

“Life-changing...”

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ULTIMATE

Heal. Reclaim. Become.

YOU

Live Your Awesome Life.

CHAPTER 1

Your First Gift:

Your Empowered Mind

“*You* are the
universe you’re
experiencing,
and the *magic*
you seek is *you!*”

Sharon Pearson

Ultimate You

CHAPTER 1

Your First Gift: Your Empowered Mind

“Wherever you are, be there totally.

If you find your here and now intolerable and it makes you unhappy, you have three options: remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it totally.

*If you want to take responsibility for your life,
you must choose one of those three options,
and you must choose now.*

Then accept the consequences.”

Eckhart Tolle

Just consider for a moment the possibility that you have within you an infinite reservoir of resourcefulness, compassion, resilience, and courage. What if, despite the negative press you give yourself, you were born naturally adventurous, lovable, worthy, brave, and curious about your world? Perhaps your view of these possibilities is being blocked by some limiting beliefs, habits, and choices that, instead of celebrating the awesome you, encourage you to hide, avoid life, and delay your dreams.

Then imagine you're with a young child who is filled with all of these wonderful possibilities. She is adventurous, open, and curious about her world and unable to comprehend that you're not this way too.

Now imagine that for some crazy reason you're going to try to convince this young, precious child that your view is right, and she should feel the same as you do.

What would you say to her? What tone would you use? How would your demeanor be? How might she react? If she was upset by what you said, how would you feel about that?

It would be a mad, sick joke to ever do this to a child...

Yet isn't that what you do to yourself, each and every day?

If you and I are going to take this journey together, how about we commit, right now, to embrace the idea that perhaps... just perhaps... the possibilities we see so easily in a child we can restore and celebrate within ourselves.

I invite you to entertain the thought that, as you've grown up, you've allowed your spirit to be dampened and the You that you are to go into hiding.

I would also invite you to acknowledge that things don't have to be this way. They shouldn't be this way! You should just be madly, completely, head over heels in love with who you are and who you're becoming, with no apology and no shame. Just laugh-out-f*cking-loud delighted with yourself as you embrace your fearlessness, your joy, and your compassion for yourself, for the people in your life, and for this very moment.

*You are the universe you're experiencing, and
the magic you seek... is you!*

It amazes me how many people think they're going to arrive at this happy place through wishful thinking, avoiding challenges, living in their comfort zone, letting time go by, or through "trusting things will get better." They react to life, seem mystified by their lack of progress, and then blame someone or something or their past, as if this will magically rectify the injustice of their situation.

The truth is that no amount of magic – or wishful thinking – can ever auto-correct the feeling of staggering under the weight of a life less than fully lived.

You and I are not the exceptions here. The universe isn't operating somehow separately for either of us. The truth is that "It" is not operating at all...

You are.

You Are a Product of Your Past Conditioning

How you got where you are at this precise moment in your life is a function of biology, psychology, your past, the culture in which you were raised, the way you were perceived as a child, the media you consume, the way you spend your day – as well as endless other factors that range from the incredibly significant to the barely noticeable. And you got here just as much based on the experiences you *didn't* have – the fact that you may not have been raised as a

princess in England means you don't have access to that world and the expectations that come along with it.

So in terms of where you are right now, what you *didn't experience* is as significant as what you *did* experience and have come to accept as truth.

So the question then becomes: **are you aware of the experiences, truths, ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and choices that will empower you and help you live Your Awesome Life?**

This question becomes incredibly pressing if your life is less than delightful, if you feel you're somehow unworthy or unlovable, or if you want to take life in your arms and embrace it. It becomes *the* most pressing question if you want to do something about it.

First, let's explore what the building blocks to Your Awesome Life consist of. And let's agree that no matter how much we don't want it to be so, *each of us is entirely in charge of what we're willing to learn, to change, to do, and to let go of on our journey to what I call our "Centered Self"*.

"If you want to create the life of your dreams, then you are going to have to take 100% responsibility for your life... That means giving up all your excuses, all your victim stories, all the reasons why you can't and why you haven't up until now, and all your blaming of outside circumstances. You have to give them all up forever."

Jack Canfield, *The Success Principles*

This is your first gift – your phenomenal, empowered mind.

It's working as you've instructed it to work. It's operating based on your beliefs and your expectations and your directions – it couldn't do anything else!

Now you're going to empower it with what it needs so you can begin your journey to your Centered Self. **Your Centered Self is the very core of you; it's where you feel compassion, fearlessness, and joy. It's the Truest You, where you complete yourself, know you're enough, know you're lovable and know you're worthy.** All of us have a Centered Self, and yet many if not most of us aren't in touch with it. This is because we've buried it beneath loads

of wishful thinking and assumptions and the desire for things to change of their own accord.

What Does Being Empowered Really Mean?

This is what *empowered* means to me... It's when you know that how you respond to life is how you respond to yourself. So there are two questions for us both to consider.

1. Is being empowered going to help you live Your Awesome Life?
2. If so, what are the building blocks of this empowerment?

I'd like to suggest to you that when you know life is simply a reflection of your own perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and choices then being empowered becomes vitally important. Especially if you don't *feel* empowered! To explore this a little further, I invite you to challenge whatever "truths" you've been holding onto and question them. If they don't meet the standard of helping you to feel and be empowered, then they have a lot to answer for. Ask yourself, "Am I allowing my most empowered self to chart the course of my life?"

Now consider the following empowerment "truths" and trust that they're true for you, regardless of what's happening in your life right now.

- *You are responsible for your life*, your choices, your responses, your thoughts, and your feelings. You love this and welcome the adventure of discovery as you reveal more of who you are by identifying what you take responsibility for.
- *You don't lie to yourself*. You are committed to you. You give yourself honest appraisal about how you're doing and where you need to lift your game. You say what you mean and mean what you say without equivocation or resentment. There is joy in commitment because it brings you closer to your Centered Self. You don't hide behind platitudes or distractions to kid yourself that it's all good.
- Rather than wishing, waiting, and hoping for "things" to change or improve, *you are the catalyst for the change you want to see in your life*.
- There's no pause in your life as you wait to figure out what's wrong with you or wish to feel more confident. *You're living life fully* as you figure yourself out.

- *You make mistakes, learn, improve, and move on*, rather than fearing mistakes and only doing what you believe you can get “right”. There’s genuine freedom within you as you welcome challenges, which are really moments to grow.
- *No one has to change for you to live your life*, for you are free of the need to control or manipulate others or to be controlled or manipulated by them. *No one has to rescue you*.

In accepting all of these empowerment truths, you’re getting behind the wall of defenses of your mind. Behind that wall, you may find the old constructs of wishful thinking about how life is supposed to unfold, perceived injustices you may be holding onto, and assumptions you’ve been making about how “you” don’t have to change for “things” to change. Once you get past all of these old beliefs, you’ve taken the first step to banish them.

*How you got to where you are is far less significant
than what you do about it*

Only You Can Rescue You

You were a child, and through no fault of your own, your Centered Self – your Truest Self – went into hiding – and she’s stayed there ever since. She needs you; oh, my goodness how she needs you, to be fierce and determined and “grrrrr” about her restoration.

Perhaps you’ve been lulled into thinking it’s “normal” to be placid about your life and oh so “stoic” as things go to shit. Or perhaps you’ve come to accept that being angry at all the injustices is somehow the way to live. Maybe you believe that if you play the victim in your relationships, you’ll finally be saved.

You may have yourself on the hamster wheel of thinking that being righteous, and proving others wrong is how you should be.

Perhaps procrastination is normal to you.

You may accept it as natural to please others and have yourself last on your to-do list.

Perhaps you’ve created a lot of drama around being wounded, being misunderstood, being more religious, being smarter, or being perfect, and you relentlessly defend this stance.

Perhaps your flavor of “normal” is to be heroic and super-helpful and all-capable and sadness-free.

Or maybe you’ve never questioned how you don’t seem to feel strong emotions, no matter what’s going on, and think it’s kinda weird (or even kinda weak) that others do.

Or you’ve set things up in such a way that everyone takes you for granted.

Or you’re measured by how much you give.

Or you’re seen as the “black sheep” of the family.

There are so many versions of “this is how I’m supposed to be,” and these are only a few.

Again, is any of this moving you toward your empowered self? Your Awesome Life? Your Centered and Truest Self? Of course not.

So it's time to hit the pause button and recognize, whatever... *whatever*... your pattern of business-as-usual is, it's time to question it, reassess it, and just possibly dump it as the saboteur it is.

As Dr. David Burns shares in his book, *Ten Days to Self-Esteem*, "I have discovered that one of the most important keys to recovery, regardless of your age, sex, or race, is the willingness to help yourself."

You Are Responsible

Your empowerment won't come about by wishfully imagining that some set of circumstances will vanish, or someone else will miraculously see things your way, or because a prayer for things to get easier is answered.

*You are the answer to all your prayers,
to all your problems, and to all the misfortune
you may have or be still experiencing*

I was my own, first, terrible client. I wanted no part of this philosophy of self-reliance when I first heard it. I'd convinced myself that blaming my parents, my illnesses, my bad luck, and my insecurities were my only option in life. And I was masterful at it.

I was also sick and tired, depressed, isolated, and righteous. I was miserable, and if you were around me at that time, thanks for not sharing with me how miserable I no doubt made you.

Just consider what or who you blame, or what excuses you make, or how you justify what's going on in any area of your life – your health, your money, your relationships, your career, your home, your education – and then look more closely at that specific area. I'm going to guess, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, that you will find some pretty well-defended rationalizations for why things are the way they are.

For the longest time, I told myself that the reason I wasn't wealthy was because I'd been raised to believe struggling financially was how it was supposed to be.

When I challenged my own BS, I saw how I was sitting safely in the cheap seats criticizing people who were Out There hustling. I was willfully trashing years of my own life on blame and excuses, and when I realized this, I quit complaining and blaming and justifying and instead decided to at least *try* to be responsible for my life. I wondered, *What if, after years of desperation, I had this power all along? What if it was in me from the get-go?*

Turns out, it was.

I became wealthy only when I changed where I placed my responsibility for my results. I felt more empowered because I owned my BS, challenged it, and found another way.

As I became more empowered, I was able to let go of the idea that I had to struggle financially.

More recently, I've been learning to shift responsibility for my relationships from "people are so selfish" to how *I'm* showing up. Have you ever noticed how it's easier to blame "them", rather than see the gaps in ourselves? Or is that just me being petty and ashamed because I knew I'd been hiding and couldn't convince myself any longer that this blame-them-and-duck strategy wasn't going to lead to my own personal empowerment?

This has been a raw journey filled with potholes from my past. I'd spent years convinced that I was a good friend because I put others first and never shared my problems. Sounds lovely, until I realized it was a form of control. As in, all out, keep-em-at-a-distance-don't-let-anyone-get-too-close warfare strategy where I got to feel superior as long as others told me their issues and I acted as if I was issue-free. I know, it's so obvious now, right? Yet Back Then I could say with my hand on my heart that I was a good person.

So why did I feel so alone?

*Responsibility is the joy of knowing that
you can find a way*

I know you know this and it's just a gentle reminder... when you are your Truest Self you're not the victim. You may have earned a few scars that life has handed out, but you're not defeated and you don't quit. You heal. You replenish. You figure out where you can adapt for next time so that you emerge, wiser, more resolute and more tuned into what works for you. You don't sit in dismay and you don't plot revenge. You don't sulk, rage, or shut down. You rally. You get the hell back up. And you own it.

You've got this. No matter the challenge, you get what you can handle. Nothing more, nothing less.

Whatever isn't working for you in your life, assume, regardless of whether it's true or not, that it's up to you. That it *is* you. No matter how it presses every button in you. No matter how much emotional reactivity you have to it. No matter how much you believe you can have one hand pointing at someone and one hand on the Bible and say "It's them."

Because as long as you act as if you're powerless, you stay stuck exactly where you are, an autumn leaf, blown where the wind takes you then swept and dumped where the gutter catches you, at the whim of whatever external force impacts you.

Sam Harris, philosopher, neuroscientist, and "thinker in public" shares in his book *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, "My mind begins to seem like a video game: I can either play it intelligently, learning more in each round, or I can be killed in the same spot by the same monster, again and again."

If being empowered doesn't seem so available to you right now, that's okay. Just stretch yourself as far as you can, and we'll do all of this again tomorrow, and the next day. None of this is an all-or-nothing kind of deal. For me and for many others it's been more of a let's-see-what-I'm-noticing-today kind of journey. That's moving us in the direction of Our Awesome Lives, which sure as hell beats the alternative.

No More Lies

Back Then, or what I affectionately call “the Beginning of Me Waking The Hell Up,” I liked being in my bubble of denial because I was so addicted to simple, straightforward, black-and-white thinking. Back then the complexity and ambiguity of life was unimaginably scary and unmanageable. Best play it safe. Best stay small. Best keep hidden. Best not stand out. Best not even try.

So I pretended to myself that I would take a massive leap towards getting my life together... *another time*.

This was my great lie.

And I had lots of little lies to keep it company. My self-esteem will improve... *somehow*. My fear will fade... *in a while*. My lack of friends will fix itself... *when people realize I'm right*. My comfort zone may be shrinking, but I know I'll do something to break out of it... *when I believe in myself*. I can't change my life today... *not until I've fixed myself*. It's not that I'm holding myself back... *I'm just constantly misunderstood*. Yes, I feel depressed and sad... *but it's got nothing to do with how badly I treat myself*. I'm miserable... *and it's just how it is*.

And on it went. Endless answers to my own pain, which were all created with one pretty serious design defect... they guaranteed my misery. These weren't lies I told myself so that one day I might actually arrive at My Awesome Life. They were lies that were literally *designed* to give me misery.

I pacified myself into a lull of complacent acceptance until my world consisted of so many lies that I had to defend. Breaking out of my day-to-day misery never occurred to me. To break out would have been to admit the entire house of cards upon which I'd built my internal world was a lie.

I'd walled myself into a tiny space, where even breathing became difficult. Everything outside of this narrow, confined space was overwhelming and beyond me, and reminded me how little I knew about how to really, truly, deeply... live.

So of course the obvious thing to do was to block out the wonderful world Out There. To do this with any measure of success, I had to become, for a short

while, shut inside my house, too scared to venture out. This was not just because the world was *big*, but because I'd trained my thinking to become so incredibly small.

I was a prisoner of my own making. I often told myself Back Then that I wasn't successful. Yet when I think about the lengths I went to, the determination I showed, and the tenacity I demonstrated to stay in this prison, I would say I knew how to succeed. I was just succeeding at *really* dumb, self-sabotaging stuff.

My wake-up call happened on a regular day, just like any other – except on this day I found myself frozen with fear. Just the thought of walking to the kitchen to make a cup of tea filled me with terror.

So I remained rooted in one spot in my living room, knowing that whatever direction I took, I would feel like a failure. And it occurred to me that there were plenty of people in the world who'd had awful, heartbreaking upbringings who had gone on to triumph over their pain and lead lives of epic proportion. And although I'd had my fair share of heartbreak, my life until then was... mundane... compared to the depths of their despair before their having risen to become the best version of themselves they could possibly be. I thought about Oprah. Mandela. People who were doing whatever they could to triumph over their very real heartaches.

What. On. Earth. Was. My. Excuse?

Or excuses, I should say. I knew I had a stack of them but I'd never challenged them. I'd just gone along with them, assuming they were right and true.

I was thirty-seven. And I'd invested – dedicated – all those years to a set of beliefs, the sum total impact of which was that I was now rooted to the spot with fear at the thought of walking across my living room.

I'd been lying to myself, and the wake-up call was the ice-cold bucket of water I needed. Admittedly (because I hate to be wrong) I spent two weeks after this realization crying over the wasted years and how I'd deceived myself.

As I stood there in my living room, paralyzed with my own stories, I committed to dedicating my *next* thirty-seven years to figuring out what My Awesome Life looked like, and what it would take to achieve it.

The first thing I did, and I invite you to do the same thing if you relate to any of what I've just shared, is to face your lies – the little ones that seem so harmless, and the bigger ones that you just know are getting in your way of your great mission to live Your Awesome Life.

And then, begin to slowly, gently, and a little fiercely, replace the BS with the big truths. These are the truths that will move you toward your own empowerment. Here are a few big truths that I hold dear today, but which have taken more than a few years to become *my* truths:

1. **What you're willing to do today is what you'll be willing to do tomorrow.** That's the truth. If you're not going to do it today, dump the BS that tomorrow will be different. Instead, do a little something today. Just enough so you live this truth. Your empowerment depends on it.
2. **How you do the little things is how you do everything.** No more hiding. If you treat the little moments like they don't matter, you're going to keep having moments that don't matter. Make them matter. Make this moment, right now, matter. Give this moment your attention, your focus, your appreciation.
3. **Imperfect action beats perfect planning.** Or, to put it a little more directly, doing something is better than doing nothing. Your procrastination – which you justify as “planning,” “thinking,” “waiting for the right time” – is BS. Do something today that your future self will thank you for. Special note to the perfectionists: For goodness sake, you've tried doing things your way! If it was a sure-fire, champion, winner of an idea, wouldn't the sages have written about it for hundreds of years? Yet everywhere I look, and everyone I listen to who knows how to live fully seems to be getting Out There and taking imperfect action and improving through actual effort. Special, special note to the control freaks: You are not the exception.
4. **You tune into your empowerment when you keep your promises to yourself.** Every promise you keep to yourself is a deposit into your empowerment bank. Each and every time you make a commitment to yourself that you don't keep, your sense of empowerment drops and your Centered Self retreats. Stop, right now, with the “I'm gonna...” and replace it with, “I may...,” “I choose...,” “I am delaying this, and I'm being honest to myself about it...”

5. **Your Centered Self is hungry for you to only make promises that you will keep.** Every promise you make and keep to another builds your sense of empowerment and empowers your relationships as well.

*You Were Born to Have the Life You Deserve,
and That's Exactly What You're Getting*

Making decisions for yourself about the life you wanted wasn't available to you as a child. It was in the hands of the people who raised you and contributed to your upbringing. They include your family, the people you were in touch with as you grew up, and your school and its teachers. Today... whether you own where you're at or believe it's not up to you, you are getting the life you deserve.

No more lies. Only the truth. And when you forget, as I often did but less so now, give yourself a gentle reminder. Nothing too harsh. Let it contain compassion for yourself. And acknowledgment to yourself that you're making progress.

Whatever your big lie is, and no matter what your little lies have been, it's okay to face them. It's also okay to feel a bit uncomfortable when you do this. In fact, it's normal. Do it anyway, because as we're going to explore later, you, honestly facing yourself and then staying with it, is the key to unlocking your Centered Self.

This is the Sign You've Been Looking For...

Have you noticed how we're often encouraged to look for our meaningful and fulfilled lives by placing trust in forces outside of ourselves, and then we're asked to believe "they" will take care of things? Success. Crystals. Psychics. Sex. The Spirits. The Fates. Karma. Signs. Tarot. Synchronicities. Magic Charms. Astrological signs. Power. Money. The "perfect" partner.

We're encouraged to look for these things anywhere, it would seem, but within ourselves.

And it makes sense why it would be this way. Looking within is uncomfortably hard, sometimes excruciatingly hard. I say this from experience. When something outside of us gives us a “clue” or a sign as to which way to inform our decisions, and it turns out to be wrong, it’s so easy to justify it... *Not the right time... I need to become more spiritual... It has a meaning I haven’t uncovered yet... Mysterious...* Or easier still, when we *like* the answer we receive, and we act accordingly. In this case, we don’t have to think too deeply about it, its repercussions, or whether it’s truly aligned with who we are and who we’re becoming.

To look outside of yourself for guidance is, don’t you think, a lot simpler than to look within yourself, not find an answer, and then admit we don’t know what to do about it? For a long time, my looking within felt like a short ride to hell. Too much chaos. Uncertainty. Fear. Reminders of my flaws. Scenes of the mistakes I was yet to make. Or my personal specialty... believing that disaster was imminent all the time.

If you have a particular way of seeking the truth “Out There” and you feel like you need to defend it right now, just read the next few sentences before you skip this section, please.

If you grew up encouraged to look within to find answers for yourself, which allowed and encouraged you to develop your own set of values, beliefs, expectations, and perceptions independent of your tribe, you’re an anomaly on the planet. Second, you wouldn’t equate “Out There” mystical guidance, or a desire to win, or a hunger to have the... relationship... car... career... as the path for you to transition from confusion to clarity.

Looking to an external sign for guidance wouldn’t even be something you would consider turning to, because you would have such a deep sense of self-trust, which you knew you could count on to be relentlessly accurate. You already would have those most precious of elusive gifts... sound judgment, wisdom, patience, compassion, good humor, resilience, calm in the face of the inevitable storms of life and an ability to adjust and bounce back should your decisions miss the mark.

If you've been raised, like most of us, in a way that *did* impose its preferences, beliefs, expectations – even demands – onto you, then turning away from yourself and towards some external impetus for your decisions seems natural.

Because of this, you would struggle to see your Inner World as a source of guidance, comfort, wisdom, calm or certainty. You feel undernourished when you look within.

If you've been raised as most people have, I'd go even further and say that rather than being a source of comfort and love, your Inner World is *the source* of much of your pain and confusion.

And this becomes a self-fulfilling loop. You don't have a developed Inner World to draw on with repetitive reliability, so you go outside of yourself for answers, which means your Inner World falls into greater disrepair, which makes it even harder to turn within for much needed guidance. So you go outside yourself for this, and the loop of all that discontent continues and frequently accelerates.

We all need a level of certainty in the midst of the chaos of life. If we can't detect trust within ourselves, then suspicion, superstition, and self-doubt creeps in. We either feel we can handle the stuff of life, or we fill the gap of doubt with superstition and suspicion. And the bigger the gap, the more “signs” and indicators from outside of us we come to depend on.

*The closer you move toward restoring your
Centered Self, the more grounded, resilient, capable,
and awe-inspiring you feel about yourself*

It's inevitable that when you want something, there will be obstacles to overcome. If there were no obstacles, you would achieve the goal just by wishing it was achieved. That's what's significant about achieving a goal. It's not whether or not you “won”. It's whether or not you're a better person for the experience. It's whether you learned from what happened... Whether you trusted yourself. Whether you handled what happened with calm resilience. Whether you discovered an aspect of you which is wonderful.

You find out who you truly are when the pressure is on and the convenient thing to do would be to quit.

But if you see obstacles as a “sign” you shouldn’t do something, you won’t give this hard stuff a go, and you won’t become the person you admire. You’re drawing on your Outer World for “clues” about what the “universe” is telling you, instead of finding out who you really are.

*Obstacles are a sign you’re doing something
you care about and that matters to you:
It’s a great sign that you have discovered what
you need to learn to achieve your goal*

News Flash: Your Flaws Aren’t That Fascinating

You and I have what I call a “Guardian”. It’s the mask we wear in public so that people don’t see the “real” us. We don’t believe we can reveal our true selves, or we’ve been discouraged from doing so, or we don’t like what we see, so we stay hidden. This false self – the part of you that currently runs the show, thinks it has all the answers, tries to keep you safe, seeks to protect you from ever feeling vulnerable yet strong, denies you compassion and doesn’t think there’s anything wrong with you feeling self-doubt – is right now resisting the messages of this book. They’re scary to your Guardian because they challenge its very existence. If you’re authentically, fully, and unselfconsciously living your own conscious life, your Guardian’s purpose has ended.

More than anything else, your Guardian wants you to be safe. Never mind that the definition of this safety is for you to play a small game, stay in your lane, not be vulnerable, and not love yourself. To help you get hooked and addicted to safety, it plays a head game with you. This head game is called “let’s undermine your every move.”

You know the one. You’re thinking... just *thinking* for goodness sake... of trying something new. And what’s the very next thing you’re thinking about? You’re now listening to your mind try to talk you out of it, as it helpfully reminds you of all your flaws and all the ways you’ve failed in the past. *Thanks, brain.*

Instead of trying the new adventure, you're now plunged into self-doubt and listing your flaws; all the while your Guardian is thinking: *crisis averted*.

So let's just stop the record for a moment and think this through. This whole chapter is about your empowerment. Has reminding yourself of your flaws ever helped you feel empowered?

Ever?

Could it?

At your core, you know the truth. Life is happening right now. Ready or not. And no amount of self-reflection without action is going to make you feel empowered, or deliver you Your Awesome Life. To do this to yourself is self-sabotage. It's the fastest way to feel frozen with fear, out of control, and numb with overwhelm.

Constant self-analysis of your so-called defects is never going to bring you closer to your Centered Self.

And the more you focus on yourself, what's wrong with you, what you need to "fix" and what's not working, the more miserable, insecure, and uncertain you will become.

So the "game" is this – your Guardian wants you to stay "safe," and it interprets this as you doing as little as possible to risk anything, ever, for the rest of your life. Ideally, if you could stay home and watch old reruns on TV, that would be epic.

But there's this whole other part of you – Your Centered Self – who's crying out to be heard, and needs a better PR person, frankly, because she doesn't have the best message in comparison. Your Centered Self is saying: "Get Out There and live! You're worth it! You've got this! Go you!"

See the difference? The message of Your Centered Self requires... well... *action*. It needs that you do the opposite of what your Guardian thinks and believes you're really comfortable doing. It requires that you be vulnerable and face your fears. And figure out what you love. It's really scary, revealing, I-don't-know-if-I-have-what-this-takes stuff.

And it never stops.

Crap.

It's at this point in my workshops that I remind people I'm not a motivational speaker full of all kinds of spin. No one seems to argue with that.

And my cheery message continues. I'm not saying you don't have flaws. We all do. At different times in my life, I've been overly selfish, self-absorbed, felt obsessively sorry for myself, was depressed for no reason, was unkind, harsh, critical, judgmental... and I made myself feel sad and lonely because of these defects. And then I made myself even sadder and lonelier thinking about how sad and lonely I was because of my flaws...

None of this brought me closer to knowing myself, liking myself, or feeling great about my life.

Neither My Amazing Life nor Your Amazing Life can ever be the recipient of endless self-criticism.

There is nothing wrong with reflecting on an aspect of yourself that you think you can improve upon, and then figuring out and learning how to do just that.

The problem comes when you get stuck in first gear – “What's wrong with me?” “Why me?” “Why can't I just... ?” – and you don't shift gears.

*Live life with the expectation that your
full participation will resolve much of what bothers you*

Much of what bothers you about yourself is learned conditioning from your past. It's automatic self-criticism that you picked up as you grew up. You don't know yet how to see yourself differently. This quest you're on will resolve this for you, not because you're reading these pages, but because you will bring the pages to life with your own experiences.

And you have flaws.

That's being human.

And it's okay.

The message here is to **live full-time *despite* your flaws. Work on what you want to change as you live, not so you can live.**

If you wait until you're "perfect," or "together," or "feeling confident enough," or "feeling the courage I need," you will never act.

Perfection is a myth that doesn't exist for anyone.

If you wait until your Guardian shuts up telling you to stop living, you will never live, because it will never stop.

No one has it together. No one. Not. One. Person. Some people are getting on with it, regardless.

The One Relationship You Need to Claim Your Courage

There is only one relationship you and I need to build to learn how to be courageous. If you change this one relationship, everything changes.

Just this one thing:

*Teach yourself to become comfortable
with making mistakes*

I'm saddened by how many people think they have a "procrastination" problem when what they really have is a terrible relationship with their own humanity. They will avoid anything – including the things they suspect they may love – to avoid the feeling of being revealed to be human. And most of the people who I see held by the throat by this fear are terrified, not by what *others* may think or say, but by what *they* might think and say to themselves.

I see people hiding. Making excuses. Pretending they're too busy. Cowering behind "busy family lives". Lying to themselves with the placatory "I'll do it later". Or they're declaring a very reasonable-sounding "fear of success / failure". In honest moments they're berating themselves about how small they're being, but doing their best to keep the show going with well-worn platitudes.

Trapped in the quicksand of their minds.

If you can't face your own humanity, then you can't face the fact that you are capable of making mistakes. You can't accept that you don't have all the answers, that you don't have it all together, that you're not completely confident all of the time. That you feel shame when you think about failing, and that you feel terrified by the very idea of being seen to fail, even by yourself. If this describes you, then you feel trapped in the cage you've built for yourself.

And yet, you're no different to *anyone else*. The whole of humanity – everyone – making mistakes. Overcoming setbacks. Facing challenges. Living while flawed. Sitting with this is not easy in the beginning. We've been taught to bounce away from what we feel is shame at the *thought* of making mistakes. But what if, instead of trying to avoid mistakes, you committed to accepting that you will make them and that to make them as you learn was *vital* and necessary for your journey to your Centered Self?

Challenge Your Conditioning

Here's an insight that was a wonderful source of comfort to me. If, when you grew up, you were shamed when you made a mistake, or you were mocked or felt outcast, you associated making mistakes with being emotionally abandoned. When I understood this, it was comforting to me because it informed me that my journey was never about me "getting it all together," but instead it was about me embracing my emotionality – to welcome, celebrate, acknowledge, own, and allow myself the experience of emotions that I had pushed away since childhood.

It doesn't really matter what the endeavor is. You could be a gun Wall Street super-stud who looks like you've got it completely and utterly made, and yet you can still have an irrational fear of abandonment, a fear of vulnerability, and of intimacy, and of emotional realism. My talking about all this is causing you discomfort.

Change the subject.

Please.

You can be a multi-millionaire property developer. A hippy, spiritual type. A teacher. A therapist. A "go with the flow" kinda guy. An uptight, buttoned-down analyst. A mother. A university lecturer. A mechanic. A homeless person. A celebrity. But none of these outside "suits" means spit when it comes to being able to live in your own skin as you face a setback, recognize your own

mortality, allow yourself to feel vulnerable, learn, apply what you learn, and continue.

When you were growing up, the Big People in your life – to some extent or to a large extent – held tightly to their insecurities and then handed them to you. You didn't know that the flaw was in giving you their insecurities.

A child doesn't have a choice but to accept their Big People's endowments. But you, as an empowered, centered adult, *have a choice*. You can continue to listen to the record in your head, which is your Big People's record that was given to you, or you can start to write a new one.

Start with some small questions as you work to develop trust in yourself. Is it true that you'll be rejected if you make a mistake when trying something new? Is it *really* true? Or is it just what you've accepted as your fate, without really questioning it?

And is the person doing the "rejecting" someone who isn't supporting you?

May I ask why are you listening to them?

And have you considered that the person doing the "rejecting" is most likely *you*? Are you ready with handy put-downs, condemnation, and criticism if you make a mistake, so you hold yourself hostage from your dreams?

Don't be the hostage of yourself and rob yourself of your dreams; be daring and open to falling down so you can learn how to get back up and thus know you can handle it.

May I invite you to remember that you're capable of trying something new, making a mistake, and then learning from that mistake so you can do better.

You learned to walk.

You learned to ride a bike.

You learned to write your name.

If you drive, you learned that. If you catch the bus, you navigated that.

And in every one of these activities, you made mistakes along the way, learned from them, and did a little better the next time.

This lets you know that you can take small steps and teach yourself how to handle what comes up along the way. You've done it before. Take a moment and recall when you've had to dig deep within you to learn something, and

you've made mistakes, learned more, applied what you learned, and then got on with it.

It's not what you were conditioned to believe in childhood that's going to make the difference *unless you let it*. It's your willingness to *overcome* the conditioning and to develop new, wonderful attitudes about learning and growth and your own humanity in making mistakes.

If you sit waiting until you "know enough," or feel confident enough before you act, then you're letting your fears drive your life, and that's not living.

*Your quest to your Centered Self – just like in any great movie –
is paved with mistakes, setbacks, unexpected twists and turns,
breakthroughs, tragedies, and triumphs*

The mess comes when you mistake your need to avoid the pain of making mistakes for an actual reason for not doing something. If the pathway to your own empowerment involves making mistakes – and it does – then make mistakes. Learn. Grow. Improve.

Recognize this universal aversion to feeling the shame of your own humanity. And then do what is not universal. Act anyway.

Recognize that if you feel the fear and still take action, you will earn your courage.

Take these three steps to take action in the face of your fear that you may get it wrong.

1. **Acknowledge to yourself that you're human.** You're not perfect. You're learning, you're progressing, and you're here today to be a little better than you were yesterday.
2. **Pick one thing you can do that will move you toward being a better version of You.** It can be the smallest thing, say, tidying up a room. Or it could be something more significant, such as applying for the job you want. This can be anything, but it's got to be something that you will do, not something you'd just wish you'd do.

3. **Do the thing as soon as you've made the commitment.** Ideally, do it within five seconds of committing to it. If it's a bigger thing, break it down and do the first, small step. Using the job application as an example – you've read the job ad, now write down where you think you're a match. That's the first step, and you've done it. You've done the first thing.

Let go of the energy that you waste in telling yourself you're no good, or telling yourself "Come on, just get on with it." Usually, it doesn't work. Instead, what it typically does is make you feel worse about yourself.

Just one small action step.

Right here.

Right now.

Accept That "They" Won't Change

Being empowered became important to me when I realized how much I relied on others. And not in a cool, I-know-how-to-ask-for-their-support kind of way. It was all about me being able to anticipate and predict *their* preferences and expectations. How *they'd* hurt me. How *they* might hurt me again. What *they* did to me in the past; what I had to do to get them to "like" me; and how to feel in control around them, so I wasn't judged by them.

I was buying into a bad script that said my life could only be shaped when others thought, felt, and behaved a certain way. And that "certain way" meant in a way that gave me a sense of control, certainty, and safety. For me, it was all about shutting down any form of "attack". Read: vulnerable moments, intimacy, people getting to see me as I really am, asking for support and then allowing the support.

It was a sad merry-go-round of who did what and what I would do about it to protect myself for next time. I would look for – no, I would *hunt out* – any form of fault or flaw in anyone I met. Better to get them before they got me, right?

But “they” weren’t getting with the program. “They” were, no matter how much effort I put into it – and it was a lot – staying stubbornly free of my influence and manipulations.

This included my family, my friends, people I met, people I imagined I’d meet, and people I’d never meet but would fantasize about meeting. You get the idea. No one was free of the quick tally of flaws I’d do in my head as I assessed just how f*cked up they were compared to me.

If I could find enough flaws, that would free me not to have to feel bad about my own shortcomings. It gave me freedom from the responsibility of ever having to sort my own shit out, because, hey, have you seen how messed up *they* are?

Oh, the utter exhaustion of it all.

Two blindingly obvious ideas occurred to me Back Then. First, no one was responding as I thought they were supposed to. Which sucked. And no matter how hard I worked this particular angle, it wasn’t – go figure – making me feel particularly empowered.

A third idea crept up on me, and then a fourth, which I quickly cast aside several times before finally giving them both my full attention. What if I stopped trying to get people to be a certain way? And what if I stopped looking for everyone’s flaws?

The questions were awesome, I grant. My answers, not so much. I really couldn’t see any other way to be with people except to be controlling and judgmental. I knew I was never going to empower myself with the way I was going about “relating,” and yet alternate ways of relating were, to me, what I decided were “low return” strategies. Which meant, they didn’t make me feel “safe”.

Maybe you don’t relate to this, and perhaps I’m the only freak in the room. Or you relate to your own version of this. However you got here, if you find yourself thinking that *they* have to change, or *they* have to do something to make it right, then I’m sure you’ve guessed where this is heading...

It's not *them*.

It's *you*.

*No matter what they've done, or you've perceived they've done,
waiting for them to change is only hurting you*

When you wait for someone else to change as the reason why you're not doing what you need to be doing, you're really saying, "I have no power. This other person controls me."

Recognize that this belief says that something outside of you controls you; that someone else has sway over your choices, that you are dependent on another.

Know that you are the reason for how you feel, for what you think, and for how you live. You didn't have this power as a child. And now you do.

Use it.

It's clunky at first, as is anything unfamiliar. I remember having no clue about how to stop blaming my parents for feeling depressed until I realized one day that the only person hurting – was me. And then I had no clue what to do once I'd stopped blaming them! The difference was that now at least I was giving myself the opportunity to learn how to empower myself, instead of leaving my power with people who didn't even know they had it.

Be uncomfortable. Sit with the uncertainty. Stay with the feelings of inadequacy and of fear. Just sit with them and don't distract yourself with TV or busyness, or some excuse to avoid them. Just sit with the truth that "they" aren't going to change and even if they did, it wouldn't help you feel, think, or live differently. This is because the illusion was always that this power lay somewhere else other than with you.

The truth of the matter is that it's always been with you.

Remember, you are retraining your mind, so patience is called for. Be patient, but keep reading. We'll be turning these pages together.

You Are Awesome

You are awesome. You have the power to choose how you respond to life, your thoughts, your perceptions and your actions. You can, whenever you want, give yourself honest appraisal about how you're doing and where you need to lift

your game. You are capable of committing to yourself and to Your Awesome Life. You're the catalyst for the change you want to see in your life.

Regardless of whatever flaws you have, you are free, right now, to embrace life. You live life knowing that your full participation will resolve much of what bothers you.

You make mistakes. You learn. You grow. In fact, you know that to grow the mistakes are inevitable and required. You feel freedom within you because you can take on new challenges knowing you can handle whatever comes along.

And no one has to change for you to live your life.

This Matters So Much: Annette Sayers' Story

I spent twenty years trying to work out what was wrong with me.

Struggling as the single mother of a drug-addicted teenager and dealing with many addictions of my own... I felt lost, lonely, depressed, unworthy, unloved, and unlovable.

The funny thing is, so many people would say I was doing amazingly well and that I had created a great life for myself. Little did they know I never felt truly happy. Everything was a struggle, and I was exhausted from trying to please people, from playing the roles, and from putting everyone else and *their* needs before my own.

I was keeping "busy" and focused on what was Out There, because focusing on how *I* felt hurt too much.

If only I could get rid of some problematic situations in my life, I would be happy... If only my son would listen to me, life would be great... If only people in my life "got" me, all my problems would be solved... Clearly, I was way too focused on the external, without pausing to think – how could *I* bring about the change I so desperately needed?

I discovered Sharon's Ultimate You quite by chance. And my entire journey started to unfold, step by step, for the better, in front of my very eyes...

With the help of the Ultimate You Quest community, I made a decision to draw a line in the sand and I found the courage within to take full responsibility for what was happening in my life. I realized that I couldn't change other people – this was going to be an inside job.

To my surprise, after six weeks of me working through the Ultimate You Quest program, my family started to see a change. They asked me, "How are you doing that?"

Wow! I couldn't believe it... my internal work had started to be reflected in my External World.

The journey to my Centered Self has enabled me to connect with my deepest feelings, and my innermost needs and emotions, all of which I had been suppressing all these years. This has empowered me to finally resign from roles that didn't serve me and to find parts of myself that I never knew existed.

I'm slowly learning to set new boundaries and embrace the warrior within... I'm discovering how to connect with my own feelings and emotions and meet my needs resourcefully... I'm stepping into new territories, where I can now fully embrace myself for being me...

And I know I couldn't have done this alone. I've had so much support from the awesome Ultimate You Quest community, its amazing coaches and mentors – the change has been phenomenal!

This is the beginning of me, Annette, playing a bigger game and not hiding in shame anymore.

I am worthy.

I am lovable.

I am enough.

Key Messages

- Being empowered is what you deserve and is your natural state. Here you're free of thinking that "somehow and somewhere this all goes away and everything is fine."
- You, and only you, are responsible for your life. Joy comes in knowing you can handle this and that you're the leader of your own life.
- How do you the little things is how you do *everything*.
- It's up to you to be proactive about what you want to experience in your life.
- Your flaws can't be the focus of your thinking. Instead, live life with the expectation that your full participation in it will resolve much of what bothers you.
- Earn your courage. Don't hold yourself hostage by robbing yourself of your dreams.
- No matter what "they've" done, or you've perceived "they've" done, waiting for them to change is only hurting *you*.
- If you see obstacles as a "sign" that you shouldn't make proactive changes to your life, you'll never do anything worthwhile. Instead ask yourself if the path you're on is aligned with who you are and who you're becoming.
- Surrender the thinking that says "things" have to be easier before you'll do them. Instead, aim to be better.
- You must be your own source of healing.
- You are not the exception.



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