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The Keys to Decision Making

EXCERPT FROM *PERSONAL COACHING FOR RESULTS*, BY LOU TICE





—THE KEYS TO DECISION MAKING

Could This Be You?

Picture this: You're living with your spouse in a beautifully decorated, warm and comfortable home that many people would describe as a mansion. It's located on the shores of a large, sparkling lake in what is arguably one of the world's most beautiful cities. You also own a working ranch a few hundred miles away that you visit often. It's nestled in a valley where the air is unbelievably sweet and clean and the scenery is spectacular. You look forward to going there to ride your horse through the countryside, fish in the stream, practice skeet shooting, and make plans for the future.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your marriage is fulfilling and long lasting — a true partnership in every sense of the word. You and your spouse have worked as a team to build a widely respected international company. Your business is tremendously successful and satisfying because it helps literally millions of other people to become successful, too. Now you are a grandparent, and it's a great feeling to realize that when you die, you'll be leaving behind not only substantial material wealth and an extensive body of useful, meaningful work, but also a wonderful living legacy. Some years ago, you bought yourself a black Rolls Royce Corniche convertible — the car of your dreams — that you have a lot of fun driving. And you spend much of your time traveling all over the world, talking to folks from all walks of life about your favorite subject: how people can use more of their vast potential.

Before I tell you what all of this has to do with coaching or mentoring, let me ask you a very important question: Do you have any trouble putting yourself in this picture?

Of course, maybe the things I've described here aren't really your style. Maybe you'd rather imagine yourself creating art in a light-filled studio, or setting up free medical clinics in an urban ghetto, or raising llamas on a farm. Maybe your ideal of personal bliss would be reporting news direct from the world's hot spots or helping aid organizations care for the sick in India or Africa, or taking photographs of artifacts from ancient civilizations for National Geographic. Or maybe it's living with your family in a comfortable, attractive home out in the suburbs, writing a best-selling mystery novel, or growing your own business to the point where you no longer have to worry about feeling secure in your senior years.

The specific images don't matter. What I'm asking is whether you can see yourself actually living the life you would most want to live. Do you have difficulty imagining that life? Does thinking about it seem like wasting time on a fantasy that could never really happen? Well, that's the way it would have seemed to me, too, forty years ago. In fact, if you had tried to get me to see myself living the life I've just described in the first two paragraphs of this chapter, I would have told you that you were nuts. Born crazy and had a relapse.

Nevertheless, this is a fairly accurate snapshot of my life as it is today. Forty years ago, though, I was a high-school teacher and football coach, struggling to keep the bills paid and raise a rapidly growing family on \$1,000 a month. Some days I thought ends would never meet, and some days I thought I was doing all right — compared to the situation I was raised in, anyway.

I grew up with three brothers and a sister in a run-down house (shack might be a more accurate word) in one of the worst parts of the city. I don't know if they were alcoholics or not, but both of my parents drank a lot more than just socially. As a result, in addition to being dirt poor, we lived with chaos and turmoil. Episodes of intense physical and emotional violence were routine. After my father died when I was thirteen, we had to go on welfare. My mother tried to keep our household going, but she was, even in the best of times, pretty unstable. I went to work after school and during the summers to help out, but even then, we never seemed to do more than just barely get by.

Some people would say without any hesitation that these kinds of early-life circumstances add up to a sure-fire formula for failure. As a matter of fact, many people who have had similarly difficult childhoods would be the first to agree. For me, though, it turned out to be the first chapter in a wonderful success story.

The “Secret” I Refuse to Keep

So what’s my secret? How did I get from that painful place where I started out to the wonderful life I have today? Was it dumb luck? Driving ambition? Exceptional talent? Well-placed connections with the “right” people?

Well, I’ll admit to having plenty of ambition (which, to me, is just another way of saying that I have goals I take seriously). But anyone who knows me can tell you that I possess no great genius or extraordinary talent. As for luck, on the whole I don’t believe in it. And forty years ago, the only people I knew were my family members, a bunch of high-school kids, other teachers and coaches, and a few priests. What I did have, though, and still do, is the willingness to work hard and the determination to persist.

But hard work alone doesn’t necessarily get you anywhere. In fact, it’s extremely common to find people who work incredibly hard all their lives but end up just as badly off as they were when they started. The same is true of persistence. If you hang in there doing the wrong thing over and over, when what you really need to do is let go and try something new, all you’ll have to show for it is a matched set of white knuckles.

I’ve given a lot of thought to the question of why I’ve been so successful, and I think I’ve done a good job of answering it. I’ve identified a number of key principles in the growth process that I’ve used to take me from poverty to affluence, from doubt and confusion to confidence, from a struggle for survival to an exciting, fulfilling life. And I’ve discovered that these principles work as well for other people — people from every walk of life — as they have worked for me.

But the secret of my success isn’t a secret. Quite the contrary. Once I discovered how well these principles worked, I immediately began to teach others. This book is one way I can share them with you. It’s also a way I can help you to become very effective at doing something I really love to do — sharing the “secrets” of success with other people.

In fact, it’s information I share all the time with Fortune 1000 executives and government leaders, four-star generals and professional athletes, Nobel Prize winners and college presidents, so there’s no question about its value or usefulness. In a slightly different form, I also share it with the chronically unemployed, at-risk kids, social service workers, and inmates as well as staff in state and federal prisons, because it can benefit anyone. Put as simply as possible, it’s about a process that will help you, no matter who you are, to make your future a lot better than your past.

So, now, let’s get started. Just like so many other things, it begins with your imagination.

Inventing the Future

Do you believe in the power of imagination? I sure do. Just look at the empires that the power of imagination has built through the advertising media alone. Then take another look, and consider the fact that everything that has ever been invented, built, composed, painted, created, or otherwise brought into this world by a human being first started out as an idea in someone’s mind — a product of their imagination. Then, after the “what” part of the idea was conceived, one way or another the “how” got invented, and the thing itself was born into what we think of as “reality.”

As humans, we invented our future, day by day, century by century, because we were uniquely equipped to do it. We had unbelievably fertile, incredibly powerful imaginations — the greatest gift, next to life itself, that we could possibly possess. That hasn’t changed. You and I still invent our futures in exactly the same way.

Nature, Nurture, and Human Agency

Scientists used to argue heatedly about the relative importance of heredity and environment in understanding human behavior. This question was dubbed the “nature versus nurture” debate. These days, another factor has entered the equation, and the debate has settled down somewhat as a more complex possibility continues to emerge and assert itself. This factor is called human agency, and it simply means our ability to choose and change, to want and desire, to intend and imagine.

Human agency must now be taken into consideration whenever we are attempting to predict or influence human actions. It appears that our thoughts about our environment are as important as the environment itself and that our thoughts about our genetically inherited characteristics are as important as those characteristics themselves.

Human agency helps explain why two kids raised in the same abusive, impoverished family can turn out so differently. It helps us understand why one woman who loses her sight in a freak accident becomes an alcoholic recluse, but another who goes through an almost identical trauma becomes a bestselling author and teacher. Human agency is the reason one man lives happily weighing an extra fifty pounds, while for another it's a constant struggle of deprivation and relapse. It's why bankruptcy means deep depression, shame, and suicide for one investor but is only a painful learning experience to be avoided in the future for another. It's probably also why some people's health quickly fails when they believe they're not likely to live much longer, yet others survive and even thrive in spite of so-called terminal illness.

When the distinguished psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, described his time as a prisoner of the Nazis during the Holocaust, he stressed the power of thought — specifically the collection of beliefs we call attitude — in determining the impact of the prison camp experience. Here is a short passage from his extraordinary book, *Man's Search for Meaning*:

“We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of his freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

One of the central principles of this book, and of the programs my company produces and implements all over the world, is that we move toward and become like what we think about. Our present thoughts determine our future.

This is by no means a new idea. “The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts,” Marcus Aurelius maintained. “There exists nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,” wrote Shakespeare. In the late nineteenth century, William James (medical doctor, Harvard professor, respected psychologist, and philosopher) proclaimed, “The greatest discovery of my time was that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of minds.”

Unfortunately, there wasn't much information available in James' day about how to deliberately change an attitude or even about how to test the theory, so this discovery wasn't as immediately exciting as it might have been. Most folks knew nothing about this discovery. They just went on about their business of living as best they could, and, if their attitudes changed, it wasn't really seen as something they caused themselves. It was more like something that happened to them.

Even though we know a lot more than we used to about the human mind, thanks to many years of diligent work by scientists and psychologists, it's still pretty much the same story. Every now and then, something occurs that turns a light on for you, that helps you see yourself and others more clearly, think differently, let go of unproductive behavior and attitudes that stand in your way. Sometimes it's an event of major importance — a marriage, the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a serious illness, an unexpected divorce, or even participation in a military conflict. Sometimes it's something that no one notices but you. Nevertheless, you feel changed for the better by it. And that's exciting.

What's even more exciting, though, is when you learn how to deliberately generate these enlightening experiences yourself in ways that spare the pain and harness the power.

Now, if you move toward what you think about, then your ability to control what you think about, who you listen to, and how you interpret and explain your experiences becomes crucial. Your ability to control these things will, in turn, control your direction in life. And if you become like what you think about, your character and integrity are involved, aren't they? Repeated thoughts generate actions; actions repeated over time determine character; and character, as the great writers and thinkers of the world will tell you, is destiny. In other words, what happens to you in life is not accidental. It's a direct or indirect result of what you think and what you do.

The Search for the Truth

A quote attributed to Lao Tsu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, counsels, “Do not seek the truth; only cease to cherish opinions.” With that in mind, here are some things that I maintain don’t exist: a beautiful day, an exciting story, a delicious meal, a boring party, a soothing melody, a fascinating conversation, a stressful situation, and countless others that could be similarly described.

Why not? Well, we behave, not in accordance with “the truth,” but with the truth as we perceive and believe it to be. A meal may taste delicious to me, but if you were raised in a very different culture or are feeling ill, you might not agree. If you are in the hospital getting ready to have a second cancer operation, a beautiful day might seem pretty gloomy to you. And the conversation I find fascinating you might describe as obscure and irritating.

See what I mean? All of us live on the leash of our senses and our beliefs. Because of our physiology, the information our senses perceive is extremely limited. When we assume that we know the truth from what is apparent to us, we may well be deceived. If we want to see the details of our solar system, we need a telescope. If we want to see the details of the human body, we need a microscope. Even then, there is much that escapes us. Physicists tell me that the chair I am sitting in is not the solid object that it appears to be; they say it is composed largely of space. So, you see, the truth often depends on who’s looking, how they’re looking, and how they interpret what they see.

Getting to the truth takes determination, persistence, and willingness to set aside preconceived ideas. Our tendency is to lock on to conventional and conditioned ways of thinking, adopting them as “the truth” and locking out other possibilities. We tend to be uncomfortable with paradox or thinking that is very different from our own. We like to feel sure of what we know, so we will argue for our version of the truth and try our darnedest to make someone else’s version wrong. We may even see ourselves as having won the argument, but in the process, we have lost the opportunity of seeing and possibly understanding someone else’s truth. Locking on to “the truth” can be a mistake that alienates others, limits our options, and locks out a world of possibilities.

Instead, you want to become a possibility thinker, someone who looks beyond convention, beyond conditioning. When you’re a possibility thinker, you stop focusing on what you don’t want — the problems, obstacles, and difficulties in your life. Instead, you look for options, solutions, and new ways of doing things that will give you the results you do want. You recognize your own biases, strengths, and weaknesses, and you can put them aside when they prevent you from seeing other possibilities. It’s critical that you be able to do this, not only for your own success and well-being, but for the success of those you will be coaching and mentoring, too.



—THE KEYS TO DECISION MAKING

Now You See It, Now You Don't: Scotomas

Sometimes you can look right at something and not see it. How can that be? If you drive a car, you know about the dangerous blind spot that exists between the time something passes from the rear view mirror to the side view mirror. Similarly, scotoma is the term that describes a blind spot within the eye's visual field caused by a physical defect or disease.

As I use the term, though, a scotoma is anything that keeps us from perceiving or understanding the truth. Most often, we inadvertently create these “blind spots” ourselves so that we can hold on to our version of reality, our beliefs about ourselves and the world in which we live. Scotomas cause us to see what we expect to see, hear what we expect to hear, and experience what we expect to experience.

If you're having a terrible time with your fifteen-year-old, whom you see as uncooperative, surly, and argumentative, you may have built a scotoma to the things he does that don't fit your picture. You won't notice when he cleans up after himself without being asked, but the mess he leaves in the living room will scream out at you. You won't hear him when he thanks you for the ride you gave him to the movies, but the silence will scream at you when he forgets. It's what you expect, and it confirms your belief, so, without fail, you notice.

If you believe that your company can't sell its services or products in a retail market, you won't see retail opportunities. You'll swear they're not out there. Your belief will create a scotoma. If you believe that women are poor drivers, you'll be on the alert for mistakes and dumb moves made by women behind the wheel. In fact, you'll notice nothing else, including the hundreds of expert female drivers with whom you share the road every day, and you'll find a way to rationalize any information to the contrary, such as your wife's flawless driving record or the insurance industry's statistics.

More often than not, scotomas block our positive change efforts, flexibility, and creativity, because they make us selective information-gatherers. They keep us prisoners to our preconceived ways of seeing things and our habitual ways of doing things.

How to Get Lucky: Lock On and Open Up

So scotomas can help you achieve your goals, but they can also blind you to important information. The ideal way to manage this dilemma is to both lock on and open up. That is, focus intensely on your goals, but remind yourself to stay receptive to new information. Accept that what you “know” is only part of the truth, and be on the lookout for more of it. Go ahead and lock on to an imagined ideal or a desired end result, but remain open to unconventional options when it comes to figuring out how you’re going to get there.

Don’t think you know all there is to know about anything, no matter how long you’ve been learning, no matter how much authority you have, no matter how many people consider you an expert on the subject. In fact, the longer you’ve been doing something — running a company, raising kids, coming home to your spouse, being part of a friendship, mountain climbing, you name it — the more alert you need to be in order to avoid the blindness that is so often caused by complacency, tradition and routine.

Diversity is a wonderful scotoma-buster. Even the benefit of one additional point of view gives you more information to work with and lets you see more of the truth. Many perspectives are available if you listen to the people around you, whether that’s a widely varied work force or an extended family, a support group or a task-oriented team. Asking for input and listening carefully without preconceived judgments not only helps to eliminate blind spots and gives you an expanded view, it also says to the people you ask, “I value your opinion. I respect your ability to contribute.” When you can base your decisions and actions on thoughtful consideration of this expanded view, a funny thing happens. You start to get “luckier.”

As the quantity of truth that you see increases, so do the “lucky breaks” in your life. Only it isn’t really about luck. It has nothing to do with coincidence or intelligence, either. It has to do with the way that you think, which causes a dramatic increase in the options available to you. Problems get solved because you lock on to solving them and then open up your mind to information about how. Relationships become more harmonious because you lock on to the positive, loving way you’d like them to be and open up your mind to finding the means to that end. Finances improve because you lock on to living a more abundant life and open up your mind to activities and behaviors that will earn it for you.

How the Mind Works

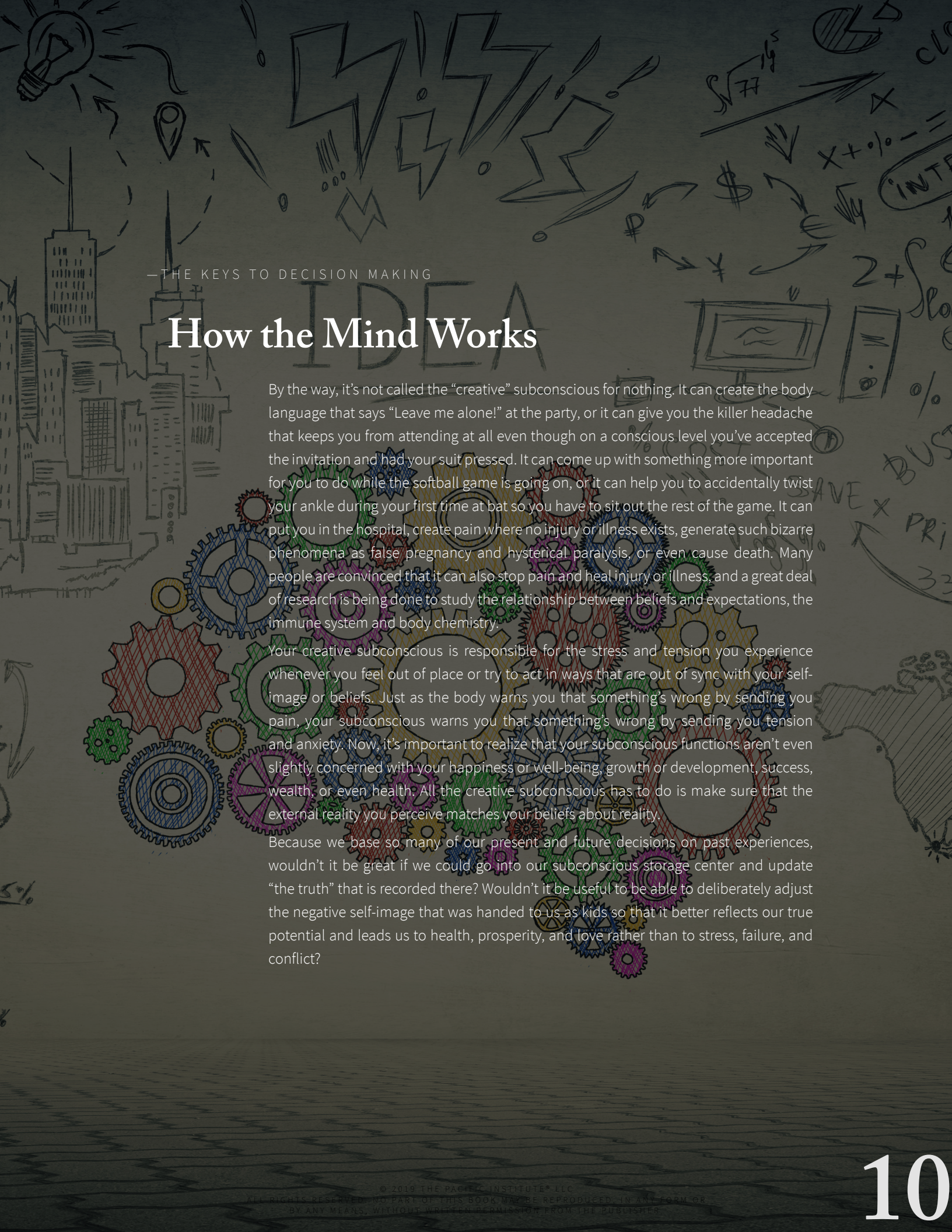
Psychology and psychiatry departments at large universities have entire libraries devoted to the workings of the human mind. So, although it's accurate, what I'm going to tell you about here amounts to skimming the surface — but that's OK, because you're not reading this book in order to become a psychologist. Also, the surface I've skimmed off to give you is, in my opinion, the cream — the essential things you need to know in order to be more and do more than you ever have before and to be the finest coach and mentor anybody ever had.

For some time now, a widely accepted way to look at the process of thought has been in terms of the conscious and subconscious. Occasionally, a third is added—the creative subconscious. These are purely theoretical terms, useful in helping us understand and explain human behavior. They aren't actually separated from each other by any physical boundary. Instead, these words represent different functions of what we commonly call “the mind.” Exploring a few basic principles of how these three functions work will help you understand why you sometimes behave as you do. It will also help you see why the affirmation and visualization process you'll learn about in Chapter 6 works as well as it does and why it is so critical to helping yourself and others grow.

The conscious mind deals with external and internal reality. It perceives, investigates, and interprets information that comes in through the senses. Once you perceive (see, hear, smell, touch, sense) something, you associate it with anything similar you have experienced before. Then, you decide whether any action is needed based on what happened in the past. That's why Jennifer, who was severely bitten by a neighbor's dog when she was coming home from second grade one day, is still afraid of dogs — all dogs — at age fifty. It's why the slightest whiff of barbecue sauce has made 35 year old Frank sick to his stomach ever since he became violently ill after eating a charbroiled hot dog when he was six. It's also why many people who have just had a painful divorce or relationship breakup are often reluctant to date or begin a new relationship. “I'm not about to open myself up to that kind of hurt again,” they think, because they now associate intimacy with pain.

Your subconscious handles everything that goes on outside of your consciousness. It's a kind of autopilot that takes care of everything you don't think about — habits, attitudes, and beliefs; many body functions; memories; learned behaviors that have become automatic; feelings that have not been acknowledged or expressed, etc. The creative subconscious maintains order and sanity by making sure that you behave in ways that reflect your inner version of reality. In other words, it causes you to act like the person you know yourself to be. It operates very creatively to see that reality and your beliefs about reality match.

This is vitally important to remember as you attempt to change and grow, because your creative subconscious maintains your presently dominant self-image. If you see yourself as painfully shy and inept at making small talk, you don't have to remind yourself to be anxious about meeting new people or socializing at a party. If you believe that you are clumsy and uncoordinated, you won't have to remember to say, “No, thanks!” when you're invited to join the softball game at your company picnic. If you can't get out of playing, you won't have to remember to strike out or miss catches and feel uncomfortable the whole time, either. Your creative subconscious will take care of all of that for you.



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How the Mind Works

By the way, it's not called the "creative" subconscious for nothing. It can create the body language that says "Leave me alone!" at the party, or it can give you the killer headache that keeps you from attending at all even though on a conscious level you've accepted the invitation and had your suit pressed. It can come up with something more important for you to do while the softball game is going on, or it can help you to accidentally twist your ankle during your first time at bat so you have to sit out the rest of the game. It can put you in the hospital, create pain where no injury or illness exists, generate such bizarre phenomena as false pregnancy and hysterical paralysis, or even cause death. Many people are convinced that it can also stop pain and heal injury or illness, and a great deal of research is being done to study the relationship between beliefs and expectations, the immune system and body chemistry.

Your creative subconscious is responsible for the stress and tension you experience whenever you feel out of place or try to act in ways that are out of sync with your self-image or beliefs. Just as the body warns you that something's wrong by sending you pain, your subconscious warns you that something's wrong by sending you tension and anxiety. Now, it's important to realize that your subconscious functions aren't even slightly concerned with your happiness or well-being, growth or development, success, wealth, or even health. All the creative subconscious has to do is make sure that the external reality you perceive matches your beliefs about reality.

Because we base so many of our present and future decisions on past experiences, wouldn't it be great if we could go into our subconscious storage center and update "the truth" that is recorded there? Wouldn't it be useful to be able to deliberately adjust the negative self-image that was handed to us as kids so that it better reflects our true potential and leads us to health, prosperity, and love rather than to stress, failure, and conflict?

Accountability, Control, and Power

Powerless people tend to blame others for their disappointments and failures. They blame their families: “No one could succeed with the parents I had!” They blame their friends: “If my so-called friends would just come through for me once in a while.” They blame the system, society, their employers, the political party in power, and their individual circumstances.

Powerless people often feel that the deck has been stacked against them, and they have endless excuses for their lack of achievement and power over their own lives: “All I need is some real money for a change.” “It’s because I didn’t pay enough attention in school.” “If only I was better looking (taller, shorter, a different race, a different age),” and so on. They stumble through life feeling anxious, depressed, resentful, and bitter, dreaming of unlikely events that will magically transform them through little or no effort of their own. Because they’re filled with envy, it’s hard for them to feel real pleasure in other people’s successes.

The cure is simple but not often taken: They just need to accept accountability for their own lives. They need to give up blame and learn to hope. Give up faultfinding and learn to set goals. Give up thinking about what they’d do if they won the lottery and figure out what to do with the money they have right now.

When we accept full accountability and responsibility for the results we get in life, we empower ourselves to change. When we believe that forces outside ourselves control us, we remain victims, feel powerless, and behave accordingly. It doesn’t matter whether the outside force is the system, a disease or addiction, an employer, less than adequate parenting received as a child, the government, society, what others will think, the approval of a mate or spouse, peer pressure, and so on. Of course, these things do affect us to varying degrees. But when we make them responsible for what we do and say, for our failures and lack of effort, for our attitude that says “Why bother?”, and for the pain we inflict on ourselves and others, we are, in effect, saying, “Until this outside force changes, I’m stuck.” And so we are.

Accountability or responsibility (response ability) suggests that we are able to thoughtfully choose the way we respond to life’s events, rather than simply reacting by reflex. Feeling responsible is a good thing. As a matter of fact, it’s essential if we are going to live up to our potential, enjoy fulfilling relationships with others, and live happy, fulfilling lives. John Kennedy became a true leader when he stood before the American people and said that the Bay of Pigs was an atrocity that should never have happened—and then took full responsibility for it. It was then, that Kennedy was transformed from a promising young politician to a great leader. The same is true for you and me. When we take responsibility for our lives, we give ourselves power.

Accountability goes hand in hand with confidence and the feeling of controlling one’s own life. When we’re accountable, it means that we’re capable of making rational or moral decisions on our own and that we are answerable to others for our behavior. It means that we can be trusted — that our word to others and to ourselves can be depended on.

The good news is that you can change the way you think. You can become accountable for your attitudes, expectations, and beliefs. You can deliberately change your self-image, your ideas about your attributes and capabilities, your convictions about what is possible for you and the world in which you live, your beliefs about who is responsible for your happiness and success.

When you change the way you think, the way you behave changes. And when you behave differently, you get different results.

What's Good Enough for You?

If you're already feeling on top of these things and in charge of your life, let me ask you some questions.

Because you are accountable for your thoughts, they are focused, creative, and positive virtually all the time, right? Since you are accountable for your body, you must be trim and toned, healthy, fit, flexible, and active, correct? Because you are accountable for your emotions, you are filled with joy, enthusiasm, and a sense of inner peace on a daily basis, right? And since you are accountable for your time, your life is prioritized and balanced among many important interests and activities, isn't that so?

Do you see what I'm leading you toward? Even if you feel that you're already accountable and in control of your life, is there more you could be doing? Are there any less-than-ideal behaviors or results that you're settling for, day after day, year after year? Is there more growing you could do in some areas? Could you be happier, healthier, more productive?

Did you find yourself feeling at all defensive when you read the last paragraph? I often notice that when I'm giving a presentation or a seminar and I start talking about accountability, some people begin to look uncomfortable. Maybe they're trying to cope with illness or injury, and they're feeling like victims. Their thinking probably goes something like this: "Are you trying to tell me that I am to blame for this? Do you expect me to believe that this is my fault?" The answer is no. But neither do I want them to believe that it's someone else's fault. The accountability I'm talking about has nothing whatever to do with blame, guilt, or finding fault, and I get concerned when I hear so many people these days describing themselves as victims. So-and-so is the victim of an illness. Someone is a crime victim. Someone else is a victim of poverty or racism or sexism. Of course, I realize that these things exist and that no one deserves to have tragedy strike. But there's something in the label "victim" that tends to create a powerless attitude. Victims are helpless. If you think of yourself as a victim, you may begin to believe that you have no control over your life, that you probably aren't going to be able to have what you want, and that there's nothing you can do to change that.

Adopting a victim mentality can also be a way of avoiding accountability, like the man who filled out an accident report by saying, "The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of its way when it struck my car." See what I mean? When you accept accountability for your role in creating a problem, you empower yourself to change the situation or to handle it differently next time.

By the way, the word accountability comes from an ancient Roman term that meant "to stand forth and be counted." That's the kind of accountability I mean — standing up more in your life and making it count. In the future, instead of playing the blame game ("Whose fault is this? Who's to blame here?"), examine as objectively as you can what your role may have been in creating the things that "happen to" you. Then, ask yourself how you would like to change your experience, what it would take to change it, and do what you need to do to make it happen. That's accountability in action.



—THE KEYS TO DECISION MAKING

How Personal Accountability Creates a Better World

I want to say one more thing about accountability on a personal level and how it connects to the social problems that plague us today. Some people think that we could solve a lot of society's problems with more laws, but the more laws we have, the more our prisons fill up. Others think that what we need is more money, but as a nation we are among the wealthiest.

I think the state of California was on the right track when it established a task force to promote self-esteem and personal and social responsibility. The report of that task force made it clear that society's problems dwindle when its citizens feel accountable for their own actions, for the consequences of those actions, and for their own mental and physical health. People who feel this way don't expect others to make them happy and don't blame others for their sorrows. When a feeling of accountability arises from an inner choice rather than being imposed upon us by others, we operate with minimal confusion and self-deception and, therefore, we have better end results.

Accountability is definitely related to our feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The more we appreciate our own worth and importance (self-esteem), and the more we feel able to cause the things we most want to happen (self-efficacy), the more we are able to act responsibly toward others. And the more responsibly we act toward others, the better our society as a whole will work.

All my experience, everything I know, tells me this is true. Winston Churchill once said, "The price of greatness is responsibility." I would add that when you take full responsibility for your life, you enable yourself to cause great things to happen. You help create not only a better life for yourself, but also a better world.

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what we think about. Our present
thoughts determine our future.”**

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