fluctuate somewhat based on their daily experiences. The grade you get on an exam, how your friends treat you, ups and downs in a romantic relationship-all can have a temporary impact on your wellbeing.

Your own self-esteem, however, is something more fundamental than the normal "ups and downs" associated with situational changes. For people with good basic self-esteem, normal "ups and downs" may lead to temporary fluctuations in how they feel about themselves, but only to a limited extent. In contrast, for people with poor basic self-esteem, these "ups and downs" may make all the difference in the world.

People with poor self-esteem often rely on how they

are doing in the present to determine how they feel about themselves. They need positive external experiences to counteract the negative feelings and thoughts that constantly plague them. Even then, the good feeling (from a good grade, etc.) can be temporary.

Healthy self-esteem is based on our ability to assess ourselves accurately (know ourselves) and still be able to accept and to value ourselves unconditionally. This means being able to realistically acknowledge our strengths and limitations (which is part of being human) and at the same time accepting ourselves as worthy and worthwhile without conditions or reservations.

What we want to do is help you raise your self-esteem to levels that will enhance your life and the way you view life. It can make a tremendous difference in your quality of life. Learning techniques to raise self-esteem can be taught and put into practice in just a few days. However, it will take practice to keep your self-worth at the forefront.

We can show you how to improve your self-esteem in just one weekend! Three short days where you will apply what this book will show you and that will stay with you as your life becomes the bright place it should be.

WHERE DOES OUR SELF-ESTEEM COME FROM

Our self-esteem develops and evolves throughout our lives as we build an image of ourselves through our experiences with different people and activities. Experiences during our childhood play a particularly large role in the shaping of our basic self-esteem.

When we were growing up, our successes (and failures) and how we were treated by the members of our immediate family, by our teachers, coaches, religious authorities, and by our peers, all contributed to the creation of our basic self-esteem.

An adult who has healthy self-esteem was given this gift in childhood. This could have been done in many ways. Probably one of the most important is being praised for accomplishments. Children who are talked to respectfully and listened to also contributed to healthy self-esteem in adulthood. These children were hugged often and given attention and experienced some type of success in school or sporting activities.

On the other side of the spectrum, we have to identify the childhood for those adults who have poor self-esteem. These children were often criticized harshly, were yelled at or beaten, and were given little attention by those they were closest to. They were ridiculed and even teased as they experienced failures in their young lives. They were made to feel they had to be perfect in order to be valued and associated failure in situations as a failure of their whole selves.

It's sad, isn't it? To think of a child treated that way. What's even sadder is the effect that treatment has on their lives as adults. We are shaped and molded by our experiences. Do you recognize yourself?

How we feel about ourselves can influence how we live our lives. People who feel that they are likable and lovable (in other words people with good self-esteem) have better relationships. They are more likely to ask for help and support from friends and family when they need it. People who believe they can accomplish goals and solve problems are more likely to do well in school. Having good self-esteem allows you to accept yourself and live life to the fullest.

Self-esteem plays a role in almost everything we do. People with high self-esteem do better in school and find it easier to make friends. They tend to have better relationships with peers and adults, feel happier, find it easier to deal with mistakes, disappointments, and failures, and are more likely to stick with something until they succeed. It takes some work, but it's a skill you'll have for life.

This ebook is about how to raise your self-esteem, so we will focus on the low self-esteem that many people have these days. You can overcome issues with low self-esteem. It's not as difficult as you might think. In fact, all you have to do is recognize, understand, and use the techniques we will give you.

One of the initial questions we feel compelled to address is what exactly self-esteem is.

WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM

Some people think that self-esteem means confidence - and of course confidence comes into it - but it's rather more

than that.

The fact is that there are any number of apparently confident people who can do marvelous things but who have poor self-esteem. Many people in the public eye fall into this category. Actors and comedians and singers in particular can seem to glow with assurance 'on stage', and yet off-stage many of them feel desperately insecure.

Indeed, individuals can be stunningly attractive and

world-famous, and seem poised and perfect - yet still, deep down, find it hard to value themselves. Think of the late Princess of Wales and Marilyn Monroe and you'll accept, I think, that public adulation is no guarantee of self-belief.

So, if self-esteem isn't quite the same thing as confidence, what is it?

Well, the word 'esteem' comes from a Latin word which means 'to estimate'. So, self-esteem is how you estimate yourself.

To do that you need to ask yourself certain questions:

- Do I like myself?

- Do I think I'm a good human being?
- Am I someone deserving of love?
- Do I deserve happiness?
- Do I really feel - both in my mind and deep in my guts - that I'm an OK person?

People with low self-esteem find it hard to answer 'yes' to these questions. Perhaps you are one of them. If you're reading this book, we think you are. Don't despair. Just read on!

The concept of self-esteem can be summed up as: Confidence in our ability to think and in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life and confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feelings of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values and enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

We also commonly think that self-esteem is merely about how we feel about ourselves at any particular moment. While seemingly existing in degrees, we tend to believe that we have positive or negative self-esteem and that we make that determination simply by how we feel about ourselves.

However, our feelings or emotions do not exist alone or have an independent existence. We do not just simply feel. Rather, for every feeling or emotion that we have, either positive or negative, there is a corresponding thought that we have about ourselves that generates the experience of self-esteem.

Whether positive or negative, self-esteem is merely how our psyche experiences the thoughts that we have about ourselves. If a person has positive thoughts about himself he will experience positive or good self-esteem. On the other hand, if the individual has negative thoughts about whom he thinks he is then he will experience poor or negative self-esteem.

Therefore, to truly understand what self-esteem is all about and more importantly to be able to alter it when necessary for ones wellness or healing, we must first get it that self-esteem is really about our thinking, and more specifically about the thoughts that we develop or create about ourselves. The thoughts or beliefs that we have about ourselves are crucial in that they determine or create the structure of our experience of self-esteem and the various emotions associated with it.

We also tend to think of our self-esteem as being something that is shaped by the events that take place in our life, particularly those from our past. We tend to believe that who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves is merely the product, effect or caused by the experiences that we have had in the past – it says that we are who we are by virtue of what has happened to us as human beings.

More specifically, we tend to think that the cause in the matter of whom we think we are and our self-esteem is due to circumstance, situation or others, people, places and things. We do not tend to think that our self-esteem is something we actually developed or created. Our personal self-esteem is shaped by our past and the experiences we have had in our lives.

We created our thoughts and with it our emotions from the meaning that we gave to the events that took place in our life, especially at an early age. We give meaning to everything in our life including and most importantly to ourselves. At an early age the meaning that we give an event tends to be made out to be all about us. While events do happen it is not the events that are important but rather the meaning that we give them and especially how we made

it out to be about our identity.

Living in a state of low self esteem can be very damaging to the quality of life you lead on a daily basis. Your self esteem is YOUR opinion of yourself, but far too many people allow others to influence or even make up their opinion for them. It sounds so very silly, but if you think on this you will realize how certain events, comments and encounters helped to "make or break" your self esteem.

Let's look at some indicators that you might have low self-esteem.

DO I HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM

While you might already have a good indication that you are suffering from low self-esteem, it might be a good idea to explore this a little further.

Take this simple quiz.

~Self-Esteem Assessment

Directions: Answer T if the statement is true for you.

Answer F if the statement is false for you.

T F I am able to discuss my good points, skills, abilities, achievements, and successes with others.

T F I assert myself with someone whom I believe is violating or ignoring my rights.

T F I am content with who I am, how I act, and what I do in life.

T F I am not bothered by feelings of insecurity or anxiety when I meet people for the first time.

T F My life is balanced between work, family life, social life, recreation/leisure, and spiritual life.

T F I am aware of the roles I played in my family of origin and have usually been able to make these behavior patterns work for me in my current life.

T F I am bonded with the significant others in my environment at home, work, school, at play, or in the community.

T F I am able to perform the developmental tasks necessary to ensure my ongoing healthy self-esteem.

T F I am satisfied with my level of achievement at school, work, home, and in the community.

T F I am a good problem solver; my thinking is not clouded by irrational beliefs or fears.

T F I am willing to experience conflict, if necessary

to protect my rights.

If you selected F for three or more of the preceding questions, you probably need to work at increasing your self-esteem. That's what we're here for! But that comes a little later!

There are many, many indicators that a person has low self-esteem. Consider this list.

People with low self-esteem:

- Consider themselves lost, unworthy of being cared for.
- Are poor risk takers.
- Operate out of a fear of rejection.
- Are typically unassertive in their behavior with others.
- Are fearful of conflict with others.
- Are hungry for the approval of others.

- Are poor problem solvers.
- Are fraught with irrational beliefs and have a tendency to think irrationally.
- Are susceptible to all kinds of fears.
- Have a tendency to become emotionally stuck and immobilized.
- Have a poor "track record" in school or on the job; conversely, they sometimes over compensate and become over-achievers.
- Are unable to affirm or to reinforce themselves positively.
- Are unable to make an honest assessment of their strengths, qualities, and good points; they find it difficult to accept compliments or recognition from others.
- Have poorly defined self-identities with a tendency to be chameleons in order to fit in with others.

- Are insecure, anxious, and nervous when they are with others.
- Often become overcome with anger about their status in life and are likely to have chronic hostility or chronic depression.
- Are easily overcome with despair and depression when they experience a setback or loss in their lives.
- Have a tendency to overreact and become de-energized by resentment, anger, and the desire for revenge against those whom they believe have not fully accepted them.
- Fulfill roles in their families of origin that are counterproductive and maladaptive. These roles carry over into their adult lives.
- Are vulnerable to mental health problems and have a propensity to use addictive behavior to medicate their hurt and pain. Such addictive behavior can include alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex, shopping, smoking, working too much, or the search for excitement, truth,

wisdom, and a guru with an easy guide to the achievement of happiness.

Kind of overwhelming, isn't it? Do you recognize yourself in any of these statements? Don't feel alone.

Actually, low self-esteem is actually quite a widespread problem. And if you suffer from this problem, it can cause some more – even serious – problems.

~Low self-esteem can have devastating consequences.

- It can create anxiety, stress, loneliness and increased likelihood for depression.
- It can cause problems with friendships and relationships.
- It can seriously impair academic and job performance.
- It can lead to underachievement and increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse.

Worst of all, these negative consequences themselves reinforce the negative self-image and can take a person into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem and increasingly non-productive or even actively self-destructive behavior.

There are actually three “faces” that people with low self-esteem wear. See if you see yourself in any of these personalities.

The Impostor: acts happy and successful, but is really terrified of failure. The impostor lives with the constant fear that she or he will be "found out." They need continuous successes to maintain the mask of positive self-esteem, which may lead to problems with perfectionism, procrastination, competition, and burn-out.

The Rebel: acts like the opinions or good will of others - especially people who are important or powerful - don't matter. The rebel lives with constant anger about not feeling "good enough." They continuously need to prove that others' judgments and criticisms don't hurt, which may lead to problems like blaming others excessively, breaking rules or laws, or fighting authority.

The Loser: acts helpless and unable to cope with the world and waits for someone to come to the rescue. The loser uses self-pity or indifference as a shield against fear of taking responsibility for changing his or her life. They look constantly to others for guidance, which can lead to such

problems as lacking assertiveness skills, under-achievement, and excessive reliance on others in relationships.

So what does a person with healthy self-esteem look like? These people exhibit the following qualities.

- Hold themselves as worthy to be loved and to love others, worthy to be cared for and to care for others, worthy to be nurtured and to nurture others, worthy to be touched and supported and to touch and support others, worthy to be listened to and to listen to others, worthy to be recognized and to recognize others, worthy to be encouraged and to encourage others, worthy to be reinforced as "good" people and to recognize others as "good" people.
- Have a productive personality; they have achieved success to the best of their ability in school, work, and society.
- Are capable of being creative, imaginative problem solvers; of being risk takers, optimistic in their approach to life and in the attainment of their personal goals.
- Are leaders and are skillful in dealing with people. They are neither too independent nor too dependent on

others. They have the ability to size up a relationship and adjust to the demands of the interaction.

- Have a healthy self-concept. Their perception of themselves is in synchrony with the picture of themselves they project to others.
- Are able to state clearly who they are, what their future potential is, and to what they are committed in life. They are able to declare what they deserve to receive in their lifetime.
- Are able to accept the responsibility for and consequences of their actions. They do not resort to shifting the blame or using others as scapegoats for actions that have resulted in a negative outcome.
- Are altruistic. They have a legitimate concern for the welfare of others. They are not self-centered or egotistical in their outlook on life. They do not take on the responsibility for others in an over-responsible way. They help others accept the responsibility for their own actions. They are; however, always ready to help anyone who legitimately needs assistance or guidance.

- Have healthy coping skills. They are able to handle the stresses in their lives in a productive way. They are able to put the problems, concerns, issues, and conflicts that come their way into perspective. They are able to keep their lives in perspective without becoming too idealistic or too morose. They are survivors in the healthiest sense of the word. They have a good sense of humor and are able to keep a balance of work and fun in their lives.

- Look to the future with excitement, a sense of adventure and optimism. They recognize their potential for success and visualize their success in the future. They have dreams, aspirations, and hopes for the future.

- They are goal-oriented with a sense of balance in working toward their goals. They know from where they have come, where they are now, and where they are going.

Does this sound like someone you want to be like?

Well, it can be! There are so many steps you can take to raise your self-worth and stop suffering from low self-esteem.

You will be a much better person for it and enjoy a

wonderfully fulfilling life.

The first point we need to address is your inner voice.

THE INNER VOICE

Our past experiences, even the things we don't usually think about, are all alive and active in our daily life in the form of an inner voice. Although most people do not "hear" this voice in the same way they would a spoken one, in many ways it acts in a similar way, constantly repeating those original messages to us.

For people with healthy self-esteem the messages of the inner voice are positive and reassuring. For people with low self-esteem, the inner voice becomes a harsh inner critic, constantly criticizing, punishing, and belittling their accomplishments.

Do you ever find yourself berating yourself for something that you've done? Have you ever found yourself struggling with something that you know you should do but keep talking yourself out of? That's your inner voice.

Your inner voice will say things like, “You can’t do this”, “There’s no way you can succeed”, and “Why bother trying, you’ll just fail”. Your inner voice is your harshest critic and the one who will lower your self-esteem the quickest. You need to change that inner voice from a negative influence to a positive one.

We all have an inner voice. You should talk back to it. Combat it. Let it know that YOU are the one in control, not it! Let’s look at some of the dialogue the inner voice will tell you and healthy ways to rebut what it is saying.

When the inner voice is unfairly harsh:

"People said they liked my presentation, but it was nowhere near as good as it should have been. I can't believe no-one noticed all the places I messed up. I'm such an impostor."

Counteract by being reassuring yourself:

"Wow, they really liked it! Maybe it wasn't perfect, but I worked hard on that presentation and did a good job. I'm proud of myself. This was a great success."

If the inner voice is unrealistically generalizing as in:

"I got an F on the test. I don't understand anything in this class. I'm such an idiot. Who am I fooling? I shouldn't be taking this class. I'm stupid and I don't belong in college."

Tell that inner voice something specific:

"I did poorly on this one test, but I've done O.K. on all the homework. There are some things here that I don't understand as well as I thought I did, but I can do the material-I've done fine in other classes that were just as tough."

~The inner voice might also be extremely illogical.

"He is frowning. He didn't say anything, but I know it means that he doesn't like me!"

Tell that voice something that is purely logical.

"O.K., he's frowning, but I don't know why. It could have nothing to do with me. Maybe I should ask."

Finally, the inner voice will take things to extremes.

"She turned me down for a date! I'm so embarrassed and humiliated. No one likes or cares about me. I'll never find a girlfriend. I'll always be alone."

It's time to tell that inner voice things aren't nearly as bad as they make them out to be.

"Ouch! That hurt. Well, she doesn't want to go out with me. That doesn't mean no one does. I know I'm an attractive and nice person. I'll find someone."

In general, when that inner voice begins putting you down, counteract with a positive statement. Don't let that voice overtake you and talk you into something that just isn't true. You are in control – not the inner critic. Take charge and begin the journey toward more positive thinking!

One way to do this is through positive affirmations.

This isn't new-age anything, it's simply a way for you to infuse positive self-talk into your life and calm that negative inner voice.

Utilizing positive affirmations can be a very powerful tool for transforming what a person thinks about himself and as a result improve the individual's self-esteem. Consistent use of positive affirmations will transform the negative

beliefs about who a person thinks he is into positive ones, will begin to alter the basis and structure of his self talk or inner voice and produce a transformation from poor self-esteem to positive self-esteem.

While utilized in a various ways, working with positive affirmations will be more effective when delivered through or combined with therapeutic relaxation music. What therapeutic relaxation music does to enhance the effect of positive affirmations is to create a very relaxed audio environment for the individual to become even more open or suggestive to the language of positive affirmations.

When you use music while telling yourself positive affirmations, you will be more relaxed and more open to accepting the positive comments you are telling yourself.

We found a wonderful music CD at Wal-Mart that helps to calm the soul and transform negative thoughts into positive thoughts. These music CD's are available everywhere, however. Just look for something that has calming music along with some soothing background noise like waves crashing on a shore or water that is flowing.

The key to the effective use of positive affirmation in

this or any other type of intervention is consistency. The self-image and the negative thoughts about who a person thinks he is that generates his experience of poor or negative self-esteem is well established in the his belief system. In many cases the development of a negative selfimage took years to create and has been reinforced through repetitive behavioral validation.

Because positive self-affirmations are key in developing healthy self-esteem, let's look at these a bit more closely.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Positive self-affirmations are healing, positive scripts you give to yourself to counter your negative inner voice. They can help you free yourself from the over-dependence you have on other people's opinions, attitudes, or feelings about you and help you feel good about yourself.

When you visualize a new order and sense in your life, you can work toward a more positive attitude and take responsibility for your own health and emotional stability.

You will let go of negative emotional baggage and be able to deal with your life in a realistic and positive manner.

Positive self-affirmation will help you resolve negative feelings from the past so you can face the present with a less obstructed view. In doing this, you will give yourself permission to grow, to change, to take risks, and to create a better life for yourself.

You will take a healthy self-oriented route in your life so that you can let go of the people and thoughts that drain your emotional resources and keep you from experiencing full personal health. When you recognize that you have a right to be a healthy and happy human being, you will have a fighting chance at achieving your full potential.

Success prophecies, when visualized, imagined, or believed in, do come true. It's time for you to believe that fully. This is how positive affirmations can affect you and your inner being. The biggest plus is that the negative inner voice will be quieted allowing you to find the positive inner voice that will help you become a fully happy individual.

There are three areas of self-affirmations. Try using any of these statements the next time you are feeling that

negativity come over you.

I am: A statement of who you are

This is a positive affirmation of a real state of being that exists in you. You can achieve a full list of I am statements by taking a personal positive inventory of your attributes, strengths, talents, and competencies. Examples include:

-
- | | | |
|--------------------|--|-------------------|
| I am competent | | I am energetic |
| I am strong | | I am enthusiastic |
| I am intelligent | | I am relaxed |
| I am beautiful | | I am joyful |
| I am a good person | | I am trusting |
| I am caring | | I am generous |
| I am loving | | I am courageous |
| I am smart | | I am forgiving |
| I am creative | | I am open |
| I am talented | | I am sharing |

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I can: A statement of your potential

This is a positive affirmation of your ability to accomplish goals. It is a statement of your belief in your power to grow, to change, and to help yourself. Examples include:

-
- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| I can lose weight | | I can grow |
| I can stop smoking | | I can heal |
| I can handle my children | | I can let go of guilt |
| I can gain self-confidence | | I can let go of fear |
| I can take risks | | I can change |
| I can be a winner | | I can be positive |
| I can be strong | | I can be a problem solver. |
| I can pass calculus | | I can handle my own problems. |
| I can laugh and have fun | | I can be honest with my feelings. |
| I can be assertive | | I can let go of being compulsive. |
| I can control my temper | | I can succeed |

I will: A statement of positive change in your life

This is a positive affirmation of a change you want to achieve. It is a positive statement of what you want to happen. It is a success prophecy. Examples include:

I will like myself better each day.

I will gain emotional strength each day.

I will control my temper today.

I will give others responsibility for their lives today.

I will grow emotionally stronger each day.

I will smile more today.

I will praise my children today.

I will feel good things about me today.

I will sleep easily tonight.

I will feel less guilt each day.

I will face my fears courageously today.

I will take on only what I can handle today.

I will take care of me today.

I will challenge myself to change today.

I will manage my time better today.

I will handle my finances wisely today.

I will take a risk to grow today.

The daily use of these "I" statements is another form of self-affirmation designed to counter negative self-concept. It can result in a positive attitude, optimism, and can motivate you toward emotional growth and progress.

Another good way to focus on the positive in your life is to make up some affirmation cards and place them in places where you will see them often.

These forms of affirmation are words, phrases, or statements written on 3 x 5 index cards and placed where you can see them daily and be reminded of positive aspects about you. Every time you see these affirmation cards they will remind you to affirm yourself about these positive qualities or attributes. State all affirmations in a positive way.

Here are some places to put your affirmation cards:

*mirror in bathroom

*dashboard of car

*mirror on dresser

- *desk at office
- *closet door
- *desk at home
- *refrigerator door
- *in your wallet
- *front door
- *in your brief case
- *bedroom door
- *in books you use at work
or school.
- *at your telephone

Try some of these words to put on your affirmation
cards:

- *bright capable
- *creative strong
- *intelligent beautiful
- *smart giving
- *Quick peaceful
- *loving hopeful
- *caring responsible
- *successful problem solver
- *calm quiet
- *pretty handsome

*relaxed enjoyable

Consider some of these phrases as well:

*think happy

*take it easy

*be calm

*think wisely

*take action

*work smart

*do it

*take the time

*do it

*now have fun

*be a winner

*relax and enjoy

*take a risk

*sit back

*dare to be different

*step back

*seize the blessing

*take the lead

*get in control

*give them space

*let go

*believe in me

*let them be

*trust in me

*let it be

*enjoy good health

Affirmation statements can also be used to remind yourself that you are worthy and that you need to remain positive in all situations.

I can be a winner.

I am the best friend I have.

I have solved problems like this before.

I have the ability to handle this.

I am a capable human being.

I deserve to love and to be loved.

I am a skillful and artistic person.

I can show others a good example.

Letting go is best for them and for me.

They will thank me in the future.

Nothing is worth losing my sanity over.

I am responsible only for my own feelings.

I owe no one explanations for my behavior, which is legally, morally, and ethically correct.

I deserve to have my rights recognized.

I am a deserving human being.

I deserve to enjoy the fruits of my labor.

I deserve to be rewarded for what I do.

I love myself for who I am.

It is OK to be selfish if I don't hurt anyone.

I like the way I handle problems.

I am able to handle any problem I face.

I have the right to feel the way I do.

My children will benefit from my healthy changes.

My children will survive my healthy changes.

My family will benefit from my relaxing more.

I deserve to relax more and take it easy.

There are beautiful things happening in my life
daily.

I experience the excitement of growth daily.

Change is a blessing I am working toward.

Taking risks is the path to growth.

I grow in love daily.

I face each new day as a race to be won.

I am winning in the race of life.

I am a rich treasure ready to be found.

Let others know who I am.

Say hello to a new person today.

Open up to be loved today.

Be responsible. Relax!

Letting go is loving

You will be free of guilt today.

To be loved I must love.

God does not make junk.

There are opportunities in life to be tried.

My possibilities are endless.

Success is to be enjoyed.

Open myself up with one new person today.

Belief in self is a step toward personal growth.

I can handle all changes that come my way.

There is nothing I cannot handle.

Smile and let others in on the secret.

When you make a conscious effort to put these positive affirmations into your daily routine, you will be well on the way toward lifting your self-esteem and realizing your full potential as a meaningful and wonderful person!

There are so many other steps you can to raise your self-esteem and become everything you were meant to be.

Let's move on!

SELF-NURTURING

Rebutting your critical inner voice is an important step, but it is not enough. Since our self-esteem is in part due to how others have treated us in the past, the second step to more healthy self-esteem is to begin to treat yourself as a worthwhile person.

Start to challenge past negative experiences or messages by nurturing and caring for yourself in ways that show that you are valuable, competent, deserving and lovable. There are several components to self-nurturing:

First and foremost, practice basic self-care. Get enough sleep, eat in a healthy fashion, get regular exercise, practice good hygiene, and so forth. A healthy mind is dependent on a healthy body. When you take care of the outside, it is natural that taking care of the inside will follow.

You should plan fun and relaxing things for yourself.

You could go to a movie, take a nap, get a massage, plant a garden, buy a pet, or learn to meditate-whatever you enjoy.

Try new things to help you pamper yourself. This author has delved into self-hypnosis through online, downloadable

sessions at selfhypnosis.com. They work wonders for me!
You may want to look at it yourself!

Reward yourself for your accomplishments – big and small! You could take the night off to celebrate good grades, spend time with a friend, or compliment yourself for making that hard phone call. It doesn't matter how small the accomplishment might seem, you deserve to celebrate every single little step. Try a little chocolate ice cream, or allowing yourself to relax and just do nothing. It doesn't matter as long as it's a reward for YOU!

You should always remind yourself of your strengths and achievements. This may seem daunting – especially when you have a low self-image. How do you find those strengths?

One way is to make a list of things you like about yourself. Or keep a 'success' file of awards, certificates and positive letters or citations. Keep mementos of accomplishments you are proud of where you can see them. Focus on anything and everything. No matter how small it may seem, if you succeeded and are proud of it, focus on it and celebrate!

A huge step you can take is to forgive yourself when you don't do all that you hoped to do. Self-nurturing can be surprisingly hard if you are not used to doing it. Don't be critical of yourself-remember that inner voice -when you don't do it just right. Reward yourself for trying in the first place. That's a huge step towards the positive YOU that you want to be!

There will be times when you don't feel you deserve to nurture yourself. This is when you need it the most! "Fake it" until you can "make it." When you treat yourself like you deserve to feel good and be nurtured, slowly you'll come to believe it. You'll be amazed at how you'll feel when you let go of the trash and embrace the jewels.

You may find yourself a bit lost during this process. It is also important to enlist the help of others in this process.

CALLING OUT “THE TROOPS”

Getting help from others is often the most important step a person can take to improve his or her self-esteem,

but it can also be the most difficult. People with low self-esteem often don't ask for help because they feel they don't deserve it.

But since low self-esteem is often caused by how other people treated you in the past, you may need the help of other people in the present to challenge the critical messages that come from negative past experiences.

Ask for support from your friends. Have them tell you what they like about you and what they think you do well. Have someone around just to vent to when you are feeling low. This person is your sounding board. He or she should allow you to express yourself without trying to fix things.

You may also ask for a hug when you need one. Dr. Leo Buscaglia, also known as “The Hug Doctor” advocates hugging as a therapeutic measure in all situations. Sometimes the physical contact can fix anything by making you feel worthy of that hug. It may sound silly, but try it – it really does work!

There are plenty of other people who can help you with your self-esteem. If you are having trouble in school, go to professors or advisors and ask for help in classes. These

people are here to help you learn, and they will! Once you start to realize success in your classes, your self-esteem will rise!

If there is something at work that you feel you are lacking in, ask your supervisor for help or advice. Ask for new projects or challenges to help foster your successes. You can also ask your co-workers to help you along by being supportive of each other.

Consider taking classes or trying out new activities to increase your sense of competence. You could take extra classes, join an exercise group, or find community classes in something that interests you such as scrap booking or karate. You can Get Help from Teachers & Other Helpers

If the problem really is too over-whelming for you to deal with on your own, you may want to talk to a therapist or counselor. Sometimes low self-esteem can feel so painful or difficult to overcome that the professional help of a therapist or counselor is needed. Talking to a counselor is a good way to learn more about your self-esteem issues and begin to improve your self-esteem.

Besides the inner voice, you need to begin telling

yourself certain things to recognize in yourself.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

A critical first step is to realize and accept that you are not alone in this. Many, many people suffer from low self-esteem. They range from high-ranking government officials to celebrities to the postman or the lady down the road. They are all in this with you whether they make it publicly known or not.

You need to realize that you are a wonderful, individual and special person - and there is no one quite like you. Your fingerprints and your DNA are totally different from everybody else's - unless you happen to have an identical twin.

And your mind - and how it thinks and operates - is absolutely your own. This means that out of six billion people in the world, you are a one-of-a-kind. So if nature has bothered to make you utterly unique, don't you feel that you should accept that you're important, and that you have as much right as anyone else to be on this planet?

You have other rights too. One of them is the right to make mistakes. Don't forget that 'to err is human' and most of us do much of our learning through getting things wrong before we get them right.

Furthermore, we have the right to respect ourselves - and to be respected: this is very important. And finally - and perhaps most vitally of all - we have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for ourselves.

Many people with poor self-esteem think that they're not very important and that their views carry no weight. Is this you? If so, try to stop these destructive thoughts; because if you go around believing them, you'll encourage other people to believe them too.

Instead, start thinking of yourself - with your individual DNA, fingerprints and mind - as someone who has rights and opinions and ideas that are just as valid as anyone else's. This will help you to improve your 'selfestimation'.

The key to positive self-esteem is to remember that you have control over your situation: When feeling glum about a character flaw, remind yourself that you can take

action to change yourself and shape your future.

This is a good time to start journaling – if you haven't already. Journaling can be an amazingly therapeutic tool in raising not only your self-esteem, but also discovering new and exciting things about yourself that you might not have known.

Begin with a big project. In your journal, list 25 good things about you. This may seem like a daunting task, but we're willing to bet that you can come up with them if you really try. Anytime a negative thought pops into your head, push it out and write down what you were going to do in the first place.

You need to take stock of your positive qualities and your strengths. You have them, just look inside yourself. Can you whip up a mean batch of brownies? That's something! Maybe you're a whiz at surfing the net. Not everyone is adept at that – write it down! Every little thing counts, so take note and be proud!

The next thing we want you to write in your journal is 10 things you want to improve in yourself. Don't look at these as your shortcomings or weaknesses. They are simply

things you need or want to change. Next to each entry, write a way that you can change that aspect of yourself.

For example, if you feel you're lazy, go ahead and write that down, but also write down ways you could be less lazy. Find something that will motivate you - perhaps a reward system. It works in the schools; it could work with you too!

Don't concentrate on this list too much. The idea here is to acknowledge that there are parts of you that you want to work on and then set about doing just that!

Finally, take a moment to dream in your journal. Find something, or several things, which you would like to do. Maybe you want to learn to scuba dive. Write it down and make an action plan. You'll need to find a place that teaches scuba diving, and then enroll in the class!

Maybe you want to know more about Greek mythology. Call a community college and see if they offer a class and then sign up for it. Maybe you could find the class online. Just look and then go for it!

Now that you have a base journal, you need to

accentuate the positive aspects of your life. Find a moment at the end of each day and write down at least one good thing that you did that day. Write down something that happened that you're proud of.

Maybe you stood up to a co-worker who's been giving you trouble. Perhaps you befriended that new person in the office. There is nothing too small to write here. Everything counts. We're focusing on the positive things in your life.

When you have them down in black and white (or red or blue – whatever ink color you prefer), they become real and true. That's what you should focus on – every day!

You will also need to daily give yourself a little pep talk. Don't base your perception of yourself on what others think of you. This is destructive. No one else knows you better than YOU! Look in the mirror every morning and say something positive.

“Your hair looks great”

“You can do anything you want to do”

“You are a worthy person and people should listen to you”

Etc.

It can be anything at all – as long as it's something positive about you. Remember that everyone feels this way sometimes. Don't compare yourself to others. Even the popular girl thinks nobody likes her. You are a unique individual with great qualities that you can share. Stand up and be heard!

Often we make ourselves unhappy because we go over and over mistakes that we have made. But we can feel happier, and improve our self-esteem, if we re-think those things we believe we have done wrong or badly.

When you have a bad day, or something goes wrong in your relationship or at work, write in your journal an account of what went right with that episode, not what went wrong. The results will surprise you - and improve how you see yourself.

Your environment can play a huge role in developing and nurturing healthy self-esteem.

YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Healthy self-esteem originates in the environment found in the: family, school, peer group, work place, and community. There are certain characteristics of your environment that need to be present in order for self-esteem to be fostered and grow.

The main component of a healthy environment is that it needs to be nurturing. It should provide unconditional warmth, love, and caring. It needs to provide the realization that other people are recognized as deserving to be nurtured, reinforced, rewarded, and bonded to.

The environment transmits messages of warmth, loving, and caring by physical touch, meeting the survival needs of food, clothing and shelter, and providing a sense of stability and order in life.

A healthy environment should provide acceptance. It will recognize that other people see each other as worthy individuals who have a unique set of personality characteristics, skills, abilities, and competencies making them special.

Acceptance helps individuals recognize that differences among and between people are OK, and this encourages the development of a sense of personal mastery and autonomy. Acceptance enables people to develop relationships with others, yet maintain healthy boundaries of individuality within themselves.

There should be good communication, everyone should be heard and responded to in a healthy way so that healthy problem solving is possible. Appropriate giving and receiving of feedback is encouraged and rewarded.

Communicating at a "feelings" level is a mode of operation for these people, allowing them to be in touch with their emotions in a productive manner.

For the environment to support the development of healthy self-esteem it must contain recognition and acceptance of people for who they are. That recognition and acceptance should not be based on the condition that they must first conform to a prescribed standard of behavior or conduct. This is unhealthy. Unconditional recognition and acceptance given in the form of support allows individuals to reach their ultimate potential.

There should be clearly defined and enforced limits known to individuals with no hidden tricks or manipulation. Limits set the structure for the lives of individuals, allowing clear benchmarks of appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Limits enable individuals to recognize their responsibilities and to chart their course of behavior in a rational way.

Respect and latitude for individual action within the defined limits of the environment should be present as well. This encourages individuals to use their creativity, ingenuity, and imagination to be productive within the established structure. Restrictions that suppress individuality can lead to a narrow focus, with people becoming stunted and handicapped in the use of their personal skills, abilities, and resources.

There should also be established freedom within the structure. This enables individuals to develop a sense of personal autonomy. If they are too tied down and inhibited they could become resentful and eventually rebellious against the prescribed structures in their environment.

Being given the freedom of self-expression within the established rules and norms allows individuals to explore their potential to its fullest; thus there is a greater possibility

of becoming successful, healthy achievers.

Finally, there should be bonding, which is the physical/emotional phenomenon between individuals and the others in their environment. This is necessary for the development of healthy self-esteem.

Bonding is forming a mutual emotional attachment between an individual and a "significant other" (parent, child, friend, lover, etc.). This involves the significant other giving unconditional love and support as well as developing an emotional link between each other.

Bonding provides a sense of emotional security and stability. It allows you to be free to explore all that is wonderful about you and the people around you without fear of reproach or ridicule. This will develop a healthy self-image and sense of identity. Bonding also will give all involved a sense of belonging and mattering in the "big picture"

Bonding can be achieved in many ways. You allow the other person to enter a strange environment while providing support and "cheerleading" the entire way. It encourages the other person to be self-confident and offers up help with individual problems while being encouraging

that any problem can be overcome.

If you want to bond effectively with those around you, there are some things you can do.

- Talk face to face with people.
- Use physical touch when interacting.
- Work at meeting the "match" of the person by encouraging him to do things for which he is ready and capable.
- Speak in a loving, caring manner.
- Show respect.
- Listen carefully; offer empathy and understanding.
- Be honest when describing or dealing with problems.
- Be supportive as they face the harsh realities of life. and becomes fearful, scared, or concerned about the future.
- Let the person grow to be his own person by encouraging the development of independent and autonomous thinking
- Assist in becoming a good problem solver by encouraging open exploration and discussion of options and alternatives when facing problems at home, school, work, or in the community.

If you feel you aren't bonding with the people around

you, show them this list. Ask them to help you on your journey towards healthy self-esteem. Our guess is they'll be happy to help!

In general, you need to make the environment conducive to the positive aspects of you and your inner voice. Surround yourself with people who are loving, caring, and supportive. Stay away from those people who are fountains of negativity. They'll only bring you down.

Look at your surroundings. At work, do you have a work space that fosters positive emotions? Place pictures of your loved ones around you. Add a pretty flowering plant. Post motivational sayings where you can always see them.

You should be happy in your own home and happy to arrive there at the end of the day. Personalize your house, hang pictures you love, drawings from kids, motivational quotes, posters, arts, crafts. Use anything that makes you feel good. So what if you don't have perfect décor. Make yourself happy and serene. Surround yourself with what you think of as beauty.

If you are in a negative environment, the logical answer is to change it. But what if you can't? Not everyone

can just up and quit a job that is an unhealthy environment. The thing is that it isn't always easy to change that which is negative.

There are, however, things you can do to minimize the negativity. There are certain people and situations that will threaten your self-esteem. You need to stay away from these in order to maintain the positive thinking you are trying hard to cultivate.

- At work: Beware of “dog eat dog” theory where everyone else is fighting just to get ahead. This is where non-appreciative people usually thrive. No one will be grateful for your contributions even if you miss lunch and dinner, and stay up late. Most of the time you work too much without getting help from people concerned. Stay out of this; it will ruin your self esteem. Competition is at stake anywhere. Be healthy enough to compete, but in a healthy competition that is.

- With people: Bulldozers, brown nosers, gossipmongers, whiners, backstabbers, snipers, people walking wounded, controllers, naggers, complainers, exploders, patronizers, sluffers... all these kinds of

people will pose bad vibes for your self esteem, as well as to your self improvement scheme.

- Change: Changes challenge our paradigms. It tests our flexibility, adaptability and alters the way we think. Changes will make life difficult for awhile, it may cause stress but it will help us find ways to improve our selves. Change will be there forever, we must be susceptible to it. Focus on the positive parts of the change. It will take some getting used to, but remember the old adage “Change is good.”

- Past Experiences: It’s okay to cry and say “ouch!” when we experience pain. But don’t let pain transform itself into fear. It might grab you by the tail and swing you around. Treat each failure and mistake as a lesson. Acknowledge it, get past it, and don’t dwell on it. Letting go of the past is so important in a healthy lifestyle. We can’t change what has happened to us in the past. It’s important to focus on the future.

- The World: There are so many awful things that happen in this world. It can bring most people down. Don’t wrap yourself up with all the negativities of the world. In building self esteem, we must learn how to

make the best out of worst situations.

- Genetics: The way you are and your behavioral traits is said to be a mixed end product of your inherited traits (genetics), your upbringing (psychic), and your environmental surroundings such as your spouse, the company, the economy or your circle of friends. You have your own identity. If your father is a failure, it doesn't mean you have to be a failure too. Learn from other people's experience, so you'll never have to encounter the same mistakes.

Before we move on to our “quick start” guide to elevating your self-esteem, we want to include what we feel is an extremely important section: how to improve and foster healthy self-esteem in children.

KIDS AND SELF-ESTEEM

None of us were born with low self-worth or low self-esteem. It developed through the years by what we were told and how we were made to feel by the people in our lives. Whether you have children or not, you can make a

difference in a child's view of themselves and stop the cycle of low self-esteem problems.

The obvious first step toward fostering a good selfimage in children is to provide them with unconditional love and caring. Don't criticize or berate them. Always focus on the positives and provide encouragement in everything they do.

More specifically, however, there are many, many other things you can do. First, you should model good selfesteem. Express through your actions and words that you respect yourself. Children are wonderful at imitating what they see and hear. Be a good role model.

Create positive routines. Young children need routines to help them to feel secure and competent. Try to set a good schedule for bedtime, rest/naps, meals, etc. Try to keep exceptions to the routine to a minimum and explain any necessary changes if/when they occur.

Allow many opportunities for children to contribute to the family. Give the child a job/chore that only he/she does for the family. Even a small job can have a positive lasting impact on a child's self esteem.

Talk about the world in positive terms. Even though there is negativity in the world, don't dwell on it with a child. Be sure to point out the many positive things in the world to children.

Give them the gift of your time. Remember quality is more important than quantity. Even if you spend just 30 minutes with a child one on one -- playing games, taking walks, having long bedtime chats, or just snuggling in front of the TV, spending time with a child shows them that you value their company.

Give them choices. By giving a child choices between a reasonable set of options that are already predetermined, you will make them feel empowered. But be cautious here.

Too much control sends the message that your children can't adequately handle their lives. Too little control sends the message you don't care, so you must strike a balance between these two extremes and give them more freedom as they grow older.

Acknowledge and listen to their thoughts and emotions since they are so much a part of who they are.

Listening to your offspring with empathy says you care about what they think and feel. Plus it will create an atmosphere in which they will be more willing to listen to you.

You don't always have to agree with your kids when you listen to them, nor let them do whatever they want. You can have a different view on a situation and still understand their perspective. And you may still have to discipline them even if you better understand why they misbehaved.

You should structure situations so your children experience more success than failure. Don't expect standards of performance which they cannot achieve. You want them to grow up with far more praise than criticism, more accomplishments than failures.

Let your children know they are lovable and capable. Again, this is a self-evident principle. You should give your children daily expressions of affection - hugs, kisses, words of love, praise and appreciation. Think of them as cups of love which you want to fill with as much caring as you can.

Provide security for them. Children need to feel

secure. Few feel secure when there are conflicts occurring around them. Few can relax inwardly when others around them are shouting, accusing, criticizing and hating each other. To a small child, tension between parents, or between parents and the child or other children, constitute a deep chasm of insecurity. Plus, they may end up blaming themselves for the conflicts around them.

Avoid arguing around them as much as possible. If they do see conflict, make sure they also see resolution of the conflict. Not everything in life is peaches and cream and problems do arise. People will argue – it's a fact of life. The important part here is that the child sees a peaceful resolution in the end. This will teach them problem solving skills and help them realize that even though there is conflict in the world, there is also a way to resolve it in ways that everyone benefits from.

Our children need to know that we accept and love them regardless of what they may do, but also that certain forms of behavior are not acceptable to us. We should, however, investigate for ourselves why this behavior is not acceptable.

Is it because it will be potentially harmful to the child,

to someone else, or to us? Or is it simply because we are programmed that it should not be done? Or does the behavior conflict with our expectations based on our personal needs and dreams for the child? Or are we afraid of what the others will think about our child and subsequently about us?

We must be very clear about why we are rejecting a certain behavior. Our rejection can come out of a place of real love and concern for the child, if, in fact, we are not simply protecting our own interests. As long as a certain behavior does no real harm to anyone, it is best to allow the child to pursue it. Something within them, some need is guiding them to explore that kind of activity. They have something to learn through doing that.

This does not mean that there are not moments where control or even natural or logical consequences may be necessary. But we need to be sure that the reasons are valid and have to do with real issues of safety or morality and not because we are disappointed with their grades or selection of hobbies, interests or friends.

In order to love our children unconditionally, we will need to start loving ourselves unconditionally. We will have

to let go of all the prerequisites we have put on our own self-love. We will need to love ourselves even though we are not perfect, even though we make mistakes, even when others do not love and accept us. The more we free our selflove from the various prerequisites, the more our love for our children and others will become unconditional.

Finally, we must provide positive reinforcement for our children. Everyone likes a pat on the back, recognition, strokes, praise or affirmation of his or her ability, goodness and worthiness. Our children have not yet formed images of themselves and need these positive inputs even more than adults. Children are not sure if they are able or not. They are small in such a large world. They are learning and thus making many mistakes as they try to learn how to do things correctly.

In our attempt to help our children we often tend to point out their mistakes more frequently than their successes. The mistakes are what are more obvious and thus we feel the need to point them out. The successes are taken for granted. We over-emphasize what our children do wrong. This undermines their sense of ability, and they start to doubt whether they can really succeed.

Thus they become preoccupied, worrying about whether they will be able to do it, and whether they will be criticized. Thus little energy is left for focusing on what they are actually doing so that they can do it correctly and succeed. Then, if our children's performance suffers, we become even more critical. This creates a vicious circle in which our children's sense of ability, success and worthiness is completely undermined.

So, the easy thing to say is just "Don't do this". If you find yourself overly criticizing a child or yelling berating comments at them, take a moment, count to 10 and think of a healthier way to address the situation. They will be better for it – and so will you!

What about that huge area that is especially difficult to deal with? It's bound to happen, but don't let it swallow you! Criticism can be given and accepted graciously without affecting your self-esteem.

COPING WITH CRITICISM

One of the areas that people with low self-esteem have

greatest difficulty with is criticism - giving as well as receiving it. Both can be extraordinarily difficult. In fact some individuals are absolutely demolished by criticism, but it's something we cannot avoid.

Now, criticism is often unfair - and when it is we need to counter it by putting our own case succinctly and calmly. But some criticism is justified - and when we're sensible we can learn from it.

Often when we're criticized, we're so hurt that we start excusing ourselves and rebutting what's being said without really listening to it.

A mature, self-possessed person listens to criticism without interrupting. If there are aspects to the criticism that are valid, just begins by agreeing with those points. If you're unsure what's being said, ask for clarification. If indeed you are wrong, say so and apologize. But if you disagree with the criticism, smile and says: 'I'm afraid I don't agree with you.'

Now, it takes quite a lot of practice to feel and act this cool. So let's go through it again. When someone criticizes you:

- listen - don't interrupt or start excusing yourself
- agree - where possible
- ask for clarification
- when you're wrong, admit it and apologize
- if criticism is wrong or unfair say: 'I'm afraid that I don't agree with you'

Now, let's look at giving criticism, because people with poor-self esteem often find it harder to dish out criticism than receive it. In fact many adults actually avoid promotion because they can't face the prospect of being in authority and having to criticize others.

So, how can you learn to criticize when you have to?

First of all, keep calm. Second, try to make your criticism at an appropriate time, rather than waiting till you're so fed up that you're furiously angry - when you'll be bound to make a mess of it.

Take some deep breaths when you know you've got to criticize someone. Then try a technique called the 'criticism sandwich'. This means that you say something nice to the person you're criticizing, then you insert the criticism, then you end with something else that nice or positive or flatter.

You might notice that people, who are good and fair when they criticize, tend to use the word 'I' rather than the word 'you'. This is because the word 'I' shows you're in control and that you've thought about what you're saying.

All too frequently when we're out of control we don't say anything initially, which is when we should address the problem. Instead we bottle it up till we explode. Then we use the words 'you', 'you're' and 'your' all the time. We say: 'You're lazy.' Or 'You make me sick.'

These kinds of phrases sound very angry and accusatory. They also show that we're not in control. And after uttering them we generally feel worse about ourselves and our self-esteem plummets even more.

So just to recap, when criticizing:

- use the word 'I', not the word 'you'
- keep calm and do some deep breathing
- use the 'criticism sandwich' technique
- always try to criticize a person's behavior rather than the person

These tips are just as handy when it comes to

standing up for yourself in other situations. And they're very useful when you want to be able to say 'no' without feeling guilty. Just keep calm and use the word 'I'.

Say: 'I won't be coming to that party with you.' Or:
Or; 'I can't work late tonight, I'm sorry. But if necessary I'll happily stay tomorrow.' And never, ever apologize for saying no. It's your right – exercise it.

People with poor self-esteem are always getting talked into doing things that they don't want to do. Does this sound like you? If so, it must stop if you want to value yourself more. So learning how to stay calm and just say 'no' is very important.

Now that we've looked at different ways you can combat low self-esteem, our next section is the **Quick start guide**. It's packed with tips on how to start raising your self-esteem – right now!

QUICK START GUIDE

We promised that you would be able to start raising

your self-esteem in just one weekend. Here are several tips on how to start.

1. Try to stop thinking negative thoughts about yourself.

If you're used to focusing on your shortcomings, start thinking about positive aspects of yourself that outweigh them. When you catch yourself being too critical, counter it by saying something positive about yourself. Each day, write down three things about yourself that make you happy.

2. Aim for accomplishments rather than perfection. Some people become paralyzed by perfection. Instead of holding yourself back with thoughts like, "I won't audition for the play until I lose 10 pounds," think about what you're good at and what you enjoy, and go for it.

3. View mistakes as learning opportunities. Accept that you will make mistakes because everyone does.

Mistakes are part of learning. Remind yourself that a person's talents are constantly developing, and everyone excels at different things — it's what makes people interesting.

4. Try new things. Try experimenting with different activities that will help you get in touch with your talents. Then take pride in new skills you develop.

5. Recognize what you can change and what you can't. If you realize that you're unhappy with something about yourself that you can change, and then start today. If it's something you can't change (like your height), then start to work toward loving yourself the way you are.

6. Set goals. Think about what you'd like to accomplish, and then make a plan for how to do it. Stick with your plan and keep track of your progress.

7. Exercise! You'll relieve stress, and be healthier and happier.

8. Have fun. Ever found yourself thinking stuff like "I'd have more friends if I were thinner"? Enjoy spending time with the people you care about and doing the things you love. Relax and have a good time — and avoid putting your life on hold.

9. Use the 10 minute technique. People with poor self-esteem often fail to give themselves enough time and

space. So find 10 minutes every day to be alone and to just sit and do nothing. Some people find it helpful to close their eyes and imagine a country scene or the sight and sound of waves gently lapping against the seashore. During these 10 minutes, allow yourself to feel peaceful and happy. Enjoy this time. It is yours - and yours alone. And you deserve it. Finding 10 minutes for you is a caring thing to do and you will feel better for doing it.

10. Act confidently. People will sense your selfconfidence and respond positively to you, strengthening your image and self-image all at once.

11. Practice breathing easily, freely and deeply and then think of it. It implicitly says you should believe in yourself and do it without any help from others, this in turn enhances your self-esteem.

12. Think back to when you did something new for the first time. Learning something new is often accompanied by feelings of nervousness, lack of self belief and high stress levels, all of which are necessary parts of the learning process. The next time you feel under-confident, remembering this will remind you that

it's perfectly normal - you're just learning!

13. Do something you're good at. How about swimming, running, dancing, cooking, gardening, climbing, painting, writing... If possible, it should be something that holds your attention and requires enough focus to get you into that state of 'flow' where you forget about everything else. You will feel more competent, accomplished and capable afterwards, great antidotes to low self esteem! And while you're at it, seriously consider doing something like this at least once a week. People who experience 'flow' regularly seem to be happier and healthier.

14. Stop thinking about yourself. This may sound strange, but low self esteem is often accompanied by too much focus on the self. Doing something that absorbs you and holds your attention can quickly make you feel better.

15. Remember everything you have achieved. This is where your journal can come in handy. This can be difficult at first, but after a while, you'll develop a handy mental and written list of self-esteem boosting memories that you can refer to often. And if you're

thinking "But I've never achieved anything", I'm not talking about climbing Everest here. They can be things like passing your driving test (despite being nervous), passing exams (despite doubting that you would), playing team sport, getting fit (even if you let it slip later), saving money for something, trying to help someone (even if it didn't work) and so on.

16. Choose something that brings about a good thought and focus on it when you are feeling blue. Country singer Clint Black wrote a song that included the lyric "Ain't it funny how a melody can bring back a memory." It doesn't have to be a song, though, it could be the smell of a certain perfume that reminds you of a special person or even a piece of clothing that you were wearing during an especially wonderful time. Use this stimulus and focus on it. Let those good feelings wash over you and chase away those "I'm no good" blues.

17. Clear out the junk: This means anything hurtful and unconstructive that you've been told by someone you care or cared about (or even some you didn't) is to be taken with a grain of salt. It is one thing to be given constructive criticism in life, but quite another when

people are downright mean about it. Remember it's the offending party's issue. NOT yours.

18. List first why you believe the negativity you tell yourself (i.e., I'm too old. I'm too fat. Nobody loves me. I'm never good enough. etc.); laugh at that piece of paper you just wrote on; THEN tear it up and move on to the next strategy.

19. Count your blessings, which can include things people actually take for granted, such as food and shelter, access to a computer, etc.

20. Make a list of what you love to do, starting from childhood until now and try to find time to do it at least once a week, even if it's just for a few minutes.

21. List at least three things that you would love to have the courage to do. Then formulate a plan to actually do them. You may not be able to at first, but know that if there are other people out there who can and do, you can too.

22. Realize once and for all that your self-worth and self-esteem is defined by you and only you. You

cannot rely on someone else for your happiness.

Another person's view of you is immaterial. Where happiness and self-esteem comes from is inside of you. Once you embrace that fully, the transformation will begin!

23. Choose to be happy. Happiness is a state of mind. The Dalai Lama says that the very purpose of life is to seek happiness. He believes that if you train the mind to be happy, you will be. Likewise, you can train yourself for higher self-esteem.

24. Be passionate about something. This can be anything. Be passionate about yourself. Be passionate about your hobbies. Be passionate about raising your self-esteem. Passion takes hold of you and feels like "fire in the belly." It is a source of power that enables you to get fired about life and make a difference. The more passion and zest you feel the more alive and brightly lit you are.

25. Reward your successes. Set yourself up for success by breaking big goals into daily action steps and take time to acknowledge and celebrate the small successes. This will feed your need for recognition and

provides the extra push to keep you moving forward. Rewards could be as simple as that delectable piece of turtle cheesecake you saw in the bakery or as huge as a dream vacation. Either way, you deserve to celebrate your successes. When you do, you'll be rewarded in many more ways than just materially!

CONCLUSION

Your self-esteem is like a star at night that shines brightest when it is the darkest. It is your inner light that burns brightly and freely no matter what is happening around you. A Zen saying reminds us: "What was your original face before you were born?"

Self-esteem is perfectly intact when we are born, in fact, it is inherent to us; however, it often diminishes over the course of our childhood. We lose a little of it whenever we fail, make mistakes, misbehave, feel guilty, refuse to forgive, neglect ourselves, and/or do things we are ashamed of. As an adult, we sometimes feel as if our "self" is in pieces--- that we are somehow not whole and complete.

This is not true. We are whole and complete even with our missing pieces and broken parts. We just need to decide to gather up ourselves up and become whole again. I am willing to bet that when you look back over your life, the first thing that comes to mind are the regrets, the sad times in your past.

Do you see the pieces of yourself lying along the path of your life? The ones where you didn't feel good enough, or where you were criticized or blamed by someone else? But have you ever stopped to look at the memories of when you won the prize, felt really great, on top of the world----those moments that prove what a wonderfully amazing human being you are?

It is your birthright to love and honor yourself. The good news is that you can reclaim that which is yours. That is your self-esteem.

There is absolutely no reason at all why people should "suffer" from low self esteem. Your self esteem is something over which you have absolute and immediate control. Think of self esteem as a muscle; it never stays the same for any period of time.

Like any muscle it either weakens or gets stronger. Self esteem improvement is like exercising a muscle. It relies on small incremental improvement on a daily basis. You won't run out to the gym and have perfect muscles for life in an hour. Consistent self esteem improvement is the only way to lasting success and an increase in the quality of your life everyday you live it.

Your self-esteem contributes to your vitality, energy level, persistence, and personal magnetism. Self-esteem is about what is on the inside, a belief in yourself and your abilities. Positive esteem focuses on acceptance of self and others. It remains constant despite the storm. This fosters cooperation and wholeness.

Building self esteem will eventually lead to self improvement if we start to become responsible for who we are, what we have and what we do. It's like a flame that should gradually spread like a brush fire from inside and out. When we develop self esteem, we take control of our mission, values and discipline. Self esteem brings about self improvement, true assessment, and determination.

Be positive. Be contented and happy. Be appreciative.

Never miss an opportunity to compliment. A positive way of

living will help you build self esteem, your starter guide to self improvement.

It is never too late to build your self-esteem. You can start RIGHT NOW! Self-esteem has a big impact on how we enjoy life. Respect others, yourself, and life in general. Practice the techniques we have given you every single day. Watch them work wonders in your life.

Become the person you can be and treat yourself well.
You deserve it!

The Bonus Section:

****How to Break Your Very Bad Habits**

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~~Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to go.~~

Can People Really Change?

David Lucero knows where he wants to go: He wants to go to El Paso, Texas.

David is about sixty years old, I think. For the last three months, he has been living on a sidewalk across the street from a Greyhound bus station.

I don't know how long David has been homeless. He is one of America's walking wounded— mentally ill, unable to take care of himself, unable to cope with the business of life. He is always happy to talk, although you have to repeat yourself a few times before he can understand you:

David is losing his hearing.

One day I tried to take him to a shelter for the homeless. All he had to do was get in the pickup truck. He had to make a decision: Get in or stay on the street. The right decision could have started the cycle of healing and change, but it was more than David was capable of doing that morning. He decided to stay on the street, waiting for his imaginary ride to El Paso.

When I meet people like David, I tell myself that Lewis Carroll didn't make anything up when he wrote Alice in Wonderland. I have met many people who are flesh and blood Cheshire Cats, Mad Hatters, and Queens of Hearts.

I come into contact every day with people whose lives and families have been torn apart by bad habits: people addicted to cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs; over-spenders, overeaters, and chronic worriers; negative thinkers, procrastinators, and people who won't forgive themselves for something that happened long ago.

I have seen firsthand how bad habits keep ordinary people from living happier and healthier lives. Everywhere you look, people want to know why they are unhappy. And they want to know what they can do about it.

The talk shows offer a constant menu of miracle cures for every type of bad habit imaginable— everything from quick weight-loss programs to 20-minute lessons in positive thinking that promise to cure depression. We are constantly bombarded by programs that promise effortless and immediate results: Lose weight fast, while eating as much as you want! Guaranteed to work!

Sure.

We are overwhelmed with solutions today. And the more solutions there are, the harder it is to find one that works. Many people have failed so many times that they've almost given up the battle. Others gave up a long time ago.

Establishing new priorities

Is it possible to free yourself from bad habits? Can people really change in any meaningful and long-lasting way? Can I change myself? The answer to each of these questions is "yes." But you can't change in 24 hours, as some programs and self-help books promise.

My research, as well as my experience and common sense, tell me that anyone can change, but at the same time, I know that people need a compelling reason to change.

What does it mean to change? To change means to establish new priorities—to choose a behavior that's different from the one we're using now. David Lucero is stuck on the street, waiting for a solution that doesn't exist. When a real solution is right in front of his nose, he can't see it.

I don't know when his hearing started to deteriorate. And even though he can see, I have a feeling that he has been blind for many years. I don't know the story of his life, but I suspect it is a story of bad habits and bad decisions.

I'm sure it's a story filled with bad people and bad situations, too. But at some point we have to discard the factors, the people, and the situations that shaped us. Focusing on the past won't help us solve today. At some point we have to take responsibility for our own lives.

I suspect that bad habits and bad choices are what brought David to this point—day after day and year after year—until he hit rock bottom. That's always the way it is.

Learning how to free yourself from bad habits starts with the realization that we cause our own feelings. I am the major cause of my own problems. The moment I grasp that simple fact, I'm ready to step into the process of self-change that will lead to freedom from the habits that keep me from living a more satisfying life. And when I'm free from my bad habits, the people around me will be free from the person I used to be.

All people can bring about superficial changes in themselves. But freeing yourself from a selfdestructive habit like smoking or overeating requires a deep, long-lasting change. A bad habit is like an iceberg. You can't beat the habit if you approach it as if it were only as large as what you can see on the surface.

Franz Kafka said, "a book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us." Any book or program that aims to help people break bad habits must reveal the whole iceberg that lies below the surface.

You can't eliminate the whole thing in one day, but if you take a step-by-step approach, you can eliminate the bad habit sooner than you thought possible. It is going to take effort on your part.

You can't eat whatever you want and loose weight, no matter how many times you hear it on the talk shows. But you can loose weight, and you can learn to enjoy healthy foods more than the unhealthy foods you're eating now.

David has constructed a verbal cage for himself. His definition of the problem seems to give him no choice; he avoids having to take responsibility for himself.

To receive the benefits that come with daily meals, hot showers, clean clothes, a bed, medical attention, companionship, and as much help as a social worker can give him— bus fare to El Paso, if that is indeed where he should go—he must break out of the cage.

But David is convinced that he cannot go to the shelter, for doing so would mean that he might miss his ride to El Paso. That is how people get trapped in verbal cages of their own making.

I talk about some extreme cases in this report, because I see them every day. But I also think that these extreme cases make it easier to see the real issues and challenges faced by people who are not in such obviously life-threatening situations.

David isn't conscious of the elaborate mechanisms he has constructed to hide the truth from himself, but he is hiding it all the same. To free ourselves from bad habits, we must stop hiding the truth from ourselves.

Overeaters, smokers, and chronic procrastinators have more in common with people like David than meets the eye. We all go to great lengths to hide the truth from ourselves about the destructive nature of our bad habits; too often, lives and families are destroyed before we become aware of the verbal cages that keep us trapped in self-destructive behavior.

Does professional therapy work? Can it help people break bad habits before the habit destroys their lives? The dropout rate is astonishing: 45% of clients who seek a professional therapist drop out of therapy after two or three sessions.

Do programs help? Millions of smokers have quit forever without following a treatment program. On the other hand, many people who try a smoking-cessation program are not able to quit, no matter how many different programs they try.

Some research suggests that for every person who quits smoking by following a treatment program, there are almost twenty persons who quit on their own.

What conclusion should we draw from all of this? It's pretty clear, I think. You have a better chance of freeing yourself from a bad habit by becoming your own coach, by taking responsibility for your own program.

The goal of this report is to give you the information and strategy that will empower you to free yourself from bad habits. Millions of people have succeeded

in breaking a bad habit, and so can you.

The six stages in the process of self-change

Change is not an event, but a process. Change happens through a series of stages, and most successful self-changers fail at least once before they succeed. Willpower alone won't do it.

You need to understand the cycle of change, or you risk substituting one bad habit for another, as so often happens when ex-smokers satisfy their craving for "something" by overeating. Success depends on having the right information and knowing how to use it.

Researchers have identified six clear stages in the process of successful self-change:

1. Denial
2. Awareness
3. Preparation
4. Action
5. Maintenance
6. Termination

For most people, the process of breaking a bad habit is not a straight path that takes them from one stage to the next. Successful self-changers usually follow a path that's more like a spiral:

They move forward, go back to a previous stage, and move on to the next level of commitment one or more times before breaking the habit for good.

Quitting a habit cold turkey usually doesn't work. If a person isn't ready to move ahead, pushing her into the action stage will cause her to feel like a failure the first time she slips up. She may end up more addicted to her habit than she was before

she tried to quit. If she feels guilty and blames herself for failing to break the habit, she will find it even harder to make a commitment to quit the next time.

We have all seen cases close to home. Many of us have experienced the frustration of trying to break a bad habit. As Mark Twain said, “Quitting smoking is easy. Personally, I’ve quit many times.” If that sounds familiar, this report is for you.

Whatever your bad habit is, you may have tried to break it many times, too. This time will be different, because you’ll understand that breaking your habit is a process, not an event. You will have the knowledge and the confidence to succeed this time.

Can you really change? Can you really free yourself from bad habits? Millions of people around the world are living proof that you can. This guide will show you how. But like Alice, to reach your goal you need to know where you want to go. For many people, that is the hardest part.

Like David, they’re stuck.

~Freeing yourself from a bad habit starts by removing the blinders.

Stage 1

“It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”

— G.K. Chesterton

Removing the Blinders

At the age of 72, Jim is a chronic complainer. I learned a long time ago that I don’t need to buy a newspaper or watch television to know what’s wrong with the world; there are plenty of people like Jim who will tell me what’s wrong. Complaining, gossiping, criticizing, and negative thinking are some of the deadliest habits.

Little by little, negativity eats away at a person's health and eliminates the possibility for happiness. If someone close to you is a complainer, a criticizer, or a negative thinker, your own well-being is at risk.

Complaining about things beyond our direct control is one of the most destructive habits. Yes, I know, it's also one of the most common things that people do. We complain about the weather;

we talk about whoever is the focus of the latest celebrity scandal; we blame the government— any government—for everything that's wrong.

Complaining about things we can't control is a very effective way to avoid facing up to things that we can do something about. By spending his life complaining about things that he is powerless to change, Jim avoids having to confront his own negative thinking and bitterness.

Jim wants everyone else to change. He blames everyone else for his problems: his parents, a former business partner, the government, the local economy. In his present state, he can't begin to understand that his unhappiness has nothing to do with any of these things, and everything to do with his habit of blaming others for what's wrong in his life.

Jim doesn't have a habit that causes a clear health risk. He doesn't smoke, drink, use drugs, or overeat. But his health is failing, and he is worried about the need for major surgery. Although negative thinking hasn't been conclusively linked to cancer or heart disease, researchers are beginning to find evidence that resentment, bitterness, and hatred literally kill people.

Jim feels no reason to change his own attitude or behavior. He is a classic example of a person who is unable to recognize the true cause of his unhappiness. Jim is in denial.

Denial is the first stage in the cycle of self-change. The vast majority of people whose health, happiness, or relationships are being threatened by a self-destructive habit spend months, if not years, in a stage where they deny the seriousness of the problem.

People in this stage share the following characteristics:

- They refuse to admit that they have a serious problem.
- They resist change and usually become aggressive if confronted about the need to change.
- They have a general sense of hopelessness, no matter how busy their lives seem to be on the surface.

Many people who have self-destructive habits also suffer from feelings of distress. Research suggests that up to 50% of drug users have some form of depression. Misery loves company: We tend to form relationships with people who have our bad habit.

By spending time in a bar, people can convince themselves that it's the normal way to unwind after a stressful day, since there are so many other people in the bar doing the same thing.

Research shows that clinically obese people are less likely to lose weight when they live with other clinically obese people.

Self-destructive behavior

Many people are so stubborn in their unconscious need to defend their bad habits that they refuse help even when their lives depend on it.

In *Changing For Good*, James Prochaska mentions a startling experiment done by a zoologist named Calhoun. Instead of using domesticated white mice and rats in his research, Calhoun studied wild mice to gain an insight into how they strive to maintain control over their own behavior.

In one experiment, Calhoun gave the mice an electric switch that allowed them to select dim light, bright light, or no light in their cages. When allowed to make their own choice, the mice avoided bright lights and darkness; time after time, they turned on the dim light. But when the dim light was turned on by the experimenter, the mice ran to the switch and turned it off. Then they turned on the bright light or left the cage dark.

In another experiment, the mice were given control of a switch that activated a treadmill, which was their only source of exercise. Caged mice need to run about

eight hours a day to stay healthy. Without any prompting, the mice turned on the treadmill and ran at different times of the day.

Whenever the experimenter turned on the treadmill, the mice immediately turned it off, even though the first part of the experiment clearly showed that the mice wanted and needed to exercise.

Prochaska calls this “foolish freedom.” Laboratory mice are too domesticated to exhibit this kind

of behavior. Prochaska points out that the wild mice “demanded control over their behavior, even if it meant sacrificing their own health.”

Helping relationships

People in denial have lost control of the problem, which means that they have lost control of their lives. They rarely progress to the next stage without the benefit of a helping relationship.

Professional counselors, therapists, and helpers have learned that confrontation doesn't help a person move from stage 1 to stage 2. Nagging doesn't help. Letting him have his way—or

“going along with him” to avoid confrontation—merely strengthens his denial of the problem by reinforcing in his own mind that whatever he's doing is right.

People usually need an unexpected response before they can remove the blinders. This is a fact that hasn't changed in the last 3,000 years, as the following story illustrates.

King David was one of the heroes of ancient Israel. He was the leader of his nation, a great warrior, an accomplished musician, and one of the greatest poets of antiquity. When he was a young shepherd tending his father's flock, he killed a bear and a lion with his hands. When he was barely a teenager, he killed Goliath on the battlefield.

One evening, the king got out of bed and went up to the roof of his house. He saw a beautiful woman washing herself not far away. Immediately he sent his men to find out who she was. Her name was Bathsheba. She was the wife of a soldier named Uriah, who was one of Israel's bravest and most loyal soldiers.

Uriah was away from home, serving his nation in a war against one of Israel's many enemies.

David sent for Bathsheba and slept with her. She became pregnant.

The king wanted Uriah out of the way. The Israeli army was besieging an enemy city at the time.

David sent a letter to the commander of his army, Joab, in which he laid out instructions for getting rid of Uriah. He told Joab to send Uriah to the front of the battle, then retreat with the rest of his soldiers, leaving Uriah alone.

Joab carried out the king's orders and Uriah was killed in battle. David made Bathsheba his wife, and she gave him a son.

There are a lot of things going on here that are worse than smoking, overspending, negative thinking, and overeating—treachery and murder, to name just two. And it started with David's voyeurism, a nasty thing in itself. How do you tell a king that he's developing some dangerous habits?

If you think it's hard to get somebody in your own family to remove the blinders, imagine what the prophet Nathan was up against. Nathan knew what was going on. As a prophet, it was his job to help the king open his eyes.

Nathan didn't confront David directly. Instead, he told the king a story about two men who lived in the same city. One man was rich, the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds.

The only thing the poor man had was one lamb. The poor man loved the lamb as if it were his daughter.

One evening the rich man needed a lamb for a dinner party. Instead of sacrificing a lamb from one of his own flocks, he took the poor man's lamb. When King David heard this, he was furious—he thought Nathan was telling him a true story about two men in his kingdom.

“The man who did this thing shall surely die,” said the king.

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man.”

David listened to Nathan’s story, and it opened his eyes. Why can’t we listen better? Why can’t we see the faults in ourselves that others see so clearly in us? It is so easy to know when others are in denial, and virtually impossible to admit that we are in this stage.

In the language of modern therapy, the prophet Nathan was in a helping relationship with King David. He confronted David, but not through an act of direct verbal aggression. He created uncertainty in David by responding in a way that David least expected. That is what allowed David to open his eyes.

Uncertainty is what causes us to look for new options. Nathan knew that it’s impossible to change another person, but you can motivate him to want to change himself. Your role as a helper is to support another person during the process of self-change, not to attack him or reject him.

We can’t all be as wise as Nathan. But there is always a way to help someone open his eyes without entering into an aggressive confrontation, which often causes irreparable damage to everyone involved.

If someone close to you is in denial, you are already equipped to be a better helper by having read this. Don’t go along with him, don’t cave in to him, and by all means, don’t confront him openly.

The best thing you can do is give him this report. When he reads the story of Nathan and King David, he may be ready to say, “I am the man.”

If you’ve become aware of the need to free yourself from a bad habit, you’re already in stage 2.

Stage 2

“We are not helpless dolls...we do not behave as we behave by accident.”

— Ernst G. Beier

Awareness—When You Know You Have a Problem

People in this stage know they have a problem and want to understand their problem, but they don't know what to do or they feel powerless to change. People in stage 2 are still far from making a commitment to change.

Many people get stuck in this stage. They spend years telling themselves that they are going to change “one day.”

Fear of failure keeps many people stuck in this stage. They hide from the truth by telling themselves that they're waiting for the “perfect” weight-loss program, the perfect smoking cessation program, or the perfect time to stop drinking.

“I'll change when the time is right,” is one of the phrases you hear most often from people in this stage of the self-change cycle. There will never be a “right time,” of course, but they haven't been able to break out of their verbal cage.

Some people in this stage are never able to make a serious commitment to change, even though their life depends on it. We are all familiar with the day-to-day experiences and struggles of ordinary people who are stuck in this stage.

My father-in-law recently died after a long struggle with emphysema. Even though he slept with an oxygen tank next to his bed, he never quit smoking. He cut down, but he never quit, even though he knew it was killing him.

A number of years ago, I read about a woman in New Jersey who had a tracheotomy before she died of cancer. After her tracheotomy, she was no longer able to breathe through her mouth, so she placed lighted cigarettes into the hole in her throat and inhaled the smoke that way.

Danger signs

People in stage 2 are still focusing on the problem. They want to talk about

themselves and their families; they can be quite open when talking about their problem. What holds people back in this stage is often a fear of change.

Even good change threatens our security. When we're accustomed to something, the thought of losing it can cause us to panic and freeze where we are, no matter how much we stand to gain by changing.

Olga is a widow with three children in their teens and early twenties. She met a man named Chuck and fell head over heels in love. Chuck is divorced and recently moved to Olga's city from another part of the country. He is a construction worker in his late forties who seems to have no trouble finding jobs in spite of a drinking problem.

A few months after I met them, Olga and Chuck left town. When Olga's children realized that their mother was going out with an alcoholic drifter, they naturally became alarmed and pleaded with their mother to break off the relationship.

When Olga refused to stop seeing Chuck, her children told relatives that they feared their mother was in a dangerous relationship. When the whole family confronted Olga, she did what any experienced counselor could have easily predicted: She left town with her car, her clothes, and her new boyfriend.

I was taking my walk around the neighborhood one evening when Olga stopped her car and asked if she could talk to me. What followed was a sad but common story of a woman in love with the wrong man.

When Olga and Chuck got back in town, Olga used her contacts to get Chuck a good job. Chuck moved into an apartment that Olga owns. The apartment is adjacent to the house where Olga lives with her children. Olga told me that Chuck pays rent, and he is nice to the children.

But Chuck has become verbally abusive to Olga. He hasn't abused her physically, but the verbal abuse has become intolerable. Olga is a Hispanic American. She was born in the United States.

When Chuck is drinking, he shouts at Olga and tells her to go back to Mexico. Every time Chuck insults her, Olga asks him why he doesn't go back to wherever he is from.

Olga is a classic example of a person in stage 2. She has become aware of the

problem. Olga's "bad habit" is her low self-esteem, which is the only thing that keeps her from ending such an abusive relationship. Just as every bad habit can be broken, low self-esteem can be changed into a healthy self-image. But it takes time.

Olga realizes that her children's safety may be at risk. Chuck has never done anything violent so far, but Olga is beginning to understand that she's playing with fire. As bad as the relationship is, Olga doesn't want to lose Chuck. "I love him," she says, "Can't he see how much he's hurting me?"

Olga recognizes that her life may be in danger. Chuck has said that he would like to take her to another part of the country. Olga senses that moving to an area of the country where she doesn't have any support relationships would make her even more vulnerable than she is now. "He might take me there and then decide to kill me," she said.

Chuck hasn't threatened Olga or the children, and Olga doesn't want to ask Chuck to leave. She still can't take action, which is a common problem for people in stage 2. Instead of telling Chuck to leave, she asks him why he doesn't leave on his own. That's as far as she can go at this point.

Getting unstuck

Olga is afraid to lose the life she has become used to, no matter how unsatisfying or risky it is.

She worries about her problem day and night, but so far that is all she has done.

One of the biggest dangers in this stage is to substitute worrying about a problem for working on it. That describes Olga. If you're in a position to help someone who's in stage 2 of the cycle,

always keep the following points in mind:

- People in this stage need support, listening, and feedback.
- Don't give advice unless you're asked for it.
- People in this stage usually need to be jolted into action, but that doesn't mean

you're the one

who should apply the pressure.

Trying to push a person to take action before she is ready to change can be a big mistake.

Pressure at this point will only make the person more resistant to change. People who are stuck in stage 2 really do know better, but they have forgotten what they know. Too often, a personal tragedy must happen before a person in this stage is able to move forward.

Olga knows what she must do. Yet she still can't do it, even though her family's welfare depends on her ability to act. This is typical of people in stage 2 of the cycle. Olga didn't come to me for advice. She already knows all the reasons to end the relationship that she needs to know, and she is beginning to understand that as long as she does nothing, the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better.

Olga is like a chain smoker who isn't ready to quit. Many smokers are fully aware of the damage they're doing to their health. John repeatedly says that he wants to quit, but can't. The truth is that John doesn't want to quit smoking.

John knows the health risks that smokers face. But he doesn't want to give up all the little satisfactions that smoking gives him: the pleasant anticipation he experiences after a meal when he is about to light a cigarette; the satisfaction of feeling the cigarette between his fingers; the nicotine rush that goes straight to his brain every time he takes a puff; the security of knowing he has an extra carton of his favorite brand stashed away in the closet.

The only part of smoking that John wants to give up is the part that threatens to give him lung cancer; he wishes he could somehow eliminate that part, and hang onto all the other little perks that hooked him in the first place. People like John don't want to quit, no matter how much they say they do.

John isn't lying when he says he wants to quit. He sincerely thinks he wants to quit. His problem is that he hasn't come to grips with the real reason he smokes. As soon as he is able to do so, he will be in a position to move forward. When he is able to admit that he likes lots of little things about his habit, he will be in a position to substitute healthy new habits for the old destructive ones.

As long as he hides from the truth—from the real reasons why he smokes—he can conveniently shift responsibility from himself to a “force” that’s stronger than he is. When a smoker says, “I really want to quit, but I just can’t,” what he really means is that he doesn’t want to be held accountable for his bad choices.

For many people, there is a certain comfort in believing that they can’t avoid the destructive path they’re following, even though they know where it leads in the end. They are locked into a selfdefeating mindset that says, “I know I’m doomed, but what can I do about it?” The answer is that they can do a great deal about it, but not until they are able to see through the mind games they play.

Why do we play these games, even when we know our habits are destroying us? I think the answer goes something like this: As soon as we break out of the cage we’ve been hiding in, we will have to admit that we had the power to do it all along.

That can be a scary thing. A person who frees himself from a habit that has dominated his life for years or decades can be terrified of the prospect of having to admit that he wasted a large part of his life by failing to take responsibility for his own behavior.

If you’re in a helping relationship with a person like that, or if you are courageous enough to admit that you are that person, take heart and remember this: Better to have wasted part of your life than to have wasted all of it. It’s never too late to turn your life around. As soon as you do, you’ll discover that none of it was wasted after all—it just took a little longer to reach your goal.

A woman you know may be drinking herself to death, but subconsciously she tells herself that it would be far worse to be free of her habit. If she were free, she would have to spend the rest of her life wondering what she might have made of her life if she had realized sooner that she was free to make better choices.

This is the danger of focusing on the past. When all you can see is what lies behind, you aren’t able to understand that new opportunities present themselves as soon as you make the decision to walk in a different direction.

A person’s capacity to shift her thoughts from the past to the present is the key to moving from stage 2 to stage 3. You can’t make the decision to change as long as you’re still focused on the past.

As soon as you decide to change, you’re at the end of stage 2. The next step in the

cycle of freeing yourself from a bad habit is the preparation stage.

Stage 3

“Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.”

— Proverbs 4:25

Planning Your Personal D-Day

We live in a world that is accustomed to 30-second commercials that offer instant solutions. But we shouldn't be surprised when the easy solutions don't work: There are no magic bullets, no simple solutions on the path to deep and lasting change.

In this stage, you work on making change your No. 1 priority. You can't move into stage 4 until freeing yourself from the habit becomes your highest priority. Your life will go in the direction of your most dominant thoughts. When you focus on the past, your thoughts hold you back by causing you to relive events over and over.

Blaming ourselves for things that went wrong in the past is the most self-destructive habit of all.

It's easy for our families and friends to see when a habit like drinking, overeating, or overspending is destroying our lives. But it isn't always so easy, not even for the people closest to us, to know when guilt and self-blame are destroying our possibility for happiness.

The solution is to accept responsibility for yourself, to realize that you can decide to take charge of your life. There is a scene in Disney's animated film, *The Lion King*, which illustrates this in a humorous and powerful way. Simba has been hiding the truth from himself ever since he ran away from Pride Rock. He has constructed all sorts of verbal cages for himself: Hakuna Matata, he says, No worries.

But he isn't happy, and he worries all the time. He blames himself for his father's death. Simba is destined to be king of the Pride Lands, but guilt and self-blame keep him from taking action.

Rafiki, the wise, old monkey and high priest of Simba's future kingdom, tracks Simba down and tries to bring him to his senses. To bring home the message, Rafiki hits Simba on the head with his staff.

"Why did you do that?" asks Simba, rubbing the sore spot on the top of his head.

"It doesn't matter," answers Rafiki, "It's in the past."

Simba needed to be jolted into action, and Rafiki's staff proved to be an effective tool. Of course, if you're in a helping relationship with a person who is trapped in a cage of guilt and self-blame, you must never hit him on the head with your staff. That technique works wonders in cartoons, but it will destroy a helping relationship in real life.

So how do you jolt a person into action if he's stuck in the same bad habits that threatened to ruin Simba's life?

Here's an idea: Make popcorn, get comfortable, and invite him to watch *The Lion King* with you.

If the person is in stage 1 or stage 2, the movie will hit him on the head for sure. It may even jolt him into action and accelerate the cycle of self-change.

As soon as you've decided to change, it's time to schedule your Decision Day. Set a date and announce your intention to take action: "I will stop smoking on the first of the month." Put your commitment in writing.

One of the keys to successful self-change is to develop your own plan. The critical element in any program is the confidence of the person who is using it. If you believe the program will work, you have a better chance of making it work. The best way to do that is to create your own plan.

Preparing for a total lifestyle change

The key to success in this stage is reevaluating your life. The greatest motivator is a vision of what your life will be like when you break your bad habit.

Being prepared for change means that you set goals for yourself. The best way to do this is to write a personal mission statement. Make a list of the benefits of changing. How does each of these benefits help you achieve your goals in life?

The key to freeing yourself from bad habits is to change your lifestyle. A total lifestyle change isn't something that happens overnight. It happens one day at a time, as soon as you begin to focus on the solution instead of the problem. The process of total lifestyle change starts when you begin to think more about the present than the past.

Don't be surprised if you're not completely sure that you're ready to break your habit at this stage. It's not about quitting cold turkey; no one is asking you to do it today. Forcing yourself to quit before you're mentally and emotionally prepared to change usually backfires. Quitting cold turkey usually doesn't work at this stage. In this stage, you're getting ready to quit.

The best way to free yourself from any bad habit is to replace your old behavior with a more active lifestyle. Your commitment to an exercise program is one of the keys to breaking a bad habit.

I started smoking when I was 22 years old. I had never taken a single puff on a cigarette before then. When my smoking turned into a two-pack-a-day habit, I started to worry about my health.

Like many smokers, I spent five years smoking and another five years trying to quit. I switched to a pipe for a while in the hope that the trouble it takes to prepare a pipe and clean it would curb my smoking, but it didn't slow me down enough to make a difference. Eventually I went back to smoking cigarettes.

I realized that I was going to need a plan. I had noticed that many ex-smokers substituted snacking on junk food for their former cigarette habit. Their rapid weight gain made me wonder if the remedy wasn't worse than the disease. I didn't want to fall into the same trap, so I planned to use sugarless gum to satisfy my craving to put something in my mouth.

I was teaching at the time, and back then I was still using a chalkboard in the

classroom. When I was trying to quit smoking, I would sometimes catch myself holding a stick of chalk between my fingers as if it were a cigarette. I almost put a stick of chalk in my mouth once. I'm sure it looked funny to the students, but I didn't worry about it. They knew I was trying to quit, and their encouragement and support played an important role in my success.

My plan to free myself from nicotine included an exercise program. I theorized that if I punished my body enough, it would cry out for me to take better care of it. Some of my students had a basketball team in a local league. I was 33 at the time, so they were 10 to 15 years younger than I was. I told them that I wanted to start playing again, and they invited me to a practice game.

I had been a decent basketball player in my teens, but I hadn't played competitive sports for a long time. I played about 10 minutes the first time, and when it was over, I told myself that I didn't need to punish my body that much. But the kids wouldn't let me quit.

I didn't stick to the date I set for breaking my habit. It took about a month of lapses after my target date had come and gone before I quit for good. During that month, I would steal a smoke room time to time—never more than one cigarette in a day. I didn't know it then, but I was still in stage 2 when I set my target date. I was aware of the damage that smoking was doing to my body and to my relationships, but I hadn't made a serious commitment to change.

My lapses taught me that breaking the habit was going to cost more than I thought. I started my real preparation one day after my target date, the first time I lapsed. The month-long period of lapses after my target date became my stage 3—the preparation period that allowed me to be successful. That's not the best way to do it, but it worked.

The most important part of my preparation was my commitment to a more active lifestyle. My new teammates wouldn't let me quit. I played on their team for two years. I paid for new uniforms and warm-up suits before one important statewide tournament.

I didn't realize it then, but I understand now that the new uniforms were a motivator and a reward—my motivation to stay committed to a healthier lifestyle, and my teammates' reward for supporting me.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the father of the aerobics movement, has said that maximum health benefits are obtained by participating in any activity that increases your

heart rate for at least 30 minutes, three times a week.

Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise is enough to release endorphins into the brain. Endorphins are chemical substances produced by the body that are many times more powerful than morphine.

Endorphins are responsible for the sensation of peace, well-being, and exhilaration commonly experienced by people who exercise regularly.

If you make a commitment to exercise for just 90 minutes a week, it will make you happier and it will help you replace your self-destructive habits with healthy new habits.

It doesn't have to be competitive basketball. Brisk walking, swimming, or an exercise class will do the trick. Every lasting change costs something in terms of time, energy, and money. But if you stick with it, the payoff is a thousand to one.

You can't exercise away all the temptations to go back to your old habit, of course. You need a plan that works 24/7. The best alternative for self-destructive habits is active diversion. Keeping busy—keeping your mind off the temptation to drink, smoke, or overeat—is the strategy that all successful self-changers use. Exercise is the healthiest substitute for bad habits, but it's not the only substitute that works.

You are the only person who can know what will work for you. Whatever keeps you busy and takes your mind off your craving for a drink, a piece of cake, or a shopping spree will work for you. It has to be something you enjoy. Playing your favorite game, reading a book, listening to music, cleaning the house, or working on a home improvement project are all healthy alternatives.

Beware of procrastination

The biggest danger in this stage is procrastination. Try these strategies at the first sign that you're

trying to put off your commitment:

- Weigh the benefits of acting versus the effects of procrastinating.

- Set achievable goals. Trying to pay off your credit card next month will only set you up for failure. Paying off the credit card in six months or one year gives you a much greater expectation of success.
- Get started. Do something. Sign up for an exercise class or go for a ride on your bike. Activity is the best antidote for procrastination.
- Don't beat yourself up if you're not perfect all the time. It's not about perfection—it's about taking progress one step at a time.

Knowing yourself is the key to successful planning. What are the real reasons for your habit?

What are the real causes of your procrastination? Your greatest enemy at this stage is fear of failure. That's normal. Don't let it bother you. Just set a date and stick to it.

Be sure to set a date that's in the near future—two weeks from today, not two months from today. If you give yourself too much time, you'll be more likely to procrastinate.

Stage 4

“Change has to do with recognizing the value of options and with experiencing the fact that we

are fully responsible for what we choose to do.”

— Ernst G. Beier

Attacking the Problem

In this stage you finally do it. But you need to remember that action isn't the first or the last step in a change.

This is not the only stage where important changes happen. To get this far, you had to change your awareness, your emotions, and your self-image as you moved from each of the earlier stages to the next.

The goal in this stage is to change your way of thinking. You do this by:

- Learning how to relax when temptations are strong.
- Starting an exercise program.
- Learning effective “countering” techniques—thoughts and actions that keep you from falling into your old patterns.

How to defeat daily temptations

Countering is one of the most effective techniques in the cycle of self-change. It’s easier to promote the new behavior than to get rid of the old one. Trying too hard to break a habit is usually a recipe for failure. As long as you’re focused on trying to break the old habit, you’re like a soldier who is fighting with one hand tied behind his back.

Focusing on your new behavior is like freeing the hand tied behind your back. Suddenly you have more power to bring about the change you desire. People who break bad habits frequently experience frustration in the early stages, when they’re trying as hard as they can to eliminate the old behavior.

In a very real sense, success comes when you stop trying. By focusing on your new lifestyle, you stop trying to break the old habit; almost without being aware of what’s happening, you move to the next stage as the new behavior replaces the old one. When your preparation is good, you should be able to move through the action stage very quickly. If you have laid the proper foundation, your transition from stage 4 to stage 5 will be a smooth one.

You need a strategy to handle the daily temptations that arise in this stage. One of the secrets to success is to stay active.

Our bodies are designed for activity. Ancient hunters lived on a diet of red meats that were high in bad cholesterol and triglycerides, the two most important factors in high blood pressure and heart disease. Yet anthropologists have discovered that members of ancient hunting tribes did not suffer from these diseases, due to the fact that they led such active lifestyles.

The urges we feel when we light a cigarette, pour ourselves a drink, go for an extra piece of cake, or drive to the mall are often physical promptings of an entirely different nature. We think our body is telling us to kick back and relax with a box of doughnuts when in reality our body is trying to tell us to move.

By now you should be convinced of the crucial role of exercise in your total lifestyle change. But you can't exercise or go for a walk all the time. So how do you fight temptation when you can't exercise?

~The answer is RSD: relaxation, stretching, and deep breathing.

Relaxation: Smokers who say that they smoke in order to relax are fooling themselves. Research shows conclusively that nicotine and other chemicals in tobacco stimulate brain cells. Smoking provides the opposite of relaxation—nicotine is a stimulant. When you feel the urge to go back to your old habit, do something that's truly relaxing. Think about a beautiful day at the beach.

Imagine you're floating in the water with the sun on your face. You can do this in just a few seconds. It works every time.

Stretching: This is a great technique to use at the office. I'm not talking about a 20-minute routine (although you should stretch for at least 10 to 15 minutes every day). Anytime you feel temptation strike, fight it by stretching for a few seconds. If you have just one minute, that will defeat the temptation.

Deep breathing: This is done just like you do it at the doctor's office. Breathe in and breathe out. This technique works every time. Try it right now. You'll see what I mean.

By keeping you in tune with the natural rhythm of your body, these three countering techniques remind you that you don't really want the chocolates after all.

Reward yourself

It's important to reward yourself during this stage. Make contracts that reward you for fulfilling

your part of the agreement. Write down the terms. As every lawyer knows, a contract is more

binding when it's on paper.

Your contract might say something like:

- "For every pound I lose, I will put \$___ (You choose the dollar amount) into a savings account" (shopping account, weekend getaway account, etc.)
- "I will deposit \$___ into my shopping account for every 30 minutes I exercise."
- "I will make a donation to charity in the amount of \$___ for every pound I lose."

Use your imagination. Whatever you're trying to free yourself from, rewarding yourself is a powerful motivator.

If you decide to make a donation to charity, your reward will be immense. Losing unwanted weight as you donate money to a charity that feeds hungry children will give you all the motivation you need to reach your goal. You can make a tax-deductible donation to Feed the Children, a nonprofit organization based in Oklahoma City.

Ron Artest is one of the most gifted players in professional basketball. Artest is also one of the NBA's bad boys. He has a history of violence, both on and off the basketball court. He has been fined by the NBA and suspended from play for fighting with opponents on the court and, on one occasion, with fans in the seats.

Ron's bad temper has been his worst enemy throughout his NBA career. His first team, the Indiana Pacers, has given up on him. He will be playing with the Sacramento Kings in the 2007- 2008 season.

In May of 2007, Artest was sentenced to twenty days in jail; 100 hours of community service;

parenting and anger-management classes; and three years of probation. His crime?

Domestic violence and wife abuse, two very bad habits.

In July of 2007, Ron participated in a Feed the Children mission that delivered grain to faminestricken regions in Africa. He says that the mission trip gave him a new perspective on life. He called it a life-changing experience. He plans to return to Kenya often.

I hope it's true. I'm eager to see how Ron conducts himself in the upcoming NBA season—on and off the court.

Stage 5

“There is no way to change one isolated item of behavior if the item is significant and the change

is to be a lasting one. We have to change the pattern of which it is a part.”

— Ernst G. Beier

Winning the Battle

In this stage, the key is to replace your bad habit with a new lifestyle. Professional therapists call this stage maintenance.

Countering, the technique we studied in stage 4, is the first step in this process. Promoting new habits is crucial to your success. If you only remove the old habit, you're condemned to a lifetime of fighting off the urge to go back.

People who get stuck in this stage would gladly go back to their old lifestyle if science were suddenly to offer new proof that their habit was harmless. If safe cigarettes were invented that somehow satisfied a smoker's nicotine craving without causing cancer, emphysema, and heart disease, ex-smokers who never move past this stage would buy them by the truckload.

In this stage you must struggle to prevent a relapse. As I mentioned in the last chapter, I wasn't ready to quit smoking when I reached my target date. I thought I could just quit cold turkey and break the habit by using sheer willpower. I was

wrong. My mistake didn't cause me to give up, as often happens when people discover that willpower alone isn't enough.

I understand now that I did two things right that were keys to my success: First, I went through a real preparation stage that lasted about one month. Second, I didn't blame myself or let myself feel guilty because I lapsed.

Research has shown that these two things are keys to breaking any bad habit. I didn't know at the time that these techniques were scientifically sound. I simply used them as part of my trial-and-error effort to quit, and common sense told me that they were the right way to attack my problem.

I had many lapses during that month. It wasn't a relapse: I was still in the preparation stage, still strengthening my commitment to quit. There were many lapses, however. Almost every day, I ended up buying a pack of cigarettes, smoking one, and throwing the rest of the pack away out of disgust.

Lapses as well as relapses teach you that real change costs more than you thought in terms of time, effort, and cash. My lapses taught me that I needed to make a more serious commitment to preparing for my lifestyle change. One of the most important things I did during this period was to buy new uniforms for my basketball team.

Putting your money where your mouth is always helps to keep you focused on the goal of lifestyle change. By doing this, I was starting to think more about getting in basketball shape and less about trying to quit smoking.

I came to understand another important thing after my lapses. Every time I lapsed, I felt disgusted. But I didn't feel guilty or beat myself up for not being strong enough to stick to my word. There is a huge difference.

I felt disgusted because I was letting the bad habit control me. Every day when I threw away the almost-full pack of cigarettes, I proved to myself that I could control the habit. Instead of feeling guilty, I felt free and powerful every time I chose to throw away the nineteen cigarettes remaining in the pack I just bought. If I could choose to do that, I could choose not to buy the pack in the first place.

Do some bad habits require a lifetime of maintenance? Even the experts are divided on this.

Alcoholics Anonymous teaches its members that this stage lasts for as long as they are alive. I believe that it is possible to free yourself from bad habits forever. I believe it because I did it, and millions of other people have done it, too.

One thing is sure: Programs that promise easy change or quick fixes fail because they ignore stage 5. Dieters who regain more weight than they lost by following the latest fad are victims of programs that ignore the need for a total lifestyle change. In the end, of course, they are victims of their own wishful thinking. They learn the hard way that lasting change cannot be made without serious effort on their part.

People in stage 5 haven't changed their lifestyle yet. They are still working on changing it. For some people, the struggle can indeed go on for a lifetime; others move through this stage quickly and free themselves from the problem forever.

What causes people to relapse

Researchers have identified three main causes of relapses:

1. Overconfidence: The ex-alcoholic who says, "I can handle one drink," is clearly in stage 5.

As everyone in AA knows, overconfidence is the No. 1 cause of relapses among its members.

2. Daily temptation: A man who is fighting an addiction to pornography cannot walk into a movie theater that's showing an X-rated film and ask God for the strength not to look at the screen. People in stage 4 still feel tempted. Success depends on removing daily temptations from your life. You can't eliminate every temptation, of course. That's why you need to master the countering techniques covered in stage 4.

3. Guilt and self-blame: Telling yourself that you aren't strong enough to break the habit sets you up for a relapse. It's part of the verbal cage that people construct to avoid responsibility for their choices.

Deep change must be associated with a new way of life. Research shows that a diet is successful when it is combined with eating healthier foods and exercising. Most of us don't need to see research findings to believe this: We see the proof every day in our own lives and in the lives of people who are close to us.

The first danger sign for a dieter usually isn't overeating, but weakening her commitment to a new lifestyle. She stops going to her exercise class. When she sits in front of the TV instead of exercising, she's only one step away from serving herself a big bowl of ice cream.

Most gyms and fitness centers have mirrored walls. When she goes to the gym again, she will be reminded of the need to keep working on a healthier lifestyle. But if she stops going to the gym altogether, the lapse can become a total relapse.

Social pressures are still dangerous in stage 4. As far as possible, ex-smokers must stay away from environments where people smoke, and dieters must stay away from environments where people overeat. That's why holidays are the most difficult times to start a diet. Setting a target date that coincides with the Christmas season is foolish. It makes more sense to start your diet after the New Year.

New Year's resolutions don't fail because they're made on the New Year; they fail because people jump into them without having progressed through the previous stages. As I learned from my experience, you can't move through the action stage successfully if you haven't already moved out of the preparation stage.

Most people make New Year's resolutions after waking up with a hangover—or with five extra pounds in their midsection—on the morning of January 1. They haven't done the necessary preparation to have a chance to be successful. It's no wonder that so many people go back to their old behavior before the month of January is over.

When you relapse, learn from it and move on. This is part of the spiral that most people go through before they exit the cycle forever. You don't have to start over when you slip up. A lot of people fall out of the cycle completely by beating themselves up with feelings of guilt after a lapse.

My experience taught me two important lessons: (1) A lapse isn't always a relapse; and (2) Guilt and self-blame don't help. If I had allowed myself to feel guilty when I lapsed, I probably would have dovetailed into a total relapse, and it might have taken me another five years before I was ready to make a serious commitment to quit.

It took years to establish your bad habit. If you think you can eliminate it in a few days or weeks, you're probably setting yourself up for failure.

Stage 6

“Anyone who learns that he can choose his own feelings and words and actions is a free person

and a powerful person.”

— Ernst G. Beier

Free at Last!

When you move from stage 5 to stage 6, you've broken the habit forever. In this stage the bad habit is no longer a threat. It will never return.

Professional therapists call this stage termination. Some therapists believe that termination is impossible. Alcoholics Anonymous teaches its members that they can never be free of the threat of a relapse. In other words, the best they can hope for is a lifetime of successful maintenance, which means that they can expect to spend the rest of their lives fighting the urge to have a drink.

There is a better way: I know that termination is possible, because I was as addicted to nicotine as alcoholics are to alcohol, and I freed myself from cigarettes forever.

Final Thoughts:

Our potential for change

I don't want to make it sound easy, because it isn't. But it is possible to break bad habits forever.

We tend to get the results that we expect to get. A recent article in the New England Journal of

Medicine reported some interesting findings on the attitudes and expectations of cancer patients.

The researchers studied the relationship between prayer and improvement in the condition of cancer patients. The study concluded that the prayers of other people didn't seem to have any bearing on the condition of the patients in the study.

But the attitude of the patients themselves had a very strong bearing on their chances for surviving cancer. The researchers found that, all other things being equal, a patient's chances for surviving cancer depend in large part on his belief that he is going to get well.

This is not the first study to reach this conclusion, and it won't be the last. Such studies only confirm what many doctors have known for a long time: Our thoughts and expectations can help make us well, or they can make us sick. Scientists are beginning to gather a lot of research data that suggests that people can literally worry themselves to death.

The point is this: If you think you will have to spend the rest of your life fighting the urge to go back to your old habit, you probably will. Not because you can't be free of the problem, but because the way you view the problem forces you to stay focused on your old behavior.

By refocusing on the benefits of your new lifestyle, you replace negative thoughts with positive ones. I agree with the basic premise of AA: Eliminating the old problem requires a long, hard struggle. The point is that you don't have to eliminate it. It's much easier to replace it with something better.

Freedom from bad habits comes when you replace the old behavior with a new lifestyle. I have always wondered why AA doesn't focus less on controlling its members' urge to drink and more on helping them build a new lifestyle that emphasizes the importance of exercise.

AA is right about one thing: Overconfidence is a danger in stage 5. Telling yourself that you can handle one drink, or one cigarette, or one piece of chocolate cake is one of the major causes of relapses. So how do you know when the war is over?

The difference between stage 5 and stage 6 is a difference between still changing and already changed. People in stage 5 are struggling to make and maintain changes in their life. The struggle can go on for years, or forever. People in stage 6 have successfully changed their lifestyle.

How do you know when you're really free of a bad habit, forever? Look for these three signs.

When you find all three in the new you, you can be sure that you've broken the old habit forever:

1. You have a new self-image. Successful self-changers talk about “owning the change.” When they reach stage 6, they feel that they've “made the change theirs.” In other words, they now see themselves as the new person that is living the new lifestyle. One day I stopped thinking of myself as an “ex-smoker.” It may seem like a superficial difference, but it isn't. Once I started thinking of myself as a nonsmoker instead of an ex-smoker, I knew that there had been a deep and lasting change in my self-image. At that moment I knew the problem would never return.
2. You no longer feel tempted in any situation. You no longer have to make an effort. If half the people in a meeting are smoking, you have a legitimate complaint—and a real problem if one of the smokers is the owner of the company—but you aren't the least bit tempted to join them. That's a sure sign that you're free at last.
3. You have real confidence in your power of choice. You know that you live better without the old behavior. You enjoy your healthier lifestyle. Nothing could make you go back to your old habit. Social pressure is no longer a threat. You no longer have to drink with the boys to feel like a man, and you no longer have to go on a spending spree to feel that your life is complete.

David Lucero is still stuck on the street across from the Greyhound bus station. I hope he'll be ready to get in the pickup truck soon. For now, he is still waiting for

an imaginary ride to a place and time that only exist in his imagination. He still can't make a choice based on what he needs to do today.

If you have come to the realization that you're stuck in a self-defeating lifestyle, you have already taken the first step in the cycle of self-change. You have started to become aware of the need to change in some area of your life.

Whatever it is, remember that you can free yourself of it. It will take time, but you have already taken the hardest step by consciously recognizing the problem. Now start working on your plan.

Use this report as a step-by-step guide. Don't try to skip any of the stages—it won't work if you do.

Believe that you can create a happier, healthier lifestyle. As you move through the stages of selfchange, always remember what psychologist Ernst G. Beier discovered about the process of freeing yourself from bad habits: "Anyone who learns that he can choose his own feelings and words and actions is a free person and a powerful person."

When you win the battle in your mind, it's only a matter of time before you win the war against bad habits.