

PART I

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# The Promise of Self-Coaching

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# 1

## Self-Coaching: Get the Power

**B**arbara, a fifty-two-year-old insurance salesperson, had been struggling with apathy for years in her marriage, in her lackluster career, and in her life. Like those of many people, Barbara's problems weren't serious or debilitating enough for her to seek therapy. After all, she had always managed to get by—one way or another. She was a woman who had long ago conceded to a life of self-deprecation, doubt, and hesitation. Why? No reason—well, at least no rational, here-and-now reason. It had simply become her habit. It was only because of her frustrated husband's instigation that Barbara—with her typical humor, detached attitude—agreed to talk with me. After a few months of Self-Coaching using the techniques outlined in my previous book, *Self-Coaching: How to Heal Anxiety and Depression*, Barbara had an epiphany:

Funny how you come to accept a view of yourself—even if that view is distorted! For most of my adult life it's as if I've been building a case against myself. Looking for reasons to say "I'm not okay!" Perhaps the biggest lesson I've learned these past few months is that I have a choice. For years I've been choosing—without really thinking about it—to accept a decrepit view of myself! Can it really be true that now I can simply choose to "not choose" negativity? The truth—once you see it—seems so simple,

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so obvious, yet for most of my adult life it's been eluding me. Then again, I haven't been looking that hard.

I'm not exactly sure what triggered my complete turnaround, but it happened, and I'm feeling intoxicated! It's as if everything became clear all at once. My life is changing before my eyes, almost as though all I've had to do is set the course and turn the switch. How can it be so easy? How could I have missed seeing it all these years?

Now that I'm finally beginning to see myself clearly, I need to ask: What's my first step toward satisfaction? I need to determine what I want or need. I realize that what I want or need may not exactly be what Tom wants or needs, so we must continue to talk and somehow mesh our goals. I hope our compromise will give both of us a sense of satisfaction. The very act of trying to work it out is a positive move, but really only one step in the right direction. Tom is thrilled that I'm not the way I was, that I am trying. Thinking about how I was (thoughtless, impetuous, anxious, depressed) is sobering. For now I'll be on my guard against careless actions, lazy patterns, thoughtless remarks and responses. But I must say, with my new attitude, nothing seems impossible any longer.

### Stripes to Spots

You've heard it said that humans are creatures of habit. If you're anything like Barbara, you've probably never given this notion much thought, especially if you've been trying to figure out why your life seems to be wasting away, forever stuck in second gear or, worse, in reverse. Whereas other people seem so much more successful and downright blessed, you keep plodding along wondering when—or if—your time will ever come. Perhaps you have a dead-end job or a seemingly unending string of bad luck, or one personal rejection after another. Many people I've worked with come to me suspecting an assortment of reasons for their unhappy lives, but rarely—if ever—do

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they suspect the culprit to be nothing more than bad habits. Convinced instead that fate has been conspiring against them, many feel victimized by life, looking to be rescued from their own powerlessness and despair.

In twenty-five years of private practice you learn many things about human nature. You'd probably be surprised if I told you that many people who come into therapy aren't actually looking to change. It's true. What they really want is to become better neurotics! The perfectionist, for example, wants to become more perfect without feeling that nagging, uncomfortable anxiety all the time. The worrywart simply wants a lifetime guarantee to eliminate all those nasty surprises. And the compulsive workaholic isn't looking to slow down, just to get a good night's sleep once in a while.

How many times have you said, "I really have to change," only to go on and on with your incessant rituals? A big part of why you struggle is because you've become attached to your problems—your insecurity is the tar and your bad habits the feathers. And as uncomfortable and difficult as these habits may be, you're so identified with them that you'll actually argue with anyone who suggests that you try to change them. "But, Doctor, you don't understand, I've been a nervous wreck all my life. How do you expect me to relax?" Or, "There are people who live charmed lives and then there are people like me. Everything I touch turns sour. It's just the way it is."

If you're like most people, you probably feel that leopards can't change their spots. For leopards this may be true, but for you it's dead wrong. If you've been limited by your "spots," whatever they may be—lethargy, anxiety, self-doubt, fear, panic, depression, apathy, or even bad luck—then you need to be convinced that the power for change, real change, is a choice that Self-Coaching can teach you to make.

### ***Self-Coaching Reflection***

An ineffective, unhappy life is learned.

The fact that they weren't born ineffective, unhappy, frustrated, or insecure seems to elude many people. Regardless of what you may think, a

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life of struggle consists of learned patterns of perception and reacting. And if all your problems are, in fact, learned, then the good news is that whatever trips you up can be unlearned. In the chapters that follow you'll learn that the quest for control is the motor behind your unhappiness. But more important, you'll learn one of life's best-kept secrets: controlling life is a myth! Life simply cannot be controlled.

For now I have only one question for you: why do you go on struggling with your life if you're unhappy? Maybe it never occurred to you that you don't have to struggle, especially if you've become identified with your problems. You might, for example, throw up your hands and admit, "Yes, I'm lazy, it's my nature." In this case you're admitting that there's no difference between you and your laziness. Another reason may be that you've become a slave to the faulty perception that more control is the answer to your problems. "I can't let anyone see me without my makeup. What will they think?" Whatever the reason for your struggling, stumbling life, why not change? You can, and Self-Coaching can teach you how—not by trying to control your problems, but by living without them.

Before going farther, let's start off with a simple self-quiz to determine the quality of your life. After learning to incorporate the power of Self-Coaching into your life, you may want to retake this quiz to prove just how much you've changed. Then again, you may not want to bother—since you'll already know how much happier your life has become. You'll have the power.

### Quality of Life Self-Quiz

Please read the following questions carefully, but don't overthink your responses. Circle your responses as being either mostly true or mostly false as they generally pertain to your life. Answer each question even if you're not completely sure. Scoring is at the end of the test.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | I'm not a very positive person.                                 |
| T | F | I usually wake up with a sense of dread about beginning my day. |

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T	F	I seem to have many regrets.
T	F	I'm often jealous of other people.
T	F	I hate my job.
T	F	I'm not as happy as other people.
T	F	I have many fears.
T	F	I'm often moody and/or depressed.
T	F	I worry/ruminate a lot.
T	F	I seem to have bad luck.
T	F	I often have thoughts that begin with "If only . . ."
T	F	I'm insecure.
T	F	I'm often too negative.
T	F	I've had one or more panic attacks in the past six months.
T	F	I usually don't feel that I'm as good as other people.
T	F	Life is a constant struggle.
T	F	Something always goes wrong.
T	F	I have many self-doubts.
T	F	I'm a great procrastinator.
T	F	I'd much rather be safe than sorry.
T	F	I waste too much time.
T	F	I often find myself "what-iffing."
T	F	I'm often anxious or tense.
T	F	In relationships I often feel competitive.
T	F	I suffer from unexplained physical difficulties.
T	F	I often have nightmares.
T	F	I've been treated for anxiety or depression.
T	F	I always expect the worst.
T	F	I don't have many interests or hobbies.
T	F	I get bored too easily.

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- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | I spend too much.                                     |
| T | F | I'm not a good listener.                              |
| T | F | I have no willpower.                                  |
| T | F | I'm lazy.   |
| T | F | I'm always tired.                                     |
| T | F | I have a hard time saying no to others.               |
| T | F | I watch too much TV.                                  |
| T | F | I don't sleep well.                                   |
| T | F | I fear getting older.                                 |
| T | F | I often hold grudges.                                 |
| T | F | My looks are too important to me.                     |
| T | F | I have trouble falling asleep.                        |
| T | F | I'm stingy.   |
| T | F | I often drink too much.                               |
| T | F | I don't adjust well to changes.                       |
| T | F | I can't stay focused at work.                         |
| T | F | I'm not very efficient.                               |
| T | F | I always find fault in others.                        |
| T | F | I'm always feeling rushed; there's never enough time. |
| T | F | I don't consider myself an emotionally strong person. |

Total your “true” responses. A score of 14 or fewer suggests that you have a satisfactory quality of life. Self-Coaching can teach you to cultivate an even deeper awareness, spontaneity, and enjoyment of life.

A score of 15 to 30 suggests that the quality of your life is significantly restricted. For you, it's safe to assume that Self-Coaching will make a significant difference in your overall happiness.

A score of 31 or more suggests that the quality of your life is substantially compromised. Self-Coaching can make a profound difference in the quality of your life.

## Choosing Power

It's time to stop making yourself miserable and start learning how to jump-start your life. You hold in your hands a powerful and unique program that works. For years I've been incorporating my Self-Coaching technique in my practice as well as assisting readers from all over the world. The results confirm, over and over again, that success and personal happiness—on the job, in relationships, or in your own mind—is a choice you can learn to make. Sounds kind of simple, huh? With the right understanding and uncomplicated coaching program to implement it, it is.

Self-Coaching is going to connect you with your inner power to no longer feel victimized by circumstances, self-doubts, or even bad luck. You can choose to create the life you want by training yourself to be a complete and successful person. And make no mistake, the power that can transform your life isn't something you have to develop or create—all you need do is unleash it! It's always been a part of you, hidden by insecurity, waiting for you to turn it loose.

How do you turn your power loose? Simple: remove the obstacles of self-doubt and insecurity that are blocking it. If you do this, your power will find you. It's up to you. If you already possess the power, why not use it? The only thing you have to lose is your misery.

### ***Self-Coaching Reflection***

Who you are, what you are, and where your life is going  
are all choices.

This notion that you have the power to choose the life you want may take some getting used to. I'd like to take the concept of choice a step further. As I see it, life itself is choice. The person you are at this moment is really the end result of all the life choices you've made to date, even though that may be difficult to believe. Just as a building is made of many individual bricks, each life choice you've made has contributed to the person you are today—choice by choice. The sooner you learn to take responsibility for the choices you make, the thoughts

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you have, and the attitudes you embrace, the sooner you can have the life you want.

### Self-Coaching Makes More Sense

Since Self-Coaching is so different from traditional therapy and other methods of self-help, I don't want you to think of it as therapy. Think of it as coaching, Self-Coaching (Self with a capital "S"). Although rooted in sound psychological and therapeutic principles, Self-Coaching is not only a totally different approach to solving problems, it's also a revolutionary new mind-set. So forget about analyzing your problems or dredging up the past in an attempt to understand why you suffer.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Self-Coaching isn't concerned with *why* you struggle. Although this notion may sound radical at first, it's no different than if you were a cigarette smoker who wanted to quit smoking. Do you really think it matters why you smoked that first cigarette? Of course not; it matters only that you break the habit. And if your goal is to create the life you want, then the only thing that matters is breaking the habits of control and insecurity that are ruining and ruling it. So, rather than finding out *why* you're insecure and struggling, Self-Coaching's five essential steps will allow you to cut to the chase by replacing "whys" with "how-tos."

A football game I played in high school can help clarify the difference between more traditional approaches to healing and the power of Self-Coaching. It was halftime and our spirits were as grim and as cold as the freezing November rain that soaked us. Losing by three touchdowns, we slumped into the locker room. Silence quickly replaced the clatter of cleats on concrete as we anticipated Coach Brown's choleric address. It started slowly, reaching fever pitch quickly as he ranted, raged, stormed, and kicked helmets with fire in his eyes. Let me tell you, it was a doozy! The mood, the atmosphere—whatever it was—shifted. Adrenaline pumping, hearts pounding, we stormed back onto the field a pack of warriors, confident, bold, and determined.

We lost that game in overtime, but compared to the defeat we were willing to accept at halftime, it was a complete and satisfying victory

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for me. We went out with pride and dignity. And that's exactly what a coach can accomplish. A coach lights fires, reverses negatives, defeats attitudes, and instills a can-do philosophy.

Can you imagine if a psychologist instead of a coach had addressed our team at halftime? It might have gone something like this: "Okay, boys, just settle down and reflect a moment. How does it feel to be getting your butts whipped? Go ahead, don't be afraid to let it out, we've got plenty of tissues if you're feeling upset." I don't think so! To me, when life gets bogged down with feelings of powerlessness and negativity, we don't need a stoic, reflective approach. We need an active, involved, inspirational pep talk that generates desire and demands results. We need to light the can-do fire. Whereas therapy is passive, reflective, and patient, Self-Coaching is active, involved, and, if anything, impatient. Self-Coaching's uncomplicated training program will teach you how to disarm your habits of insecurity and ineffectiveness and replace them with the tools for a successful and productive life.

### Overcoming Any Problem

Over my many years of private practice I've heard just about every reason why people can't seem to find success and personal happiness. Like an echo reverberating through a tunnel, echoes of insecurity can roll through your life, distorting your every perception. Ginny, a young woman whose life had become a smorgasbord of destructiveness, will help me introduce you to how Self-Coaching approaches problems.

When I first met Ginny she was just twenty-two years old, and already her life was in danger of a total meltdown. She was a daily, addicted marijuana smoker and binge drinker who was becoming increasingly depressed and agitated. She was angry, hostile, bitter, and scared. Her home life was a shambles. Her parents were divorced. She rarely saw her father, and when she did, the potential for physical violence would quickly erupt. Her relationship with her mother was beginning to reflect this same violent loss of control, accompanied by hostility and a total lack of tolerance.

As you might imagine, Ginny's social life was terrible. It was

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centered mainly on finding men who would—in one way or another—finance her ability to get high. She had long ago given up on maintaining any serious relationships with her peers, and trying not to think about where she was headed, she worked hard at staying intoxicated. For Ginny, drugs and alcohol were the only escapes from an intolerable world of turmoil, confusion, and family chaos, a world where hope was replaced by a dark certainty and bitterness that there was no way out.

We talked about a trauma Ginny had recently gone through when she asked her father for money that she desperately needed to help pay for her car insurance. When her father brusquely refused, Ginny recalled feeling an intense rage that blotted out all thinking, leaving her shouting, cursing, and throwing dishes. This event was unfortunately followed by days of self-destructive behavior.

### Taking the Challenge

Ginny's script read that she was destined to forever be the victim-child of a selfish and unloving father, which compelled her to keep looking for some sign of acceptance, support, possibly even love. There was a part of Ginny that just couldn't accept her father's shortcomings. How could she? If she acknowledged that her father could never give her the love she needed, then Ginny would remain incomplete. Self-Talk (the five essential steps of Self-Talk in part II will teach you this powerful technique) began to teach Ginny to start looking at her perceptions of insecurity and rejection not as givens but as habits. Ginny's habit could be stated like this: *Unless my father gives me what I need, I will never be okay. I'll always be a little girl, wanting "Daddy" to make me feel better.* Talk about feeling impotent!

Ginny didn't pursue her relationship with her father consciously. Quite the contrary. Ginny, who fancied herself as fearless, independent, and tough, almost gagged when I first suggested the concept to her. It didn't matter that Ginny was unaware of her habit of insecurity; it only mattered that it was steering her life—right into a brick wall! All this changed when she began to challenge her habit. At that point the truth was finally able to percolate to the surface. What was this truth?

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Simply that she was okay—really okay! Always was. But most important, she needed to recognize that she didn't need her daddy. What she desperately needed was to experience her own maturity and power. Until now her habit of insecurity had completely obstructed this rather straightforward solution.

Keep in mind that a habit such as Ginny's isn't a deliberate, conscious decision, "Now I'm going to feel insecure." Habits of insecurity have long ago become automatic, reflexive themes that echo and repeat throughout our lives. And herein lies the biggest danger: these habits aren't going anywhere. Unless you actively challenge and break them, they can and will ruin your entire life. Like a backpack, you'll carry these habits strapped to your back for years, never realizing there's a choice.

What about you? Anything strapped to your back?

### After the Choice

Self-Coaching allowed Ginny to reorient her thinking and to finally break the habits of victimization and powerlessness that had begun years before. Rather than perpetually behaving like an angry little girl looking to be rescued, Ginny instead learned to turn to herself, and that's where her power was waiting for her. Once self-doubt gets replaced with self-confidence, life begins to soar. Ginny went to rehab, stopped drinking and drugging, joined a YMCA volleyball team, and decided to go to a local community college. A recent e-mail from Ginny informed me that she's currently a solid B+ senior with high hopes of becoming a journalist. Ginny managed all the above while working at two jobs, buying a car, and starting a small investment portfolio. It's no wonder that Ginny's favorite book is Horatio Alger's *The Ragged Dick*. Talk about a rags-to-riches story!

Ginny's success may seem like an exaggeration to you, but it's not. Not when you tap into the power within you. Fortified with this instinctual reservoir of confidence and trust, no problem is insurmountable. Ginny came to me one inch away from total self-destruction. Her chaotic life contributed to her profound sense of insecurity and

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self-doubt. When she was high, she felt in control and invulnerable. When she was straight, she was tortured with fear, anger, low self-esteem, and distrust. Self-Coaching didn't change Ginny's external circumstances (her father still remains detached and uncaring), but by teaching her how to fight off her doubting nature and replace it with self-confidence, she was able to change her insecure thinking with the power of Self-Coaching.

### ***Self-Coaching Reflection***

If you allow insecurity to echo through your life,  
don't expect to have a life.

You're going to be learning all about insecurity in chapter 3, but for now recognize that insecurity, if allowed to distort your thinking, will do one thing: it will dictate the quality of your life. And that quality will be riddled with doubt, distrust, and powerlessness. Just as you can't point one foot north and the other south and expect to begin walking, so, too, with insecurity. Part of you is pointed toward wanting a happy, effective life, and part of you is pointed toward a controlling, congested waste of a life. End result: your life becomes split and frozen with inertia.

Whether you're sixteen or sixty, emotionally stuck, suffering from inertia, worrisome anxiety, self-doubt, panic, depression, or just feeling victimized by the lack of success in your life, Self-Coaching can teach you, as it did Ginny, to reinvent your life and free yourself from the shackles of insecurity and habit that hold you prisoner. Becoming a winner isn't that complicated. In fact, with Self-Coaching's five essential steps, you'll find it's rather straightforward. If Ginny could do it, you can, too.

### **Transform Your Life with Two Power Words**

Let's keep this simple. Two power words: "control" and "habit." Just two words—that's all you're going to need to turn your life around. Control is an attempt to manage and manipulate life because you've

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come to distrust your natural, spontaneous capacity to handle life. Habit refers to the specific control patterns that have become automatic, such as worrying, rumination, perfectionism, and the like. Understanding how control and habit can echo through your life is the way toward dismantling the most stubborn, resistant problems. It may sound too simplistic, or even a bit too fantastic. But that's okay. If you can accept the unobservable notion that the physical world is composed of molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles, then you should be able to accept the psychological view that everything you need to change yourself and your life, you already possess. Even if you can't observe it . . . yet.



### **SELF-COACHING POWER DRILL**

Regardless of your current belief, periodically during each day practice allowing yourself to believe that everything you need to have a happy and successful life, you already possess. Just permit yourself to relax and accept this fundamental notion—even if it's only for a few seconds at first. Don't allow yourself to fight it. You can expect a struggle from your traditional doubts and hesitations, but for now, accept it *as if* it's true. The important thing in this drill is to begin feeling what it's like to be empowered and not victimized by life. Later, as you progress with your Self-Coaching program, you won't have struggle with this. You'll be totally convinced.

