

***CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN
TEN WEEKS***

THE PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those individuals who are currently facing difficulties in achieving fulfilment, peace and contentment in their personal lives. It is hoped that the Program set out here may in some way prove of benefit to them or may, at least, stimulate them to take appropriate action to improve the quality of their lifestyles.

CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN TEN WEEKS

THE PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN

A Practical and Easy To Follow Guide and Workbook
on
How to Transform Your Present Lifestyle

*helping you to become
more healthy, more relaxed, better adjusted to the stresses of life,
less frustrated, easier to get along with
and changing you into a
more fulfilled and happy individual*

AMBROSE A. HARDY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to my wife and dearest friend Josephine who encouraged me to carry on with the manuscript when - at times – I was struggling to express my ideas.

It is a most worthwhile exercise, whatever one's age or achievements, to look frankly and honestly at where one is now [HERE] as compared to where one would like to be [THERE] and to either accept with quiet resignation the here and now, or to work with determination to get closer to one's vision of a better lifestyle.

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PREFACE

Many of us, at various times in life, are aware that we are not living our lives in the most fulfilling and satisfying way. We are conscious that the routines and habits of our lifestyle are sometimes unsatisfactory and in need of adjustment or improvement. We may want to be fitter, healthier, happier, enjoy better relationships, use time more effectively, improve our financial situation and feel more at peace with ourselves.

Yet so much of our time is taken up facing and responding to the urgent daily tasks of our personal lives, our relationships, our work and family responsibilities that many of us simply don't get started on the path to self-improvement. At the same time, we battle constantly in adjusting to life changes, some invited and some not, that often challenge our coping skills and give us stress.

And so, because of these demanding societal, work and family responsibilities, and the many related tasks that take up our time and energy, we never really manage to get properly started in restructuring our life . Perhaps we make an occasional attempt, as at New Year and around birthdays, to make a fresh beginning, but somehow - for many of us - our plans fizzle out and not much is accomplished. Yet, deep down, we know and believe that things can be made better if we could only organise

ourselves more effectively and consistently apply the necessary time and effort to achieve the goals that are important to us.

This is where *Change Your Life in Ten Weeks* can help. In this *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* guide and workbook, I have attempted to put together the basic principles of a self-transformation program which is easy to follow and which, if fully implemented, will deliver an improved and more satisfying lifestyle. Of course, in order to make real progress, we need to know *where* we want to go in life and have a sense of vision as to *how* we would like our life to be. This self-awareness task, determining the *where* and the *how*, is one which only YOU will be able to accomplish. However, it is my hope that the *Plan's* Program, as set out in this book, will help you to work out more clearly *how* you want to re-plan your life and to define *where* you want to be.

Getting from HERE [*where you are now*] to THERE [*where you want to be*] is what this book is all about.

This second edition of the book has seen a general update and has been expanded by the inclusion of Chapters 8, 12 and 13 . A *Further Reading Resources* list has been added.

I wish you every blessing and good fortune as you follow through the stages of this self-development Program.

With warm regards

Ambrose Hardy

Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan

June 2014

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO THE READER

This book is meant for you if you feel a need and have a desire to make some significant changes in your present lifestyle. The program set out in these pages – the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* – will provide you with a well thought out structure which – if followed through – will get you from *where you are now* to *where you want to be*.

If you are not quite sure *where you want to be*, the *Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire*, which is the first step of the *Phoenix Plan*, will assist you in determining what will become your priority goals for personal change.

The book does not tell you what changes to make in your life. It may offer suggestions and highlight areas for change that are generally considered important for personal growth, but fundamentally YOU decide *how*, *why* and *when* you want to work to implement your selected lifestyle changes.

The title of the book invites you to work to change your life in *ten weeks*. This proposed duration should be regarded as a guide only and may be modified to suit your personal circumstances. However, I do believe it does take several weeks before a person's change of behaviours and/or routines become established habits in their lifestyle. I know that there are many programs advertised which suggest that you can make big

permanent life changes in a week or less, but I am somewhat sceptical of the likelihood of this being possible for most individuals.

I think it is very important that you spend an adequate period of time (at least one week) identifying your chosen goals, breaking these down into appropriate weekly targets and making any necessary domestic and work arrangements so that you have time and opportunity to work on these targets. In later pages, the book gives detailed assistance on how to do this.

In preparing to work on the *Phoenix Plan*, it is suggested that you equip yourself with a good sized notebook where you can keep a personal record of your progress as you proceed with the *Plan*. Documentation is important so that you can monitor your thoughts and see your general progress towards your goals. The documentation provided within the book may prove helpful in this regard, but dispense with it or modify it if you can work out a system of recording your own progress which is better for you.

This book is best described as a workbook to help you transform your lifestyle to how you want it to be. For this reason, it is not a book to be simply read through once and placed aside. Rather, it represents a step-by-step approach to making significant life changes which require careful thought and planning. As such, it is best to work at a pace comfortable for you and not to attempt too many life changes at the same time (*more on this later*).

As a general rule, I would recommend that you read through or scan the book completely once to get an overall idea of how it is set out and what it will require of you: but *do not scrutinise the Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire on this first reading*. Then go back and start the program as set out, selecting and planning your priority goals and targets. When this is completed, allow

yourself an extended timeframe (*at least four weeks*) to work on achieving your selected goals. The book section which follows, *How To Use This Book*, gives further helpful information on this approach.

You will see from the above that the *Plan* contained in this book requires a lot from you in terms of thought, planning and action. Make sure you are prepared and able to make this commitment before you begin. If you can't or won't commit in this way, defer starting the program until a more opportune time.

Sometimes, readers are fearful about failing to achieve the goals they select for themselves. Do not worry about this – the likelihood is that you will falter somewhat along the way. Most people do. The strength of your commitment and endeavour is judged more accurately on your capacity to pick yourself up again and to regroup your efforts. An expression I have used elsewhere that “*..two steps forward and one step backwards marks real progress..*” is truly relevant here.

Some of the points I have made here will be repeated in later sections of this book. This is because of their importance to your overall progress and to help you get, in the near future, to *where you want to be* !

Good luck in working through the program.

You cannot move forward until you know where you want to go.
You cannot know where you want to go until you have worked out what is wrong with the way things are at the present.
Lifestyle evaluation is the precursor to the birth of worthwhile and appropriate goals

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

The *Phoenix Plan* can be an effective stepping stone to a better lifestyle - if you are prepared to devote the time and commitment to follow it through..

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I recommend that you first read through this Part One *Introduction*. This will provide you with a brief overview of what the *Phoenix Plan* aims to do and what it requires of you. After reading, you can decide whether or not you wish to proceed with it. Assuming you do, continue to Part Two and read the chapter *Detailed Guide to the Program*. Then carry on reading chapters 2 through 5 and follow the step by step instructions set out there.

Give yourself *ten* weeks to work on the *Plan's* Program. The first two weeks will be needed to do the necessary reading and planning and in making the practical adjustments to fit the Program into your present lifestyle. You will also benefit by equipping yourself with a notebook to make brief jottings in as you progress through the Program's stages.

Although the timeframe set down here for working through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is *ten* weeks [*two* weeks for preparatory work and *eight* weeks for working on selected targets and goals] this arrangement is not mandatory. It is set down in this way as this seems to me to represent a realistic period of time in which a self-improvement project can be

established and worked through. However, you are free to adjust this suggested timeframe to suit personal circumstances: for example, to *eight, six or four* weeks overall. I do caution about shortening the project to less than four weeks as it is likely that new lifestyle practices will take at least this period of time to become established habits. Of course, the shorter the overall timeframe chosen for your project the more important it is to limit your goals to be worked on to those which have high priority and which you can reasonably expect to be achievable in the lesser period of time. In general, it is probably sensible to limit your choice of goals for *any* self-change project to not more than four carefully selected ones. If you choose more than this you may well be taking on too much.

In the book text, statements are based on the *ten* week timeframe and should be loosely interpreted if you choose to alter the overall duration of your project .

If, initially, you wish to explore the theoretical rationale underpinning the *Phoenix Self-Help Plan*, go to Appendix B and read the short chapter there [*Theoretical Rationale for the Program*]. However, this is optional reading at this stage.

Part Three of the book is a series of brief chapters on some key self-help topics which relate to how we handle and cope with life in general. They are not exhaustive or professional essays but are taster observations on the topics included. Hopefully, they may encourage you, when and if your time permits, to seek out more detailed information on their content. Each chapter includes a related Exercise which is aimed to assist you in working out how important that particular topic might be in your own life situation.

You are not required to read through Part Three before

beginning the Program. Ideally, you could read through one or more of the topic chapters as you progress through the eight weeks of your Personal Plan. However, I do recommend that, at least, you read them through and complete the exercises included after you have completed the Program and, especially, if you intend to work through the *Plan* for a second time.

If you want to learn more about the topics in Part Three, have a look at the *Further Reading Resources* contained in Appendix C. The Internet is also a rich source of fuller information on all of them.

Part Four is the *Appendices* section of the book. The *Sample Documentation* [Appendix A] section provides some guidance on how to complete the various forms used in the *Phoenix Self-Help Plan*. It gives examples of how one person might have completed the *Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire*, calculated her score, worked out selected goals and targets and constructed a schedule. This form-filling is an *essential* part of the *Phoenix Plan*. Blank copies of the forms appear in the chapter text. However, if you do not wish to enter your personal information on the forms where they appear in the book format, they can be photocopied. A few blank pages have been inserted at the end of the book to enable you to make jottings but you may prefer to use a notebook dedicated to this task.

Appendix B contains the more technical chapter *Theoretical Rationale for the Program*, mentioned above and which should be read through at some convenient time.

In Appendix C, there are some *Additional Reading Resources* listed and in Appendix D, under *My Website Links*, there are details of a website which I have set up on the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*. The website may contain additional resources and

references to sources where you can obtain more information on matters related to your self-improvement. It is hoped that this web site, located at

www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk

will expand and develop as time proceeds.

The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is also suitable for working through with a partner or even in a small group setting.

It is hoped that *Change Your Life in Ten Weeks* will prove to be, for you, a worthwhile guide and workbook on how to plan and implement the life changes that you desire. However, as already mentioned, do not simply *read* through it – *study it carefully* and *work through* its various stages and you will be assured of personal progress in the goals that are important to you.

THE PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN

In today's busy and sometimes confusing world, our personal lives can often become crowded with responsibilities and things and events that demand our time and attention. As a result, we can easily become stressed out and feel we are close to losing control over our lifestyle. We often experience a sense of frustration when we seem to have so little time left for ourselves. Many of us don't know how to handle or change this situation and we can't see it getting any better in the foreseeable future. Our thinking patterns become negative and, as a consequence, our lifestyle can become boring, unrewarding and chaotic. We lose confidence in our own ability to turn things around and our sense of personal happiness suffers.

The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* set out in this book seeks to address this general problem by providing you with a program framework within which you can work to a *Personal Plan* which will assist you to get your life back on track. The *Plan's* Program is set out clearly, in step by step fashion, and requires you to make a detailed and intimate evaluation of your current lifestyle, to work out a selection of appropriate self-development *goals* and *targets* that are right for you and to work over eight to ten

weeks to effect the changes you want. Detailed guidance is given along the way and sample documentation is provided to assist you in recording your *Personal Plan* for life change.

I have devised the *Phoenix Plan* through my personal attempts, over many years, to take more control over the direction of my own life and to devise a means by which I could increase its quality and emotional comfort. After many fits and starts, the format of the Plan presented in this book reflects the way forward which proved most valuable to me. It is my belief that the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* contained here will be a valuable and effective self-help tool for all who wish to work for positive life change.

The *Plan's* Program is free of complicated psychological terms and can be followed by any adult with a desire and determination to work to improve the quality of their lifestyle. The basis of the approach involved in working the *Plan* is related to *rational-emotive* cognitive therapy, which stresses the vital interrelationships between our *thoughts, feelings* and *behaviours*. In simple terms, what we *think* determines how we feel and, largely, how we behave : if we change our thoughts, over which we have total control, we can more easily change our feelings and our behaviours. This is explained more fully in Chapter 8 and in the section *Theoretical Rationale for the Program* located at the end of the book in Appendix B.

Change Your Life in Ten Weeks introduces and guides you through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*. The *Plan* itself runs over eight weeks, but requires of you quite a bit of preparatory work before formally beginning it. The first two weeks are used to become fully acquainted with the *Plan*, to evaluate your present lifestyle, to establish your *Personal Plan* and to set up your

buddy support [*more about your “buddy” later*]. Then you work through the *Plan's* Program for the following eight weeks.

Why not give the *Plan* a try? It might just be the tool that will enable you to get your life to where you want it to be.

It is difficult to make positive life changes without establishing goals and a means to achieve them..

The *Plan* in this book provides an easy to follow method which can lead you to the personal lifestyle you seek..

PART TWO

THE PROGRAM

Do not be overwhelmed by the amount of documentation set out for the *Phoenix Plan*. This has been included to make it easier for your planning. It is all fairly simple to follow and well explained.

However, if this gets in your way of setting up your *Personal Plan* simply disregard it and substitute a more acceptable method of recording your goals and monitoring your progress.

1. DETAILED GUIDE TO THE PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In the *Phoenix Plan* Program set out in this book, you are invited and encouraged

- *to make a realistic evaluation of your present lifestyle*
- *to assess what needs dealing with or improving in your life*
- *to carefully work out your priority goals for self-development*
- *to select an appropriate number of personal development goals and targets to work on*
- *to commit yourself to working within the Program for a minimum of eight weeks*
- *to regularly monitor, on a weekly basis, your progress towards your selected targets*
- *to set up a workable schedule for implementing your Personal Plan*
- *to learn to maximise the quality of your personal life, whatever your circumstances*
- *to work to create a personal philosophy that leads to a greater sense of self-acceptance and contentment*

- *to examine and assess your present level of personal spirituality and how it influences your present lifestyle*
- *to utilise the support and friendship of a “buddy” in your self-help Plan.*

Is the Program suitable for everybody?

Not everyone who works through the *Plan's* Program will achieve a breakthrough in their personal development. If you are suffering from a serious addiction or serious mental health problem, or have recently experienced severe trauma or relationship breakdown, you *may* require specialist professional or medical help to bring about effective and lasting change. *However, if you are in such a situation, reading through these pages may inspire you to take the necessary steps to seek such help.*

In general, the *Phoenix* Program is aimed at adult individuals, in all age groups, who are in a relatively stable personal environment and who recognise that it is in their long-term interest to work to improve the quality of their lifestyles.

Remember, too, that the Program will only work best for you if you are able and prepared to devote the necessary time and effort to following it. If you lack this opportunity or motivation at the moment, reading through the Program steps may, nevertheless, convince you of the immense value personal change can make in your life at a more appropriate time.

If you find that the *Plan's* Program is too structured for your personal circumstances, you are free to modify it to suit your purposes.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

THE CHALLENGING MESSAGE OF HOPE WHICH UNDERPINS THIS PROGRAM IS THAT YOU ARE ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE FOR, AND YOU CAN DETERMINE, THE LEVEL OF HAPPINESS IN YOUR LIFE, WHATEVER ITS CIRCUMSTANCES and

THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER TO RE-PLAN OR REFORM THEIR LIFESTYLES SO THAT THEY LIVE AT PEACE WITH THEMSELVES, ARE SELF-ACCEPTING, EXPERIENCING CONTENTMENT, COPING WELL WITH STRESS AND ENJOYING A SENSE OF FULFILMENT.

Program Steps : A Summary and Guide

Firstly, using the Questionnaire provided, you will be asked to make a careful and thorough *evaluation* of your present lifestyle, noting and prioritising the areas in which positive change is desirable and possible. The *Scoring Key* provided with the Questionnaire will help you in this task.

You will then consider and work out the practical details of the kinds of changes that could realistically be implemented in some of these areas over the eight week period of the Program. You will select the life areas *you* consider most important to work on and you will carefully choose and write down *specific behavioural goals* for each area selected.

This self-searching section of the Program is most important for you as it indicates to a large extent *where* you want to go in your life and what you want to *change* in your current lifestyle. For this reason, this part of the Program should not be hurried through, but you should devote as much time as is necessary to work out clearly the priorities for your self-development. It is probably a good idea, at this stage, to equip yourself with a notebook in which you can jot down some of your ideas and aspirations. It should also be recognised that you are likely to progress better in the Program if you select a small but realistic

number of goals. Trying to achieve too much in too short a time is likely to be too demanding with the resulting danger that you give up. Rather, aim for a few important goals which, if achieved in the eight week period, will give you a real sense of achievement and personal success. If you attain these goals, your success will become a valuable motivating factor if and when you work on the Program a second time. Do not worry if right now you are somewhat unsure of what these goals should be. You will find that when you start to work through the evaluation *Questionnaire* you will gain insights into how you perceive what is currently happening in many critical areas of your life.

When you have succeeded in working out the goals that you are going to concentrate on in the eight weeks of the Program, you will then need to break down each specific behavioural goal into a series of weekly targets, starting with an easy version and/or low frequency of the new behaviour and gradually working up to the full target, as originally selected [The Sample Weekly Target Sheet in Appendix A will explain this more clearly]

The links and personal development Resources included on the web site at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk may additionally assist you in drawing up appropriate goals and target behaviours.

When you have established and written down your goals and targets on the form sheets provided you are asked to then consult with a friend or buddy, explaining to that person what you are setting out to achieve by the end of the eight week program. You do not need to provide your buddy with the full details of how you responded to the lifestyle questionnaire or what your questionnaire score was. The purpose of a buddy is to

provide you with a support person who will respect, admire and encourage you in your plan for self-improvement. You will need to discuss with that person your *Weekly Target Sheet* and invite her/him to support your plans and to assist you in monitoring progress on a weekly basis.

At this stage, do not be put off at the mention of having a support buddy. Much more will be said about this later in the book, including possible options if it is really impossible for you to enlist the help of such a person.

The first week of your Program will begin. When you complete a target behaviour, you will tick it off on the *Program Monitoring Sheet*. At the end of the week, you will review your progress with your buddy. If you have achieved all of your target behaviours, that's great! It proves your capacity to bring about desired personal change. If you missed some of your targets, perhaps you will need to redefine the specific target behaviours for Week Two and onwards, being entirely realistic in your thinking. You can enlist your buddy's help on this.

After the first week, you will work through each subsequent week as in the above step. When you fully achieve your selected targets in any one week, you will allow yourself a small reward. When you reach the end of Week Eight, and you have consistently achieved your target behaviours, you will allow yourself a bigger reward. At least, you will certainly need to congratulate yourself on your worthwhile progress and be proud of the pattern of persistent effort that you will have then built into your life.

And After Week Eight?

You will then *review* what you have achieved through the *Plan's* Program over the eight week period. You will be invited to look

at your lifestyle and compare it to your position of two months previously. You will ask yourself:

- *How do I now feel about myself?*
- *Is life, in general, better and more satisfying than before?*
- *To what extent have I moved from HERE [where I was] to THERE [where I want to be] ?*

If you can answer positively to all three of these questions, you will know that the Program was entirely worthwhile for you.

You will now consider the future. Hopefully, you will want to continue with the positive changes you have already introduced into your lifestyle. Ideally, you will want to restart the *Plan*, this time selecting different and, perhaps, more ambitious behavioural targets. You will, hopefully, want to broaden your knowledge and awareness of self-development issues and practices by further reading or by following up further on some of the links and resources accessible on the web site at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk

THE CHALLENGE FOR YOU

Should I or Shouldn't I?

You now have a general view of the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, how the program is set up and what will be expected of you if you take it up. It remains for you to make the decision as to whether or not to commit yourself to working through it. Of course, it is not a perfect program and it may not be the best way forward for some individuals. However, for many readers, it will represent an unique opportunity to move forward towards the worthwhile goal of self-improvement. Whatever your circumstances, having read this far, you are clearly aware that your present lifestyle is not providing you with the enjoyment,

the peace of mind, the sense of fulfilment that you wish for. You acknowledge that change is needed in your life, even if you may feel somewhat unsure as to what direction you should take.

You have the right to live your life in a way that allows you to feel happy and to know where you are going. Your life activities and the dimensions of your lifestyle should not be totally determined by outside sources or other persons. You are your own person and, while you may have many responsibilities towards your family, your workplace, your friends and community, you have a perfect right to tailor your life, within your duty parameters, so that you are happy, relaxed and following your dreams.

It is highly probable that the change you would like to see in your life will not happen of its own accord. It is also unlikely that someone else will make it happen on your behalf. Only YOU are the real architect of your future. If you want to achieve the change that you yearn for, or simply want to make life feel better for you, *you must make the commitment to work at making your choice of change happen.* Otherwise, the change that does happen by virtue of external events and individuals will be the change of someone else's choice.

You will then have to tolerate and respond to these uninvited and external influences for change, even though such actions may not necessarily enhance the quality of your personal lifestyle. However, if you work through the Program set out here, you have a real chance to sort out some of the things in your life that are currently causing you distress and spoiling the quality of your day to day existence.

*Your life can only improve if you work on
self-improvement.*

Making the Decision

What have you got to lose by following the Program?

Apart from the time and effort commitment, absolutely nothing.

What have you got to gain?

Potentially, a great deal, particularly the conviction that you CAN improve the quality of your lifestyle entirely by your own efforts.

IMPORTANT NOTE

THE PROGRAM SET OUT IN THIS BOOK DOES NOT ARGUE OR PRESENT A SINGULAR PHILOSOPHY OR POINT OF VIEW AS TRUTH OR BEST PRACTICE, BUT LARGELY ENCOURAGES THE READER TO SEEK AND REACH THEIR OWN TRUTH AND TO SET UP THEIR OWN BEST ARRANGEMENTS FOR A QUALITY AND HAPPIER LIFESTYLE.

IT DOES NOT REQUIRE YOU TO HAVE ANY PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS OR MORAL OUTLOOK NOR DOES IT ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE YOU IN YOUR CHOICE OR REJECTION OF ANY

THE PROGRAM DOES NOT INVOLVE YOU IN EXPENSE OF ANY KIND. YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO REGISTER ANYWHERE OR TO PROVIDE ANY PERSONAL DETAILS. YOU MAY MODIFY THE PROGRAM AS YOU SEE FIT TO BETTER SUIT YOUR NEEDS.

THE ONLY BELIEF THAT IS REQUIRED OF YOU IS THAT YOU BECOME AND REMAIN CONVINCED THAT YOU DO HAVE THE POWER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR PRESENT LIFESTYLE, WHATEVER ITS SHORTCOMINGS OR COMPLICATIONS.

2. YOUR LIFESTYLE EVALUATION

BEGINNING THE PROGRAM

Your first major step in beginning the *Plan's* Program is to complete the *Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire* provided. This consists of 33 questions about your present lifestyle. The questions are very personal and require you to be very honest and frank about the reality of things as they are with you at the moment. Your detailed responses do not need to be shared with anyone else, even your “buddy” [*more about your “buddy” later*]. You are encouraged to photocopy the Questionnaire so that only you know how you have answered the questions. When you have completed the Questionnaire, you will be required to score your answers according to the scoring instructions provided later in the Chapter.

Each question will have the same five possible alternative answers. These are “YES” , “NO”, “SOMETIMES”, “OCCASIONALLY” and “RARELY”. You will choose *one* alternative answer for each question by ticking in the appropriate check box. After completing the Questionnaire, you will be asked to count up the number of responses you have made to each of the five possible alternatives and to record these numbers in the boxes provided with the questionnaire form.

Completing the Questionnaire...

Before rushing to photocopy and complete the Questionnaire, read through the following points. They are listed so that you can obtain the most worthwhile outcome from this question-and-answer lifestyle evaluation exercise.

- *give yourself up to thirty minutes of private time to answer the questions*
- *do not read through the questions in their entirety, or scrutinise the Scoring Key before starting the exercise*
- *answer questions in the order in which they are set out in the Lifestyle Questionnaire*
- *cover up the questions which follow the one you are currently answering*
- *do not consult anyone about how you should answer any questions*
- *do not deliberate unduly on any question: rather, record the response which pops into your head after reading the question.*

NOW WORK OUT WHEN YOU WILL HAVE THE NECESSARY TIME AND PRIVACY TO COMPLETE THE *LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE*. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOURSELF TO KEEP TO THIS ARRANGEMENT.

After Questionnaire Completion...

When you have completed the Questionnaire and counted up your answers for each of the possible responses, go to the section WORKING OUT YOUR SCORE on Page 45. Follow the instructions given on that page. For now, if you are ready to take the Questionnaire, go to the next page.

DO NOT READ THROUGH THE ENTIRE QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE STARTING TO RECORD YOUR ANSWERS.
ANSWER THE QUESTIONS IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY ARE SET OUT AND KEEP ALL THE OTHER UNANSWERED QUESTIONS COVERED UP.
WITH EACH QUESTION, SELECT THE ONE RESPONSE THAT COMES NEAREST TO THE REALITY OF YOUR PRESENT LIFESTYLE.

LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you have a feeling or sense that all is not well in your lifestyle at the moment?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

2. Are you in some way unhappy, unfulfilled or stressed out in your personal life?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

3. Do you often feel frustrated or bored with the quality of your present life?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

4. Do you sense that you are somehow missing out on the joys of living?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

5. Are you in a dilemma about a personal relationship or lack of it?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

6. Do your home or work duties hinder you from attending to your personal needs?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

7. Are you having problems at your place of work [*paid employment or home management duties*]?

YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___

QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued | |
|---|--|
| 8. | Do financial problems cause you extended periods of worry? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 9. | Are you having serious difficulties coping with the demands of children or other family members? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 10. | Do you complain regularly that you can't find the time to do the things you want to do? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 11. | Do health fears and personal problems keep you awake at night? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 12. | Do you feel impatient and irritable when it is not appropriate? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 13. | Is your sex life problematic and unrewarding or causing difficulties with your partner? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 14. | Do you lack an appropriate number of close friends? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 15. | Are you often depressed or anxious without really knowing why? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 16. | Would you say you generally suffer from low self-esteem? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES | |

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued | |
|---|--|
| 17. | Are there any unwanted or unhealthy obsessional habits in your lifestyle which cause you distress? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 18. | Are you seriously unhappy about your body weight and personal appearance? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 19. | Do you regularly experience poor quality sleep? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 20. | Do you consume [alcoholic] drinks more than you should or do you smoke excessively? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 21. | Do you habitually use any other health harming substances? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 22. | Is there a lack of order or personal discipline in your lifestyle? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 23. | Are you on the verge of, or presently adjusting to, a relationship or marital breakdown? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 24. | Are you working through the aftermath of a bereavement? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 25. | Are you aware of a sense of spiritual isolation in your life? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES | |

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued |
|---|
| <p>26. Do you feel you have somehow lost your sense of direction in life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>27. Do you have an unrealised but realistic life dream which is being thwarted by your present lifestyle?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>28. Is there an impending personal crisis in your life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>29. Do you generally avoid following a regular physical exercise routine?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>30. Do you lack clear personal development goals covering the next three years?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>31. Do you regularly experience a build-up of deep resentment or anger against anyone or anything from the past or in the present?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>32. Do you ever seriously contemplate that life is just not worth living?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>33. Do you lack a belief system or personal philosophy which gives meaning and purpose to your life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| END OF QUESTIONNAIRE |

DO NOT CHANGE ANY OF THE RESPONSES YOU HAVE GIVEN TO THE
QUESTIONS

Go directly to the next page and complete the boxes which collate the
answers you have provided

COLLATE YOUR ANSWERS AS INSTRUCTED BELOW

YOU NOW NEED TO COLLATE YOUR RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS YOU ANSWERED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE. AS YOU WILL SEE LATER, SOME QUESTIONS [Set A] SCORE HIGHER THAN OTHERS [Set B] FOR THE SAME RESPONSE.

(Details of Set A and Set B questions are indicated below)

FOR NOW, COMPLETE THE BOXES BELOW BY COUNTING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES IN EACH OF THE FIVE CATEGORIES [**YES, NO, SOMETIMES, OCCASIONALLY, RARELY**] FOR EACH OF THE TWO SETS OF QUESTIONS. THEN GO TO *WORKING OUT YOUR SCORE* ON PAGE 45

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Set A | QUESTION NUMBERS: 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 31, 32 |
| | <p>Total number of YES responses _____</p> <p>Total number of NO responses _____</p> <p>Total number of SOMETIMES responses _____</p> <p>Total number of OCCASIONALLY responses _____</p> <p>Total number of RARELY responses _____</p> |

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

COLLATE YOUR ANSWERS FOR Set B QUESTIONS IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU DID FOR Set A QUESTIONS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Set B | QUESTION NUMBERS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33 |
| | Total number of YES responses _____ |
| | Total number of NO responses _____ |
| | Total number of SOMETIMES responses _____ |
| | Total number of OCCASIONALLY responses _____ |
| | Total number of RARELY responses _____ |

NOW READ BELOW AND THEN GO TO THE NEXT PAGE TO WORK OUT YOUR SCORE

When you work out your total score from the Scoring instructions provided on the next page, it will give you a fairly accurate picture of how you see yourself and how you currently feel about your present lifestyle. It will also provide you with a wide range of clues as to the major areas in your personal life that you might choose to work on if you are to improve the quality of your lifestyle. Generally, questions that have been answered by a YES response pinpoint what are likely to be specific areas of concern. The questions in Set A refer to more serious lifestyle problems and issues than those in Set B questions.

Overall, if you have answered YES to more than about ten of the total questions, the likelihood is that your present lifestyle is somewhat out of control and it is in your interests to do something about it. The Program contained here can offer you some valuable help to take immediate charge of your life and assist you in working intelligently to improve your lifestyle so that it becomes more rewarding and fulfilling.

WORKING OUT YOUR SCORE

DO NOT READ OR CONSULT THE SCORING KEY ON PAGE 47 UNTIL YOU HAVE ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THE *LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE* AND CALCULATED YOUR SCORE.

Steps in Scoring Your Questionnaire

By now you should have completed the boxes on the previous pages which show the total number of each of the five possible answers in the questions listed in Set A and in Set B.

Look at your collated responses to the Set A questions: [*numbers 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 31 and 32*]. Score these as follows:

For each YES answer to any of the above questions, record your score on *each* question as 4

For each SOMETIMES answer to any of the above questions, record your score on *each* question as 3

Look at your collated responses to the Set B questions: [*numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30 and 33*]. Score these as follows:

For each YES answer to any of the above questions, record your score on *each* question as 3

For each SOMETIMES answer to any of the above questions, record your score on *each* question as 2.

Now total all your above scores : that is, the YES and the SOMETIMES scores in Set A questions PLUS the YES and the SOMETIMES scores in Set B questions.

Notice that no scores are recorded for any NO, OCCASIONALLY or RARELY responses to any of the 33 questions.

Now, using your *total* score, look at the assessment of your present lifestyle as determined by your replies to the *Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire*. Assessments are based on *total* scores of *under 40, between 40 and 59, between 60 and 75, and over 75.*

This assessment provides a general indication as to the probable state of your present lifestyle and, in particular, your perception of it.

Validity of the Scoring System

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NO EXPERIMENTALLY ESTABLISHED OR SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR THE VALIDITY OF THE SCORING SYSTEM BEING USED IN THE PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN.

THE SYSTEM USED TO SCORE THE VARIOUS QUESTION RESPONSES IS BASED SOLELY ON THE AUTHOR'S OPINION AS TO WHAT IS , OR IS NOT, LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON AN INDIVIDUAL'S PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIFESTYLE.

HOWEVER, THE QUESTIONNAIRE SCORE ACHIEVED BY ANY PERSON IS PROBABLY A SAFE AND SOUND POINTER AS TO HOW THAT INDIVIDUAL ASSESSES HIS OR HER PRESENT LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE SCORE YOU GAIN GIVES YOU A VALUABLE BASELINE TO START FROM WHEN YOU BEGIN TO CONSTRUCT YOUR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

Now take your *total* score to the SCORING KEY breakdown on the next page. Select the appropriate score category and read the brief comment on your lifestyle evaluation.

YOUR SCORING KEY

Your Total Score Assessment, if you scored...

Total of under 40

You are largely in control of your life and your lifestyle is generally very stable and rewarding. Congratulations on your score. Nevertheless, you may want to work for further personal development. If so, the Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan will help you to do this.

Total of 40-59

It seems your lifestyle is perceived by you as being somewhat problematic at the moment. It is in your own interest to do something about it. You are in the right place to consider taking appropriate action by working on a self-improvement plan. Hopefully, you will proceed to work through the Program set out here.

Total of 60-75

Your score is high indicating a lifestyle with which you are seriously ill at ease. This is not a matter you can afford to ignore. It seems essential that you work to take more control over your own life. The Program set out here gives you an excellent opportunity to deal with the disquiet you are currently experiencing.

Total of over 75

It is clear that much is out of joint in how you are living at the moment. Your score should set your alarm bells ringing. It

demonstrates that there is much work to be done if your lifestyle is to become stabilised. Hopefully, you will be willing to invest some energy into taking immediate steps to begin re-planning your life. The Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan provided here may be an excellent starting point.

YOUR REACTION TO YOUR SCORE....

Unless you achieved a score of less than 40, the message is clear that there is a need to work on your present lifestyle if you are to experience the quality of life that you desire. If you are convinced that this is true, that's a great starting point for entry to the *Plan's* Program. If you are still unsure as to whether personal change is necessary or worthwhile, take another look at your *Questionnaire* responses. In particular, look closely at your answers to those questions in Set A. Can you really accept the number of YES and SOMETIMES answers you have recorded?

More About The Scoring System

You will already have noticed that some questions incurred higher scores when you answered YES or SOMETIMES than other questions. This is because the first set of questions (Set A) [numbers 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 31 and 32] refer to more serious behaviours or states of mind than those in the second set (Set B) [numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30 and 33].

Generally, individuals answering YES or SOMETIMES to Set A questions are more likely to have some form of distressed lifestyle than those who answer YES or SOMETIMES to Set B questions.

In fact, how you answer the first set of questions (Set A) can be a real index of how you view your present lifestyle. If, for example, you answered YES to more than four questions from this set, it may be that some form of counselling, psychological guidance or medical intervention is advisable.

If you fall into this latter category, you need to give immediate serious thought as to what is the best course of action for you. Working through the Program may be beneficial but is probably not sufficient for your lifestyle reorientation.

As already pointed out, no scoring has been allocated for OCCASIONALLY and RARELY responses in either set of questions as responses of this frequency are likely to be widely experienced by many individuals in the ups and downs of normal living.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE *LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE* AND WORKED OUT YOUR SCORE, IT'S TIME TO ASK YOURSELF SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

THE BIG QUESTIONS

You are now facing the BIG QUESTIONS:

- *What am I prepared to do about improving my lifestyle?*
- *Am I willing to make a real effort to make a difference to the way things are at the moment?*

- *Will I take up the free opportunity offered by this book to follow through on a program which has the potential to recharge my life?*
- *Can I afford to ignore the distress and frustration I am currently experiencing?*

You may be quite surprised at how your scoring worked out. If you achieved a low score then you know that your current lifestyle is largely appropriate for your continued general peace of mind. Nevertheless, the exercise will probably have highlighted a few areas where minor lifestyle improvements might be worthwhile. If you decide to proceed with the *Phoenix Plan*, use one or more of these areas to build the goals for your *Personal Plan* for self-improvement.

On the other hand, your results on the *Questionnaire* may show that there are a significant number of life areas which are not as you would like them to be and clearly need some fairly urgent thought and attention. It is important that you do not become discouraged or depressed at this discovery. Rather, try to see your results as indicating a call for considered action. Do not be overwhelmed by the extent of life changes that are implied because of your results, but carefully and methodically work out a few of the top priority issues for improving your current lifestyle.

Hopefully, whatever your score, you will recognise that there is no present advantage or long term gain in taking no immediate action or in postponing your intention to work at self-improvement.

If you choose to take either of these negative options, you are much less likely to return later and to work seriously at improving your lifestyle.

NOW is probably the very best time in your whole life to take on the vital task of self-improvement and lifestyle renewal.

What Do I Do Now?

If you are up to the task or willing to have a try, go to the next chapter. Chapter 3 tells you how to set up your *Personal Plan*.

If you are not yet ready or able to continue work on the Program, make a resolve to return to it at a later date.

If you don't take control of your life and direct your energies to where you want to go, there is a danger that someone else, or other people, may hijack your lifestyle and you will be wedded to their goals and values.
Is that what you really want?

3. SETTING UP YOUR PLAN

THE ROLE OF YOUR BUDDY

Earlier, I stressed that a great deal of value could be gained, in working through the *Plan's* Program, by making use of a "buddy". The buddy you choose is likely to be someone you know quite well, someone whose views and judgement you respect, a good listener and a person who is largely emotionally and psychologically stable. Your buddy also needs to be someone who knows *you* well and is assertive enough to be frank and honest in communicating with you. She or he needs to accept and support the general concept that a self-help program for personal development can work. It is vital too that your buddy is able and willing to spend some confidential time with you each week throughout the Program's eight week duration.

It is recommended that you do your utmost to secure a buddy *before* starting to work on the targets chosen in your *Personal Plan* but *after* you have chosen your general goals and selected the related targets. *How to establish your goals and work out your related targets is explained fully later in this chapter.*

Your buddy could be your spouse or partner, a relative, a dear friend or a work colleague.

Choosing a buddy will require careful thought and a willingness, on your part, to share with that person something of your

concerns and aspirations about your present lifestyle. Initially, you will need to request and be sure of your buddy's willingness to devote the necessary time and support for you throughout the Program's eight weeks. Your buddy will probably have to be willing to provide you with about half an hour of her/his time each week. Once the necessary commitment to you has been made, you need to explain to your buddy the general set-up of the Program and how you have selected appropriate goals and broken these down into manageable weekly targets. *Do not* [at this stage] ask your buddy about how she/he thinks you should seek to change your lifestyle. Later, when your buddy has a full understanding of his or her role in your project and expressed a willingness to support you, you can outline the goals and targets you have selected. In this discussion with your buddy, you can obtain worthwhile feedback on whether or not the choice of goals and targets you have made makes good sense to someone who knows you well. Your buddy will also be in a favourable position to comment on whether your plans for self-change are realistic and within your capacity to achieve. However, in the last analysis, you alone are responsible for your choice of goals, targets and project timeframe. While you may adjust your *Personal Plan* on the basis of this discussion with your buddy, you must not allow your buddy to *tell* you what you should do to enrich your lifestyle.

What is the Point of Having a Buddy?

Why can't I follow the Program entirely on my own? Why do I need a buddy?

You probably *can* follow the Program on your own but I believe the chances of your ultimate success with it are far greater when

you have a buddy working alongside you. Basically, your buddy is there to assist you in making and maintaining commitment to the Program. This assistance is demonstrated in a number of ways:

- *by taking your buddy on board initially, you signal, in a more public way, your intention to work on your lifestyle to achieve worthwhile change.*
- *having committed yourself to the Program with the knowledge of your buddy, you are less likely to give up suddenly or if and when you become discouraged by your efforts. In such situations, you will probably have to convince your buddy that your withdrawal from the Program is sensible and appropriate. It is much more likely that your buddy will exhort you to keep on trying.*
- *At the beginning, after you have selected your goals and targets, your buddy, knowing you and your capabilities well, will be a great help in advising you whether, perhaps, you have taken on too much and how realistic the steps of your targets are.*
- *When you consult with your buddy on a weekly basis, you will be able to share your successes with pride as well as to ask for guidance where something is not working out in the Program.*
- *As you progress, you will be aware of the benefit gained from the respect and admiration you will undoubtedly receive from your buddy because of your efforts to improve the quality of your life.*
- *Your buddy will become an excellent sounding board if and when you need to re-examine the priorities in your life or if you need to re-think some of your long-held beliefs and values.*

- *When you have completed the Program the first time round, your buddy will be able to give valuable feedback on your overall progress and to provide insights into other goals you might want to work towards for additional lifestyle change.*
- *By working regularly with your buddy for the eight week period, your own communication and listening skills will be stimulated and enhanced.*

START NOW TO CONSIDER WHO YOUR BUDDY MIGHT BE AND MAKE THE NECESSARY APPROACH TO THAT PERSON. EXPLAIN TO HIM OR HER WHAT THE PROGRAM REQUIRES OF A BUDDY AND SEEK TO GET THE NECESSARY PROMISE OF SUPPORT FROM THE PERSON SELECTED.

Do not be tempted to dispense with the idea of having a buddy. If you do so, the likelihood of making a success of this Program is greatly reduced.

Consider why you would want to limit the Program in this way. Is it because of personal embarrassment or fear that, by asking for support from another individual, you are making a statement that your present lifestyle is not perfect? If it is, or if it is related to some form of similar thinking, realise that in today's world most honest people would admit fairly readily that there is room for improvement in their own lifestyle. And so, rather than scorning you for your tacit admission [*by asking for their support*] most mature people would admire you for having the courage to try and bring about the life changes that are important to you. However, in the rare situation where you find it difficult to secure a buddy simply because you cannot find anyone who is willing to give you the necessary commitment, or

you simply do not have any real friends, *do not despair*. But try not to *assume* this is the situation until you have really worked it through. If possible, ask at least *two* individuals and take the risk of being turned down by them. Even then, if there is no positive response to your request, *do not abandon the program*.

Not being able to find a person close to you who is willing to support and endorse your efforts at self-improvement probably says quite a lot about where *your* life is at right now. In fact, it probably highlights how much you need to work urgently on developing your personal relationships with others. In such a situation, and where a buddy is simply not available, *take the risk and work through the Program on your own*.

Another possibility for help and support exists. This book has a linked web site at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk where the same *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is promoted. As the web site develops, it is intended to include a guest facility or link to a forum where those interested in the Program may be able to write comments about their experiences with it. Reading such comments could prove helpful to someone who is without a buddy.

It may even be that you could request another visitor to that site, who is fully familiar with the Program, to act in a buddy role. But do not do this hurriedly or without careful scrutiny of what the other person reports. As always with the Internet, *great caution should be exercised in divulging personal and possibly highly confidential information to someone unknown to you*.

If seeking help through the above web site does not appeal, or is impractical for whatever reason, and you are still without that vital buddy support, why not consider the substitute idea of creating a Program *journal*. This would entail keeping a weekly or daily notebook record of your efforts as you work through your Program targets. You could also include your own comments as to how you feel when you are successful in achieving the targets and why, if it happened, you missed out on some of them. This disciplined activity, if carried out faithfully, would probably keep your enthusiasm high and your motivation strong for continuing with the Program. At the same time, and through the remainder of the eight weeks, you could continue to seek for a caring person with whom you would feel confident to share some information about what you are seeking to achieve through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*.

YOUR PERSONAL PLAN

First Considerations

Now that you have completed your lifestyle evaluation by working through the Questionnaire and scoring it, you have established the HERE in your life [that is, *where you are now*]. It is also likely that you have come to the conclusion that there is a need for you to work at improving, re-planning and reforming some aspects of your present lifestyle. This consideration will take you towards the THERE in your life. Remember, THERE is *where you want to be*. Of course, the move or jump from HERE to THERE is, for most of us, not going to be achieved in one massive bound. Rather, you will move from where you are now to where you want to be by a series of carefully selected steps. I believe that the Program set out in this book will assist you in

this gradual move from HERE to THERE. Be content with this step-by-step approach for achieving your goals, for it will – in the longer term - definitely get you to *where you want to be*, if you are persistent enough and follow through on the targets you have established.

BUT THERE ARE SOME COSTS INVOLVED

- *You need to be prepared to commit time and effort to working through the Program*
- *You need to be prepared to follow through the Program as set down and for at least eight weeks or for your timeframe duration*
- *You must be willing to withhold judgement on the Program's effectiveness until the eight week or selected period is over*
- *You need to be willing and able to find a close friend or colleague [your buddy] with whom you can share some details of your Plan's goals and targets and who will act as a support and mentor*

If you can meet these conditions, that's great. It means it's now time to move forward in developing your *Personal Plan* to move from HERE to THERE. *Continue now to the section on ESTABLISHING YOUR GOALS.*

If, unfortunately, you can't meet the above conditions, for whatever reasons, please don't give up on the idea of self-improvement. Perhaps bookmark the Program set out in this book for now and come back to it when you are ready and able to move forward again. OR

if this Program seems unsuited to your needs, why not search elsewhere for something more appropriate?

IF YOU GIVE UP NOW ON WORKING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR PRESENT LIFESTYLE, IT IS LESS LIKELY THAT YOU WILL RETURN TO THIS IMPORTANT TASK IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IF YOU TAKE THIS OPTION, YOU ARE LIMITING YOURSELF TO A CONTINUATION OF THE INADEQUATE LIFESTYLE YOU ARE EXPERIENCING CURRENTLY.

IS THIS WHAT YOU REALLY WANT?

ESTABLISHING YOUR GOALS

The THERE Concept...[*where you want to be*]

Obviously, you need to know where ultimately you want to be prior to establishing the necessary steps to getting there. Hopefully, after having worked through the *Questionnaire* exercise, you now have a clearer idea of this. To further assist in this task, try to evaluate where you would like to be, in all aspects of your life, in three (or two or five) years from now. Such a time based approach allows more easily for the setting up of clear and definable goals [and then targets] which will help you to get THERE.

No one outside yourself can define *your* THERE or set down for YOU which goals and targets you should select for your Personal Plan. However, there are a number of elements which seem to the author to be related to a successful and happy modern lifestyle, often regardless of a person's age, status, gender or aspirations. Some of these elements will be more important to some individuals than to others and some elements will, for some people, have no very important meanings at all. Yet it is a valuable exercise to scrutinise these and to assess their relative importance in your own lifestyle. One can probably live a fairly comfortable, happy and satisfying life without having to meet all the criteria implied in each of them. What *is* helpful is to work out the ones which have most relevance in your life at the

moment and to resolve to work on these.

The elements listed are in addition to the human person's basic needs for safety, food, shelter and community. They are presented for your consideration and set out below. The elements are not listed in any priority order:

- *a reliable means of stable income*
- *a general sense of purpose in life*
- *supportive family relationship(s)*
- *involvement in a wider social unit*
- *close and intimate (non-family) relationship(s)*
- *an ability to express emotions appropriately*
- *workable problem-solving skills*
- *clarity of own values and goals*
- *a solid sense of self-worth*
- *maturity to make own decisions*
- *ability to relax physically and mentally*
- *confidence in expressing own sexuality*
- *the ability to be assertive*
- *a spiritual perspective on life*
- *some satisfying hobbies or recreational activities*

Give consideration as to how you rate in your own life on the above elements and, together with the results already obtained through the *Program Questionnaire*, you will have a wide range of options on which to base your *Personal Plan* for the Program. Your immediate task now is to establish the *precise* goals you plan to include in your *Personal Plan*. Take time and care in this exercise. Remember that you are making a *selection* of the various changes that you might like to see enacted in your life. Distinguish between *long-* and *short-term* goals.

For the purposes of this Program, long-term goals refer to

changes you would like to have achieved by the end of, say, two or three years while short-term goals refer to *changes you hope to have made by the end of the eight week program*.

For example, *I will run 20 km three times a week* is a long-term goal [achievable at the end of two years] while *I will run three km once a week* will be a short-term goal [achievable at the end of eight weeks].

In this Program, though you are mainly concerned with the achievement of *short-term* goals, it is valuable to have a related long-term goal in mind for each of the goals set down for your eight week Program.

In selecting your program goals, make allowance for the time and opportunity you will have at your disposal to spend on working the Program. Generally, it is appropriate to select two, three or four goals for inclusion. If you select a higher number than this, you may be setting up a commitment which will be too demanding with the likely outcome that you will give up before the eight weeks have expired. It is more fruitful to work on two goals, or even one, if it means you will see the Program through successfully. Clearly, you need to prioritise in your selection : but, I believe, you should include at least *one* goal which you regard as fundamental to your own self-development. Take care you do *not* include goals which are solely of someone else's making. Remember, outside the bounds of the laws of the land, no one has the right to decide how *you* should live your life or what *beliefs* and *values* you should live by.

Do not worry about the actual targets initially, for these represent the gradual steps of your selected goals and will be worked on later. Make sure each goal you select is sufficiently *modest, clear, specific, realistic* and *measurable* to the extent

that it can be fully understood by someone else [e.g. your buddy]

Sometimes some of the goals we choose may involve refraining from, or limiting our involvement in, some kind of present activity or personal habit. Where this is the case, it is recommended that you write up the goal(s) in a *positive* statement. For example, if I want to stop smoking by the end of the eight weeks, I might record my goal in this way:

By the end of the Program I will have achieved total freedom from my smoking habit

Other possible areas for self-improvement which might need to be expressed positively could include:

- *limiting the amount of TV watched*
- *keeping to a weight loss program*
- *spending too much time at the computer*
- *getting up consistently late in the morning*

What if one of my selected goals is to change my habitual way of *thinking* from a negative pattern to a more positive one? How can I set up appropriate targets for this which will help me to achieve my goal within the eight weeks of the Program? As already explained, our *thinking* patterns relate closely to our *beliefs* and *values* systems. If you are generally negative in your views about most things in your lifestyle you will need to examine and challenge some of these basic and, probably, long held beliefs and values. It is suggested that you read Chapters 6 [*Happiness*], 8 [*Your Thinking*] and 10 [*Self-acceptance*] in Part Three of the book. Carefully complete the Exercises which conclude each of these chapters.

Another way in which negative thinking can be challenged and often dislodged is by the use of *affirmations*. *Affirmations are*

positive statements made to oneself and repeated, or listened to on a CD or posted on the fridge door or bedroom wall. They are particularly effective if used or listened to during a relaxation exercise or meditation session. Such sessions could be built into your weekly schedule as appropriate *targets* for your overall goal. When repeated sufficiently, at regular recurring intervals, they tend to enter the subconscious where they can germinate to become basic ways of thinking. Examples of *affirmations* could be:

- *I am able to see the good in every life situation that presents itself*
- *I am becoming more and more confident of my ability to handle life's problems*
- *In my life, I have so much more to be happy about than I have to make me miserable*
- *I am feeling increasingly satisfied with my life and how I am living it as each day passes*

When you have finalised your goal selection, *write them out fully* on the *Goals Summary Sheet* provided [see page 66]. When you write in the *starting date* for your eight week program, allow sufficient time to complete the task of breaking down your goals into appropriate targets and time to consult with your buddy on your proposed Personal Plan.

Work Out Your Goals Right Now

The *Goals Summary Sheet* is printed on page 66. There is also a sample [that is, *partially completed*] copy available in the *Appendices* in Part Four of the book. If you are still somewhat unsure about how to proceed, have a look at this sample Sheet.

Then photocopy the blank *Goals Summary Sheet* and begin to set up your Personal Plan.

STOP NOW AND WORK ON SELECTING THE *GOALS* YOU INTEND TO WORK ON FOR THE DURATION OF THIS SELF-HELP PROGRAM. TAKE TIME AND CARE OVER YOUR SELECTION.

WRITE YOUR SELECTED *GOALS* ON A COPY OF THE *GOALS SUMMARY SHEET* ON PAGE 66 AND SIGN AND DATE YOUR COMMITMENT

YOUR NEXT TASK WILL BE TO TAKE EACH SELECTED GOAL AND BREAK IT DOWN INTO *TARGETS* WHICH WILL BE SPREAD OVER THE EIGHT WEEK PERIOD OF THE PROGRAM. THIS TASK WILL BE EXPLAINED FULLY IN THE NEXT SECTION OF THIS CHAPTER.

The *Goal Summary Sheet* appears on the next page...

| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | |
|--|---------------------|
| GOALS SUMMARY SHEET | |
| Program Starting Date | Program Ending Date |
| <i>By the end of this eight week self-development Program I shall have accomplished the following Goals:</i> | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| <i>The above Goals represent my Personal Plan for self-development and for improving the quality of my life I commit myself to working towards these Goals for the eight week duration of the Program.</i> | |
| SIGNED: | DATED: |

WORKING OUT YOUR WEEKLY TARGETS

IMPORTANT

DO NOT CONSULT OR DISCUSS YOUR CHOSEN GOALS WITH YOUR BUDDY UNTIL *AFTER* YOU HAVE BROKEN DOWN EACH GOAL INTO THE REQUIRED TARGETS *AND* READ THROUGH THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER SECTION ON *THE ROLE OF YOUR BUDDY*

Now that you have selected your chosen goals for the *Phoenix Plan's* Program, written them up on the *Goals Summary Sheet* and signed your commitment, it is time to break down each goal into weekly targets. This entails looking closely at each goal, working out a range of weekly steps, probably graduating in difficulty of achievement, until each goal is fully achieved in the eighth week. It is important that the *starting* Targets for Week One , for each goal, are modest so that you are assured of success from the beginning. This success will act as a momentum for further motivation as you tackle the somewhat more difficult target tasks in the remaining weeks of the Program.

It is necessary to set down *eight* separate targets for each goal. As long as the targets to the goal become subsequently more challenging from Week One through to Week Eight, achieving the full goal in Week Eight, this is entirely sufficient. Once you have broken down each goal into the required targets, you need to record the targets on the *Weekly Target Sheet* provided. Use one *Target Sheet* for each goal you selected. A copy of the *Weekly Target Sheet* is set out on Page 70.

As mentioned earlier, when one of your selected goals is to refrain from or limit a present activity or personal habit, it is important to set out your weekly targets in positive language. This is not just a matter of style. By stating a goal *positively* it helps you to think positively about the life change that you are seeking to implement. For instance, in the example given

previously where you are hoping to stop smoking by the end of the eight week program, you might state your targets in the format below:

Weeks 1- 2: *I shall enjoy one smoke free day this week*

Weeks 3- 4: *I shall enjoy three smoke free days this week*

Weeks 5- 6: *I shall enjoy four smoke free days this week*

Week 7: *I shall enjoy five smoke free days this week*

Week 8: *I shall have a totally free smoke free week*

To assist you in the task of establishing targets for your selected goals, a sample *Weekly Target Sheet* is set out in the *Appendices* in Part Four of the book. This will demonstrate how a chosen goal can be broken down into weekly targets. It is suggested you study this and then proceed in the task of breaking down your own goals into appropriate targets.

You may be thinking *This Phoenix Self-Help Plan requires a lot of filling in of forms and paperwork! Is this really necessary?*

I believe it does and it is necessary if you are to get the greatest benefit from the *Plan*. However, if the format of recording provided does not appeal and you are able and willing to work out your own system of documentation, go right ahead. What is important is that you should have some paperwork system that allows you to know exactly what you have committed yourself to in your *Personal Plan* and permits effective monitoring of your efforts and progress.

DO NOT BE TEMPTED TO GIVE UP BECAUSE OF THE AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK AND DOCUMENTATION BEING ASKED OF YOU AT THIS STAGE. THIS IS NECESSARY SO THAT YOUR *PERSONAL PLAN* IS SET OUT CLEARLY AND PRECISELY

and so that

THE TARGETS YOU SELECT ARE EASILY MEASURABLE AT ALL STAGES THROUGHOUT THE EIGHT WEEKS OF THE PROGRAM.

IN ADDITION, BY SETTING UP YOUR PERSONAL PLAN IN THIS WAY IT BECOMES EASIER FOR YOUR BUDDY TO ASSIST IN MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS AND TO OFFER YOU THE NECESSARY SUPPORT AND FEEDBACK.

The *Weekly Target Sheet* is located on the next page.

| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | |
|---|---------------------|
| WEEKLY TARGET SHEET | |
| A separate <i>Weekly Target Sheet</i> should be completed for <i>each</i> Goal you have included in your <i>Personal Plan</i> | |
| Program Starting Date | Program Ending Date |
| GOAL NUMBER ____ | |
| WEEK 1. | |
| WEEK 2. | |
| WEEK 3. | |
| WEEK 4. | |
| WEEK 5. | |
| WEEK 6 | |
| WEEK 7 | |
| WEEK 8 | |
| | |
| I have shown the above Goal and Targets to my buddy. We have discussed them and made modifications where this has been mutually agreed. | |
| SIGNED: | DATED: |

4. MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS

IT IS ASSUMED THAT BY NOW YOU HAVE WORKED OUT THE *GOALS* YOU WANT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR *PERSONAL PLAN* FOR THE PROGRAM, THAT YOU HAVE BROKEN DOWN EACH GOAL INTO THE APPROPRIATE *TARGETS*, RECORDED THESE DETAILS ON THE *SUMMARY SHEETS* PROVIDED AND THAT YOU HAVE SECURED THE AGREEMENT OF A FRIEND TO ACT AS YOUR PROGRAM *BUDDY*.

If you have not yet completed all of these tasks please return to them now and work to complete them before continuing...

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SCHEDULE

You are almost ready to begin work on the targets in your *Personal Plan*. Before starting, it is strongly advised that you work out a weekly timetable, or schedule, which will set out *when* you are going to carry out your target activities. For example, if one of your targets for Week One is to *jog twice a week for two kilometres*, you really need to work out the days and times when you are going to take your run. If you just leave it to the times when you feel like doing it, it is very possible that you will fail to meet your target requirements. Of course, such a schedule does not have to be totally prescriptive - it should also make allowances for the unexpected.

Overall, however, a schedule tends to commit you to a routine which, more often than not, will lead to the successful completion of a target. So, if, for example, you set down Monday

and Thursday evenings, directly after coming home from your workplace, as the times for your jogs then there is greater likelihood that you will keep to your targets. However, in setting up a schedule, you may need to consult with a partner or members of your household so as to ensure that your chosen times do not conflict with other important routines or commitments.

In the same way, it is advisable to set up a *regular* weekly meeting with your buddy which is mutually convenient so that the valuable weekly get together is not missed. Try to ensure that when this meeting occurs you are alone together and not under undue pressure of time or in a place which is subject to potential distractions [e.g. with the TV sports channel running or when your children are likely to arrive home from school]. If the regular meeting with your buddy is unavoidably missed, then plan for another time slot for the same week.

A few people may be able to successfully keep the details of a schedule in their heads, but I think most individuals will have problems with this kind of arrangement. Try, therefore, to set down in writing the precise details of your target completion times and the time planned to meet with your buddy. To assist in this regard, a column has been provided in the *Program Monitoring Sheet* [see Page 75] where you can record briefly your target schedule.

Of course, some targeted activities may not fit in well with timed slots. For example, if one of your targets is *to pay more daily compliments to your partner or children*, it is very difficult to relate this to particular times. However, what you can do is to set aside a time when you check with yourself whether or not you have carried out your chosen target. You might, in the example

above, do this just before going to bed at night. Whatever your target, there is always a way to monitor it effectively. You just need to work out what the best way is for you.

GUIDE TO MONITORING THE PROGRAM

The *Program Monitoring Sheet* has been provided to help assist you with setting out your weekly targets and schedule. This Sheet provides you with an easy means to record, on a weekly basis, *all* of the targets, based on *all* the selected goals you have set yourself together with a note of the time slots, or other arrangements, allotted to them. It also provides a means of ticking off, as completed, each target activity carried out and records the weekly meeting with your buddy.

You are required to complete one *Program Monitoring Sheet* for *each* of the eight weeks of the Program. However, only one sheet should be completed at a time, that is, on a *weekly* basis. This is because you may make a change to behaviour targets after the first or subsequent weeks. The completed *Program Monitoring Sheet* is kept as a record of your activity during a particular week and forms a useful record of progress for your meeting with your buddy.

A blank *Program Monitoring Sheet* can be seen on Page 75 while a sample of a partially completed one appears in the *Appendices* in Part Four.

STOP NOW AND GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO SETTING UP A *SCHEDULE* FOR TARGET COMPLETION FOR *WEEK ONE* WHICH SEEMS TO YOU TO BE WORKABLE IN YOUR LIFE. REMEMBER YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHERS AND TO YOUR EXISTING TIME COMMITMENTS.

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, CONSULT BRIEFLY WITH YOUR BUDDY AND MAKE, AT LEAST, A TENTATIVE ARRANGEMENT AS TO

WHEN YOU WILL HAVE YOUR FIRST DISCUSSION MEETING.

Consider and concentrate on Week One only at this stage. If necessary, you may later change schedule arrangements for subsequent weeks.

When you have worked out the outline of your schedule, fill in all the details of your arrangements on the *Program Monitoring Sheet*. You will need to photocopy this from Page 75.

| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---|---|----------|
| PROGRAM MONITORING SHEET | | | | | | |
| <i>Week Number</i> _____ | | <i>Date beginning</i> _____ | | | | |
| GOAL NO: | TARGET DETAILS | SCHEDULE | COMPLETED * | | | COMMENTS |
| | | | F | P | N | |
| 1 | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | |
| <p>* F = Fully achieved P = Partially achieved N = Not achieved</p> | | | | | | |
| <p>ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS: [VERY GOOD] 5 4 3 2 1 [VERY POOR]</p> | | | | | | |
| <p>Meeting arranged with Buddy on _____ Meeting carried out _____</p> | | | | | | |

Dreams of a better life seldom lead to a new and improved lifestyle. But dreams which are tied to goals, determination and action can take you very close to where you want to be.. For the truth is – you *can* largely be in control of your life...

5. WORKING THROUGH THE PROGRAM

THE FIRST WEEKS

Week One

You are now ready to launch your Personal Plan. Before beginning, you need to have already set out your Program *goals*, broken these down into manageable weekly *targets*, found a willing “*buddy*” and planned a workable *schedule* around your lifestyle commitments.

IF YOU HAVEN'T YET COMPLETED ALL THE ABOVE PRELIMINARY TASKS, *STOP NOW* AND ARRANGE TO COMPLETE THEM *BEFORE* ENTERING INTO WEEK ONE OF THE PROGRAM

The first week of the *Plan's* Program is, perhaps, its most important week. This is why it is essential that you are fully prepared for it. If you succeed in meeting *all* your Targets in Week One you will, by the end of that week, experience a real sense of pride and achievement which will provide you with a strong motivation to continue in the Program's subsequent weeks. If, on the other hand, you make a half-hearted or carelessly planned attempt at your Week One plan, managing only to achieve partial success in meeting your selected targets, then you are more likely to lose confidence in your ability to stay with the Program for its eight week duration.

It is important that at the end of Week One you set aside some time to assess your progress. If you are satisfied with what you have achieved, take heart that you almost certainly have the commitment and competence to complete the entire Program successfully. If you are not satisfied with your progress at the end of Week One take time to consider fully *why* this is so. In particular, try to work out what went wrong with your schedule and how this could have been avoided. Discuss any problems with your buddy.

Regardless of whether or not you are satisfied with your Week One progress, you are strongly advised to consult with your buddy and to report to her/him the level of progress achieved, including your feelings about what you have, or have not, accomplished. If, by completing your targets successfully in Week One, you have proven to yourself that the tasks set out for Week One were well within your ability to complete, you may comfortably move on to beginning Week Two as already planned. However, if you come to believe that you have been too ambitious in your plans, or that your regular time, work and home commitments prevent you from achieving your targets, you are advised to revise your targets for Week Two and, possibly, for subsequent weeks. If necessary, discuss this with your buddy.

If, for whatever reason(s), you have failed to complete even a minority of the tasks set down for Week One, consider restarting the Program from Week One. At the same time, you will probably need to look again closely at the targets you have already set out for Weeks Two to Eight and to consider revising the targets contained there. Again, make use of your buddy.

Whatever your situation is, *do not move to Week Two tasks until*

you have made a success of the targets established for that first week, as it is imperative that you proceed to Week Two feeling proud of your achievements in Week One and filled with enthusiasm to tackle the more demanding tasks of Week Two.

Remember, in all your considerations here, your buddy's views are likely to be most valuable and it is important that you listen with great care to what he or she has to say. Of course, YOU alone must take full responsibility for the non-completion of targets and for whatever changes you make, or do not make, to your *Personal Plan*.

It is recommended that when you have completed satisfactorily the majority of tasks set down for Week One, you *provide yourself with an appropriate small reward*. Working this out in advance is probably a good idea.

Subsequent Weeks

It is suggested that you apply this same discipline and approach throughout the Weeks from Two to Eight. Above all, maintain a consistent contact with your buddy and always listen thoughtfully to any advice or feedback provided. Remember, too, that by interacting with your buddy you are very likely to bolster your self-confidence and self-esteem when you are able to acknowledge, in this more public way, the successes you have achieved in your Personal Plan. It is likely also that your buddy will want, and be ready, to congratulate you on your steady progress towards your selected goals.

When you reach the end of Week Four, and assuming you have made continuous and consistent progress on your weekly targets, it is time to strongly commend yourself on what you

have achieved to date. Look closely at your re-planned lifestyle and you will be certain to regard it with justifiable pride. Note its improvement since the time you first considered taking up the *Phoenix Plan Program*. *Now is the time to reward yourself in some way meaningful to you*. Convey your sense of pride at your achievements to your buddy and express thanks for his/her support. Re-energise your determination to continue to work enthusiastically at the remainder of your Personal Plan in Weeks Five to Eight.

AFTER WEEK EIGHT

Perhaps the first thing to do after completing Week Eight successfully is to again *congratulate yourself* for having worked through the eight week self-improvement program. Focus on the things you have achieved rather than on any imperfections in your efforts. Look closely at your now established new lifestyle and examine your present feelings about yourself as compared to what these were only two months ago. If you have selected appropriate goals and targets for your Personal Plan and conscientiously worked through the Program steps, you should notice a marked and positive difference between how you feel now as compared to then.

In a sense, you have truly moved from the HERE of pre-Program days to the THERE that you then wanted to achieve.

What you have achieved is no mean feat. Lots of people do not stick with self-improvement programs but give up, for various reasons, shortly after beginning.

It is now most important that you provide yourself with a substantial reward in view of what you have achieved. You

certainly deserve it!

Talk also to your buddy about your success in the *Phoenix Plan*. Your buddy will be rightfully admiring of you, having seen how you have disciplined yourself over the eight weeks in order to improve the quality of your lifestyle. Recall, too, that your success may also, in a very real way, have been made possible because of the support, encouragement and mentoring provided by your buddy. Make an appropriate gesture of thanks to that person who has given you such valuable help by monitoring your efforts to meet the requirements of the goals and targets set out in your Personal Plan. Yet, remember that YOU are the primary architect of your achievements.

At the beginning of the book, I suggested that if you worked diligently and appropriately at the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* Program, you:

- *would be assured a greater degree of personal peace*
- *would be better able to weather the storms of stressful events*
- *would have a more rewarding sense of achievement and satisfaction in your lifestyle*
- *would have gained a higher level of self-acceptance and*
- *would enjoy fuller and better relationships with those close to you.*

MEASURE YOURSELF NOW AGAINST THESE CRITERIA

If you have followed the Program effectively, you should now be able to note significant improvements in all of the above areas.

In reality, you have re-planned, reformed and redirected the path your life is taking. These changes will, undoubtedly, lead you to a higher quality, more enjoyable and more satisfying lifestyle.

Once again, **CONGRATULATIONS !!**

WHAT NOW?

It is vital that you hold on to the progress that you have made throughout the eight weeks of the Program. Whatever your final goals or targets in the eighth week, they give you a ready-made schedule to inculcate as a permanent feature of your new lifestyle. You should strive to maintain these activities as a regular feature of your weekly timetable if you are to safeguard and retain the level of lifestyle improvement you have built up over the last eight weeks. If you drop your commitment to these newly established goals and targets, you may eventually slide back to the lesser quality lifestyle you had before you started the Program.

WHAT IN THE FUTURE?

If this *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* self-improvement program has really brought you closer to the kind of lifestyle you sought, perhaps dreamed about, before you started to work through it, then realise that it can be a most important resource in your future self-development.

*Do not regard the Program as a once only exercise to deal with emergencies, but rather see it as a means by which you can plan and make long term, gradual and carefully selected step-by-step moves towards a better and happier lifestyle. Hopefully, your progress to date will have convinced you that, through using the *Plan*, you have in your possession a valuable self-improvement*

tool which you can call upon and implement at any future time in your life.

Your recent progress through the Program, while always a matter for rejoicing and self-congratulation, will inevitably have helped you to realise that the task of self-improvement and development is never really completed but is a life-long and ever present challenge. Even now, in spite of your achievements to date, you will be able to perceive that there are opportunities for further improvement in those areas of your lifestyle which you have already worked on successfully. There will also be new areas for development which have been left untouched to date.

It is my sincere hope that the progress you have recently made by working through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* will act as a powerful source of motivation for you to continue further in your work of self-improvement. I urge you strongly to confer with your buddy within at least two weeks of completing your first round of the Program. Attempt, between you, to formulate any further lifestyle improvements that could be attempted and which would enhance the quality of your day-to-day existence. Focus, in particular, on the possibilities for progress that could be developed where these are based on the goals you have *already* achieved. As before, if you decide to tackle a range of new developmental goals, take time to choose these carefully and use your buddy as a friendly sounding board. However, do not attempt more than you are likely to be able to handle.

Read through *Part Three* of this book. This deals briefly with some general considerations about life areas that are of significant importance to the quality of the lifestyle a person enjoys. Consider whether or not you have given, or are giving, appropriate consideration to any or all of these matters. Your

analysis of your performance in these life areas will help you to establish new or improved life goals which you may want to include in any second round of implementing the Program.

When you have a clear idea of what lifestyle matters you want to work on further, begin the Program a second time. Work through all the steps as set out already and maintain the supportive role of your buddy.

Once again, *congratulations on what you have already achieved* and good luck with all your future efforts within the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*.

May your lifestyle become happier, healthier, more rewarding, less stress inducing, more prosperous, be filled with improved personal peace and may you enjoy productive and mutually stimulating relationships with all with whom you come in contact.

IF, SOMEHOW, THOUGH YOU HAVE REACHED THIS STAGE OF READING IN THIS BOOK, YOU HAVE FAILED TO APPLY YOURSELF SUFFICIENTLY TO THE PROGRAM AND THEREFORE ARE UNABLE TO ENJOY THE POSITIVE REWARDS DESCRIBED ABOVE, DO NOT LOSE HEART.

THE QUALITY OF THE EFFORT YOU DID MAKE SHOULD NOT BE DISREGARDED OR MINIMISED. AFTER ALL, YOU DID MAKE A START AND, TO SOME EXTENT, YOU DID TRY TO WORK THE PROGRAM. THAT, ALONE, IS A SUFFICIENT BASIS FOR YOU TO FEEL PROUD ABOUT YOUR GOOD INTENTION TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFESTYLE.

RATHER THAN GIVE UP NOW, GO BACK AND RESTART THE PROGRAM. LEARN FROM THE ORGANISATIONAL MISTAKES YOU MADE THE FIRST TIME AND ENSURE YOU HAVE THE ONGOING PRESENCE OF A SUPPORTIVE BUDDY.

MY REQUEST TO THE READER

IF WORKING THROUGH THIS *PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN* PROGRAM HAS TRULY HELPED YOU AND IT CONTINUES TO INSPIRE YOU TO WORK AT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFESTYLE, PLEASE TELL OTHERS ABOUT IT AND/OR ENCOURAGE THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN IT.

YOU CAN DO THIS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:

- tell a friend about this book and where you found it.
- mention the program on any of the social networking sites [e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace]
- write a report on it that can be used as a testimonial and send it to the author at the address below
- write a review of the book and post it on your website or e-zine it
- offer to act as the buddy of someone who may want to work through the program
- visit the website www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk
- make a link with the above website
- write to or email the author and make suggestions for the program's improvement.
- offer to advertise the book or the program on your website

THE AUTHOR CAN BE CONTACTED BY EMAIL AT THE ADDRESS BELOW

Every email will be answered personally

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Many individuals start work to change their lives for the better but - for a variety of reasons - give up quickly, feel ashamed of their lack of dedication to the task and conclude that they can never change. THIS IS AN ERRONEOUS AND UNFOUNDED CONCLUSION AND ENTIRELY SELF-DEFEATING. The most dedicated make slips in working to achieve their goals but bravely struggle and eventually succeed!

PART THREE

SOME THOUGHTS ON KEY SELF-CHANGE TOPICS

In Part Three, we take a general look at some key self-change topics which are commonly thought about in Personal Plans for self-improvement and lifestyle renewal. Each of the topics included is highly pertinent to coping well in the diversity of life situations that can arise.

Each brief section provides a general overview of its particular topic and includes a basic Exercise for the reader. Each attempts to give you an insight into the relevance of the topic for self-change and aims to encourage you to consider how, in your present lifestyle, you are dealing with any issues that may arise from the topic. Some topics highlight tools for coping and others are meant to challenge your current thinking patterns.

It is hoped also that the general basic information provided here may lead readers to research further into those topics that may, for them, be problematic or have special meaning within their individual lifestyles.

Wealth, power and status alone do not guarantee personal peace and happiness..

Poverty, trauma, low station in life are not insuperable obstades to achieving a satisfying lifestyle..

Personal peace, happiness and a satisfying lifestyle are there for all to achieve. If you choose to have these things, regardless of circumstances, you can attain them.

6. HAPPINESS

Most of us would agree that we want to be happy. But what is meant by *happiness*?

Perhaps happiness could be described as *the feeling we experience when we enjoy a lifestyle which is safe, comfortable, lively, financially stable, includes close personal supportive relationships, is relatively free from fear, disease, loneliness and personal trauma, and where the individual has a sense of direction as to where she or he wants to go in life.*

If all or most of these lifestyle qualities are present in sufficient form, it is likely that a person will mostly experience satisfaction and pleasure as they live from day to day. However, when one or more of the elements listed above are absent or inadequate in their lives, many people can experience a sense of deep unhappiness. The associated feelings can be anxiety, frustration, depression, confusion, resentment and lowered self-esteem.

However, what needs to be noted is that while the general description of happiness, as set out above, is basically accurate for all of us, most individuals place different levels of importance and priority on the individual elements which make up the concept. For example, *close personal relationships* may be seen

as of more importance to one person while another places great value on the *financial stability* factor. In spite of the fact that most other elements may be in place in their lifestyles, some individuals, noting the absence of one or a few elements which they see as vitally important, experience an overshadowing sensation that they can never possess any sense of real happiness.

It follows, then, that for most people, happiness is a feeling, a concept, a state of mind that is highly individual and relates closely to how we look at and think about life. Our sense of what happiness is can also be influenced heavily by how we have been brought up and the range of other influences which have surrounded us as we have achieved early adulthood and beyond. It behoves us to stop, from time to time, and look more closely at what we, as individuals, really understand by happiness. A question to ask yourself is *What do I think needs to be included in my lifestyle for me to be happy?*

A cursory examination of people's lives in general makes it clear that happiness does not immediately result from personal wealth, power, prestige or striking physical appearance. It is also clear that a life characterised by frequent hardship, lack of prestige, little personal power and ordinariness of appearance is not necessarily full of unhappiness. What emerges from any such research is that happiness is more related to how we look at life events and to the *beliefs* and *values* which a particular person holds. This largely equates with *how we think*.

It is a central belief in *rational-emotive* and *cognitive* therapies that how we *think* is largely responsible for what we *feel* and how we typically *behave*. If we seek to raise the level of happiness in our lives, we need to look critically at our current

ways of thinking and at the beliefs and values which underpin them. Values and beliefs are closely linked to each other and influence how we *act* in any given situation.

- A *belief* is a point of view which you regard as true and fundamental to the way you conduct your life. Example: *most people will respond warmly to you if you treat them with cordiality and respect.*
- A *value* is a way of acting towards yourself and others which you regard as fair to all and which influences how you act. Example: *kindness is a virtue.*

The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* recognises the importance of our established thinking patterns and encourages you to take time and effort to work out what *you* really want in your life, both in the short and the long term. This relates to a careful examination of what things in your life you hold as valuable [*values*] and what ideas you strongly believe in [*beliefs*]. Often, a close scrutiny of these will demonstrate to you that your own portfolio of beliefs and values is somewhat out of date or not really in line with your more fully considered thoughts about which things should be priority in your lifestyle. In particular, take careful note of any beliefs which imply the words *should* or *must*. It may be that some of these ways of thinking reflect the views of someone else or some other societal institution and may not be part of the new portfolio you wish to build up.

The core argument presented here is that you can be happy provided that your lifestyle is neatly tuned to your beliefs and values. If, at the moment, they are not, you are left with the options:

- *you can change your beliefs and values to be compatible with your current lifestyle* OR

- *you can change aspects of your lifestyle to fit in with your current beliefs and values* OR
- *you can modify both your beliefs and values and your current lifestyle so that they are largely compatible.*

No *one* of the above options is the only answer. Only you can work out which is most appropriate for your own benefit and happiness. In this regard, the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is a suitable tool to help you implement those changes you perceive as necessary to improve the life you live as at now. By working through the Program set out in this book, it is close to certain that you will be called upon to challenge some of your existing beliefs and values as you work to select the self-improvement *goals* you intend to work on during the eight weeks of the program.

Finally, it is stressed again that to be happy in life is a matter of *decision* for you. You can *choose* to be happy whatever the circumstances that surround you. The goals which you select for the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* program will be the cornerstone of your efforts to change your life from how it is right now into making it a lifestyle which is essentially a happy and satisfying one.

You may find the exercise which follows helpful.

EXERCISE

Take some private time to work out what seem to you to be the most important basic *beliefs* and *values* which sustain your general mode of thinking. Write them down in your notebook.

Now examine them critically:

- *Does it still seem appropriate that all of these should be central to your thinking?*
- *Are any of them, for you, outmoded or opposed to the way you want to live your life?*
- *Do any of them condemn, criticise or demean the kinds of goals you want to establish in your life?*
- *Are they all fully rational and realistic in your present life circumstances?*
- *Would it be a good idea to discard or modify one or more of them?*
- *Do you think you need to add any new beliefs and/or values to your present way of thinking?*
- *Do any of your current beliefs and values cause you distress or a sense of guilt in terms of how you live your life?*
- *Are your existing “should” and “must” beliefs still acceptable to you?*

After this critical examination of your current beliefs and values, rewrite them in the way that, to you, makes most sense in terms of your current goals and life aspirations. Cancel any that seem inappropriate and add any that seem missing. Now, armed with this *new* set of beliefs and values, go back to consider what things or circumstances need to exist in your present lifestyle if you are to attain the kind of happiness that is meaningful to you. Relate this knowledge to the goals you selected for the *Phoenix Plan* Program. Are they compatible? If they are not, restate or rewrite your life goals so that they are.

If you have the chance, engage someone else [e.g. *your buddy* under the *Plan*] and discuss with that person your experiences in completing this exercise and whether or not it has proved beneficial.

Meditation and relaxation are great tools to relieve stress and to bring quiet and personal peace into your life....

They are entirely free: all they require is your time..
Why not spare the time and try them out?

7. STRESS

It is normal, and to be expected, that when a person's lifestyle is unhappy and unsatisfying that they experience a sense and feeling of stress. Stress can destroy one's equilibrium and can have a devastating effect on how an individual thinks, feels and behaves. Additionally, stress punishes the body, weakens the immune system and has the potential to cause minor ailments and to bring about general bodily discomfort. Prolonged or chronic stress can seriously influence a person's long-term health and can sometimes be a major causal factor in serious disease.

Obviously, then, it is a worthwhile objective to try to minimise the stress in your lifestyle. However, before you can seriously tackle this task, it is necessary to have a fuller understanding both of what stress is and what situations or factors are causing the stress.

We generally associate stress with *distress*, that is, *something which happens to us which disrupts, or threatens to disrupt, the order and comfort in our lives*. It often brings about a sense of anxiety and disequilibrium. As a result, we feel concerned, or frustrated, or confused, or fearful, or unable to reach a decision on some matter which is important to us: or a combination of any of these states.

There are a lot of common situations which can give rise to these feelings of stress. Some of these are listed below but, for some individuals, there will be other personal situations which will elicit the stress response.

Common Stressors

- *believing there is not enough time to do all the things that we are obliged to do, or want to do*
- *bouts of worry about something that is about to happen, is happening or might happen*
- *difficulties with others in a personal relationship or in a work environment*
- *believing that we do not have the ability or skills to complete a task which others expect of us*
- *difficulties in child-rearing practices and in knowing whether we are doing the right thing by our children*
- *worries about our financial situation, about getting and holding down a job, or about debts*
- *fears about interacting with neighbours, strangers and people in public places*
- *concerns about the way in which our emotional and sexual needs are being met or expressed*
- *health concerns arising through the experiencing of unusual bodily symptoms*
- *questions of personal safety and neighbourhood crime*
- *worries about dying, death and the possible afterlife.*

While the kinds of stress factors mentioned above are likely to produce personal distress and discomfort, it is worth noting that some forms of stress are positive and non-threatening. For example, the kinds of stress engendered by an exciting adventure, a competitive event, a family reunion, a holiday – all

of these bring a high level of pleasure and joy which makes any accompanying distress contained in the experience as being acceptable and worthwhile.

Primarily, stress is related to our unique perception of, and response to, any one or more of the events which make up our daily lives. In addition to the common situations listed above, almost any event or situation can become a *stressor* in our lives. What may be a stressor for one person may not be a stress factor for another. Thus, person A may be stressed out by having to drive on busy motorways while person B may find the same experience quite exhilarating and enjoyable. Yet person B may experience great stress at having to interact with potential clients in a business environment while person A may see it as challenging and a fun experience.

It follows, then, that in looking to minimise the stress factors which operate in your life, you first need to identify the situations and events and, possibly, people which are *your* stressors. This is a process which can take a considerable amount of time and thought. The task is probably best accomplished if you make brief written notes for yourself.

As you examine your personal lifestyle, it should be noted that, sometimes, the stressful situation which comes to mind initially is not always the real stress factor. Thus, in the example given above of Person A being stressed out when driving on busy motorways, the real origin of the stress may lie in that person's fearfulness of a road accident, or their lack of confidence in their driving skills, or their possible lack of trust in the mechanical soundness of the vehicle being driven.

Nearly always, awareness of any stressor will become evident through a person's thoughts and feelings about the situation

which is causing the stress. Therefore, to come to a full understanding of why a particular situation is stressful, it is essential to become fully aware of the individual's underlying self-talk about it. As emphasized previously, our *thinking* about a situation or event can largely determine our feelings about it and ultimately influence our resulting behavioural responses.

Clearly, identification of the stressors which cause distress in one's life does not eradicate them. Many stressors, even after recognition based on rigorous analysis, have to be lived with. The more important technique to be learnt, if we are to restore some degree of lifestyle equilibrium, is to know how to manage stress. Changing our thinking about the reality or likelihood of a personal catastrophe may lead us to find and adopt a more rational and realistic awareness of the problem situation or event. This new awareness may, in turn, lead to practical actions which, when carried out, will defuse the fear and anxiety that previously gripped us. Thus, Person A above may reduce his stress levels about driving on busy motorways when he chooses to have his vehicle properly checked for possible mechanical faults: by having it thoroughly serviced by a competent car mechanic. Person B may minimise the stress level experienced in business conferences by improving her interpersonal and social skills.

The examples given above deal with life situations which can be fairly clearly identified, and which are, therefore, relatively easy to understand and analyse. As a result, the practical steps that need to be taken to lessen the stress level experienced tend to be fairly obvious. However, sometimes stress relates to a kind of free floating anxiety, where the sufferer cannot clearly find an obvious source for the stress experienced. In such a situation, an extensive and careful analysis of the thinking patterns which

underlie such anxiety is essential if the stressor is to be fully understood and dealt with. The *Phoenix Self Help Life Plan Evaluation Questionnaire* may prove of some help in undertaking this personal analysis of thinking.

In most situations, where an individual is experiencing severe stress, it is a powerful sign and timely warning that all is not well in that person's lifestyle. Urgent action is called for to take immediate steps to manage the stress situations involved. As pointed out, it is generally impossible to make all the stressors go away. As well as working out the practical steps necessary to manage the stress, there are a number of other tools which may assist a person to come to terms with what is happening. A close examination of beliefs and values which seeks to expose the underlying patterns of thinking can be hugely beneficial. Learning to improve one's skills to physically and mentally relax by means of a variety of relaxation and meditation techniques can provide meaningful relief. Discussing with a close friend or counsellor those areas of tension which are giving rise to stress can pay dividends. Taking steps to ensure that there is adequate balance between work, family and personal time, and ensuring that there are appropriate supportive relationships which can be called upon at times of need are of major importance. All of the above should be carefully considered by anyone who perceives their lifestyle as being highly stressed.

In the last analysis, stressors have to be managed when they can't be avoided. For most individuals, this is a personal, sometimes complex, ongoing task for which there is no easy or one-fit-all recipe. Everyone must work out, for themselves, the best way forward. However, it is worth reiterating the valuable and helpful roles that physical and mental relaxation exercises, meditation, self-hypnosis and creative visualisation can play in

almost all our lives. The reader is encouraged to read up elsewhere on these topics and encouraged to implement at least one such program in their regular lifestyle.

There is much evidence to suggest that general stress levels in Western societies are at very high and, potentially, dangerous levels. It is in every person's interest to check out the stressors in their lifestyle and to map out a personal stress management plan to deal with them. This would include seeking out all those resources available which, if utilised, would help increase their coping resources. The exercise which follows is highly recommended.

EXERCISE

Examine your current lifestyle and note how you *feel* about it. Are you conscious of dissatisfaction or major inadequacies in it? Try to pinpoint the role *stress* is playing in it. Attempt to identify the major *stressors* [events, situations and relationships] which relate to any negative feelings or concerns in your life.

Take particular note of the responses you provided in the *Phoenix Plan Evaluation Questionnaire*.

When you have identified all your major stressors, list each one individually and, firstly, try to establish whether or not that particular stressor could be removed from your present lifestyle. If it *can*, record the steps you need to take to make this happen. This task will provide you with the basis of a goal which you might want to include in your *Personal Plan* the next time you work through the *Phoenix Self Help Life Plan*.

If the stressor *can't* be removed from your present lifestyle, consider what tools can assist you in managing this source of stress.

- In particular, look at your *thinking* about that stressor. If you were able to change your thinking pattern about it, would it lower the level of stress you feel?
- If so, how could you change your *thinking* about it?
- How do you think other people would see and respond to your stressor?
- Would it deliver the same level of stress in their lives? If not, why not?
- From this awareness, can you gain any insights from this as to what you might *do* to make your situation somewhat better?

Look, too, at some other possibilities open to you: re-planning your lifestyle routines, implementing better time management, establishing an improved home, work and recreational balance, and / or making use of relaxation and meditation techniques.

This exercise should be of great assistance in guiding you as to the types of *goals* which you might establish if you decide to work through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* a second time.

Only you are responsible for your thoughts..
Your thoughts impact on your feelings and strongly influence how you act
Negative thoughts lead to tension and worry.
Positive thoughts take you on the road to happiness..
By monitoring and managing your thoughts you can transform your life..

8. YOUR THINKING

CHANGE YOUR THINKING...

Much has been written in this book about working to improve the quality of your present way of life. You have been introduced to the *Phoenix Self-Help Plan* which has been created and promoted as a framework to help you achieve a better lifestyle, making use of your self-selected goals and chosen project timeframe. You have been encouraged to rigorously examine your current lifestyle and to work out where and what important changes are required if your life is to become more satisfying and productive. You have examined these important areas for change and you have selected and prioritised a number of them as the *goals* for your *Personal Plan*. You have broken these down into manageable chunks or *targets* to be completed within specific periods. You have been assured that if you keep to your carefully crafted plan that you will achieve your goals in a matter of weeks. And, again and again, you have been reminded of your undoubted potential to get from *where you are now* to *where you want to be*.

I believe all of this reflects a sound and rational approach to bringing about the lifestyle changes that are important to you. And I have no doubt that if you follow through with the *Phoenix*

program that you can achieve your goals. But perhaps the presentation of the *Phoenix Plan*, as set down here, glosses over a fundamental requirement which underpins all of the stages of this self-help program. This is the necessity to *check your thinking* about how you view both yourself and life in general. If we find that we engage regularly in negative self-statements we need to resolve to check out the validity of what we say about ourselves, and – where necessary – to take steps to change our habitual ways of thinking.

It is clear that you cannot work through the *Phoenix Plan* successfully without having to make fairly fundamental changes in how you discipline your mind and in how you think about your future. However, for real overall lasting progress, it is not enough to limit these changes in thinking to the specific goals and targets you have chosen in your self-improvement project. Rather, your new thinking approach needs to extend to everything about yourself and how you see and relate to others and to the world at large. This, of course, is a tall order and requires ongoing and consistent commitment to your newly created lifestyle.

Many self-help authors have written about the importance of and necessity to *change your thinking* if you want to move away from a distressed, frustrating and stressful lifestyle to a more satisfying, fulfilling and productive way of life where you enjoy greater fun, better interactions with others and general peace of mind. Many of these writers assert and support the truth in the maxim: *Change Your Thinking – Change Your Life*. A quick search on Google for this phrase will demonstrate the extent of this belief. *Change Your Thinking – Change Your Life* is also a foundation belief in cognitive therapy, on which the *Phoenix*

Self-Help Life Plan is based. [More detail on this is contained in Appendix B – Theoretical Rationale for the Program].

The purpose of the present chapter is to highlight common areas and situations where individuals often possess irrational, distorted and unprofitable ways of thinking about themselves, about those they come in contact with and in their views of life events and the wider world. If real progress in lifestyle reconstruction is to come about and be maintained through the *Phoenix Plan* these areas of faulty thinking need to be discovered, challenged and repaired.

The way we think is vitally important in that our thoughts can largely create our feelings and influence our beliefs. Our feelings and beliefs have a powerful effect on how we behave. Thus, if I think and believe that most people are out to cheat me if they can I will experience suspicion and possibly fear when someone tries to sell me something that I really want [e.g. a second hand car or washing machine]. This initial belief can in turn create a further belief such “*I will never buy a second hand item from anybody because they are only out to cheat you!*” Of course, such a dogmatic belief is irrational and needs to be examined in the light of reality. Clearly, many people have bought second hand cars and washing machines from other individuals and been perfectly happy with their purchases. Likewise, many sellers of second hand goods are honest individuals who would not resort to cheating buyers. Of course, there will also be a small minority of sellers who will try and cheat any buyer. The task for the potential buyer is to discern whether the buyer is honest or fraudulent – admittedly, sometimes not an easy task.

The belief implied in the above example is that most people are out to cheat you wherever and whenever they possibly can.

However, though irrational and without supporting evidence, such a belief may be strongly held and may prevent a person from engaging in the purchase of second hand items. This faulty thinking will be reinforced the next time an opportunity arises to obtain a desired item but which is second hand. The individual will most likely dismiss this new opportunity to purchase because – in their view – *“It would be foolish to buy anything second hand as the seller is bound to cheat you...”*. In time, this refusal to engage in purchasing a second hand item reinforces the distorted belief and disadvantages the individual’s purchasing options.

The above example demonstrates that the faulty thinking in the above situation is not only generated by the initial belief [*“sellers of second hand items will cheat you...”*] but that the continued flawed thought initiates *action* which is both irrational and non-productive [*“I will never buy second hand items...”*]. It follows from this that the *belief* is generally the source from which related faulty thinking and irrational actions arise. Thus, to challenge flawed thinking requires that we seek out the underlying belief which sustains it.

We then need to ask: but *where does the faulty belief come from?* Generally, it will have its origins in early social conditioning or in prior adverse experiences. To set right the flawed thinking, it will be necessary to challenge the belief and to trace its origin. Perhaps the belief had a particular validity at a previous time but no longer serves its original purpose. So, returning to our example of the reluctance to purchase second hand goods, the individual holding this belief may discover that his parents were responsible for foisting this dubious belief on him. The reason the parents held this view may be quite

complex. It may simply have been passed down to them by their parents or it may have been a device used by them to hide their poverty. This suggests a further irrational belief held by them: *“Only poor people buy second hand goods. Prosperous people buy new...”*

Yet, regardless of the reason for the parents’ flawed belief, there is no convincing rational argument why anyone should think and hold the belief that *“Sellers of second hand goods are always out to cheat you...”*. By challenging and rejecting this limiting belief a person is freed from the dogmatic doctrine that to buy second hand goods inevitably leads to being cheated. The person can now see that the more accurate position in regard to purchasing second hand goods is that there is a greater likelihood that you can make a worthwhile and safe purchase. Of course, the wise buyer will – as far as possible – still take appropriate steps and cautions to ensure that the seller is honest and reliable.

More about the Rational-Emotive model on distorted thinking can be found in Appendix B.

Flawed Thinking About Ourselves

Far more serious than the example of flawed thinking discussed above are those negative irrational statements that many of us make about ourselves. These statements represent a most destructive form of flawed thinking in relation to oneself. Many of us – at times – are guilty of misrepresenting ourselves by highlighting our shortcomings and deficits while often ignoring our real talents and potential. We do this by *self-talk*, which is

the way we communicate with ourselves about ourselves. Sometimes, we make statements like

- *I could never achieve that goal...*
- *I don't have that skill...*
- *I'm no use at that...*
- *I'm just an average guy...*

and worse..

- *I don't have any talents...*
- *I'm a bit of a dead loss...*
- *I'm no use...*
- *I could never change...*
- *I'm not that clever...*

These sorts of self-statements seldom have a solid or factual basis. They are the weak cries of someone who essentially feels inferior and without the personal power to take on life's challenges. These forms of implied self-criticism are totally destructive for they rob the individual of motivation to tackle day-to-day issues or to achieve new goals. They can wreck the potential of the *Phoenix Plan* to transform a lifestyle – in spite of having carefully formulated goals and targets to be worked on within a chosen timeframe.

Some further examples of negative self-statements are given in Appendix B [*Theoretical Rationale for the Program*]

It is vital that such negative and largely irrational self-talk is challenged and replaced if any worthwhile lifestyle changes are

ever to be achieved. The following approach may be helpful in combating this flawed thinking:

- Establish what underlying beliefs are responsible for these negative self-statements
- Try to work out the origin of these beliefs: e.g. *Did they arise in childhood as a result of negative messages from parents or those in authority over you? Did they come about as a result of past traumatic experiences?*
- Challenge the beliefs head-on. *Are these beliefs valid for you at your present age and place in life? Do they accord with your own value system?*
- If the beliefs as they stand are inappropriate for you, decide to modify or replace them with other belief statements which will permit future positive self-statements.
- Focus on one or two positive belief statements about yourself which you can totally accept: for example
I am a conscientious person who works hard to achieve any goals I set for myself...
I do have well developed skills in working with others..... or in hobbies such as [examples: woodwork / dressmaking / music / photography / computing... or whatever]
I take every opportunity available to further my levels of physical and mental fitness...

Self-statements such as these [sometimes called *affirmations*] when included in our self-talk and reflected on regularly raise our opinion of ourselves and help to dissipate the effects of previous negative statements. When we feel good about

ourselves through positive self-talk we become more confident, more able to recognise our potential for personal progress and we experience a greater degree of happiness. This, in turn, makes us more able to take on new challenges and to work with high levels of motivation to attain the goals that we choose to set for ourselves.

Flawed Thinking About Others And The World

Another form of flawed thinking occurs when we attribute negative motives to others or to groups of people without having any real evidence to support our assertions. In the example discussed earlier, sellers of second hand goods were branded as cheats. The evidence that exists does not support such a claim. Other examples we might hear from time to time are along the lines of

- *All politicians are totally self-seeking...*
- *I'm sure, deep down, Mary/Michael hates me...*
- *Nobody cares about the poor...*
- *I think the group find me really boring...*
- *Everybody is getting more and more selfish...*
- *Bosses are only interested in profits...*
- *They definitely think I am ugly...*

When statements like the above are challenged and evidence is demanded, they tend to fall short of the total truth. Indeed, they may contain an element of truth in that they may apply to some individuals or to some members of the groups referred to and on some occasions. But as they stand they are distorted and inaccurate statements. If we allow such exaggerated and generalised beliefs to influence our thinking, accepting them as

globally true, we do ourselves a great disservice. We prejudice our ability to make rational and fair assessments of others and we invite a degree of heavy pessimism into our personal world. Such statements of doom and gloom imply that there is no possibility of positive change within the groupings mentioned and paint a sad picture of a very bad world.

If we allow ourselves to live in a world where we hear others regularly promulgating half-truths as absolute fact and we are not able or prepared to challenge the assertions, we place ourselves in danger of including this distorted thinking in our own belief system. If this happens, it is likely that we will lose the motivation to work for positive change both in our private lives and in the wider world. To combat this tendency, we need to take care to avoid listening to or using vague generalisations about other people and groups and to refrain from indulging in mind-reading of other people's intentions and motives. Instead, we should first look for evidence to support whatever we intend to say.

Having faith in ourselves and in our potential for positive lifestyle change through the regular use of supportive self-talk and the continued commitment to reject lapses of negative thinking does not mean that we acquire an exaggerated and deceptive opinion of our ability to achieve new goals and skills. What it does mean is that we are more likely to take on carefully chosen goals – which are in line with our undoubted talents and levels of skills – and have a high likelihood of success in achieving them. Sometimes we might come to realise that a particular goal is outside our range of ability and we decide to discontinue working at it. That's fine, as long as we do not allow ourselves to become depressed and negative because we have

done so. Rather, we have learnt more about our probable potential and that itself can be a step forward in our project to make life better. This new realisation will lead us to later formulate a more appropriate goal which we will then tackle with renewed motivation.

Perhaps one of the most important facts we need to bear in mind is that we alone are responsible for the content of our thoughts. After all, thinking is something that *we* do: the thoughts are not somehow or other downloaded to our brain by some mysterious external process or by the statements or behaviour of other people. We *choose* the nature of our thoughts based on our belief and value systems. Because all thoughts lead to feelings and strongly influence our subsequent actions it means that by controlling the content of our thinking we are ultimately empowered to control our actions – and our lives. Thus the validity of the statement *Change Your Thinking – Change Your Life* becomes apparent.

The most effective way to control our unwanted thoughts is simply to replace the inappropriate thought with another thought which is positive, rational, supportive of a kind view of ourselves and tolerant of the actions of other people and events. This favourable thought will disperse any negative feelings which were occasioned by the original unwanted thought and will result in a more upbeat mood which – in turn – is likely to lead to more productive action. Of course, this *thought stopping* technique takes time and practice to become habitual and we need to be patient with ourselves until we reach that happy stage. At the same time, we can also use *thought stopping* when we challenge negative beliefs and

replace these with more uplifting, less distorted and more rational ones.

Whether we use the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* or some other personal method of working to change our lifestyle for the better, it is imperative that consistent effort is made to monitor the thoughts that make up our thinking patterns. Where thoughts and their underlying beliefs are deemed to be inappropriate, non-productive, unduly self-critical or simply negative it behoves us to challenge and change them. If we fail to do so, the energy of our resolve to achieve our chosen goals will be threatened.

Have a go at the Exercise which follows. It may help you in the task of *thought stopping* and support you in eradicating negativity from your belief and value systems.

EXERCISE

Look again at the Exercise which followed the chapter 6 on *Happiness* [see page 89]. If you did not work through the exercise it might be valuable to do so now before proceeding to the Exercise below.

[A] Examine the initial list of *beliefs* and *values* you listed in your notebook. Then look at the second list you drew up – after you had decided to modify or reject some of those in the first list. In view of what you have just read in this last chapter, ask yourself

- *Do I still agree with the modifications, additions and/or rejections I made in that earlier exercise?*
- *If not, what further changes would I make now?*
- *Since I decided earlier to make changes, has it brought about any significant positive changes in my thinking, general mood and action?*

- *If not, how would I now rewrite the changes I decided on in the Happiness chapter exercise?*

[B] Try to visualise a typical day in your life. Think about the impact of your generally recurring thought patterns. Ask yourself:

- *Are there more negative thoughts than positive productive ones?*
- *If so, can you spot the negative thoughts which recur most often?*
- *Can you link these negative thoughts to beliefs which you have not yet fully challenged?*
- *If so, can you work out new positive beliefs which can replace them?*

Make appropriate notes on your findings if this is helpful.

[C] To help with the substitution of unproductive thoughts, try this mini exercise. Take five minutes two or three times a week when you won't be disturbed and try to engage in positive self-talk. Before beginning, write out three or four complimentary self-statements [*affirmations*] written in the present tense. While in relaxed mode, repeat these self-statements to yourself over the short period of time. Do not allow your analytic self to challenge the veracity of what you are saying.

Sample statements might be:

- *I know now that I have the potential to make my life what I want it to be..*
- *I am a generous and well-intentioned person and all those I meet agree with this assessment..*
- *I am justifiably proud of much that I have achieved in life recently*

- *I have a wide range of talents which I am using to improve the quality of my lifestyle*

[D] Download from the internet some free short guided meditations on *affirmations* and listen to them when you have quiet time for yourself. As before, do not question the accuracy of any of the statements but simply *imagine* them to be totally true. These positive self-statements will enter the subconscious mind and, in time and with sufficient repetition, will become the basis of a firmly held belief.

[You will find links to some free meditation resources in the self-improvement web sites listed in Appendix D as well as on the web sites accessible through www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk]

How we treat others and relate to them often determines how we are treated by them..

It pays to show kindness and a willingness to listen to those around us and to be slow to make judgement on their intentions...

Closeness and quality friendship come quickly when we show respect for the views and feelings of others...

9. COMMUNICATION

This chapter on Communication is included as verbal interaction is, probably, the major life area that you need to get right if you are to relate well with others. Relating effectively with others is the essential basis for establishing, between the individuals involved, sound mutual respect, a spirit of co-operation and a willingness to exchange views and to work towards solutions when issues have to be resolved. Successful team work, whether in the home, at play or in the workplace, requires good interpersonal relationships among all participants.

Much of the interpersonal stress that individuals and couples experience can often be traced back to poor communication methods. If we are to minimise our stress levels it is advisable to look at and evaluate our personal modes of communication.

All of us, all our lives, are involved regularly in face-to-face verbal communication with others. How we interact and communicate with any individual will often depend on the role which that individual plays in our lives. Clearly, we will communicate differently, in both intensity and intimacy, with our partner or spouse than with the postman or supermarket checkout assistant. However, in all situations, certain

characteristics will need to be present, in varying degrees, if our interactions are to be mutually pleasant and rewarding. These characteristics would include the following:

- *We need to say what we mean in a frank, friendly, non-threatening and assertive way.*
- *It must be evident to the person or persons with whom we are communicating that we want to respect their points of view and acknowledge their fundamental right to hold and express views, values and beliefs which may differ from our own.*
- *Our body language, especially facial expression, needs to be consistent with the statements we are making.*
- *In our approach to others, there should be no suggestion of arrogance or feigned superiority.*
- *Appropriate visual contact needs to be made with those to whom we speak and to those being listened to. The degree of this contact will vary with the nature of the intended communication, the status of the person involved, the importance of the message, the level of agreement or disagreement about the matter being discussed and the quality of the existing relationship(s) which exist(s) between or among speakers and listeners.*
- *When others are speaking, we need to be good listeners, always allowing others adequate time to finish what they want to say and never attempting to anticipate what the other person is attempting to express [by – for example - finishing their sentences for them]*

- *Good listening also involves verbally reflecting back to the speaker the essence of what we think has been stated, thus permitting her/him to clarify or modify what has already been said.*
- *We need to be as accurate as we can be in what we say, avoiding all exaggerations, unwarranted generalisations and deliberately prejudicial statements.*
- *Choosing the right moment to introduce a topic, especially a potentially controversial one, is most important.*
- *Communicating sometimes needs to be a full-time activity. It is unlikely that you will communicate effectively, on a difficult issue, if you are trying to carry out another unrelated task at the same time.*
- *The use of humour can sometimes, when used appropriately, help to create the right environment for good verbal interactions. On the contrary, the use of sarcasm seldom helps.*

Communicating is not just about *making statements* to others but also involves *listening* and *responding*. Perhaps these latter areas are ones where many of us are somewhat inadequate in our communication skills. Instead of listening carefully to the entire statement of the speaker before responding, it is common for many people, once they get the gist of what they think is being said, to use this time to work out what they intend to say in reply. Often, this approach misses some vital ingredient in the speaker's statement: and, so, misunderstandings are born.

Misunderstandings can also arise when the listener interrupts the speaker, assuming they know what is going to be said. Some people may even try to finish the speaker's sentences for them. Either way, this is likely to upset the speaker's train of thought

and to make him/her wonder whether the listener really wants to hear what he/she is trying to say.

Appropriate honesty is an important consideration in our verbal interactions with others. The level of honesty essential for successful communication will vary according to the person we are talking to and the role he or she plays in our lives. For example, if the new neighbour across the street greets you for the first time and asks *How are you ?* you are unlikely to provide the same answer to her as you would to your spouse if he were to ask you the same question. In the latter case, you would probably consider it appropriate to give a fuller “more honest” answer, maybe including reference to the aches and pains you are experiencing which have arisen since yesterday's first gym session. You might also tell your spouse or partner how, overall, you are feeling about yourself, including some of the things you might be fearful of or worrying about. You would expect it as likely that both of you would talk further about the details of what is on your mind. You would expect to be asked, and be willing to respond to, some probing questions as to why, today, you are feeling the way you do. This level of honesty with your partner is totally appropriate and normal within a close intimate relationship, but would be quite inappropriate and ill-advised when responding to the greeting from your new neighbour.

Indeed, if you were to provide the same full answers, or level of honesty, in response to your neighbour's *How are you ?* it might well be that your neighbour would make sure she didn't ask you the same question at the next casual over-the-fence meeting.

Appropriate honesty within a relationship needs to be distinguished from *deception*. You are not deceiving your new neighbour when you respond to her question in a limited way by

answering *Pretty well, thanks*. However, you might be guilty of deception if you replied to your spouse or partner in the same fashion.

Tact and *diplomacy* are further important considerations when we communicate with others. For example, if your boss asks you *How's the project going ?* you might say *I'm getting on top of it now* . Yet, referring to the same project, you might, that evening, confide to your spouse *This new project is driving me mad! It's making me hate my job*. In another situation, your close friend, an avid rock and roll fan, might ask you how you like his new MP3. You might respond with *It's not bad, but I don't really follow rock and roll* . Inwardly, you might say *What a horrible sound – it grates on my nerves*.

When you employ this kind of tact and diplomacy you are not seeking to deceive the questioner, though, of course, you are not giving a fully truthful answer. The justification for it, however, lies in the fact that to provide the totally truthful answer might set in motion a series of consequences which you neither want or deserve. In the examples above, and if you responded with the total truth, your boss might enquire as to whether you might be advised to seek a new position elsewhere, or, in the case of your rock and roll friend, you might cause offence or place undue and unnecessary strain on your relationship. However, in both cases, the justification is only valid when the issues involved are peripheral or relatively unimportant to your relationship. So you might be aware that while your present project at work is testing your patience, it will be completed by the end of the month and you will then return to other regular projects which you generally enjoy. With your rock and roll friend, you may know that while he is deeply involved in that music genre and spends much of his free private time listening

to it, he generally doesn't expect you to share the experience with him. It is also highly probable that there are other life areas where you both have common interests which you pursue together happily.

It has to be repeated, however, that there is at least one area where fuller honesty in communication is nearly always vital. This is in a close, intimate and life-sharing relationship. It is generally the case, within a sound relationship, that your spouse or partner wants to have a fairly detailed knowledge of what's going on in your life and in your head. They want to know and share about mutual feelings, fears, dreams and goals. They will expect full and honest answers to most of the questions they put to you. You will most likely expect the same from them. This is not to say that there is no room or opportunity for tact and diplomacy within an intimate relationship, but it is more likely that there will need to be a greater level of total truthfulness about matters which concern both parties. It is probably true to say that once a lack of *appropriate honesty* occurs within a close one-to-one relationship, then it is likely to increase and, eventually, it will seriously endanger the relationship's future. Perhaps more than anything else, working towards total truthfulness in sharing one's feelings about the relationship, in setting out what you see to be your needs and wants within it, stating how you want it to develop, talking about matters of sexuality, children's upbringing, finances, the roles of friends and in-laws, the sharing of chore roles: all of these frank discussions are essential if a fundamental and long-lasting trust is to be established and maintained between partners. Once trust in an intimate relationship is fractured or lost, communication becomes less effective, honesty less present and the relationship can be on the slippery slope to break-up.

In all face-to-face communications, the role of *cordiality* is important. By *cordiality*, I mean being pleasant in tone and facial expression, being free from irritation, being accurate in what you are saying, refraining from put-downs and being non-demanding. Cordiality bids us to keep our patience and to give the listener the right to accept or decline, or agree or disagree, with whatever we have chosen to ask or speak about. We are not being cordial if, deliberately, we misrepresent a person's point of view, their attitude to any issue or their history of behaviour in any life areas. The cordial communicator avoids the use of phrases such as *You always..* , *You make me...* ,*You never...* using instead *I* statements such as *I feel when*

Lack of cordiality in verbal interactions seems often to occur within family groups and between couples rather than in the workplace or with relative strangers. When this happens, it limits and strains the possibility of effective communications among those concerned.

Improving the quality of our communication with others is a life-long challenge. When we are stressed or unhappy about what life is handing out to us, there is a likelihood that our interactive skills with others will become less effective. Life pressures, such as perceived time shortage, having the sense of too many things to do or the demands of others, may cause us to try less to communicate well. As a result, those trying to interact with us may become less patient, less cordial and, perhaps, unfair and over demanding. Invariably, the result is further tension, misunderstandings and challenged relationships.

The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, through its *Lifestyle Evaluation Questionnaire*, highlights areas, in a person's life, where communication may be ineffective or even lacking. Nearly all life

crises have some element of communication disorder contained within them. Working through the *Phoenix Self-Help Plan* will encourage and assist most readers to look at the quality of their verbal interactions with significant others. Improving communication can often become a worthwhile goal within the *Plan*.

It is important to note and remember that the quality and effectiveness of verbal interactions and communication tend to be reciprocal: that is, if we relate warmly and cordially with others they are most likely to respond to us in the same way. If we are aggressive, cold, or unfair in what we say to others and in how we communicate with them, their responses to us are likely to mirror our own.

Now work through the Exercise which follows

EXERCISE

Set aside at least half an hour when you can think about the quality of your own verbal interaction and communication skills with others. Equip yourself with a small notebook to make appropriate jottings.

Look at your communication skills in at least *three* of the following categories: *home and family, spouse or partner, children, the workplace, close friends, general acquaintances, shopping places, strangers*. Try to assess and measure how you ordinarily behave in each of your chosen categories against the *characteristics* for effective communication set out in the chapter. Indicate both your *positive* and *negative* habits.

Now look more closely at your communication skills within one of the categories selected. Choose the one which you regard as most important in your life at the moment. Assess it further in terms of *appropriate honesty, tact and diplomacy, deception and cordiality* [as

defined above]. Make jottings as to where improvements are necessary or can be made.

Make an approach to at least *two* people who know you well and with whom you interact regularly. Ask them to advise you or to write down, as they see it, the *pros* and *cons* of your communication style. Invite them to make suggestions as to how you might modify your style so as to improve it further. Then compare the responses you obtain from the two individuals and note any similarities or differences.

Looking at your own analysis of your communication skills and the comments made by the two people who provided you with feedback, select an area where you want to work to improve your present skills. Write down *precisely* what it is you want to do differently and assess *how* and *when* you will be able to measure your level of improvement.

If you are working through the *Phoenix Self-Help Plan* a second time, perhaps you can make this one of your *goals* or *targets*.

Self-acceptance is a precious goal and a necessary one if we are to live without the pain of thinking that we should have achieved something for which our abilities and life circumstances have not equipped us..

But self-acceptance also allows us to strive for those goals which are within our range and which are dear to us..

10. SELF-ACCEPTANCE

While every participant in the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is looking to improve the quality of their lifestyles, no real long-term equilibrium or sense of personal peace will come to anyone unless and until they learn self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance implies awarding yourself unconditional respect and worth as a human being. It also means knowing yourself and accepting yourself for the person you are, together with your range of talents, shortcomings and potentials. This wide awareness is learnt only through careful self-examination and analysis. Apart from working personally to obtain this important self-knowledge, it will prove helpful to take note of other people's observations about you as well as to discuss, with wise friends and advisers, what they perceive as your personal strengths and limitations.

Such a self-searching exercise should not be undertaken in a highly defensive mood where you are inclined to largely deny or challenge how you really see yourself to be or what the honest opinions of trusted others indicate. The exercise requires a degree of personal humility linked to a kindly self-assessment. What self-acceptance requires is to achieve a realistic and informed view of who you really are, noting both the undoubted

talents you possess and the life and skill areas where you may be somewhat lacking [compared to *some* other individuals] as well as discovering those areas where you can – if you wish – develop further.

Having secured valuable input from selected others, you need to mesh this with your own careful self-assessment. Yet you are not primarily in the business of comparing yourself to others or to making critical judgements as to the kind of person you seem to be. What you are striving to do is to lead yourself to a position where you accept that the self-sketch you have built up of yourself is a fairly accurate indicator of who and what you really are.

Then comes what is, perhaps, the *harder* part – and certainly the *more important* part – *accepting this version of you as valid, totally OK and worthy of your and others' respect*. However, remember, your self-acceptance of this version of you is not a static situation – it acknowledges also the things you can do to make changes and to become what *you* regard as a *better* person. It also notes things and changes which are probably outside your capacity to become or to accomplish. Self-acceptance does not exclude or limit you from efforts at self-improvement, for it does provide you with real clues as to where such improvement is likely to be worthwhile.

A vital understanding of self-acceptance is that you recognise that your worth and entitlement to respect is not based merely on your achievements or on how you think, but - as well – exists simply because you are and regardless of whether or not you choose to engage in self-development exercises. Most of us would agree to accord this basic reverence to most other human beings yet many of us seem to have difficulty in bestowing it on

ourselves. As long as we link our sense of self-worth solely to what we think we *should* accomplish, or to what we consider others might *expect* of us, or to a set of rigid behavioural rules, inherited from a family, community or religious culture, which tell us how we *ought to* act, then we will, almost certainly, deny ourselves that essential peace of mind and self-respect that we unconditionally deserve and seek. Again, most of us need to be more generous with ourselves in making our self-judgements.

On the other hand, once we recognise and accept that we are basically OK, entitled to genuine respect from those around us, possess – like anybody does – limited talents and some skill deficits, have achieved some goals which we rate worthwhile, have made mistakes and miscalculations in the past for which we do not berate ourselves and do not feel impelled to continuously seek perfection in what we do, THEN we will most likely achieve a sense of pride in who we are, satisfaction at what we have done well and be encouraged to work at our future self-development because it will further enhance our lives and raise our self-esteem.

Moreover, with self-acceptance, our efforts at improving ourselves and our lifestyles will be built on a realistic awareness of our abilities, skills and limitations and will never be based on ill-considered dreams or negative self-judgements. We will cease to care over much for the opinions and criticisms of others, knowing that we have become our own person with a conscience and behavioural system created by our own thought out values and beliefs and which recognise our own rights as well as those of others.

In particular, true self-acceptance requires that we develop in being able to forgive ourselves for the life mistakes we have

made and the unfriendly acts which, in the past, we have directed against others. We need to regard such previous happenings as present opportunities for learning and as indicators for future achievements. Self-acceptance requires us to work harder at loving and respecting ourselves, at refraining from unnecessary self-criticisms, while yet seeing ourselves – overall – as neither innately superior or inferior to others.

I have said above that self-acceptance is linked to a healthy self-esteem. When you possess high *self-esteem* it means that you have a sense of confidence and competence in facing the inevitable challenges and hardships that beset your life. It means you feel OK about who you are and how you look, that you like and respect yourself as a person and believe that most others will find you interesting and worth getting to know. High self-esteem also equips you to be assertive about your personal values and beliefs and encourages you to follow your aspirations and dreams for lifestyle improvement.

If you have not yet embraced self-acceptance then your self-esteem is likely to be low, bringing with it fears about your own abilities, a sense of inferiority to others, a degree of self-loathing and a generalised gloom and despondency about life in general. When such negative thinking patterns become fixed, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to apply yourself effectively to any plans for self-development.

I believe that there is also a link between self-acceptance and spirituality. True self-acceptance, it seems to me, implies an acknowledgement that ultimate control over life and death is somewhat outside your jurisdiction. While you may do every sensible thing to foster good health and longevity and to avoid accidents, your efforts are no guarantee of success. Serious

illnesses and accidents do happen to some people in spite of their health enhancing and careful lifestyles. Nor had you any conscious choice in the matter of when and where you were born, your gender, the kind of parents provided, the culture which surrounded you in childhood or the level of material comfort available to you.

This general awareness of our own powerlessness and absence of birth choices can prompt questions like

- *Why am I here?*
- *What's life all about?*
- *Have I any responsibilities to help others?*
- *What happens when I die?*
- *After death, will I be judged for my earthly actions?*

Most people do not have full and personally satisfying answers to such questions. *Spirituality* is about our individual responses to these kinds of considerations. A *spiritual* person is someone who recognises and admits this lack of real power over life and death, who acknowledges the possible existence of some creative power or force greater than themselves, a person who has etched out and/or believes in a personal moral code which enshrines and defends a set of basic rights for all living creatures and who tries to live their life according to this behavioural code. Clearly, having a sense of spirituality is not necessarily dependent on membership of, or adherence to, an established religion or church. Of course, the traditional religions do tend to give very full answers to the kinds of metaphysical questions posed above, but you do not need to accept any of these answers to be a truly spiritual person.

It is hard to visualise true self-acceptance without some

component of spirituality. If a sense of spirituality is lacking, there is likely to be a greater tendency to personal confusion and anxiety as to what life is all about. While the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* does not specifically address the concepts of self-acceptance or spirituality as essential *goals*, it is highly recommended that participants in the *Plan* should give some consideration to these important aspects of their lives.

The essential concept of self-acceptance is eloquently enshrined in the well-known *Serenity Prayer* [by Reinhold Niebuhr] which has been adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve step life improvement programs:

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.*

The Exercise which follows may help you to establish higher levels of self-acceptance and spirituality in your present life.

EXERCISE

Read through Niebuhr's *Serenity Prayer* and try to assess how much its sentiments guide your life at present. Ignore the *God* inclusion if it does not fit into your personal philosophy. Concentrate on the *Prayer's* essential meaning. Make written notes of any life areas which come to mind where there is disparity between your lifestyle and the prayer.

Look into *who* you really are and what your *public* behaviour displays about your general views on life and the *beliefs* and *values* it reflects. Are these beliefs and values and the *moral code* you profess to hold really your own? Have influences such as culture, family, religion and friends largely predetermined these? Explore what you *truly* believe,

value highly and consider as worthwhile moral guidelines. Ignore, for the moment, the *should...*, *ought to...*, *must...*, *everybody expects...* considerations. *Now write down a summary of what you have worked out.*

Look closely at yourself and your life: your overall situation, your talents and limited skill areas. What are the things in your life which *cannot* be changed? What are the things that *can* be changed? Which of the things which can be changed would you like to change? Would such changes fit in with your awareness of your potential? How would you feel if you decided not to make these changes? *Make appropriate notes on your deliberations.*

Decide what you can and need to do to achieve greater self-acceptance in your life. How can you translate these ideas into practical *goals* and *targets*? Could you implement any of these in the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* if you work through it a further time? *Keep written records of your findings.*

Consider the matter of *spirituality* in your life. Make an assessment as to whether or not you need, or want, to work on this issue. If you do, how can you – in the longer term – proceed with this? In the shorter term, is there any action you can take to assist in developing your sense of *spirituality*? Check out the many resources on the Internet and elsewhere which might prove of assistance. Talk to a close friend or adviser about your thoughts on spirituality.

Each of us has so much to be grateful for...
Noting and appreciating our talents and the good things which are now present and happening in our lives can lead us to feel happier and to be more motivated to work productively and for positive lifestyle change..
Many many people in our world do not have access to the things and opportunities we take so much for granted..

11. GRATITUDE

One commonly used analogy in self-help books to contrast the *optimist* with the *pessimist* is that of the half-filled glass. The optimist describes the glass as being *half full* while the pessimist says it is *half empty*. The optimist is held to have a more *positive* view of events while the pessimist sees the same events in a more *negative* way. Most of us would not disagree with the thrust of this argument. We can all probably recall occasions in our own lives when we have taken the *pessimistic* view of a situation knowing full well that there was a convincing case for being more *optimistic* about the matter's eventual outcome.

The purpose of this short chapter is to take this analogy a little further and to assert that most life situations for most people reflect a situation where the individual's glass is *three quarters full*. This is to say that in *most* scenarios of life difficulties there is more reason to be optimistic rather than pessimistic. It is, however, acknowledged that in *rare* cases of life threatening events this may not be true. However, it is *probably* true to assume that most of those reading these pages do not, at this moment, have to battle with grim catastrophic happenings in their lives. This is a reason for comfort and optimism because it means that most painful and chaotic lifestyle problems can be eased, perhaps even resolved. The one condition for lessening

the pain and distress of any lifestyle problem is that we take action to solve it by working intelligently and creatively to do so. After all, this is one of the prime purposes of the *Phoenix Self Help Life Plan*. To return to our analogy, I would assert that *in most situations the glass is three quarters full*.

But what does this *really* mean? It means that, for *most* individuals *most* of their lives, there are more *good* things than *bad* things happening at any one point in time. It means that the problem areas of one's life can be seen and measured against the background of the many favourable ingredients of that lifestyle. In this way, a more realistic assessment of problem areas is possible and hope and determination to resolve matters is likely to flourish. However, when a problem area is perceived without taking note of the many good things still operating in that lifestyle then the person involved is more likely to experience anxiety and depression and to have great difficulty in believing that the matter can be contained or resolved.

In other words, our way of thinking can strongly influence how we see the problem area and effects greatly our capacity to work to remedy it. If we see the glass as *three quarters full*, we will be optimistic and resourceful. If we see the glass as *three quarters empty*, we will be pessimistic and fearful.

What has all this to do with *gratitude*? The argument advanced here is that if we can search out the many good attributes in our lifestyle at a time when we are experiencing problems, and be *grateful* for the presence of the good things, then it will become easier for us to see the true dimensions of the problems and to take appropriate steps to deal with them. The raw emotions sometimes experienced with life difficulties can blot out our awareness of the many positive things which remain in our lives.

Seeking out and acknowledging the good happenings in life and expressing gratitude for their presence can be uplifting and can reassure us that the future can be made positive if we choose to work at bringing about the necessary change. In this context, *gratitude is acknowledging and expressing thanks for the many good things that have happened and are happening in your life.*

In the mysterious hand-out that is life, none of us are entitled to anything. We cannot demand to be born rich or intelligent, beautiful or musically gifted, charismatic or a great footballer. We are as likely to be born poor and with lower than average IQ, physically deformed, tone deaf, unimpressive in personality and with poor spatial skills. How we are is largely decided by the great lottery that is our birth. This is the source of most of our talents and limitations. Life's challenge is, probably, to use and develop our talents to the highest level, to get by with our limitations and to use all the skills we possess to develop where we want and however we can.

However, in reality, *many* of us get a fairly good deal at birth. We get at least average intelligence, reasonable health, fair looks, acceptable material surroundings, plus a collection of skills by means of which, ultimately, we can earn a living, enjoy warm relationships with others and carve out a pleasant lifestyle for ourselves. Of course, some are not so lucky.

If you are one of the *many* described above, and you probably are, then – right away – you have reason for being grateful for the many gifts accorded to you. If you doubt this, consider for a moment how things could be different. For example, you could have been born disabled or in a war torn country where medical supplies and treatment are unavailable. Your parents could have perished in air raids and there could be a general shortage of

essential food. And so, on and on...

You may retort.. *Yes, this is probably true. But what about those who are provided with the very best of what life can offer? These lucky ones are born into riches, are talented and physically beautiful, go to the best schools and universities and never seem to meet misfortune. If I compare myself to them, I have been dealt a rough deal!* My response to this argument would be to acknowledge that there are probably a *minority* of individuals who fit into this category. I concede that their lives *may* be easier than yours or mine, but I ask: *why compare my life with theirs?* It seems more logical and fair to compare the lot that life has given me with that of the *majority* of souls. When *this* comparison is made, there is probably little doubt that your lot, and mine, is quite an acceptable inheritance. True, it may not match the comforts and opportunities of the rich and famous you talked about, but it is still rich in benefits, worthwhile challenges and has the potential for personal happiness. Remember, too, that the rich and famous – for all their inherited and sometimes hard won advantages – do not necessarily achieve a higher level of personal peace and contentment than you might achieve. Indeed, tales of celebrities abound with sad stories of their personal pain, unhappiness and even despair, in spite of being beautiful, rich and famous. For me, and I hope for you, it follows that being grateful for what life has provided, notwithstanding its shortcomings, is eminently sensible and emotionally uplifting.

Perhaps, too, a glance at history over the last few hundred years will convince the average reader that – in spite of all the difficulties that besiege the twenty-first century - our general material standards of living, the medical services available to us, our transport systems, our opportunities for personal career and

advancement, our rights of political choice, our freedom to express our views and to improve our lifestyles: all of these are convincing reasons for being grateful for being alive at this time rather than in an earlier age. *Would you, really, be willing to work and live in the way the majority in your community did one hundred and fifty years ago?*

What do we gain from allowing gratitude a prominent place in our lives? It seems to me that it provides many benefits:

- *it makes us recognise and focus on the undoubtedly good things that surround us and do happen to us*
- *it helps us to see negative and unfortunate occurrences in a more realistic perspective and as challenges*
- *it gives courage to the belief that the future will probably not be entirely full of pain, distress and misfortune*
- *it motivates us to deal with negative events so as to minimise their impact on the quality of our living*
- *it enables us to assess how much worse things could be if we were in someone else's shoes*
- *it helps us to appreciate and enjoy the good things that have come, and are likely to come, our way*
- *it can encourage us to work at areas of self development by which we can maximise the advantages of our birth inheritances.*

Another important aspect of gratitude is learning to *thank* others, family, friends and strangers, for the kindnesses and favours they bestow on us. Gratitude impels us to say *Thank you* more often, to call someone up to express appreciation for the time, services, and/or friendship they have provided. Gratitude also leads us to respect and practise the old-fashioned virtues of politeness and good manners. By dealing with others in this

positive fashion, we cement and enhance the quality of our relationships and demonstrate our willingness and ability to participate successfully in group ventures, whether family, work or leisure related. Inevitably, the new warmth of relationships that we establish tends to increase our personal confidence, raises our level of self-esteem and motivates us to work to achieve those lifestyle changes that we regard as important.

Try working through the exercise below.

EXERCISE

Take some time to look closely at your current lifestyle. Try to analyse and assess it as an objective and friendly third party might do. Make lists of the *positives* and the *advantages* that your lifestyle offers. Use headings such as *My surroundings*, *My material standards*, *My proven skills*, *Family and friends*, *Work and income*, *Leisure and hobbies*, *Current opportunities*.

When you have completed your lists, ask a friend or family member to check them out for you and see if they can develop your lists further.

Now make lists of the *negatives* and the *disadvantages* in your lifestyle. Use headings like *The things I lack*, *What's wrong with me as a person*, *Work problems*, *Family difficulties*, *Other relationship problems*, *Opportunities not available to me*.

As before, ask a friend or family member to check these out for you and see if they can develop your lists further.

Now compare your lists of *positives* with your lists of *negatives*. Which is the longer list? Try to assess how they compare. If you were to give a numeral weighting to each item [e.g. (in the first set of lists) *big* positive = 3, *average* positive = 2, *minor* positive = 1 and (in the

second set of lists) *big negative = 3, average negative = 2, minor negative = 1*] how would the scores work out?

[*My prediction here would be that – for most people - the positives would outscore the negatives*]

Now return to your lists of *negatives*. Go through these and group them in the following four categories:

1. *shortcomings and problems experienced at some stage in life by many people and either resolved or lived with*
2. *shortcomings and problems experienced at some stage in life by a minority of people and either resolved or lived with*
3. *shortcomings and problems experienced at some stage in life by a minority of people and life-threatening or never resolved*
4. *shortcomings and problems experienced at some stage in life by a small minority and which proved fatal.*

Now look at the lists for each of the four categories above. Negatives in *Category 1* make you little different from most other people. Those in *Category 2* mean you are not alone in dealing with these kinds of difficulties. Negatives in *Category 3* require some special thinking or, perhaps, third party advice. *Category 4* matters probably require immediate professional help.

Now look again at your earlier lists of *negatives* and *positives*. Having examined and categorised the negatives, *how do the lists now compare?* [For most people, the positives will well outnumber the negatives: in other words, *your glass is three-quarters full*].

Now plan *action* to deal with as many of the negatives as you can while expressing *gratitude* for the greater number of positives. Hopefully, the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* set out in this book will assist you to do so. *Good luck!*

We risk our peace of mind and sense of life enjoyment if we do not make space and time in our lifestyle schedule for opportunities to relax with family and friends...

Good life balance allows us to work hard, enjoy our family and friends, plan our future, make and take time for ourselves and engage in healthy exercise for body and mind..

12. LIFE BALANCE

This short chapter is about how your time might be divided up among the various activities which make up a lifestyle: and about some of the choices open to you. If we aspire to a lifestyle that is relaxed, highly productive, fulfilling in most respects and one in which we experience a pervading sense of personal happiness then there is an ingredient which must be present. This is a sense of life balance. *Life balance* is about having appropriate involvements in your chosen areas of living.

Life balance is about making time in your life for both essential and recreational activities. It is generally held that an individual who permits one kind of activity to dominate their lifestyle is more likely to suffer from stress and personal frustration than someone who has a balanced range of life activities. Thus, a mother who spends most of her time caring for the family and household and does not permit herself to claim time for relaxation and her own interests may - in the longer run - end up feeling used and disadvantaged. Likewise, the parent who spends long hours and weekends on career work projects and doesn't find time to be with the family can easily become uptight and unfulfilled. In both examples, communication and relationships with others are likely to be adversely effected.

The dilemma that faces each one of us is *How can I divide up my*

time so that I can meet all my responsibilities and still have time to do all the things that I would like to do?

We are all subject to the same twenty-four hours a day limitation. Clearly, if we spend too much time in one life area the result is obvious – we have less time to spend in other areas. We recognise that if we do not make time for all that we *have* to do, and for what is *important* to us, that life will be unbalanced and we will probably be less than happy. Remember the old saying: *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.*

This chapter attempts to draw attention to many of the life areas that most of us have to respond to. Some areas may well be essential choices in our personal lifestyle mixture [e.g. earning a living] while others are entirely a matter of choice [e.g. pursuing a hobby]. While our lifestyle is essentially built up by the choices we make, it is essential that we attend to and make time for a wide range of life areas if life is to be balanced and rewarding.

Below I have set out a list of life areas which I regard as important ingredients in a balanced lifestyle. However, as individual choices can vary as to what must be included in your preferred lifestyle package, I have not stated what *must* be included, or suggested that one or more life areas are *less* important than others. However, it does seem to me that everyone must give consideration to all of the areas listed below. Under each heading I have placed a few key questions which may help the reader to decide on the relative importance of any particular life area. Remember too that it is not just a matter of whether an area is included or not, but of the level of priority an individual accords to it.

The list below does not deal with the primary needs of having somewhere to live, guaranteed personal safety and a sufficient

food and clothing supply. It assumes these are provided. Neither does the order of life areas as set out in the list below indicate any sense of priority of one life area over another.

It is suggested that you work through the questions below and respond to them as honestly as possible. It might help if you record some of your responses in your notebook. When you have completed this task, consider how your answers are relevant to your current lifestyle and summarise what changes would have to occur in this if a future lifestyle was as close as possible to the way you would like it to be.

It is hoped that this little exercise will help you to make the right choice of life areas which you can build into a future lifestyle: and which will reflect the kind of life balance you seek.

Work and career

Do I have a satisfactory means of earning a living?

Does the time I spend related to earning an income still allow me opportunity to include other important life areas in my lifestyle?

Family

Am I able and willing to allocate sufficient time to relate well to members of my immediate family?

Do I work at developing warm and supportive relationships with my partner and (if applicable) my children?

Have I planned sufficient time for playing and sharing fun?

[If living alone] Do I ensure that I have a close sharing relationship with at least one other adult?

Health

Do I take consistent care of my health and include an exercise program appropriate for my age and state of health?

Do I follow the national guidelines for good nutrition and healthy eating?

Am I overweight or obese? If so, am I taking steps to reduce my body weight?

Do I make time for including physical and mental relaxation programs in my lifestyle?

Finances

Do I generally live within my means?

Do I have serious debt issues? If so, am I dealing effectively with them?

Is my household and other spending built around a planned budget?

Personal time

Do I recognise the importance of having free time for myself?

Do I regularly place the needs of others above my own?

If I take time for myself, do I feel guilty about it?

When I make free time for myself, do I use some of this time as an opportunity for physical and mental relaxation practices?

Do I encourage others in my family or network to insist on having some private time for themselves?

Fun and hobbies

Do I have a fun activity or hobby that I really enjoy and participate in?

Does my hobby activity give me full scope to be fully creative?

If I have no real hobbies, why is this?

Sleep and rest

Do I have sufficient and restful sleep? If not, what are the consequences of this?

Does my lifestyle permit me to have a short rest or siesta if I suddenly feel tired?

Do others somehow keep me from having the rest I need?

Intimate relationship

Do I have a really intimate relationship with another person?

If not, do I seek or need such a relationship? If so, what am I doing about it?

Is there enough time in my lifestyle to enjoy intimacy with a special partner?

Sense of life purpose

Am I aware of a sense of purpose in my life? Am I satisfied with where it will take me?

If, currently, I do not have a sense of purpose, do I feel the need for one?

Do I feel supported by some form of spiritual belief? If not, do I yearn for this?

Time with non-family friends

Do I have close friends outside the family setting?

If I have no close non-family friends, why is this?

Can I share personal problems with at least one of these friends?

Personal Organisation

Have I established workable routines that allow me to carry out essential tasks without feeling hassled for lack of time?

Is important paperwork filed sensibly or do I regularly mislay things?

Is my home or work area often in a cluttered state?

Conversation

Apart from day to day routine interactions with others at home and elsewhere, am I able to have relaxed conversations with others on issues that interest me?

Do I feel that there is enough laughter in my personal world?

If not, how could this be improved?

Addictions

Do I have any addictive behaviours which concern me or which can spoil the relationships I have with others?

If so, what am I doing about it?

What would I like to do about it?

Would it be valuable to obtain external help to deal with my particular addictive behaviour?

Personal goals

Do I have a vision of where I want to be in the future [e.g. two to five years ahead]?

If so, have I established realistic goals to get me there?

If not, do I ever think about where I might be or want to be in the future?

EXERCISE

When you have worked through the questions, take time and think hard and carefully about how you have responded. Try to pick out the life areas which are currently not being given sufficient priority in your lifestyle. See if you can create a new model which will permit a better distribution of life areas while still giving you the time and space to complete what you regard as absolutely essential activities. You will need to not only work out what life areas you want to give preference to in your re-planned lifestyle but also how you will allocate sufficient time to include your choices in your weekly or monthly timeframe. You might have to consider dropping some of your current activities to allow space and time for your new choices.

Remember, the overall objective of this exercise is to help you to transform your current lifestyle into a more balanced one which – when implemented - will bring you greater personal fulfilment and satisfaction.

Look back at the Exercise you completed at the end of the chapter on *Gratitude* [page 140]. Take careful note of what you then recorded as important inclusions in a better personal lifestyle. Compare these ideas with what you have just worked out as desirable lifestyle components after reading this chapter.

Try to merge the two sets of ideas into one composite personal recommendation as to how you might improve your existing lifestyle. Write your conclusions in your special notebook. If you are able,

discuss your choices with your partner or your buddy or a close friend. If necessary, make further adjustments to your notes.

Next have a close look at the goals you selected when you worked through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* earlier in this book. Consider the following questions:

- *Do the goals you selected in the Plan reflect and support the kind of new lifestyle you are considering?*
- *In the light of your newly planned lifestyle blueprint, are your Phoenix Plan goals too demanding or too tame?*
- *Is the timeframe you have selected for the Phoenix Plan too short? Would you have a better chance of eventual success in achieving your selected goals if you extended this timeframe?*
- *Bearing in mind the possible revamp of your lifestyle, are your Plan goals still specific, realistic and measurable?*

Now make any further adjustments to your notes about re-planning your lifestyle and consider the steps necessary to start implementing the changes you have chosen.

13. TIPS FOR MINI-GOALS

It has been stated several times throughout the book that your revamped lifestyle should be one that, overall, brings you satisfaction and fulfilment. This is most important if your general levels of happiness and peace of mind are to be established and maintained. The point has also been made that there needs to be a careful balance in your choice of lifestyle activities so that your home, career, personal development and other needs are provided for.

However, there is sometimes the danger that even a carefully constructed lifestyle package can end up being somewhat tedious and perhaps even boring. This is because most of us tend to place a heavy emphasis on those life areas relating to earning a living and maintaining a home and family: and place far less emphasis on relationships, personal development and having fun and laughter in our lives. However, if we ignore the latter areas or do not provide for them adequately we run the risk of ending up with a lifestyle experience which can leave us less than happy.

This short section of the book has been included to try and offset this possible difficulty. It highlights a large number of important non-career activities, all of which are broadly related

to the concept of personal development. Most people would agree that some of these activities should be included in any well-balanced lifestyle.

It is suggested that you look through the lists below and check out that some of these activities, or similar activities, are planned for and included in your new lifestyle blueprint. If not, consider including some of these *mini-goals* insofar as time and opportunity permit.

Some of the activities can also be used as *rewards* within the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* program: for example, when you complete a week of the program and all your targets have been met as planned on your *Program Monitoring Sheet*.

The activities are loosely grouped into the following categories:

- Activities With Others
- Learning A New Skill
- Your Relationships
- Improving Your Health
- Keeping Yourself Happy
- One-Off Activities To Make You Feel Good

If you don't find activities which appeal in these groups, it is likely that the lists will prompt you to create another activity which will better suit your life situation.

[See lists on next page]

Activities with others

- Go skiing
- Volunteer in your local community
- Assist in a children's play group
- Join an amateur dramatics club
- Join a political party
- Join a debating society
- Join a pottery club
- Take your family on a surprise outing
- Visit or join a church group
- Visit a coffee morning meeting
- Join a choir
- Join a walking group

Learning a new skill

- Develop your cooking skills
- Join a club: knitting/pc/flower arranging
- Learn to play a musical instrument
- Take up weight lifting
- Take up a martial art
- Grow some vegetables
- Go ice-skating
- Take up horse riding
- Learn ballroom dancing
- Develop your computer skills
- Start a garden
- Take up oil painting
- Learn a new language

- Join a night school class
- Do an advanced driving course

Your relationships

- Speak warmly to a stranger
- Invite a friend for the weekend
- Send a birthday or greetings card
- Send some flowers to a friend
- Plan a romantic evening
- Get yourself a pet
- Telephone a friend
- Play a game with your family
- Sign up for a dating club
- Buy a present for someone
- Go for a drink with your partner

Improving your health

- Take up meditation
- Join a weight loss group
- Practise self-hypnosis
- Have a health check-up
- Visit a sick or lonely person
- Join a Get Fit club
- Go fishing
- Start jogging
- Take up Tai Chi
- Take up Yoga or Pilates
- Get a bike and go cycling

Keeping yourself happy

- Join a local library
- Move your furniture around
- Visit a nature reserve
- Visit a garden centre
- Go to the movies
- Go for a swim
- Walk in your local park
- Support a chosen charity
- Give yourself a make-over

One-off activities to make you feel good

- Watch a sunset or sun rise
- Do a jigsaw puzzle
- Read a novel
- Go to the beach
- Have a massage
- Visit a historical site
- Write to the newspaper
- Replace your curtains
- Write to an old friend
- Go to the theatre
- Visit a museum
- Take a bus or train trip
- De-clutter your bedroom
- Listen to music on headphones
- Paint a room in your home
- Take a break from all chores

- Donate unwanted clothes to a charity
- Have a totally lazy day

If you managed to find some activities from the above lists which sparked your interest and enthusiasm, that's great! But don't just dwell on the idea of building it into your lifestyle in the future – *when you find the time*. If you do, it might never happen. Instead, take steps *this week* to set up arrangements which will *make* it happen!

EXERCISE

If necessary, review your blueprint for your plans for an improved lifestyle to take you from *where you are now* to *where you want to be*. If it is helpful, talk your ideas through with your buddy within the *Phoenix Plan* and come up with a final edition of how your lifestyle format is going to be.

Again, make sure that you have made adequate provision for relaxation, family and leisure time and free time for yourself.

If you are still working through the *Phoenix Plan* check your goals again and make any amendments which you feel are called for. If you have already finished with your first round of the *Plan*, consider setting up a second round with new goals.

11. CLOSING THOUGHTS

Thank you for taking the time and effort to read, study and work through *Change Your Life in Ten Weeks*. I trust that the book has proved helpful in some way and has been instrumental in getting you to look more closely at your lifestyle and to take steps to improve its quality and joy. I hope that you have examined the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* thoroughly and have – in a fashion suitable for you – made use of the method of self-change it proposes. If you have not yet worked the *Plan*, I do suggest you give it a try.

The *Plan*, and the book, are necessarily imperfect but they do point in the direction of striving to make life more tolerable and personal peace more attainable. Both reflect my own philosophies and the manner of my personal efforts to improve my life and my birth inheritance. For me, the *Plan* has worked fairly well while some other approaches have not. You alone must be the judge of what the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, or any other self-help program, will do for you.

What seems certain is that whatever method you choose to follow, in attempting self-improvement in your lifestyle, you will not achieve any worthwhile progress unless and until you are prepared to put in the necessary effort. Most of us start off very well-intentioned to work for change, but are easily diverted from

our course by the sheer pressures of everyday realities and demands. The message here is that we must be willing to acknowledge that being knocked off course is normal and likely and that we need to have the spirit to rise again and keep going. Not once, or twice or thrice, but until we reach our selected goal.

At some stage in the past, the title of this book grabbed your attention. You locked on to it and considered that it might offer something of value. Clearly, you then had some misgivings about the way in which your life was proceeding and you acknowledged that change was needed. If this book has developed your thinking about your present lifestyle and led you to take steps to improve matters, that's great and it pleases me. However, if the book has not given you the assistance you needed, or has not presented for you a method that seemed worthwhile, do not give up. *Find another way to deal with things. Search for and discover a method of self-change which will work for you.*

However, a word of caution. There are certain authors and philosophies in today's self-improvement world which seem to assert that anyone can achieve anything provided they put their mind to it or allow the law of attraction to bring them all the things they need and desire. It may be that I am unfair to such theorists or that I have not personally succeeded in inculcating this life-change philosophy into my belief system, yet I hold that there are limits to self-change. It seems to me that there is strong evidence that some aspects, or pre-dispositions, of personality are inherited and that our boundaries for change are, to some extent at least, set and defined by the range of talents and deficits gained by our birth inheritance. My purpose in mentioning this here is to advise the reader to give full

consideration to the possibility that a particular form of self-change or improvement sought after may be outside the scope of one's potential. The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* underscores this and suggests that selected goals are checked out with a buddy. However, if a goal is thought to be appropriate and yet it is not achieved, even after many consistent and diligent efforts, it would be wise to check its suitability. After all, most young footballers – if they were to adopt a goal to become a world class player – will never make it, nor is it likely that a beginner keyboard player ever attain concert pianist status by practice alone.

I have already mentioned in a previous chapter about the importance of *self-acceptance* and its link with *spirituality*. I draw attention to this again for, in my view, there can be no real self-development without a full sense of self-acceptance. I am also inclined to argue that without some kind of spiritual framework which is satisfying to the individual there can be no lasting or worthwhile equilibrium in life. I am not a protagonist or practitioner of any formal religion, established or new, but I am close to believing that there is more to human existence than the path from birth to death. It may be that the reader would benefit immensely from exploring this aspect of life. I will leave it to others to advise and guide you in this momentous quest.

There is a fair bit of repetition in the pages of this book. This is not accidental nor necessarily a flaw in its composition. It is a deliberate device used because we need to keep coming back to face the same questions and tasks:

- *Am I really satisfied with the lifestyle which I am experiencing at the moment?*

- *Could things be better than they are now?*
- *Am I really being fair to myself and to others close to me by living my life as I do now?*
- *What do I have to do and what steps must I plan to make my life better for me and generally more productive?*
- *How can I become a happier, healthier, more relaxed, loved and loving person in today's world?*

By approaching the same questions from a variety of stances – as set out in these pages – it is hoped that the reader will be able to tease out those aspects of daily living which need to be addressed if lifestyle transformation is to be achieved. At the same time, I hope that by working through the *Phoenix Plan* you will be led to create a vision for your own future. This will assist in providing you with a clear purpose for living and may enhance your sense of spirituality.

I stress again – as mentioned on the Title page- that *Change Your Life In Ten Weeks* is essentially a workbook. This means that true value from its pages will only be realised if the exercises contained in it are fully considered, completed and personal notes recorded. I urge you to follow this approach.

This book has not been written as a vehicle for financial profit. Rather, it is an attempt by a retired person to pass on to others what I see as some important considerations about how to make life more meaningful and fulfilling. As such, it is offered as a free public service. Additionally, my own web sites linked to the book are generally without any commercial ingredients and personal details are never sought from site visitors.

When you write a book like this, it is exceedingly difficult to

know or to find out whether the program set out in it does or does not help people in their path to a better and more qualitative lifestyle. For this reason, reader feedback is sought and greatly encouraged. Though I am aware of many shortcomings in *Change Your Life in Ten Weeks* I do sincerely believe that the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* which it contains is a sound and valuable program for self-improvement. However, I would respect your opinion about it and about any aspect of the book. You may contact me at

ambrosehardy@yahoo.co.uk

and I will acknowledge any comments you make. If the book and *Plan* do prove helpful, I would be most grateful if you would pass on information about it to any person or persons you think it might help in their struggle to improve their lives.

I have not provided much information about my own life or biography. Suffice it to say that I am a retired school teacher, now aged 75, who has lived and taught in various parts of the world. Throughout my career, I have been involved in various self-help projects and have run classes in stress management and relaxation. Like most others of my age, I have experienced a wide range of personal upsets, crises and achievements. I have battled to overcome difficulties and made more than a few wrong turns. Overall, I have made immense progress and achieved a fair level of self-acceptance and personal peace. However, I am still working on the spirituality issues. I now live in Liverpool [England] with my wife who has encouraged me to produce this book.

Though we live in a world which, at times, seems full of troubles and where hardship and pain abound for many, I earnestly believe that the bulk of humankind seeks a better way. I remain

optimistic that life for all can get better when individuals work to achieve fulfilment and peace in their personal lives. Just as the last hundred years has brought great benefits to many, the remainder of our century has enormous potential for the world's betterment.

I encourage you again to make a determined effort to look at the shortfalls in your lifestyle and to commit yourself to do all in your power to change your life to the way you want it to be. Do not be put off by repeated lapses in following your goals. *Get up again and keep going* . If you do, you will surely – in time - get to where you want to be.

It is my fervent hope that the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* and the thoughts set out in this book will inspire you to take the necessary steps to improve your present life and to lead you towards greater fulfilment, healthier living, better relationships with those you come in contact with and increased personal joy and peace.

MAY EVERY BLESSING COME YOUR WAY

PART FOUR

APPENDICES

When starting on the demanding path to self-improvement, we tend to take many unsteady and temporary steps..

These are not failures but, properly viewed, can give us confidence to try again in a slightly different way..

For two steps forward and one backwards always represents real progress..

Appendix A

Sample Documentation

| |
|--|
| <p>DO <u>NOT</u> READ THROUGH THE ENTIRE QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE STARTING TO RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. ANSWER THE QUESTIONS IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY ARE SET OUT AND KEEP ALL THE OTHER UNANSWERED QUESTIONS COVERED UP. WITH EACH QUESTION, SELECT THE <u>ONE</u> RESPONSE THAT COMES NEAREST TO THE REALITY OF YOUR PRESENT LIFESTYLE.</p> |
| <p>LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE</p> |
| <p>1. Do you have a feeling or sense that all is not well in your lifestyle at the moment?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>2. Are you in some way unhappy, unfulfilled or stressed out in your personal life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY <u>X</u> RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>3. Do you often feel frustrated or bored with the quality of your present life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>4. Do you sense that you are somehow missing out on the joys of living?</p> <p>YES <u>X</u> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>5. Are you in a dilemma about a personal relationship or lack of it?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY <u>X</u> RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>6. Do your home or work duties hinder you from attending to your personal needs?</p> <p>YES <u>X</u> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>7. Are you having problems at your place of work [<i>paid employment or home management duties</i>]?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES</p> |

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued |
|--|
| <p>8. Do financial problems cause you extended periods of worry?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>9. Are you having serious difficulties coping with the demands of children or other family members?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>10. Do you complain regularly that you can't find the time to do the things you want to do?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>11. Do health fears and personal problems keep you awake at night?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>12. Do you feel impatient and irritable when this is not appropriate?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>13. Is your sex life problematic and unrewarding or causing difficulties with your partner?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>14. Do you lack an appropriate number of close friends?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>15. Are you often depressed or anxious without really knowing why?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>16. Would you say you generally suffer from low self-esteem?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES <input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY <input type="checkbox"/> RARELY <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES |

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued | |
|---|--|
| 17. | Are there any unwanted or unhealthy obsessional habits in your lifestyle which cause you distress? YES ___ NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 18. | Are you seriously unhappy about your body weight and personal appearance? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RARELY ___ |
| 19. | Do you regularly experience poor quality sleep? YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 20. | Do you consume [alcoholic] drinks more than you should or do you smoke excessively? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 21. | Do you habitually use any other health harming substances? YES ___ NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 22. | Is there a lack of order or personal discipline in your lifestyle? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 23. | Are you on the verge of, or presently adjusting to, a relationship or marital breakdown? YES ___ NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 24. | Are you working through the aftermath of a bereavement? YES ___ NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| 25. | Are you aware of a sense of spiritual isolation in your life? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___ |
| QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUES | |

| LIFESTYLE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE - continued |
|--|
| <p>26. Do you feel you have somehow lost your sense of direction in life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>27. Do you have an unrealised but realistic life dream which is being thwarted by your present lifestyle?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY <u>X</u></p> |
| <p>28. Is there an impending personal crisis in your life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO <u>X</u> SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>29. Do you generally avoid following a regular physical exercise routine?</p> <p>YES <u>X</u> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>30. Do you lack dear personal development goals covering the next three years?</p> <p>YES <u>X</u> NO ___ SOMETIMES ___ OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>31. Do you regularly experience a build-up of deep resentment or anger against anyone or anything from the past or in the present?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>32. Do you ever seriously contemplate that life is just not worth living?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| <p>33. Do you lack a belief system or personal philosophy which gives meaning and purpose to your life?</p> <p>YES ___ NO ___ SOMETIMES <u>X</u> OCCASIONALLY ___ RARELY ___</p> |
| END OF QUESTIONNAIRE |

FOR SAMPLE SCORING DETAILS SEE BELOW

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Set A | QUESTION NUMBERS: 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 31, 32 |
| | Total number of YES responses ___ 3 ___ |
| | Total number of NO responses ___ 5 ___ |
| | Total number of SOMETIMES responses ___ 2 ___ |
| | Total number of OCCASIONALLY responses ___ 2 ___ |
| | Total number of RARELY responses ___ 0 ___ |
| | |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Set B | QUESTION NUMBERS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33 |
| | Total number of YES responses ___ 8 ___ |
| | Total number of NO responses ___ 2 ___ |
| | Total number of SOMETIMES responses ___ 7 ___ |
| | Total number of OCCASIONALLY responses ___ 3 ___ |
| | Total number of RARELY responses ___ 1 ___ |
| | |

| FINAL SCORING OF SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------|
| SET | YES RESPONSES (each [A] is 4 points) (each [B] is 3 points) | SOMETIMES RESPONSES (each [A] is 3 points) (each [B] is 2 points) | TOTAL |
| A | 3 [x 4] = 12 | 2 [x 3] = 6 | 18 |
| B | 8 [x 3] = 24 | 7 [x 2] = 14 | 38 |
| TOTAL POINTS | | 18 + 38 | 56 |

PROGRAM COMMENT ON SCORE OF 56

Total of 40-59

It seems your lifestyle is perceived by you as being somewhat problematic at the moment. It is in your own interest to do something about it. You are in the right place to consider taking appropriate action by working on a self-improvement plan. Hopefully, you will proceed to work through the Program set out here.

| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| SAMPLE GOALS SUMMARY SHEET | |
| Program Starting Date 01 AUG | Program Ending Date 25 SEPT |
| <i>By the end of this eight week self-development Program I shall have accomplished the following Goals:</i> | |
| 1. I will have a weekly physical and mental fitness routine, jogging 30 minutes twice weekly and meditating three times a week for at least 20 minutes in each session. | |
| 2. I will organise at least three social private outings per month with my partner and children to a place of their choice and at a mutually convenient time. | |
| 3. I will set aside a two hour period, at home, for three evenings per week when I will study for my degree course. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| The above Goals represent my <i>Personal Plan</i> for self-development and for improving the quality of my life <i>I commit myself to working towards these Goals for the eight week duration of the Program.</i> | |
| SIGNED: <i>Mary Baxter</i> | DATED: 25 July |

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | |
| SAMPLE WEEKLY TARGET SHEET A separate <i>Weekly Target Sheet</i> should be completed for <i>each</i> Goal you have included in your <i>Personal Plan</i> | |
| Program Starting Date 01 AUG | Program Ending Date 25 SEPT |
| GOAL NUMBER 1. I will have a weekly physical and mental fitness routine, jogging 30 minutes twice weekly and meditating three times a week for at least 20 minutes in each session | |
| WEEK 1. JOG FOR 10 MINUTES ONCE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 10 MINUTES ONCE THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 2. JOG FOR 10 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 15 MINUTES ONCE THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 3. JOG FOR 15 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 15 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 4. JOG FOR 20 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 15 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 5. JOG FOR 20 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 15 MINUTES THREE TIMES THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 6 JOG FOR 25 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 15 MINUTES THREE TIMES THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 7 JOG FOR 25 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 20 MINUTES THREE TIMES THIS WEEK | |
| WEEK 8 JOG FOR 30 MINUTES TWICE THIS WEEK MEDITATE FOR 20 MINUTES THREE TIMES THIS WEEK | |
| I have shown the above Goal and Targets to my buddy. We have discussed them and made modifications where this has been mutually agreed. | |
| SIGNED: <i>Mary Baxter</i> | DATED: 27 July |

| <i>PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN</i> | | | | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|-------------|---|---|----------|
| SAMPLE PROGRAM MONITORING SHEET | | | | | | |
| <i>Week Number</i> <u> 1 </u> <i>Date beginning</i> <u> 01 AUG </u> | | | | | | |
| GOAL NO: | TARGET DETAILS | SCHEDULE | COMPLETED * | | | COMMENTS |
| | | | F | P | N | |
| 1 | JOG FOR 10 MINS ONCE MEDITATE FOR 10 MINS ONCE | TUES 7PM FRI 8PM | | | | |
| 2 | OUTING WITH PARTNER AND CHILDREN | VISIT SEASIDE SUNDAY MORNING | | | | |
| 3 | TWO HOUR STUDY PERIOD FOR DEGREE | MONDAY 8-10PM | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | |
| * F = Fully achieved P = Partially achieved N = Not achieved | | | | | | |
| ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS: [VERY GOOD] 5 4 3 2 1 [VERY POOR] | | | | | | |
| Meeting arranged with Buddy on 29 July Meeting carried out <u> </u> | | | | | | |

Appendix B

Theoretical Rationale for the Program

The only way to beat stress and disappointment is to work out what things and situations really bother you, and then to make appropriate changes to your lifestyle so that you handle these stressors differently..

If you just complain and take no action, your distress will be compounded and your depression deepened..

The *Phoenix Plan* helps you to plan these lifestyle changes..

THEORETICAL RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAM

While the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, as set out in Part Two, does not specifically address the psychological and theoretical rationale which underpins it, it is, nonetheless, built on the firm foundation of *cognitive therapy*. In particular, it takes note of the views of *rational-emotive* therapy. This modern and popular theory emphasises the causative links between *thoughts*, *feelings* and *behaviours*.

What follows below is a very brief summary of the theory behind rational-emotive therapy. Hopefully, it will prove a worthwhile introduction for the reader. Do note that there are many books, web sites, and counselling centres which provide a much more thorough exposition of it.

In basic terms, rational-emotive theory stresses that our *feelings* and *behaviours*, at any particular time, are directly linked to our mode of *thinking* at that time. Thus, in facing an important project that we are required to complete, if we believe [that is, *think*] that we are going to struggle or fail to meet its demands or objectives, we are much more likely to feel inadequate,

despondent, fearful and our resulting behaviours [in tackling the project] are likely to lead to failure or problems.

In short, by virtue of our *thinking*, we have set ourselves up for failure.

On the other hand, if our thoughts about our possible success in the project are positive and reflect a belief in our ability to meet its demands, we are very likely to feel confident, competent and relatively relaxed as we approach the demands of the task. Likewise, our behaviour will be forceful, appropriate and will achieve success in the project.

Again, our *thinking* has, to a large extent, determined the outcome of the project. This time, our efforts have brought about success rather than failure.

The important deduction from rational-emotive theory is that our thinking has a direct influence on how we feel and how we behave. Another idea that emerges from this is that happiness [*however we might define this at a personal level*] is always within our grasp. In other words, by disciplining our thinking, we can choose to be happy, whatever our circumstances. This is borne out by the fact that many individuals, though experiencing very painful and destructive events in their lives, manage to cope well emotionally and retain a sense of personal peace and acceptance in spite of the distressful external events.

A vital point that rational-emotive therapy makes is that our thoughts are under our own command. As such, we can change them when we choose to do so. Of course, changing our thought patterns is not always easy. But, with practice and dedication, we can train ourselves to push away negative and unwanted thoughts and replace them with more positive and inspiring ones. In turn, as already explained, our feelings and

behaviours will change to become more positive and success based.

Traditionally, rational-emotive therapy postulates its basic theory in an A-B-C framework where A is the stressful occurrence [or *activating event*], B is our personal sets of beliefs and values [or *belief system*] and C is the behavioural consequences [or *consequences*] of A and B combined. Thus, as an example, when a friend appears to ignore you as you pass her on the street [A–*activating event*], you feel offended, rejected and angry that she should do so [C–*consequences*]. According to the theory, our behaviour or feelings at C derive from our *belief system* at B. Sometimes we don't recognise or accept the link between B and C. However, what B [our *belief system*] does is to lead us to evaluate and interpret A [the *activating event*] in a way consistent with our distinctive *belief system* [B]. Often, this *belief system* persuades us to evaluate and interpret event A in an *irrational* or inappropriate fashion. So, in our example, you jump to the conclusion that your friend has deliberately ignored and scorned you. But, REBT points out, this is only *one* possible explanation for your friend's behaviour. Other possible explanations might be:

- *she didn't see you*
- *she was too absorbed in her shopping agenda*
- *she was preoccupied with a collection of personal worries*
- *her poor eyesight excluded you from her range of vision*
- *she was feeling tired and exhausted after a late night*

Clearly, if you were to accept any one of these alternative explanations for your friend's behaviour, your consequential

behaviour [C] would be different. You would not be feeling ignored, rejected and scorned. This is because your *belief system* [B] is now different.

In jumping to the first conclusion that your friend has deliberately ignored and scorned you [*your belief system B has inclined you to make this evaluation*] you are most likely engaging in *irrational* or faulty thinking. *Rational* thinking would incline you to consider *all* the possible alternative explanations for your friend's behaviour.

According to rational-emotive therapy, individuals are advised to employ a process when stressful or unpleasant life events occur.

- identify the *activating event* [A] clearly and without exaggeration
- if the *consequences* at C are distressing you, look closely at the beliefs and values which might influence you in your interpretation or evaluation of event A. In particular, look out for irrational thinking, exaggerations, over-generalisations, narrow ways of thinking, tendencies to mind-read.
- If you discover that your *thinking* at B is faulty, replace the thread of faulty thinking with a more rational, realistic or positive one. This should result in a more accurate, and probably more acceptable, consequential behavioural response at C.

- When you uncover evidence of consistent faulty thinking in your cognitive processes [like *if a friend does not greet me, she is probably deliberately rejecting me*] you need to work to permanently replace this strand of thought with a more accurate one [like *if a friend does not greet me, she probably either did not see me or is self-absorbed in some way*]

Thus, in summary, rational-emotive therapy holds that, though distressful events do occur in one's life, the resulting behaviours and emotional reactions that occur, that is [C-*consequences*], do so because of the limiting beliefs and values [B-*belief system*] which we use to interpret and evaluate them. A corollary of this, as already stated, is that we are largely in charge of our own misery or happiness. This is so because, regardless of the event that troubles us, we can influence our consequential behavioural responses [C] by ensuring that our beliefs and values [B] are rational, realistic and not exaggerated. As an illustration, if I say *He is making me angry* I am guilty of irrational thinking [B] and I will feel angry [C]. In truth, no one has the ability to *make me do or feel* in any particular way. What really happens is that I *choose* to act or react [by feeling angry] because of my faulty thinking. If, instead of saying *He is making me feel angry* I say *I am choosing to react to his behaviour by becoming angry* then I have control over my resulting feelings: that is, I can *choose* to be angry or not. In this way, according to REBT, any individual is able to largely secure control over distressing emotions.

In line with the philosophy of rational-emotive theory the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* is set up to encourage you to adopt an *I can do it* or *I can cope* way of thinking as you begin your Personal Plan. It is for this reason that you need to ensure that the *goals* and *targets* you set up are *modest, realistic* and *within*

your capability. The success you achieve, from week to week, by completing your targets satisfactorily, will help to further establish in you a positive and confident way of thinking about your own self-development. The *I can do it* approach and conviction will be reinforced.

In practical terms, when you discover that you are thinking negatively or irrationally or with exaggeration [*as in the examples below*] :

- *I just can't do it*
- *I just can't cope any more*
- *I'll never improve*
- *I have no friends*
- *I'm just inferior to everyone else*
- *I'll never be happy*
- *This task is beyond me*
- *Nobody cares about me*
- *Life's a bunch of problems for me*
- *It's a catastrophe*

you need to consciously push aside the negative thoughts and replace them with more rational, positive and realistic ones [*as in the examples below*] :

- *I can do it*
- *I can cope with this situation*
- *My life will improve if I work consistently at my targets*
- *I am able to establish worthwhile relationships with other people, if I work at it*
- *I may not have all the skills that someone else has, but I have, in some areas, a lot more skills than some others*
- *I can choose to be happy whatever the circumstances*

- *With proper help and concentration, I can beat this task*
- *There are people who do care deeply about my happiness*
- *I have lots to be grateful for in my life*
- *Life has its ups and downs, but I can handle this problem*

If we follow the advice of rational-emotive theory, we are moving from a lifestyle which can be characterised mainly by negative and faulty thinking to one where you are generally positive and rational in outlook. This is, in itself, a great step forward in personal development. This is why, within the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, it is so important to congratulate and reward yourself when you successfully meet your weekly targets. The effect of even a simple reward will convince you that you are competent and that you can succeed in the goals you have selected within your Personal Plan. The only condition for this eventual success is that you keep working according to the Program schedule you have set yourself. If you fail from time to time, as most of us do in working to achieve our goals, you need to be willing to pick yourself up again, and again and again.

The rational-emotive therapy approach, which supports the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, will bring about successive achievements and rewarding experiences in your life. These help to increase your self-esteem, your self-confidence and your determination to make a worthwhile difference to your lifestyle. In short, your *thinking* becomes positive and is likely to remain so. With such a frame of mind, you will be able consistently to make great strides in your efforts for the self-improvement you seek.

The approach and program set out in this book can and does work – if you can put your mind to it and dedicate the necessary time and effort to get to where you want to be..

If it didn't work for you, don't give up. Try at least one more time... Perhaps your goals were too ambitious or you needed better buddy support.

If you just didn't like the *Phoenix Plan*, that's OK. But don't stop there – find another program for positive change or work out one of your own.

However it happens, *you will get there* – if you are totally determined.

Appendix C

Further Reading Resources

Further Reading Resources

The books below represent extended reading on many of the issues and concepts that are briefly dealt with in this book. All have been chosen for listing because they are well presented texts and generally easy to read.

They are worthwhile resources if you are interested in developing your knowledge in the general fields of personal growth and self-improvement.

All of the books were in print in mid-2014 and will easily be found in online bookstores. Many will also be available through local public library loans.

The books are not listed in any priority ranking.

Manage Your Mind – The Mental Fitness Guide [Butler & Hope]
Oxford University Press Second Edition 2007

The Relaxation And Stress Reduction Handbook [Davis, Eshelman & McKay] New Harbinger Publications Inc Sixth Edition 2008

What You Can Change...And What You Can't (Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement) [Martin E. P. Seligman]
Nicholas Brealey Publishing 2007

Mindfulness – A Practical Guide To Finding Peace In A Frantic World [includes CD] [Williams & Penman] Piatkus 2011

The Life Plan (700 Simple Ways To Change Your Life For The Better) [Robert Ashton] Pearson Education Limited 2007

Choose To Be Happy – Your Step-By-Step Guide [Wayne Froggatt]
Harper Collins 1993

Further Reading Resources – continued

Creative Visualisation For Beginners [Richard Webster]
Llewellyn Publications 2005

The 12 Secrets Of Health And Happiness [Louise Samways]
Penguin Books 1997

Anxiety, Phobias & Panic – A Step-By-Step Program For Regaining Control Of Your Life [Reneau Z. Peurifoy] Warner Books 1995

How To Get Everything You Ever Wanted – Complete Guide To Using Your Psychic Common Sense [Adrian Calabrese]
Llewellyn Publications 2008

Hypnosis And The Art Of Self-Therapy [Gordon Milne]
Geddes & Grosset 2007

Self-Empowerment Through Self-Hypnosis [Weschcke & Slate]
Llewellyn Publications 2010

Beat Stress With Meditation [Naomi Ozaniec]
Teach Yourself Books 2010

15 Minute Gentle Yoga [includes CD] [Louise Grime]
Dorling Kindersley 2008

The Easy Yoga Workbook [includes CD] [Tara Fisher]
Duncan Baird Publishers 2007

Meditation For Multitaskers [includes CD] David Dillard-Wright
Adams Media 2011

Destress Your Life In 7 Easy Steps [includes CD] [Glenn Harrold]
Diviniti Publishing 2007

The New Guide To Therapies [no author quoted]
Paragon Books 2002

Further Reading Resources – continued

Little Book Of Tai Chi For Health [includes DVD] Jason Chan
Demand Media Limited 2013

The Rough Guide To Happiness – Practical Steps For All-Round Well-Being [Dr Nick Baylis] *Rough Guides Limited* 2009

365 Ways To Be Your Own Life Coach [David L. Preston]
How-To Books Limited Second Edition 2009

How To Be Brilliant – Change Your Ways In 90 Days
[Michael Heppell] *Pearson Education Limited* 2011

Making The Big Leap – Coach Yourself To Create The Life You Really Want [Suzy Greaves] *New Holland Publishers* 2004

Learn To Balance Your Life (Take Control, Find Time, Achieve Your Goals) [Michael & Jessica Hinz] *Duncan Baird Publishers* 2004

Mind Power: Change Your Thinking – Change Your Life
[James Borg] *Pearson Education Limited* Second Edition 2013

Positive Thinking [Susan Quilliam]
Essential Lifeskills - Dorling Kindersley 2003

Appendix D

Web Site Links

WEBSITE LINKS

MY WEBSITE LINKS

This book *Change Your Life in Ten Weeks* is linked to a website which promotes the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan* as set out here. This web site is at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk and contains additional resources and references to sources where you can obtain more information on matters related to your self-improvement. From time to time, I will be updating some of the content on the site and hope to include, on a regular basis, some new self-assessment tools and other resources for your use.

A second web site is dedicated to explaining how to work through the *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*. This site repeats some of the information in this book but should prove worth a visit. The site address is www.replanyourlife.co.uk

I have created other personal growth web sites which are linked to the *Phoenix Plan*. Full details of these and links to them are provided at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk

Readers are invited to visit any of the above sites and check out on any worthwhile links or free downloads which might be included there.

The websites located at www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk and at www.replanyourlife.co.uk have also a *Guest Comment* page where you can make known some of your ideas about the site [*and this book, of course*] and you can, possibly, exchange some of your views with other users.

A list of other helpful web sites, which are currently available, appears on the next page

OTHER HELPFUL WEB SITES

There are many sites on the Internet which deal with the issues of personal growth and lifestyle improvement. They are so diverse in what they cover and the programs they endorse that it would be impossible for me to make specific recommendations for any small selection. Instead, I have provided a list of general self-improvement sites which will provide a starting point for anyone seeking guidance on a particular topic or program.

At the time of printing [2014] all the web sites listed below were up and running. All deal with one or more aspect of the general field of personal life improvement. I believe that many of them provide information and suggestions which will help the reader to take steps to make life more fulfilling.

As far as possible, I have avoided listing sites which seem to me to have heavy commercial leanings. However, I can accept no responsibility for the advice or practices of the sites below and I urge all readers to take great care before purchasing products and/or entering into any financial commitments with any personal improvement web site. If you search carefully enough you will find a considerable number of worthwhile free downloads which you can make use of alongside the *Phoenix Plan*.

GENERAL LIFE-IMPROVEMENT SITES

<http://www.trans4mind.com>

<http://www.artofliving.org>

<http://www.uncommonforum.com>

<http://www.thework.com>

<http://spiritualityhealth.com>

<https://soundcloud.com>

<http://www.tarabrach.com>

<http://www.pickthebrain.com>

<http://www.scribd.com>

<http://www.white dove books.co.uk>

<http://www.24-7help.com>

<http://mernathrone.com>

<http://toolstolife.com>

<http://www.brighthub.com>

<http://www.stevejones.com>

<http://lifecoachonthego.com>

<http://www.harnessinghappiness.org>

<http://www.depression-guide.com>

<http://goal-buddy.com>

<http://www.bhf.org.uk>

<http://personalsuccesstoday.com>

<http://bookboon.com>

<http://www.simplypsychology.org>

<http://thanks2net.com>

MY REQUEST TO THE READER

AS A RETIRED PERSON OF LIMITED FINANCIAL MEANS I AM NOT IN A POSITION TO ENGAGE WIDE COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING FOR THIS BOOK.

IF WORKING THROUGH THIS *PHOENIX SELF-HELP LIFE PLAN* PROGRAM HAS TRULY HELPED YOU AND IT CONTINUES TO INSPIRE YOU TO WORK AT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFESTYLE, PLEASE TELL OTHERS ABOUT IT AND/OR ENCOURAGE THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN IT.

YOU CAN DO THIS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:

- tell a friend about this book and where you found it.
- mention the program on any of the social networking sites [e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace]
- write a report on it that can be used as a testimonial and send it to the author at the address below
- write a review of the book and post it on your website or e-zine it
- offer to act as the buddy of someone who may want to work through the program
- visit the website www.changeyourlifein10weeks.co.uk
- make a link with the above website
- write to or email the author and make suggestions for the program's improvement.
- offer to advertise the book or the program on your website

THE AUTHOR CAN BE CONTACTED BY EMAIL AT THE ADDRESS

All emails will be answered personally

ambrosehardy@yahoo.co.uk

Many people have risen above adverse life circumstances, great misfortunes and unexpected setbacks to stagger through to eventual success and realisation of their precious dreams...

They are the champions of yesterday...

The champions of today are still in the process of trying, giving up, trying again and getting discouraged, but then trying yet again and now tasting the first sweet fruits of their efforts.

Maybe you are one of these champions of today or maybe you will yet become one?

Good luck in your quest for a better way of living.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A PERSONAL PROFILE

I am a retired teacher with my home in Merseyside in the UK. Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, I have lived and worked in several countries and continents. Throughout my career, I have been involved in projects aimed at encouraging others to improve their lifestyle quality and raise their self-esteem.

I am currently 75 years young and, in the past, I have led classes for adults in stress management and relaxation skills. I have always had a keen interest in meditation, self-hypnosis and yoga type exercise programs and believe that their practice in an individual's life can have a powerful positive influence on lifestyle quality.

Like many older people, I have experienced over the years a variety of life upsets and made some wrong turns in life but thankfully I have survived them all. I have learnt and believe that self-acceptance and gratitude are necessary and important attributes for attaining personal peace and fulfilment. I have also come to understand the importance of goal-setting as a device for personal growth.

I am not a practitioner of or protagonist for any organised belief system, traditional or new. The *Phoenix Self-Help Life Plan*, and this book, represent my present efforts to helping others to help themselves. I am a certified Life Coach, trained NLP Practitioner and hold a Certificate in Hypnotherapy.

I continue to work to improve the quality of my own life. I still have much work to do on this, especially in the area of spirituality.

Ambrose A Hardy

A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT...

In the end when all is said and done

The greatest riches I can have

Are knowing

That I have treated self and others fairly

Shown my love to those around me

And aimed today

To be a little better than I was

Just yesterday

In my deepest meditations I have come to know

True peace and happiness come not from high intelligence

Or personal strength or beauty

Nor from earthly riches or material goods

Nor from the power we hold over others

But proceed

From deepest feelings about ourselves

And how we view the world around

For

Our thoughts dictate our feelings

Our feelings prime our actions

And how we see to-morrow

And I have learnt this gem of wisdom

That if I but watch and manage

My downcast thoughts

And all leanings towards negativity

I can truly change my life

And come to know

My better self

And gain

Much peace and happiness.

FOR YOUR NOTES

FOR YOUR NOTES

FOR YOUR NOTES