Part One

Uncover Your Dreams

CHAPTER 1

Know Your Own Mind—Even if It Scares You

Have you ever tried and tried and tried to fall asleep . . . and the harder you try, the more awake you feel?

Or perhaps you've had the experience of telling yourself not to bring up a difficult topic—your best friend's bad haircut or your boss's recent divorce—and then hearing yourself blurt out the very comment you're desperate to avoid?

How about that disturbing encounter—tomorrow's job interview or last night's disastrous date—that you're determined not to think about? Does every effort to divert your thoughts simply increase your obsession?

If any of these examples rings a bell with you, then you've experienced one of the most interesting—and frustrating—aspects of the human mind, what fellow neuroscientist Daniel W. Wegner calls the "ironic processes of mental control." Dan described these

processes in a groundbreaking article in *Psychological Review* that helped to inspire my own work in this fascinating field.

Although ironic processes don't tell the whole story of buried dreams and hidden fears, they're an extremely important part of knowing our own mind. Whether we're talking about falling asleep, sticking to a diet, getting over a fight, or following a dream, we need to understand how ironic processes work, because they're one of the most common methods our mind uses to keep us from getting what we really want.

How Your Mind Secretly Undermines You

Let's suppose you're concentrating on accomplishing a specific goal. You may be trying to perform a physical action: *Don't hit the golf ball into the sand trap*; or *Don't run over that broken bottle in the middle of the road*. You may want to exert some control over your body itself: *Fall asleep*; or *Stop feeling nauseated!* You might be trying to influence your actions in a social situation: *Don't mention colleges—George's son just got rejected by his top three choices*; or *Don't tell Sue that secret!* You may even be trying to direct your mind's own thoughts and feelings: *Stop waiting for that new guy to call*; or *Don't think any more about that awful fight with Mom*.

Although these are all actions that we are presumably capable of completing successfully, we tend to fail at many of them—often. Indeed, sometimes it seems that the more we don't want to do something—stay awake, blurt out a secret, obsess about romance—the more we feel compelled to do it.

I work with a number of professional athletes, and they are especially aware of this frustrating lack of control. If a baseball player is in a slump, for example, he is likely to obsess about his inability to hit the ball. Every time he comes up to bat, he worries about whether he'll get a hit—and the more he worries, the less

likely he is to get one. Or a pro golfer who's had bad luck on a particular hole during a tournament often gets spooked when she has to play that hole again. She remembers all the mistakes she made the last time—and then labors under what feels like an irresistible compulsion to repeat them. Athletes from all different types of sports describe the same phenomenon: "The harder I try to avoid a mistake, the more inevitable that mistake starts to feel."

Sports psychologists and coaches often try to help by telling players to relax when they tee up or come to bat. But for many athletes, these new instructions only seem to make the problem worse. "Relax, relax, relax," they repeat to themselves, becoming tenser and less confident with every word.

Dan's article brilliantly illuminates the problem: our mental control is by nature divided. One aspect of our mind, the Operator, tries to do what we want. Another aspect, the Monitor, tries to find out whether we've done it.

On the surface, this would seem like a logical arrangement. After all, you don't need to keep trying to fall asleep once you've already fallen asleep. You don't need to keep diverting your thoughts away from an unpleasant topic after they've already been diverted. And you don't need to keep avoiding a mistake after you've successfully avoided it. In fact, it's crucial for every function to have not just an on switch ("Do this") but also an off switch ("Okay, you've succeeded; you can stop now"). Otherwise we'd be like the broom in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," bringing bucket after bucket of water when the tub was already full. So our Monitor's job is to notify us when our task has been completed, freeing us to turn off the switch and proceed to the next task.

But how does the Monitor know whether our task has been completed? Alas, that's where so many of us undermine ourselves. By nature, the Monitor isn't set up to seek evidence that we have done something. Instead, it looks for evidence that we haven't. If it finds no evidence to the contrary, we've succeeded, and we can move on to new activities. But if our Monitor finds any evidence

of any remaining problem, we'll stay stuck in our same old task.

Here's a somewhat simplified version of how our Operator and our Monitor interact so that ironically we end up doing exactly the opposite of what we intended:

Operator: "I'd like to go to sleep now. So I'm going to try to go to sleep. Okay, can I stop trying? Am I asleep yet?"

Monitor: "Wait, let me check. Nope, still awake . . . still awake . . . still awake."

Operator: "Last time I did this task, I made a mistake, and I really don't want to make it again. Am I successfully avoiding my past mistake?"

Monitor: "To answer that question, I'm going to seek out all available evidence that you are *not* avoiding your past mistake. Wow, look at all this evidence I've found! And guess what? The more evidence I look for, the more I find!" (Oops. Now all you can think about is that mistake and all the possible ways you might repeat it. From being a tiny, nagging fear, your concern with that mistake has blossomed into a full-blown obsession.)

Operator: "That fight I had with Mom last week is still bothering me—I really want to stop thinking about it. Have I succeeded yet? Can I stop trying to stop?"

Monitor: "To answer that question, I have to look for every shred of evidence that you are still thinking about that fight. If I don't find any, then you've been successful. But if I find even the tiniest sign that you're still thinking about Mom, you'll have to keep trying to stop—while I keep seeking evidence." (You guessed it. As your Monitor continues its ironic process, that fight with Mom begins to completely dominate your thoughts. "Am I still thinking about it now? Now? Now?" "Yes, yes, yes—more than ever!")

You see the problem. Some instructions—*relax*, *avoid*, *don't make a mistake*—are virtually impossible to complete because of that inevitable monitoring process. Thinking about the problem reactivates the problem, a seemingly endless feedback loop that locks us into a permanent cycle of repeating our mistakes and obsessing about our failures.

But here's the good news. This version of getting in our own way is not necessarily due to buried dreams or hidden fears. We're not deliberately sabotaging our own progress, we're just not doing a very good job of pursuing our goals. So if your only problem is those pesky ironic processes, consider yourself lucky: I'm about to share an easy way to free yourself from this mental trap.

Think Positive

Athletes and their coaches were among the first to discover the secret I'm about to share, one that sports psychologists and other cognitive scientists have also helped promote: give your mind only positive instruction . . . and then imagine that your success has already happened.

In other words, don't tell yourself not to miss the ball. Don't even tell yourself to hit the ball. Instead, imagine that you have already hit the ball—and then put yourself into the mental state you'd be in if you actually had hit it. In effect, you'll have fooled your Monitor, which won't be able to find any negative evidence that you're about to repeat your same old failure. By convincing yourself that you already are successful, you will succeed.

Likewise, don't tell yourself to fall asleep. I know that sounds like a positive instruction, but it still prompts your Monitor to look for evidence of wakefulness. Instead, visualize yourself already asleep, or simply imagine yourself relaxed, happy, and at peace. Don't focus on trying to sleep—instead, try to remember in luxurious, minute detail exactly what it feels like to be sleepy. If you can, enjoy the process.

Another approach to a demanding task is not to think about the task at all. If, for example, you want to sleep, ask your mind to daydream about a task that you find pleasant and soothing—your own personal equivalent of counting sheep—with no goal, no expectations, just a pleasant state of interest. Replay the plot of a movie you loved. Daydream about your next vacation. Relive one of your favorite romantic moments. Without any goal at which you can succeed or fail, you'll fool your Monitor into thinking it has nothing to do, and your own natural tiredness will take over. (By the way, don't try counting sheep—that actually gives you an impossible-to-achieve goal that tends to keep you up and make you tense!)

My patient Barb, a marketing executive, found positive thinking extremely helpful in improving her performance at work. Barb had always had trouble speaking in public, and she was especially

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Sleep without Sheep

There actually is a study showing that counting sheep is less effective in combating insomnia than is visualizing a pleasant or soothing scene, such as a holiday, a sunny afternoon, a family Christmas, a walk in a meadow, or a country scene with a waterfall. In 2002, Oxford University researchers Allison G. Harvey and Suzanna Payne decided to test how Dan Wegner's "ironic processes" theory might play out for insomniacs, so they divided forty-one self-identified insomniacs into three groups: one was given no instructions; the second was simply told to distract themselves by, for example, counting sheep; and the third was told to visualize a pleasant or soothing scene such as a waterfall. Although people in the "general distraction" group found that counting sheep was better than doing nothing at all, the "imagery distraction" group were the clear winners, falling asleep significantly sooner than the other two groups.

concerned about her difficulty now that her job required her to make weekly presentations to her boss and his colleagues. She felt the first few presentations hadn't gone well, and since she genuinely wanted to succeed at her job, she came to me for help.

With my coaching, Barb began to visualize her success. She imagined herself speaking fluently, clearly, effectively. She pictured how good it would feel to present a speech with authority, to answer questions without hesitation, to remain in command of the room. Barb found these fantasies thrilling, and they did indeed improve her presentations. Because Barb had no conflicts about doing well at work—because she genuinely wanted to make good speeches—this technique worked for her.

Many of us believe that the way to improve our performance is to monitor it consciously. When we do well, we say to ourselves, "Good for me!" When we do badly, we tell ourselves, "That was a mistake; I should have done such-and-such instead." We believe that through this process of continual evaluation, we'll improve our game, our speaking ability, or any other activity that matters to us.

In fact, that kind of evaluation has its place, but only after the fact. While you are playing, speaking, writing, or otherwise engaged in a demanding activity, it's far more helpful to give yourself constant praise, even when you do something wrong. "Good for me! Look how hard I'm trying! Look how much I'm learning! I have so much to be proud of!" Afterward you can say, "Wow, I'll never use that joke again," or "I wonder whether it would have been more effective to feint right instead of to charge left." But making any kind of judgment during play only activates your Monitor, who then begins searching for every shred of evidence that you're doing everything wrong.

If you'd like to experience the power of positive thinking, try the following exercise. I've presented it with a work example, but it works just as well with regard to love (such as visualizing a successful date or sexual encounter) and personal life (for example, visualizing a graceful, dignified, and assertive response to family

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Rewiring Your Brain

Throughout this book, I'll be helping you use visualization and guided imagery as a transformational tool. That's because visualizing an action can affect your brain in virtually the same way as physically performing it, creating new synapses and pathways. According to Harvard neuroscientist Steve Kosslyn, visualizing yourself performing a skill actually helps you improve that skill: "For example, if you were learning a new dance, visualizing the steps would lead you to be a better dancer—provided that imagined practice is intermixed with actual practice."

Dr. Kosslyn's conclusion is partly based on research by Gayle Deutsch and her colleagues, who found that when experimental subjects were asked to visualize an action—rotating an imaginary object—they activated the same parts of the brain that are used to physically perform the same action (specifically the parietal and frontal lobes of the right hemisphere). Dr. Kosslyn's colleague neuroscientist Marc Jeannerod, took this idea one step farther: he says that imagining an action creates memories that are similar or perhaps even identical to memories of actually performing the action, and these memories can be used to help you perform the action the next time, just as if you'd actually been practicing it physically. Once you actually do perform it physically, real-life memories supersede the ones created by the visualization. But until then, visualizing your ideal performance of an activity—succeeding at whatever you've chosen to imagine—really does count as practice in doing something well.

In other words, visualization isn't just mind over matter. It's actually mind creating matter as your images literally alter your brain.

members). I've suggested one approach to visualization, but feel free to experiment with your own variations and approaches. Just make sure your focus is on visualizing a success as if it has already happened. Don't give yourself any opportunity to monitor or evaluate your performance. That ironic Monitor will trip you up every time!

EXERCISE

Visualize Success

1. *Relax.* This exercise works best if you're in a calm, relaxed frame of mind, so take a few moments to breathe deeply and allow your mind to clear. Take ten slow, deep breaths, breathing in on a count of 8 and out on a count of 8. (If you find it difficult to breathe so slowly, begin with a count of 2, then 4, then 6, then 8—then try ten deep breaths on a count of 8.) Focusing entirely on counting your breaths will help relax your body and clear your mind, putting you into a receptive state for the rest of the exercise.

2. *Visualize yourself proceeding through the activity of your choice*. If, like Barb, you want to improve your public speaking, begin visualizing the activity from the very beginning. See yourself entering the room where the talk will be given. Imagine yourself speaking. Hear how clear your words are, how forceful. Notice the facial expressions on your audience. Bring your visualization into sharp focus by paying attention to specific sensory details. Ask yourself what you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel. Experience the bright yellow of the wall, the sounds of the traffic coming through the open window, the scent of the coffee, the feel of the pencil between your fingers, and the sensation of your wool blazer against your skin. If you don't know the sensory details of the actual place you'll be giving the speech, make them up.

Sensory experience—even imaginary experience—will make your visualization feel more real to you, and that sense of reality will support your sense of confidence and well-being.

3. *See your activity ending.* Give your visualization a more "finished" sense by proceeding on, through the end of your activity. See yourself finishing your speech, picking up your notes, putting them into your briefcase. Notice the response of your audience. Again, make it as specific as possible—see as many individual faces as you can bring into your mental vision, noticing their expressions, hearing any words that might be spoken. Find a satisfying way to bring your visualized experience to a close. Take a few moments to savor your success.

4. *Remain in your relaxed state for another few minutes.* Finish with another ten slow, deep breaths, inhaling on a count of 8 and exhaling on a count of 8. Try to focus entirely on your breathing. This "mind-clearing" time will also help you retain the emotional aura of your visualization and will ensure that you don't erase its good effects by jumping right back into an anxious, busy state.

5. *Jot down a few notes to yourself.* Many people find it helpful to take a few more minutes to describe their experience in writing or to note the main points they wish to take away from their visualization. Writing down your feelings, thoughts, and conclusions can be a terrific way to give form to your experience, which in turn will help you remember it longer.

The Limits of Positive Thinking

I'm all for positive thinking, but it does have its limits. If, like many of my patients, you are driven by hidden fears and buried dreams,

positive thinking probably won't work. That's because, no matter what you think you're doing, you're ignoring the real intentions that are driving your actions. Divided against yourself, you're not entirely sure you want to achieve your chosen result, so you have no genuine commitment to positive thinking. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if positive thinking fails you, that's a pretty good indication that there's some hidden fear or buried dream that you have consciously or unconsciously decided to ignore.

For example, suppose, like my patient Teresa, you are having trouble with your career. Teresa was no stranger to positive thinking. A brilliant tennis player, she had recently turned pro after a dazzling amateur career. She'd picked up her first tennis racket at age three and now, nearly twenty years later, she was approaching the pinnacle of her success. Visualization and positive thinking had helped to put her there.

Recently, she had been plagued by a series of small injuries—a pulled ligament, a bruised shoulder, once even a severe sprain that kept her out of a match she'd spent months training for. Injuries are common among athletes, and at first Teresa had written off the incidents as a run of bad luck. But when they caused her to miss her third match in a row, her trainer suggested that she talk to me.

"What do you think the problem is?" I asked Teresa when we first met.

She shook her head, barely able to hold back the tears. "I'm used to working hard for what I want—and I'm used to winning. But this is something I'm doing to myself. I know I'm the one holding myself back. But I can't figure out why."

Clearly, Teresa was willing to work hard for what she wanted. No one becomes a topflight tennis pro without unremitting work and passionate ambition. Teresa had been blessed with talent, drive, and a positive attitude, and she was finally on the verge of achieving her lifelong dream. Her goal was practically within her grasp, so why balk now?

Gradually we discovered that Teresa had always longed for

a close group of friends. She'd come from a cold, withholding family who had pushed her to achieve her athletic goals without giving her much emotional support. Her dedication to tennis had isolated her from other girls her age and hadn't left her much time for a social life with boys, either. The first time she ever felt like she belonged was on the circuit, hanging out with the other tennis players who shared her dedication and love of the game.

But Teresa's friends were also her rivals. If she truly became the number-one champion, she couldn't expect to stay close to numbers two, three, and four. For Teresa, becoming a success meant losing the only friends she'd ever had.

Although most women don't become star athletes, I've met many who shared Teresa's fears of isolation. "Once I'm successful, everyone will hate me," another patient once told me, a high-powered advertising executive who had suddenly found herself feeling unmotivated and listless. "My husband is already angry that I'm spending so much time at work, and my sister is always making these little digs about my fancy career. My best friend quit her job two years ago to stay home with her kids—we're still close but I'm always worried that she'll look down on me for being a bad mother, or worse, that she'll feel threatened by my choice. I've worked all my life to get to this level—but what's the point if I have no one to share it with?"

Like that patient and many others, Teresa was holding herself back because of her hidden fears. Part of her wanted to become a champion. But part of her feared losing her circle of friends—a conflict too deep for mere positive thinking to resolve. Teresa's fear of isolation was the part of her experience she just couldn't bear to attend to.

Is There Something Your're Ignoring?

If positive thinking has worked for you, congratulations! But if you want to take a deeper look, let's get started. In this section you'll have the chance to find out whether hidden fears and bur-

ied dreams are interfering with your progress—whether you, too, are ignoring a hidden pattern of self-sabotage.

Let me be very clear: I am not saying that fear itself is the problem. Fear can often be a healthy emotion, one that warns us about dangers we need to avoid. And even if you think your fears are giving you faulty information ("Everybody will hate me!" "I'll never find true love!" "My family will abandon me and I'll be all alone forever!"), those fears needn't hold you back. Most people who achieve happy and fulfilling lives will agree that they've often experienced fear, both rational and irrational. The key is learning how to feel your fears and then put them in perspective. Not fear, but hidden fear, is the problem.

Nor am I saying that you must follow every dream. Even the most satisfying life requires some compromise, giving up some dreams to pursue others. Moreover, our dreams change and grow throughout our lives. Changing your mind about what you want and what you're willing to give up is a natural part of growth. Not abandoned dreams but buried dreams are the problem.

That's why getting in touch with hidden fears and buried dreams is key to getting the life you really want. So look at the following checklist and see if any of the items ring any bells. Put a check mark in the box by any item that you think applies to you. Put an X by any item that seems especially true.

CHECKLIST

Am I Holding Myself Back without Realizing It?

- ☐ I find myself hesitant to share good news with one or more of my loved ones, such as friends, family, romantic partners, or spouse.
- ☐ My reaction to praise is often to disagree and/or to find some way to compare myself unfavorably to the other person.

- ☐ I frequently feel mystified by why things don't work out for me.
- ☐ I often have difficulty being on time for meetings and/or deadlines. In fact, the more important the meeting or deadline, the harder it is for me to be on time.
- ☐ At work, I often end up on the wrong side of office politics or find myself enmeshed in petty feuds.
- ☐ I've noticed a pattern of things going well—at work, in love, or in my personal life—until out of the blue, something mysteriously disrupts my good time.
- ☐ I've begun to have trouble doing something that formerly came easily to me.
- ☐ I've begun to have trouble getting along with someone I was formerly close to.
- ☐ Whenever I get into a romantic relationship, I notice myself quarreling with my friends or simply liking them less.
- ☐ I often have headaches, stomachaches, backaches, or exhaustion just before or just after a family visit.
- ☐ I start off great at a new job—and then suddenly my rate of progress seems to slow.
- ☐ I have a typical breaking point for relationships, whether after the first date, the first month, or the first two years; I see myself as someone who can't stay in a relationship longer than a certain amount of time.
- ☐ I tend to be interested in romantic partners who are involved with other people.
- ☐ I tend to be interested in romantic partners who are in crisis—unemployed, struggling with an addiction, coping with a family tragedy.
- ☐ I tend to be interested in romantic partners whom I would identify as ambivalent or afraid to commit.

- ☐ My friends have a very different sense of my abilities and/or attractiveness than I do.
- ☐ I frequently engage in activities—personal or professional—while insisting that I am no good at them or will not succeed in my goals.
- ☐ I am critical of most financially successful people, on the grounds that they are either greedy or spiritually limited.
- ☐ I am critical of most married people, on the grounds that they are either shallow or settling.
- ☐ I find myself becoming less interested in friends or romantic partners after they become more happy or successful.
- ☐ I find myself becoming less interested in friends or romantic partners as they become more interested in me.

Now look back over the items you've marked and see if you notice any patterns of self-sabotaging behavior. Pay particular attention to any item that upsets you or makes you anxious. Give even more attention to those you find your mind wandering away from, as when you are bored or distracted. Those feelings are usually good indications that there's something going on that you might want to pay attention to.

Are You Driving with the Emergency Brake On?

Often we claim to be going full speed ahead toward a cherished goal when in fact we're actually driving with the emergency brake on. Despite our lip service to a particular end—marriage, career, family, a happy personal life—we also hold negative opinions that make it difficult to pursue our goals wholeheartedly.

So let's explore your attitudes toward success in work, love, and personal life. Look over the following statements. Check off the ones with which you agree. Put an X beside the ones that seem especially true or powerful.

CHECKLIST

What Do I Think about Success?

- ☐ People who make lots of money have very little time left in their lives for anything else.
- ☐ Women who have great careers will face extra challenges finding love.
- ☐ Women who have great careers will face extra challenges starting a family.
- ☐ Most people in positions of power are a bit heartless—they have to be, to do those jobs.
- ☐ It's hard to become successful and remain close to the people who knew you when.
- ☐ Someone who is happy or content will often be the target of envy.
- ☐ People for whom things come easily miss out on a very important life lesson.
- ☐ People who get along with their boss are usually either naive or sucking up.
- ☐ Becoming successful can really change a person—and rarely for the better.
- ☐ If I became more successful in work, love, or my personal life, I expect my relationships with my loved ones would change quite a bit.
- ☐ It's very difficult to become a success without selling out in some way.

- ☐ A man who is not professionally and financially successful will probably not have a happy emotional or family life either.
- ☐ If I became more successful at work, I would expect to be less close to my coworkers.
- ☐ People who are professionally successful find it very difficult to have a happy home life.
- ☐ People who are successful may be feared, envied, even respected—but they are rarely liked.
- ☐ Successful or talented people are frequently arrogant.
- ☐ Being liked is more important than being respected or admired.
- ☐ When I'm in a good relationship, I tend to lose my edge at work.
- ☐ Successful or talented people have difficulty relating to "ordinary" people.
- ☐ A person whose daily life is happy and peaceful is probably shallow or insensitive.
- ☐ Though most people don't realize it, success is frequently a mixed blessing.

Look back at the items you've checked or starred. Then ask yourself if there is any conflict between the items you've marked and the goals you say you want. Again, conflict isn't the problem; hidden conflict is. For example, most people will agree that it's hard to succeed at work while also raising a family. That's not a hidden conflict, but an open one—even if you don't always know how to resolve it. But if you say you want to earn a lot of money while also believing that rich people are jerks, you may be setting yourself up for failure. Likewise, if you say you want to get married while also believing that most marriages are unhappy, you might be caught in a conflict that is holding you back.

Remember, discovering a conflict doesn't necessarily mean giving up either your beliefs or your goals. Perhaps you'll decide that you will be the exception that proves the rule. Or maybe you can take steps to guard against the outcome you most fear, promising yourself to increase your charitable donations if you become rich or committing to positive efforts to keep your marriage healthy. But you can't take those helpful steps if you're not even aware of the conflicts. As always, awareness is key.

Rediscover Your Buried Dreams

You've had a chance to think about hidden fears. But what about your buried dreams? In this section, I invite you to take a closer look at what you really want, and at what might be holding you back.

As you check out the following questionnaire, remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Your only goal is to become aware of what's going on inside you. I suggest answering each of these questions as quickly as possible, to see what your immediate response is. You may surprise yourself! Then, after you've had a few minutes to sit with the questions, you might return to answer them a second time, more slowly and thoughtfully.

QUESTIONNAIRE

What Do You Want—and What's Holding You Back?

1. When I picture myself in five years, I hope I _____ _____.
2. The thing I find most frustrating about my life now is _____ _____.
3. If I could change something about my life now with the wave of a magic wand, it would be _____ _____.

4. If I could magically change something about my past, it would be _____
_____.
5. The person who has most helped me get what I want in life is _____. He/she has helped me by _____
_____.
6. The person who has made it hardest for me to get what I want in life is _____. He/she has held me back by _____
_____.
7. When I picture myself in a great relationship, I imagine _____
_____.
8. When I picture myself doing great work of some kind, I imagine _____
_____.
9. When I picture myself happy in my personal life, I imagine
_____.
10. The reason I'm not as happy as I could be is _____
_____.
11. To get more of what I want, I would have to _____
_____.
12. To be more successful in an area that currently frustrates me, I need to change myself by _____
_____.
13. When I think about changing myself to become more successful, I feel _____
_____.
14. When I picture my mother, I see _____
_____.

15. When I picture my father, I see _____
_____.

As with the checklists, you may find yourself feeling angry, anxious, sad, or defensive in response to some of the questions. That's usually a sign that something is going on, so give yourself lots of time to explore the questions that upset you most. You might talk over your feelings with a friend or, even better, write about them in a journal. Writing about your feelings gives you time to process them and put them in perspective. It's also a great way to chart your progress.

Whatever comes up as you consider these questions, take heart. There is a way to fight free of your hidden fears and get in touch with your buried dreams, and that's exactly what the rest of this book is for.

Granted, this process may take time. You may not know right away whether you really want to have a family, become a heart surgeon, move to another city, or enter a traditional marriage. You may need time to decide which compromises you're willing to make, which aspects of your dreams are truly important, and which can be left behind. Facing your fears can also take time, as well as generating pain, anger, grief, and confusion. But I believe that it's better to see yourself as a work in progress—as someone in the process of deciding and choosing—than to choose false goals and then keep yourself from getting them.

So let's keep going!