

How To Live a Positive Life

Everything we watch, listen to and experience gets stored somewhere in our minds. In that sense it becomes a part of us. Just as what you eat, drink and possibly smoke affects your physical body, so too the words, visual images and other input you receive impact your emotional and psychological well-being. There is no way to control all of the stimuli you receive. For example, there is nothing you could do to avoid witnessing a car crash on the road in front of you.

Luckily, it is not these random events that have the most impact. Ask yourself: Is it the occasional slice of birthday cake that clogs your arteries? Or is it the daily breakfast of eggs, sausage and bacon and the regular cheeseburger with chili-fries for lunch? It is the daily influences that you are exposed to over and over again which are the greater determining factor in your well-being. Most of us know that we can't eat like that without some serious consequences to our health, but do we realize the negative consequences it can have for our quality of life if we do not watch our intake of other types of input?

Here is another image I often use to help clients understand the importance of managing the input we receive. Imagine a thousand gallon acrylic aquarium filled with water. At one end of the aquarium is a tube going in, and at the other end is a tube going out. In the beginning the water is crystal clear, but throughout the day water is continually flowing into and out of the tank. Sometimes the water coming in is clean, and sometimes it is full of "gunk". This gunk tends to settle, and the water starts to darken. When the water is clear you notice a clump of algae as it enters, and can move it toward the exit pipe. But once the water is murky, you no longer notice the new "gunk" as it enters the aquarium and so it sets, making the water darker and dirtier.

In a similar way, we are born "whole" or "good," like a tank of pristine water. What happens is that throughout our lives, experiences come in that are both positive and negative. The negative things slowly start to cloud our awareness and interfere with our joy and our ability to love. The more unprocessed negative experiences we have stored inside us, the more difficult it is to notice and deal with negative input as we receive it.

In this analogy, if you were to start scrubbing the walls of the tank and get rid of the crud that has built-up, this would be the process of doing Anger Work, which I have described in detail in my book [Anger Work: How To Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind](#). Anger Work can help you process childhood trauma and other negative events. That is not the focus of this e-book. This e-book is about taking the next step. It is about how to filter the water that we allow to enter our aquarium, and thus prevent having so much crud to deal with as we move forward.

In this e-book I will discuss the main types of input that we need to be looking out for because they affect our overall sense of well-being and wholeness. The primary influences in our lives can be separated into two categories: those that come from outside of ourselves (External Influences) and those that come from within us (Internal Influences). Our *External Influences* include our entertainment choices and the people we spend time with. Our *Internal Influences* include our physical state of being, our conditioning, our self-talk, and our level of awareness.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

External Influences include all of the sensory input that we receive: sights, sounds, smells and touch. There are a few main areas of our lives that determine so many of these experiences. These areas are the personal and professional relationships we have, and our entertainment choices. If we manage these well, it has a significant positive influence on how we experience life.

Entertainment Choices

Probably the easiest area to be in control of is the entertainment choices we make. How great an impact this area has on your overall life depends on how much time you spend engaged in various forms of entertainment. There are so many options available, but you really need to be picky.

Advertising

Whether you are reading a magazine or newspaper, watching TV, listening to the radio or surfing the Internet, you will find yourself assaulted by a barrage of advertisement. It is important to consider your exposure to advertising as well as the actual program or content that you choose for entertainment.

Companies spend billions of dollars or Euros on advertising, and the reason they spend so much money is that it works! The words and images contained in advertisements affect us! A study was conducted some time ago in movie theatres in which quick flashes of “buy popcorn” and “buy candy” would appear on the screen during the movie. Although the images flashed too quickly for the people in the audience to recognize them, they were still affected by them. This was demonstrated by a significant increase in purchases every time after the images had been shown. When news of this study came out, many people were upset and felt it was an outrage! If quick flashes can be so powerful, what impact does the constant influx of information that we receive all day long from the television, radio, books, magazines, newspapers, and Internet have on us?

Advertising is designed to make us feel and believe that we need something else (the product) to be happy, acceptable, lovable or valuable. Each ad tantalizes us with the promise of improving our life somehow if we purchase the product. It feeds a propensity toward discontentment and a subconscious hunch that something is currently lacking. In short, we are being brain washed! I believe that a great deal of the rampant materialism in society today is due to the influence of media advertisement. Public television has an interesting documentary called “The Persuaders” that deals with the topic of advertising. You may want to check that out.

This message threaded throughout advertising - that possessing one more thing will bring you happiness, has no basis in reality. Studies examining the relationship between material wealth

and happiness have shown that an increase in money leads to an increase in happiness only for people who are living at a severe level of poverty. Having enough money to feed, clothe and provide shelter for the family does make a difference. Beyond this there is no correlation between money and happiness.

Studies done on lottery winners are consistent with this finding. Many people imagine that winning the lottery would take away all their problems. In actuality, the majority of lottery winners spend the money rather quickly and end up with the same financial problems they had previously. After the general euphoria of winning and spending the money has worn off they find themselves unhappy.

Although we've heard time and time again "money can't buy happiness," people still seem to chase after it in hopes that it will make them happy and take all their problems away. Even most children in America believe that wealth and material things will make them happy. At Christmas time, children want the popular toy of the year not because it is a great toy, but because they watched it being advertised on television over and over. They want whatever the ads are saying they want. Children are not as sophisticated as we are, but they work just like we do! It is sad to see that a child will feel that he or she is "less than" or cannot be happy without the latest material possessions.

So now, you may be asking yourself: What can I do differently? The answer is simple: Be aware, and be savvy. Don't let yourself be brainwashed by companies trying to create a false need in your head. Don't watch the ads on television! This is where TIVO and DVRs can be very helpful. Pre-record shows, and skip the ads. If you are watching a live program, mute the ads, or if you have a DVR, pause the program for the length of one commercial break and come back to fast forward to your program. Public TV is a nice option because the sponsorship announcements are typically straight-forward and do not use sophisticated psychological methods to sneak into your sub-conscious mind.

If you are listening to the radio, change the station and come back when the ad is done. On your computer you can block pop-up windows. This helps a little, but won't solve your problem. Simple awareness and setting the intention to ignore the advertisements will go a long way.

TV Programs and Movies

Advertising is only part of the "gunk" that enters our system! We need to pay attention to the programs and movies we watch as well. The fact that they are audiovisual means that they have multiple channels through which to impact us. Violence, verbal abuse and the portrayal of human sexuality are all things that we need to be on the look-out for if we want to manage the input we receive and keep our minds clear for optimal living.

Violence

People fall somewhere on a continuum from highly tolerant to highly sensitive toward violence and the mistreatment of others. Television and movies show us how to treat others. They help frame what seems normal to us. You may be thinking "just because I watch a show about

murder and sexual crime doesn't mean I'm going to go out and commit those crimes!" I agree that in most cases the images and story lines from such programs don't motivate people to commit similar crimes unless they were already on the brink of such behavior. It won't take you from one end of the continuum to the other; however, I do think it can move us a couple of notches down the continuum.

Exposing ourselves to violent input desensitizes us to the reality of such horrors. When such atrocities are viewed regularly in our homes during our relaxation time, it conditions us not to have the immediate shock and call-to-action that such stories should generate. When you hear a case in the news of a baby found in a dumpster or a woman dying of spousal abuse, do you respond by thinking – oh, that's sad, but that's how the world is? Imagine if the only stories of this sort that people heard were the true, local stories. This would make them less frequent and more shocking. Might we be more inclined to *do* something to address the social problems in our community to make the world a better, safer place?

Violent media has a negative impact on children. Studies show that children are much more likely to be aggressive toward toys when they are exposed to violent programs, even in the presence of their parents. They are also more violent toward their siblings and peers. Ask any parent or teacher about the sudden rise in karate kicking kindergarteners after a family movie with fighting is released.

Sex

Many parents are concerned about the affects of sex in the media on their children, and rightly so. I recommend sticking to the movie rating guidelines as a bare minimum, then looking out for sexual innuendo or insulting humor that can damage body image or send the message that a person's value is based on their physical appearance.

In adulthood our concerns about sexuality in the media may ease. Now the key is to be conscious of what images and messages we are getting. What is the nature of the relationship being portrayed and what affect does it have on our emotions and expectations? If we allow ourselves to be indiscriminant, passive receivers it will negatively impact our sexuality in the real world.

Pornography is a concern because there is an addictive attraction to it for many people, especially men. Frequent viewing of pornography typically results in changing what is necessary for that individual to bring about arousal. Few real people match the airbrushed images in magazines or on the Internet. A habit that may have started as looking at smiling college students in swimsuits can progress to the point where that person has to look at more complex situations to get the same feeling. This can cause problems when it is time to be intimate with the person you love. A person who views a lot of pornography may have difficulty engaging in and enjoying normal sexual behavior.

A more subtle problem is the unrealistic picture of relationships and human sexuality shown in movies. In my work with couples and individuals I have found that I often have to educate men

about female sexuality. What they have learned from television and movies is so skewed from what women really want and feel. Women typically are not going to desire intimacy unless they feel emotionally connected with their partner and the couple is getting along well together that day. There will be exceptions, such as at bars or one-night stands, but mostly this is what women need before being intimate. Many men do not see the link between their wife's lack of sexual interest and the fact that they have yelled at her or treated her poorly. It takes some re-educating to undo what the media has falsely represented as women's sexuality.

Rudeness and Verbal Abuse

Violence and sex are not the only influences we need to be aware of. We also need to consider how much rudeness, verbal abuse, and humiliation we want to expose ourselves and our children to. The reason this often flies under the radar is that one of the main places it shows up is in comedy. That continuum I mentioned earlier from highly tolerant to highly sensitive toward violence and the mistreatment of others applies here as well. We need to consider whether our entertainment choices may be moving us in the direction of being more tolerant of the mistreatment of others.

As we progress toward wholeness and health, we may want to evaluate some of the humor we expose ourselves to. What kinds of jokes do we want to tell or listen to? How about sitcoms in which married couples, families or friends routinely put each other down? Or "reality" TV where people are regularly criticized and humiliated for their choice of clothing, or some other inconsequential lack of "coolness"?

Check in with yourself and see what kinds of thoughts and feelings remain in you as a sort of aftertaste or residual effect after watching a certain program. We may not become just like the characters portrayed, but do we hold ourselves to a lower standard of kindness because, in comparison to what we've seen, we are doing quite well? Let's be careful not to lower the bar too far!

The same mimicking I mentioned earlier with regards to violence takes place when children are exposed to characters that speak rudely or dismissively to one another. I am not a fan of Hollywood's trend of portraying children as jaded, smart-alecks who always know more than the adults in their lives. Children hear people laugh at such behavior and this creates a strong motivation for them to adopt such behavior themselves. We expose our children to this sort of entertainment for years and then wonder why they are so difficult as teenagers!

There is an inherent developmental need for our children to set themselves apart as an individual— separate from their parents. This means that they need to make some decisions differently than their parents would. They need to disagree and make their own mistakes. This does *not* mean that they need to be blatantly rude and disrespectful on a daily basis.

What You Listen To

How often have you driven to work only to realize that you do not remember the journey? Perhaps you were zoned out. Can you remember what you were listening to during that time? How many ads played while you were driving? Were you listening to a talk show? If so, what attitudes and outlooks were expressed? Pay attention to this because unless you are playing a CD or music from your I-pod, chances are you've been listening to things that can and will affect you.

Music

In regards to music, we really need to pay attention to what we are listening to! One recommendation I make is that you don't leave background music playing unless it is instrumental or you know what the words say. While I'm at the gym I always bring my own music and headphones so that I can have control over what music, or input, I am listening to. I am not promoting one type of music as better than another. I believe you can find songs without negative lyrics in any genre of music. When you buy an album read the lyrics, especially if you don't really know what the songs are saying, because what you listen to all day long will affect your state of mind.

Talk Radio and News

It is important to keep ourselves informed of the current events that affect us, our families and the world at large. That being said, we need to be just as careful about the news and talk radio that we take-in as we are about all of our other media consumption. With TV news, as with other programming, I recommend pre-recording. You will find that you really don't need to know about the tragic bus or train crash that occurred across the nation unless you have friends or family in that area, or you are in a related industry yourself. You will want to know if something like Hurricane Katrina happens - perhaps you can do something to help - but you do not need to hear every crime and tragedy that occurs around the world. That is depressing! You especially don't need to hear it repeated over and over again.

When it comes to radio talk shows, remember that while they may impart bits of information, often of dubious origin, they are designed primarily to entertain. You are the consumer that they are marketing their product to. Their product is their program. Pay close attention to what emotions arise in you as you listen. Evoking a strong emotional response is the hook that many talk shows use to keep you listening. How is your blood pressure affected? What impact if any does listening have on your mood, outlook, and feelings toward others? Did you learn something of value that you can act on, or did you just get yourself riled up? These are the tests that you can apply when deciding whether a show is beneficial to you or not. If you are looking for "just the facts" then print versions of news, whether online or on paper, tend to have fewer emotional "hooks", and require less of your time and energy to relay the information.

Computer Games

There are lots of entertaining computer games available today. Role playing games can be especially fun. My only words of caution here are to make sure that amount of time you spend engaged in these games reflects the priorities that you want for your life, and to evaluate the characters you use for role-playing. If you find yourself constantly being drawn to playing evil

or cruel roles, you may be reaching for a cathartic experience. You may have an emotional wound that you need to cleanse. Playing evil roles may foster dysfunction and draw you deeper into the dark side of yourself. Ultimately, it may be more like picking a scab instead of bringing you the healing that you need. In this case, you may find it helpful to read my book [Anger Work: How To Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind](#).

Attending Live Events

Don't forget live community events as an alternative form of entertainment. I'm talking about things like state fairs, local festivals, farmer's markets, art shows, community theater, and so on. Go to a museum, take a class at a community center or local college that reflects something you've always wanted to do or know more about. Walk with a friend as the sun rises or sets. In our fast-paced lives we often feel we don't have time for such things. They seem like luxuries, yet many of these activities don't take any more time than we normally spend in front of the TV.

These events provide the opportunity for you to be more than a passive receiver, but to actively engage with others around you. Share your smile with the rest of the world, even if it takes an effort that day. Enjoy the enthusiasm of others and the fresh air. Experiment with this and see if it makes you feel more invigorated to get out with other people who are having fun.

Summary & Action Points for Entertainment Choices

If you find yourself still questioning the impact that words and images can have on you, consider this. With my training and experience as a clinical psychologist I have been able to influence a person's habits (even smoking and other addictions) to help bring about change, simply through hypnotic suggestion. Many times, after a hypnosis session has ended, the client does not even remember what happened. This is similar to our memory of all the input we receive on a daily basis.

The self-help industry has been very successful selling CD's that the listener plays while sleeping to change bad habits, increase self-esteem, decrease depression, etc. Many people find these very helpful. If so much can be accomplished while we are in an unconscious sleep state, what power do the images and words that we receive while we're awake have on both a conscious and unconscious level?

So, what are we supposed to do? Join the Amish? Avoid all forms of entertainment? Of course not! Let's return to the idea that making healthy entertainment choices is a bit like making healthy diet choices. There has been a sharp rise in the popularity of bottled water and organic produce in recent years. This is because people are concerned about the effects of pesticides and other chemicals on their bodies. When people became aware of the negative health affects of certain chemicals, did they stop eating and drinking altogether? Clearly not!

Likewise, we need to try to get what we need and want—what feeds us—minus the contaminants. Think of being selective about your entertainment choices and avoiding ads like ordering

Chinese food without the MSG, or being careful not to spray Malathion on your tomato plant. Certainly some movies and video games will need to be taken “off the menu” if you want to be healthy.

The great thing is you can enjoy the quest of discovering media and entertainment choices that feed your soul. Yes, they actually *are* out there. Find media that inspires you to raise the bar and become your best self. You may not find a good movie for *every* Friday night at the theater, but if you are a real movie buff, take that opportunity to revisit an old favorite on DVD. This is not an unobtainable goal. You truly can give yourself a more positive outlook by making these simple choices!

People You Spend Time with

One of the most important choices anyone makes in life is whom they spend their time with. The people we surround ourselves with will end up having influence on every area of our lives. Have you ever noticed that you may be having a wonderful day and feel very happy until someone who is being very negative comes around you and brings you down? This is magnified when it is someone you know personally and especially if it is someone close to you. However, the opposite is also true. You could start out having a pretty awful day, but due to a random act of kindness, you may find yourself feeling more optimistic and joyful. There is great power in choosing positive and loving people to be in your life.

Some people move through this world with negative opinions about almost everything, constantly complaining, putting others down, cursing at people as they drive, and generally taking a pessimistic view of the world. These individuals pinpoint everything that is wrong with the world around them, even though they may have difficulty seeing what lies within them. People like this have the power to influence us in very negative ways.

The most important reason to be careful about who we spend time with is that we can internalize someone's words or non-verbal message so that they become a part of our own thoughts. When this takes place, it magnifies the influence of that message immensely because we carry it around with us and replay it even when the individual is not present. If this person is constantly critical of us, we may second guess ourselves, put ourselves down, and develop feelings of unworthiness or self-loathing. These can cause us to make poor choices in regards to how we take care of ourselves and what kinds of relationships we allow ourselves to be in. If the individual is not attacking us personally, but is generally negative and cynical about people's motives, we may find that spending time with this person brings on depression or anxiety for us.

Let us not forget that the non-verbal communication we receive from people such as tone of voice, facial expression, touch, and body language matter too! Tone of voice can be used to infuse words with meaning that they would not have if you read them on paper. Combinations of non-verbal communication used with or without words can convey messages such as: You are boring me and not worth my time; What you have to say fascinates me; I am moved by what you are sharing; I am angry with you!; You better do what I want you to or I'm going to hurt you; What you are saying is ridiculous; You are stupid; That's an interesting thought, but I

disagree; I am impressed by what you; What you are saying makes a lot of sense-it makes me realize something; You are humorous; You are sweet; You are disgusting; You are beneath me; I put you on a pedestal; I approve; I disapprove; I love you; I hate you, and so on, endlessly.

We need to take a look at our everyday relationships with friends, co-workers, family members, spouses, and even new acquaintances. I urge you to examine your relationships one-by-one. Ask yourself these questions: What kinds of messages does this person send me about myself and my situation in the world? Am I being abused? Does the dynamic of the relationship draw out my best or my worst qualities? Do I like who I am when I am with this person? Do I feel brought down, lifted up, or neutral after spending time with this individual? Does this person use their proximity, touch or gestures in a way that is intimidating and demeaning or respectful, loving and supportive?

“Keepers and Tossers”

Every human being is valuable; however, not every relationship functions in a way that is beneficial to the parties involved. This is why we each need to take inventory of our lives and evaluate which relationships are “Keepers” and which are “Tossers”.

“Tossers” are dysfunctional relationships that sap your energy or add negativity to your life, but are not important enough to be worth the investment of time and emotional energy it would require to try to improve them. “Tossers”, as the name suggests, are relationships that need to be phased out of your life entirely, or have interaction kept to a minimum. Sometimes people outgrow their friends, or simply move on. This is okay. It’s a normal part of life. Don’t feel guilty about it.

“Keepers” are relationships that matter. A relationship may be important because of who the other person is to you, (for example a parent, spouse, child, or sibling), or the relationship may matter because of what it brings to your life. For example a friendship that adds fun, joy, or some other great quality to your time on this Earth is worth investing in.

Just as plants in a garden need to be pruned and watered, “Keeper” relationships need to be managed with healthy boundaries and proactive scheduling. Too often we fail to set healthy boundaries with those “Keeper” folks that drive us crazy—yes, everybody has those. The permanent nature of these relationships tempts us to take the attitude that “it is what it is” and never consider breaking out of old, dysfunctional patterns. Setting healthy boundaries is like pruning a shrub that has taken on an undesirable shape.

Plants not only need to be pruned, they also need to be nurtured in order to flourish. So often the significant relationships in our lives may go untended. When was the last time you went on a date with your spouse, had a road trip your best buddy, a heart-to-heart talk with dear old Mom or Dad, or spent quality one-on-one time with your child? Investing in these ways gives relationships the water they need to grow.

Evaluate which individuals currently in your life have the most positive or least negative affect on you. Make it a priority to schedule more time with these people, rather than getting together with the people who drag you down. Don't fall into the trap of hanging out with someone who is a negative influence, simply because it is easier or requires less planning. Be sure to take time for the people who make you laugh, feed your spirit, and make life worth living. These relationships foster your growth and help you to become your best self, which you can then offer to those you love and the rest of the world.

There are times when we need to make ourselves available to offer support to someone who is going through a difficult time. We can listen to people vent their feelings about personal experiences they've had without trying to "fix" them or force them to put on a happy face.

Every life has its storms. You may choose to "be there" for a friend, or your family may go through a rough patch. When this occurs, I recommend trying to balance out the draining effect that these times can have by balancing out the negative with more positive. Give yourself permission to let some things that don't really matter slide. Do more of what you love, whether it's a hobby, spending time alone reading, or whatever fills you up. Living a positive, healthy lifestyle is not only about restricting the influx of negative influences, but also about letting more of the good stuff in.

I worked with a teenager once who struggled with depression. He was a great individual, but most of the people he spent time with were very negative. As we worked together in therapy our first task was to find healthy activities that he enjoyed. He discovered that he loved being outdoors and hiking, and began to put forth the effort to do these things more often. The more he engaged in activities that he enjoyed, the better he felt and the more he met individuals with whom he could share his passions.

As we continued to work together, he was able to form healthy boundaries in his "keeper" relationships and weed out some "tosser" relationships that were dragging him down. The improvement in his outlook on life and ability to really enjoy life were nothing short of a transformation.

Remember to be on the lookout for new, positive, emotionally healthy people who enter your life. If you continually put forth the effort you will find at least one. It is work to find such people, but the pay off is immeasurable.

If you are a parent, make sure that you get to know your kids' friends and encourage your children not to hang around with friends who cut them down all the time. Of course, you need to make sure that you are not doing this to them either, and are not modeling such behavior between you and your spouse. If your child hears the two of you cutting each other down, this will be what he or she unconsciously expects and will tolerate from others.

Strategies For Managing Relationships

Following are some guidelines covering areas that people commonly struggle with. They are meant to help you maintain healthy boundaries and improve the quality of your interactions with others. When I use the term ‘boundaries’ in this psychological setting, I’m referring to that invisible fence that needs to exist between any two people in order for the relationship to be healthy. When someone tosses a psychological grenade into our emotional landscape, or trespasses on our domain by being controlling or butting into our business, we say, “this person has crossed the line!” That line is our boundary. I hope you will find these suggestions helpful.

Abuse

Many clients that I work with have been treated poorly and even abused by family members, peers, and intimate partners in the past. As a result, they have become accustomed to this sort of treatment, and often tolerate cruel and disrespectful behavior. In a sense, they don’t know any better. I hope this won’t be your first time hearing this, but let me clearly say that unkind and degrading behavior is not okay—from anyone! If you are being physically abused, remove yourself from that situation immediately and find a safe place to work on the changes you need in your life.

That being said, it is also possible for someone in your life to become upset and engage in negative, critical behavior that is not typical for him or her. When someone who cares about you has treated you badly, it is important for that individual to acknowledge this, show remorse, and take steps not to do this to you again.

Human communication is inherently imperfect. It is possible for us to misinterpret someone’s intent in any given instance, either because of the way it was phrased or because of a bias on our own part. A certain amount of grace is required to navigate any relationship. However, if you find yourself in a pattern in which you are continually attempting to understand while an individual explains that his or her comment - which sounded cruel - meant something different than what you understood, take this as a red flag. Unless you have been diagnosed with paranoia, trust your gut instinct.

Some people have a pattern of hurting others repeatedly, only to apologize and promise to change, which they do, but often only temporarily. This is the classic cycle of domestic violence or abuse that so many individuals find themselves in. This not only applies to domestic violence, but to any kind of abuse. If you are caught in this cycle, set a boundary by creating enough space between yourself and the abuser for you to gain some clarity and peace. You will need this renewed perspective to help you make the important decisions about how to proceed.

Gossip and Negative Talk

I remember watching an episode of Gilligan’s Island when Gilligan found berries that allowed him to read other people’s minds. Gilligan shared the berries with his friends on the island, and not too long after this everyone started hating each other because they could hear the negative things they were thinking about each other. Gilligan burnt all the berries and everyone got mad at

him and questioned why he had done this. He said “but look at how much damage it was causing!”

The moral of this story is that sharing all your negative thoughts with people causes damage to them and your relationship with them. When you hurt others, you just have to forgive yourself, and forgiving ourselves is probably one of the most difficult things to do. Even when you don't say anything, but are thinking really mean thoughts about someone it is not healthy for you. It can cause you to see yourself in a negative light, as cruel and unforgiving. At the very least, it robs you of your joy in experiencing the present moment.

The good news is that the reverse of this behavior is also true. When you focus on the beautiful traits of others, and even cultivate the habit of sharing your kind observations with them, your world will change. People around you will feel your love and warmth and benefit from it. You will feel more loving, and perhaps, slowly but surely, you will start to fall in love with yourself. Kindness, gentleness, warmth, and love are the gems of life. Share them with others and yourself, and see how “the world” begins to change.

It is also a good idea to limit your exposure to people who enjoy painting the worst possible picture of how things are - the Eeyores and Chicken Littles of your life. Assess whether the relationship is a “keeper” or “tossler.” If it is a keeper, you can care for them and love them, but don't let them drag you down.

If you are in the presence of people that are gossiping, speaking negatively about another person, or taking the most negative view possible of a situation, I recommend redirecting the conversation. You can change the direction of the conversation by making a positive remark on the subject, or changing the subject entirely. Some may find it difficult to take such initiative and change the direction of the conversation, or it may simply not be worth the effort in many instances. If you find yourself in this position, the best thing you can do is cut the conversation short and just walk away. If you make a habit of only participating in positive conversations, you will find that you attract people with a positive attitude.

Teasing

Teasing is an area that is important to address as it often occurs between couples, families, and friends. Teasing can be harmful because it usually contains underlying criticism to it.

Many people use teasing as a covert way to deliver complaints that are sensitive in nature. For example, a spouse might tease their partner about their weight, or about that “honey do” list. Usually the result of this kind of teasing is to irritate, if not emotionally injure the person being teased. It rarely results in the change that the teaser might hope for.

Another type of teasing is to pick on characteristics that the person may have no control over, such as a permanent physical trait or lack of ability. This may be an unconscious means of social positioning, like wolves in a pack, or it may be a well-meaning substitute for positive affection. Some men are uncomfortable with complimenting or being affectionate with other males, even

their own family members. Their conditioning has taught them that this is “sissy stuff.” In an ironic twist, instead of saying “I love you” to the ones they care about, they tease them, having the opposite effect. In their own minds those doing the teasing may know that the characteristic they are teasing about is just a distinguishing quality that they find endearing; however, the one being teased almost never understands it that way.

Maybe you, or someone you spend time with is in the habit of teasing. It might seem that you can't have fun without teasing, but teasing can hurt a relationship and damage the self-esteem and confidence of an individual. No matter how tough or strong a person's exterior is, we all care what our loved ones think of us, and we are all sensitive to the damage that teasing causes. Part of living a healthy lifestyle is eliminating mean-spirited or critical teasing both on the giving and receiving ends.

Work

When it comes to work, as with everything else, we need to do our best to minimize the negative aspects and maximize the positive. Every job has its down side. The question is whether there is enough good to balance out the bad.

One way to tilt the balance in a positive direction is to choose work that you are passionate about. This can make it easier to tolerate difficult people at work. Another way is to choose a group of people that you enjoy working with, or the freedom of working by yourself. This can make the unpalatable aspects of your work easier to deal with.

Work relationships can be tricky, especially if you have difficulty with a superior in your chain of command. We often have to deal with personalities at work that we would never chose to spend time with if given the choice, but everybody's got to make a living. The feeling of financial dependence tied to the job certainly raises the stakes of those relationships.

While we may need to tread carefully with a supervisor to avoid losing our job, I think we also have to be careful not to be so paralyzed by fear that we become doormats. Feeling mistreated on a daily basis at work is enough to make just about anyone unhappy. If you find yourself in a work environment that is hostile, abusive, or extremely negative, I would recommend forming a contingency plan for alternative employment options.

Having a back-up plan can give you the courage you need to use the healthy boundary skills mentioned throughout this article/podcast. You might be surprised at the changes you can bring about in your workplace interactions. Sometimes showing more backbone at work can earn you more respect. But of course, all of this depends on the complicated and unique set of personalities that you are dealing with.

Ultimately, if you can't seem to escape or change the negativity I highly recommend changing your job, or starting your own business working for yourself. Don't forget that your day-to-day happiness, or lack thereof, is YOUR LIFE! Don't settle for being miserable!

Some people have genuine limited flexibility with regards to where they can work, but for the vast majority of people it is their own false limitations that would make them settle for a job that they hate. If you choose not to change your job, then you will have to work extra-hard on your attitude.

Try to become aware of the fact that every job is ultimately a choice. There may be other jobs that would pay less, require you to get more education first, force you to move, or require a long and arduous job search. There is always the possibility of starting your own business. If you realize this and still choose the job you've got, then evidently this job is better than your alternatives. The simple act of realizing that you are making the choice can cause a shift of attitude that makes you happier in the same situation.

Marriage

All of us who are married know that the state of our marriage impacts the overall functioning of our lives. Marriage relationships fall into the "keeper" category: they are worth trying to fix if they are broken, and worth nurturing even if they are already doing well. Establishing healthy boundaries in your marriage is a key component to living a positive, healthy lifestyle. It's not only a matter of looking out for yourself, but also for the health and sustainability of the relationship and the well-being of any children that are involved.

If you find yourself in a dysfunctional relationship, you will have to work hard to make the necessary changes. You will need to stand firm about being treated with respect, and equally firm about behaving in a respectful manner yourself. Going back to the initial metaphor of the aquarium, following the Golden Rule of treating your spouse the way that you want to be treated will not only keep your personal aquarium clean, but the aquarium that your whole family swims around in.

You will need to work at resolving conflict with your spouse, not with the goal of winning the argument, but with the goal of maintaining connection with your partner—keeping that aquarium water clear. Hopefully your partner will catch the vision you have of a healthy, happy relationship and will come on board with your efforts to make positive changes in your interactions. If not, you must carry on regardless. If you encounter a lot of resistance from your partner, you may find it helpful to get professional counseling or join some sort of support group.

I have worked with a number of women who are married to very critical, verbally abusive men. In such cases, I recommend that the woman carry money with her at all times, so that if her husband begins to abuse her, she can get out of the car or house and call a cab if necessary to get to a friend's house or other safe location. This is a way to set boundaries, and abusive people need to learn more boundaries. In less severe cases, it may be sufficient to simply end the conversation and tell your husband or wife that you don't feel that you are resolving anything at the moment, and would like to talk about it another time.

Time Alone

When considering the people that we spend time with, let us not forget the important role of solitude. Spending time alone can help us to focus on the good and meaningful things in life, and create the time and space for us to clarify our priorities and intentions. Many of the great spiritual leaders throughout history have taken solitary journeys wandering through the wilderness before settling into their wisdom and embarking on their ministry. We may not choose to wander for years, but how about a half-day each month? Or how about 20 minutes each morning or night? How about both?

I meditate every day. When people ask me how I make time for it my question in return is how do you *not* make time for it? The impact it has on my day and my life is immeasurable. It keeps me on track with living the kind of life I want to live. If you would like to learn how to meditate, you can read my free e-book *Meditation for Health and Happiness* or listen to my various Meditation podcasts.

INTERNAL INFLUENCES

The Internal Influences that have a huge impact on our lives include:

- 1.) our Physical State of Being,
- 2.) our Conditioning,
- 3.) our Self-Talk, and
- 4.) our Level of Awareness.

Physical State of Being

Let's start with our Physical State of Being. When we are too hungry or tired, it influences our mood. We can start to feel and act grumpy. Likewise, chronic pain can increase the challenge as we strive to be positive. This is why we need to take care of our bodies with proper sleep, exercise and nutrition. A lack of exercise can lead to higher levels of depression and stress-related physical ailments as well as a greater risk of injury.

Genetics are also a part of our physical state of being. Maybe you are asking yourself: "What if I am genetically predisposed to being negative?" It is true that people seem to be born with a certain range of temperament, and may have genetic predispositions that make it easier for them to develop particular psychological disorders. That notwithstanding, we must remember that nature and nurture are both elements of what we become. That nurture is ongoing, and includes how we care for ourselves today.

Any disorder can be treated and can be treated well. For example, I have treated several people that were on the edge of becoming Schizophrenic. They were presenting with early signs of Schizophrenia such as auditory and visual hallucinations. Most of them were teenagers as this is typically the age of onset for the disorder. I was able to successfully help these individuals by helping them to change their thoughts and decrease their stress.

Although these individuals may have had genetic predispositions to schizophrenia, they did not become schizophrenic, and are not taking medication. It took a great deal of work, but imagine the pay-off for these individuals. They did not end up with a life crippled by hallucinations, and voices or tied to medication for the rest of their lives. Everyone is predisposed to something, but if you take care of yourself, that negative genetic predisposition doesn't need to be manifested. In most cases it takes stress or other risk factors, which we can control, for the genetic element to kick in.

Programming or Conditioning

One of the primary reasons we think and behave in the ways we do, comes from the conditioning we have received throughout life. Conditioning is a mixture of positive and negative influences. Part of this is the Societal Conditioning that we received by living in a particular culture at a given time. Another element is the Personal Conditioning that we received living our unique life with the specific details of our relationships and experiences.

Cultural Conditioning

Men and women are both conditioned by culture to be dysfunctional. In addition to the positive messages put out there by society, numerous unhealthy behaviors are approved and supported. This is true in every culture, though the specific behaviors will vary. In American culture, historically, women have one primary societal message that causes them dysfunction, while men have four main messages that cause them emotional and psychological struggles.

Women are repeatedly told through the media, peers, etcetera that they need to be concerned about their looks and that they always have to "look good". I would add that in recent years "looking good" has taken on a narrower definition of looking young and sexy. It is no longer enough to look well groomed and feminine.

Obviously, this creates a lot of pressure on women because they cannot always "look good" as society has defined it. They may not even want to try. This can cause women to feel conflicted, or lead to incredible insecurities. Who feels sexy after they've just given birth? When they've got a migraine? Should the way we dress or style our hair reflect how we are feeling on a given day, or some standard set by unnamed media sources?

Human beings age. This is simply a natural process of life. It would seem that this would go without saying, but there is great pressure placed upon women-and increasingly men as well-to have less wrinkles and sagging. Flooding these messages out there makes billions of dollars every year for the companies that specialize in anti-aging remedies and plastic surgery. This pressure to look young and "look good" all the time is cultural programming. The underlying messages are 1.) You don't need to look old, even when you are. 2.) Therefore, you *shouldn't* look old, even if you are. 3.) You won't be valued as highly by society if you show signs of aging.

Our programming can influence us to engage in very dysfunctional behavior if we let it. Studies have shown that even models struggle with thoughts that they are “average” or “less than average” because they perseverate over small, seemingly insignificant characteristics they find unattractive about themselves. Open up any of the celebrity-centered magazines and you can see how women starve themselves, use drugs and diet pills, or go under the knife just to meet these expectations. The truth is, being healthy means accepting who we are no matter what we look like. No one can live up to the standard of beauty set by our society, at least not for long, because no matter how beautiful, thin, or young looking we may be, mirrors don’t do airbrush touch-ups!

When it comes to men, society has four, strong dysfunctional messages that it offers. The first is that “big boys don’t cry”. Boys and men get this message from their peers, media, and sports. This encourages men to suppress their feelings.

Secondly, men are encouraged to be workaholics. This means sacrificing the other priorities in life to the primary goal of workplace achievement and generating financial income. They are told that they have to do this in order to be a “successful human being”. If men are not workaholics they are often called losers.

Thirdly, men are encouraged to be sex-addicts and to have many different sex partners. There are many messages in society that say cheating on your partner, even after you are married is normal and acceptable.

The fourth main dysfunctional behavior that men are encouraged to engage in is excessive drinking of alcohol. There is a great deal of pressure for men to drink at sporting and social events. In fact “guys night out” typically involves getting drunk for most men. There is an underlying message that alcohol is necessary to enjoy “hanging out” with friends, romantic rendezvous or any other social engagement.

These are the historical, gender-specific messages that we have been conditioned with in our society. However, it is important to note that the societal roles and conditioning of the genders are becoming more blurred. As a result, women and men are starting to have some of the struggles that have historically been experienced by the opposite sex.

Society has improved somewhat in the last generation or two about letting little boys cry, but this bias still exists to some extent. You don’t see too many action heroes talking about their feelings or crying if their feelings are hurt. With their increased presence throughout the work force over the last several generations, women have found themselves struggling with some of the issues that were previously primarily male issues, such as work-a-holism, alcoholism, and suppressing emotions.

Here is a review of the negative societal messages I just discussed:

- You should always try to look young and sexy-it will be a sad day when you don’t, because no one will value you.

- For a man to show tenderness, doubt, or hurt is unmanly and unacceptable.
- All men and “career women” should make work their #1 priority, sacrificing anything that gets in the way of their career.
- Men are not faithful to their partners-you just need to accept that. There’s nothing you can do about it.
- If you want to have a good time, you are going to need some alcohol.

Exposure to these messages through culture has conditioned us to believe that they are true: The reality is that believing and living according to these messages has caused many people a great deal of struggle and suffering. Until we become aware of these societal messages and decide whether to embrace or reject them, they will influence our decisions and attitudes without us even realizing it. Our conditioning continues to be one of our greatest Internal Influences. I encourage you to add your own list of the negative messages you have received as part of your personal conditioning below this list. Is seeing them lined up like this enough to make you want to break free from the brain-washing and live a positive, healthy lifestyle instead?

Personal Conditioning

Personal Conditioning is the unique package of messages, experiences, exposure to people and ideas that have formed our ways of looking at things, our ways of thinking, and the emotional reactions which spring naturally from us. Just as each person is physically unique, separate even from their siblings with the same genetic ancestry, so each person is experientially unique, even from those raised in the same household. Personal Conditioning is obviously a huge factor in our lives. I will discuss how to deal with the influence of our conditioning more under the section on Awareness.

Sometimes we are able to identify aspects of our Personal Conditioning as “the tapes I hear replaying inside my head” or “the voice of my mother inside my head.” Of course you can fill-in father, Third grade bully, Sunday School teacher, or other influential people from your past or present. You may have a positive role model that you have internalized which guides you in your decision-making. On the other hand, you may be aware of some very negative conditioning. For help in letting go of the damaging messages you have received, I recommend my book, *Anger Work: How To Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind*, which has been made into a free podcast and free e-book. It can assist you in this cleansing process.

Our conditioning is the source of the judgmental thoughts that arise in our minds about ourselves and others. Judgmental thoughts about other people can do much to disturb our peace of mind. We go through our day thinking “Why is he so selfish? Why can’t she be more dependable? What’s wrong with them?” When you ask yourself these kinds of “why?” questions, try this answer on for size: it is the result of their conditioning. If you want to blame someone, blame the conditioning. See if this makes a difference in how you feel about those individuals or in how much you enjoy your day.

We do not choose our genetics or the circumstances into which we are born. Our conditioning has occurred without our choice as well. If you try to see the actions of others as being a result of their conditioning, then you may be able to stop judging them as much. If you had the exact same genetic make-up and experiences they did, perhaps you would be acting just like they are. The Native Americans have a very powerful and wise saying: “Until you’ve walked in a persons moccasins for several miles, don’t judge their behavior”.

This is not to say that people can’t change, but that they need new conditioning to do so. Until they have that new conditioning, they will probably continue to think and behave in the same ways they currently do. Right now, if you are receptive to it, I am offering you new conditioning. I am teaching you to look at people and see how they, like you, are a product of circumstances beyond their control. This shift in thought will soften your heart towards everyone, even yourself. Taking this approach, you can learn to stop judging and start enjoying life more.

Self Talk

Self-Talk is what you say *to* yourself *about* yourself and your life situation. It usually occurs on the subconscious level, though we may at times blurt out something like “I’m an idiot!” when we make a mistake, or “I’m a genius!” when we’re feeling particularly proud. Many people don’t pay attention to their self-talk, but it is critical to your health and happiness. Everything you say about yourself matters. This is true whether you say it out loud to other people, or mutter it inside your own head without ever verbalizing it.

Years ago I worked with a woman whose husband had made a negative comment about her intelligence. What he said hurt her feelings deeply, and stuck in her brain. It became part of her programming. She had difficulty getting over it, and was mad at him for years. His apology didn’t help.

After I began working with her, we uncovered the fact that all day long as she worked she would criticize herself repeatedly, calling herself “dumb”. I asked her “How come it was *not* okay for *him* say something mean to you, but you say it to yourself all day long?”

She strongly felt that because *she* was saying it, it didn’t matter, but actually her echoing of the insult was keeping her from healing. The truth is, when you say negative things to yourself it matters just as much as someone else saying it to you, if not more. She came to realize the importance of self-talk and was finally able to heal from that wound and improve her self-esteem.

Once you decrease the negative self-talk, you will be surprised how your judgments about others will decrease as well. This is where the saying that you have to love yourself first in order to love others comes into play.

The best way to determine whether your self-talk is appropriate is to ask yourself “How would I feel if someone else said this to me?” If you don’t want someone else to say it to you, don’t say it to yourself! If you want to live a positive, healthy lifestyle you must be kind to yourself.

Level of Awareness

This brings us to our final major Internal Influence: Our Level of Awareness. In order to live a positive, healthy lifestyle we need to gain clarity and some level of control over the airwaves of our minds. Though we may not be aware of it, when we hear our old programming messages replaying in our heads, we have the power to hit the stop button. Once we become conscious of this, we can introduce some new tracks to our brain’s playlist and stop listening to the ones that drive us crazy.

Even if the people who were the source of negative messages in our past are still part of our lives, the past must be separated from the present to deal with it effectively. We must work on our present day interactions, as discussed previously under the section about managing our relationships. After that, we need to do some serious mental housecleaning. We shouldn’t let old useless thoughts clutter our minds on a daily basis. We can’t be happy if we are slaves to old, negative conditioning or harmful self-talk.

Unless you have mastered the principles outlined in my previous podcast, Living a Peaceful Life, and have learned to still your mind, you are going to be having stray thoughts all day long, and what you think matters. Just like environmental pollution can range anywhere from toxic waste to the cacophony we call noise pollution, so it is with our mental environment as well. Some thoughts that wander through our minds are mere distractions, while others are truly toxic. We need to become aware of the thoughts passing through our minds.

Awareness is the antidote to negative conditioning and self-talk. Awareness is the advisor on making healthy decisions about relationships. Once we are aware of something, change can occur. Awareness is the most powerful transformational force in the universe. Ignorance and lack of awareness cause suffering. All the addictions in the world, from drugs to food and everything in between have only one purpose—to avoid being aware of current reality. Another way to say that is that they are a means to avoid being present with what is.

When you are completely aware, you won’t want to hurt another person. This is because your awareness will extend beyond your own feelings, and cause you to care about the feelings of others. The greater a person’s awareness, the more their actions will be in-line with the Golden Rule.

I often work with my clients on helping them to increase their awareness, because if they are not aware, they cannot change their behavior. Awareness in itself changes things a great deal. If you aren’t aware that every time you see a certain ethnicity you are filled with hatred and malice, or every time you look in the mirror you say hateful things to yourself about your educational level, a certain part of your physique, etcetera, then you can’t change it.

If you would like to work on your level of awareness, you need to start observing yourself. Ask yourself “what am I doing? What thoughts are going through my head? What messages am I replaying? What judgments am I making?” You may not like what you find when you start to become aware of your actions and thoughts.

Do not dwell on this. Don’t tell yourself that the behavior or thought you just observed is meaningful because it indicates a greater character flaw. For example: I just snapped at my daughter...well that is because I’m so impatient and high-strung. You can see how the judging and labeling only adds to the problem.

When a stray thought arises spontaneously in your mind it is important to note that thoughts are not good or bad, but they may be something you want to foster or something you want to allow to drop away. At this point you have three options for dealing with these thoughts.

One option is to continue following the thoughts, filling up the next 5 minutes to 5 hours with worries, fears, and longing. This is what most people have done throughout their lives, and in some senses have become like puppets to their thoughts because they are so tied to them.

A second option is to suppress the thoughts. The problem here is that the very act of suppressing them, gives them power. A great example of this can be seen in lust. When you lust after something, be it food, another person, goals, etcetera and you try to repress it, the desire to consume, be with, obtain and grasp are intensified immensely.

So if following or suppressing the thoughts only leads to more pain and suffering, what is the third alternative –the more beneficial option? The answer is simple. Just become aware of your thoughts; notice them and then get back out of your head and into the present moment. As your awareness increases, you will be able to witness your thoughts and actions almost like an objective bystander and then shift your focus to something else.

You may choose to focus your attention on your five senses to take in what is going on in the present moment. Pay attention to your surroundings and you will surely find that there is something beautiful to look at or listen to, be it a bird singing, a beautiful song on the radio, good company, or a flower blooming in the garden. Try to look at the world through child-like eyes, filled with wonder, and there will always be something new to look at.

Another way to redirect your attention is to focus on following your breath. You may find that this quiets your mind and instills a sense of calmness and well-being within you. You can learn to let go of your judgments and just be, with very little mental commentary. If you would like to try this, you will find information and guidance on how to do this in my other e-book/podcasts *Living a Peaceful Life*, *Meditation For Health and Happiness*, and *Guided Meditation*

As an example, lets say you are with another person when the thought pops into your head “that person is fat”. Instead of suppressing this thought, you merely witness it with “oh, there is that thought.” and shift your focus to something else. Don’t judge or be harsh to yourself about these thoughts, simply observe and witness them.

In life there is always something beautiful to participate in or look at. If you have a critical thought, similar to the one just mentioned, focus on some trait that you admire about the person: their hair, smile, or personality instead. With time, as you change, hopefully that attitude in you will change as well.

In many ways this is parallel to what I stated earlier about walking away from a situation in which people are speaking negatively about others. You don't criticize them, you merely notice their behavior and walk away. The same can be done with your thoughts, don't criticize them—just notice them and redirect your attention.

The beauty of pursuing awareness is that it is a break from the old way of trying to work up the willpower to strong-arm yourself into changing. Instead, you simply notice when you do something that you don't like, observe your own behavior in a nonjudgmental way, and recognize your conditioning as its source. This frees you from the shame that usually clutches your heart and disables you from making changes.

There is a lightness that comes from not identifying with the bad actions. You can tell yourself “My conditioning lead me to do that, but now that I see it, I'm going to choose differently in the future.” The next time a similar situation comes along, you may behave differently, or you may catch yourself doing the same thing again. If that's the case, rather than berating yourself, you say “Oh, there's that response again. Well, this time I caught myself in the act. Maybe next time I'll catch myself on time to respond differently.” The transformation that awareness brings is a process. We must be patient and kind with ourselves.

A NOTE ABOUT CHANGE

When I was at Princeton I used to go to inner city Brooklyn to work with Junior High aged children every weekend for one year. After getting to know them, I learned that each of them had been mugged at least two times in their life. They all came from a very poor part of Brooklyn and each of them had an extremely tough background. One day I took about 10 of them to the Princeton campus for a field trip. Princeton has beautiful rolling hills with wide-open spaces, and is very pristine.

We were crossing one of these gorgeous lawns when I noticed that the children were dropping their garbage on the ground as they walked, leaving a trail of trash behind us. This is because their lives had conditioned them to be familiar and comfortable with the dirt, debris, and noisy hustle and bustle of the inner city. In their experience, it was normal to drop trash on the ground. They were very uncomfortable on the campus, because they were not used to that cleanliness, open space and quiet.

If you are used to having negative words and images bombarding you all day, and you decide to cut that out and start listening to the birds and watching sunsets, you will probably have a very hard time at first because you aren't used to it. You may listen to this podcast and start to make some of these changes, but find yourself wanting some of that “junk” back because you aren't used to having clear, open spaces in your mind. You might miss the drama. Don't tell yourself

that this means you can't improve. Just notice your resistance, and keep moving in a positive direction, granting yourself some grace.

It is good to consider yourself a work in progress. Change may come slowly, but keep at it! If you would like to speed the process along, it can be very helpful to work with a therapist that is practicing good self-care him or herself. Your therapist can help you identify some of the unhelpful thoughts and self-talk that keep you from living life to the fullest and offering the world your best self.

The great thing is, when we decide to make positive changes in our lives, we can have an influence on the people around us as well. Others around us may decide that they want to join us in leading a more positive, healthy lifestyle. It is also positive that they will not want to give up the negativity that they are accustomed to. You may find that this shifts things in your relationship. People in recovery from substance abuse are the clearest example of this I can think of.

When you break the existing patterns of interaction in a relationship, especially by setting healthier boundaries, a new pattern must emerge. When you change, the relationship will change too. Unfortunately, it may not always be the kind of change you were hoping for. Every relationship takes two, and you cannot control the choices of the other person. The ways in which those around you respond can make more clear to you the choices you need to make in order to lead a healthy and happy life. This may mean spending less and less time with certain people and perhaps even ending unhealthy relationships.

CONCLUSION:

All day long we are being exposed to various sources of input. They can have a positive or negative effect on the direction and quality of our lives. If we are not attentive to these factors, we become like puppets being manipulated by them. In our everyday lives as adults, we have a lot of control over what influences we are exposed to. If you become aware of that fact and start being selective, your life will change.

Proactively managing the influences we allow into our lives means being aware of the music we listen to, TV shows and movies we watch, as well as the people we spend time with. This also means being aware of what goes on in our heads—shifting our focus when we begin to judge other people or ourselves. It means not only limiting our exposure to that which is negative, but also actively filling our lives with the people and experiences that nurture us, bring us joy and cause us to grow.

If we do this, it will optimize our health and allow us to function better on every level. It will help prevent crises such as panic attacks, nervous breakdowns, violence, suicidal thoughts and other catastrophic events. Being intentional about what we expose ourselves to will help us to get more out of life and have more to offer others as well. What are you feeding your heart, your mind...your soul?

It is important to mention here that knowledge is not enough! You may listen to or read this podcast and really understand it, but unless you practice it, it won't do you any good. You can have all the knowledge in the world about how to be healthy and still be extremely unhealthy because you haven't applied that knowledge. You have to live it!

In parting, let me say that I wish you infinite blessings on your life's journey. As you strive to create a healthy and positive life, my wish for you is that you have an immense experience of peace and joy.

All of Dr. Puff's e-books and podcasts mentioned above are available for free on his website: www.DoctorPuff.com