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# **Be Your Own Entrepreneur**

## **How to Create a Self-determined Life**

Part 1

**By Paul Halbe**

**Translated from German to English by Karen Leube**

**A SINNphOLL<sup>®</sup>-book**

May 2013

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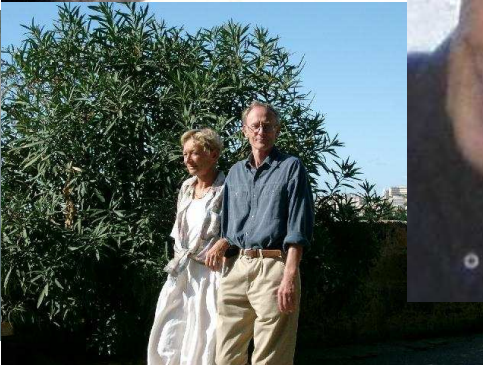
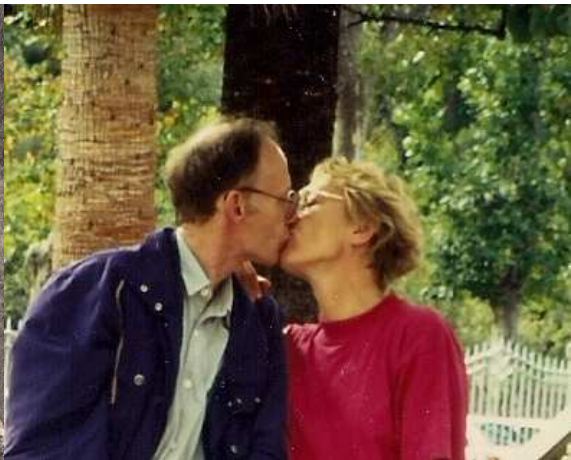
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## **How to Create a Self-determined Life**

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### **Abstract**

The only way to follow your own path is to do everything in your power to liberate yourself from internal and outward forces. This calls for self-esteem. Being motivated and taking the initiative will allow you to reach new horizons. The intellectual capacity required for this involves concentration and memory.

Keeping a diary, recording your daily events along with the insights gained and experiences gathered is at the heart of all self-realization. Mistakes and errors are the starting points for self-improvement. Your attitude toward others should be one of benevolence.

Leading a self-determined life will give you joie de vivre.

## Life's balancing act: Self-esteem

When you apply for a job, your cover letter usually includes a request for a personal interview. This is because you are aware that your credentials and the facts and figures in your résumé only provide insight into **part** of who you really are. Business owners and their human resources staff think the same way. When they hire a new employee, they also want an interview to get a personal impression of the applicant.

So how should I present myself? How should I behave in order to demonstrate that I am the right person for the job that has been advertised? These are questions that applicants ask themselves as they prepare for an interview. Potential employers use formal credentials to shortlist potential new employees based on their professional qualifications, but they also want to find out about the candidates' characteristics and attitudes. How self-confident is the applicant? Does she fit on our team? Is the "chemistry" right?

Both applicants and potential employers know that this chemistry can't really be verified until they get to know each other better during the probationary period.

### Born into the world of our parents

With all due respect to psychology, there is nothing that allows you to look inside a person. You cannot plumb the depths of a person's inner workings. And no one knows himself or herself down to the last detail. It is only when I have engaged in life that I can know what kind of **thinking, speaking and actions** I will use on my way and to orient myself when it comes to coping with challenges, dealing with disappointments, resolving conflicts, correcting mistakes and lending meaning to my existence.

In order to achieve stability and continuity in life, to provide a foothold on the tightrope of my life's unfolding path, I need self-esteem. This is what gives me the conviction that I can follow my path in life under my own power. As a child, although I have the will to live, I do not yet have self-esteem. I acquire self-esteem little by little, by engaging with my surroundings, especially through experiences with my mother, my father and the other people into whose context I was born.

Determining factors for me as a baby and toddler and as a child in daycare are the affection and affirmation of life, the role model and

the guidance I am exposed to. This allows me to achieve **self-assuredness**, a security that is dependent on my surroundings, rather than security in life based on my own thoughts and decisions. It is a security that is dependent on feelings.

As a child I do not yet have a mature capacity for perception, intellectual abilities or orientation for how to behave. As I learn, I first grow into what the adults model as their world for me: their ideas about how to shape one's life and the way they behave, their milieu.

## We are all children of our time

All mothers, all fathers, all caregivers, all preschool teachers and all teachers live out their individual attitudes towards life based on their individual self-esteem and are all children of their time. They make **mistakes in their child-rearing**. One of the worst of these mistakes occurs when, in order to justify a boundary, a mother says to her child, "What will people think of us!" In so doing, she puts her child at the mercy of the zeitgeist and rears her to bow to the rules of others, exposing her own weak self-esteem.

Every era has its own special "balancing act". Our time imposes work as the "act" of choice. I have to **work** in order to be recognized in our society. Whether you are male or female, if you have a regular job, pay your taxes and make the social security contributions required to insure you against the risks associated with life, you will be recognized as a fully valid member of society. In line with the income that you earn based on your professional qualifications, you can participate in the general prosperity.

**Our jobs have become the be-all and end-all of our existence.** In all the previous centuries, our self-esteem was derived from being part of a family, a clan and a people. Today, we get it from our career! The problem children of our society are no longer the black sheep of a family, but rather the people who have failed to learn any skills. You have to have a profession that serves society's prosperity.

## The self-esteem of freedom

Women who care for their families, supporting their husbands in the traditional distribution of gender roles and devoting themselves to rearing their children in their role as mother – and as such not being available to the labor market – have to be very self-assured these days and sense the support of their families. Society itself does not acknowledge them for their work. Quite the contrary: they are actually objects of scorn. The credential of **housewife and mother**, which up to a few decades ago was passed down in families from generation to generation, has disappeared. In



Germany, politicians talking about the child-rearing allowance refer to it with the derisive term “kitchen bonus”.

But women who have continued to receive their “family” credentials or have acquired them for the first time attest to the fact that a person, whether male or female, is capable of developing his or her very personal self-esteem, as a member of a group and as an individual. No one is condemned to live his or her life with the self-esteem imposed upon him or her by society.

Here is another glance back into history. In earlier centuries, the status of a person was determined by the family into which he or she was born – peasant, serf, nobleman. And it was opportune to be one of the victors in the waves of war. Otherwise, you were a slave.

The revolution of Christianity is that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. This is what granted human beings **the self-esteem of freedom**. Freedom alone empowers us to live our own self-esteem.

Our actions allow our self-esteem to be seen

What is the basis of our self-esteem? A test we have passed? A contest we have won? Recognition for a special achievement? It is the **feeling** that I am someone and I can do something. A feeling that can also handle defeat and is in fact reinforced by it. After all, defeats force me to assert myself. The same is true after we fall down. We have to pull ourselves together, stand up again and start over. We are not perfect. We err and make mistakes. Our knowledge is limited. There is no point in denying it, minimizing it, or putting a different spin on it. We have to accept it, continue to be able to learn and seize the opportunities to improve ourselves. That’s how you acquire self-esteem.

I have to internalize the fact that despite all my imperfection and even as a loser, I am not nothing. Instead, I have worth as a person. That’s what lets me get back up on my feet. This **feeling of worth** is something that I acquire as a child from the love of my parents and from the affection of those who care for me. Praise and scolding instill my bearings in me. As a young person, the recognition and affection, contempt and enmity of my peers become increasingly significant for me. I learn to fit into a group.

As young people, we acquire self-esteem from the feeling of **belonging**. We fall into line, find our roles, assume the behavior that is expected of us. The same idols, the same clothes, the same language. In addition to conflicts with our parents and siblings, in the group of our peers, we learn to assert ourselves and to not shy away from conflicts. Otherwise, we will take on the status of followers. Which is what happens if our parents have failed to instill us with a robust **set of values**.



Self-esteem based on a set of values: Do we have our own point of view, or do we conform to the status quo? Do we leave the group to remain true to our values, or do we throw our values overboard? Values: Are we honest? Do we respect the property of others? Do we badmouth others? Do we respect our own integrity and that of others? Can we admit to mistakes and apologize? Do we bear grudges? Do we forgive? Are we prepared to make sacrifices to preserve the group? Self-esteem is reflected in the way we behave.

Belonging to a group forces us to develop communication skills, notions of norms for dealing with others and the perception of situations and processes that is close to reality. Young people who withdraw as loners and flee to a virtual world miss out on an important phase of their development.

### What meaning do I give my life?

Many members of the up-and-coming generation are in top form as young adults, full of élan. They want to change the entire world, seize control from the old guys in charge and create a future based on their own ideas. But you can also find the other extreme: moving back in with their parents instead of daring to do something themselves and developing their independence, demanding a piece of the government safety net at every turn. To keep from losing your balance, you should not overestimate yourself, but at the same time, don't run for cover either. Be self-critical and remain grounded!

This phase is also accompanied by questions you have to ask yourself: Why do I feel strong and able to cope with life? Which situations do I feel unsure of myself in? What is my optimism based on? How do I see the future I am growing into? Can I and do I want to work on shaping this future with my generation?

**Self-esteem requires life to have meaning the way a flame requires oxygen to keep burning.** What meaning do I give my life? What do I want to achieve?

Here is a suggestion for how to find clues for answering these questions: Take a closer look at the people living around you to date. Without emotions, and with the intention of being as fair to them as possible, seeing the positive sides you have experienced as well as the negative ones. What am I grateful for? What was well-intended but stupid? What burdens me?

And then a view that is independent of my self: What are my father, my mother, my siblings, my grandparents and my uncles and aunts proud of? How is this reflected in their self-esteem? Then ask, What are my friends, fellow students and my sports buddies

proud of? What do they believe they can do? When are they weak and fearful? And then, What are the motives for their actions? Why do they do certain things? How do they talk? Why do they talk the way they talk? What's behind it? All talk and no action? Or do they put their money where their mouth is? For example, is there a "shrimp" who perceives his or her height as a handicap and tries to compensate for it by pushing himself or herself to the forefront at all times?

How do the people around me see me?

More questions: Who has what it takes, but doesn't show it because she doesn't believe she can do it? Who always wants to be in the majority? Work through all of these questions and any other questions that might occur to you, preferably in writing. And then **apply them to yourself**, look at yourself and place yourself in this tableau of individuals. It's true. All these questions are a real pain. But the alternative is just living with abandon, living it up and risking that you will end up somewhere where you won't feel good, have trouble getting out again, get stuck, feel that a cloud of bad luck is hovering over you, fail to seek the reasons for this within yourself, not to mention starting with changes with yourself. Good intentions but not more.

One exercise that is helpful for finding one's self is the following: Make a list of all the terms our language offers that refer to people. For instance, real friend, super buddy, good listener, spontaneous person, brown-nose, know-it-all, hair-splitter, high achiever, someone who deals with whatever life throws at him, narrow-minded specialist, daredevil, reliable partner, font of knowledge, good observer, boaster, hippie wannabe, squabbler, etc. There is a wealth of words and idioms used to characterize people as they are **perceived** by others. This can be wrong and slanderous. It is subjectivity that has become reality. It comes about through communication and has a strong influence, especially when the social media send it out into the world and amplify it.

The task: Take the individuals living in our surroundings to date and assign them to the labels on our list. How are the people seen by their surroundings? Then, for each person, mark whether we think this evaluation is right or wrong, whether I agree or disagree. For example, my mother thinks my father is a coward. That is wrong. My father just takes longer to make a decision.

The pièce de résistance of this work: Applying the list to yourself! How do the people living in my surroundings see me? As a lovable peer? As a clown? As an unconventional thinker? As a front man? As a chaotic person? And so on. The second to last question: Do I see myself this way too? Or is none of this correct or at most, only some of it? The final question: Why am I seen this way?

## How do I perceive myself?

The way others value us plays a key role in shaping our self-esteem. We should try not to depend on it. By the same token, neither should we sit up on a high horse and say that I don't care what people say about me, since I know myself what I'm worth. Everyone wants to be **acknowledged** and to be as **popular** as possible. Words of praise from our boss, from our training instructor or our professor feel good. Friends who accept us as we are feel good. Recognition of our achievements feels good. However, this "feels good" goes too far if we are dependent on it, are addicted to it, and are unhappy without it. If this is the case, we are manipulable!

In my perception of my surroundings, it is important to realize what other people think about me. Not, however, because my well-being depends on it, but because it provides me with information that I need to find and evaluate myself, in order to be able to compare the way I perceive myself with the way others perceive me. While there will always be a discrepancy between these two perceptions, if it is too great or even contradictory, then there is something wrong with my self-awareness. More illusion than substance? Or too nondescript to be properly recognized? Am I unable to communicate what I am?

There are situations in life in which it is obvious that we are living in a way that is controlled by outside influences or that we have self-esteem that is autonomous. Here's an example: I lose my job. Am I ashamed of myself and wear a bag over my head, or do I go to my friends and ask them to help me find a job? Another example: I reach retirement age and leave my job as a top manager of my company. Do I withdraw and suffer from the fact that I am now a private individual without any status symbols and am no longer needed, even though I still feel completely fit? Or do I have a project in which I volunteer my time, contributing my know-how and my experience? What about the Hollywood star whose fans are no longer interested in her? Or the quiz show host whose ratings plunge?

There are **shining examples** of a successful "change of scenery": helping the up-and-coming generation, providing service for a good cause after a successful career, providing social services, promoting research, taking on a task in the field of art and culture or setting up a foundation. All of these activities demonstrate a feeling of self-worth from which people know how to make themselves useful.

To acquire "adult" self-esteem, you need to detach yourself from the trial phases of your youth, leave the "borrowed" self-esteem of the group behind and find personal **self-confidence**. This is a

constant balancing act that you cannot achieve by standing still, but only by constantly moving forward in your life. Be active! Do something!

**We are so talented!**

And what do I have to do to develop independent self-esteem? The first step involves ongoing reflection as the expression of conscious living. The second step calls for accepting my lifelong imperfection. The third step involves a way of dealing with my feelings that continually guides me toward life's joys.

**Reflection:** Constantly thinking and writing about the fundamental questions of my existence in a new and more profound way. Where do I come from? Where do I want to go? Who am I? What do I want to do in this world? What means are at my disposal for doing it? Which of them are immutably imposed on me? Which of them can I influence?

If you refuse to reflect on these questions, others will tell you what to do in line with their own notions. Your thoughts will be controlled by outside parties. Sometimes it doesn't fit very well, but you don't do anything about it because you are cowardly, inept and lazy. You moan, you scold, and you condemn, putting everyone in a bad mood. You are a weakling who just cannot be taught.

Reflection calls on you to get out of your rut, to pause, become quiet, listen to yourself, think about your thoughts, words and actions, re-examine your relationship with your fellow human beings – and ask yourself questions!

**Imperfection:** Even if we would like to be perfect, and we are constantly tempted to try, we are not perfect, all-knowing, almighty, omnipresent, timeless, absolutely just, showing unconditional love. No, we are imperfect. This is what motivates us in life! Expanding our knowledge without any limits, gaining new insights, gathering experience, learning lessons, correcting ourselves, improving, recognizing interactions, making distinctions down to the last detail, thinking in terms of alternatives, sharpening our senses, seeing and hearing precisely ...

We are so talented! It is so much fun to use one's talents! You may have to overcome yourself, at least at the beginning or when starting over, but it is so worth it! It is not unlike the incredible view after hiking to the top of a summit or the feeling of euphoria after you have run a marathon.

**Character gives freedom**

**Feelings:** If you allow them to run rampant, you will lose your freedom. And you will demote your sense of reason to its lackey, which has to keep coming up with new justifications and excuses. Without a robust character, you can't come to terms with your feelings, and they turn into a danger. You cannot live them as love and joy.

My character determines the way I deal with myself and with my fellow human beings. Am I honest with myself? And with others? Do I deal with my things carefully? And with those of others? Am I reliable? Can I count on myself? Can I do without things? Can I be seduced? Can I admit to mistakes? Do I keep my word? Can I restrain myself? Am I so self-assured that I can live to my fullest?

If you are the epitome of self-control, you have misunderstood the meaning of character. My character, which like all of my other expressions of life requires ongoing self-improvement, gives me security in my actions. Without it, I would have to reflect in every situation. It gives me the freedom to **be spontaneous**. It helps me to diminish the discrepancy between self-perception and other perception. It opens up the joys of life to me!

The freedom given to me by my character must be used, to keep orienting myself and my fellow human beings toward what makes life in this world **worth living**. This means focusing attention on people who build peace, save lives, comfort others, give love, alleviate need, create values, resolve conflicts, give praise and recognition, provide hospitality, excite us with works of music and art, . . . discover nature and immerse themselves in it.

In order to allow this orientation to predominate, we have to shift our gaze from what brings us down, spoils our mood and turns us into spoil sports. We cannot pay any more attention to what is bad and reckless than what is required to keep it in check. This begins with us: not allowing our alter ego to get the upper hand, and overcoming ourselves.

Our **yearnings** give us notions of absolute justice, boundless freedom, unlimited knowledge, unbreakable peace and total love. The name for our notions of perfection based on our yearning is **God**. Living toward God, in the conviction that death is not the absolute end, but the start of a new beginning, gives us hope. Our self-esteem that is filled with **joy** can hinge on this.

### The conveyor belt to a self-determined future: Asking questions

The freedom to think

Personal development uses the ability to ask questions. With questions, you can open up the future. Asking questions means wanting to know something specific about something. We have the freedom to think and are not controlled by instincts but instead are **capable of understanding**. Individuals who do not ask questions remain ignorant and choose not to develop.

After I graduated from high school, lots of people wanted to know what I wanted to become. I didn't know. I didn't recognize any particular talent in myself. I knew what teachers did, and the same went for doctors. And I didn't want to learn either of those professions. So what was I supposed to become?

Back then, if you managed to get your *Abitur*, the academic track high school diploma, you could study whatever you wanted. Two things were for sure: I had to leave home, and I had to go for a university degree that would allow me to be as flexible as possible in my later career. I had no doubts that I would find what I was looking for. I knew that I would use my questions to succeed as soon as I found something I was interested in.

### Approaching reality

We use questions to help us size up a situation or make predictions about the future. The **answers** to the questions **serve as the basis** for shaping a situation or for preparing ourselves for the future. Since both questions and answers can be based on false assumptions, this sizing up and shaping situations is only productive if they approximate reality as well as possible.

I found out that there was a German Institute for Film and Television in Munich that offered a university degree. To study there, however, I had to take an entrance exam. Only twenty students from among the several hundred applicants were taken. I sent letters with queries, went to Munich and questioned students who were already enrolled at the institute. I used the information for in-depth preparation and I passed.

Life is the ongoing challenge of asking questions. To meet this challenge, you have to **stay curious**. We have desires, have to solve problems and manage tasks. We want to reach goals and

overcome resistance. Many of us want to “make it.” Some of us who feel that we do not get enough attention want to “show everyone.” To translate our desires into deeds, we have to make decisions and act on them.

## Be curious!

In many cases, asking questions is no different than seeking answers that have already been given by others. Learning is no different than adopting the **answers of others**. Since as children and adolescents, we are unable to predict what we should learn that will be beneficial for our lives, this decision is made for us by our parents, teachers, politicians and civil servants. This subjects us to learning stress that stifles our curiosity. And even worse, we do not learn to develop the skill of taking the **initiative** for learning!

Some young people find classroom learning easy. I always envied them during my school days. Later, however, I realized that while their good grades gave them an advantage at the start of their careers, they soon lagged behind if they were unable to translate their knowledge into action. Similar to a computer, it doesn't help if the knowledge programmed into it is never used.

No matter how much we learn and study, we have to be sure to retain both our curiosity, as well as our **sense of reality**. How can I apply what I have learned? Where I can try it out? In what situations can I make use of it? I was one of the first participants in a Studiosus study tour because I wanted to go to Greece and Athens to visit the Acropolis. After all, I had been put through the mill learning Greek at school for years.

## Acting from the helicopter perspective

You need **the dimensions and the context** of what you have taken on board as knowledge. Otherwise, knowledge quickly turns into a collection of trivia that might help you as a contestant on a quiz show, but not for shaping your life.

I had read and heard a lot about the Holy Land, even as a child. But it wasn't until I traveled to Israel and Jordan that I even came close to understanding the historical events that took place there. Being in the actual place, engaging with the situation, preparing for the visit in-depth, **following up on what you have seen and heard**, this is how you gain insight and experience that form the awareness from which life is shaped.

In this process, situations can be so powerful that you are completely absorbed by them. I experienced this in Brazil when I was working on development assistance projects. It wasn't until months later that I was able to deal with my impressions and be completely present back in my place in Europe. A sense of reality



requires **the distance of the helicopter perspective**. Otherwise, you can't see the forest for the trees.

## Exploring the world

Science and research are characterized by systematized processes of asking and responding. A **critical distance** is respected. This creates the prerequisites for understanding reality and unleashes possibilities for shaping situations. You take on knowledge and the tried and tested experiences of those who have gone before you, subject them to critical review and open up new perspectives through questions.

Performing research means asking questions. You put together preliminary answers, or hypotheses. You have ideas about what the answer might look like. Your assumptions are tested under various conditions. While the final answer may not necessarily be the answer you sought, it may still be of value. The quest for a new sea route to India culminated in the discovery of America.

Some people lose their ability to ask questions during their childhood and their youth. Responsible for this are adults who, in their role as caregivers, are unable or unwilling to educate them. If that is the case, you have to relearn how to ask questions, no matter how strenuous or inconvenient this may be. After all, living means discovering the world, finding your way around it, achieving self-realization, and not going to seed as someone who warded off all attempts to bring them up properly.

Learning to ask questions in the right way is something you learn as a child if your parents are smart

Parents are familiar with the developmental phase in which their children ask questions nonstop. This is a very important phase for the children. If their parents do not deal with it properly, they can do a lot of damage. On the other hand, if they are smart in the way they respond to their children's thirst for knowledge, they can create ideal conditions for their further development.

If a child's thirst for knowledge is adequately quenched, she will gain more and more insights that will stimulate her to new discoveries based on new questions. **Children's questions must be taken seriously, and must not be considered dumb.** The answers have to be honest, be as close to the truth as possible; however, they also must not overwhelm the questioner.

Incorrect responses on the part of parents during the phase in which their children ask questions incessantly can have the following consequences:

- quick resignation

- low self-confidence
- passiveness
- anxiety toward mysterious surroundings
- imaginings that are not based on reality
- defiance
- communication disorders.

We should all check whether we are plagued by these sorts of impairments.

Improve the principles behind your actions on an ongoing basis!

When you are a young adult, before you storm out into the big wide world all full of energy and ambition, it is useful to pause for a moment and ask, What am I good at? Where do I need to improve?

- Am I able to organize my learning myself?
- Can I admit gaps in my knowledge?
- Do I tend to think that other people are smarter than me?
- Am I afraid to embarrass myself?
- Do I often blurt things out?
- Do I become aggressive when people don't take me seriously?
- Do I only speak when I am asked something?

For most people, staying abreast of new developments in their area of work is a given. They read the relevant journals, are members of professional associations, go to conferences, attend continuing education courses and share their experiences with their colleagues. But **our lives are more than our careers** and are more than our professional expertise. A great deal has to do with our characteristics. And they can be changed and improved. We are citizens, voters, partners, mothers, fathers, community members and neighbors.

In order not to appear with “borrowed self-esteem” in our web of relationships by not daring to break out of the patterns of the majority, we need self-assuredness, which grows out of **knowledge and life experience**. We acquire knowledge and life experience by observing and communicating, by reading and experiencing, and by reflecting and forming opinions.

The two big question areas

There are two areas in which we should constantly review, improve and expand the **state of our knowledge** and our **ability to take action**:

1. Politics, business and society, as well as

## 2. Everything related to interpersonal relationships.

The latter point has a great deal to do with our feelings. Conventional wisdom, examples from history and literature, research from the social sciences and events in our life context help us deal with these feelings.

We experience the areas mentioned in the first point in the way they impact us. We feel like victims if we have no idea why development goes the way it does. In this case, we are citizens without representation.

Observing, perceiving, questioning and reflecting constitute the first and direct level of information and experience. The second level is the virtual world with the information it offers. In order not to drown in the flood of information, we have to be able to differentiate between what is important for us and what is not. Direct your attention!

Otherwise, we will fall prey to anything and everything that appears to be interesting. In dealing with our surroundings, we need to keep a critical distance and have exact ideas of what fosters and enriches us and allows us to be independent.

### The criteria for our store of knowledge

There are criteria that tell us when our store of knowledge is sufficiently large and up to date:

1. When it comes to information, we recognize whether it is **complete** or if something essential has been left out. This is because we know the facts and the context.
2. When it comes to presentations, especially with argumentations, we recognize whether they are **consistent or whether they contain contradictions**.
3. When it comes to problem-solving, we recognize the alternatives and can **weigh** which arguments speak for and which ones speak against the different possibilities.

If we meet these criteria, not only are we able to discuss the topics in question, but we can also meet the requirements for using our current knowledge to develop our own scenarios, as well as to make carefully considered decisions and put them into practice. This opens up the **scope** for a self-determined life.

Any skill that is not practiced will atrophy. For the skill of asking specific questions, there are three outstanding ways to practice:

1. creating sets of questions
2. conducting interviews and
3. using a time planner.

## The three practice areas

### Sets of questions:

Each of us has projects that we would like to carry out. Always be planning one of them, a trip, for instance! To do this, you need to create detailed sets of questions – for everything and everyone that can be asked for information you need for the trip. Structure the questions, work through the answers by asking new questions, use a mind map to create **associations**, set **priorities** – and continuously: questions and answers. This is how you work your way into any project.

### Interviews:

Observation alone does not suffice if you want to get to know other people. You have to have conversations with them and cannot be afraid to ask questions. If you do this tactfully and unobtrusively, most people will perceive such questions as interest in them, in their work and their circumstances.

If you for your part also share something about yourself, the conversation will not deteriorate into a one-sided cross-examination. If you have the impression that the person you are speaking with knows something about the areas you are interested in, you can ask them if you may interview them at some point. For this purpose, you should put together a dozen or more questions.

Furthermore: On a regular basis, choose a prominent public figure and prepare a **fictitious interview** that you would like to conduct with him/her.

### Time planner:

An organizer, i.e., a calendar with pages for the months, weeks and individual days of the year, helps you to keep track of your activities. Similar to physical exercises you do every day, you can use the organizer to train your capacity to ask questions: Every evening, **write down** what information you have solicited through your questions during the day. Likewise, **write down** what you would like to ask the people you have an appointment with the next day.

Keep track of what questions you did not receive a response to, or only an unsatisfactory response, and what questions you should have followed up with but which didn't occur to you at the time. Keep in mind: Conversational situations vary and require different

questions in each case. Small talk is not the way to elicit responses to business questions.

## Free leg and supporting leg

Personal improvement processes are nothing other than acting from a response position confirmed through experience, and at the same time, lending this action forward movement by means of constant questioning. Questions and answers are like a free and a supporting leg: **The answers that are considered to be confirmed provide stability, and the questions provide us with the opportunity to take the next step.**





### One thing you shouldn't resign yourself to: Handicaps

Imperfect – but with the chance that you can improve yourself

Human beings are imperfect. They err and they make mistakes. They behave in ways that bother them but, despite all of their resolutions to the contrary, they keep on falling back into these ways.

No matter how hard mothers and fathers try to do a good job of bringing up their children, their influence on the up-and-coming generation has both positive and negative sides. And at the same time, parents are often unaware of what will have a positive effect and what will be negative. Much of what they do is well-intentioned but nevertheless has negative consequences: handicaps.

Researchers have obtained a wealth of insights that can be used to analyze actions that come across as problematic. While it can help us understand the behavior, **the person in question has to solve the problem himself or herself.**

Work on yourself!

When you go to a psychotherapist, you get help with delving into your past. Explanatory paradigms reveal to us the evolution of our behavior that is often compulsive. Recognizing and understanding the causes and effects allows us to obtain approaches for getting rid of the handicaps.

However, some of us simply use the explanatory paradigms to liberate ourselves from the feeling of guilt for our unpleasant behavior. To blame is the authoritarian **father**, the overprotective mother, the father who is always absent, the **mother** who is overwhelmed by her double duty as mother and working woman, the parents' strained marriage or the shock of a hospital stay, etc.

In order to overcome handicaps or at least to deal with them, we first need the ability to look inside ourselves and observe ourselves. It is crucial, however, **for us to be able to deal with them constructively.** In other words, to work on ourselves. Many people are afraid to do this. They would rather acquiesce to obligations imposed on them by others than force themselves to do something.

## How to resist temptation

Working on one's self does not require any heroic efforts, but instead calls for properly dealing with one's self **in the little events of everyday life.**

Take the example of “getting up in the morning”: If getting up in the morning has not become an automatic habit, then the following scenario will ring a bell: Why not stay in bed a little longer? The weather outside is bad anyway. I'll just close my eyes again for a few seconds and enjoy the nice, warm bed. Now it's too late anyway. Being well rested helps you work better. There are a thousand reasons for why it could make sense not to force yourself to do something unpleasant and just stay in bed. After all, it's a free country, and you can do what you want.

If you want to resist the temptation to stay in bed and instead, follow the need to get up, you can't allow yourself to engage with the internal dialogue entitled the “advantages of staying in bed” but must focus on the “advantages of getting up”. This means concentrating on a tasty, relaxed breakfast, on meeting people, on the activities and events of the day and on everything that makes this day **worth experiencing.**

The power of the factual is used by those of us who set goals and imagine them and use their mind, body and soul to achieve their goals. Goals that beckon on the horizon are the instincts that take us away from self-pitying obsession with our handicaps.

## Make a decision!

Young adults are supposed to make decisions. One of them is whether we should move out of our parents' house or whether we should stay. The right time for making this decision is when we graduate from high school. From my own personal experience and based on my observations of young people's biographies, I say, **“Move out!”** And make sure to move far enough away so that you are outside the monitoring range of people who would like to keep you close by because they love you, feel responsible for you and have the best of intentions.

If you do not go out “into the big wide world” to try your wings, but choose to try this at home instead, you run the risk of two things: Either you will fail to spread your wings and will never manage to detach yourself from your social environment or the confrontations will lead to ongoing conflict possibly culminating in irreconcilable enmity.

In contrast to their siblings who have remained at home, many young adults find their way back to a harmonious relationship with their parents after their “years of apprenticeship”. Even if they turn



up at home again as a “prodigal child” after a long period. Parents have to let go of their children after puberty. Children who are in the process of becoming adults must experience that they can **manage on their own.**

Psychologists use the term “cutting the cord”. This works best when young people have the opportunity to do this in an unfamiliar place, “unsupervised”. Nor should they be supervised by their peers, for instance, in shared housing. The bottom line is, dare to “take flight”, pack your things and leave. As a young adult, you have the right to try things out without constantly getting well-meant advice and having risks pointed out to you. You have the right to make mistakes without being observed and to learn from them.

### Earning freedom!

A second question must now be decided: When do I want to permanently commit myself to another person? You have to decide this before you meet the great girl or the great guy you want to move in with. **Every commitment initially clips your wings.** When a couple declare that they will permit each other absolute freedom, they are deceiving themselves.

While I was at university, after I had left home, I decided that I would not enter into a relationship defined by marriage and family. This is because in the first place, I wanted to remain “completely free” and in the second place, I wanted to be sure that I could organize my life independently. And I recalled what our German teacher had told us: No man meets just one woman he could marry during his lifetime.

A “completely unfettered life” gives rise to a third question: How do I obtain financial independence? Firstly, by gathering experience dealing with money as a young person, for instance learning how best to divide up your allowance. And secondly, by having had a job at some point.

For example, playing an instrument and playing a gig, offering computer services or tutoring. I have heard of students who have hired themselves out as temporary workers, not just to earn money, but because they wanted **to get to know a company from the inside out and to make contacts.** Furthermore, look for paid internships and find out about scholarships. On the expenditures side, be frugal and look for discounts.

### Focus on your talents!

Sadly, we take our handicaps with us when we leave home. Still, it is easier to deal with them in a new social setting than in the milieu in which they came to be. Deal with them? Only to the extent to

which we bother others with them. If the reactions of others show me that my behavior strikes others as unpleasant or if I get angry about myself, this should stimulate me to think about my behavior and consider how I can correct it. Otherwise, you should just try out different variations and continue developing.

In order to recognize the fantastic goals that can be achieved while living your life, you just need to take a look at the biographies of people who have stood out for their achievements. Very few of them achieved the impressive moments en route to and at their goal without having exerted a great deal of effort along the way. They had to deal with setbacks, disappointments and detours. Many of them had starting positions that were actually rather poor. Some of them were so impaired by physical limitations that it seemed as though the possibilities for them to develop seemed very remote.

Still, despite all of their handicaps, people constantly prove that each and every one of us has huge potential for development. **No one is born without talent.** Focus on your strengths, not on what hinders you! Physically challenged individuals can teach us how we can deal with our handicaps such that while they are parameters of life, they are not our sole purpose in life. They demonstrate a **zest for life** and **joie de vivre** that serve as a model for how having goals pushes handicaps to the background.

We all have to live with our personal handicaps, but we need to keep our eye on our goals at all times. This is the only way to keep our dealing with the reasons for our disadvantages in life from becoming self-pity but rather allowing them to become a soberly clarifying analysis that aims to develop precisely designed future projects. Once I find out where my shortcomings are, I can compensate for them, and often even eliminate them.

## Becoming your own boss

We will most likely never find out to what extent our **genetic material** and to what extent the **context in which we were brought up** influence the way a person develops. The two are inextricably linked. On the other hand, it is clear that differences in the quality of our upbringing do impact the development of handicaps and the way we deal with them. There is no one-size-fits-all upbringing. All of the scientific efforts to develop a childrearing approach that is universally valid results in ideological impasses rather than opening up opportunities for people to **develop their personalities.**

We develop our personalities with and through people. Because their father does this or that kind of sport, his children do this as well. Because his girlfriend has this or that preference, her boyfriend tries to match it. **People open up the world for people.**

Affection always plays a role. We take most of the affection from people to whom we are attached, who love us and whom we love.

The first key people in our lives are assigned to us. We cannot choose our mothers. Nor our fathers. We have to accept the people whom we need to survive at the outset of our lives as given. And they are the very ones who determine a great part of the horizon of life that opens itself up to us. Children experience their dependence on their parents not only as loving security, but also as a restriction of their freedom.

For this reason, the impact of all upbringing is characterized by ambivalence: doing the opposite. In certain developmental phases, there is nothing more interesting than breaking rules. Puberty is supposed to be followed by cutting the cord from where we have grown up, standing on our own two feet and not bowing to the comfort of “Hotel Mama”.

### With initiative, ideas and perseverance

Once you have moved away from home, it can be extremely enriching to undertake something like an extended trip that you have arranged yourself. Not a tourist trip, however, but rather an expedition that you have meticulously prepared, executed according to plan but which is still open to situations that crop up and documented through notes and photos. The important thing is to **immerse yourself in another culture!**

A vital point for your preparation: Collect addresses and make contacts that open up possibilities for paying a visit. Then, when you are underway, be flexible enough to be able to adjust your plans if a “once in a lifetime opportunity” for a tour or for an experience comes up. In this case, you may also have to dispense with your documentation or record the events by memory after the fact. After you have returned, you need to work through the trip.

As a young adult, you should also **unremittingly enrich yourself** where you study and learn. You need to devote yourself to an area of knowledge that you are interested in. Whether it is a foreign language, a certain area of the world, a person or history is moot. You need to pursue it with initiative, ideas and perseverance. In so doing, you get to know yourself and others.

### Forget it, start over and take action!

Most handicaps disappear as we continue to develop. Experiencing this is extremely pleasurable. Still, a few bad habits can continue to stubbornly impair every one of us. They have become ingrained, as it were. In this case, you have to deal with them specifically, for instance, the fact that you blurt things out, without thinking about

what you want to say beforehand, or that you constantly allow yourself to be talked into doing things and can be seduced.

You have to deal with these deeply ingrained behavioral handicaps. There is no way around it. You can't escape. Instead, you have to take a hard look at the damaging effects and keep reminding yourself to get rid of this behavior. To this end, there are different **means** that you should not be afraid to use. For instance, you can write reminder cards and put them where you will see them all the time. You can make up symbols and place them where you will constantly see them and write about them in a journal until you have managed to eliminate them.

This type of self-improvement method is a very personal matter, and we learn to be our own masters, independent of others.

## Observing yourself

Only rarely are the formative events of one's childhood and youth so final that an adult is unable to direct his or her own life and make something of it, despite all the handicaps. In fact a handicap can even motivate us to show everyone **that we really can do it**, and even better than everyone else. Here, ambivalence also plays a role. The one-time follower develops into a leader. The former ne'er-do-well becomes a high-achieving, responsible peer.

As adults, we have to achieve a distanced attitude towards ourselves, stepping out of ourselves and observing ourselves -- the way we occasionally observe ourselves in dreams. What matters is not that we assess ourselves positively or negatively, but only that we ascertain, **soberly and honestly**, where we stand toward ourselves and what we can appreciate about ourselves.

The following exercise can be helpful for achieving this: Every time you meet with others, consciously describe the position you took within the group. Ask yourself the following questions:

## Questions for self-observation

1. Did I stand more **toward the center** of the group, i.e., where the impact on the other members of the group is the greatest?
  - 1.1 Did I say everything I wanted to say? And did the others accept it?
  - 1.2 Did I have a great impact on the group's actions?
2. Did I stand more **at the edge** of the group, i.e., where the impact on the other members of the group is the least?

- 2.1 Did I always manage to speak when I wanted to say something?
- 2.2 Did the others expect more activity from me than I contributed?
3. Did it depend on the **topic** or the activities whether I stood more in the center or more at the edge of the group?
4. Did I **feel at ease**? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What position **would I like to have** within a group?
6. **What is responsible** for me not being able to take the position I would like to take?
7. Do I **prefer to be alone** rather than in a group? Does the size of a group determine whether I feel at ease in it or not?
8. Why do I like being together **with others**?
9. Independent of being together with others, what are my successes **based on**? My failures?

### Self-development gets rid of handicaps

These questions give you a mirror for **self-observation**. After all, the behavior of the group members not only tells you something about them, but indicates something about you, namely, what kind of impression you make on others. This is how you can identify your rough edges and find out where you have to work on yourself.

The responses to the questions in the list above will allow you to find out

- whether you have trouble expressing yourself clearly and comprehensibly at the right moment,
- whether you understand the other group members properly and assess their intentions and tendencies correctly,
- whether you have enough information and experience to participate in conversations,
- whether you are plagued by the fear of saying something wrong or inappropriate for which you will be made fun of or be considered to be incompetent,
- whether you have the urge to constantly say something, so that you are unable to listen to the others at all.



You can save yourself all the getting to the bottom of how and when one or more of your handicaps may have evolved.  
**Handicaps are not the bad part about life, since everyone has them. What is bad is resigning yourself to your handicaps, not doing anything about them and leaving them up to fate.**



### If you don't force yourself, you will be forced

#### In the jungle of influences

We are all living in a web of human influences. Parents, partners, colleagues, bosses, neighbors, friends. Indirectly, they also include politicians, officials and journalists. Some influences we can escape, for instance, by breaking off all contact. However, no one can escape from all influences for his or her entire life.

We live in **dependencies** that everyone attempts to shape to their benefit. Even as infants, we express our displeasure and pleasure. As adults, we come to terms with our fellow human beings, striking a balance in their relationship with us. In most cases, this has to do with pecking order. The **power structure** is clarified. We talk about winners and losers, followers and those who call the shots. Which group do you belong to?

#### Whose influence are you subject to?

If you want to lead a self-determined life, you need a high level of **independence**. You not only need to be independent of your fellow human beings, but also of the influences that are constantly rising up from within yourself. My wife and I went skiing with a friend. Ever since, the two of us have had a special phrase: "I have to have that." Our friend had to have all kinds of things, for instance, a cup of strong coffee and a soft-boiled egg every morning. "Otherwise, I just can't get going." Her mood depended on a number of things she just had to have. She was a slave to herself.

Is your life **determined by external phenomena or by you yourself**? Are you the master of yourself? Everyone is "both." But which of the two has the upper hand? Your goal should be to primarily be self-determined as the master of yourself. If you are your own master, you can be hard on yourself if you run the risk of giving in to the wimp inside yourself.

The best way to clarify the extent to which you are determined by external circumstances is to make a **list of individuals**: What people influence me? Label people you have written down according to the degree of their influence: strong, medium, moderate. Then add a short description. What does the influence consist of? Finally, do I perceive this influence as paternalistic, or is it something that helps me in life and that I accept?

Here are three more questions to add to the way you characterize the individual:



- What individuals do I feel superior to?
- What individuals do I see myself as being at the same level?
- What people do I subordinate myself to?

## Living in freedom and joy

Your list of individuals will clearly show you the sphere of influences in which you live. Conclusions: Which people am I responsible for? Who do I act as a role model for? Who is my work useful for?

The question “What do I enjoy doing” is not wrong in this context, but it is dangerous, because it can cause us to look only for work that is easy and complacent. It is better to ask yourself, How do I change myself and my sphere of influence such that **a fulfilled life** can develop for everyone?

This SINNphOLL book is the attempt to provide impetus and demonstrate possibilities for coming closer to achieving the goal of a fulfilled life. We can only approximate it, since while we can free ourselves of many dependencies through self-improvement, dependencies that we need will remain. They can even make us happy if they are lived in benevolence or even love.

And we are also allowed to love ourselves. Love, anchored in inner calm, embodied by self-confident actions and found in our belief in perfection, i.e., **God**, gives the opportunity of a life in freedom and joy. There are models, such as the Franciscan friar Maximilian Kolbe, who emit or emitted this kind of love.

## Potentates live in dependencies too

The past centuries of human history are largely characterized by social structures in which there is **a clear top and bottom**. In the hierarchies, the power positions were prescribed. People lived under the reign of those who had power. But even those who had power were in no way “sovereign”.

From *Steinfall* (Rock Slide), poetry/satire, Shaker Media, 2012:

For and against

Be mighty. Force others to do your will.  
 Have slaves. immortalize yourself. Be adored.  
 Survive death as a mummy. Or deep-frozen.  
 Live out all your freedoms. Decide over life and death.  
 Be revered as God. Super!

Intrigues. Dependent on slaves.  
 Be hoodwinked. Not safe from traitors.

Threatened by death. Surrounded by brownnosers.  
Snakes in your bed. Lied to and cheated.  
Leeches. Hustlers. Vermin. Crap!

Hone your people smarts!

One thing that is crucial for a self-determined life is **inner freedom**; it is independent of power. Anyone can get it. But not on a whim; solely by dealing with yourself and your fellow humans lovingly – and there are times when this also means in an authoritarian manner.

Deal with people lovingly! **Dealing with people lovingly** takes people smarts. This is because there are dangerous people out there. If you don't recognize them and are unable to assert yourself toward them, then you have to avoid them. They are the masters of manipulative behavior. You can find them among your fellow human beings in the form of colleagues, family members, neighbors and friends who have an uncanny knack of aligning the people in their surroundings toward them.

They can be the epitome of kindness. But only toward those who are affectionate toward them or are even at their service. Those who refuse or are critical are punished by contempt. Friendly looks, nice words and favors for one person, stony silence, ostracism and a scornful glance for the others. And it's even worse when these kinds of people are in a position to combine their **manipulative behavior** with positions of power.

Don't allow yourself to be manipulated!

People who are good at manipulating others make it absolutely clear to those around them how they would like things to be, when they feel hurt and for what they expect an apology. They have an excellent sense of how to make other people feel guilty. They are never to blame. There is never any doubt as to how they see things and what is pleasing to them. With their facial expressions and gestures, their choice of words and their voice, they express what they like and what they don't like.

They have everything they need for information control at their command. They know how to use omission, reinterpretation, exaggeration and understatement to disseminate their view as indisputable at all times. And they manage to do this at the right moment.

In **partnerships**, these kinds of people are especially dangerous. If you engage with them, learn to appreciate their kindness, enjoy their attention, and possibly succumb to their charm as a man or a woman, you will be sucked dry until you have nothing left to offer. Some of these people aren't even aware of what they do to others.

They think it is legitimate to invest all their skills to make themselves feel well and they also think that they are giving a great deal for their part. They want to be recognized as good people. If they are mirrored as anything else, they disagree, insulted.

Don't fall for the seducers!

If you are a match for this kind of person and see through them in time, you are "self-confident". In my life, I have run into these kinds of people. I didn't see through them. Thank God I didn't become dependent on them. My **dislike of "external control"** prevented me from being put under their spell. I wasn't able to prevent friends from being sucked in by them, though.

But people are not just manipulative when they deal with each other directly, but rather – today more than ever – by the use of modern means of communications. Social networks control our attention. They supply us with selected and preprocessed information and convey opinions to us as we are meant to understand something. Thumbs up. Thumbs down.

How to take away the suggestive power of images

We are deluged with images. This dulls us. We no longer take a good look but rather allow ourselves to be deceived by the first impression. The producers and conveyors of the flood of images select and design subjects for the images that are ever more penetrating. They want to use them to assert themselves in the competition for the viewers' attention. We are expected to be gripped by the power of their images. We are also expected to become upset about injustice, feel sympathy, be made afraid, and feel powerless, desire, joy, envy, pride, harmony and other emotions. That boosts the ratings and sells books.

Admittedly, there have never been as many fantastic images in movies, TV shows, coffee table books or calendars as there are today. They trigger **feelings of happiness as well as wistfulness**. If you deal with the power of images, you have to ask the images questions such as "What is it that fascinates me about this?" "Why would I like to be like the person in the image?" "Why would I like to get a first-hand look at this place just once or experience a similar situation?" You should always look very carefully. After all, some pictures don't show the reality they claim to show, but rather **a virtual world** that serves our hopes and desires. There are not as many beautiful people out there, for example, as we encounter in the images we see every day.

Back when I was a film critic, I developed a habit of watching scenes in videos, TV shows and advertising material, etc., several times and in slow motion if emotions were awakened in me without

me being able to immediately recognize the why and wherefore for this. I want to know what tools were used, and not just the script: what picture detail, perspective, lighting, colors, facial expressions, gestures, montage, sounds, music. In the meantime, not just feelings, but also thoughts are evoked by images. Our memory is primarily geared toward images. We dream in images. Our thinking is underpinned by images.

## Become aware of the images of your thoughts and feelings!

Images are always allegories: a landscape for creation, a bridge for connectedness, a laboratory for scientific curiosity, markets for sharing, mountain tops for ambitious goals, and all kinds of other things. Reporters use their cameras to supply loads of these kinds of photos and scenarios. What kinds of insights do they strike in us? What do they make us think about and challenge us to do? Here too you have to **look – and listen carefully**. After all, manipulation occurs here too, through the choice of words used for the commentary, through the associations that are raised and, especially, through omission. This manipulation can only be countered by means of our own knowledge and experience.

If you pay attention to the images of your thoughts and feelings and follow up on them, if you constantly call up images in yourself that make **the joy of enriching insights and experiences** present, after some time you will notice that you will stop being controlled by the image-laden ideas influencing you from outside, whether these ideas confirm or deny them. We recognize the alleged manipulation of television, movies and magazines. This prevents them from having a direct impact without denying that they are an expression of our time.

In this way, you will become the master of your own world of images. Moreover, you will acquire the ability to deal with your ideas creatively: the capacity to come up with ideas, acquire new insights and coordinate your own ideas with those of others.

From time to time, I ask friends and acquaintances to share their thoughts about the subject of a photograph. The amazement at the **wide range of associations** is often great. It reflects the fact that we carry very different ideas inside us. As long as we describe what we have seen, the utterances tend to be quite similar, even if the choice of words may differ. Yet as soon as we describe the feelings evoked by the subject, the ideas can be diametrically opposed. This shows how our individuality compared to the ideas of other people can be recognized. Some people find it difficult to understand other people's associations. But that is exactly what we should try to do.

## How the resistance to self-development comes about

Our children and young people have become subjects of the state by attending day care centers and schools due to the changes in the social structure along with the fact that all adults do paid work. The consequence is that in the competition for the best slots in the knowledge-oriented educational system, we are **unable and unwilling** to continue to develop ourselves independently. Add to this the stress of everyday life, brought about by the constantly increasing complexity of our life circumstances. This stress makes us seek relaxation, recuperation and fun only when we are not running the rat race of our jobs.

These are not good prerequisites for subjecting ourselves to what is understood as even more stress – working on ourselves. If it were in fact stress – rather than the greatest opportunity to escape from all the stress of being controlled by external forces!

The lack of gripping personal goals is the most common reason for people seeing a life lived with dependencies as safer than the independence of a way of life that we are responsible for ourselves.

## Instill your life with meaning and goals!

Of course, there is no such thing as absolute independence. Still, all of us can at least acquire an inner attitude to not be dependent on others come hell or high water. Achieving this attitude requires a clear answer to the question What do I want to use my life for? **If you don't have your own goals, other people will use you to reach their goals.**

On the other hand, if you know what you want, and are aware of your possibilities to control yourself, you can substantially reduce your susceptibility to being patronized, no matter how attractive this might be. And you can resist the tendency to kowtow to authoritarian structures that serve to help you escape from your own responsibility.

In the end, self-realization is a lifelong process, not unlike a never-ending mountain hike. What's important is the beginning and sticking through the first sections. At some point, the moment will come at which you will find your pace. The joy you experience at the top of the different summits is unforgettable. How fantastic that you didn't throw in the towel!

These days, doctors' efforts to bring people who are clinically dead back to life are sometimes successful. From the reports from people who have had near-death experiences during the state during which their heart stops beating, we know that they **look back on their lives and reassess them**. When we are on the threshold of death, it



seems, we finally clearly realize what we – not others – have done with our lives.



### Embarking on self-management: Planning your time

Use your time!

In order to have the **freedom** you need to reach your goals, you have to be the master of the way you use your time. Becoming an adult means having control of your time independently. Being independent does not mean living from day to day, but rather making responsible decisions about how you use your time. Of course, all of us live in dependencies on other people. The consequence of doing this is that we do have to adhere to non-self-determined times, for instance, working hours, opening hours or timetables.

Your first step toward self-management based on **time management** must provide clarity about how you want to spend your time at the moment. What do you do all day? Write it down! Don't skip a single day. Don't let anyone keep you from doing it. No one has the right to disturb you as you embark on your self-management or throw cold water on your efforts.

Develop your own time-management system!

To track the way you spend your time, you need a **calendar**. A wide variety of calendars is available at office supply stores and online, ranging from simple pocket calendars to wall calendars with spectacular photos and even sophisticated calendar books with all kinds of information. You need an easy system that you can put together using

- a yearly overview,
- monthly planning pages,
- weekly planning pages and
- daily planning pages.

Some calendars are available as free downloads on the internet that you can assemble and print out and use as a working tool. For instance, you can hang up the yearly overview on your bulletin board.

You can use a ring binder filled with lined sheets to combine these time descriptions. Use the time description and the ring binder to develop your **time recording system**, in which you enter appointments, keywords, remarks, notes, reference points, etc.



**Keep in mind: For everything that you do in your life, you need time – even for not doing anything. You can only ever use your time once. You will never be able to bring back a single second of your life. You alone are responsible for what you make out of your lifetime.**

Your lifetime is for the most part predetermined. You cannot set the date for the day you were born or the day you will die. Your lifetime runs like an hourglass. You can't bribe it or manipulate it. But you can decide what you will make out of each and every next day. And the faster you develop your self-management, the more you can decide.

**Take a hard look at your daily routine!**

In order to analyze your daily routine, use the lined paper contained in your ring binder. Start by writing down the date. Then, in the evening, write down all of your **daily activities**, dividing them into “planned” and “executed”. Then evaluate how your day has gone. Write down:

- Was it a *normal*, a *special*, or even an *extraordinary* day?
- What was good? What was bad?
- What insights did I gain?
- What information have I taken on board or procured?
- What ideas occurred to me?
- What have I planned for the next day?

If you write down what you have done from morning until evening every day for a certain period of time – two or three months – you will pave the way for the next step on the way to self-determined time management. This next step involves becoming aware of **how you use your time**. Over the course of the year, the months, weeks and days:

1. What are the activities that you determine yourself?
2. What are the activities that you can neither plan nor perform on your own?
3. With what activities do you spend the 24 hours of a *normal* working day, a *day off* and those of a *holiday*?

For the first two questions, you can use different colors to mark the activities in your list of daily activities. For the third question, you can write down a list of activities.

If you record the way you use your time in this manner and have marked the activities accordingly and now **know** exactly – not just based on your assumptions – **how** you use your time, the next step then follows: becoming aware of how you deal with your lifetime.

## Create documentation for how you use your time!

Time is more important than money! Keep a record of how you use your time. Write down the starting and stopping time for each activity and then calculate **how much time you spent**.

Some people think that this work is monotonous and, besides, they already know how much time they use. And when it comes down to it, they have more important things to do than write down all these numbers and activities . . . This may in fact be true, but: In my decades of working with people in executive positions, I always had the experience that what you think you do and what you actually do with your time, i.e., your **subjective assessment** and the **objective description** are often miles apart. For this reason, write it down!

Otherwise, you'll never get out of your rut. And without knowing exactly how you **consume your time**, you will not know what to address in order to improve the way you organize your daily routine or what opportunities you have to **save time**. Moreover, if you don't write things down – at least for a few months – you will not reach your goal of “moving away from external determination and moving toward self-determination.” The risk is too great that you will not move beyond your good intentions. So once more for good measure: **Write it down!**

Do this until you can say, Yes, now I know where my time goes. If after a while you still don't really know where your time goes, then start documenting your time again in writing.

## Set priorities!

Over the course of a day, you can accomplish a great deal. But there are people who put off accomplishing endless to-do lists. They are always stressed out and feel guilty because of the jobs they haven't accomplished. They have to constantly apologize to others. If they are reminded about what they have promised to do, they have to put them off. They live in time chaos because they don't set priorities. **Set flexible priorities!**

There are people who can work quickly and precisely for hours on end with only five hours of sleep. This kind of person needs priorities, because they tend to overestimate their **work capacity** and end up biting off more than they can chew. They don't notice that in the long term they are exploiting their health. These are the so-called workaholics.

All activities are related to something: to other people, to objective requirements or to personal life circumstances. This is where the priorities are set: What is absolutely necessary? What has to be

done every day? What daily obligations do I have to other people? What responsibilities do I have to perform around the house? What job-related responsibilities? Go through all of the activities on your list and assign them a value on a scale of 1 to 5 along with a time reference: daily, weekly, monthly, annually.

Assign a 1 to all activities that help you maintain and further develop your talents, skills and your performance capacity. Also assign a 1 to the attention you pay to all people for whom you are responsible.

When you are finished, assign all of your activities to the categories “set time” or “variable time.” In so doing, you will obtain a **flexible priority list**, which is the basis for realistically planning your day.

This priority list is also an excellent decision-making tool for times when unexpected events throw a monkey wrench in the works. You can then quickly use your priority list to postpone, cancel or move up activities and combine them in a new way. **This is autonomous time management!**

## How to get moving

You need to have analyzed the way you use your time and have assigned a flexible priority list in order to reach the starting position for beginning with your time management. To this end, you will need your calendar again, with its division into daily, weekly, monthly and yearly overviews.

For every weekend, you should include a quiet hour during which you **review the past week** and **look ahead to the next week**. Enter all of the projects and events that have already been set for the coming months or the year into the calendar system you have put together. Examples include your vacation, your participation in events, excursions, trade fairs, exhibitions, visits and continuing education courses.

Then, write down your **ideas and concepts on how to use your time more wisely**.

Some people get the suffocating feeling that they are planning every minute of the day and are depriving themselves of the freedom to do things on the spur of the moment when they focus on their inalienable right to “time”, which is an unaccustomed activity. That is a trick our inner demons play on us! They delude us into thinking that freedom means not planning our time.

But think about it: **If you don’t plan your time yourself, then other people will do it for you**, or you will fritter away your time. Instead of falling for this trick, include some **times for not doing anything** and time for spontaneous action, for instance, one

weekend per month! In addition, now and then, if you feel like it and can afford to do so, throw all of your plans for the day overboard. You aren't a **slave** to your time but rather the **master** of it, as long as the right self-management is in place!

## Time for what?

In order to motivate yourself to start your self-management, take a minute to imagine what you would like to have more time for:

- ❖ What would you like to occupy yourself with?
- ❖ What **skills** would you like to learn?
- ❖ What languages would you like to speak?
- ❖ Who would you like to **keep in touch with** better?
- ❖ Who would you like to have more time for?

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The more you develop your ideas, dreams and plans on these questions, the more intensively you will look at the way you use your time.

Many people live in a **partnership** or in a **family**. If you include your partner or your family members in your time management, you can substantially improve your life together. You should **coordinate your dates and appointments** at least once a week.

Time management in a partnership or in a family **fosters togetherness** and the feeling of belonging. It helps **avoid misunderstandings**, prevents boredom, keeps the family home from deteriorating into a "Hotel Mama" and stimulates the sharing of information and experiences. The up-and-coming generation will not have a pure life of its own but will develop its independence from within the family.

## The family council

Parents with children should have a family council once a month. It should be a relaxed and cheerful event that everyone looks forward to. Use a piece of music that everyone more or less likes to call the family members together. Over time, it can become something like your "**family anthem**". When the music has finished, ring a bell. It's time to start!

Begin the meeting with a funny story. And allow the others to tell something entertaining as well. To prepare for the meeting, everyone should have performed their personal **time analysis** and should have made a list of the things they have observed about the way the others use their time. After everyone has shared their funny

stories, everyone should share the results of their time analysis and their list of observations, followed by a discussion. Then everyone shares their **time management** for the coming days, which should be coordinated with the others. Afterward, you should make plans for things you want to do together.

Be careful, however. The council **must not be abused** for monitoring the individual family members. If someone doesn't want to share information about certain times, this has to be respected. This has to be one of the **rules of the game** that the group uses for the council. Furthermore, the family council should only take place if everyone is present. If the atmosphere for discussion is not "open and honest," this has to be addressed and discussed as a question. The atmosphere should be as pleasant as possible.

### Don't let your time be stolen!

In our professions, we should all be our own managers. The alternative involves being a cog in a machine, bound to authority, at the mercy of others and lacking of independence. If you want to be up to the task of being a manager, you need tools for optimum time management. Otherwise, you will constantly be under time pressure. The only way to liberate yourself from time pressure is through self-management. **For this reason, make it clear to your employer that you want to perform your time management yourself.** They should tell you what results they expect from you. How you get to these results, however, should be up to you and the group you work with.

Unfortunately, there are a number of businesses that do not trust their employees to develop themselves and that require their executives to perform their leadership by means of **instructions and check-ups**. Working hours continue to be rigid. There is no flexibility that would allow workers to accommodate the amount of work that crops up. Instead, there is overwork or underwork. Work flows are prescribed by standard operating procedures. In these types of businesses, you are most likely underappreciated. If that is the case, then you are out of place.

### The most important thing is the right time management

As an employee of this type of business, you should ask yourself whether your scarce resource of "time" is actually being wasted here. If this is the case, and if your employer does not value your self-management, let alone encourage it, then you should resign--not just internally but for real. **Look for a boss who requires self-development from you.**

Self-determined time management also allows the feeling for the right timing to develop, i.e., doing the right thing at the right time.

Whether they are speed skaters, track and field athletes or Formula 1 racing car drivers, they all have to ideally plan the timing of their race and their competition. On top of that, they have to master their skill and the timing so autonomously, that they can **react to unexpected events spontaneously**. That's the mark of a champion.

**Everyone who manages to properly manage their time in line with their priorities, correctly assess the time they need to perform an activity or perfectly predict the point in time for successfully undertaking something will experience feelings of happiness.**

Get out of the rut from time to time!

Some people reach their golden years and are aware that they never had the chance to do what they really wanted to do, whether because fate dealt them a poor hand, or because they lacked the strength to liberate themselves from habits and adverse influences.

**Is there anything worse than realizing at the end of your life that you didn't use the time you had properly?**

You should prevent this from happening to yourself. Early on. Here is what you need to do: From time to time, get out of the "rut", take a deep breath and check whether the direction, the speed and what you are taking with you are still in line with the meaning you have assigned to your life. If you fail to do this and do not take the necessary consequences, you will most likely gamble away your golden years. After all, a "fulfilled life" doesn't just happen by chance.

Scientists have provided data for astronomical or geological facts that are beyond our imagination. In terms of light years the **quantum of time** assigned to us for a normal life expectancy disappears. When we are young, it may appear to be huge, but at the end of our lives it is tiny. In the context of our time frame, whose beginning and end we are unable to determine ourselves, we are responsible for our thoughts, speech and actions. Our life-time is a commodity for whose use we are accountable. A happy life is a life in self-determined harmony with the time given to us.



### The spark of determined action: Initiative

Don't dream about Never-Never Land!

Nothing happens on its own. If you want to survive and have a prosperous life, you have to move, become active and take action. In the past, this happened within the social network of the family. These days, it happens in the context of a state economic and social order. **Today, to live, you no longer need family. Instead, you need a job.** However, since no one is guaranteed a job, every one of us has to develop initiative.

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Immediate success is rare

But how do you become someone with initiative? For example, a high school graduate has decided that to achieve her goal of working in financial management, she will start by doing business training in a medium-sized company. She writes to the chamber of commerce for addresses. She wants to go to the companies and have a look at them. What kind of setting are they located in? How will they receive her? What impression does what she gets to see make? What kind of people will she encounter there?

Rather than sending an application, she sends emails in which she requests an appointment for a visit. She justifies the motivation for her request to “do temporary work” with her interest in business-related work as preparation for her professional career. She decides that she will not specifically ask about a slot in a training program until she's invited for an interview. The young woman is **not under any illusions** about her quest. She knows that she will need **perseverance**.

The response to her email campaign: Only a handful of companies respond. Some of them send her company brochures with the comment that she is welcome to write again some time. But in fact she is offered a few appointments. And in the end, during one of the visits even the CEO is available to meet with her. He asks whether she has ever had a job before. Yes, during the summer vacation, she answers. But it isn't so easy to find a summer job these days--or did she have connections, he asks. No, I found it on my own.

The company head wants to know about the details and finds out that the young woman is full of ideas and has worked systematically. At the end of the meeting, without her asking he offers her a place in the company's training program.

## Getting closer to your ideas about yourself

If you have initiative, you have to have goals. You shouldn't just jump into things. That would be impulsive, and doesn't lead to anything.

There are all kinds of goals. After you have written down your personal goals, just as they occur to you and without judging them critically, it is useful to assign them to one of the following categories:

1. goals for your personal behavior and
2. goals for shaping your life.

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**Behavior goals** are defined for the long-term and are pursued by means of ongoing practice. You will never achieve them completely, but instead, you will keep getting closer with the quest to be "better and better."

Examples of behavior goals:

- **being** open and **curious** toward people and situations: attentive, friendly and benevolent;
- being open to new things: listening, looking, **asking questions**;
- resolving conflicts, not running away from them: self-critical, argumentative and **prepared to make compromises**;
- **dealing** with work-related problems and not putting them off: not allowing yourself to be determined by your desire and moods;
- continuously expanding your educational horizons: wanting to know ever more, **wanting to know the details**, assigning facts to contexts;
- whenever possible, gathering **new experiences**; being courageous, taking risks, jumping in headfirst;
- maintaining and expanding your intellectual capacity: remaining capable of learning, being able to **learn on your own**;
- **putting up with** shortcomings without resigning yourself to them: neither being angry nor succumbing to indifference;
- having a positive and **opportunity-oriented attitude toward life**: always keeping in mind that there are two sides to everything.

Come up with an image of how you would like to be! Write it down in keywords in your diary and go back and read it from time to time!

What do you appreciate about other people? Do you have role models? **Read biographies** and become aware of the subjects' behavior and character.

## Shaping your life according to your ideas

In contrast to behavior goals, **goals for shaping your life** are not based on the HOW of your action, but rather on the WHAT. They have different time-related dimensions; they can be long-term or they can apply only briefly. They have to do with **life planning** and life phases.

Goals for shaping your life include:

- determining your living space and making arrangements,
- setting up and maintaining your social network,
- earning your money and managing to live within your means,
- ensuring that you eat a balanced diet,
- keeping your professional skills up to date,
- lending expression to your values,
- keeping yourself physically and mentally fit.

The wide range of goals forces you to set priorities. You cannot seek to achieve all of your goals at once. This means that you have to **proceed according to urgency and consistency**.

Initiative is not an end in itself; instead, its purpose is to achieve something. You have to pursue your goals in a professional manner and not succumb to the fallacy that you can also make it as a dilettante. Dilettantes cannot make it. For this reason, you need to **become professional!** This means mastering the methods you need and being thorough.

Translate initiative into actual action! Otherwise, your intentions will burst like bubbles. Actual action means the following: analysis, concept, plan, project, action. You must proceed with all of this and carry it out in a manner using a reliable method. If you don't, even the best of initiatives, along with the fantastic ideas, will never get off the drawing board.

## Take the initiative proactively!

The occasions and impetuses for taking the initiative often come from outside. Unfortunately, these are often bad news or events: We get caught up in a confrontation, someone plays a prank on us, we are the victim of injustice, someone sets a trap for us, we have been fooled, our feelings have been hurt, etc.

An **early-warning system** can help us to take the initiative proactively. It enables us to become active at our own initiative, before the inevitable impetus comes from outside.

There is a **tool** that is perfectly suited for developing proactive behavior early on: the calendar that you have expanded into an organizer. In the context of the time frames you have defined, your organizer serves to help you do the following:

- maintain a clear picture of your goals for your behavior and for shaping your life,
- keep the program for improving your behavior and the projects for shaping your life in mind,
- keep an eye on the early-warning system for the need to take action.

The activities and events recorded in your organizer are checked off every day in a log in a way that makes the need to take action tangible. How did the daily events pan out and what feelings dominated as you dealt with them? Then,

1. What conversations and processes took place?
2. Who took the initiative?
3. What information gaps and what misunderstandings were revealed?
4. What action needs to be taken?

Scrutinizing the daily events by asking the question “What action needs to be taken” **leads to proactive action**. Just as when you are on the road, you develop a sense of what other road users will do – and prepare yourself for it. Or like when you play chess: You consider in advance what moves you want to make and predict how your opponent will react.

If you think about what may happen to you, how you will continue to pursue your goals despite all the setbacks, you will increase your chances of moving forward. Proactive action allows you to take the initiative. It should become a habit!

## Things that can rob us of our ability to take the initiative

Performing this type of initiative review over a period of several months can **work wonders**. While you can definitely take a break for a while, if you notice that you have fallen back into passiveness, you need to perform the review again.

This is because dangers are lurking. You lose sight of the big picture. We no longer know in which areas and with whom we need to take the initiative. We miss the right point in time. Needed information is missing, important conversations do not take place and priorities are set incorrectly.

Under stress, we can lose our cool and become hectic. We then quickly lose sight of our behavior goals, we start flagging and drop behind. The consequence is that we only rarely take the initiative and are just rushed around from outside. Our initiative dies. We have to counteract this:

- **The enemy of all initiative is procrastination.** That's why you should take care of everything you can immediately. It has to become a habit!
- Don't expect others to take the initiative but – whenever possible – **become active yourself!**

Examples of risks that can suffocate our ability to take the initiative:

- Media such as television and the radio can turn us into passive recipients of stimuli. **Antidote:** Repeat what you have seen and heard, interpret it and evaluate it.
- On the internet, we click our way aimlessly from website to website and are taken in by every link that appears to be attractive. **Antidote:** Before you start surfing, write down what you want to do on the Web.
- With friends, we just kill time. **Antidote:** Plan and undertake activities together.

## You acquire independence through proactive behavior

Adolescents on their way to becoming young adults may have to pull themselves together in order to stand on their own two feet, to leave home and set up their own place to stay. But there are so many people who don't manage to do this. They are wimps who love it when things are easy and like themselves the way they are. They think that the diplomas and training courses they have managed to graduate from are enough. They think that the way to a pleasant life is to not subject themselves to any constraints and even more, to absolutely refuse to inflict any pain on themselves.

Of course, this also depends on a person's **temperament** and the amount of intrinsic energy they have whether they tend to be an active or a passive individual, whether they are attentive and alert and ready for action or if they rather tend to be observant and introverted. On the other hand, as children, most people are **spontaneous, curious and outgoing**. It is up to their parents, their caregivers and daycare and school teachers to foster and develop these traits which are crucial for survival.

It is terrible to have to watch how parents – in particular those who are incapable of bringing up children – allow a child's initiative to hit a blank wall, squelching their offspring's activities by warning, reproaching and forbidding them. This means that the only option the young adult has is to regain his or her **ability to take the initiative**.

See your employers as customers!

Since today having a job is the precondition for a comfortable life, all of us have to direct a great deal of our initiative to being **fit for the job market**. What can I do? What do I have to learn? What do I have to improve? Who needs what I have to offer in terms of proficiency, knowledge, experience and skills? How do I find my "customers"?

In the economy, an unrelenting exchange of services takes place: give and take. This means that anyone who has something to offer has a chance if they manage to make themselves known to others who can use their services. We really shouldn't leave this solely up to the employment agencies.

Whether we want to or not, **each of us shapes our life via markets**. If you operate in markets and want to be successful, you have to know your market: Where does it operate? Who are the other suppliers and who are the customers? What is offered? What is needed? How much is paid? What is topical? What is timeless?

If you are looking for a new job and if you want to advance in your career, then you have to **see yourself as a supplier! Not as a customer**. Only as a supplier will you make sure to constantly improve your offer. Only as a supplier do we compare our offer with that of the competition, develop our strengths, offset our weaknesses, learn about the customers, their desires and their preferences and do we attempt to establish contact to them.

No matter what company form you choose,  
be your own entrepreneur!

If you don't want to spend your life as a wage-dependent individual or on welfare, you have to establish yourself as an entrepreneur. You have to see the employers as your customers. You don't demand things from your customers, you offer them something. To do this, you need self-confidence. A self-employed plumber can't win customers if he or she has an inferiority complex, and most certainly will not be able to convince them of his or her competence.

**Seeing yourself as someone who believes the statement "I offer competitive services" makes you employable.** It is the basis for all other mindsets and skills that are significant for coping with life



independently. Another thing that develops from this is a sense of self-awareness that you know how much you are worth.

An employee who allows his awareness of what he is worth to be taken from him or who has never developed this in the first place should not be surprised if he is labeled as someone who has to work in an employment relationship in which he is dependent, i.e., as an employee instead of a supplier of labor. In this case, the work he performs as a dependent employee for his boss smacks of dependence. He is an executing body. However, if you see yourself as the supplier of labor and your boss as the customer of labor and move away from the feeling of dependency from the slave days, you will become your own entrepreneur.

This book is dedicated to the theme that “We are all our own entrepreneur.” (The precursor was the book “Your Brain, Your Capital”, which was published by Gabler-Verlag in 1996.) Be **your own entrepreneur!** Take the initiative for this!

German humorist and writer Erich Kästner once wrote: “Nothing is good unless you do it!” In other words, Become proactive! Do something good! For yourself and for others.



### Like the euphoria from running a marathon: Self-improvement

#### Fundamental experiences

Being able to do absolutely anything without any effort. In any situation. Like Adonis, **bright and handsome** – this is how we would like to act on the stage of our life. Doing whatever we feel like doing spontaneously. And not having to fear that we have to pay for it with some kind of disaster later. Eating and drinking to our heart's content. Living with whoever you want to at any given moment. Working without being forced to.

But from the time we are small, we are told differently. Something is always wrong. We are constantly warned to be careful of something and to beware of things. **We are preached at relentlessly.** We are not allowed to do what we would like to do but we have to do what adults think is right.

Once we have found a way to deal with the environment of our childhood, the shock of the first day of school occurs: discipline and being forced to learn. **School grabs us** and determines our day. Even if we manage to adapt and perform, we have the feeling that we are living a way that is externally determined – and we long for the day when we will become adults, the day when we can do whatever we want on our own authority.

#### Deprivation of liberty and the fear of failure

The time I spent at high school was one of the torturous periods of my life. Even if I have slowly begun to realize that school did in fact equip me to deal with life and that this was actually valuable, both the specific and the general circumstances of my school days caused and reinforced fear in me from which I have not managed to ultimately free myself, even today. The lessons became more and more intensive and impaired me more and more in that which I considered to be “real life”. In the end, I lived in two worlds: the world of school, in which I was constantly plagued by the **fear of failure**, and the world of my self-determined activities, such as sports, traveling and earning money.

A key conviction guided me: You can achieve anything if you do it right. Today I would qualify that statement: **nearly anything.** In order to keep from failing a grade, apart from learning the minimum required to prove some knowledge of a subject, you had to be able to properly assess the teachers' behavior. In order to play tennis decently, drive a motorcycle instead of riding a bicycle, find

a girlfriend, have some money in the bank and a number of other things, you had to **proceed deliberately and systematically**. When I played chess and bred angelfish, I had the experience that the right moves and measures lead to the desired success, step by step.

I had another experience while I was at university and in the early years of my career – an experience that makes me sad. My hope of encountering a person with life experience who could be a **role model and a mentor** for me was not met. I did not find a professor nor did I have a boss who could have individually helped me to move forward. Some people wanted **auditable output** and others wanted **exploitable output**. No one cared about me as a person. This meant that I was forced to seek my way on my own.

## The world of our thoughts shapes us

On our life journey, we arrive at points at which others have gone before us. At these points, you can find something like a plaque on which one of the following statements is embossed:

- No pain, no gain!
- Pride goeth before a fall!
- A rolling stone gathers no moss!
- My mind is my kingdom!
- You've made your bed; now lie in it!
- Rome wasn't built in a day!

We constantly wish that we could act from a feeling of ingenious disposition – laid back, easy-going and the object of everyone's admiration. But then we experience the frustration of being thrown back as a result of our own mistakes. **The gap between wishful thinking and reality is painful.** Some people cannot admit to their own mistakes and blame other people's meanness and adverse conditions for their failures. They believe that winning the lottery, getting a dream job or finding a certain model for society would be able to close the gap. That's a delusion.

**Becoming a satisfied person can only be achieved by each of us on our own, based on what we have made of ourselves. "Our life is what our thoughts make it." (Marcus Aurelius)**

## The human as a learning package

No living being is born in as unfinished a state as the human being. On the other hand, we humans are born as learning packages. What becomes of us is determined in our early years depending on the surroundings into which we are born and depending on the people who care for us. Over the years, we grow into our possibilities, we become adults and are responsible for ourselves.

No one is born lazy, fat or as a glutton. Children are **initiative-takers and are curious, able to learn and creative by nature**. Each of us had experiences like these as children, realizing that you have to use your senses to elicit reality, that you have to ask in order to get explanations, that you have to try to find something out and that you have to invest effort to achieve something.

But improper or practically nonexistent upbringing on the part of parents, who often then attempt to compensate for their failure with material deeds; the constant stream of the media, which creates a harsh atmosphere of stimuli; and policies that promise to eliminate the evil of this world while meeting the ideals of social justice – all of this prevents young people from adequately internalizing vitally important experiences.

This type of environment – the downside of some of their parents' careers – renders children and young people inept. It restricts their **possibilities to fully develop** and prevents them from becoming adults and being able to cope with life. If despite all this young people manage to get the high school diplomas required of them, some of them are deluded into thinking that life's learning phase has now come to an end. They are euphoric: "No more teachers, no more books . . ."! This makes it difficult to acknowledge and accept that you have to continue learning and **that now the time has finally come to take personal responsibility for learning**.

As adults, too, we are constantly involved in learning situations, even if we don't notice it because they are not arranged the way a school is. What we do with these situations, whether we are up to coping with them, whether we gain insights and experiences from them, all of this depends solely on us and on our **attitude toward learning and life**.

## Learning as childlike joie de vivre

Young children are constantly exploring their surroundings, full of curiosity and interest. We should try to find our way back to this fundamental attitude from our early years. Many situations in our daily life can be understood as learning situations that can enrich us:

- we meet new people,
- we learn new things,
- we get used to a new boss,
- we change jobs,
- we move to a different city,
- we travel,
- we immerse ourselves in an unfamiliar environment,
- we experience strange customs and traditions,
- we work our way into a new field of work,

- we enjoy a hobby,
- we are open to unfamiliar things

and much more.

Strangely enough, we do not like to acknowledge all of this as a learning process. We do not see challenges as a fantastic learning opportunity, but instead, more like a welcome opportunity to demonstrate everything we can already do. We want it to look as though coping with our responsibilities is effortless. After all, we have a substantial educational period under our belts. We may have earned a college degree or even a Ph.D. We have so many qualifications!

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We have advantages. These are theoretical advantages that may be miles away from the reality of our daily lives. **In general, our “qualifications” are only fragmentary.** Even if we have a top learning aptitude, a high IQ and the best character traits, any type of training and education is patchwork. If, once you have embarked on your career, you plan to restrict your education to on-the-job learning, this means that you have underestimated life’s challenges in a reckless and arrogant manner. On the other hand, if you continue to develop and improve yourself unceasingly, like a child, you can avoid this **arrogance of smug adulthood**. This means that as an adult, you acknowledge that you are not a finished product, but are capable of learning new things.

Athletes show how this works

No one participates in a marathon without preparing for the challenge. It wouldn’t occur to someone to sign up for the New York Marathon just because they jog on a regular basis at home and happen to be in New York when the race is on. But in our daily lives, where more is at stake than just the **endorphins you release when you have managed to run a marathon** – in our jobs or in our lifestyle – we think that we can just do things off the top of our head.

And here is another example from the world of sports: No one would think of participating in a long-jump competition without having developed a technique for the approach and the jump and without becoming physically fit. But in our daily lives, everything is supposed to work without any effort. Employment office, find me a job! Top athletes are **perfectionists** who constantly improve themselves for years. The saying “Veni, vidi, vici” (I came, I saw and I conquered) makes no mention of the preparation and efforts that led to the success.

Self-improvement means understanding **your life as an ongoing opportunity**. It means proceeding consciously and systematically. Consciously and systematically means using learning tools and



methods as a matter of course and with childlike abandon. Self-improvement allows you to live in a manner that is increasingly insightful and in balance. You don't suffer from constantly having to learn something because you do not yet know it or cannot yet do it. Instead, you enjoy the pleasure of your constant expansion of knowledge and your capacity to perform, which leads you to new shores. This is the opposite of the vain and egotistical prattle of people who always have to show others what they can do and what they have.

## Self-improvement as an attitude toward life

Having self-improvement as an attitude toward life makes tension dissipate. I don't have to be someone I'm not. I don't need the show of the smart guy, the clever man, the person who climbs the career ladder, the whiz kid or the rich guy. I have found myself, I'm completely tuned into myself, I'm at peace with myself. I'm aware of my capabilities. I'm content – and I'm **modest**. If you constantly improve yourself with respect to what you know, you will soon realize that your knowledge is always only fragmentary. “The more I know, the more I realize how much I don't know,” as the proverb goes.

Reflecting on life and shaping it proactively is the attitude that we will use to move forward on our **pilgrimage**. The objection that this will keep us from being spontaneous is false. People who like to react spontaneously allow others to define what they *react* to. Their “spontaneity” itself is determined by others. Then you also fall for con artists and people behind election frauds. It is certainly a good idea to learn how to *act* spontaneously. To do this, however, you need to have **solid ground under your feet**, which you can create by acquiring more knowledge and greater freedom to take action. Then you can spontaneously vary or create new things and you will experience brilliant moments with yourself.

If you take yourself by the hand to improve yourself, you will not have to force yourself to do anything and will not have to perform a tour de force. It is also not a matter of New Year's resolutions. It is simply leading your daily life based on an **opportunity-oriented attitude toward life**. Everything is capable of improvement. Based on the competitive field in which they have to stand out, entrepreneurs know that what is better is the enemy of what is good.

While self-improvement does not protect us from failure and setbacks, they are not accepted as determined by fate, but rather **as learning opportunities**. The ups and downs of the highs and lows contain a long-term trend: more and more feelings of happiness as a result of deeper insights, recognizing associations, understanding reasons, increasing your personal capabilities, situation-appropriate action, growing social competence, in short, inner joy about the

expanding and deepening shaping of life. This is referred to as self-realization. You find and develop what is in yourself.

## Effortless, flying leap

For ongoing self-development, you do not need to follow a certain program, nor do you need to start from scratch. You just jump in with a flying leap. In line with your new attitude toward life, a new driving style develops on its own and gives rise to everything else.

### **Take the initiative!**

Toward the end of my school days, I was on a quest for a recipe for success. Friends of my parents introduced me to Oscar Schellbach and his success system. In my final year of school, I went to Baden-Baden and participated in one of his courses. I only worked through part of his thick book. It was too much for me, in some places too complicated, and in general, I found that it was perfectionistic and the terminology turned me off. I wanted inspiration, not to be swallowed up. Swallowing people up is what the majority of authors want to do who offer success systems. My stubbornness kept me from becoming a follower of some success guru.

This is still the case today. I do not just take something on. Instead, I look at what my curiosity pulls me to, I assess it and test it. I fit arguments and insights, tools and methods that I think might be useful into my situation and the way I act. **It has to fit my “driving style”**. For this reason, my seminars and workshops are also based on my conviction that **self-discovery** benefits the participants better than me presenting recipes that I have practiced to perfection.

You start self-improvement where you are. It always refers to tomorrow. Before I continue tomorrow, I reflect on what I have done today, how I have done it and what I can learn from it for the next time. Thinking in sequences: **What** happened? **How** was it? Possibilities for improvement? Measures for improvement!

Here's an example of something mundane from everyday life: Open the refrigerator, close the refrigerator; put things in wherever you find space for it; before you take it out again, look for it or see where it has ended up. Gradually arranging the contents of your refrigerator to reflect the frequency of the things you use or the type and size of packaging saves time and energy, especially if several people use the refrigerator. Recognizing and seizing the opportunity for improvement means no longer having to look for things and always knowing what you need to buy.

Ask for suggestions and practice!

There is a wealth of suggestions for your new driving style. Read, test new ideas and **take the things you can use on board!** From time to time, take yourself to training camp and do some brain training in the evening. This doesn't have to be some sort of hermit-like activity. There are lots of games that offer ideal training for your gray matter, such as chess, rummy, the word games suggested at [www.sinnpholl.de](http://www.sinnpholl.de), and many other games.

A number of special behaviors and actions can have an exponential effect on self-improvement. These include:

- active reading,
- concentration and memory training,
- creating sets of questions,
- keeping a diary,
- writing experience reports,
- language exercises,
- developing implementation programs,
- making detailed travel arrangements.

It is not possible to introduce all of these things into your lifestyle at once. You have to start with one thing or another and make a project out of it. Gradually, you will move forward from your starting position and will transition **into an ongoing process**. The successes of the “better and better” will ensure progress on their own and will cause it to be extended to more and more areas of your life.

Yet some people are hesitant to take the plunge: What will people think? My partner? My colleagues? If you don't feel comfortable doing what benefits you and what has no impact on others in front of your peers, then you should begin with measures that you can implement in the privacy of your own home. If you want to learn to stand on your own two feet, you will have to create this space, unrelentingly. **Anything else means living at the mercy of others.**

The times of survival as if you were under the guardianship of a protector are over. If you think you can survive the upheaval of our time without improving yourself, you will fall behind, slowly but surely. Whereas in the past in the world of work, instructions for work were given in detail, today, independent planning and implementation of the assigned tasks is called for. Whereas in the past work was delegated according to a strict hierarchical classification, today, **taking the initiative** and **monitoring one's self** is expected. Whereas in the past, each individual employee was assigned a share of the work on a case-by-case basis, today, groups are formed that are expected to autonomously complete their work mission.

Self-improvement is the key to **personality development**. Take the step to provide yourself with this joie de vivre. You are the only one who can do it.





### **The foundation of all capacity: Concentration and memory**

Be fully focused

The impacts of poor concentration are particularly obvious in the immediate effects of certain types of sports. Just a tiny **lapse in concentration** is all it takes to lose the split seconds that are decisive for winning or losing. The chance to score is missed or a fall means the end of a game – or a career. Fully focus your thoughts, senses, feelings, movements on something and forget every bit of the rest of the world around you. If you are unable to do this, you will make more mistakes than someone who can. This is reason enough to improve your concentration and your memory.

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Intensify your attention!

Read the text below out loud, **really loudly**, as though you were reading to an audience:

“The most important skill for benefiting from the knowledge, insights and experiences of other people is the ability to read! The wisdom of humankind is laid down in writing. We do not have to experience everything first hand. We do not have to reinvent the wheel or repeat the mistakes of our ancestors from generation to generation. Instead we can “get smart” through reading, by asking for suggestions and advice, by learning lessons and by making comparisons.

Taking up the written or spoken notions of others calls for interest and concentration. In order to derive benefits, you have to be open to the topic and be able to understand the explanations. When you listen actively during a discussion, your facial expressions and gestures express that you are tuned in.

But the spoken word is ethereal. Even if you have written down key words during a lecture, for example, you often still want to get the speaker’s manuscript afterward in order to read through what the speaker has said.

When you are reading, you do not have the rhetorical experience of a moving speaker. Still, it gives you the opportunity to draw on the intellectual substance and deal with it: active reading.”

Did you manage to read it without making a mistake? Did you read out loud as if you were an anchorperson reading the news?  
Congratulations!



## Active reading

Active reading is performed in three steps: You highlight the **substance** of the text, you add your own **insights and experiences**, and you formulate the **benefits** for your personal thoughts, words and actions.

If you use this method for the first paragraph of the text that you just read out loud, you might highlight the text as follows:

>The most important skill for benefiting from the **knowledge, insights and experiences of other people** is the ability to read! The wisdom of humankind is laid down in writing. We **do not have to experience everything first hand**. We do not have to reinvent the wheel or repeat the mistakes of our ancestors from generation to generation. Instead we can **“get smart” through reading**, by asking for suggestions and advice, by learning lessons and by making comparisons.<

Write down your insights and experiences on what you have highlighted, just as they occurred to you. You can jog your memory by looking at your bookshelf, your magazine rack and the internet texts you have printed out. Here, you will most likely find what you have acquired in terms of knowledge over time. What books do you consult from time to time, for instance, practical guides or biographies? What newspapers and magazines do you subscribe to? What articles by what authors on what topics do you collect? Do you have an archive?

While I was at university, I started **writing an abstract** of the things I highlighted and then added to it whatever occurred to me. In the third step, I wrote down what questions I wanted to follow up on related to the topic, what I wanted to keep in mind as a **conclusion** and what I might care to undertake.

## Concentrating while you read means taking a close look!

In the text below, which describes the process of active reading in more detail, some of the **punctuation** is missing or appears in the wrong place. Find the mistakes!

“You can highlight the words or passages containing the substance of the text in a more or less differentiated manner. If you use the less differentiated approach then you underline only the words and passages that appear to be important to you

If you want to thoroughly, work through a text you distinguish between objective statements and expressions of opinion, between passages with which you agree based on your own insight and experience, and those that are new to you or with which you do not

agree, between passages that give rise to questions and doubts and those, that immediately convince you between passages that directly affect you and those that you cannot relate to, and between passages for which examples occur to you immediately and those that you are unable to relate to your range of experience.

Differentiated accordingly, you would perform the highlighting as follows: underlining with colored pencil drawing boxes and circles around the passages, using numbers. However you do it it needs to be clear and consistent. In the margin, you should write down all the associations that occur to you. These are experiences, supporting facts, examples, your own opinion, notes, questions, key words, names, etc. etc.”

Punctuation facilitates reading. In the text above, five commas and two periods are missing. Two commas are in the wrong place.

You notice text passages in which punctuation is missing or in the wrong place **if the construction of the sentence is clear to you:** subject, predicate, object, main clause, subordinate clause, enumeration, etc. Both punctuation and capitalization **make it easier to understand** a text. Understanding texts and writing texts call for correct use of language.

There are all kinds of concentration exercises. Instructions for these exercises are presented in books and on the internet. We should all put together our own “fitness program”. When selecting exercises, it makes sense to choose tasks that are useful in terms of content. Then you can kill two birds with one stone: improving your attention and expanding your knowledge.

## The wealth of our knowledge and our experiences

We do not learn through reading and writing alone. But if you only learn through the spoken word or primarily restrict your learning to your own experiences, to observation and imitation, you will not be able to become part of the **complex societies** of our time.

Inadequate reading and writing skills force people into the margins of our society. When young adults realize that they have language-related deficits, they need to **close these gaps**. Otherwise, they will quickly end up in the margins of society.

Texts are a means of transporting information and opinions. We read newspapers and watch and listen to television news in order to experience new things, in order to find out what is going on in the world and in order to learn about other people’s attitudes about the events and processes of current affairs.

Since we have a certain amount of prior knowledge and also have our own opinion, we file the content we have absorbed into the knowledge and opinion areas already established in us. For the

most part, we absorb what interests us and what corresponds to our prejudices. Our interests and our opinion control our **attention**, our **concentration** and our **memory**.

A good memory requires alert senses. For this reason, we have trained our concentration on a regular basis, and we have to invest the same amount of effort to keep our memory fit. Our memory keeps the **components of our knowledge and experience** at hand that we need for coping with our current tasks in a focused manner.

Most people's memories are geared toward images. We distinguish between short-term memory and long-term memory. **Brain research** conducted in recent years has shed a great deal of light on the prerequisites and mode of operation of the organic equipment for human thinking. This helps to recognize the given potential and to use it with a methodology adapted to the particular need.

### Our memory allows us to be capable of taking action

People with one or more impaired senses or who are missing one or more of their senses and have to compensate for the loss with the other senses have demonstrated the extraordinary perceptual performance that can be developed by the individual senses. Good **perceptual abilities** correspond to a good memory. Our perceptions are processed in the brain. Stored in our memory, they provide orientation and are the prerequisite for taking action.

Whatever knowledge and skills are not immediately available through ongoing use and are not retrievable for the case at hand must be quickly refreshed or acquired. We have to be able to address new tasks based on our existing **store of knowledge and experience** from the highest possible level. We can only establish and maintain this high level through ongoing training.

Take foreign languages, for example. Languages related to our native language are relatively easy to learn because so much is similar. The better your command of your native language, the more quickly you will be able to pick up a new language. Things are more difficult when the foreign language is only distantly related to your native language. But even when you learn this type of language, you never start from scratch. This is because no matter what the language family, they all share the same **basic phenomena** of human existence, such as eating and drinking. The better we have familiarized ourselves with the circumstances of our civilization and culture, the more easily we can negotiate the territory in which a foreign language is spoken.

No matter what you do to develop and expand your **scope of action**, the key principle involves acquiring **basic skills** and keeping them up. For artists and elite athletes, it goes without saying that they have certain exercises that they have to perform

every day. In fact, this is true for everyone. As with equestrians, gymnasts and skaters, you start with the compulsory action and then move on to freestyle.

Can you rely on your memory?

**I'd like to share a little story:** "The romantic atmosphere of winter. The glow of the fire emits a cozy warmth. At the entrance to the cave, icicles glitter in the sun. In the homey bedstead, two lovers move apart. Sunlight beckons them to come outdoors. Out of the bedclothes, out into the glistening light. They stretch their arms toward the sun. They throw themselves into the snow, which flies about like dust. At the beavers' lodge, they take a sunbath. Then they traipse through the mottled light of the forest, visit the bear and banter with the moose. Back in their winter cave, they stoke the warming fire. They close up the entrance with ice blocks. The hill of ice and snow has a yellowish red shimmer in the night. Soft singing conveys love and happiness. Snow begins to fall and covers the traces of the day. A lone wolf senses the winter happiness and howls in the night."

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Now cover the text or move it to where you cannot see it. Write down all the words that you are able to remember. Now put the words into the order in which they appeared in the story.

- What feelings did the story trigger in you?
- Can you imagine the text?
- What words do you connect to what images?

Write down the story **in your own words**.

Compare your version with the original text.

Now copy the text and format it with your computer. Select a font type and size that appeals to you and fits the story. Other ways to embellish the text: using different colors for the text, paragraphing, bolding, italicizing, etc.

Once you have **prepared and formatted** the text, memorize the text! Sentence by sentence. Before you move to a new sentence, repeat the sentences you have already learned. Resonate in the feelings that the story evokes in you. Bask in the images that you see in connection with the words.

Mark the words that you have trouble remembering. Work your way through the text at least up to the words "flies about like dust". Make it easy, laid back but with stamina. How was it? It's possible!

How to raise the level of difficulty

Advertising texts are prepared using everything that graphic design has to offer so that we can remember them without any great effort. Why shouldn't we use the same tools to train our memories? This can make memorization fun. Look for texts that you want to prepare and then learn by heart. In addition to longer texts that you would like to have at your disposal in your memory, make a **list of proverbs and quotations**. Do this as a weekly training program for your memory.

From time to time, you also have to review what you have learned. Otherwise it will fade. To this end, you need to find out how long a text you have learned will remain present in your memory. Then you will know when it is time to polish it up.

There are different **levels of difficulty** for memorization. "Internalizing" poems that rhyme and have a certain meter by reading them out loud passage by passage and repeating it is the easiest exercise. Memorizing without reading out loud is a bit more difficult. It is very difficult when you do not learn the poem from a printed medium but rather from an audio source. Here too, however, you can repeat what you have heard either out loud or silently.

Other ways to raise the level of difficulty for practicing memorization include the following: learning prose texts by heart – no meter, no rhyme – silently, only reading with your eyes; learning song lyrics from an audio source only by listening; memorizing complicated audiobook texts. As soon as you have learned the text, keep "replaying" what you have learned silently, without the book or audio source. Once it has really sunken in, recite the text like an actor, **using gestures and facial expressions, along with dramatic effects**. Then make up a situation to go with it: in front of the mirror, experiencing it yourself, or in front of friends.

## Have a closer look at visual media!

While language is significant for our communication, today more than ever, visual media are often combined with language. As the poet once said, a picture is worth more than a thousand words.

**Pictures appear to be directly linked to reality.** They are considered to be authentic. But just like words, they can also be manipulated.

If you extend your training to include audiovisual media such as movies and television shows, it will help you boost your concentration and sharpen your memory, as well as improve your comprehension of the content of these media. Start by **analyzing videos** you download from the internet.

- What photo subjects are used?

- How are the subjects set into the picture? What detail is used? What angle? What movements of the subject are used? What camera moves?
- How is the image sequence edited and cut?
- What commentary is used for the images?
- For which images is no information provided?
- What sounds can you hear? What background music is used? What moods are created by the music and the sounds?
- And another very important point: **What do you not get to see and hear?**

This last point is important if you want to form your own opinion based on television shows. In terms of content, you can only find out **what has been omitted** if you know your way around the topic. But how often is that the case? This means that you have to be able to recognize the places that raise the suspicion that something might be missing: questions that are thrown out but answered **only in part**; hints that are **not followed up**; facts that trigger **doubts**; **claims** that are not substantiated; **contradictions** in the argumentation; **one-sided argumentation**.

The design of the audiovisual media also offers **starting points**: Do the picture and the sound fit together? Is the opinion expressed obvious as such, or is it communicated as if facts are being presented? What feelings are deliberately evoked with the images and the underlying music?

After you have analyzed the video, you should then evaluate your analysis by checking **the credibility**, gathering open questions and determining the conclusiveness of the visual evidence.

Specifically training your concentration and memory may feel unfamiliar at first, and you may have to overcome some resistance. This is no different from practicing piano etudes or doing warm-up exercises and stretching when you run. But if you are undeterred, after a while you will notice that you have boosted your **mental fitness**, and then the training will actually be fun.



### Dialogue with yourself: Keeping a diary

#### Sheltered and guided

One of my favorite things is when I have a “lightbulb” moment. It’s like switching from dusky twilight to bright sunshine.

**Recognizing how things interact, identifying reasons for things, having ideas** – these are wonderful moments. Some people make a fulfilling career out of discovering these moments: researchers.

We are all on a research expedition! At least, we all started off this way. As babies, we wanted to **taste, feel, see, smell and hear** everything around us. We were constantly exploring. And we wanted to know what would happen if ... In order to keep us from harm, our parents sheltered and guided us.

During our childhood and adolescence, we need the protection and guidance of the adults around us. However, these adults are not perfect human beings. They do not know everything. They are not able to do everything. **They err and make mistakes.** Sooner or later, we figure this out – and have to deal with this disappointment. The certainty that our parents love us provides healing comfort.

#### The joys of recognizing and experiencing

We can only experience the joys of recognizing in the long run if we make an effort to acquire them. They do not fall into our laps. And very few of us will be lucky enough to find a teacher who serves as a role model and a guide on our expedition. We realize that ultimately, everyone is on their own journey. This is what is meant when people say we are all responsible for ourselves. Be that as it may, we do not travel alone, but **in groups, as individuals responsible for ourselves.** This is the only way that we can complete our life journey, with fellow travelers who help each other. Sharing the joys we experience when we make discoveries makes us happy.

The key word for our life journey is **communicating**. Not only with our fellow travelers, but also with ourselves. If you do not communicate with yourself, you run the risk of dealing with your fellow human beings on a solely superficial level. This is because outward impressions are not processed in **self-communication**; no depth is created. This is then like a rudderless boat that drifts aimlessly in the waves.

The way to embark on self-communication is to use your diary. The first step involves dealing with time properly. Chapter 5, entitled “Embarking on self-management: Planning your time”, described this step. When organizing your activities in terms of time, **your organizer and your activities journal will help you.** Our lifetime – whose span we do not know – is the parameter for our life that we have to fulfill.

## The day

Our life’s sequential unit is the day. What all did I experience today? Sit down in the evening and ask yourself this question. Write down what occurs to you, **in notes and sentences.** You think that you can remember everything and don’t have to write it down. Did you really still remember everything in the evening without having to think about it? That’s great! Then it’s even more important to write down the daily events – before you lose them. By writing them down, you are quasi placing everything you have experienced during the day on the table before you for you to consider. Spread out in front of you everything that has taken place. Take a closer look at one or two of the events and write down what you discover. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What did I occupy myself with today?
2. Who did I encounter?
3. What made me happy today?

Just start with this kind of diary. **Do it!** On the weekend, have a look at what you have written. Then you will notice that you did not in fact write down everything that took place during the week. So what else was there? Right, you were angry about something; you didn’t manage to do everything correctly; goals were only partially achieved or not at all. Write it down! After the fact.

When you start keeping a diary, the system you use is not important. All you need is a blank sheet and a pen. Write the date and start writing. **What’s important is doing it!** And do it every day, really every day, without exception. It’s better to miss a bit of sleep than to skip writing in your diary. You’ll sleep better afterward! This is because you will have concluded the day.

A systematic approach will develop on its own the more you **enter the communication process with yourself.** Soon, you will notice that you have gained a certain distance to yourself and that you can see your life **as in a mirror.**

Moreover, you can suddenly take breaks in your thoughts that are circling. You can let incidents rest that you used to not be able to let go of for days on end. This is because you have written about them. You have written down your thoughts, so you don’t have to

keep bringing them up to consciousness again. This is only **one of the many healing experiences** you will have.

## No false modesty and no false shame

After I was finished with school and my learning behavior was ruined, I had to pull myself together in order to keep from falling behind at college. I had a lot of trouble with the recommendation to “keep a diary”. **For instance, I didn’t like my handwriting.** While I was in school, I only wrote what people forced me to write. I had never learned to like my handwriting. My handwriting was more like a scrawl. I found it difficult to write letters that were more or less the same size and to write letters so they were legible.

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But then I bit the bullet. I realized that I was writing **for myself and no one else** and that I didn’t have to be ashamed in front of anyone. I didn’t like the idea of being ashamed of myself; I did have that much self-confidence. So, I started writing, messy handwriting and all. After a while, I had taken the first step toward self-discipline: lined paper.

Today, I could use a laptop. But I wouldn’t recommend doing so. When you communicate with yourself, you should do this in a manner that is as close to your roots as possible. My handwriting, whether it is neat or sloppy, is a highly personal **cultural skill** that allows me to gather thoughts. Reading and writing are the **key qualifications** with which we can enter the world. For this reason, we should practice and use them every day.

A second problem: No one else should be privy to my life, and especially not to my world of thoughts. But this would be the case if someone else got their hands on my diary. A terrible thought. I **found a way to deal with this fear:** If instead of leaving my diary out in the open, I kept it in a drawer or in a cupboard with my personal belongings, then only a handful of people would be able to find it. What consequences would there be if these individuals were to read what I had written?

First, they would have to be ashamed of themselves if they violated my **personal space**. When it came to what they read, there wasn’t much they could make use of if they didn’t want to out themselves. In some passages, they would read something about themselves. I decided to keep my diary **in my desk drawer** and when I am gone for longer periods, I either take it along or lock it up. I have a right to my privacy. If I lock the drawer, no one can be suspected of violating it.

**Do not allow anyone, no matter how close they are to you, prevent or disturb your self-improvement!** Only people who feel they are superior to you, and who want to control you, will seek to keep you from having your personal space and to thwart your self-

improvement. You need to set them straight or stay away from them. Anyone who wants the best for you will support your development. Anyone else doesn't matter to you – just as you probably don't matter to them.

## The second step: Specification

If you take the **pages you have written down spontaneously for the first few months** and read through them, you will most likely be able to distinguish two levels:

1. the level of the **facts** you have observed and
2. the level of **thoughts and feelings**.

Depending on the words you have used, these levels may be more or less **interwoven**. The statement that during a meeting, the same bores kept monopolizing the discussion does not describe the fact that a meeting has taken place but rather expresses the fact that you are not particularly fond of the key participants.

As you read what you have written, be clear about what is a **fact** and what is your **assessment** of a fact or what your **feelings** express in connection with the fact. For your future diary entries, try to record the facts without assessing them and then write down your attitudes toward them. With respect to the above-mentioned example of the meeting, you should **first** write down the topic, the participants and how long and where the meeting took place. **Secondly**, you should write down how you experienced the meeting, both in terms of the results and the course of the meeting and what insights were gained. Finally and **thirdly**, you should write down what feelings predominated and what triggered them. What was satisfying? What was hard to take?

You should use a **three-part** method for specifying what you have written:

1. Name the facts,
2. Describe the insights you have gained and
3. Describe the accompanying feelings.

You should present all important results using this form. At least one event per week. This advances you a giant step forward in your self-improvement. You can make the other entries spontaneously as you have been doing.

Over time, your **perceptual pattern** for the day will become more refined on its own. Your **personal radar system** will pick up more and more. You will remember more and more details from your encounters, your reading, your telephone calls, your actions and special occurrences.

## The third step: Your diary of insights

At some point in time you will reach the point at which writing in your diary on a daily basis has become one of your daily needs. At the same time, however, it takes a lot of time – more than an hour. This is the time to collate your entries and consolidate steps two and three of your three-part system into **a diary of your insights**. To do this, you need to purchase a ring binder or a hardbound notebook with lined pages. For each day, first write your insights and experiences that you gained and would like to take to heart and apply in the future.

Secondly, write about the **feelings and moods** that predominated during the day. Answer the question as to which occurrences and events were responsible for your feelings. **Why** were you filled with joy? **Why** were you close-lipped? **Why** couldn't you concentrate? **Why** was work fun?

Don't be afraid to write down your secret desires and dreams, your fears and anxieties, your longings and disappointments, your goals and intentions, your hopes and prayers. **Do not leave anything hidden!** Write down everything using the words that occur to you. "It would have been great if ...", "I will .... by", "In the worst case ...".

There is no binding system for this kind of diary of insights. In fact there cannot be one, because it is about your very personal communication process. For this reason, here are just a few suggestions that can help you to find **your own method and your own style**:

- Begin every day of the diary with a new page.
- Write down what events occur to you.
- Write down important thoughts on a piece of paper during the day.
- Do the exercises for improving your possibilities to express yourself in words <http://www.sinnpholl.de/go/sprache.html>.
- Evaluate books and magazines using the method of active reading. <http://www.sinnpholl.de/go/gruende/german/13-methode-aktives-lesen.html>
- Each weekend, rewrite a diary entry from the past week, making it better.

## The danger of haughtiness

The diary of insights is the direct route to self-improvement. You get to know yourself; you can see inside yourself better and better; you become calm, content and self-assured. You even learn to love yourself – albeit imperfectly. If you want to improve not only your intellectual skills, but improve your character and better yourself as

a person, you have to love yourself. **Accepting your imperfection lovingly** is the prerequisite for self-improvement.

Since we live together with other people, their imperfection plays a role in our life. In some cases, quite fiercely, so that we have to decide whether we want to love or hate them. Hate leads to killing and murder. **Love is the only thing that makes imperfection bearable.** If mothers didn't love their children, the human race would have died out long ago.

When people who live together like each other as much as they like themselves, if everyone would live improving themselves both for themselves and for the group, this could lead to a great deal of happiness and joy. Could – not must; after all, **the risk of arrogance**, haughtiness and having an inflated ego exists for both individuals and for the group.

**People who are aware of their imperfection despite all their efforts to improve themselves avoid the risk of becoming arrogant and having delusions of grandeur.** The diary dialogue helps develop an attitude toward life that is in tune with reality. On the one hand, you are always recognizing your imperfection and doing so with ever greater precision. On the other hand, your yearning for perfection grows.

Knowing everything, being able to do everything, absolute freedom, absolute justice, indestructible peace, eternal loyalty, unlimited truthfulness: We can imagine all of this and gear our thoughts, words and deeds to it. People who acquire the degree of **inner freedom and inner peace** possible for human beings, who live with the modesty based on their daily experience with themselves know that they can only begin to approach what is absolute, i.e., God.

### Why blogging is no substitute for keeping a diary

If you communicate on the internet, allow others to share in your experiences and make no bones about your views, feelings and ideas on this platform, you are actually keeping a sort of public diary. You are presenting yourself to an imaginary audience, writing for your friends and acquaintances. But you are not engaging in dialogue with yourself. Instead, you are putting yourself on display. What is important, however, **is to first communicate with yourself.** And you cannot find yourself through impromptu speeches. The only way to do this is by means of the intensity of keeping a diary.





### The power station of satisfying work: Motivation

There are lots of role models

If you want to achieve something in your life, you can learn a lot from **athletes** about motivation. In competition sports in particular, we know that victories require not just the right aptitude and systematically building on it, but even more, one hundred percent motivation. Whether in skiing or tennis, soccer or car racing, no athlete wins without being motivated to produce the needed efforts.

You have to be **excited about** your goals. Let them carry you away, dedicate yourself to them. Role models: Have the thirst for victory like Formula 1 racing car driver Sebastian Vettel, be generous like philanthropist Karl-Heinz Böhm, be a committed reporter like Austrian journalist Antonia Rados, be a successful entrepreneur like Bill Gates, be a convincing preacher like Robert H. Schuller, play an instrument like violin virtuoso David Garrett or be a loving woman like Mother Teresa.

No motivation without a goal!

We **envision** goals that excite us. The room of a high school senior: maps of the Amazon basin, posters with trees and plants of the rain forest, with animals of the jungle, posters depicting indigenous people, objects like blowguns and braided fruit presses. The way the room is decorated makes it clear that its owner plans to go to these people, do research as an anthropologist, physician or biologist, and live there.

In many cases, goals develop from **people's predilections and talents**. Their parents or siblings, friends or teachers point out that they are a good skier, that they have a gift for music, that they are talented organizers, that it's fun to entertain an audience, that they are good at solving tricky puzzles. Everyone has at least one talent that they need to discover through **self-discovery and tips from their surroundings**.

"I wanted to be free and rich," entrepreneur Robert Wolff once announced. "I want in," former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder is quoted to have said, shaking the bars of the fence surrounding the chancellor's office in Bonn. The **emotional situation** from which we cultivate our desires and dreams may be temporary, but it can also hold us captive. For those people who feel oppressed, dependent and controlled by external forces, goals always seem to **promise liberation**. This is one of the strongest

motives. The subtitle of this book is “Ways to a self-determined life”!

Many people pursue very **specific goals**. And they fully gear their thoughts, words and deeds toward achieving a goal: winning a gold medal, being the best in a music competition, becoming the world champion, being the chief executive of a company, sailing around the world, starting a circus, making it to top model, having an acting career or opening up life prospects for streetchildren in Rio.

**Goals have to glow!** Only then will you want to achieve them. Glowing goals make you creative and instill you with energy and stamina.

You have to study the course  
to reach the finish

Just as important for your motivation as a goal that glows is the course you have to take to reach the goal. **The way is not the goal. But the goal and the course determine each other.** Goals are not achieved when the path to reaching them is uncertain. A downhill racer will never win if she only has her eye on the prize and says, “I’ll get down there somehow.” It’s similar for equestrian competition. Here too, it’s not enough just to know where the finish line is. Even more, you have to be familiar with the jumping course **down to the last detail** and prepare your horse accordingly. Downhill racers, show jumpers and other athletes focus on the course before it is their turn to compete. They do a mental dry run, retracing **the ideal course, point by point**, that will lead them to the goal.

The task of achieving goals in other parts of life is met using the same attitudes and methods as those used in competition sports. The **fascination of the goals** includes the **joys experienced on the paths** to the goal. Difficult passages are accepted as welcome challenges, while mishaps and losses are considered to be opportunities to learn. The important thing is **not to jump in headfirst**, but to explore the territory and choose the right way. Downhill racers use the term “ideal line” that they follow to ski to victory. Finding it offers them additional motivation.

If you aim to discover the as yet uncharted territory between your current location and the finish line, the best thing to do is to ask questions: Is it possible to have a look at the “terrain” beforehand? What routes did previous contestants – generally there are some – select? Which route is the shortest one? Which route is the easiest one? Which route is the more difficult one? You need to create a **set of questions**. Chapter 2 of this book describes how to put together a set of questions: “The conveyor belt to a self-determined future: Asking questions”.

**To achieve big goals, break them down into smaller steps.** In addition to getting to know the course, the structure of the route is important for your planning to reach a goal: **Define milestones.** The secret of many champions: They divided up the route properly and during the race, they focused **on the next intermediate goal and not on the ultimate goal.** Constantly looking up toward the summit is intimidating, but that rock outcrop over there – “that’s doable”.

Prepare yourself intensively and quickly!

Your preparations need to include **training units** to make you fit. You have to build up the needed fitness level. This has to include the behaviors required and you have to have the know-how you need at your disposal. For instance, when I travel abroad, I should have read **everything** I can get my hands on about the destination country and should have learned the language well enough to make myself understood. When I go to a competition, I should be in **top shape.** When I go to a job interview at a company, I should **know about** the company and have prepared what I want to say.

Preparing for procedures includes pacing and stamina training. This means **training sessions** in which **subtasks must be mastered flawlessly in the shortest possible time;** in which subsections are practiced several times in a row until exhaustion sets in. Then comes the **warm-up phase** before the start. Athletes often take hours to adequately prepare for the competition so that they have a chance at winning. Hours? In many areas, one’s entire **lifestyle** has to be geared toward the goal. You have to live for what motivates you.

For intellectual goals, too, you have to undertake in-depth systematic preparation. Take the example of giving an important **presentation** for your career advancement. You have to prepare the **content**, then **structure** it and finally **prepare a draft.** You have to hone your **public speaking skills** and **tailor** your demeanor to the situation at hand.

On the evening before the presentation, you should go through the manuscript one last time – the way a long-distance runner reviews the route. **Thought for thought.** Have another look at the markings that you have made for slow and deliberate speaking and for quicker, less deliberate speaking, among other things, and **read the text out loud.**

The next morning, before your presentation, do not waste any more thoughts on your presentation. **Stay relaxed.** You have done your preparations and that will take you to your goal.



## Extremes are dangerous

It is a well-known fact that you can exaggerate anything. Total apathy is just as dangerous as being fanatical. For this reason, you need to be aware of what is motivating your actions and **reflect on this**. Why do I avoid a steady relationship? Why do I prefer a certain make of car to another? Why do I need a nicer apartment? And another important question: Who influences my actions?

After all, it is the **seducers** among our relatives, friends and acquaintances who lead us to actions that we later regret, when it is often too late to turn back. “One time won’t hurt!”, “You don’t want to be a spoil sport, do you?”, “What’s the big deal?” **Who** got you to start smoking? **Who** got you to drink more than was good for you? **Who** managed to fuel hate in you?

Each one of us tends to see other people as a role model, from the time we are children, and has the need to be acknowledged. We want to be **loved** and feel good in the **security** of a group. In order to belong, we dress the way others think we should, talk like them and behave like them. In the years in which we **cut the cord to our parents as young people** and join our peers, latch on to idols and want to be seen as cool, we are particularly **susceptible to seducers**.

There are young people who flee from the intrusiveness of their parents’ concern and the teachers’ pressure to learn, **let off steam**, and want to oppose the adults’ world. Other young people experience their situation in a way that is impersonal and cold in terms of human relations. They want to replace the arbitrariness of their parents’ behavior and the learning-objective technocracy of the school environment with **the warmth of friendships**.

And then it comes to pass: They try something risky. Drugs, hatemongers, those we have labeled as the “bogeyman”, violent fantasies, addictions. When parents fail and there is no family support, when childcare and school fail to offset **deficits and improper motivations** or to at least mitigate them, motives for action spread that are detrimental to an individual’s ability to cope with life and subsequently to a life together with others.

The motivation for action of each individual and the **viability of a society** have a reciprocal impact on each other and are interwoven. A universally binding **set of values** is necessary if a people is to survive over time. The Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites in order to enable them to survive as a people. And they were promised “milk and honey”. Values and prosperity!

To what extent are your motives determined by others?

This is a question that **young adults** in particular should deal with. After all, I will only have a chance to have a self-determined life if I find a way to act that is motivated by my self. Only then will I be armed to face the countless **influences** of my surroundings that can harm me and whose sole motivation is to put me under the yoke of others.

The **starting points** of the dangerous role models, the manipulators and seducers are first and foremost my **feelings**: fear, guilt, inferiority, loneliness, hate, rage, need for recognition. But also ignorance, lack of restraint, insecurity, arrogance, guilelessness. As well as egotism, greed, envy, distrust, despair, laziness. The list is endless!

We are seducible. By whom? For what? Take a good look at these two questions! Over and over. Motives become blurred. For this reason, ask the question “What are the real, **the genuine motives** behind my action?” In what way do my fellow human beings try to influence me and pull me over to their side? As a buyer, a voter and as a friend.

**Loving the truth** is the best way to ward off seduction. To use this, however, means that you have to know the truth and be prepared to accept it. Be honest! Especially **to yourself!** If you deceive yourself, you make yourself susceptible to manipulators and seducers. “But it tastes so good!”, “What a fantastic man”, “It’s the deal of a lifetime!”

Find out the truth! – before your feelings have suppressed your sense of reason. It has never been so easy to collect **information** as in the internet era of today. Combining the information with your own **experiences** and the **advice of people with life experience** can bring us closer to the truth. You just have to make the effort.

It is so fantastic to trust other people! But to do that, you have to be **trustworthy** and **reliable** yourself. Opportunists who jump on every bandwagon that comes along are not trustworthy. You can sense it, and your sense of reason will tell you that this is someone that you really shouldn’t follow.

If you continually improve your **gift of observation** and your ability to listen, you will recognize contradictions and inconsistencies earlier and earlier, and you will realize that **ulterior motives** are involved. If something is pitched in a way that is just too appealing, it should make you skeptical. When parts of the truth are concealed, you should notice it.

In everything that is presented to you, you should check the background, obtain clarity, and then ask yourself: Do I want this or don’t I? Justify to yourself **why** you want something. And do this



against the backdrop of imperatives for peaceful human coexistence. Your freedom is tied to **responsibility**.

There is an excellent practice field for liberating your action from outward control: dealing with all kinds of **advertising** for a while. What's happening there? Which people are addressed using what advertising? What advertising speaks to you? And why? Via which media does advertising reach me?

Specifically, review the information content, facts that are mentioned, the way feelings are addressed, the design elements of text, images and color, as well as the type of statements that are made. To this end, develop **your own “analytical system”** so that after a while, you can compare who advertises in what way, for instance, on television.

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Don't be afraid to risk doing something in vain!

Investing effort in vain is a notion that petrifies some people. They should watch a **soccer game** once in a while: the players run around and knock themselves out for ninety minutes; they keep trying to build up attacks with the aim of kicking the ball into the opponent's goal. If you have goals, and **if you want to achieve your goal, you have to take risks**. The players have to risk losing the ball to the opponent, making a bad pass or kicking the ball next to or over the top of the goal net.

Don't allow yourself to be prevented from taking risks. **Try something new**, even if it is not something you can use right away or even leads to a dead end. There is no such thing as “in vain”! After all, **in everything you do, you learn** and you gain new experiences.

If in Germany a business start-up goes bankrupt, they are blacklisted. Hardly anyone is given the **opportunity for a second attempt**. They are no longer creditworthy. In other countries, the attitude is different. If someone goes bankrupt, they get a new loan if the **business idea** is promising and they have presented a plausible **business plan**. The banks say, “They have probably learned from their bankruptcy and will do it right this time.”

There are people – relatives, friends and colleagues, who do not believe that you will achieve your goals and perhaps aren't even interested in your achieving your goals and would even like to **prevent** you from getting to where you would like to go. Brace yourself for this and don't let anyone keep you from trying to reach your goals. Don't listen to people who tell you, “You'll never manage that!”, “Why do you want to do that in the first place?”, “Forget it! You have already tried that a hundred times!”, “Don't even bother starting with that!”, “Well, if I were you, I wouldn't

subject myself to that!", "Did you really think about what you are doing?"

Sometimes it's better to keep your goals to yourself so people don't throw cold water on your ideas. This kind of pessimism provokes some people who have announced their goals as though they have already achieved them. It's better to **keep a low profile** and let your achievements speak for themselves. Otherwise you'll be like the chicken that clucks before it has laid an egg.

## Motivated people enjoy life

Nothing ventured, nothing gained! During a leg of a journey you need feedback, from others and from yourself. What is not working according to schedule? What needs to be corrected? No plan is so precise and foresighted that you will reach your goal as if programmed. For this reason, once you have started, you have to run on **situation control**, not on autopilot.

Motivation – ultimately this is the desire for life. The **desire** to achieve something in life. The **joy** of shaping your life yourself. The **certainty** of being able to cope with life to some extent in this world, despite all the imponderabilities, dependencies and strokes of fate. The ability to motivate yourself will give you the courage and strength to live.

