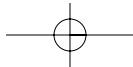
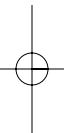
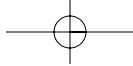


LIFE SECRET #1

Live Your Life with All Your Common Senses

*The senses serve as entrances to an inner world. Not the
senses I have but what I do with them is my kingdom.*

—HELEN KELLER



Be Completely Aware

I confirm that I'm alive when my senses inform me that it's the start of a new day. Sometimes sound is the messenger sense. I'm often aware before I'm completely awake of the cheery good morning sung by a robin in the large oak tree at the far corner of my yard. His ebullient expression of natural joy suggests that he has just eaten the proverbial worm and that all is right with heaven and earth.

My wife, Patricia, still slumbers peacefully. Her rhythmic breathing tells me she'll sleep in for another hour. I wonder what she's dreaming about. I take in her smell. It is all love. All woman. All life.

A Marvelous Run

My dog Partner and I will soon be sharing a run along my Palos Verdes, California, beach. It is *my* beach—at least I like to think so. I figure that no one could possibly be more appreciative of its sensory secrets than I am. There is a magical renewal of the spirit every day I run along this marvelous confluence of land and ocean.

I hear the tingling of metal from beside my bed as my German shepherd guide dog recognizes that I'm awake. Rising from his spot on the floor, he licks my outstretched hand as if to say, "Good morning, Master." He, too, knows it's time to run. It's his happiest experience, and we share it passionately. It's early June, but if the feeling's right, we might end our exercise with a cold swim in the Pacific. Ten years ago that wouldn't have even been a question. I

SEEING LESSONS

would've launched into the chilly ocean water with a bravado reserved for youth. Now in my fifties, I'm finding that I'm beginning to pick my spots and not always challenge the ocean's cold.

I define the intersecting of the senses as the ultimate harmony. It is seamless and beautiful. No musical chord could ever express such total richness and balance. No painting could ever reflect its perfection. Feeling it, living it, knowing it—this harmony has made the disability of my blindness not only tolerable but joyous.

This time of year, the smell spectrum is superb, from mock orange blossoms to jasmine, eucalyptus to roses. I am assaulted with an abundance of olfactory stimulation. Songbirds blend with seagulls' cries, and the dissonant cacophony is wonderful to hear. I call this *syntoncity*—being in tune with the nature around me, the natural order of things entering my brain through every sensory antennae.

The air is misty with the early morning fog, and the ground reflects the moisture as I touch fallen leaves that are slippery under my feet. The dog is so careful; he never rushes. I smell the ocean before I hear its sound. The wind blows southwest off the Pacific, and there's a long hill that leads down from the road to the sand. The ocean's smell funnels up this hill and reaches me a half mile before I arrive at the bluff. I love the taste of the Pacific, including most of the stuff that swims in it. It touches my tongue and tastes old, salty, and clean. Now Partner can't help himself. He picks up the pace, and we are almost jogging. I hear the first sound of the immense power of the surf as it blocks out the bird song. It's an odd experience because it closes out most of the rest of my audio capacity. I love it, but in some ways I'm afraid of it. I am now completely dependent on my big dog and the messages he sends through the harness.

There are fifteen different kinds of waves that caress and bombard the California coast. I've come to know them all. At low tide, the sound reminds me of the wind blowing through buffalo grass

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

somewhere on the plains of rural Nebraska. It roars over the sand dunes, arching across the complete audio spectrum as it follows the curvature of the coast. It seems to never run out of energy, and I have the impression that at any moment it could gobble up the land. When the tide is high, the sound is very different. I am reminded of a prizefight as the incoming waves punch the outgoing sand with a powerful thud in a round-by-round confrontation that never ends.

I love it when the sea is flattened by the sky. In winter, rain pounds the surf into sublime submission. My impression is that there must be a Higher Power still calling the shots. At least I like to think so.

This morning the waves are at ten- to twelve-second intervals. On other days, when the chop is up and white caps dot the horizon, the interval can be as little as three seconds, and the sound reminds me of small-arms fire. No morning sounds the same on the beach, with the waves painting a portrait in sound, rich colors that a blind person can truly appreciate. With the tide out, the kelp clinging to the rocks at the far end of this spit of sand is full of life. The smell speaks to the whole cycle of creation. I can smell new plankton and life lost during the last high tide. *Holostheiae*, the Greeks say—heart, mind, soul, and body—all of it connected in a sensory collage.

I run with Partner as hard as I can. I am exhausted but exhilarated, removing the dog's harness and my shoes quickly as we dash with a whoop into the ocean, diving under the surf. My head is chilled by the cold, but I love it. I swim straight out, probably two hundred yards beyond the surf line, beyond sound.

Rolling onto my back, I allow myself to be rocked by the ocean's swell, knowing that I am completely safe. Partner breathes next to me, and I am sure that he understands exactly how to navigate us home. I'm not thinking out here, not planning my day or worrying about the future. I am at peace.

SEEING LESSONS

We remain this way for a few minutes, then reluctantly I place my hand on the neck of my friend, allowing him to swim us in. As my feet touch the ground and I work my way onto the shore, Partner shakes the water from his fur and again touches me with his head. The dog knows the drill. I take his collar, and he helps me find the discarded shirt, shoes, harness, and leash. It's been a perfect start to what promises to be a perfect day. Nothing in creation is as connected and seamless as the way in which our senses gather information, send it in a nanosecond to the brain, and inculcate it into a common sense awareness.

The Synergy of the Senses

I define sensory synergism as the perfect coming together of data gathered through our sensory antennae and collated by the brain into a recognizable experience, thought, or impression. We are ultimately alive at these special moments, and when they occur, we always remember them. Athletes describe it as being in the zone. Musicians define it as grooving, in the pocket, solid. Artists can't wait to translate the palette of the mind to the palette of the canvas, and those who meditate frame it as a clear channel experience. On the other hand, scientists talk about carrying on mental processing of sensory information somewhere in the cerebral cortex, and even more complex elements that take us into the area of brain synapses or sensory operational modalities—all extremely interesting but not helpful in furthering our personal access to the joy of sensory synergism.

Of course, I would like to see the world in the way that a person with sight does, yet I would not trade my life connection with the senses for even the most beautiful sunset. I've come to accept the premise that sight is the lead sense and most people gain

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

information through visual recognition as your primary tool in order to understand the world. The other senses take on the role of supporting cast as in a play or film. People often tell me that they could not possibly imagine what it must be like to be blind and that the onset of blindness would be the hardest loss of any of the five senses to bear.

Helen Keller disagreed. She gave us the most introspective insight into this remarkably complex issue. When asked late in her life what sensory loss she would deem as the most debilitating, she immediately spoke to the issue of sound. She said, "It is in sound that fundamental communication finds its essence, and human beings gain their greatest understanding of another's attitudes and feelings."

The possibilities for sensory growth are virtually unlimited, and I hope that you're anxious to begin experimenting with your own sensory development. We have the capacity to either isolate each sensory stimulus individually or combine them collectively. When you rely primarily on sight and disregard the effectiveness of the other members of your sensory team, you're like Shaquille O'Neal without Kobe Bryant of the L.A. Lakers or like a conductor without an orchestra.

How do the senses plug into our recognition and evaluation of each other? Have you ever recognized the personal scent of your mate in a crowd? Every one of us has a distinct and individual voiceprint just as unique as the visual differences in our appearance. Shaking hands with a stranger projects as much about him or her as a fingerprint on file with the FBI.

Since sight is the dominant sense, it is easy for people to make immediate visual judgments about one another. Blindness has allowed me to step back and appreciate the coming together of four glorious senses. I have treasured the opportunity to personally evaluate and understand every human being I meet. The true and

SEEING LESSONS

effective use of instinct occurs when our brain's remarkable computer receives feedback from all of the senses. Our ability to make instant judgments is immensely enhanced when the data are gathered from every sensory outlet rather than just our visual center.

Being blind creates an extraordinary psychological and sensory dynamic, particularly when I meet people for the first time. Right from the initial handshake, I know exactly where they're coming from. Is the first touch dynamic? If it is, generally the shake is firm and it lasts a beat while we complete some form of basic human connection. Then there are the pumpers. These people are generally insincere and carry on an exaggerated up-and-down motion to avoid intimacy. The fingertip shake—when two hands don't actually interlock because the other person only presents you with his or her fingers—suggests superiority. The worst of all is the handshake of the wimp—the person with no obvious dynamics who just barely makes civil contact.

These dynamics are further developed in my case because of many people's discomfort when first meeting a blind person. At the same time their palm is sweating and their eyes are looking away, they tend to be speaking with an exaggerated volume level, as if I must not only be blind but deaf. In these moments of discomfort, I am compelled to try to put people at ease, so usually I place my left hand over our two hands in a gesture of warmth and friendship. I know I've lost any possibility of connection when the other person flinches and pulls his or her hand away.

Extending the handshake to the next level, a hug says it all. Is it a hug of friendship or a hug of sexual intent? Is it a hug saying I love you or a hug asking you to love me? Is it a cursory slap on the back or a massage of emotional commitment? Is it an upper body lean that says keep your distance or a full body embrace that speaks to a commitment? If the handshake is a dynamic sensory imprint, a hug stands as the defining statement of human intent.

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

Have you observed that when people are under stress you can smell the toxins they excrete? Their odor is filled with tension that hangs suspended in the air all around them, and if you're a true sensory observer, whether it's in your own family dynamic or a corporate meeting, you can be way ahead of the game by letting your olfactory sense work overtime.

Partner knows when I'm under the pressure of a dynamic personal stress. He feels it in the harness. He picks up on every nuance and never misses even the most subtle changes in the rhythm of our work. I suppose that my body chemistry is giving off a different smell, and in those moments he struggles to compensate by working even harder to ease my concern.

Vocal intonation is as relevant to integrated human interaction as facial expression. Our manner when we're on the telephone is the most interesting way in which we connect without visual support. I am an expert when it comes to telephone communication because for me it's so honest. Since people are not visually interactive when speaking over the phone, they tend to let down the barriers of normal convention, and their true mood is never hidden from the careful listener. How often have you been aware that the person on the other end of the phone has had a bad day? Pauses, sighs, pitch change, intensity, and total vocal nuance paint a complete picture of the person's mood. The truest lie detector available is not a machine; it's in our ability to interpret an individual's voiceprint. I can tell you it is never wrong.

I've often heard friends say that they can see the tension on a person's face. I grasp the same information except that it comes through enhanced vocal imprinting. No two voices are exactly alike, but if you pay attention to intonation, nuance, and rhythm, the vocal picture carries with it all of the gathering capacity of visual acuity.

The most intimate element in our sensory synergism is touch. It

SEEING LESSONS

can either confirm love or affection, or shatter relationships through violence or through something much more subtle: the coldness of contact when it becomes mechanical. When intimate touch is only routine, a relationship is on extremely rocky ground. In my growth with Patty, we constantly assess our level of intimacy based on the application of what I think of as the touch quotient. It's not necessary to linger in the passion of a long kiss to truly express our love, but when our lips touch the message is dynamic and perfectly clear. It's like sharing a great bottle of Latour burgundy. All of the grapes, nuance, and distinction—all of the blending of its parts come together—appreciated even in the smallest sip. Every piece of our sensory mosaic will find an appropriate place in the puzzle if we have the inner vision to effectively apply it.

Turn Up Your Senses' Volume

Here is where the sensory dynamic really gets exciting: each of the five senses has an individual volume control that can be turned up or down depending on what information we need. The whole is the sum of all its parts and is greater than any one of them. When all your sensory dynamics come together, they can be relished completely. This is the unrivaled, untapped treasure of sensory synergism. And this common sense approach is available to all of us. You already have this skill. It's just a question of application and taking the time to learn, so let's consider some exercises that you can easily perform in order to expand your sensory synergism.

When our children were very little, Patty and I lived on Cape Cod in the wonderful seaside town of Scituate. Fresh produce was always readily available, and as a new bride, Patty really worked to stretch her wings in the kitchen. She was constantly preparing mouth-watering dishes with fresh vegetables, seafood of all types,

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

and a great supply of freshly grown herbs she planted just outside our kitchen window. I couldn't wait for her experiments, and thank goodness our children were not fussy eaters. When Patty would be making bouillabaisse or clam chowder, shrimp salad or baked stuffed lobster, the children and I would sit in the living room just out of sight of the kitchen and play a special sensory game. I called it "What's Mommy Doing?" With a child on each knee, I'd ask them to describe Patty's activities. They quickly learned that when they heard her using the cutting board, she was probably slicing fresh bread, confirmed by smell as it came out of the oven. They loved to hear the steam rise as the clams or lobsters boiled and anticipated the drawn butter Patty prepared to enhance the taste of the shellfish and fresh corn on the cob.

They also came to know the names of many of the herbs and spices Patty used in her cooking. Oregano was their favorite herb, and Patty used it in the homemade tomato sauce she poured over her hand-rolled pastas. I loved to make the children close their eyes and taste the ingredients individually that went into the meal.

All of these disciplines have served my children well. My son is a carpenter and a musician who appreciates every sensory nuance, from the music he writes to the surfboards and cabinets he builds out of various woods and other materials. My daughter loves to hike the Colorado mountains, and when she describes the natural plant life of the area, she always discusses various types and species in terms of smell or taste and never misses the chance to tell me about a meadowlark or other songbird common to the area.

Work to turn the volume up and down on each of your individual senses, focusing on the specific pieces of sensory information you wish to learn more about. Try eating a meal emphasizing smell rather than taste. Touch a flower rather than smell it. Hear a bird in flight rather than watch it. Change the context of your sensory learning experience, and you'll quickly find that you have become

SEEING LESSONS

rich in awareness beyond your wildest dreams. With effective application of sensory synergism, I believe your appreciation for life will jump off the Richter scale.

Over breakfast with my running friends, we often talk about the runner's high found in the release of endorphins that categorizes intense cardiovascular activity. Many of you who read this book may not want to go through the effort of becoming a runner, but you have a natural high that's readily available. It's the integration of your common senses through sensory synergism. The great thing about this high is that there is no risk involved, only reward. You don't have to take drugs or swallow gigantic doses of ginseng or ginkgo in order to get it. You just have to open your mind to the sensory possibilities available. Let yourself become passionate about the world around you.

If you live in the city, go out and get excited about the sensory energy. I grew up in Boston and used to love to go with my father to the south end where Italian restaurants prepared all kinds of culinary delights and peddlers with pushcarts sold fresh produce and vegetables on the corner. As a young musician beginning my show business career, I haunted the jazz clubs in cities like New York and New Orleans, spending time in the Village or listening to Dixie in the French Quarter. Then there were the times when the city was quiet during a heavy snowstorm. It was great to walk through normally busy streets and not hear cars while tasting snowflakes on my tongue.

No matter where you live, the senses will expand the value you place on life. Become passionate about the world around you. I bet we can solve some of the environmental problems that we will face in the twenty-first century if we become passionate about our senses. If our passion for sensory synergism is expanded, I believe our social conscience will encourage us to continue to protect our natural resources. Inculcate this concept into the way you educate

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

your children, and allow them to become the generation that may truly appreciate the world in which we live. If we open our minds to these unlimited possibilities, we can exist on a higher plane of what I think of as true sensibilities. In that place, I believe we can better appreciate each other. Communication can be enhanced tenfold, and we can gain a far better understanding of where each of us is coming from.

Seeing Lessons Reflections and Exercises

Are we getting the most out of all of the possibilities? Absolutely not. People are missing the greatest opportunity offered to everyone in the whole of creation. I am excited by my absolute certainty that with effective application you can be as in tune with the senses as anyone on Earth. All you have to do is pay attention to all of the information that's coming to you over the sensory network.

Right now, the information is probably either ignored or jumbled. My guess is you haven't learned to disseminate—that is, separate out—each signal that's coming in. It's a lot like working with your radio dial to clear up a fuzzy station. Maybe you're able to juggle the tuner to get better clarity, or maybe you move the radio around to get its antenna pointed in the right direction, in order to pick up the broadcast. The point is, you make adjustments to improve the quality of the reception. Exercising the senses allows us to learn how we might better isolate each of the senses, then put them together in various combinations, providing us with remarkable collective input.

Let's consider some fun possibilities. If you are sighted, recognize that sight is your dominant sense, just as sound provides me with a larger percentage of my sensory information. So while sitting

SEEING LESSONS

in your backyard on a spring morning, either close your eyes or go to the extreme by placing a blindfold over your face. Now start to move the individual volume controls of your senses up and down. As I write these pages, I'm sitting on our patio. I can hear cars far off in the distance. I can count thirteen different bird songs. There are some men working on the construction of a new house somewhere down the hill—I love the sound of their saws and hammers as they work to create something beautiful.

Now the wind is rustling the trees, so our wind chimes are active as the breeze creates its own free-form melodic improvisation. I'm working to center my concentration on one individual sound that's a little harder to pull in. It's the bell buoy ringing off San Pedro Point. It tells me what kind of surf my son, Tom, may have if he chooses to go out today. In order to hear it, I'm attenuating its sound forward in my concentration.

To really understand this dynamic of volume adjustment, consider your sense of sight and deal with your capacity to focus your own visual acuity. I'm astounded at what can be done with the eye, from seeing vast expanses of landscape to honing in on the tiniest splinter in the finger of a child. I am amazed when I think about a person's visual capacity and the ability to expand or contract focus as necessary.

That's exactly what I want you to do with each of your other senses. The process will take work; you'll have to practice. Sound will probably develop quicker than smell, touch, and taste. But the game is really fun, and the result will profoundly expand your potential for growth and greater understanding of the world you live in. When I've worked with kids, who are open vessels of possibility, I've seen them expand their sensory dynamic by at least 50 percent. You hold the potential to increase your sensory acuity by at least 50 percent too. I'm not kidding.

Your exercises don't have to be as formal as counting birds or

LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH ALL YOUR COMMON SENSES

closing your eyes and recognizing the significance of things you touch. You don't need to become a sensory sommelier over a myriad of tastes; you just have to say to yourself, in any given life experience, "I will not take my visual input as the be all and end all of my understanding. I will expose all of my other senses to the circumstances in which I find myself, and with this commitment, my quality of life will take on a remarkable new level of exciting passion."

And how about a fresh understanding of others by applying effective use of the senses? So much can be learned from the nuance of speech. Only a few of us are good enough actors to alter our voice sufficiently to fool a discerning ear. Where people are coming from is obvious if you learn to listen to pitch, rhythm, and inflection. As another sensory exercise, during your next telephone conversation try to draw impressions about the person on the other end. Decide what kind of a day this person is having. Could he or she be having problems at work or at home? And then, as subtly as you can, ask if things are okay.

You'll be surprised at how ready people are to talk about things that are bothering them if they are simply asked. The sound of a smile, the nuance of a sigh, the stuttering over nervous intention, the fear of relationship—all of these things and more are conveyed by the human voice.

Learn to read handshakes or hugs in order to grasp a person's behavioral intent. Assess another's comfort zone by the toxicity of personal smell. And learn to read body language when defining the way in which someone creates his or her own personal space.

The roadmap of sensory dynamics offers all kinds of routes to get to the same goal, allowing us to come to a more complete awareness of where others are coming from. When Thoreau wrote of the state of communion he experienced at Walden Pond, he was not only reflecting on the balance between humans and nature but on the synergism of the senses as they gathered the information

SEEING LESSONS

confirming that we are vibrantly alive. He understood in every way the link between mind and body, and that the bridge to the collective concept of life is found in the senses.

So build up your senses by cross-collateralizing their effectiveness. Don't just smell a flower—touch it. Don't just watch a bird in flight—listen to it. Don't record snap judgments based on visuals—hear the message from the heart expressed in the nuance of tone and voice. Become intimate and loving through the touch of another while drinking in the smell that makes that person different from anyone else. Become sensitized in the ways in which you gain information that expands your human capacity. Using your senses in new ways will allow you to step beyond compartmentalizing them so that you can enter a wondrous world in which sensory synergism provides you with levels of understanding far beyond your expectations.

Am I high on the senses? You bet. Simply put, they are sensational and available to every one who pays attention to the messages they send and learns to inculcate those messages into a life filled with natural sensory treasures.