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12 CHARACTERISTICS OF A MENTALLY STRONG PERSON

Part II

All mentally strong people have four beliefs in common. **First belief:** Mentally strong people get their strength from knowing that they are capable. They believe, **I AM CAPABLE**. I can solve problems. I can go out and face the world. I can create new relationships. I am capable of holding a job. I am capable of learning and studying. I can take care of myself without drugs or alcohol.

Mentally strong people are creative, innovative, and energetic. They do not feel that anyone, including the government, owes them a living. Just the opposite is true. Mentally strong people will feel embarrassed when they are forced to get unemployment or welfare even for a limited time.

Mentally strong people use government help only when needed and are grateful that there is a safety net. However, their strong desire to be independent will drive them out of the system as soon as possible.

Second Belief: THERE IS CAUSE AND EFFECT IN MY LIFE. We are born dependent. The goal is to go from being a dependent person to one that is mentally strong and capable of being independent. Growth from the natural state of dependence to the empowered state of independence requires that you believe that ***THERE IS CAUSE AND EFFECT IN MY LIFE.***

Accepting this concept, you quit blaming other people and other things for any negative experiences that you may inevitably have. This is where you accept that Everything Is My Fault.If I Am Lucky. [Of course, you are not always lucky. Sometimes, things happen that you cannot see coming and that are totally outside of your control.] Everything is my fault is the belief that you are responsible for creating any consequences that happen to you. If it is my fault, THEN I can change it or learn from it and never do it again.

Third Belief: I MAKE A DIFFERENCE; I am important to my parents, brothers and sisters, to my school, and to my friends and acquaintances. What I do affects others. I

have valuable input to give; I will be listened to, and my ideas will be considered. As a result, I end up feeling significant and important.

There are two areas in which I can find my sense of significance and importance: **First**, by having a job, skill, or ability in which I derive a sense of pride and accomplishment. **Second**, by having close, emotional relationship(s). Relationships with a person or persons in which I can find a sense of security and trust.

Fourth Belief: I CAN TOLERATE AND ACCEPT DELAYED GRATIFICATION.

If you look, you can see that people from all walks of life and all ages are having trouble dealing with delayed gratification. It might be a thirteen-year-old who is considering having sex with her boyfriend or the thirty-year-old who is overspending. "Charge now and pay later." Too often, that is the American way. It is the absence of being able to accept delayed gratification.

Addicted people have a problem with delayed gratification. Addiction can come in many forms besides drugs. There are shopaholics, foodaholics, sexaholics, workaholics, gambling, smoking, etc.

It does not matter whether it is an internal chemical addiction or external chemical addiction. Many people who are addicted are not even aware of their addiction.

Some drugs can work oppositely. Xanax, before it was reformulated, is an example of such a drug. Xanax could remove the feelings of high anxiety and replace it with a sense of calm within 10 to 15 minutes. The temptation was, at the slightest sign of anxiety, to take the pill to avoid any feelings of panic/anxiety. Many people became addicted to Xanax and pain pills.

It is not the chemicals in the drugs that make something addictive. It is what the drugs mean to you ("I cannot stand the anxiety/pain that I am feeling.") And then, it is also the effects the drugs produce in you. For something to be addictive, the behavior and/or the substance must have these three elements.

To check to see if you have an addiction, consider these three elements.

- ❖ All addictions will produce highs and lows. The higher the highs and the lower the lows, the more addictive the substance or the behavior is. No one has ever been addicted to a walk in the park or a glass of milk.
- ❖ The addicted person sees the source of the high as outside of themselves. "I need the drug/behavior to give me my high. I can't get high without it." Their "drug-seeking behaviors" can often identify these people.
- ❖ Intermittent reinforcement is the glue that holds the addictive urges in place long after the behaviors or drug use has ended.

Go into a casino and find a slot machine that says, "This machine pays out at a rate of 90 per-cent" (most slots payout at a lot lower rate). Now, what that

means is that **every time you put \$1.00 in the slot machine, you will only get 90 cents back!** How long would you continue to put money in? How addictive would gambling be? Gambling is addictive because it is intermittently reinforced.

- ❖ Gambling, sex, relationships, alcohol, or cocaine are all intermittently reinforced. Cocaine users talk about “chasing the high.” Relationships are notorious for their roller-coaster rides. Alcohol and drugs are known to give you “bad trips.” Does every cigarette you smoke taste good? Do you smoke it anyway? Then you have set up intermit reinforcement.

Do you want to be a mentally strong person who can handle the troubles and difficulties that you are going to have throughout your life? The power is yours.

**If the external things pain you,
it is not they that disturb you,
but your own judgment of them.
And it is in your power
to wipe out that judgment now.**

Marcus Aurelius 121 A.D. Roman Emperor

Strong-minded people understand and know how to use what Marcus Aurelius is teaching us. You, as a strong-minded person, will not react to events, people, or the words that are hurled at you. You respond to what things mean to you! And, you are choosing the meanings that distress you or create the strong-minded person that you are.

The crux of being a strong-minded person is that you, without equivocation, embrace the concept that you are the one that is creating your feelings. No one can make you angry! No one can make you feel loved! Nor can you make someone else feel loved if they are hell-bent on being angry.

**You feel the way you do right now
because of the thoughts
you are thinking at this moment.**

David Burns MD, Stanford University

If you draw it out, it will look like this:



Are you ready to give up your old way of thinking and start taking responsibility for your thoughts/beliefs, feelings/emotions, and behaviors? Below is an exercise that you can use to help identify these three elements in your life.

Take a piece of paper and make your own four columns. Take one of your own life experiences that is loaded with emotions and fill out your own chart.

EQ Worksheet: Event → Meaning → Feeling → Behavior			
As children, EVENTS happened to us that we had no control over. Yet it is not what we experienced that impacted us, it is the MEANING we placed on those events. The meanings produce FEELINGS, both good and bad, and our BEHAVIORS (how we act and react) are based on our feelings. When we become aware of the meanings we have placed on ourselves and our lives, we can choose the meanings we wish to believe. Changing the meanings, changes the way we feel, and our behaviors can change as a result.			
EVENT	MEANING	FEELING	BEHAVIOR
What happened?	What did you decide?	How did that make you feel?	What did you do?
<i>We moved, a lot</i>	I am <u>unwanted</u> I am <u>unlovable</u>	<i>hurt, afraid</i>	<i>Withdraw</i>
	Life is <u>painful</u> The world is <u>scary</u>	<i>angry</i>	<i>Addictions</i>
	Men <u>are not there</u> Women <u>are victims</u>	<i>sad</i>	<i>Shut down</i>
OR -- the same events happened	What meanings would you like to believe?	How would it feel if you believed those?	How would you act?
<i>We moved, a lot</i>	I am <u>Ok!</u> I am <u>Lovable</u>	<i>safe</i>	<i>Act with confidence</i>
	Life is <u>interesting</u> The world is <u>safe</u>	<i>peaceful</i>	<i>Make better life decisions</i>
	Men <u>can be strong</u> Women <u>are compassionate</u>	<i>connected</i>	<i>More intimacy</i>

Matt Perelstein

Repeat this process for any events in your life, which are causing stress for you. Once you can identify the beliefs that are causing your ambivalence and anxiety, then you can choose to change that belief, thereby changing your behavior.

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