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**YES
YOU
CAN!**

Introduction

This ebook was written as a companion to my commercial ebook:

[Free at Last: How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits...Forever!](#)

While I've allowed this ebook to be given away for free, if you received it for free you may also be interested in Free at Last, the core product of a Master Resale Rights reseller package available at the link above.

Having said that, the purpose of this ebook is to help people build and improve upon their level of self-confidence. If you want to, or are trying to, free yourself from a bad habit, having self-confidence can help the process along.

That's not to say you should put off breaking free from a bad habit until you have more self-confidence. The process of breaking free from bad habits outlined in Free at Last is not dependent on your level of self-confidence.

You can work on confidence and breaking bad habits at the same time. Both are a shift in mindset, and they can be complementary to each other, but either works independently of the other as well.

Sometimes we form bad habits precisely because we lack confidence. A bad habit, such as drinking or smoking, fills a void. With people whom later in life gain confidence, the bad habit they formed early on often remains.

Free at Last shows you how to end any bad habit and replace it with something positive and beneficial, but if you're lacking in confidence after being freed, it's possible, though not as likely, that you could fall into a different bad habit.

By building self-confidence you will have no need to fill the void by replacing one bad habit with another. Self-confidence, like a lack of self-confidence, can and often does grow from one area of life into another. If you become confident in one thing, you become confident in yourself, and so become more confident in other areas of life.

What is Self-confidence?

Jayne was to make a presentation to an executive committee. If her proposal was accepted it would mean she'd be in charge of a new business venture, which would mean a promotion and a nice raise in pay.

Unfortunately, her fear of public speaking got the best of her and she stumbled her way through her presentation, impressing no one and inspiring no confidence in her plan.

Richard, her co-worker and one of her competitor's for heading up the new venture, made a flawless presentation. Jayne's plan was actually better, but Richard's self-assurance in his presentation won out because Jayne couldn't confidently speak in front of such an important group.

Why couldn't Jayne present her superior plan as well as Richard did his inferior plan? It wasn't for lack of confidence in her plan—it was her lack of...

...self-confidence.

What is self-confidence?

Self-confidence is characterized by a positive belief in one's ability and a positive belief in one's worth as an individual.

People who are self-confident believe they have value to offer the world and do not rely upon the approval of other people in order to affirm their existence. It is enough for them that they know they have the capacity and the potential to do a given thing, and the courage to do it no matter what others may say or think. People who are self-confident take advantage of the opportunities that come their way.

Factors in gaining self-confidence...

Ideally, self-confidence begins in childhood, but unfortunately not all parents are wise enough to nurture their children in a way that instills a sense of confidence and worth in them.

Fortunately, an adult can still gain self-confidence through his own efforts and determination, and secondarily through the support of his family and friends.

Parental support and acceptance...

In a perfect world, children begin to develop confidence as they grow up. The role of parents in instilling self-confidence in their children is very important. Parents who are always critical of their children without praising the child's effort, success, and strengths unknowingly suppress the development of their child's self-confidence.

On the other hand, parents who are supportive and encourage their children to step forward into new experiences and praise their child for trying even if they don't succeed, will most likely rear children who become confident adults.

Parents who make their children feel loved and accepted regardless of outcomes will instill self-confidence and self-acceptance in them.

Unfortunately, over the last few decades, many parents have pushed their children too hard in trying to give them a competitive edge. The child may or may not become competitive, but they often lack self-confidence whether they are competitive or not.

When the child is never good enough for their parents, they grow up feeling even less adequate in the face of adulthood—even highly accomplished people can feel they never quite measure up.

Lack of self-confidence is not proportionate to a person's abilities. There are many extremely talented and able people who lack the self-confidence to truly make the most of their abilities. Conversely, there are many people who appear supremely confident who have comparatively little ability.

If you are lacking in self-confidence, then you must repeatedly do things that will help you gain confidence. Repetition and success, combined with a change to an old thought pattern, can turn a shrinking violet into an outgoing dynamo.

Identify your strengths and capitalize on them. Do not expect all results to be perfect because you are bound to do something wrong along the way—nobody is perfect and everyone makes mistakes. It's important that you realize this...

Mistakes are not a character flaw!

Mistakes are merely outcomes that didn't work out as you planned or hoped or anticipated. As such, mistakes are nothing more than the learning bridges we all cross over to reach the success on the other side.

Those who are afraid to make mistakes often have a history of an overly critical parent that mentally and emotionally, and perhaps even physically, punished them as a child for making mistakes. In a misguided effort to push a child toward competence, an overly critical parent mistakenly destroys a child's willingness to try anything new when there is a risk of criticism.

Do not underestimate yourself, nor be overly critical of yourself. You must learn to be your own best friend, and that means being gentle and kind to yourself when you make mistakes.

Learn to recognize the good you do instead of doing or thinking things that validate any negative ideas about yourself that others instilled in you or that you developed over time.

I want you to understand this...

Whatever you were told about yourself before you came to this point in time is *history*. Any disappointments others may have expressed in you is their problem, you are not here to live up to other's expectations. Their opinions are just that...opinions. **Opinions only have as much meaning as you give them.**

You are a singularly unique point of light in the world. Others may have tried to dim your light as you grew up, but it still shines. You are a wonderful creation. Give yourself permission to see yourself that way, and then begin looking for the good within you. It's there. You are as worthy as everyone else.

Look for things that make you feel good about yourself. It can be photos of past achievements like when you won a race or won a debate. It can be a poem or a song you wrote. It may be the time you helped someone less fortunate, or

comforted a child. Focus on your goodness every day, in every way, and this will give you more confidence to do other things in life.

Developing self-confidence takes time, so don't let setbacks deter you for even one second. It took a lifetime to create the condition you find yourself in, so don't expect to overhaul a lifetime of conditioning in a day, or week, or even a month or year. You will have peaks and valleys, and that's just fine, in fact, it's very much normal. Just keep moving forward one step at a time and in time, you'll find yourself in a wonderful place.

Even the most confident and competent among us have their self-doubts and make mistakes. The difference between them and someone that lacks confidence is that they don't dwell on their doubts and mistakes—they press toward the mark knowing one of two things will occur. They will succeed or will not. If they succeed, great! If not, they learn, regroup, and take aim again. *They don't live with an attitude of defeat.*

Beware the Shadows of the Mind

Developing self-confidence correctly starts with honest self-assessment. The mind will always replay past patterns of thought and behavior, sometimes to our benefit, and sometimes to our detriment.

Developing self-confidence can be hastened by identifying those patterns of thought, behaviors, and environments that contribute to furthering a lack of confidence, and then taking action to mitigate them.

For example, if you have a friend that, despite your fondness for, always seems to leave you feeling less competent, then perhaps that friendship needs to be examined to see if it is really serving you well.

Perhaps the friend does or says things that contribute to your lack of confidence, such as always playing the one upmanship game. Or perhaps you're envious of what you perceive to be an admirable quality that you feel you lack, and you need to make an attitude adjustment.

One upmanship, by the way, is the impossible struggle to feel better about one's self at someone else's expense. You cannot lift yourself up by pulling

others down—it may seem so momentarily, but the act always buries you deeper in the end.

And then there are the shadows of the mind. These are the self-criticisms, doubts, and reminders of past failures that our ego likes to bring to our attention to protect us from repeating our mistakes.

The trouble is, if we listen, it also prevents us from having new experiences if there is risk of failure involved. We lose any chance for success we might have won when we shrink away from opportunity.

To build self-confidence we need to monitor our self-talk. That is, we need to pay attention to what the voice in our head is saying to us. When it offers up criticism, we need to counter that with an intentionally positive thought.

When the voice brings up doubts we need to remind ourselves that **the past does not equal the future, and success is also a possibility.**

When the voice reminds us of our past failures, we need to remember that we have learned and grown since then; and in any event, **failure is not a character flaw**, it's merely an outcome, a result of an event. A failure doesn't make us a bad person any more than a success makes us a good person. Both are just results of an action or actions, they are results and nothing more.

The combination of doing things that contribute to self-confidence and neutralizing or ending behaviors and environments that erode self-confidence result in a steady march toward a more confident and self-assured you.

Let's look at some things that erode confidence and some things that you can do to build confidence. This won't be an exhaustive list, but you will hopefully learn enough to incorporate what is discussed and to further identify the positive and negative factors in your life that affect your confidence level.

Fear and Self-confidence

According to studies, fear is the main saboteur of self-confidence. These studies stressed clearly that a “fear thought” can be detected and identified. Let me clarify that the type of fear we're referring to is a fear of emotional or mental

pain. Fear of a bear running toward you is normal and beneficial; it could save your life if you don't stand there analyzing the thought!

The kind of fear thought we're discussing often finds its impetus in an acquired dysfunctional mental pattern, wherein the mind is allowed to constantly dwell on doubt, negative thoughts, inadequacy and failure.

In time, the roots of this kind of thinking can spread into any area of life, undermining our confidence and ability.

Of course, there are many different kinds of fear: fear of separation, fear of failure, fear of the loss, fear of the unknown, fear of embarrassment, fear of a loss of respect, fear of death, fear of pain, fear of rejection and so forth.

Every kind of fear can't be addressed in a small ebook such as this, but we will look at the three most common and infamous fears.

The First Infamous Fear: Rejection

The fear of rejection is an irrational fear that others will not accept you for who you are. It's a thought pattern that causes a fear of being seen as unworthy in someone else's eyes.

It inhibits a person from doing things they otherwise would, or from saying what they believe, because of the fear that other people might disapprove and voice their criticism or condemnation.

The fear of rejection plagues everyone from time to time, but some people are especially crippled by it. They live in a constant state of guarded behavior to avoid rejection. They don't allow themselves to be themselves because of their fear, and so they shrink back from life, often living vicariously through movie or music heroes.

A person who places too much value in someone else's judgment of them is placing a heavy burden on themselves. If our own activities, desires and likes depend on another's opinion of us, we are really giving them our power to choose happiness. No one should have the power of happiness over you.

**If you give your power of happiness to another person,
you have volunteered to become their emotional slave.**

That's not to say we shouldn't be concerned if people like us or not, but we shouldn't be overly concerned either. Perhaps if we knew how seldom others even think about us we'd be more concerned about that than what they are thinking! Most people spend most of their thoughts on themselves and their concerns, not on you or me.

A person's uniqueness begins to disappear the moment he puts too much emphasis on what others think. A person too caught up with pleasing others will start to emulate other people in the way they dress, their mannerisms, and even the way they behave in society and the activities they pursue.

One can quickly turn oneself into a follower of others, losing oneself in the process. Self-confidence comes from being the person *you* choose to be in your own hearts desire, not from emulating others to gain a sense of belonging.

When you lose who you are to the whims of society, the sense of belonging you seek becomes more distant. It begins a game of you playing hide-and-seek from yourself. Play the game long enough and you can lose nearly all sense of who you are.

This usually happens to young people who crave attention and acceptance but do not yet have enough maturity to accept that they are whole and complete without the adulation and acceptance of others. Hollywood is filled with immature adults desperately seeking other people's approval and adoration.

Recognizing a fear of rejection in ourselves can sometimes be difficult because we tend to rationalize it away. We humans are very good at rationalization; each of us is an expert!

To cite an example of a rationalization, rather than speaking out when we disagree about something important we may tell ourselves we are simply being polite. Or, if we continually chase after the latest fads and fashions we may tell ourselves we really like whatever the latest "thing" is rather than admit we choose it to fit in and find acceptance.

A person with a fear of rejection may...

...**act without confidence**, tending to imitate others and never going first or blazing a trail of their own.

...**keep his or her opinions private** rather than risk being criticized.

...**be depressed more often than is normal**. A person who does not have the courage to speak for himself and to express his wants often becomes depressed and loses the zest for life. He may act like an automaton rather than person with passions, ideas, and creativity.

...**be confused about his or her true identity**. Those suffering from an identity crisis may anger easily and for no obvious reason.

...**suffer an acute lack of self-esteem and self-worth**. The person who attaches too much importance to what others think often thinks little of themselves, which is why they venerate the opinion of others.

Not everyone will like you, and every single person in the world can say that and every single one of them will be right. It only matters if you say it matters. It isn't necessary to have everyone like you.

You can live a full, successful, happy life without the approval of anyone. You just have to accept that truth for it to be true for you. Self-acceptance is the only approval you absolutely need for a happy life.

The Second Infamous Fear: Failure

Modern society has placed so much emphasis on success that failure has almost become a dirty word. That's a crying shame because failure is a common attribute among the world's greatest achievers!

Failure may be a bitter pill to swallow at the time, but most highly successful people will tell you they learned more from their failures than their successes.

The only failure that really matters is the last one. Are you going to let it keep you down? Or are you going to rise up, gather your strength and go on?

A person can stay beaten down and allow a failure to define them, or they can rise up and cross over that learning bridge called failure and define themselves in their own terms. The choice is to live in the past, dwelling in failure—or to live in the present and use failure as a tool for their benefit.

The only real failure is to refuse to ever try anything daring again for fear you might fail again. A failure only defines who you are if you let it define who you are. Allow me too adapt a line from William Shakespeare to our topic...

**A person with a fear of failure dies a thousand deaths;
the more courageous die but once.**

Fear of failure is normal, so do not feel afflicted or abnormal if you fear failure. Used properly it can be a great motivating force that impels us to give good effort and produce acceptable, or even exceptional, results.

How you deal with the fear of failure makes all the difference. First, stop taking yourself so damn seriously! You're human, you err. You do not have to be perfect; in fact, you can't be perfect, so **live your life!** It's far better to try and fail than to never have tried.

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

- *Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States of America*

If that doesn't inspire you, I don't know what will. Read that again and again if you need to. Read it when you're feeling fearful or discouraged. Grind it into your brain because the wisdom in that quotation is timeless. You were born with the right to dare greatly and the right to fail. Do not be afraid to exercise your God given rights!

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The Third Infamous Fear: Imagination

One of the most improbable, yet common causes of fear is our imagination. Our own imagination can conjure up some of the most disturbing scenarios we'll ever encounter—the trouble is, most have no real basis in truth or reality and most never happen.

Worry is like a rocking chair: It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere.

- *Erma Bombeck*

How many times have you stewed and fretted over something that never happened? Excessive worry can stem from negative expectations. The question is, why do you have negative expectations? Where did they come from?

Chances are they are so old you may not be able to identify where they came from, but are they serving you well?

That you *can* answer, and the answer is almost always no, those old negative expectations do not serve us well, and perhaps they never did. However, we still fall for them because old fears always feel fresh and new by showing up wearing a new disguise (different circumstances) each time they visit us.

The longer we entertain a fear, be it real or imaginary, the more influence that fear will have on our decision making and actions. If we do not maintain the integrity of our decisions they will be wrongly influenced by fear, negativity, and false data.

I'm sure you are smart enough to realize that a decision made under the pall of fear, negativity, and false data can easily be a very different decision from the one you'd make based on clarity, self-honesty, and truth.

We need to recognize when unlikely-to-happen fears are being conjured up by our imagination and counter those phantoms of worry with positive thoughts if we are to make the best decisions possible and take the courses of actions most likely to bring us happiness.

So how do we combat our fears and increase our confidence? See the next section for some suggestions.

How to Diminish Fear and Grow Confident

Below I've listed several methods for making fear smaller and self-confidence larger. Some of these items are intended to send a message inward to your brain, while others are intended to send a message outward to other people.

If others perceive you as more confident they'll treat you accordingly, which in turn will feed your confidence. In a very real sense, this is the art of faking it until you make it. It may seem odd to you, but it does work. Here then, are the items calculated to increase your self-confidence:

- 1. Emphasize your strengths.** Focus on what you do well now and do them. Praise yourself for undertaking the journey and for your successes. By focusing on our strengths and achievements, no matter how big or small, little by little we naturally become more confident because we are seeing more successes and achievements in our life and fewer failures and doubts.
- 2. Monitor your self-talk and counter negative thoughts with positive ones.** In doing so you are literally reprogramming your brain. Studies have shown that habitual thoughts flow along the same well-established neural pathways. As you replace habitual negative thought patterns with positive thoughts you create new neural pathways for positive flow; and in time the old, negative neural pathways disconnect. This disconnect allows them to form new neural pathways that can be more beneficial, and perhaps deter the previous negative flow of thought.
- 3. Practice the art of self-evaluation.** By becoming competent at evaluating yourself, and being comfortable with who you are becoming, you release yourself from the tyranny of the judgment of others. The only opinion of you that really matters is your own. **You are not what other think or say you are, you are what YOU think.**

Notice I did not say you are what you think *you are*—I said you are what you think, period. This is because **your life will take the direction of your most persistent and most dominant thoughts**, whether you have a false perception of who you are or not.

- 4. Take calculated and reasonable risks.** When you accept your experiences as instruments for learning rather than viewing them as battles to be won or lost,

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new opportunities can be opened that can release hidden self-confidence. It is my opinion that everyone has self-confidence—it's just that it sometimes gets buried so deeply under negativity, criticism, fear and doubt that it gets a little hard to find sometimes.

5. Body language tells a story of its own. Self-confidence, or the lack of it, can often be seen in a person's body language. What few people seem to realize is that body language can also influence our confidence. Don't believe me?

Proving it to yourself is easy enough...

When you're feeling normal (not too high, not too low) go for a 20 to 30 minute walk. Walk tall and erect, walk briskly and swing your arms like you're on a mission, hold your head high and whenever you meet up with someone look them in the eye and smile. If you're walking where there aren't many people, look for beauty in nature (trees, flowers, etc.) and interesting things and smile at any beautiful or interesting items you come across.

At the end of your walk check your mood. Does it feel elevated? Do you feel just a touch more at peace with yourself? It should—your body language has been sending your mind a message.

If you take the same walk and walked slowly, shuffling your feet, slumped over some with your head bent to the ground and your hands in your pockets, and if you don't look up to recognize the beauty around you or to acknowledge passers-by and affirm their worth by giving them a smile, then at the end of your walk you will feel quite differently from the other walk I described.

I call the first walk I described the walk of confidence. It made more sense than calling it Fred. Practice walking with confidence. Make walking like that a habit. Your body language will tell your mind how to feel, which in turn will send the message to your emotions. Your emotions will sooner or later get the message, and at that point **you'll start to feel confident.**

6. Add walking faster to your walk of confidence. Surveys have revealed that people who walk faster are seen as important people, giving the impression that one is busy and are involved in significant matters. On the other hand, ambling along lazily and without purpose can be a silent signal that confidence may be lacking.

It is all about changing the image you send to others, because if others see you as confident and busy they will treat you with more importance, which in turn will reinforce your growing confidence.

At the same time, don't walk unnaturally fast. If you end up panting and looking or feeling exhausted you've pushed it too hard. It's just a matter of adding a little bounce to your step.

Walking is also good exercise, which leads us to...

7. Get some exercise! Go for a brisk walk every day, or go swimming, biking, take an aerobics class—it doesn't matter what you do—just do something!

People who lack confidence tend to be less active. Active people have less time and inclination to sit around worrying. Get active, and the activity will send a new message to your psyche.

If you choose walking as your exercise of choice, add these characteristics to your walk exercise walk to help you build confidence...

Faster!

Walking faster enhances the benefits of walking. While your "walk of confidence" should be about 10 to 20 percent faster than normal, walking for exercise should be about 25 to 50 percent faster than normal as long as that pace doesn't strain you. If you haven't exercised in a long time you may have to build up to that point, and depending on your age and condition, you may want to consult a physician before undertaking a new exercise program.

Look Up!

When walking, you shouldn't stare at the ground unless you're walking where the footing is treacherous, such as hiking over rugged terrain or walking where the dog goes potty! Hold your head level and drink in the world. This will create opportunities to make eye contact with other people. It's a non-verbal method of communicating confidence.

Sway Away!

When walking, the natural swaying of the arms shouldn't be restricted or exaggerated. Restricting this natural motion makes you look stiff and unsure, while swaying too much just looks silly.

Just walking doesn't require much thought; however, walking with confidence requires practice and devotion if it isn't natural to you. Walking can deliver numerous benefits to a person on many different levels, including helping to develop self-confidence.

8. The eyes are usually the first thing we notice about someone's face. It's been said the eyes are the windows to the soul, but they can reveal self-confidence, or the lack of it, as well.

People with a healthy level of self-confidence usually make and hold eye contact when interacting with others; while people who lack confidence tend to avoid making eye contact.

Making eye contact is a natural and essential part of self-expression. The eyes can sometimes say things words cannot convey. Practice making eye contact with people when you talk to them, it is a sign of respect, showing them you are sincerely interested in them.

It also shows self-confidence to others and builds self-confidence within. When you can look someone in the eye when speaking with them, it puts you on an equal footing with them.

9. Self-talk can be described as that little voice inside your head. The voice is sometimes beneficial and benevolent toward us. However, it is also sometimes a critical voice that passes judgment and offers little hope to us.

People who lack self-confidence often hear their inner voice making self-critical judgments. This is not the problem—the problem is how we respond.

Those who lack confidence tend to believe the judgments and pronouncements of their inner critic. Rather than evaluating the comments, they accept them. Rather than questioning the truth of the comments, they believe them. Rather than taking charge of their inner dialog, they are subservient to it.

Your inner critic is very much like an observant and talkative child that tends to blurt out whatever it is thinking, whether it's nice or not. Your inner critic, like a child, can and should be trained. You should be in charge, not it.

Here are a few thoughts on reining in your inner critic so it serves you rather than rules you...

Listen to Your Inner Voice

This is the first step in making good use of our self-talk. Monitor your inner voice and listen to what it is saying rather than just accepting what it is saying.

Thoughts Assessment

After the general direction of your inner voice has been identified, it is time to assess the nature of the thoughts it is handing you. What are these thoughts saying in general? What attitude towards the self is being projected?

If the message seems detrimental, question if there is a way you might still benefit from message. Question if the message is fresh news or an old lie being served up yet again.

How have you responded to these kinds of thoughts in the past? What have these kinds of thoughts instilled in you over the years? Have they been beneficial? Have they helped you build self-confidence?

Control the Dialog

It's important to control your inner dialog rather than letting it control you. You can direct your thoughts in any direction you choose, you just have to choose. Replace the negative thoughts that undermine self-confidence with positive thoughts. Understand that your old thought patterns will resurface again and again as you begin taking control of your inner dialog. This is normal. The habitual thoughts will begin to subside as you continue in the new direction you choose.

Strive to Be Positive

Thinking from and viewing life from a positive perspective is the way to build self-confidence. When you stumble, your inner voice should say something like, "Stand up, you can do it!" ...rather than something like, "You're pathetic, stay down before you hurt yourself again!"

Dealing with one's inner voice can be a daunting task. Becoming a more positive thinker is more readily accomplished by replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts, rather than simply fighting against negative thoughts.

For example, suppose you met a girl and wanted to ask her out. Your negative self-talk might remind you that the last time you asked a girl like her out you were rejected and felt terrible, with the inference being that you should forget it and leave well enough alone. Be safe. Don't take any chances on being hurt.

You could fight against that negative talk, perhaps countering with something like, "No, this is different. This girl is nicer." ...or whatever. This kind of conversation leaves an opening for your inner critic to argue back.

Rather than arguing with yourself, change the style of dialog you're used to having with yourself and take charge. You might say, "That was then, this is now. I'm older and wiser now. I know being rejected the last time doesn't mean I'll be rejected the next time, but even if I am I can deal with it. I survived it before and I'll survive it the next time and every time. I'm in charge of my life and I choose to ask her out."

That's quite a difference, wouldn't you say? It doesn't leave much for the inner critic to argue with when you make a decision and state your intention.

Self-confidence is like a pair of eyeglasses, having the right pair allows you to better enjoy the beauty of things to the fullest. Life, if one truly looks at it, is all about perception. **One will never fully enjoy life if it is perceived through the dirty filter of negativity.**

10. There are many things that could affect your life that you do not control, but the one thing you can control is your attitude.

Have you heard the old story of the gatekeeper? Back in medieval times when villages had walls around them, a gatekeeper would stand watch at the village gate, denying or granting travelers entry into the village.

As it happened, one afternoon a traveler arrived at the gate of a very old and wise gatekeeper.

"I am seeking a good place to stay," the traveler called out to the gatekeeper, "tell me, what kind of people inhabit this village?"

The gatekeeper responded by asking, "Tell me friend, how did you find the people at the last village you stayed in?"

"Oh, they were rude and unkind, and not helpful at all. It was a horrible place," complained the traveler, "I should not wish to stay in a village like that ever again."

"That's amazing," said the gatekeeper, "those are the exact words I would use to describe this village. You would be wise to travel to the next village lest your stay here be as miserable as the last."

With that, the traveler continued on his journey. A short time later another traveler happened by. "Gatekeeper, pray tell, what kind of people inhabit this village," the traveler asked.

The gatekeeper again responded by asking, "Tell me friend, how did you find the people at the last village you stayed in?"

"Oh, they were a wonderful people, very friendly and helpful and kind. I made many new friends there," the traveler answered.

"That's amazing," said the gatekeeper, "those are the exact words I would use to describe this village. Please come in and stay with us for a while."

The gatekeeper knew that people see in others that which they find in themselves. He knew the first visitor would bring his poor attitude into his village, spoiling the atmosphere for its inhabitants, so he sent him on. He also knew the second visitor would add to the happiness of the whole village, so he was eager to have that visitor join them.

Do you understand what I'm saying?

You are the gatekeeper of your attitude.

You can choose dark thoughts, pessimism, and an attitude of failure and ruin the atmosphere of the day; or you can choose a can-do attitude of optimism and hope and create an atmosphere of happiness and wonderful possibilities for yourself and those around you.

Choose your attitude wisely and well, for it will define who you become.

Set Goals to Survive and Thrive

The alarm goes off and your morning ritual starts. You shower, get dressed, eat, and grab your briefcase. You mechanically kiss your wife on the cheek as she readies the kids breakfast. You say your goodbyes.

As you drive away you barely notice your surroundings, you've made this exact same trek so many times. The trip is uneventful, as usual, and the radio pulsates with music you have no fondness for.

After you arrive at work you check your mail and pour yourself a cup of coffee. Work gets done, lunch comes and goes.

On your ride home you think about saving enough to run a small business in a few years. You have told yourself the same thing for several years now. Once home, you kiss your wife hello, chit chat for a few minutes, then plop down in front of the TV.

In a few hours you'll go to bed, only to repeat your performance again tomorrow. Does the same passionless day pass by one after the other until you realize your dreams are slowly slipping away?

Unfortunately, for too many people this is just what is happening. They repeat the same dreary reality over and over because they aren't doing anything to change their reality. When you always walk down the same path, you can't expect to suddenly come out at a better place.

It doesn't have to be like that. Start setting goals with a timeline. Start setting goals using the SMART method.

The SMART method of setting goals has been around for a long time and has been proven effective by a great diversity of people.

SMART is an acronym that stands for:

Specific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-bound

Let's look at each of those...

SPECIFIC

The goal you set has to be as detailed as possible. The more specific the goal, the better you'll be able to envision success. The more you know about your goal the easier it will be for you to believe you can attain it.

MEASURABLE

Your goal must be designed so progress can be held up against a measure, or a benchmark. A dieter may set a goal of losing 25 pounds in 90 days. A writer may set a goal of writing 10 pages a day. A measurable goal is one that has a system of feedback built in so you can measure your progress.

ATTAINABLE

This is a part where you determine if your goal is attainable. A goal of being the best guitar player in the world in four weeks not attainable, but a goal of learning to play the guitar is attainable. Learning a skill others possess is almost always an attainable goal. Being the “best” in this context is purely subjective and is not attainable.

REALISTIC

Does your goal make logical sense? Getting to Mars and back within 20 days is a goal, but with the resources you have, is it realistic? Part of determining if a goal is realistic lies in determining if you are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve the goal—if you are not, the goal is not realistic. It is still realistic to aim high, but if you do not possess the skills, resources, or will to reach the goal, then for all practical purposes the goal is unrealistic.

TIME-BOUND

This may be the most important factor. A goal has to have a deadline to be a goal, otherwise it's just wishing. A deadline helps to prevent the goal setter from letting his goal slide from one day to the next.

It helps to break larger goals down into achievable steps so you can measure your progress. For example, if your goal is to lose 20 pounds in 10 weeks you need to lose 2 pounds a week, so losing two pounds a week is the short term goal you'd need to achieve to reach your long term goal.

Remember this—time is the true price you pay for everything.

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Affirmations and Visualization

People from all walks of life use affirmations to develop themselves in different ways. Athletes, merchants, soldiers, students, politicians, authors, construction workers...the list goes on and on.

Why?

Affirmations work. They can serve as a reminder of our goals, they can strengthen our commitment to them, and they can help us keep our priorities in order. They also help us to develop the beliefs we wish to cultivate, and to strengthen those beliefs and our commitment to them.

While an affirmation can be defined in several ways, the definition we are concerned with this: An affirmation is the repetition of a self-suggested idea used to train the conscious and subconscious mind in a new way of thinking.

Affirmations should be stated in the present tense, should be phrased in positive language, and as much as possible should represent how you want to be without stating obvious lies that your inner critic can argue with you over.

For example, if you're 100 pounds overweight and want to be thinner, repeating "I am skinny" or "I am not fat" to yourself every day will be less effective than telling yourself, "I am safely losing weight every week and drawing closer to my ideal weight."

Just saying so doesn't make it so . . . or does it? Some would argue that it can if you believe it and fuel that belief with emotion. To my way of thinking, the affirmation is a way of changing your way of thinking that caused you to become 100 pounds overweight.

When the affirmation starts sinking in, you start changing your behavior to become that which you affirm. Maybe one day out of the blue you just start drinking a glass of water before each meal so you don't eat as much. Maybe you start skipping dessert, or cutting down on between meal snacks, or become more active and start burning more calories.

It works by synchronizing your conscious and subconscious minds so they are working toward the same goal. It is a form of self-hypnosis, often combined

with visualization of the goal achieved or the successful execution of the necessary steps involved.

Sports psychology has made use of self-suggestion and visualization to improve athletic performance for decades. We humans are actually quite good at mentally programming ourselves to achieve a specific goal.

We're also good at programming our minds to bring us the negative things we don't want to happen. One can repeat negative thoughts until our mind has been bombarded into submission.

Our subconscious mind makes no distinction between a positive suggestion and a negative suggestion, it just follows the program it's repetitively fed. This is how bad habits are formed and can have such a stranglehold on us.

I want to emphasize that the wording of the affirmation is very important. An affirmation should be a positive sentence stating exactly what you desire. You are *affirming* that which you desire, not that which you do not desire.

Our mind will often drop the negative qualifier if we do not word our affirmation in the positive. For example, if one wants to stop smoking, the statement should not be "I am a non-smoker." The subconscious mind tends to process that as affirming you are a smoker. Instead, it is far better to say, "I am smoke free." It is also better to make your affirmations in the present tense. You are affirming what you want *now*, not off somewhere in the fuzzy future.

The more positive the affirmation the more powerful it will be. The more emotion you can invest in it the more powerful it will be. The more you use it the more powerful it will be.

Affirmations must be stated everyday, several times each day. It should be the first thing done when one wakes up and the last thing done before going to sleep. In fact, you could fall asleep repeating your affirmation to yourself.

This is programming the mind for success; you are actually reprogramming a harmful thought pattern into a beneficial thought pattern.

Over thirty years ago I was diagnosed with a disease the doctor told me I would have all my life. I used affirmations to overcome the disease. It took six

months, but thirty years later I am still free from that disease and have not experienced it since. That's the power of affirmations.

Side note: PLEASE do not forgo medical care in favor of affirmations. Be smart and seek professional medical care in conjunction with affirmations.

Visualization is seeing a future event in as great detail as one can. It should involve all the senses, including taste and smell. The objective is to create a compelling vision that the mind will readily accept as reality. When correctly carried out, the subconscious mind will work untiringly toward the fulfillment of your visualization.

The mind can be a powerful and transformational tool, but because it is like a sponge, we must be careful in what we feed it. I have one last story for you that illustrates the importance of feeding our mind the proper food for thought.

There was a man with two racing dogs. Each weekend he'd race the two dogs against each other and he'd take bets, giving great odds that encouraged people to bet on the dog he wanted them to bet on.

One week the black dog would win, and folks seeing this and considering the odds would bet on the black dog the next weekend. But the white dog would win the next race.

This was repeated again and again as the man roamed from town after town, with the odds and the bets always favoring the previous winning dog, and the other dog always winning the next race. The man earned his living from this gypsy lifestyle.

When he was old and no longer raced dogs he was asked how he always knew which dog was going to win the race. He answered that, each week he'd feed the dog he wanted to win a healthy and plentiful diet, and just give the other dog enough to live on. The dog that ate well was always stronger, so it always won the race.

Our minds are like that. If we feed them a healthy mental diet they grow stronger, more capable, and more confident. If we feed them mental junk food they stagnate and grow weaker and less capable. Consider this...

What you feed your mind determines where you're going in life.