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TAKING YOUR LIFE BACK  
RIGHT NOW!

*Personal Empowerment and Goal Setting Strategies*

## **TAKING YOUR LIFE BACK RIGHT NOW! PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT AND GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES**

Oftentimes, when I talk about personal empowerment to women and men who have been in unhealthy relationships, they initially look at me as if I must be speaking a foreign language. The concepts of personal power and that you have control over your own destiny and how you can make that happen may seem unbelievable to you as well. And rightfully so: some of the consequences of having been in unhealthy relationships are that you may feel out of control, weak, defenseless, hopeless, unstructured, unable to focus, or that whatever you try is destined to fail. Well, let me be the first to tell you that these ideas—while understandable—are not true. Let's get started!

### **PERSONAL POWER...WHAT'S THAT?**

Personal power is not a mystery or only available to a select few. There are rules to achieving power, but anyone can learn the rules and create success by using them.

In order to gain personal power, you need to be accountable for your own life. No one but you has this responsibility. It is an awesome task, but a rewarding one as well. The good news is that every positive accomplishment you have from now on will be yours alone. You will have done it on your own and through your own efforts. Isn't that exciting? The bad news is that if you fail, you won't be able to blame it on anyone else. It is time to stop playing the blame game with anyone who has pushed you down before this very moment (your parents, your significant other, your boss or coworkers, children, or friends). In order to achieve personal power and success, you are going to have to work hard on yourself and take full accountability for your actions. No one except you is in charge of your destiny!

One of the universal truths I tell my own patients is that we all have free will to do almost whatever we'd like in our lives. Of course, we have to abide by laws, but then again, we have free will as to whether or not we do that, don't we?

So, the only limitations you have are those you place on yourself. Free will gives you choices and these create outcomes. There are always consequences for every choice you make. You have seen those consequences in the choices you have made to remain in unhealthy relationships. Other choices can have better consequences, such as success and happiness. Can you see that your free will makes you responsible for the outcome of your life?

Albert Einstein said, "We are what we think about ourselves every day." In your life, you will create exactly what you feel you deserve. Therefore, if you want a different life than you have now, it is important that you give yourself positive messages of encouragement to support it.

You have free will in your thoughts as well as your behavior. You can choose to think of yourself in any number of ways. So, ask yourself the following question:

*How do I choose to think about myself? Am I:*

- Weak?
- Frightened?
- Frail?
- Strong?
- Confident?
- Powerful?
- A failure?
- Not good enough?
- Magnificent?
- Successful?
- Unlovable?
- Stupid?
- Angry?
- Thoughtful?
- Loving?
- Generous?
- A quitter?

- Resilient?

Do you relate more closely to the negative comments than the positive ones? Remember, negative voices are the voices of those in your life who have treated you unkindly, including yourself. It is these voices that are helping to disable you. You have a choice about whether or not you listen to these voices and how you choose to respond. Who says that you have to agree with them? Now, you have the opportunity to discard unkind voices and listen to your own clear and powerful voice. You have free will!

## **CHOICES**

To make new and better choices, you first need to understand those you have made in the past. Let's take a look at whether you've been living your life actively or reactively.

By that I mean:

- Have you pursued your own interests?
- Have you spoken up when things didn't feel right?
- Have you thought about your own goals and gone after them?
- Have you made a personal plan as to how you can succeed at your goals?

(These are active choices.)

Or did you:

- Adjust your moods and plans to your abuser's moods and plans?
- Defer what you wanted in life until "the time was right"?
- Keep quiet when you should have stood up for yourself?

(These are reactive choices.)

I have found that in most destructive relationships, the latter situation is usually true. There may have been consequences for trying to live a more active

life, but now that you are trying to make more empowered decisions, I'm going to encourage you to become more like the person in the first list.

A former patient of mine described what it was like growing up in a family in which she felt she had to live reactively to her father and the consequences it had upon her now as a thirty-five year old woman:

*When I was a young girl, the whole house revolved around my dad. Whatever he wanted to do, we did. Whatever he wanted to eat, my mom or I fixed it. If he was in a bad mood when he got home, we knew the distance we were supposed to keep and how much we were allowed to say to him. When he accused me of something that wasn't true, I went along with him and apologized instead of making waves. It was just easier that way. I'm 35 now and my relationship with my dad still hasn't changed and I've had other relationships that seem to follow the same path.*

## **ACTIVITY**

### **Getting to Know What I Want**

If you have been living a reactive life until now, it is time to ask yourself the following important questions. Write down the questions and answers, knowing that you may not have the answers right away. You have the right to change your mind about them whenever you want. No one is going to judge you.

1. What do I want from my life?
2. Who do I want to become?
3. When I have the answer to #2, how will I act? How will I feel? What will it look like?
4. What will I have to overcome in order to have what I want?

These are very deep and personal questions. You may not have asked them before. Furthermore, you may not ever have known that you had the right to ask them of yourself. Most women and many men as well are often "trained" not to think for themselves. As a child, you may have been taught that you

should put others first, and to do otherwise was selfish and narcissistic. But think of it this way for a moment: Have you ever been on an airplane? Do you recall the emergency instructions you were given by the flight attendant? “If there is a loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will descend.” You were told to put on your own mask first and then help your children. Why? Because unless you think of yourself first and you are safe, you cannot be of any help to your children or others who depend upon you.

The same is true of everything you do. You will be more able to help others if you take care of your own needs first. Remember the airplane story as you continue reading through the rest of this e-book and do this important and empowering work on yourself.

## **ACTIVITY**

### **What Does Personal Power Mean to You?**

Let’s begin examining what personal power is to you. This will help you define your goals more clearly. Make a check mark next to each description that fits for you. Feel free to really think closely about these words and mark more than one response.

Is personal power about:

- Money?
- A nice house?
- Spirituality?
- Contentment?
- Freedom from fear?
- Education?
- Knowing that your kids are okay?
- A good job?
- Self-confidence?
- Self-knowledge?
- Self-reliance/not having to depend on others?

Which responses did you select? If you chose items such as job, house, money, or education, that's completely fine. Remember, no one is judging your responses. Now you know that what you value in the most immediate future is a plan that includes steps to accumulate the basic necessities in life and reach a concrete, visible goal. If you checked more items involving internal needs, those are also a good place to start taking charge of your life.

You may not be your only critic on the road to personal expression and involvement. Others in your life may not enjoy the "new you." They are used to the passive person they have come to know and use for their own benefit. At this point, you have another decision to make: Is your success more valuable than the opinions of those who would keep you down? If you are passionate about your success, then your family and friends will eventually come to accept and appreciate it as well. If not, it will be time for you to have a talk with them and ask them to examine their own motives for keeping you "stuck."

Only you can decide what you need in order to feel more powerful and successful in your life. Others may have ideas for you and will try to tell you what you need, but yours is the only voice that matters. You are the only person in the world who is going to be living your life. Those people can decide what they need to make their own lives a success. So far, how has listening to others tell you what you need worked out for you?

Maggie, another patient of mine put so many of these ideas I just wrote about into words when she told me this story:

*My mother used to tell me that I didn't need to go to college like my brothers. I would be a good wife to an important man some day, and what good was art history and geometry going to do to help me with that? While I was waiting for Prince Charming to show up, however, I had to work and make some money. Because I didn't have any real education, I had to take minimum wage jobs in which my bosses were real jerks to me. They knew the power they had over me. What was I going to do? Quit? Without a college education, I'd just be going to another job like the one before with other jerky bosses.*

*So finally the “Prince” shows up and I get married. My husband told me all I needed was an allowance, a roof over my head, food to eat, and sex from him once a week—the way he liked it, of course. I can’t believe I fell for this garbage for so long. Now, at 39, I’m divorced from the guy, back in college and almost ready to graduate. I have worked at some great places in the meantime and have so much more confidence in myself. It was very hard and I had a lot of obstacles to overcome, both within myself and financially. I feel so proud of myself for doing all this. For the first time in my life, I feel like I have a future.*

So, as you waltz through your life, I invite you to remember an important concept: *If something is working, do more of it. If it’s not working, so something else.* Sounds simple and stupid doesn’t it?

However, think about the number of times a plan, behavior, or thought has not worked out well, but you kept repeating it expecting a different result. That, my friend, is the definition of insanity. Therefore, if your friends, coworkers, or family insist that you would be a fool to try a different and perhaps riskier plan, or that you stick with what you know, remember the idea above. If it hasn’t worked to your satisfaction before, why continue to do it and expect a new outcome?

## **ACTIVITY**

### **What Would I Do If...**

Let me ask you two more questions in an effort to crystallize what you would like to accomplish:

- If you knew that you had three months of healthy left, how would you want to spend those three months?
- On your deathbed, what would you be sad that you had never accomplished? What passion had you denied yourself?

Get as clear as you possibly can with these questions. They will help you

on your path of success and—more immediately—as you go along in the rest of this short book. You may want to write this activity down.

So far, you have hopefully developed a clearer vision of what you need to make your life more fulfilling and more complete. It is time to start taking action. If you have been living a passive existence, this will be difficult for you to comprehend. Be patient with yourself. You are learning new skills, establishing new brain pathways, and thinking about yourself and your abilities differently.

## **TAKING ACTION**

*You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.—Eleanor Roosevelt*

Benjamin Franklin said, “Well done is better than well said.” What did he mean by that? Well, you can go around talking about all you are going to do with your life, but how far does that really get you? About as far as your mouth.

In the real world, people don’t care about how you “feel.” They care about how you behave. Try telling your boss that you “feel” badly that you didn’t finish that important report. Or, tell a judge that you “feel” that you have a good case, even though you have no hard evidence to support it and see how far you get in that courtroom. In my work as a therapist, I talk to parents on a daily basis who tell me that they “feel” like their kids are good kids, despite the fact that the children take drugs, are mouthy and disrespectful, cheat on tests, break curfew, run away, and beat up their siblings. When I tell them, “Actually, it sounds like your kids are horrifying. What have you told me so far that would lead me to believe that they are anything except little hoodlums?” Once again, they just “feel” like the kids are good and are just behaving badly. Right...it’s the behavior that counts.

Life does not reward your feelings, it rewards your actions. So, don’t “feel” like you should be successful. Do something about it. Don’t wait for luck to

strike. That will not happen. I firmly believe that *luck is when preparation meets opportunity*. Prepare on a daily basis for that opportunity to meet you and shake your hand!

## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

There is actually a very simple, time-honored plan for creating success in your life: Be, Do, and Have.

- *Be* committed to a goal.
- *Do* whatever it takes to achieve that goal, and then you will,
- *Have* what you want.

Most often, when our lives or our plans fail, we conveniently skip the middle step, as that is the hardest one. So, what will you have to do to achieve your goal?

- Go back to school?
- Get more training?
- Request more information?
- Enlist the help of a mentor or guide?
- Work late?
- Make childcare arrangements?
- Deal with your own fears or guilt?
- Make a lengthy apprenticeship in a field you'd like to try?
- Examine the difficulties in your life?

Get honest with yourself about why you haven't been important enough until this moment. In his book, *Life Strategies*, Dr. Phil McGraw discusses a seven-step process for achieving goals. I think this is incredibly wise advice (the steps are his, the parentheses are mine):

1. Describe your goal in terms of an event or behavior (not a feeling you'd like to have).

2. It must be measurable (losing ten pounds, for example).
3. Your goal must have a timeline (not just “someday”).
4. It has to be controllable (you cannot depend on luck or fate).
5. You must be able to plan and program a strategy that will get you to your goal.
6. Create steps to your goal (such as making a daily list).
7. Create accountability toward your goal (tell someone about it).

Get clear about it, and then do whatever research it takes to achieve what you want.

Are you actually willing to do whatever it takes to achieve your goal? If you can honestly say that you are not, that's fine. Perhaps this is not the perfect time in your life to make such an enormous effort. Maybe a year from now would be better. Maybe when your kids are out of diapers. When they leave home to be on their own might be the perfect moment to begin your life with passion.

Just remember that life will continue to roll by day after day whether or not you decide to do something different with it. The rest of us will not wait for you, or your perfect moment, to take action. We will get on with our own lives and achieve our own successes that may make you envious. Unless you do something different, all of your tomorrows will be exactly the same as they are today. If that's good enough for you, then that's more than good enough for me.

I don't think that is you, however. I believe that by virtue of the fact that you decided to get this little book, you are more than ready for change. You've already experienced the horrible sameness in your life when you spent time with those who treated you unkindly. You just kept waiting for the perfect time for them to change, come to their senses, see you differently, and understand what you were saying. That doesn't work, does it? So, the change will have to come from you.

What is it that you risk by not doing anything? By not making change? By not being committed to your own success? What is really the very worst thing

that could happen? Will anyone you love—including yourself—die? That is certainly the worst fear most of us have.

Before we end, I'd like for you to say the following out loud right now:

***“I know that taking risks in my life may be terrifying for a while. I know that it will be uncomfortable because it is a new skill. But I am worth it. I will not allow \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of someone in your life that tries to dissuade you from your dreams and goals) to control me anymore by disallowing myself a chance for success and a happy life!”***

You've visualized your goals and taken action steps in preparation for personal success and true power. Now, get yourself in gear and get moving!

If you would like to read more about this topic, as well as healthy versus unhealthy relationships, and the ways you can create the kind of life you'd like, I invite you to investigate my books, *But I Love Him*, *Destructive Relationships*, and *But He Never Hit Me* (release date: March, 2005). They are available in bookstores and online booksellers. If you would like to stay informed and receive e-mail messages from me, feel free to sign up for my confidential e-mail list on the homepage of my website: [www.drjillmurray.com](http://www.drjillmurray.com).

**TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF**