

Life

Strategies

**Stop Making
Excuses!**

**Do what works
Do what matters**

Dr. Phillip C McGraw

This text that you are about to read is an extract from the original book. I made it for my personal use, but now that I am sharing it with you, all I ask is that if you find it interesting, buy the book. It is worth it. The original book has 282 pages. This extract has 15 pages. Enjoy it!

Chapter one Get Real

At times, people aren't fair or sensitive, but that's just part of life. Either way, fair or unfair, you have to help you. Believe me when I tell you that if you don't step up and fight for you, no one else will. ...in this war we call life, most of the decisive battles are fought within you.

Don't feel as if you should minimize your problems, or apologize for them. We don't want to make a scene or disrupt the flow of things. As a result, we settle, quietly, much too often. If a problem is important to you, then that's enough; that qualifies it as worthy. It's important, because you are important.

Your life really can be different -you just haven't had the tools, the focus, and the "inside scoop". If what you're doing isn't working, you might as well at least consider an alternative approach. You can start by admitting you may not know everything you need to in order to get what you want.

In any trial, somebody is trying to take something away from somebody else. So it is in life. ...when the world starts coming after you, you'd better have yourself a really good strategy and know the rules of the game, or the bad guys will be dividing up what used to be yours.

Ask yourself right now: Do you really have a strategy in your life, or are you just reactively going from day to day, taking what comes? If you are, you simply aren't competitive. The winners in this life know the rules of the game and have a plan, so that their efficiency is comparatively exponential to that of people who don't. No big mystery, just fact.

You need to ask yourself: "Am I really headed where I want to go, or am I just out there wandering around?" "Is what I'm doing today really what I want to do or am I doing it, not because I want to, but because it is what I was doing yesterday?" "Is what I have what I really want, or is it what I've settled for because it was easy, safe, or not as scary as what I really wanted?" Hard questions, I know, but don't you really know the answers?

The epidemic

Taking a long, hard look at the negative behaviours in your life, and at your current life strategy -if you've even got one- can be enlightening; it can be the beginning of a Life Strategy. ...you will be, and are, accountable for your own life.

Most people, and I'll bet you are no exception, cheat themselves by not asking themselves the hard questions, not facing their true personality and behaviour. You take off the blinders and deal with the truth, and you'll leave them in the dust.

What are the patterns that may be destroying your chance to change your life and have what you want? The first common tendency is denial

The world is not always logical. Often you are forced to deal with what is, not just what should be.

The second pattern involves making initial assumptions, then failing to test them for truth or accuracy. If you adopt some position, opinion, or belief, and fail to test or verify it, subsequent thinking that is otherwise totally sound and logical can lead you to conclusions that are way wrong. If you trust yourself and therefore have confidence in the rightness of what you believe to be true, it can be very easy to close your mind to additional possibilities.

When you choose the behaviour, you choose the consequences. By choosing to keep focus on "unfairness", you let precious time and energy slip away, time and energy that could have been focused on working the problem rather than resisting it.

You don't live, choose, or manage your life in a vacuum. It happens in a context called the world. Our world is like an unguided missile, with more speed than control.

In every church I have ever attended, the people with real problems hid them rather than seeking support, and those who didn't hide them wished that they had, after the doses of guilt, judgment, or alienation they received. We hide our problems, and judge those who don't or can't hide theirs. It's not working, people -not even close. We have forgotten the basic laws of living in general, and living together in particular, and therefore violate them constantly.

You're living in the real world and dealing with real problems that need real change. You don't just need insight and understanding into your problems; you need them to change, right now.

I want you to address your problems with a real-world focus on results, not intentions.

If you are part of the epidemic of lives not managed, you may find yourself in one of these categories of existence:

- Frustrated that you are not making more money in your job or career
- Capable of more than you are accomplishing
- Stuck in a rut and not getting what you want
- Bored with yourself
- Silently enduring an emotionally barren life or marriage
- Trudging zombielike through a dead and unchallenging career
- Consistently failing in the pursuit of your goals
- Just "going through the motions" of your life with no passion, no plan, and no goal
- Living in a fantasy world in which you think you are bullet-proof, when in fact your actions entail incredible risks.
- Living in a comfort zone that yields too little challenge and too little of what you do want, and too much of what you don't want
- Living a lonely existence with little hope for change
- Suffering financial burdens you can't handle, or
- Living with lingering guilt, frustration, or depression

This book is about how to reach, in a strategic way, for something better. You have both the capacity and the right to do so. But first, you have to stop being part of the epidemic. Think about how often you have said or heard comments like:

"Well, we're doing relatively well"

"It's not what I really want, but what are you going to do?"

"I'm trying, but you know, it's hard"

"Well, compared to what we could have had to endure, we're not doing so badly"

Such ideology is seductive, because if there is no clear standard, no clear finish line, then you can pretend you aren't a loser, even if you are not getting what you want.

Reality Check

I want you to ask whether the way you are living, behaving, and thinking is working or not working. Forget about being right or winning the argument about who is right. If what you're doing is not working, change it. You've been right long enough, try being a winner instead.

There never is a "good time", so there's no better time than right now. There's no better place than right here. This book is for people who are saying, "I have had it. I am sick of this. Show me the Life Laws, show me how to live strategically and show me how to create what I want in my life. I am ready."

You have to have the guts to face the truth about yourself. Consider these two truths: First, you've got what it takes, and you're worth the effort it will take to find that truth and build that strategy. Second: nobody is going to do it for you.

Chapter two

You Either Get It or You Don't

Life Law #1: You either get it, or you don't

Your strategy: Become one of those who get it. Break the code of human nature, and find out what makes people tick. Learn why you and other people do what they do, and don't do what they don't. You break the current Live Law whenever you operate without the necessary information and skills to create the results you want.

The Edge

The kind of knowledge I want you to have is that which defines and makes the difference between really living and just existing. The primary goal is to have a quality of experience that is unique and rewarding. The skills you need to create that quality of life are the skills of understanding and controlling the cause-and-effect relationships of life: using your knowledge to make things happen the way you want them to.

We live in a social world. Virtually everything you do requires interactions with others.

I want to stress that these are learned skills, and this is acquired knowledge. No matter how smart you are, no one expects you to start speaking Russian until somebody has taught you how to do it. The problem is that when it comes to succeeding at the game of life, nobody ever really taught you the rules; let alone how to play the game.

Sometimes, the hardest part in learning something new is unlearning the old way of doing it.

I have learned that it is possible to turn situations around. Victory can be snatched from disaster.

In every strategy involving people, there are always at least two things you must do: You must overcome their resistances and excuses, and then get them to accept your view of the world.

These are the ten most significant common characteristics of people:

1. The number-one fear among all people is rejection
2. The number-one need among all people is acceptance
3. To manage people effectively, you must do it in a way that protects or enhances their self-esteem
4. Everybody - and I mean everybody- approaches every situation with at least some concern about "what's in it for me?"
5. Everybody -and I mean everybody- prefers to talk about things that are important to them personally.

6. People hear and incorporate only what they understand
7. People like, trust, and believe those who like them
8. People often do things for other than the apparent reasons
9. Even people of quality can be, and often are, petty and small
10. Everybody - and I mean everybody- wears a social mask. You must look beyond the mask to see the person

You need to be willing to learn these laws and to go beyond what you learn in this book by becoming an attentive student. Pay attention to how people are behaving and why.

Chapter three

You Create Your Own Experience

Life law #2: You create your own experience

Your strategy: Acknowledge and accept accountability for your life. Understand your role in creating the results that are your life. Learn how to choose better so you have better.

If you don't accept accountability, you will misdiagnose every problem you have. If you misdiagnose, you will mistreat. If you mistreat, things won't get better, plain and simple. By convincing yourself that you are a victim, you are guaranteed to have no progress, no healing, and no victory.

You should be willing to ask yourself questions like the following:

Did I miss important warning signs?

Did I fail to be clear about what I wanted?

Did I choose what I chose for the wrong reasons?

Did I choose the wrong time?

Did I fail to take needed action? If so, what was it?

Did I fail to stand up for myself and claim my rights?

Did I fail to ask for what I wanted?

Did I fail to require enough of myself?

Did I fail to tell somebody to go jump in the lake?

What actions do I now need to take in order to change?

Do I need to start certain new behaviours?

Do I need to stop certain old behaviours?

There is more than one way to play the victim. The most common way is to believe that you are right in your position, those who disagree with you are wrong, and therefore it is not your fault that things are at an impasse. My question to you would be, "If you're so right, if you're so smart, then why can't you create the results that you want?"

You will never, ever fix your problems blaming somebody else. That is for losers. Don't be a sucker just because it hurts to admit the truth. The sooner you accept that, the sooner your life gets better.

What about things that happened to me as a child? We don't pick our parents. We are neither responsible nor accountable for being raped, abused, or molested. That is not what I'm saying. What I am saying to you is that as an adult, you do have the ability to choose your reaction to those childhood events and circumstances.

I suppose that your accountability is both good news and bad news. The bad news is that the burden is on you. The good news is that the choice is yours.

When you choose the behaviour, you choose the consequences

When you choose the thoughts, you choose the consequences

When you choose the thoughts, you choose the physiology

When you choose your thoughts, you also choose the physiological events that are associated with those thoughts. Sometimes, when you feel in danger your heart rate increases dramatically, and you become hyper-vigilant. Your physiology determines your energy and action level. You choose the consequences with these real world choices:

You choose where to be
You choose how to act
You choose what to say
You choose what to do
You choose whom to be with
You choose what to concentrate on
You choose what to believe
You choose when to go along
You choose when to resist
You choose whom to trust
You choose whom to avoid
You choose what to say to yourself about:

Self
Others
Risks
Needs
Rights

Reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity simply says that you "get what you give". The manner, style, and level you use to engage people will determine how they respond to you.

Einstein Analyzers

Dissecting every situation to the point of complete tedium, they entirely miss the essence of any situation in which they participate, and therefore of life in general.

Guiltmongers

These folks have figured out that guilt is a weapon to be used in controlling and manipulating others. They use guilt to keep other people down. They may whine or be a martyr, but either way, you have hurt them tragically, and for your transgressions you get a life sentence of guilt and shame for who you are, or what you think and feel.

It is a sad truth that it is human nature to judge and resist things that are new or that we don't understand.

Chapter four People Do What Works

Life Law #3: People Do What Works

Your strategy: Identify the payoffs that drive your behaviour and that of others. Control the payoffs to control your life.

You already know that your behaviour creates results. What you may not know is that those results, which affect you and the choices you make, occur at different levels of awareness and that the results can take many different forms, some subtle and powerful.

When behaviour becomes almost automatic, you stop paying attention to or evaluating the cause-

and-effect relationships in the conduct.

If you are engaging in some behaviours or pattern of behaviour, you must assume that no matter how strange or illogical it may seem, you are engaging in it in order to create some result that you want. Whether you want to want it or not, you do. It is possible, for example, that you are feeding off some kinds of payoffs that may be extremely unhealthy, such as self-punishment, distorted self-importance, vindictiveness, or some other emotionally unstable response.

You may consciously be lonely, and yearn for the social and psychological income that derives from participation and companionship with others. But the fear of rejection can be so powerful that the payoff of escaping that anxiety may override your desire to reach out. In this battle of the payoffs, the easier and more immediate payoff comes from simply staying at home and not participating. Sometimes, one payoff prevails only because it is the path of least resistance.

By taking the line of least resistance, you reward yourself with apparent comfort and relief from the anxiety that comes from reaching for something else. For now, recognize that your payoff is often that you feel safe when you don't attempt change, and threatened when you do.

About identifying your payoffs: You've got to be getting a significant payoff for your negative behaviour, or you would not be doing it. The thought that a certain pattern of behaviour could be working for you is so despicable that you will behave as if functionally blind to avoid seeing it. That of course, means it will never get solved. This is perhaps your greatest danger.

Payoffs, particularly those that relieve or allow you to avoid serious pain, or minimize the fear and anxiety of potential pain, can be as addictive as the most powerful narcotics. Thus, fear of the possible outcome becomes the most powerful agent of all. I say this to put you on serious alert. If you are being controlled in this way, such fear can imprison you and ruin your life.

Chapter five

You Can't Change What You Don't Acknowledge

Life Law #4: You Can't Change What You Don't Acknowledge.

Your strategy: Get real with yourself about your life and everybody in it. Be truthful about what isn't working in your life. Stop making excuses and start making results.

If you refuse to acknowledge your own self-destructive behaviours, not only will they continue, they will actually gain momentum, become more deeply entrenched in the habitual patterns of your life, and grow more and more resistant to change.

If you lie to yourself about any dimension of your life, you can distort the entire picture so much that an otherwise sound strategy will be compromised.

You have to be willing to allow every belief, every position, and every pattern in your life to be questioned, examined, and challenged. When we discuss a truth, you have to be willing to honestly assess your beliefs, positions, and patterns against that truth. You cannot afford the luxury of defensiveness, and you cannot afford the luxury of lies and denial.

Perceptual defense is a mechanism that protects us from those things that our minds, at some level, determine we cannot handle or which we do not want to face. You may have heard the mechanism described as the "humane amnesia" or "selective amnesia" that takes effect during overwhelming traumatic situations.

Perceptual defense is active in your life every day. It can and does keep you from seeing things you simply do not want to be true.

Your life is not too bad to fix, and it's not too late to fix it. But be honest about what needs fixing. I want you to acknowledge whatever is not working in your life: self, marriage, career, attitude, anger, depression, fear. I don't care if you are absolutely, no doubt, drop-dead certain that what you are doing is right. If it is not working, then change it.

Acknowledgement in a no-kidding, unvarnished, bottom-line, truthful confrontation with yourself about what you are doing or not doing, or what you are putting up with in your life that is destructive. This also means admitting that you are getting payoffs for what you're doing, however

sick or subtle those payoffs may be.

Recall the words of the Jack Nicholson character in the movie A Few Good Men: "You can't handle the truth!" What most people want is not truth, but validation. They want reinforcements for their thinking, right or wrong. The only things they want to hear are things that make them feel good, that give them comfort about who or where they are, right now.

We make ourselves right, because that's what we treasure in life: being right. We make ourselves right by living according to our beliefs. In all the years that I worked with patients, and particularly the times I worked with couples, the most common goal of each patient was not to find out how to live and behave productively, but to convince me that what they were believing or doing was correct.

If you accept the premise that people are by nature hedonistic -that is, that we seek pleasure and avoid pain- then you will recognize that it's not easy to deal with the truth and it's not easy to change it. There's something very threatening about acknowledging a problem. It can create a lot of pressure. Once you do admit something is not working, you're also forced to admit that you are selling out for what you don't want.

In order to incorporate this law into your life strategy, you have to be willing to ask yourself the hard questions and give yourself brutally honest answers:

Am I living like a loser? If so, admit it.

Am I lazy? Am I simply not requiring enough of myself? If so, admit it.

Is my life a dead-end journey, heading nowhere? If so, admit it.

Am I scared? Am I playing this game with sweaty palms? If so, admit it.

Is my marriage in the ditch and emotionally defunct? If so, admit it.

Do I have no goals? Am I just going through the motions, day after day? If so, admit it.

Am I continually making promises to myself that I never, ever keep? If so, admit it.

I have long believed that 50 percent of the solution to any problem lies in defining the problem.

You cannot heal what you don't acknowledge. This means that admitting to yourself what is wrong is a positive. Now, in the past, you may have treated this kind of admission as a negative. But that attitude is for suckers. It's choosing denial instead of reality, and it will leave you eating the dust of those who deal with the truth.

If you're fat, you're fat. If you're lazy, you're lazy. If you're scared, you're scared. You don't have a glandular problem, an energy deficit, and a careful approach to life. You're fat, lazy, and scared. Be willing to tell it like it is, or it will stay like it is.

Part of the challenge here is accepting that there is something in each and every one of us that is not pretty, not courageous, and not appealing. I'm not trying to drag you down; I'm trying to make you be real. Face it so you can replace it.

You have to give yourself permission to be less than perfect. You have to give yourself permission to have accumulated baggage -distorted thoughts, feelings, and emotions- along the way, without condemning yourself as a bad person.

Chapter six

Life Rewards Action

Life Law #5: Life Rewards Action

Your Strategy: Make careful decisions and then pull the trigger. Learn that the world couldn't care less about thoughts without actions.

The responses and results that you receive from anyone, in any situation, are triggered by the stimuli you provide. The stimuli are your behaviours. This is the only way people can get to know you, and decide whether to reward or punish you. That is how you create your own experience. When you choose the behaviour (the action), you choose the consequences.

Start by committing to measure your life and its quality based on results, not intentions. It has

been said that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

Measure success or failure purely as a function of results because that's how the world is measuring you. You can't make your own rules or laws: the world already has its own.

If you are going to start measuring your life based on results, that means you don't take excuses from other people, either.

Hard, but true. Only with results can we be sure that the changes are real. You may choose to ignore the truth, but that won't change it.

I had the opportunity to do "therapy" with a number of elderly veterans. These men, from all walks of life and all levels of education and sophistication, taught this young doctor some important things in life. Paramount among those lessons was that every single one of the, approaching the end of his life, wished that he had done things that he had not. They talked not only of actions not taken and opportunities lost, but of timing. It is true that life presents windows of opportunity. Very often, the window of opportunity will be open for a time, but then slam shut forever. Recognize that you have to seize the opportunities when they present themselves, and create them when they do not.

The time-honored formula for taking purposeful action goes like this:

Be
Do
Have

What the formula says is BE committed, DO what it takes, and you will HAVE what you want.

Until knowledge, awareness, insights, and understandings are translated into action, they are of no value. If you know why you continue to be frustrated and depressed in your life, yet you do nothing about it, you continue to be frustrated and depressed. Life rewards action, not intention, not insight, not wisdom, not understanding.

The difference between winners and losers is that winners do things losers don't want to do.

Nothing in your life will change until you begin to do different things. The question you may need to ask yourself is: "If not now, when?"

You'll never meet a man who, on his deathbed, says, "I wish I had spent more time on my business. We all know what's important, but do we focus on it and work on it, or do we just react to what's in our face, intending to do the meaningful things soon?"

If you begin to do different things, whether that means exercising, giving your feelings a voice, going back to school, praying, or applying for a new job, your actions will gain momentum. You'll meet new people, new possibilities will occur to you.

You must be willing to question how and where you spend your time, what you say to yourself, how and why you interact with those you do, and every other aspect of your being. And you must be willing to change it. Resolve to escape the insanity and do something different. Don't intend to do it, actually do it.

If you have been cheating yourself in life, it's quite possible that you're in pain. Pain, if acknowledged, can be a powerful motivator. Pain gets you to take a direction. Use it to propel yourself out of the situation you are in and get you where you want to be.

We fear the unknown, and when we try something new, the results are always in question. How bad can this get? Can I lose it all? Will I fail?

So goes the logic of avoidance: no pressure, no pain, no fear; just don't do it, and the problem goes away. Life doesn't reward quitting. You are the only one who does that. And you may reward yourself for quitting with a pseudopeace, a peace that comes at the price of your hopes and dreams.

When it comes to taking action in the face of fear, it probably doesn't require much reflection to know that you've done this kind of thing before. You must decide that you are worth the risk. You must decide that your dreams are not to be sold out. You must decide that your dreams are not to be sold out. You must decide that you, for one, are willing to let yourself want, let yourself reach. You must be willing to say, "I know it may hurt for a while, I know it may be scary for a while, but

I am worth it. I'm going to stop denying myself even the chance of getting my goals and dreams. I am going to set goals, make a strategy, and take action"

The kind of decision I'm talking about here is a life decision. For example, haven't you made a life decision that you will not steal? Refusing to be a person who steals is a fundamental value that you have incorporated into the core of your soul. You don't need to revisit this issue on a day-to-day basis.

Consider that in the interest of incorporating the law Life Rewards Action into your life, you may need to make a life decision to actually put yourself at risk, even though this goes against your primal instinct for self-preservation. It challenges your natural craving for safety and security. But I suspect that this is one of those times to leave behind the comfortable and familiar. Decide that you're going to move onward and upward. Make a life decision to risk reasonably, risk responsibly, but risk

Resolve now that you will take the risk, make the effort, and be persistent in the pursuit of your goals.

Take action, and insist on results. This is a supremely important law of life.

Chapter seven

There Is No Reality; Only Perception

Life Law #6: There Is No Reality; Only Perception

Your strategy: Identify the filters through which you vie the world. Acknowledge your history without being controlled by it.

To appreciate how this law works, you need to understand the difference between sensation and perception. When light waves are received by your eyes, or sound waves by your ears, that is sensation: the phenomenon of stimuli being received by your sense organs. Perception, on the other hand, is your organizing and interpreting of those sensations. Perception is the level at which you assign meaning to the sensations you receive from the world.

It's no secret that a husband and wife, looking at the same situation, can come up with two really different versions of what it means. This "incongruity of perceptions" can lead to frustration, confusion, and marital disharmony.

You can, in any situation, choose your reaction. The events in your daily life have only the meaning that you assign to them. Put another way, there is no good news and there is no bad news; there is only news. You have the power to choose your perceptions. And you exercise this power of choice in every circumstance, every day of your life.

You do have a choice about how you perceive the world.

We all view the world through individual filters. Those filters -our personalities, attitudes, points of view, our "styles"- powerfully influence the interpretations that we give to the events in our lives, those interpretations, in turn, determine how we will respond, and therefore how we will ultimately be responded to. Some filters may be healthy and constructive, while others may be distorted and destructive. But to live effectively, you've got to recognize the presence of your filters, and take care that they don't distort your perceptions so as to mislead you in your decision making.

If you continue to view the world through a filter created by past events, then you are allowing your past to control and dictate both your present and your future. Take my example of someone who was raped and beaten at the age of five. The only thing worse than the event itself would be allowing that event to destroy that person's entire life by coloring how they see the world thirty, forty, or fifty years later. In that scenario, the event never comes to an end; it lives forever. As you have already learned, you cannot change what you do not acknowledge. Once you acknowledge that the pain of a particular event has altered the way you view the world and the people in it, then you can choose to be no longer a prisoner of those perceptions. You must maintain an active, ongoing awareness of your filters. Otherwise, you will dramatically mislead yourself.

Identify those filters so you can compensate for them.

More often, when we become aware of someone else's filter, it's because the filter is contributing to behaviour that we find peculiar, if not downright bizarre.

We completely overlook the ways in which we ourselves contribute to our experience of the world. Think about how many times you've heard people narrate an incident in their lives without seeming to notice any of their own accountability for what happened.

One of the greatest difficulties with filters, whether they pertain to your perception of yourself or of others, is that they are made up of fixed beliefs. Fixed beliefs are typically very dangerous, if for no other reason than their fixedness. Consciously or otherwise, you have stopped seeking or receiving and processing new information. You're treating the belief as fact, and will no longer subject it to debate or modification. In this condition, you will not only miss new information, you will overlook important changes in yourself or other people that would negate the fixed belief. One of the most dangerous categories of fixed beliefs is what I call your limiting beliefs. These are beliefs you have about your own shortcomings and limitations, either real or imagined.

A limiting belief is some negative self-perception that you have decided is true and accurate about you. You must challenge those limiting beliefs, rather than living in obedience to them. Many of them are probably the products of a distorting filter created by events long past.

Get to know your limiting beliefs so well that if one begins to show even a hint of its presence, alarms will go off and you will counteract it.

Take whatever time you need to thoroughly examine all of your belief systems. In addition to your personal limiting beliefs, you may have fixed beliefs about:

- Your mate
- Your relationships with loved ones
- Your career
- Your future
- Your friends
- God
- The world in general
- People in general

Let your perceptions be fresh and new and grounded in fact, not in history.

Chapter eight

Life Is Managed; It Is Not Cured

Life Law #7: Life Is Managed; It Is Not Cured

Your Strategy: Learn to take charge of your life and hold on. This is a long ride, and you are the driver every single day.

Clichés abound about why problems are a good thing:

- Facing problems builds character.
- Without occasional pain, we wouldn't be able to recognize and appreciate pleasure.
- Problems are opportunities to distinguish yourself.

A long-established fact of psychological functioning is that it is not so much the particular circumstance that upsets the person involved, as it is the violation of his or her expectations.

Disregarding the fact that your life manager is you, do a results-based assessment that takes into account at least the following criteria:

1. Is your life manager keeping you safe and secure from foolish risks?
2. Is your life manager putting you in situations where you can utilize all of your skills

- and abilities?
3. Is your life manager creating opportunities for you to get what you really want in this life?
 4. Is your life manager taking care of your health and well-being, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually?
 5. Is your life manager selecting and pursuing relationships in which you can be healthy and flourish?
 6. Is your life manager requiring you to reach and stretch for those things that will keep you fresh and young and alive?
 7. Is your life manager designing your day-to-day flow so that you enjoy some peace and tranquillity?
 8. Is your life manager arranging for some fun and recreation in your life?
 9. Is your life manager structuring your world so that there is balance among those things you consider to be important?

What kind of marks do you give yourself as a life manager? As the evaluator, you may decide that your biggest problem is that you can't fire your life manager, the same way you might fire someone who was mismanaging your business or your employees. This is a life manager you have to work with, motivate, educate, and be patient with.

As your own client, you must treat yourself with great care, and manage yourself with the understanding that you are a very important person. I am the only husband and father that my wife and children have. If I take care of myself, then I have something to give in those two important roles. If I choose, instead, to be a martyr -if I constantly self-sacrifice and do not take care of myself, then I may not be there, physically or emotionally, when they need me.

Commit to resolve rather than endure your personal problems. You must resolve to spend a substantial amount of your problem-solving energies on your own problems, not just everyone else's. Remember, you can't give away what you do not have.

Beware of unanswered questions. You may have heard people playing the "what if..." game with their life worries: "What if my spouse leaves me?" "What if there is a spot on my lung?" What if I get fired? It has been my experience that, when people allow these kinds of questions to gnaw at them, it's because they simply do not force themselves to answer the question.

Your fourth responsibility as a life manager is to refuse to live with unfinished emotional business. How many times have you witnessed yourself or others overreacting to some apparently insignificant happening or event? What these people or you are actually doing by overreacting is "cumulatively reacting".

To be an effective life manager, you must identify when you are hurting, angry, frustrated, or confused. You have to call time out and deal with it. Address it with the person with whom you're interacting, or at least with yourself. You must insist on getting closure. Closure means you don't carry the problem or the pain.

Finally, honor your agreements, whether they're with yourself or others. Think about how you feel when someone makes a commitment to you and then breaks it. It sends a painful message to someone when you make a commitment and then dishonour it. Whether you intend the message or not, it tells them that they are not important to you. It says to them that they have been rejected.

If you are going to start to require more of yourself as a life manager, step up and do it like you mean it. Work as hard as you would expect anyone you might hire for the job to work.

Your mission is to stop the momentum and direction you now have, and replace them with the momentum and direction you want. If you approach this mission with nothing more than a "heightened awareness," you will never get what you want. To change your life, you must be different. Really managing your life means that you will stop living reactively and put your life on project status.

Project status means you will approach your life with the conviction that you deserve what others have, and that you're worth the effort required to get it.

The world is not evil; it is just the world. It is not to be feared, just managed; and the key to managing it is having this consciously designed strategy.

List your life decisions. Once you've made a complete inventory of your life decisions, you may be pleased at the number and quality of important issues that, for you, are already resolved. At the same time, you may also discover some glaring holes that call for a life-decision level of commitment now. What are the holes? What are the problems?

If the standard you've set for yourself in managing your life is too high or too low, then you're adding to your difficulties.

In thinking about your self-requirement, you may discover that you're living in a comfort zone. You're avoiding reaching for a level of achievement or accomplishment that is not already comfortable. You are living a risk-averse life. Staying in your comfort zone can be hazardous to your genuine well-being. Remember these simple truths:

If you continue to do what you've always done, you will continue to have what you've always had.
If you do different, you will have different.

Step out of your comfort zone. Behave differently by resolving to work harder and work smarter. You've simply got to require more of yourself in every category of behaviour, even the mundane: your grooming, self control, emotional management, interaction with others, your work performance, your dealing with fear, and in every other category you can think of. Starting now, begin each and everyday of your life with the question: "What can I do today to make my life better? Ask it, answer it, and then do it, every day. Don't give in to your negative momentum. Require more of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviourally.

The essence of this Life Law is that you are your own most important resource for making your life work. Adopt it as part of your own philosophy of life management that sometimes you make the right decision, and sometimes you have to make the decision right.

The problem you're trying to solve is your whole life -your relationship with your family, your career, your physical health, and emotional well-being. You have substantial challenges, or you wouldn't be reading this book. You've got to identify the major challenges in your life. Take the time to identify those things that could and should be the focus of your management efforts.

Chapter nine

We Teach People How To Treat Us

Life Law #8: We Teach People How to Treat Us

Your strategy: Own, rather than complain about, how people treat you. Learn to renegotiate your relationships to have what you want. Because people learn by results, whether or not you reward, accept, or validate their behaviour impacts their conduct, and will influence their subsequent choices. How you interpret and react to their behaviour determines whether or not they are likely to repeat it.

So if you ever wonder why people treat you the way they do, see Life Law #3: People Do What Works. They do what they do because you have taught them, based on results, which behaviour gets a payoff and which ones don't. If they get what they want, they keep that behaviour in their repertoire.

Relationships are mutually defined: each participant contributes importantly to its definition. From the very outset it is a give and take negotiation between the participants.

If you can teach people how to treat you in the first place, you can re-teach them how to treat you after that. It is in the give and take of relating and of results, that relationships are successfully negotiated. Now you know: Being in a meaningful negotiation and not knowing it can be very dangerous.

In any case, new relationships or old, you are responsible for whatever state your relationships, are in.

Before you reopen the negotiation, you must commit to do so from a position of strength and power, not fear and self-doubt. You must make a life decision that you would rather be well by yourself than be sick with someone else.

Guilt is a powerful and destructive weapon in relationships, and you must steel yourself against being manipulated by it. Guilt paralyzes you and shuts you down. No progress is made if you are whipping yourself with shame. The healthy alternative is to acknowledge any problem behaviour; figure out why the problem behaviour happens; and make a plan for change. The universe rewards action; guilt is paralysis.

Remember the principle of reciprocity: You get what you give. Do not ask people to do what you are not willing to do yourself. Take a focused and serious look at your behaviour in relationships. What payoff are you getting for unhealthy conduct? Are you willing not just to identify those payoffs, but to give them up? By being honest about your own behaviour, you can win tremendous credibility, and foster an environment conducive to change.

Chapter ten

There Is Power In Forgiveness

Life Law #9: There Is Power In Forgiveness

Your strategy: Open your eyes to what anger and resentment are doing to you. Take your power back from those who have hurt you.

Hatred, anger, and resentment eat away at the heart and soul of the person who carries them. When you harbour hatred, anger and resentment, your body's chemical balance is dramatically disrupted. That means that are absolutely incompatible with your peace, joy, and relaxation.

If you are carrying around these ugly emotions, it's likely that your body is almost constantly in a condition called heterostasis, a condition of physiological imbalance; put simply, it's a state of having too much of this, in terms of your natural chemistry, and not enough of that. People who stay in this powerfully aroused state often experience sleep disturbance, nightmares, poor concentration, and fatigue. You also need to recognize that these feelings are the stuff of which emotional prisons are made. When you choose to bear hate, anger, or resentment toward others, you build walls around yourself. You become trapped in an emotional complex of such pain and agony that negative energy begins to dominate your entire life.

There is no reality, only perception -and yours is altered by these ugly emotions. Don't assume that they can be concealed behind a mask. The stimulus you provide, namely the face you wear, is unmistakably one of bitterness, rage, or withdrawal. You give people, in turn, little choice in how to react to you. You must learn that you do not have to be angry just because you have the right to be.

Hatred, anger, and resentment truly change who you are. They truly prevent you from being able to give to those you love that which you want them to have.

The feelings we're talking about here are the open wounds of unfinished emotional business with somebody, somewhere: whoever is the target of all that negative emotion.

You, and only you, choose how you feel. Others can provide and event or behaviour for you to react to, but it is up to you to choose how you feel about them. If you choose to carry the hatred, then know that you choose to see the world through a dark filter that, in turn, dictates a dark perception of the world.

Forgiveness is about doing whatever it takes to preserve the power to create your own emotional state. It is about being able to say: "You cannot hurt me and then control me, even in your absence, by turning my heart cold and changing who I am and what I value. I am the one who makes those choices. You cannot choose for me how I feel, and I will not give you that power"

Most importantly, you must be willing to say, from your heart: "You cannot lock me into a bond with you, where you become part of my very being and part of what I think, feel, and do every day. By forgiving you, I am releasing you, not you."

By rethinking the meaning of forgiveness, you can, and will, set yourself free from the pain that has been caused by others in your life. Understand that. If you allow them to make you hate them, rage against them, and resent them, they win.

Chapter eleven

You Have To Name It To Claim It

Life Law #10: You Have To Name It To Claim It.

Your Strategy: Get clear about what you want, and take your turn.

Not knowing precisely what you want is not okay. If you cannot name, and name with great specificity, what it is that you want, then you will never be able to step up and claim it. Most people do not know how to describe what they want, because they don't have a clue what it really is. If you can't decide which movie to see, what to order in a restaurant, or what to wear, is it any wonder you find it hard to identify goals? Indecision creates inaction. Inaction leads to results that you do not want.

What you probably can say with great confidence is what you don't want.

You live in a world where the most you will ever get is what you ask for. That's true about your major goals as well as your day-to-day desires. Suppose you put an ad in the newspaper, offering to sell your used car for \$7,000. What do you think are the chances that somebody will look at it and say, "Gosh! This is a really great car. I don't think you're asking enough! Let me pay you \$9,000"? Sounds pretty ridiculous, doesn't it? Likewise, where your life goals are concerned, the most you'll ever get is what you ask for.

There's another harsh truth to take into account here. Since naming what you truly want is so basic to having it, you must proceed with great care in deciding the answer. Being wrong or misguided about what you want is even worse than not knowing at all.

Growing up, I was cautioned to "be careful what you pray for, because you just might get it"

You obviously don't want to end up like the people who in addition to suffering much frustration in the pursuit of what they didn't really want, discovered that the thing they truly valued most was within easy reach -yet they let it slip through their fingers because they chose the wrong goal. That's one of the ironies that results from neglecting this Life Law. So don't be deceived by the simplicity of this life law. Naming what you want deserves your utmost attention.

You must also pay attention to the time element associated with what you want. Opportunities for getting what you want are time-limited. They have a shelf life that can and will expire.

The need for specificity applies to every goal you will ever set. You need to know so much about what you want that whenever you are heading toward it, you know it, you feel it, and you sense it. Similarly, when you are off track, you need to know, feel, and sense that, as well. When you know your goals, you will recognize which types of behaviour and choices support them and which do not. If you want to succeed, you have to be able to answer the following questions:

What is the it that you want?

What will it look like when you have it?

What will it feel like when you have it?

What will you be doing behaviourally when you have it?

Who are you doing it with?

Where will you be doing it?

How will your life be different from the way it is now when you have it?

For example, your first attempt to name what you want might be, "I want a fancy car and a high-paying job". I would suggest to you that the fancy car and the high-paying job are means to an end, rather than being the end in themselves. You need to go further. You must be willing to ask yourself, "Why do I want a fancy car and a high-paying job?"

The answer is very likely that you want them because of how you think you will feel when you have them. In this example, the car and the job probably represent for you a sense of security and quality in your life, things to which you respond very strongly. Your true goal, then, is not the car or the high-paying job, but the specific feeling that you associate with having those things. Cars get old, beat up, and rusty. High-paying jobs can go away. If you recognize this, then your goal shifts from the thing or event to the emotions that are connected with them. If what you really want is to feel proud of yourself and secure in your life, it would be unfair to restrict yourself to just those two methods -car and job- of getting it. Maybe there are ten different ways for you to arrive at the same desired destination, and any one of the ten would work. Your chances of getting what you want, when you have ten avenues of pursuit, are clearly greater than when you've limited those means to just one or two. And it may turn out that when you determine why you want the car and job, you decide that those two things wouldn't do the trick anyway. You then avoid wasting precious time and energy working for what you don't want.

I consider this naming process to be perhaps the number-one outcome determinative factor in a successful life strategy.

Take note of these questions. If you continue to follow the repeating pattern, you will get down to precisely what you want in this life. The key questions are:

1. What do you want?
2. What must you do to have it?
3. How would you feel when you had it?
4. So, what you really want is... (what you described in question 3).
5. What must you do to have it?
6. How would that make you feel?
7. So, what you really want is... (what you described in question 6).

By being specific and defining your goal in as many different ways as you can, you'll develop a more intimate understanding of what you want. As a result, the choices you make along the way will be more goal-directed. You'll be more likely to recognize your goal when you get there, since you'll have so many criteria by which to measure it.

Now for the second part of Life Law #10; Claim It.

Claiming it takes resolve and commitment. You've heard the joke, "The meek will inherit the earth but none of them will step up to claim the deed." You must be willing to make yourself step up when the time is right and claim what you want and deserve. Understand that this is a competitive world in which we live. There are a lot of people who are ready, willing, and able to take from you that which is rightfully yours. It might be your property; it might be your space; it might be your very right to think, feel and believe in a certain way. Why would you want to make it easier for them? You may have to overcome timidity, guilt, feelings of inadequacy, or self-consciousness. Claim what it is that you want and deserve, because no one will do it for you.

You must, in effect, sit down with yourself and have a conversation that leads to a life decision. Make the resolve, now, that your wants are worth having, and that when the time comes, you will claim your right to have them.