

Accepting Personal Responsibility

I accept responsibility for creating my life as I want it.

Successful students:

adopt the Creator role,

believing that their choices create the outcomes and experiences of their lives.

master Creator language,

accepting personal responsibility for their results.

make wise decisions,

consciously designing the future they want.

Struggling Students:

accept the Victim role,

believing that external forces determine the outcomes and experiences of their lives.

use Victim language,

rejecting personal responsibility by blaming, complaining, and excusing.

make decisions carelessly,

letting the future happen by chance rather than by choice.

Case Study in Critical Thinking

The Late Paper

Professor Freud announced in her syllabus for Psychology 101 that final term papers had to be in her hands by noon on December 18. No student, she emphasized, would pass the course without a completed term paper turned in on time. As the semester drew to a close, **Kim** had an “A” average in Professor Freud’s psychology class, and she began researching her term paper with excitement. **Arnold**, Kim’s husband, felt threatened that he had only a high school diploma while his wife was getting close to her college degree. Arnold worked the evening shift at a bakery, and his coworker **Philip** began teasing that Kim would soon dump Arnold for a college guy. That’s when Arnold started accusing Kim of having an affair and demanding she drop out of college. She told Arnold he was being ridiculous. In fact, she said, a young man in her history class had asked her out, but she had refused. Instead of feeling better, Arnold became even more angry. With Philip continuing to provoke him, Arnold became sure Kim was having an affair, and he began telling her every day that she was stupid and would never get a degree. Despite the tension at home, Kim finished her psychology term paper the day before it was due. Since Arnold had hidden the car keys, she decided to take the bus to the college and turn in her psychology paper a day early. While she was waiting for the bus, **Cindy**, one of Kim’s psychology classmates, drove up and invited Kim to join her and some other students for an end-of-semester celebration. Kim told Cindy she was on her way to turn in her term paper, and Cindy promised she’d make sure Kim got it in on time. “I deserve some fun,” Kim decided, and hopped into the car. The celebration went long into the night. Kim kept asking Cindy to take her home, but Cindy always replied, “Don’t be such a bore. Have another drink.” When Cindy finally took Kim home, it was 4:30 in the morning. She sighed with relief when

she found that Arnold had already fallen asleep. When Kim woke up, it was 11:30 A.M., just thirty minutes before her term paper was due. She could make it to the college in time by car, so she shook Arnold and begged him to drive her. He just snapped, “Oh sure, you stay out all night with your college friends. Then, I’m supposed to get up on my day off and drive you all over town. Forget it.” “At least give me the keys,” she said, but Arnold merely rolled over and went back to sleep. Panicked, Kim called Professor Freud’s office and told **Mary**, the secretary, that she was having car trouble. “Don’t worry,” Mary assured Kim, “I’m sure Professor Freud won’t care if your paper’s a little late. Just be sure to have it here before she leaves at 1:00.” Relieved, Kim decided not to wake Arnold again; instead, she took the bus. At 12:15, Kim walked into Professor Freud’s office with her term paper. Professor Freud said, “Sorry, Kim, you’re fifteen minutes late.” She refused to accept Kim’s term paper and gave Kim an “F” for the course.

Listed below are the characters in this story. Rank them in order of their *responsibility for Kim’s failing grade in Psychology 101*. Give a different score to each character. Be prepared to explain your choices.

Most responsible 1 2 3 4 5 6 Least responsible

___ Professor Freud the teacher,	___	Philip , Arnold’s coworker
___ Kim , the psychology student	___	Cindy , Kim’s classmate
___ Arnold , Kim’s husband	___	Mary , Prof. Freud’s secretary

DIVING DEEPER Is there someone not mentioned in the story who may also bear responsibility for Kim’s failing grade?

Adopting the Creator Role

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

What is self-responsibility?

Why is it the key to gaining maximum control over the outcomes and experiences of your life?

When psychologist Richard Logan studied people who survived ordeals such as being imprisoned in concentration camps or lost in the frozen Arctic, he found that all of these victors shared a common belief. They saw themselves as personally responsible for the outcomes and experiences of their lives.

Ironically, responsibility has gotten a bad reputation. Some see it as a heavy burden they have to lug through life. Quite the contrary, personal responsibility is the foundation of success because without it, our lives are shaped by forces outside of us. The essence of personal responsibility is responding wisely to life's opportunities and challenges, rather than waiting passively for luck or other people to make the choices for us. Whether your challenge is surviving an Arctic blizzard or excelling in college, accepting personal responsibility moves you into cooperation with yourself and with the world. As long as you resist your role in creating the outcomes and experiences in your life, you will fall far short of your potential. I first met Deborah when she was a student in my English 101 class. Deborah wanted to be a nurse, but before she could qualify for the nursing program, she had to pass English 101. She was taking the course for the fourth time. "Your writing shows fine potential," I told Deborah after I had read her first essay. "You'll pass English 101 as soon as you eliminate your grammar problems." "I know," she said. "That's what my other three

instructors said.” “Well, let’s make this your last semester in English 101, then. After each essay, make an appointment with me to go over your grammar problems.”

“Okay.” “And go to the Writing Lab as often as possible. Start by studying verb tense. Let’s eliminate one problem at a time.” “I’ll go this afternoon!” But Deborah never found time: No, really I’ll go to the lab just as soon as I Deborah scheduled two appointments with me during the semester and missed them both: I’m so sorry I’ll come to see you just as soon as I To pass English 101 at our college, students must pass one of two essays written at the end of the semester in an exam setting. Each essay, identified by social security number only, is graded by two other instructors. At semester’s end, Deborah once again failed English 101. “It isn’t fair!” Deborah protested. “Those exam graders expect us to be professional writers. They’re keeping me from becoming a nurse!” I suggested another possibility: “What if you are the one keeping you from becoming a nurse?” Deborah didn’t like that idea. She wanted to believe that her problem was “out there.” Her only obstacle was those teachers. All her disappointments were their fault. The exam graders weren’t fair. Life wasn’t fair! In the face of this injustice, she was helpless. I reminded Deborah that it was she who had not studied her grammar. It was she who had not come to conferences. It was she who had not accepted personal responsibility for creating her life the way she wanted it. “Yes, but” she said.

Victims and Creators

When people keep doing what they’ve been doing even when it doesn’t work, they are acting as Victims. When people change their beliefs and behaviors to create the best results they can, they are acting as Creators.

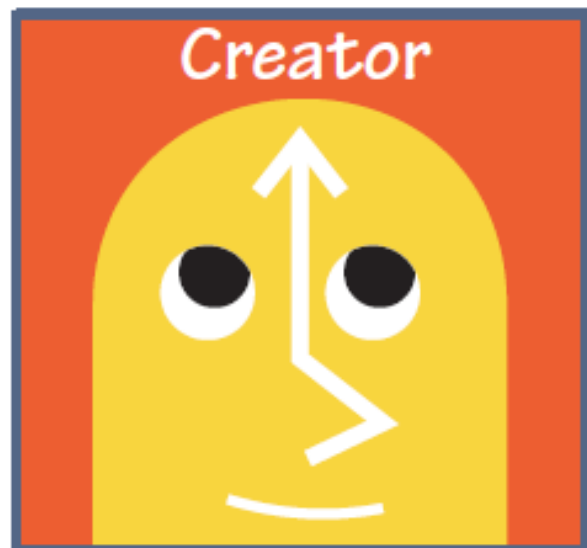
When you accept personal responsibility, you believe that you create everything

in your life. This idea upsets some people. Accidents happen, they say. People treat them badly. Sometimes they really are victims of outside forces.

This claim, of course, is true. At times, we are all affected by forces beyond our control. If a hurricane destroys my house, I am a victim (with a small “v”). But if I allow that event to ruin my life, I am a Victim (with a capital “V”).

The essential issue is this: Would it improve your life to act as if you create all of the joys and sorrows in your life? Answer “YES!” and see that belief improve your life. After all, if you believe that someone or something out there causes all of your problems, then it’s up to “them” to change. What a wait that can be! How long, for example, will Deborah have to wait for “those English teachers” to change?

If, however, you accept responsibility for creating your own results, what happens then? You will look for ways to create your desired outcomes and experiences despite obstacles. And if you look, you’ve just increased your chances of success immeasurably!



The benefits to students of accepting personal responsibility have been demonstrated in various studies. Researchers Robert Vallerand and Robert Bissonette, for example, asked 1,000 first-year college students to complete

a questionnaire about why they were attending school. They used the students' answers to assess whether the students were "Origin-like" or "Pawnlike."

The researchers defined Origin-like students as seeing themselves as the originators of their own behaviors, in other words, Creators. By contrast, Pawn-like students see themselves as mere puppets manipulated by others, in other words, Victims. A year later, the researchers returned to find out what had happened to the 1,000 students. They found that significantly more of the Creator-like students were still enrolled in college than the Victim-like students. If you want to succeed in college (and in life), then being a Creator gives you a big edge.

Responsibility and Choice

The key ingredient of personal responsibility is choice. Animals respond to a stimulus because of instinct or habit. For humans, however, there is a brief, critical moment of decision available between the stimulus and the response.

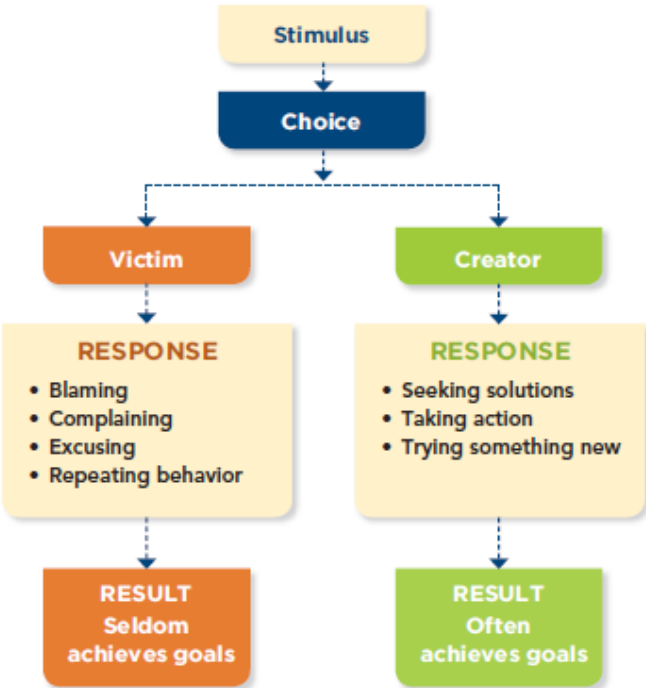
In this moment, we make the choices—consciously or unconsciously—that influence the outcomes of our lives.

Numerous times each day, you come to a fork in the road and must make a choice. Even not making a choice is a choice. Some choices have a small impact: Shall I get my hair cut today or tomorrow? Some have a huge impact: Shall I stay in college or drop out? The sum of the choices you make from this day forward will create the eventual outcome of your life. The Responsibility Model in shows what the moment of choice looks like. In that brief moment between stimulus and response, we can choose to be a Victim or a Creator. When we respond as a Victim, we complain, blame, make excuses, and repeat ineffective behaviors. When we respond as a

Creator, we pause at each decision point and ask, “What are my options, and which option will best help me create my desired outcomes and experiences?”

The difference between responding to life as a Victim or Creator is how we choose to use our energy. When I’m blaming, complaining, and excusing, my efforts cause little or no improvement. Sure, it may feel good in that moment to claim that I’m a poor Victim and “they” are evil persecutors, but my good feelings are fleeting because afterward my problem still exists. By contrast, when I’m seeking solutions and taking actions, my efforts often (though not always) lead to improvements. At critical forks in the road, Victims waste their energy and remain stuck, while Creators use their energy for improving their outcomes and experiences.

But, let’s be honest. No one makes Creator choices all of the time. I’ve never met anyone who did, least of all me. Our inner lives feature a perpetual tug of war between the Creator part of us and the Victim part of us. My own experiences have taught me the following life lesson: The more choices I make as a Creator



Responsibility Model

the more I improve the quality of my life. That's why I urge you to join me in an effort to choose more often as a Creator. It won't be easy, but it's worth it. You may have to take my word for it right now, but if you experiment with the strategies in this book and continue using the ones that work for you, in a few months you'll see powerful proof in your own life of the value of making Creator choices.

Here's an important choice you can make immediately. Accept, as Creators do, this belief: I am responsible for creating my life as I want it. Of course sometimes you won't be able to create the specific outcomes and experiences you want. The reality is that some circumstances will defy even your best efforts. But, believing that you always have a way to improve your present situation will motivate you to look for it, and by looking you'll often discover options you would never have found otherwise. For this reason, choosing to accept personal responsibility is the first step toward your success. Here's a related choice. Set aside any thought that Creator and Victim choices have anything to do with being good or bad, right or wrong, smart or dumb, worthy or unworthy. If you make a Victim choice, you aren't bad, wrong, dumb, or unworthy. For that matter, if you make a Creator choice, you aren't good, right, smart, or worthy. These judgments will merely distract you from the real issue: Are you getting the outcomes and experiences that you want in your life? If you are, then keep making the same choices because they're working. But, if you're not creating the life you want, then you'd be wise to try something new. We benefit greatly when we shift our energy from defending ourselves from judgments and put it into improving the outcomes and experiences of our lives. "Oh, I get what you mean!" one of my students once exclaimed as we were exploring this issue of personal responsibility, "You're saying that living my life is like traveling in my car. If I want to get where I want to go, I better be the driver and not a passenger." I appreciate her metaphor because

it identifies that personal responsibility is about taking hold of the steering wheel of our lives, about taking control of where we go and how we get there. Ultimately each of us creates the quality of our life with the wisdom or folly of your choices.

JOURNAL ENTRY 1

In this activity, you will experiment with the Creator role. By choosing to take responsibility for your life, you will immediately gain an increased power to achieve your greatest potential.

1:

Write and complete each of the ten sentence stems below. For example, someone might complete the first sentence stem as follows: If I take full responsibility for all of my actions, I will accomplish great things.

1. If I take full responsibility for all of my actions . . .
2. If I take full responsibility for all of my thoughts . . .
3. If I take full responsibility for all of my feelings . . .
4. If I take full responsibility for my education . . .
5. If I take full responsibility for my career . . .
6. If I take full responsibility for my relationships . . .
7. If I take full responsibility for my health . . .
8. If I take full responsibility for all that happens to me . . .
9. When I am acting fully responsible for my life . . .
10. If I were to create my very best self . . .

2:

Write about what you have learned or relearned in this journal about personal responsibility and how you will use this knowledge to improve your life. You might begin, By reading and writing about personal responsibility, I have learned . . .

One Student's Story

During my first semester in college, I was enrolled in a first-year English class. In high school I was usually able to pull off an A on my honors English papers without much work, and I thought I was a pretty good writer. So when I turned in my first college essay, I was expecting to get an A, or at worst a B. However, I was about to get a rude awakening. When we received our papers back a week later, I was shocked to see a C on my paper. I went to the instructor, and she said I just needed more practice and not to worry because I was in the class to learn. However, since I have high expectations for myself, those words weren't very comforting. About that same time in my Strategies for College Success class, we were assigned to read a chapter in *On Course* about personal responsibility. The main idea is to adopt a "Creator" approach to problems, which I understood to mean basically seek solutions and not dwell on the negative. Then it clicked for me; I am responsible for my grades and I need to do whatever is necessary to get the ones I want. In high school, I could write one draft of an essay, turn it in, and I'd usually get an A, but that approach wasn't working in college. So, now I had to do something different. I started writing my papers before they were due and then meeting with my English teacher at least once a week to get her suggestions. Because I was a full-time student and also worked seventeen to twenty hours a week in the cashier's office, sometimes I had to see her during times that were inconvenient. But I had to be flexible if I wanted her critique. During English class, we'd do peer editing, and I found that helpful, too. When I was in high school, I only spent about an hour or two writing an essay. Now I was spending at least three to five hours. To my surprise, after some not-so-great increases in grades, I received what I had been waiting for: my first A on an essay. Although my final grade in English was

a B, I learned a number of important lessons. It's really important to take your time with writing, to have your instructor or someone else read a rough draft and give you some suggestions, and then to write a final draft. I also learned that nobody can make the grade for you; you have to be responsible for yourself. I may not always get an A, but I learned to face a challenge, and no matter what grade I receive, knowing that I took responsibility as a "Creator" was the greatest lesson of all.

Mastering Creator Language

FOCUS QUESTION

How can you create greater success by changing your vocabulary?

Have you ever noticed that there is almost always a conversation going on in your mind? Inner voices chatter away, offering commentary about you, other people, and the world. This self-talk is important because what you say to yourself determines the choices you make at each fork in the road. Victims typically listen to the voice of their Inner Critic or their Inner Defender.

Self-Talk:

THE INNER CRITIC. This is the internal voice that judges us as inadequate:

I'm so uncoordinated. I can't do math. I'm not someone she would want to date.

I never say the right thing. My ears are too big. I'm a lousy writer. The Inner Critic

blames us for whatever goes wrong in our life: It's all my fault. I always screw up. I

knew I couldn't pass biology. I ruined the project. I ought to be ashamed. I blew it again.

This judgmental inner voice can find fault with anything about us: our appearance, our intellect, our performance, our personality, our abilities, how others see us, and, in severe cases, even our value as a human being: I'm not good enough. I'm worthless,

I don't deserve to live. (While nearly everyone has a critical inner voice at times, if you often think toxic self-judgments like these last three, don't mess around. Get to your college's counseling office immediately and get help revising these noxious messages so you don't make self-destructive choices.) Ironically, self-judgments have a positive intention. By criticizing ourselves,

we hope to eliminate our flaws and win the approval of others, thus feeling more worthy. Occasionally when we bully ourselves to be perfect, we do create a positive outcome, though we make ourselves miserable in the effort. Often, though, selfjudgments cause us to give up, as when I tell myself, I can't pass math, so I drop the course. What's positive about this? Well, at least I've escaped my problem. Freed from the pressures of passing math, my anxieties float away and I feel better than I have since the semester started. Of course, I still have to pass math to get my degree, so my relief is temporary. The Inner Critic is quite content to trade success in the future for comfort in the present. Where does an Inner Critic come from? Here's one clue: Have you noticed that its self-criticisms often sound like judgmental adults we have known? It's as if our younger self recorded their judgments and, years later, our Inner Critic replays them over and over. Sometimes you can even trace a self-judgment back to a specific comment that someone made about you years ago. Regardless of its accuracy now, that judgment can affect the choices you make every day.

THE INNER DEFENDER. The flip side of the Inner Critic is the Inner Defender.

Instead of judging ourselves, the Inner Defender judges others: What a boring teacher. My advisor screwed up my financial aid. My roommate made me late to class. No one knows what they're doing around here. It's all their fault! Inner Defenders can find something to grumble about in virtually any situation. Their thoughts and conversations are full of blaming, complaining, accusing, judging, criticizing, and condemning others.

Like Inner Critics, Inner Defenders have a positive intention. They, too, want to protect us from discomfort and anxiety. They do so by blaming our problems on forces that seem beyond our control, such as other people, bad luck, the government,

lack of money, uncaring parents, not enough time, or even too much time.

My Inner Defender might say, I can't pass math because my instructor is terrible. She couldn't teach math to Einstein. Besides that, the textbook stinks and the tutors in the math lab are rude and unhelpful. It's obvious this college doesn't really care what happens to its students. Now I breathe a sigh of relief because I'm covered. If I drop the course, hey, it's not my fault. If I stay in the course and fail, it's not my fault either. And, if I stay in the course and somehow get a passing grade (despite my terrible instructor, lousy textbook, worthless tutors, and uncaring college), well, then I have performed no less than a certified miracle! Regardless of how bad things may get, I can find comfort knowing that at least it's not my fault. It's their fault!

And where did this voice come from? Perhaps you've noticed that the Inner Defender's voice sounds suspiciously like our own voice when we were scared and defensive little kids trying to protect ourselves from criticism or punishment by powerful adults. Remember how we'd excuse ourselves from responsibility, shifting the blame for our poor choices onto someone or something else: It's not my fault. He keeps poking me. My dog ate my homework. What else could I do? I didn't have any choice. My sister broke it. He made me do it. Why does everyone always pick on me? It's all their fault! We pay a high price for listening to either our Inner Critic or Inner Defender. By focusing on who's to blame, we distract ourselves from acting on what needs to be done to get back on course. To feel better in the moment, we sabotage creating a better future. Fortunately, another voice exists within us all.

THE INNER GUIDE. This is the wise inner voice that seeks to make the best of any situation. The Inner Guide knows that judgment doesn't improve difficult situations.

So instead, the Inner Guide objectively observes each situation and asks, Am I on course or off course? If I'm off course, what can I do to get back on course? Inner Guides tell us the impartial truth (as best they know it at that time), allowing us to be more fully aware of the world around us, other people, and especially ourselves. With this knowledge, we can take actions that will get us back on course. Some people say, "But my Inner Critic (or Inner Defender) is right!" Yes, it's true that the Inner Critic or Inner Defender can be just as "right" as the Inner Guide. Maybe you really are a lousy writer and the tutors in the math lab actually are rude and unhelpful. The difference is that Victims expend all their energy in judging themselves or others, while Creators use their energy to solve the problem. The voice we choose to occupy our thoughts determines our choices, and our choices determine the outcomes and experiences of our lives. So choose your thoughts carefully.

The Language of Responsibility

Translating Victim statements into the responsible language of Creators moves you from stagnant judgments to dynamic actions. In the following chart, the lefthand column presents the Victim thoughts of a student who is taking a challenging college course. Thinking this way, the student's future in this course is easy to predict . . . and it isn't pretty.

But, if she changes her inner conversation, as shown in the right-hand column, she'll also change her behaviors. She can learn more in the course and increase her likelihood of passing. More important, she can learn to reclaim control of her life from the judgmental, self-sabotaging thoughts of her Inner Critic and Inner Defender.

As you read these translations, notice two qualities that characterize Creator

language. First, Creators accept responsibility for their situation. Second, they plan and take actions to improve their situation. So, when you hear ownership and an action plan, you know you're talking to a Creator.

Victims Focus on Their Weaknesses

I'm terrible in this subject.

Creators Focus on How to Improve

I find this course challenging, so I'll start a study group and ask more questions in class.

Victims Make Excuses

The instructor is so boring he puts me to sleep.

Creators Seek Solutions

I'm having difficulty staying awake in this class, so I'm going to ask permission to record the lectures. Then I'll listen to them a little at a time and take detailed notes.

Victims Complain

This course is a stupid requirement.

Creators Turn Complaints into Requests

I don't understand why this course is required, so I'm going to ask my instructor to help me see how it will benefit me in the future.

Victims Compare Themselves Unfavorably to Others

I'll never do as well as John; he's a genius.

Creators Seek Help from Those More Skilled

I need help in this course, so I'm going to ask John if he'll help me study for the exams.

Victims Blame

The tests are ridiculous. The professor gave me an "F" on the first one.

Creators Accept Responsibility

I got an “F” on the first test because I didn’t read the assignments thoroughly. From now on I’ll take detailed notes on everything I read

Victims See Problems as Permanent

Posting comments on our class’s Internet discussion board is impossible. I’ll never understand how to do it.

Creators Treat Problems as Temporary

I’ve been trying to post comments on our class’s Internet discussion board without carefully reading the instructor’s directions. I’ll read the directions again and follow them one step at a time.

Victims Repeat Ineffective Behaviors

Going to the tutoring center is no help. There aren’t enough tutors.

Creators Do Something New

I’ve been going to the tutoring center right after lunch when it’s really busy. I’ll start going in the morning to see if more tutors are available then.

Victims Try

I’ll try to do better.

Creators Do

To do better, I’ll do the following: Attend class regularly, take good notes, ask questions in class, start a study group, and make an appointment with the teacher. If all that doesn’t work, I’ll think of something else.

Victims Predict Defeat and Give Up

I’ll probably fail. There’s nothing I can do. I can’t . . . I have to . . . I should . . . I quit . .

Creators Think Positively and Look for a Better Choice

I'll find a way. There's always something I can do. I can . . . I choose to . . . I will . . . I'll keep going . . .

When Victims complain, blame, and make excuses, they have little energy left over to solve their problems. As a result, they typically remain stuck where they are, telling their sad story over and over to any poor soul who will listen. (Ever hear of a "pity party"?) In this way, Victims exhaust not only their own energy but often drain the energy of the people around them.

By contrast, Creators use their words and thoughts to improve a bad situation. First, they accept responsibility for creating their present outcomes and experiences, and their words reflect that ownership. Next they plan and take positive actions to improve their lives. In this way, Creators energize themselves and the people around them.

Whenever you feel yourself slipping into Victim language, ask yourself: What do I want in my life—excuses or results? What could I think and say right now that would get me moving toward the outcomes and experiences that I want?

JOURNAL ENTRY 2

In this activity you will practice the language of personal responsibility. By learning to translate Victim statements into Creator statements, you will master the language of successful people.

1. Draw a line down the middle of a journal page. On the left side of the line, copy the ten Victim language statements found on the next page.

2. On the right side of the line, translate the Victim statements into the words of a Creator. The two keys to Creator language are taking ownership of a problem and taking positive actions to solve it. When you respond as if you are responsible for a bad situation, then you are empowered to do something about it (unlike Victims, who must wait for someone else to solve their problems).

3. Write what you have learned or relearned about how you use language:

Is it your habit to speak as a Victim or as a Creator? Do you find yourself more inclined to blame yourself, blame others, or seek solutions? Be sure to give examples. What is your goal for language usage from now on? How, specifically, will you accomplish this goal? Your paragraph might begin, While reading about and practicing Creator language, I learned that I . . .



VICTIM LANGUAGE

1. If they'd do something about the parking on campus, I wouldn't be late so often.
2. I'm failing my online class because the site is impossible to navigate.
3. I'm too shy to ask questions in class even when I'm confused.
4. She's a lousy instructor.
That's why I failed the first test.
5. I hate group projects because people are lazy and I always end up doing most of the work.
6. I wish I could write better, but I just can't.
7. My friend got me so angry that I can't even study for the exam.
8. I'll try to do my best this semester.
9. The financial aid form is too complicated to fill out.
10. I work nights so I didn't have time to do the assignment.

CREATOR LANGUAGE

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

One Student's Story

When I began college, I was unmotivated and chose to blame others for my problems and my shortcomings. I was so much smarter than everyone that I didn't need to do all the work that everyone else did; at least that's what I thought. My favorite pastime was staring blankly at a television, rather than attending lecture or doing assigned homework. I figured everything would take care of itself without my interference. I

had carried this uninhibited laziness with me through high school and it, unfortunately, translated into my college career. It was then that the gravitas of my situation hit me; at my current rate I was going to be dismissed from school. I was placed on academic probation my sophomore year and unless I improved, I was out.

This was when I first laid my eyes and hands on the On Course book. I didn't think much of it at first; just another guide for the misguided, full of backwards theories and advice that wouldn't help me, or anyone else. But from the first reading, I noticed that this book was different. It used different language, language that didn't bore me or induce disinterest. What's funniest, though, was that one of the first journals that I was assigned had the most profound impact on my changing as a student. Just as On Course used innovative and interesting language to teach, this journal was all about changing my own language. Rather than use language that blames others or is blatantly negative, that journal taught me to use positive Creator language. I needed to think and speak in a language that searched for answers and solutions, not a language that kept me unmotivated and helpless. When I rephrased my thinking and speaking, the rest of life followed. All of a sudden, responsibility was in my own hands and the solutions that I needed, but was afraid to search out, became much clearer. Now that I knew there were, in fact, answers and solutions, I didn't look to blame those

around me. I realized that it was up to me to find these solutions; that they would not magically appear before my eyes and that nobody else would find them for me. My faults and shortcomings became more apparent than ever, and my arrogance was startling. I saw that I was not smart enough to be exempt from school and from the work of my fellow students.

They all searched for solutions and held themselves responsible for these solutions; I never realized this because I had never yearned for these solutions, and therefore never had responsibility. I stopped expecting solutions to come to me naturally and started to work, rather than fall asleep at the television. Positive Creator language was only the first step, but what I took from this first lesson carried through to every other lesson in class and in life. I found that I was newly interested in my classes; homework became a pleasure because each assignment was yet another opportunity to learn. Rather than fall asleep at the television, I now fell asleep after studying. And probation? That became a thing of the past. Even in basketball (my sport of choice) I started to take more of an interest in passing, rather than scoring, and helping my teammates, instead of blaming them for mistakes. Amongst my friends I am now known as the "problem solver," which is just as surprising to me as it is to them. They've noticed a definite change, and I am glad to advise them to read my On Course book so that maybe they too will find a lesson that sparks their own improvement. On Course provided me with valuable steppingstones that have made me into a student and person who cares enough to take responsibility for his language and his actions, doing what needs to be done in order to succeed in school and in the outside world.

Making Wise Decisions

FOCUS QUESTIONS How can you improve the quality of the decisions you make? How can you take full responsibility for the outcomes and experiences in your life?

Life is a journey with many opportunities and obstacles, and every one requires a choice. Whatever you are experiencing in your life today is the result of your past choices. More important, whatever you'll experience in the future will be fashioned by the choices you make from this moment on.

This is an exciting thought. If we can make wiser choices, we can more likely create the future we want. On the road to a college degree, you will face important choices such as these:

Shall I . . .

- major in business, science, or creative writing?
- work full-time, part-time, or not at all?
- drop a course that bores me or stick it out?
- study for my exam or go out with friends?

The sum of these choices, plus thousands of others, will determine your degree of success in college and in life. Doesn't it seem wise, then, to develop an effective strategy for choice management?

The Wise Choice Process

In the face of any challenge, you can make a responsible decision by answering the six questions of the Wise Choice Process. This process, you might be interested to know, is a variation of a decision-making model that is used in many career fields. For example, nurses learn a similar process for helping patients that is abbreviated ADPIE. These letters stand for Assess, Diagnose, Plan, Implement, and Evaluate. Counselors and therapists in training may learn a similar process for solving personal problems that was described in 1965 by William Glasser in his book Reality Therapy.

And the NASA Systems Engineering Handbook says, “Systems engineering [. . .] consists of identification and quantification of system goals, creation of alternative system design concepts, performance of design trades, selection and implementation of the best design, verification that the design is properly built and integrated, and post-implementation assessment of how well the system meets (or met) the goals.” In layman’s terms, this explanation simply means that systems engineers are in the business of identifying goals and then designing systems that define wise choices to overcome any problems that interfere with achieving those goals.

You are about to learn a system that will empower you to take full responsibility for creating your life as you want it to be despite the inevitable challenges that life presents.

1. WHAT'S MY PRESENT SITUATION?

Begin by identifying your problem or challenge, being sure to define the situation as a Creator, not as a Victim. The important information here is “What exists?” (not “Whose fault is it?”). Quiet your Inner Critic, that self-criticizing voice in your head: I am a total loser in my history class. Likewise, ignore your Inner Defender, that judgmental voice that blames everyone else for your problems: My history instructor is the worst teacher on the planet. Instead, rely on your Inner Guide, your wise, impartial inner voice that tells the truth as best it can. Consider only the objective facts of your situation, including how you feel about them. For example: I stayed up all night studying for my first history test. When I finished taking the test, I hoped for an A. At worst, I expected a B. When I got the test back, my grade was a D. Five other students got A's. I feel depressed and angry. By the way, sometimes when we accurately define a troublesome situation, we immediately know what to do. The problem wasn't so much the situation as our muddy understanding of it.

2. HOW WOULD I LIKE MY SITUATION TO BE?

You can't change the past, but if you could create your desired outcome in the future, what would it look like? I would like to get A's on all of my future tests.

3. WHAT ARE MY POSSIBLE CHOICES?

Create a list of possible choices that you could do, knowing you aren't obligated to do any of them. Compile your list without judgment. Don't say, "Oh, that would never work." Don't even say, "That's a great idea." Judgment during brainstorming stops the creative flow. Move from judgments to possibilities, discovering as many creative options as you can. Give yourself time to ponder, explore, consider, think, discover, conceive, invent, imagine. Then dive even deeper. If you get stuck, try one of these options. First, take a different point of view. Think of someone you admire and ask, "What would that person do in my situation?" Or, pretend your problem belongs to someone else. What advice would you give them? Third, incubate. That is, set the problem aside and let your unconscious mind work on a solution while you do other things. Sometimes a great option will pop into your mind while you are brushing your hair, doing math homework, or even sleeping. Your patience will often pay off with a helpful option that would have remained invisible had you accepted the first idea that came to mind or, worse, given up.

- I could complain to my history classmates and anyone else who will listen.
- I could drop the class and take it next semester with another instructor
- I could complain to the department head that the instructor grades unfairly.
- I could ask my successful classmates for help.
- I could ask the instructor for suggestions about improving my grades.
- I could read about study skills and experiment with some new ways to study.
- I could request an opportunity to retake the test.
- I could take all of the online practice quizzes.
- I could get a tutor.

4. WHAT'S THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF EACH POSSIBLE CHOICE?

Decide how you think each choice is likely to turn out. If you can't predict the outcome of one of your possible choices, stop this process and gather any additional information you need. For example, if you don't know the impact that dropping a course will have on your financial aid, find out before you take that action.

Here are the possible choices from Step 3 and their likely outcomes:

- Complain to history classmates: I'd have the immediate pleasure of criticizing the instructor and maybe getting others' sympathy.
- Drop the class: I'd lose three credits this semester and have to make them up later.
- Complain to the department head: Probably she'd ask if I've seen my instructor first, so I wouldn't get much satisfaction.
- Ask successful classmates for help: I might learn how to improve my study habits; I might also make new friends.
- Ask the instructor for suggestions: I might learn what to do next time to improve my grade; at least the instructor would learn that I want to do well in this course.
- Read about study skills: I would probably learn some strategies I don't know and maybe improve my test scores in all of my classes.
- Request an opportunity to retake the test: My request might get approved and give me an opportunity to raise my grade. At the very least, I'd demonstrate

how much I want to do well.

- Take all of the online practice quizzes: This action wouldn't help my grade on this test, but it would probably improve my next test score.
- Get a tutor: A tutor would help, but it would probably take a lot of time.

5. WHICH CHOICE(S) WILL I COMMIT TO DOING?

Now create your plan. Decide which choice or choices will likely create your desired outcome; then commit to acting on them. If no favorable option exists, consider which choice leaves you no worse off than before. If no such option exists, then ask which choice creates the least unfavorable outcome.

I'll talk to my successful classmates, make an appointment with my instructor and have him explain what I could do to improve, and I'll request an opportunity to retake the test. I'll read the study skills sections of On Course and implement at least three new study strategies. If these choices don't raise my next test score to at least a B, I'll get a tutor.

Each situation will dictate the best options. In the example above, if the student had previously failed four tests instead of one, the best choice might be to drop the class. Or, if everyone in the class were receiving D's and F's, and if the student had already met with the instructor, a responsible option might be to see the department head about the instructor's grading policies.

6. WHEN AND HOW WILL I EVALUATE MY PLAN?

At some future time you will want to evaluate your results. To do so, compare your new situation to how you want it to be (as you described in Step 2). If the two situations are identical (or close enough), you can call your plan a success. If you find that you are

still far from your desired outcome, you have some decisions to make. You might decide that you haven't implemented your new approach long enough, so you'll keep working your plan. Or you may decide that your plan just isn't working, in which case you'll return to Step 1 and work through Step 5 to design a plan that will work better. However, you're not starting completely over because this time you're smarter than you were when you began: Now you know what doesn't work. After my next history test, I'll see if I have achieved my goal of getting an A. If not, I'll revise my plan.

Here's the bottom line: Our choices reveal what we truly believe and value, as opposed to what we say we believe and value. When I submissively wait for others to improve my life, I am being a Victim. When I passively wait for luck to go my way, I am being a Victim. When I make choices that take me off course from my future success just to increase my immediate pleasure (such as partying instead of studying for an important test), I am being a Victim. When I make choices that sacrifice my goals and dreams just to reduce my immediate discomfort (such as dropping a challenging course instead of spending extra hours working with a tutor), I am being a Victim.

However, when I design a plan to craft my life as I want it, I am being a Creator. When I carry out my plan even in the face of obstacles (such as when the campus bookstore runs out of a book I need for class and I keep up with my assignments by reading a copy the instructor has placed on reserve in the library), I am being a Creator. When I take positive risks to advance my goals (such as asking a question in a large lecture class even though I am nervous), I am being a Creator.

When I sacrifice immediate pleasure to stay on course toward my dreams (such as resisting the urge to buy a new cell phone so I can reduce my work hours to

study more), I am being a Creator.

No matter what your final decision may be, the mere fact that you are defining and making your own choices is wonderfully empowering. By participating in the Wise Choice Process, you affirm your belief that you can change your life for the better. You reject the position that you are merely a Victim of outside forces, a pawn in the chess game of life. You insist on being the Creator of your own outcomes and experiences, shaping your destiny through the power of wise choices.

Journal Entry 3

In this activity you will apply the Wise Choice Process to improve a difficult situation in your life. Think about a current problem, one that you're comfortable sharing with your classmates and teacher. As a result of this problem, you may be angry, sad, frustrated, depressed, overwhelmed, or afraid. Perhaps this situation has to do with a grade you received, a teacher's comment, or a classmate's action. Maybe the problem relates to a relationship, a job, or money. The Wise Choice Process can help you make an empowering choice in any part of your life.

A. Write the six questions of the Wise Choice Process and answer each one as it relates to your situation. The Wise Choice Process

1. What's my present situation? (Describe the problem objectively and completely.)
2. How would I like my situation to be? (What is your ideal future outcome?)
3. What are my possible choices? (Create a long list of specific choices that might create your preferred outcome.)
4. What's the likely outcome of each possible choice? (If you can't predict the likely outcome of an option, stop and gather more information.)
5. Which choice(s) will I commit to doing? (Pick from your list of choices in Step 3.)
6. When and how will I evaluate my plan? (Identify specifically the date and criteria by which you will determine the success of your plan.)

B. Write what you learned or relearned by doing the Wise Choice Process. Be sure to Dive Deep. You might begin, By doing the Wise Choice Process, I learned that I . . . Remember, you can enliven your journal by adding pictures cut from magazines, drawings of your own, clip art, or quotations that appeal to you.

A story of a student:

A student once told me she'd had more than a dozen jobs in three years. "Why so many jobs?" I asked. "Bad luck," she replied. "I keep getting one lousy boss after another." Hmmmm, I wondered, twelve lousy bosses in a row? What are the odds of that? Responsibility is about ownership. As long as I believe my career success belongs to someone else (like "lousy" bosses), I'm being a Victim, and my success is unlikely. Victims give little effort to choosing or preparing for a career. Instead, they allow influential others (such as parents and teachers) or circumstances to determine their choice of work. They complain about the jobs they have, make excuses for why they haven't gotten the jobs they want, and blame others or their own permanent flaws for their occupational woes. By contrast, Creators know that the foundation of success at work (as in college) is accepting this truth: By our choices, we are each the primary creators of the outcomes and experiences of our lives. Accepting responsibility in the work world begins with consciously choosing your career path. You alone can decide what career is right for you. That's why Creators explore their career options thoroughly, match career requirements with their own talents and interests, consider the consequences of choosing each career (such as how much education the career requires or what the employment outlook is), and make informed choices. Choose your

career wisely because few things in life are worse than spending eight hours a day, fifty weeks a year, working at a job you hate. Taking responsibility for your work life also means planning your career path to keep your options open and your progress unobstructed. For example, you could keep your career options open in college by taking only general education courses while investigating several possible fields of work. Or you could eliminate a financial obstacle by getting enough education—such as a dental hygiene degree—to support yourself while pursuing your dream career—such as going to dental school. In short, Creators make use of the power of wise choices. They believe that there is always an option that will lead them toward the careers they want, and they take responsibility for creating the employment they want. Instead of passively waiting for a job to come to them, they actively go out and look. One of my students lost a job when the company where she worked closed. She could have spent hours in the cafeteria complaining about her bad fortune and how she could no longer afford to stay in school. Instead she created employment for herself by going from store to store in a mall asking every manager for a part-time job until one said, “Yes.” In the time she could have wasted in the cafeteria complaining about her money problems, she solved them with positive actions.

When it comes to finding a full-time career position, Creators continue to be proactive. They don’t wait for the perfect job opening to appear in their local paper or on an Internet job site. They don’t wait for a call from an employment agency. They know that employers prefer to hire people they know and like, so Creators do all they can to get known and liked by employers in their career field. They start by researching companies that need their talents and for whom they might like to work. Then, they contact potential employers directly. They don’t ask if the employer has a job opening. Instead, they seek an informational interview: “Hi, I’ve just gotten my degree in

accounting, and I'd like to make an appointment to talk to you about your company What's that? You don't have any positions open at this time? No problem. I'm just gathering information at this point, looking for where my talents might make the most contributions. Would you have some time to meet with me this week? Or would next week be better?" Creators go to these information-gathering interviews prepared with knowledge about the company, good questions to ask, and a carefully prepared résumé. At the end of the meeting they ask if the interviewer knows of any other employers who might need their skills. They call all of the leads they get and use the referral as an opening for a job interview: "I was speaking with John Smith at the Ajax Company, and he suggested that I give you a call about a position you have open." A friend of mine got an information-gathering interview and wowed the personnel manager with her professionally prepared résumé and interviewing skills; even though the company "had no openings" when she called, two days after the interview, she was offered a position. Accepting responsibility not only helps you get a great job, it makes it possible to excel on the job. Employers love responsible employees. Wouldn't you?

Instead of complaining, blaming, making excuses, and thus creating an emotionally draining work environment, responsible employees create a positive workplace where absenteeism is low and work production is high. Instead of repeating ineffective solutions to problems, proactive employees seek solutions, take new actions, and try something new. They pursue alternative routes instead of complaining about dead ends. Creators show initiative instead of needing constant direction, and they do their best work even when the boss isn't looking. As someone once said, "There is no traffic jam on the extra mile." Creators are willing to go the extra mile, and this effort pays off handsomely. If you run into a challenge while preparing for a career, seeking a job, or

working in your career, don't complain, blame, or make excuses. Instead, ask yourself a Creator's favorite question: "What's my plan?"

Believing in Yourself

Change Your Inner Conversation

Imagine this: Three students schedule an appointment with their instructor to discuss a project they're working on together. They go to the instructor's office at the scheduled time, but he isn't there. They wait forty-five minutes before finally giving up and leaving. As you learn what they do next, identify which student you think has the strongest self-esteem.

Student 1, feeling discouraged and depressed, spends the evening watching television while ignoring assignments in other subjects. Student 2, feeling insulted and furious, spends the evening complaining to friends about the inconsiderate, incompetent instructor who stood them up. Student 3, feeling puzzled about the mix-up, decides to email the instructor the next day to see what happened and to set up another meeting; meanwhile, this student spends the evening studying for a test in another class. Which student has the strongest self-esteem?

The Curse of Stinkin' Thinkin'

How is it that three people can have the same experience and respond to it so differently? According to psychologists like Albert Ellis, the answer lies in what each person believes caused the event. Ellis suggested that our different responses could

be understood by realizing that the activating event (A) plus our beliefs (B) equal the consequences (C) (how we respond). In other words, A _ B _ C. For example:

Activating Event	+ Beliefs	= Consequence
Student 1: Instructor didn't show up for a scheduled conference.	My instructor thinks I'm dumb. I'll never get a college degree. I'm a failure in life.	Got depressed and watched television all evening.
Student 2: Same.	My instructor won't help me. Teachers don't care about students.	Got angry and spent the night telling friends how horrible the instructor is.
Student 3: Same.	I'm not sure what went wrong. Sometimes things just don't turn out the way you plan. There's always tomorrow.	Studied for another class. Planned to call the instructor the next day to see what happened and set up a new appointment.

Ellis suggests that our upsets are caused not so much by our problems as by what we think about our problems. When our thinking is full of irrational beliefs, what Ellis calls “stinkin’ thinkin’,” we feel awful even when the circumstances don’t warrant it. So, how we think about the issues in our lives is the real issue. Problems may come and go, but our “stinkin’ thinkin’” stays with us. As the old saying goes, “Everywhere I go, there I am.” Stinkin’ thinkin’ isn’t based on reality. Rather, these irrational thoughts are the automatic chatter of the Inner Critic (keeper of Negative Beliefs about the self) and the Inner Defender (keeper of Negative Beliefs about other people and the world). So what about our three students and their self-esteem? It’s not hard to see that student 1, who got depressed and wasted the evening watching television, has low self-esteem. This student is thrown far off course simply by the instructor’s not showing up. A major cause of this self-defeating reaction is the Inner Critic’s harsh self-judgments.

Here are some common self-damning beliefs held by Inner Critics:

I'm dumb. I'm unattractive.

I'm selfish. I'm lazy.

I'm a failure. I'm not college material

I'm incapable. I'm weak.

I'm not as good as I'm a lousy parent.

other people. I'm unlovable.

I'm worthless.

A person dominated by his or her Inner Critic misinterprets events, inventing criticisms that aren't there. A friend says, "Something came up, and I can't meet you tonight." The Inner Critic responds, "What did I do wrong? I screwed up again!"

The activating event doesn't cause the consequence; rather, the judgmental chatter of the Inner Critic does. A strong Inner Critic is both a cause and an effect of low self-esteem.

What about student 2, the one who spent the evening telling friends how horrible the instructor was? Though perhaps less apparent, this student's judgmental response also demonstrates low self-esteem. The finger-pointing Inner Defender is merely the Inner Critic turned outward and is just as effective at getting the student off course.

Here are some examples of destructive beliefs held by an Inner

Defender:

People don't treat me right, so they're rotten.

People don't act the way I want them to, so they're awful.

People don't live up to my expectations, so they're the enemy.

People don't do what I want, so they're against me.

Life is full of problems, so it's terrible.

Life is unfair, so I can't stand it.

Life doesn't always go my way, so I can't be happy.

Life doesn't provide me with everything I want, so it's unbearable.

A person dominated by her Inner Defender discovers personal insults and slights in neutral events. A classmate says, "Something came up, and I can't meet you tonight." The Inner Defender responds, "Who do you think you are, anyway? I can find someone a lot better to study with than you!"

The activating event doesn't cause the angry response; rather, the judgmental chatter of the judgmental Inner Defender does. A strong Inner Defender is both a cause and an effect of low self-esteem.

Only student 3 demonstrates high self-esteem. This student realizes he doesn't know why the instructor missed the meeting. He doesn't blame himself, the instructor, or a rotten world. He considers alternatives: Perhaps the instructor got sick or was involved in a traffic accident. Until he can find out what happened and decide what to do next, this student turns his attention to an action that will keep him on course to another goal. The Inner Guide is concerned with positive

results, not judging self or others. A strong Inner Guide is both a cause and an effect of high self-esteem.

Disputing Irrational Beliefs

How, then, can you raise your self-esteem?

First, you can become aware of the chatter of your Inner Critic and Inner Defender. Be especially alert when events in your life go wrong, when your desired outcomes and experiences are thwarted. That's when we are most likely to complain, blame, and excuse. That's when we substitute judgments of ourselves or others for the positive actions that would get us back on course. Once you become familiar with your inner voices, you can begin a process of separating yourself from your Inner Critic and Inner Defender. To do this, practice disputing your irrational and self-sabotaging beliefs.

Here are four effective ways to dispute:

- Offer evidence that your judgments are incorrect: My instructor emailed me last week to see if I needed help with my project, so there's no rational reason to believe he won't help me now.
- Offer a positive explanation of the problem: Sure my instructor didn't show up, but he may have missed the appointment because of a last-minute crisis.
- Question the importance of the problem: Even if my instructor won't help me, I can still do well on this project, and if I don't, it won't be the end of the world.
- If you find that your judgments are true, instead of continuing to criticize

yourself or someone else, offer a plan to improve the situation: If I'm honest, I have to admit that I haven't done well in this class so far, but from now on I'm going to attend every class, take good notes, read my assignments two or three times, and work with a study group before every test. According to psychologist Ellis, a key to correcting irrational thinking is changing a "must" into a preference. When we think "must," what follows in our thoughts is typically awful, terrible, and dreadful. For example, my Inner Defender's belief that an instructor "must" meet me for an appointment or he is an awful, terrible, dreadful person is irrational; I'd certainly "prefer" him to meet me for an appointment, but his not meeting me does not make him rotten—in fact, he may have a perfectly good reason for not meeting with me. As another example, my Inner Critic's belief that I "must" pass this course or I am an awful, terrible, dreadful person is irrational; I'd certainly "prefer" to pass this course, but not doing so does not make me worthless—in fact, not passing this course may lead me to something even better. Believing irrationally that I, another person, or the world "must" be a particular way, Ellis says, is a major cause of my distress and misery. If all of the previously mentioned ideas fail, you can always distract yourself from negative, judgmental thoughts. Simply tell yourself, **"STOP!"**

Then replace your blaming, complaining, or excusing with something positive:

- Watch a funny movie, tell a joke, recall your goals and dreams, think about someone you love.
- Wisely choose the thoughts that occupy your mind.
- Avoid letting automatic, negative thoughts undermine your self-esteem. Evict them and replace them, instead, with esteem-building thoughts.

JOURNAL ENTRY 4

In this activity, you will practice disputing the judgments of your Inner Critic and your Inner Defender. As you become more skilled at seeing yourself, other people, and the world more objectively and without distracting judgments, your self-esteem will thrive.

1. Write a sentence expressing a recent problem or event that upset you.

Think of something troubling that happened in school, at work, or in your personal life.

For example, *I got a 62 on my math test.*

2. Write a list of three or more criticisms your Inner Critic (IC) might level against you as a result of this situation. Have your Inner Guide (IG) dispute each one immediately.

Review the four methods of disputing described on page 52. You only need to use one of them for each criticism. For example,

IC: You failed that math test because you're terrible in math.

IG: It's true I failed the math test, but I'll study harder next time and do better. This was only the first test, and I now know what to expect next time.

3. Write a list of three or more criticisms your Inner Defender (ID) might level against someone else or life as a result of this situation.

Have your Inner Guide (IG) dispute each one immediately. Again use one of the four methods for disputing. For example,

ID: You failed that math test because you've got the worst math instructor on campus.

IG: I have trouble understanding my math instructor, so I'm going to make an appointment to talk with him in private. John really liked him last semester, so I bet I'll like him, too, if I give him a chance.

4. Write what you have learned or relearned about changing your inner conversation.

Your journal entry might begin, *In reading and writing about my inner conversations, I have discovered that . . .* . . . Wherever possible, offer personal experiences or examples to explain what you learned.

One Student's Story

Enrolling in college at the age of twenty-eight was very intimidating to me. Having dropped out of high school at fifteen, I had a real problem with confidence. Even though I had a GED and was earning a decent living as a car salesman, I still doubted that I was smart enough to be successful in college. I finally took the leap and enrolled because I want a career where I don't have to work twelve hours a day, six days a week and never see my family. However, by the second week of the semester, I found myself falling back into old habits. I was sitting in the back of the classroom, asking what homework was due, and talking through most of the class. Negative thoughts constantly ran through my mind: The teachers won't like me. I can't compete with the eighteen-year-olds right out of high school. I don't even remember what a "verb" is. I

can't do this. Then in my College Success class, we read Chapter 2 about becoming a Creator and disputing "stinkin' thinkin'." I realized I had taken on the role of the Victim almost my whole life, and I was continuing to do it now. One day I was on my porch when I caught myself thinking my usual negative thoughts. It occurred to me that I was the only one holding me back, not the teachers, not the other students, not math, not English. If I wanted to be successful in college, I had to quit being scared. I had to change my thinking. So I made a deal with myself that any time I caught myself thinking negatively, I would rephrase the statement in a way that was more positive. I started to truly pay attention to the thoughts in my head and question the negative things I was telling myself. After that I began sitting up front in my classes and participating more. I've always been kind of scattered, so I started using a calendar and a dry erase board to keep track of what I had to do. What amazes me is that I didn't really make that big of a change, yet I finished the semester with a 4.0 average! All I did was realize that what I was saying to myself was my underlying problem. I am responsible for my thoughts, and the choice about whether or not to succeed is mine. These days when I have a ridiculous thought going through my mind and I change it, I smile. It's very empowering.

Embracing Change

Do One Thing Different This Week

Many people resist change.

It's easier to complain, blame, and make excuses. More challenging is experimenting with new beliefs and behaviors, evaluating your results, and then adopting the more helpful ones permanently. And that is exactly what Creators do. Creators crave new methods for lifting the quality of their lives up a notch. And then up another notch. And another. Creators embrace change because it's a great way— maybe the *only* way— to maximize their potential to live a rich, full life.

In this chapter, you have encountered a number of empowering beliefs and behaviors related to personal responsibility and self-esteem.

Here's an opportunity to experiment with one of them. First, from the following list, choose one belief or behavior you think will make the greatest positive impact on your outcomes and experiences.

1. Think: "I accept responsibility for creating my life as I want it."
2. Write a list of Victim statements used by other people and translate the statements into Creator language.
3. Catch myself thinking or speaking Victim language, write a list of these statements, and translate them into Creator language.
4. Use the Wise Choice Process to make a decision.
5. Catch myself using stinkin' thinkin' and dispute it.
6. Demonstrate personal responsibility at my workplace.

Now, write the belief or behavior you chose under “My Commitment” in the following chart.

Then, track yourself for one week, putting a check in the appropriate box each day that you keep your commitment. After seven days, assess your results. If your outcomes and experiences improve, you now have a tool you can use for the rest of your life.

My Commitment

Blank space for writing a commitment.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

During my seven-day experiment, what happened?

Blank space for describing what happened during the seven-day experiment.

As a result of what happened, what did I learn or relearn?

Blank space for reflecting on what was learned or relearned as a result of the experiment.