

*C h a **1** p t e r*

Change Your Thinking

There is a law in psychology that if you form a picture in your mind of what you would like to be, and you keep and hold that picture there long enough, you will soon become exactly as you have been thinking.

—William James

Once upon a time there was a woman, about 30 years old, married with two children. Like many people, she had grown up in a home where she was constantly criticized and often treated unfairly by her parents. As a result, she developed deep feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem. She was negative and fearful, and had no confidence at all. She was shy and self-effacing, and did not consider herself to be particularly valuable or worthwhile. She felt that she was not really talented at anything.

One day, as she was driving to the store, another car went through a red light and smashed into her. When she awoke, she was in the hospital with a mild concussion and complete memory loss. She could still speak, but she had no recollection of any part of her past life. She was a total amnesiac.

At first, the doctors thought it would be temporary. But weeks passed and no trace of her memory returned. Her husband and children visited her daily, but she did not know them. This was such an unusual case that other doctors and specialists came to visit her as well, to test her and ask her questions about her condition.

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■ STARTING OVER

Eventually, she went home, her memory a complete blank. Determined to understand what had happened to her, she began reading medical textbooks and studying in the specialized area of amnesia and memory loss. She met and spoke with specialists in this field. Eventually she wrote a paper on her condition. Not long afterward, she was invited to address a medical convention to deliver her paper, answer questions about her amnesia, and share her experiences and ideas on neurological functioning.

During this period, something amazing happened. *She became a new person completely.* All the attention in the hospital and afterward made her feel valuable, important, and truly loved by her family. The attention and acclaim she received from members of the medical profession built her self-esteem and self-respect even higher. She became a genuinely positive, confident, outgoing woman, highly articulate, well informed, and very much in demand as a speaker and authority in the medical profession.

All memory of her negative childhood had been wiped out. Her feelings of inferiority were wiped out as well. She became a new person. She changed her thinking and changed her life.

■ THE BLANK SLATE

The Scottish philosopher David Hume was the first to propose the idea of the tabula rasa or blank slate. This theory says that each person comes into the world with no thoughts or ideas at all, and everything that a person thinks and feels is learned from infancy onward. It is as though the child's mind is a blank slate that every passing person and experience leaves a mark on. The adult becomes the sum total of everything he or she learns, feels, and experiences growing up. What the adult does and becomes later is the result of this early conditioning. As Aristotle wrote, "Whatever is impressed is expressed."

Perhaps the greatest breakthrough in the field of human potential in the twentieth century was the discovery of the *self-concept*. This is the idea that each person develops a bundle of beliefs regarding oneself, starting at birth. Your self-concept then becomes

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the master program of your subconscious computer, determining everything you think, say, feel, and do. For this reason, all change in your outer life begins with a change in your self-concept, with a change in the way you think and feel about yourself and your world.

The child is born with no self-concept at all. Every idea, opinion, feeling, attitude, or value you have as an adult you learned from childhood. Everything you are today is the result of an idea or impression you took in and accepted as true. When you believe something to be true, it becomes true for you, whatever the fact may be. “You are not what you think you are, but what you think, you are.”

■ FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE LASTING

If you were raised by parents who continually told you what a good person you were, who loved you, encouraged you, supported you, and believed in you, no matter what you did or didn’t do, you would grow up with the belief that you were a good and valuable person. By the age of three, this belief would *lock in* and become a fundamental part of the way you view yourself in relation to your world. Thereafter, no matter what happens to you, you would hold to this belief. It would become your reality.

If you were raised by parents who did not know how powerful their words and behaviors could be in shaping your personality, they could very easily have used destructive criticism, disapproval, and physical or emotional punishment to discipline or control you. When a child is continually criticized at an early age, he soon concludes that there is something wrong with him. He doesn’t understand why it is that he is being criticized or punished, but he assumes that his parents know the truth about him, and that he deserves it. He begins to feel that he is not valuable or lovable. He is not worth very much. He must therefore be worthless.

Almost all personality problems in adolescence and adulthood are rooted in what psychologists refer to as *love withheld*. The child needs love like roses need rain. When children feel unloved, they feel unsafe and insecure. They think, “I’m not good enough.” They begin to engage in compensatory behaviors to make up for this inner anxiety. This sense of love deprivation is manifested in misbehavior, personality problems, bursts of anger,

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depression, hopelessness, lack of ambition, and problems with people and relationships.

■ YOU ARE BORN UNAFRAID

The child is born with no fears, except those of falling and loud noises. All other fears have to be taught to the child as he or she grows up.

The two major fears we all develop are the fear of *failure* or *loss* and the fear of *criticism* or *rejection*. We begin to learn the fear of failure if we are continually criticized and punished when we try something new or different. We are shouted at and told, "No! Get away from there! Stop that! Put that down!" Physical punishment and the withholding of love, possibilities that scare us and make us feel insecure, often accompany these shouts and criticisms.

We soon begin to believe that we are too small, too weak, incompetent, inadequate, and incapable of doing anything new or different. We express this feeling with the words, "I can't, I can't, I can't." Whenever we think about doing something new or challenging, we automatically respond with feelings of fear, trembling, and a churning stomach. We react exactly as if we are afraid of getting a spanking. We say, "I can't" over and over.

The fear of failure is the primary reason for failure in adult life. As the result of destructive criticism in childhood, we hold ourselves back as adults. We sell ourselves short. We quit before we even try the first time. Instead of using our amazing minds to figure out how to get what we want, we use our reasoning ability to create reasons why we can't, and why the things we want are not possible for us.

■ THE NEED TO BE LOVED

The second major fear that holds us back, undermines our confidence, and destroys our desire for a happy life is the fear of *rejection*, and its expression, *criticism*. This emotion is learned in early childhood as the result of our parents expressing disapproval of us whenever we do something they don't like, or don't do something that they expect. As a result of our displeasing them, they

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become angry and withdraw the love and approval we need so much as children.

The fear of being unloved and alone is so traumatic for a child that she soon conforms her behavior to do whatever she thinks her parents will approve of. She loses her spontaneity and uniqueness. She begins to think, “I have to! I have to! I have to!” She concludes, “I have to do whatever Mommy and Daddy want me to, or they won’t love me, and I’ll be all alone!”

■ **CONDITIONAL LOVE**

As an adult, a child raised with what is called “conditional love” (as opposed to unconditional love, the greatest gift one person can give to another) becomes hypersensitive to the opinions of others. In its extreme form, he cannot do anything if there is the slightest chance that someone else may not approve. He projects his childhood relationship with his parents onto the important people in his adult life—spouse, boss, relatives, friends, authority figures—and tries desperately to earn their approval, or at least not lose it.

The fears of failure and rejection, caused by destructive criticism in early childhood, are the root causes of most of our unhappiness and anxiety as adults. We feel, “I can’t!” or “I have to!” continually. The worst feeling is when we feel, “I can’t, but I have to!” or “I have to, but I can’t!”

We want to do something, but we are afraid of failure or loss, or if we are not afraid of loss, we are afraid of disapproval. We want to do something to improve our lives, at work or at home, but we are afraid that we may fail, or that someone else may criticize us, or both.

For most people, their fears govern their lives. Everything they do is organized around avoiding failure or criticism. They think continually about playing it safe, rather than striving for their goals. They seek security rather than opportunity.

■ **DOUBLE YOUR RATE OF FAILURE**

The author Arthur Gordon once approached Thomas J. Watson Sr., the founder of IBM, and asked him how he could succeed faster as

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a writer. Thomas J. Watson, one of the giants of American business, replied with these profound words: “If you want to be successful faster, you must double your rate of failure. Success lies on the far side of failure.”

The fact is that the more you have already failed, the more likely it is you are on the verge of great success. Your failures have prepared you to succeed. This is why a streak of good luck seems to follow a streak of bad luck. When in doubt, “double your rate of failure.” The more things you *try*, the more likely you are to *triumph*. You overcome your fears only by doing the thing you fear until the fear has no more control over you.

■ YOUR MENTAL HARD DRIVE

Everything you know about yourself, all your beliefs, are recorded on the hard drive of your personality, in your self-concept. Your self-concept precedes and predicts your levels of performance and effectiveness in everything you do. Because of the law of correspondence, you always behave on the outside in a manner consistent with your self-concept on the inside. All improvement in your life therefore begins with an improvement in your self-concept.

You have an *overall* self-concept that is made up of all your beliefs about yourself and your abilities. This bundle of beliefs includes all the experiences, decisions, successes, failures, ideas, information, emotions, and opinions of your life up to now. This general self-concept determines how and what you think and feel about yourself, and measures how well you are doing in general.

■ YOUR MINI-SELF-CONCEPTS

You have a series of “mini-self-concepts” as well. These mini-self-concepts combine to make up your overall self-concept. You have a self-concept for every area of your life that you consider important. This mini-self-concept determines how you think, feel, and perform in that area.

For example, you have a self-concept for how healthy and fit you are, and how much you eat or exercise. You have a self-concept

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for how likable and popular you are with others, especially with members of the opposite sex. You have a self-concept for what kind of a spouse or parent you are, for how good a friend you are to your friends, how smart you are, and how well you learn. You have a self-concept for every sport you play, and for every activity you engage in, including how well you drive your car.

You have a self-concept for how well you do your work, and for how well you do each part of your work. You have a self-concept for how much money you make and how well you save and invest it. This is a critical area. The fact is that you can never earn much more or less than your self-concept level of income. If you want to make more money, you have to change your beliefs about yourself relative to income and money. This is an important part of this book.

■ CHANGE YOUR BELIEFS

In every case, if you want to change your performance and your results in any area of your life, you have to change your self-concept—or your beliefs about yourself—for that area. Fortunately, your beliefs are largely subjective. They are not always based on facts. Instead, they are based largely on information you have taken in and accepted as true, sometimes with very little evidence or proof.

The very worst beliefs you can have are *self-limiting beliefs* of any kind. These are beliefs about yourself that cause you to feel somehow limited or deficient in a particular area. These beliefs are seldom true, but if you accept them as valid estimates of your ability, they become true for you, exactly as if they were correct.

The starting point of unlocking your potential, and accomplishing more than you ever have before, is for you to *challenge* your self-limiting beliefs. You begin this process of freeing yourself from self-limiting beliefs by imagining that, whatever they are, they are completely untrue. Imagine for the moment that you have no limitations on your abilities at all. Imagine that you could be, do, or have anything you really wanted in life. Imagine that your potential is unlimited in any way.

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For example, imagine that you could be earning twice as much as you are earning today. Imagine that you could be living in a bigger house, driving a better car, and enjoying a more expensive lifestyle.

Imagine that you have the ability to be one of the top people in your field. Imagine that you are one of the most popular, powerful, and persuasive personalities in your social and business world. Imagine that you are calm, confident, and unafraid of anything. Imagine that you could set and achieve any goal you put your mind to. This is how you begin changing your thinking and changing your life.

The starting point of eliminating your fears, and releasing your potential, is to reprogram your mental hard drive with new, positive, constructive, and courageous beliefs about yourself and your future. Throughout this book, you will learn how to do this.

■ THREE PARTS OF YOUR SELF-CONCEPT

Your self-concept has three parts, like a pie divided into three wedges. Each is linked with each of the others. All three elements together make up your personality. They largely determine what you think, feel, and do, and everything that happens to you.

Your *self-ideal* is the first part of your personality and your self-concept. Your self-ideal is made up of all of your hopes, dreams, visions, and ideals. Your self-ideal is composed of the virtues, values, and qualities that you most admire in yourself and others. Your self-ideal is the person you would most like to become, if you could be a perfect person in every way. These ideals guide and shape your behavior.

Great men and women, leaders, and people of character are very clear about their values, visions, and ideals. They know who they are and what they believe in. They set high standards for themselves, and they don't compromise those standards. They are men and women that others can look up to and depend on. They are definite and distinct in their interactions with others. In everything they do, they strive to live up to their ideals.

■ THE WAY YOU SEE YOURSELF

The second part of your self-concept is your *self-image*. This is the way you see yourself and think about yourself. It is often called your “inner mirror.” It is where you look internally to see how you should behave in a particular situation. Because of the power of your self-image, you always perform on the *outside* consistent with the picture you have of yourself on the *inside*.

The discovery of the self-image, pioneered by Maxwell Maltz, is a major breakthrough in understanding human performance and effectiveness. By visualizing and imagining yourself performing at your best in an upcoming situation, you send a message to your subconscious mind. Your subconscious mind accepts this message as a command, and then coordinates your thoughts, words, and actions so that they fit a pattern consistent with the picture you created.

All improvement in your life begins with an improvement in your mental pictures. Your internal images influence your emotions, your behaviors, your attitudes, and even the way other people respond to you. The development of a positive self-image is a vital part of changing your thinking and changing your life.

■ HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF

The third part of your self-concept is your *self-esteem*. This is the emotional component of your personality, and is the most important factor in determining how you think, feel, and behave. Your level of self-esteem largely determines much of what happens to you in life.

Your self-esteem is best defined as *how much you like yourself*. The more you like yourself, the better you perform at anything you attempt. And by the law of reversibility, the better you perform, the more you like yourself.

Your self-esteem is the “reactor core” of your personality. It is the energy source that determines your levels of confidence and enthusiasm. The more you like yourself, the higher will be the standards you will set for yourself. The more you like yourself, the bigger the goals you will set for yourself and the longer you will

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persist in achieving them. People with high self-esteem are virtually unstoppable.

Your level of self-esteem determines the quality of your relationships with others. The more you like and respect yourself, the more you like and respect others and the better they feel toward you. In your business life and career, your personal level of self-esteem will be the critical factor that determines whether or not people will buy from you, hire you, enter into business dealings with you, and even lend you money.

The better your self-esteem, the better you will be as a spouse and parent. High self-esteem parents raise high self-esteem children. These children develop high levels of self-confidence and associate with other high self-esteem children. High self-esteem homes are characterized by love, laughter, and happiness for everyone who lives there.

■ THE DETERMINANT OF SELF-ESTEEM

Your level of self-esteem is largely determined by how closely your self-image—your current performance and behavior—matches your self-ideal—your picture of how you would perform if you were at your very best. You are always comparing your actual performance with your ideal performance at an unconscious level. Whenever you feel that you are living up to your very best, you feel terrific about yourself. Your self-esteem soars. You feel happy and fulfilled.

Whenever you do or say something that is *not* in keeping with your ideals or the best of which you feel you are capable, your self-esteem goes down. Whenever there is a wide separation between the person you are in the moment and the ideal person you want very much to be in the future, you feel badly about yourself. This is why you get angry with yourself whenever you fail at something, or behave badly in a situation with other people. Your self-ideal continually reminds you of how much better a person you can be.

■ THE CORE OF PERSONALITY

Psychologists agree today that your self-esteem lies at the core of your self-concept and your personality. Every improvement in any

part of your personality or performance boosts your self-esteem, and causes you to like and respect yourself even more. The more you like yourself, the better will be your self-image and subsequent performance, and the faster you will move toward becoming more like your self-ideal.

The best news of all is that there is an *inverse relationship* between your level of self-esteem and your fears of failure and rejection. The more you like yourself, the less you fear failure. The more you like yourself, the less concerned you are with the opinions of others, and the less you fear criticism. The more you like yourself, the more you make your decisions based on your own goals and standards, and the less you care what others think or say.

■ CONTROL YOUR INNER DIALOGUE

Just as you become what you think about, *you also become what you say to yourself*. The most powerful words you can repeat to yourself, especially if you are feeling tense or uneasy about an upcoming event, are the words, “I like myself! I like myself! I like myself!”

Whenever you say, “I like myself!” your fears diminish and your courage increases. The words, “I like myself!” are so powerful and positive that they are immediately accepted by your subconscious mind as a command. They instantly affect your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Your body language immediately improves, and you stand straighter. Your face becomes more positive and cheerful. Your tone of voice becomes stronger and more confident. You feel better about yourself, and as a result, you treat everyone around you in a warmer, friendlier way.

You begin the process of changing your thinking and changing your life by going to work on your self-concept. You start by developing a clear, positive, exciting, and inspiring self-ideal, consistent with the very best person you can imagine yourself becoming. You develop a positive self-image by imagining yourself performing at your very best in everything you do. Finally, you develop high and unshakable levels of self-esteem by loving and accepting yourself unconditionally as a valuable and worthwhile person.

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■ EXAMINE YOUR BASIC PREMISES

Most of your thoughts and your responses to the events and people of your life are determined by your *basic premises*. These are the ideas, beliefs, opinions, and conclusions you have come to as the result of inputs and experiences starting in childhood. They constitute not only your self-concept, but also your *philosophy of life*. The more adamant and convinced you are of your basic premises, the more they predict and control everything you do, say, and feel.

If you believe yourself to be an excellent person, loaded with talent and ability, friendly and popular, healthy and energetic, curious and creative, and destined to have a wonderful life, these basic premises will lead you to set goals, work hard, develop yourself, treat others well, bounce back from adversity, and ultimately succeed. Nothing will be able to stop you in the long run.

It is not what happens to you in life that is important. It is only *how you react* to what happens. It doesn't matter where you're coming from, either. All that really matters is where you are going. And where you are going is limited only by your own imagination. And since your imagination is unlimited, your future is unlimited as well. *These* are the basic premises and beliefs you need to fulfill your potential.

■ DISSOLVING THE MYTHS

Unfortunately, there are several myths that we accept as we grow up that can sabotage our hopes for success, joy, and fulfillment later in life. Let's look at these self-limiting beliefs one at a time.

The first and worst is summarized in the feeling, "I'm not good enough." This is the basic premise that causes feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. We assume that other people are better than we are just because, at the moment, they are *doing* better than we are. We feel that they must be worth more than us. Therefore, we must be worth less than them. This feeling of *worthlessness* sits deep in the psyche and causes us to sell ourselves short. We settle for less than we are truly capable of. Rather than to fail at a new goal, we don't set it in the first place.

The correct basic premise for you to develop, or belief for you to

have, is that not only are you good enough, but you have the ability to be excellent in any area that is important to you. You have unlimited potential to be, do, and have more than you have ever achieved up to now. As William Shakespeare said in *The Tempest*, “What’s past is prologue.” Whatever you have accomplished in the past is only a hint of what you can do in the future.

■ TALK TO YOURSELF POSITIVELY

The most powerful words in your vocabulary are the words that you say to yourself and believe. Your self-talk, your inner dialogue, determines 95 percent of your emotions. When you talk to yourself, your subconscious mind accepts these words as commands. It then adjusts your behavior, your self-image, and your body language to fit a pattern consistent with those words.

From now on, talk to yourself only in terms of what you want to be and do. *Refuse to say anything about yourself that you do not sincerely desire to be true.* Repeat the powerful, positive words, “I can do it!” over and over. Prior to any event of importance, repeat the words, “I like myself!” Say, “I’m the best! I’m the best! I’m the best!” again and again like you really mean it. Then, stand up straight and strong, put a confident smile on your face, and do the very best of which you are capable. Soon it will become a habit.

■ YOU DESERVE THE BEST

As the result of previous destructive criticism, people accept another myth, or self-limiting belief. It is that they don’t really believe that they *deserve* to be successful. This deep inner feeling of undeservingness is quite common among those of us who started off with very little in life, or who came from families that had little money when we were growing up. It can also be caused by people who told us at a young age that to be poor is virtuous but to be rich is sinful.

If you have grown up feeling undeserving of good things, for any reason, and you do achieve success in your field, you may experience what is called the “imposter syndrome.” You will feel that you are an imposter in your success, and that you are going to be found

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out. No matter how successful you become as the result of your hard work, you will have a nagging fear that it will all be taken away from you.

If you feel like an imposter, you will often feel guilty for achieving greater success than others. To escape these feelings of guilt, many people engage in *self-sabotage*. They eat too much, drink too much, take dope, ignore their families, engage in unpredictable behaviors, and often throw their money away in extravagant living and unwise investments. They feel deep down inside that they don't deserve their success. As a result, they often drive it away.

■ DEDICATE YOURSELF TO SERVING OTHERS

The truth is that you deserve everything you can rightfully earn by doing an excellent job, and producing or distributing products or services that improve people's lives and work. In a market society such as ours, all transactions are *voluntary*. People buy something only if they feel that they are going to be better off as a result. You can therefore be successful in the long run only by providing people with the things they want to improve their lives and work. The more and better you serve other people, the more you both deserve and earn.

The word "deserve" comes from the two Latin words, "dē" which means "from" and "servire" which means "to serve." Therefore, the word "deserve" means "from service." The people who do the best in our society, with few exceptions, are those who are serving other people better than someone else. Your whole focus in your career should be on serving other people better. Then you will deserve every dollar you earn.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The very best way to help the poor is not to become one of them." In our society, the more financially successful you are, the more taxes you are likely to pay. These taxes help pay for the schools, hospitals, roads, welfare, Medicare, military expenditures, and all the important things that our society offers. You can be proud to be financially successful. By making a lot of money, you make a significant contribution to lots of people. You do well for yourself by doing well for others.

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Repeat the words, “I deserve every penny I earn as the result of serving others with the products and services they need to improve their lives. I am proud of my success.”

■ YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT PERSON

You are a thoroughly good person. You are honest, decent, truthful, and hardworking. You treat other people with courtesy, respect, and warmth. You are dedicated to your family, friends, and your company. You are strong, confident, and responsible. You are knowledgeable, intelligent, and experienced. You are important not only to the people closest to you, but also to your community. You were born for a special reason, and you have a great destiny to fulfill. You are an excellent person in every way.

The preceding paragraph is a statement of your real personality and character. It may not be true for you 100 percent of the time, but it is a good general description of who you really are inside, and where you are going with your life. When you unconditionally accept that you are a truly valuable and worthwhile person, you will express it in everything you say and do. Over time, it will become true for you. Your ideal will become your reality.

Repeat to yourself, “I like myself and I love my life. I am a thoroughly good person in every way, and I always do my very best at anything I attempt.”

■ THE MENTAL SOFTWARE STORE

Imagine that there was a store that sold mental programming. You could purchase any self-concept, belief, or attitude that you wanted and install it in your brain, and that is the person you would be from then on. If such a store existed, and you could buy any set of beliefs, what would you choose?

Here is a suggestion. Look around you and find out what the happiest and most successful people in your world have developed as their core beliefs, and then get the same set of beliefs for yourself. Load them onto your mental hard drive and start running the same programs they are running.

Fortunately, based on hundreds of interviews with successful people, we know exactly how they are programmed and what beliefs

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they have developed from an early age. The most important core belief you can adopt for yourself is this: “I am a thoroughly good person and I am going to be a big success in life. Everything that happens to me, good or bad, is simply a part of the process of achieving the great success and happiness that is inevitable for me.”

If you absolutely believed that you were guaranteed to be happy and successful, and that every setback or obstacle was sent to you to teach you important lessons that you needed to know to achieve your goals, you would be completely unstoppable. You would be positive and optimistic most of the time. You would set big goals for yourself and bounce back quickly from any temporary defeat. Your belief would eventually become your reality. By changing your thinking, you would change your life.



Throughout the pages that follow, I will share with you a series of time-tested and proven methods and techniques that you can use to take complete control over every area of your thinking. I will show you how to think so positively and effectively that you will feel yourself capable of accomplishing anything. You will learn how to program and reprogram your self-concept so that your inner world is consistent with the person you want to be and the life you want to experience on the outside. You will learn how to become *unstoppable*.

ACTION EXERCISES

1. Define your ideals clearly. If you could be an excellent person in every way, what qualities would you have? How would you behave?
2. You become what you think about most of the time. Identify one or more areas of your life where your thinking is having a major influence on your emotions, attitudes, or actions.
3. In what area of activity do you perform at your best? How do you visualize yourself in that area? How could you extend this act of visualization to other areas?

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4. What kind of people do you most admire and respect? Why? How could you change your behavior so that it is more consistent with that of the best people you know?
5. In what areas of your life do you like yourself the most? What sorts of activities give the highest levels of self-esteem and personal value? How could you do even more of these things?
6. You are a thoroughly good person. From this day forth, see yourself as the very best you can be, and refuse to accept any limitations on your possibilities.
7. Change your self-concept by continually thinking, talking, and acting as if you were already the person you would like to be, enjoying the life that you want and deserve.