

The Ultimate Secret to Self-Mastery

The Practice of Self-Acceptance

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The Ultimate Secret to Self-Mastery: The Practice of Self-Acceptance.

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Welcome to The Ultimate Secret to Self-Mastery: the Practice of Self-Acceptance. This is a working ebook, so please have a pen and paper ready – I will be giving you exercises to complete as we go along.

...My Story

I got involved with mental toughness 16 years ago as an athlete in the sport of ringette. I became aware that I was a mental marshmallow in my sport.

One week I was invincible; the next, my confidence came crashing down. I never knew why, and it hurt me all the time. My insecurity reached its zenith at the 1991 National Championships, where we lost with one second left on the clock.

I think that losing (failure) hurts, but underperforming hurts more. And I knew I had choked in the biggest game of the year for my team.

Worse, a teammate of mine scored all 5 goals for our team. Outwardly, I pretended to be happy for her. I said, "Well done, Shauna. Way to go." Inwardly, though, I wasn't happy for her at all. I wanted to be a leader, but I had no idea how.

Exhausted and depressed on the plane ride home, I finally broke, letting in the negativity I had been defending against for years.

I made some startling realizations, including the fact that my fearful self had become more dominant than my confident self. I wondered:

“What do mentally tough people know that I don’t?”

My story has a happy ending. I went on to play for Team Canada for ten years, winning 3 World Championships. More exciting, though, was the joy and confidence I experienced in my sport. I retired only when age forced me to, 30 years after the day I began.

This question led me to investigate the mindset of top performers. For three years, I scoured the literature, seeking answers from the high achievers who came before me. For 13 years after that, I facilitated mental toughness seminars, carefully listening to people about their inner game.

I wanted to know: what are the elements of mental toughness? And, Could I become more mentally tough?

This teleseminar is the result of my 16 year exploration into the invisible mental toughness practices of top performers. I hope you find it useful in your quest for success, love, and happiness.

Are You Winning?

There are only four challenges: health, money, relationships, and career. Are you winning them?

As you reflect on this question, I think you will agree that life is hard. In truth, it is a series of problems to be solved. Here are typical problems people have shared with me:

"I'm stuck in a dead-end job."

"My wife and I have lost our passion for each other."

"I'm not making enough and I don't manage my finances well."

"My boss won't listen."

*"The men I want are commitment-phobic,
but I'm not attracted to men who want me."*

"I'm a good tennis player, but I'm negative towards myself all the time."

"I want to come across as a confident leader at work, but I don't."

"I can't seem to follow through on my goals.

Why do I self-sabotage in this way?"

"Every year I find myself more depressed and de-motivated."

"Now that I'm over 40, I'm in despair about my weight.

Why am I out of control?"

I'd like you to write down a problem you are facing. Just write this challenge down as you currently perceive it. I'll give you 32 seconds to complete this exercise.

Now let's turn our focus to winning. Winning is moving through problems to fulfill your deepest desires.

Why People Fail: Inner Barriers to Winning

Here is the typical inner reaction most people have when they encounter problems.

The first reaction to a problem is learned helplessness. Once you have encountered a setback, you have 'learned' that success is not possible with this person or goal. Unconsciously, you assume that *nothing you do will make a difference*.¹

Here are some examples:

- Your assistant has missed several deadlines. You don't trust her; you think she'll miss deadlines no matter what you say to her. You do her work, reducing your efficiency. [You feel helpless to get her to meet deadlines].
- You're dating again after a divorce, but you have little hope because your last partner gradually becomes less passionate about you, rejecting you in the end. [You feel helpless to trigger lasting attraction in others].
- You have a secure, well-paying job, but yearn for a career that fires your imagination. Gradually, you resign yourself to your current position [You feel helpless to discover your true purpose in life].
- Your husband is not as enthusiastic about childcare as you are. You sign up for an evening course, but hesitate to tell him. [You feel helpless to gain his support].
- You want to quit smoking, but every time you try, life gets stressful and you start again. [You feel helpless to change your habit].

Learned helplessness makes you passive; giving up seems to be the most sensible option, because reality has proven to you that you cannot win.

Learned helplessness is the first barrier to winning.

Once learned helplessness strikes, you are beset by negative emotions: fear, anger, frustration, sadness, and depression. The collective name for these emotions is unhappiness.

Since our culture disapproves of unhappiness, you will tend to be ashamed of it. Annoyed by your inability to control your negative emotions, you'll chastise yourself for them—and resent having to feel inadequate, rejected, or depressed. The more emotional a person you are, the more upset you'll get about these feelings and feel victimized by life. This phenomenon is called self-pity.

Self-pity prevents you from winning because it tempts you to focus on your feelings instead of the problem you are facing. You may even fall prey to viewing your depression or anxiety as the problem instead of the original issue that produced these feelings.

You say things like, "I didn't get my promotion; I've lost my confidence," and you are more troubled by your confidence crisis than the fact that your career is faltering. Self-pity is the equivalent of emotional quicksand. It distracts you from finding solutions that help you win.

Self-pity is the second inner barrier to winning.

The next typical impulse is to try and escape the fear and despair your problem evokes in you.

If you're a proponent of self-help, you'll turn to techniques such as positive thinking to manipulate yourself into feeling better. You'll tell yourself to be more rational, optimistic, and confident despite your problem. You hope that changing your mindset will restore happiness in you.

Positive thinking works wonders when negative thinking is the *cause* of your unhappiness or poor results. When this is the case, correcting your dysfunctional mindset improves your mood and mobilizes you to perform better.

But, if negative thinking is *not* the cause of your problem, working on your thoughts only provides only short term relief. This is because you are spending your energy monitoring your thoughts instead of solving the problem in front of you. This is why therapy so often fails: people use it to analyze their feelings and gain sympathy--not to set goals, change their behaviour, improve their relationships, and solve life problems.

If self-help isn't your thing, you might turn to religion. You'll pray for strength and entrust the problem to God, telling yourself that your problem exists 'for a reason' even if you don't know what it is yet.

Faith is empowering when you draw on it to cope with loss and confront life problems. But, if you use faith to try and escape your pain without addressing your problems, you will simply feel forsaken and let down.

Trying to eliminate your negative feelings by misapplying self-help, therapy, or religion is the third barrier to winning.

At this juncture you'll be tempted to try and escape your distress by convincing yourself that your goal wasn't important to you anyway. This is called disowning your desires. Here's how it shows up:

“I want him to respect me, but I think he’s too insecure to listen to my opinion. I’m going to steer clear of him.”

“He didn’t call, but it’s Ok. We weren’t right for each other anyway. He’s not the man I thought he was.”

“I’m not fulfilled at work, but it’s only 9 years until the pension kicks in.”

“I don’t need a fancy wardrobe or car. Those people are missing the true meaning of life.”

“What do I want to be? I thought I would know one day, but it never happened.”

“Some people are just not meant to be thin.”

But, your desires are still within you. Certain desires we never relinquish, no matter what obstacles we face. In order of priority, they are:

1. Physical security and survival (food, air, water, sex)
2. Loving relationships with others, including acceptance in a group
3. Leisure time and pleasure
4. The need to feel competent and esteemed at work
5. The desire for self-actualization as expressed in knowledge, creativity, truth, and spirituality
6. Financial independence

Denying your desires weakens your commitment to them. This does not help you win, for the hallmark of high achievers is their laser-like focus on a single goal.

When you disconnect from your desires, you don't know who you are or what you want. You say yes to others, but rarely to yourself. Goal-setting shows up as a futile, bewildering exercise. Over time, vague discontent sets in, and life feels meaningless without quite knowing why.

Disowning your desires is the fourth barrier to winning.

The final—and most common—inner reaction to a problem is to suppress your true feelings about it. Suppression is the technical term for pushing fear, rejection, inadequacy, or sadness outside of your conscious awareness.

Suppression temporarily helps us function, but long term it is a recipe for underachievement.

Suppressing negative feelings is the fifth barrier to winning.

We have these 5 typical inner reactions to a problem. I'd like you to do a quick inventory of yourself regarding these reactions. Here is a quick summary of them:

1. Learned helplessness – what are you giving up on?
2. Self-pity – upset that you have to do through unhappiness
3. Misapplying positive thinking – talking yourself about of your feelings
4. Disowning your desires
5. Suppressing your true feelings about the problem

Of course, If none of these reactions leads to winning, we must ask, “How should I deal with my negativity?”

We start by understanding what our negative feelings are telling us.

All negative feelings are a variation of the same theme: you desperately want something, but feel helpless to attain it.

Consider the following definitions:

Anger	Desire contaminated by helplessness
Fear	Desire for the future contaminated by helplessness
Frustration	Less form of anger
Sadness	Rage at being attached to a person who is rejecting you or a desire you cannot fulfill
Grief	Extreme sadness
Disappointment	Milder form of grief
Depression, despair	Suppressed negative feelings
Self-pity	Alarm about your unhappiness

Negative feelings arrive unbidden from deep in your unconscious to warn you that your desires are in jeopardy.

The Practice of Self-Acceptance

“What you resist, persists”

The first step to winning:

harnessing the wisdom of your negativity

There is no need to dread anger, fear or any form of unhappiness. These feelings are natural when we are not winning, and they are powerful tools for navigating life.

Every problem is confusing initially. When learned helplessness sets in, we find ourselves backing away from our desires—or worse, acting in opposition to them. We wonder, “Why am I getting in my own way?”

To win, we must restore clarity and motivation to our inner game. The first step is discovering the exact source of our helplessness.

Just as you cannot cure scurvy unless you know it is caused by a vitamin C deficiency, you cannot cure your learned helplessness until you discover its root cause. You do this by harnessing the wisdom of your negative feelings.

Our negative feelings will take us to the root of our problem if we listen to them.

What is self-acceptance?

When we dislike something, our first temptation is to resist it with denial or anger. Consider your finances, career, appearance, relationships, or emotional state. Is your attitude towards these things one of openness or resistance?

Self-acceptance is the ability to experience yourself just as you are, without resistance. This includes your thoughts, feelings, and results. We drop our self-image and experience ourselves 'warts and all'.

The mental act of self-acceptance is tantamount to removing a blindfold. We remove our denial of harsh realities, particularly about ourselves; we confront unpleasant feelings about our current problems.

We embrace the reality of ourselves whether we like it or not.

The barrier to self-acceptance is that we are not always as we would like to be. We desperately want to view ourselves as successful and happy, and stubbornly reject thoughts and feelings that contradict our carefully cultivated self-image.

Acceptance vs. approval

You may be wondering: "What if I despise something about myself or my life? How can I accept it? And if I do accept it, am I stuck with my chronic anger / poverty / bad marriage / depression / annoying boss / weight problem?"

I believe this question stems from the fact that the word *acceptance* has several definitions, including 'to approve of.' We think that accepting a negative condition, quality, or feeling means to approve of it.

This is a misunderstanding of the term self-acceptance. When you accept yourself, you do not resign yourself to your negative traits, feelings, or habits.¹ You are simply opening to your negative feelings about them.

Cultivating self-acceptance

We cultivate self-acceptance by refusing to suppress our negative feelings when they arise.

The lure of suppression

Suppression is the technical term for pushing feelings like fear, rejection, inadequacy, or sadness outside of our conscious awareness.

Suppression is a mental habit. When negative feelings break into our awareness, we suppress them again and again into the unconscious mind.²

You tell yourself to ‘get over’ your feelings, not let others ‘get to you’, and that anxiety and depression are a sign of weakness. You may even take pride in your mental discipline, believing that mental toughness means never feeling unhappy.

The idea that we banish feelings from our consciousness was popularized by psychiatrist Sigmund Freud in the early 1900’s. Using hypnosis, Freud discovered that some of his patients’ symptoms were caused by suppressed feelings. When the patients brought these feeling into consciousness and experienced them, their physical maladies disappeared.³

At first, suppressing negative feelings seems to be the answer to our problems. We assume that if a feeling is not in our conscious awareness, it is gone.

This is a grave mistake.

Suppression is a recipe for underachievement

Suppression temporarily helps us function and avoid emotional pain, but it has self-defeating side effects. They include mild depression, addictions, overreactions, lack of empathy, low confidence, and self-sabotage.

Sometimes the best way to understand a concept is by understanding its opposite. Because self-acceptance is an abstract concept, I'm going to describe its opposite – suppression – in depth. I'd like you to do an inventory of yourself from the perspective of these side effects as we go along.

Suppression side effect #1: mild depression, de-motivation, procrastination

The moment you suppress a strong negative feeling, you become mildly depressed. Sometimes the depression is quite noticeable; other times, it is a subtle shift. This is because the only way we can avoid negative feelings is to mute our entire feeling function, resulting in mild depression. Suppression is a defense mechanism against fear, anger, and sadness.⁴

By suppressing, we elude a conscious experience of our pain. However, we do not have the luxury of being able to suppress only negative feelings. This is how the feeling function works. We either get to experience both positive and negative feelings, or our feeling function is muted. Once our feeling function is now muted, we cannot access a high energy, motivated state of mind.

Motivation requires a passionate, fully alive feeling function.

Testing the theory

Reflect on your own life experiences for a moment. Recall the last time you had a major conflict with someone that did not get resolved immediately.

Until you resolved the conflict, you probably had trouble accessing either a) your connection to this person, b) your motivation to work things out, or c) your personal confidence. If the disagreement happened at work, you probably wanted to stay home the next day.

Once the conflict was resolved, however, it's likely that all your positive feelings came rushing back...and you were so happy the conflict was over.

Case Study: Maggie

An intelligent young graduate student named Maggie attended my seminar with the goal of finishing her thesis, due in 32 days. She had been procrastinating on it for weeks.

Maggie thought her problem was lack of discipline. She kept making up writing schedules and trying to adhere to them, which only motivated her for a day or two.

I asked Maggie to close her eyes and imagine writing her thesis. After a few moments she reported feeling 'uncomfortable.'

I said, "Bring a sharper observer to the feeling. What is it exactly?"

She replied, "Inadequacy. My topic is too broad in scope. Based on my research, it cannot be covered in one thesis. Even my supervisor agrees that it's extremely broad."

Maggie opened her eyes and smiled. She had finally uncovered the source of her helplessness: her thesis topic was too broad. That same day, she scheduled a meeting with her supervisor to negotiate a narrower topic.

By experiencing her feelings of inadequacy, Maggie pinpointed their source. With newfound clarity, she was able to take constructive action to fix the problem.

Case Study: Stephen

Like most people, Stephen began his relationship with money from a place of lack. Other than investing in a monthly RRSP, he rarely thought about his investments.

At 51, Stephen woke up to a harsh reality. After 10 years of losing money listening to his financial advisor say, 'This is a long-term investment', he knew something had to change.

Stephen enrolled himself in an intensive weekend seminar on wealth-building. At first, he was sure he had made a mistake – the seminar was way too 'touchy-feely' for him.

Over the course of the weekend, Stephen was surprised to discover that confronting his inner wealth demons was exactly what he needed. For the first time in his life, he acknowledged his feelings of helplessness around money, which stemmed directly from his financial illiteracy.

Stephen left the seminar determined to elevate his knowledge about mortgages, investments, and personal financial planning. He had finally shaken the de-motivation around finances that had followed him for years.

Depression and success

Mild depression is the most common reason for underachievement in life, because it erodes our desire to act. Depression is a low energy condition because we are channeling our energy into suppressing feelings, not solving our problems.⁵

Depression translates into procrastination, de-motivation, and clinging to your comfort zone. When you are depressed, even mildly, trying to motivate yourself is like resisting gravity: your overwhelming urge is to surround yourself with T.V., food, and other comforts to get yourself through the day.

Self-acceptance and mild depression

Self-acceptance is the way out of mild depression. The key is to turn inward and experience the feelings that are trying to break into your conscious awareness. Instead of panicking about mild depression and assuming you are mentally ill, you can open to all your feelings—the good and the bad. This will not only remove the depression: it will reveal why you shut down emotionally in the first place.

As you do so, you infuse your life with unceasing energy. You invest your energy into solving your challenges, rather than avoiding them with suppression.

Exercise: are you experiencing mild depression?

If so, describe how it shows up in your life.

Suppression side effect #2: addictions

Suppressing feelings is exhausting; addictions give us energy to continue suppressing and function at the same time.

Over-eating, smoking, drugs, alcoholism, over-napping, eating disorders, compulsive spending or gambling, relationship/sex obsession, and workaholism are all ways we gain energy and keep our feelings suppressed.⁶

Want to test this idea? For one week, cut out everything you habitually use to stay sane: coffee, soda pop, sugar, alcohol, cigarettes, shopping, naps, TV—and do not use substitutes. It may surprise you just how anxious or depressed you feel without these addictions.

Note: a caveat – taken by themselves, many these activities are fine. It is when we use them to suppress—and when they become compulsive—do they qualify as addictions.

Alternatively, the motive for an addiction may be physical--you suffer from symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, or stomachaches--and your addiction masks your ill-health.

The biochemical nature of addictions

While we may *start* an addiction to suppress negative feelings or physical symptoms, the addiction quickly turns biochemical in nature. With repeated use, the substance becomes a necessary ingredient of the body's chemistry; when the substance is withheld, we go into withdrawal.

An addiction can also perpetuate itself by creating new symptoms. For example, high doses of aspirin can create 'rebound' headaches that make us want aspirin. Caffeine wreaks havoc with our adrenal system, fatiguing us and creating a craving for more caffeine.

When you have an addiction and are deprived of it, the symptoms are painful and sometimes unbearable. Not only is your body screaming for the substance, negative feelings or symptoms of illness (or both) are breaking into your awareness. This pain frequently lures you back to the addictive substance or behavior, beginning the destructive cycle anew.⁷

Case Study: Gail

Gail didn't drink, but she used food like a drug. She loved ice cream, chocolate, and other treats, and often would organize her day around eating.

I asked Gail to keep a food diary. The first thing Gail noticed was that some days, she was not compulsive about food; but other days, the idea of skipping her treats was unbearable.

I suggested that on her 'bad' days, Gail put off eating sugar for 30 minutes and journal instead.

Gail had a very good marriage and was deeply in love with her husband. She did not view herself as depressed, and was convinced that her eating was only about pleasure.

After a few weeks, Gail finally admitted that there was something missing with Alan that was difficult to put into words. After a few more weeks, Gail forced herself to acknowledge that Alan was not always responsive to her.

When Gail spoke, Alan was often distracted (but he'd pretend to be listening so as not to incur her wrath). He'd watch sports when she talked about an issue that was upsetting her, or forget to do little things around the house.

When Alan was attentive and affectionate, Gail would relax and not need treats. When he wasn't, she would eat comfort foods throughout the day.

Gail had finally spotted the core of her helplessness: her inability to connect with Alan consistently. Gail was an emotionally intelligent woman who took great pains to not blame. She knew Alan was a wonderful husband, albeit with a lesser need for intimacy than her. She wondered: "How can I create more connectedness with Alan?"

Gail spent much time researching for the answers to her questions. As she found them, her marriage improved and her eating habits smoothed out. She no longer felt trapped in food obsession, and she blossomed in a new fitness program.

Addictions and success

It goes without saying that addictions are incompatible with high achievement in work and love. Addictions lower our consciousness about all problems. We stay confused and unhappy, unable to solve the challenges that plague us.

Over time, an addiction can morph into its own separate problem by damaging our health, relationships, and self-respect. Now we have two problems: the life problem we are distressed about and the addiction. This is why it is best to catch our addictive behaviours early on.

Exercise: Are you indulging in addictions that may be keeping you from addressing problems? Briefly describe them.

Self-acceptance and addictions

By opening to your feelings, you can nip addictions in their infancy. Do not chastise yourself for your addictive urges; instead, get curious about them. Relate to them as a sign that you are suppressing an important feeling, and explore it. You will soon discover the unfulfilled desires your soul is crying out for.

Suppression side effect #3: overreactions

If you do not experience negativity when it arises, these feelings build in your unconscious and surface later in unexpected ways. When this happens, it's hard to deal with the situation rationally.

In overreactions, suppressed negative feelings from the past are breaking into your conscious awareness. Since you did not experience these feelings fully at the time, they are surfacing now.

When I mention the past, I do not necessarily mean your childhood. You may be reacting to an event that happened days, hours, or moments earlier. Common overreactions include:

- **Taking things personally (suppressed rejection).** When people act in selfish or insensitive ways, you are easily hurt. You interpret their actions as rejection of you, not a reflection on them and their circumstances. Here, your suppressed feelings of rejection have been triggered.
- **Chronic anger (suppressed powerlessness).** When people disappoint or say no to you, you become irrationally angry. You suspect you are being unreasonable, yet you still feel justified in your reaction. In these cases, suppressed feelings of powerlessness have been awakened.
- **Defensiveness (suppressed inadequacy).** When people suggest improvements in your work or behaviour, you find it difficult to discuss their concerns rationally. Here, suppressed feelings of inadequacy have come into your conscious awareness.
- **Choking (suppressed fear of failure).** When performing under pressure, you find yourself overwhelmed with anxiety. Your suppressed fear of failure is projected onto this one event, producing extreme nerves.
- **Weeping at commercials, movies, or T.V. (suppressed sadness).** Clearly, you do not have genuine attachment to the people involved ...they are not even real people! Your suppressed rejection and sadness (rage at being attached to people you cannot fully connect to) is coming forth.
- **Random crankiness or violence (general suppression).** When you are cranky and lash out for no apparent reason, your suppressed feelings are being displaced onto an unrelated situation. Road rage, abuse of pets, and office bullies all fall into this category. The extreme example? The macho man in a bar who takes offence to another guy's glance by saying, "Are you lookin' at me?" and starts swinging.

Exercise: Do you overreact? Which categories do your overreactions fall into? What do you feel helpless about?

Case Study: Roger

Roger came to see me after he broke up with his girlfriend over... her dog. One day, his girlfriend mentioned that she didn't like the way he had spoken to her dog. Roger looked at her, walked out of her house, and never talked to her again.

It didn't take long to discover the real origin of Roger's hurt. 14 years earlier, his wife left him, giving him no explanation. Although many years had passed, the slightest criticism from a woman triggered his suppressed rejection, causing him to abandon the relationship.

I challenged Roger to go deeper into his feelings of rejection over his marriage. This was very difficult for him, because he was heavily defended against these feelings. Roger desperately wanted to believe that his ex had been completely irrational.

Roger bolstered his courage and went deeper into the feelings of rejection. Gradually, he recalled how he had verbally bullied his wife during arguments, and how she had cringed in fear and pain.

Finally, over 15 years after his divorce, Roger stopped insisting he had no part in creating it. He admitted his worst fear: helplessness to sustain a woman's passion due to his chronic anger. At long last, Roger was ready to work on his temper.

Overreactions and success

A cornerstone of success is personal responsibility: the ability to be objective about your results and your role in them.

When you suffer from overreactions, you invariably develop a victim consciousness. Blame is always present in your mind because you do not realize that most of your feelings are actually coming from inside you.

Naturally, you want to believe that you are a reasonable person; if you are not educated about suppression, you will assume that your feelings are legitimate responses to an insensitive world, not overreactions. Your lack of consciousness leaves you feeling victimized and immersed in self-pity—not bolstered by personal accountability.

Unrecognized overreactions can make you fearful and spiteful, not to mention defensive. This mindset creates tension in your relationships; in the extreme, you feel alone and alienated much of the time.

Self-acceptance and overreactions

I'm not suggesting that people never do hurtful things.

There is much unconsciousness in the world, and people do transgress against us. Sometimes, the person who has hurt you *is* acting distant or hostile in an effort to communicate something important.

However, you do not need to buy into your overreactions by blaming. If you embrace the core feelings in your overreactions using self-acceptance, your feelings will lessen in intensity. You will understand how your past is impacting you; you will re-gain emotional control and be able to address the situation appropriately.

Suppression side effect: #4: lack of empathy

The hallmark of modern relationships is lack of empathy. People feel alone on an unprecedented scale.

When you have empathy, you easily imagine what another person is feeling and form a genuine connection with him. Empathy makes you want to alleviate the suffering of others, also known as compassion.⁸

When you are disconnected from your own emotions, you do not want to be empathic. Empathy activates your feeling function and brings forth your own suppressed fears and sadness. Here are classic signs of lack of empathy:

- Self-absorption: boredom or disconnection when others talk about themselves; need to hog the spotlight in conversation.
- Insensitivity: discomfort when others are emotional; forcing people to display a 'stiff upper lip' during trauma.
- Excessive dominance: command and control decision-making; refusing to listen when others are upset with you; inability to apologize.
- Inappropriate selfishness: resisting others' preferences for shared activities (restaurants, entertainment, sports); chronic lateness; messiness; being cheap with money.
- Aggressiveness: criticizing, yelling, making hurtful comments or jokes that cause others shame.
- Judging others: gossip, racism and bigotry.
- Forgetting to compliment others or celebrate their achievements, birthdays, weddings, retirements, etc.

- Neglecting to nurture others through stressful events such as health, job or relationship problems.

These are all signs of lack of empathy, created by suppression.

Case study: Chad

Chad sought my help to try and bring his marriage back to life. He said he no longer felt any passion for his wife, and doubted it could be re-kindled.

Compounding matters was the fact that Chad had felt tremendous passion for a woman he had had an affair with years earlier.

Initially, Chad scoffed at the notion of inner work. He just wanted me to tell him what to say to his wife to improve the marriage.

I did not relent. Instead, I kept asking Chad to visualize a time he felt connected to his wife. After many attempts in which he felt numb, Chad began to soften and weep.

Chad finally touched the sadness in his heart about betraying his wife. This led him to experience true empathy for her for the first time in years. Aloud, he wondered:

- I don't know if she will ever be able to trust me again
- I don't know if she loves me
- I don't know how she feels about our sex life
- I don't know if she stays with me for love or security

Chad finally admitted his helplessness over re-gaining his wife's trust:

"I put myself in her shoes and I don't know how one could get over that kind of betrayal. I have been so stupid to think it should be just brushed aside and forgotten." He left my office to begin the long process of earning his wife's forgiveness.

Case study: Nick

Nick was frustrated at work. His boss, the president, had an aggressive, command-and-control style. Because he lacked an engineering background, the boss would attack Nick's ideas to see how strongly he would defend them. It was his way of testing Nick's ideas without revealing his own deficiencies.

Nick, a strong person himself, would instantly become confrontational and argumentative. This would escalate the conflict, create an alpha-dog battle, and leave Nick distressed about the lack of harmony with his boss.

Nick decided to explore his feelings of anger and frustration towards his boss using the practice of self-acceptance. Almost immediately, he recognized the source of his helplessness: he felt unable to gain the president's approval. Nick finally let in the shame and fear this failure was generating in him.

By experiencing his own feelings, Nick softened towards his boss. He began to empathize with his boss's feelings of fear and frustration, realizing that the president only acted this way when he felt helpless to get the information he needed. Gradually, Nick stopped arguing, and responded with patience instead.

Before too long, Nick was astonished to see his boss soften back and begin to listen to his ideas with respect – something he never would have thought possible three months earlier.

Empathy and success

The opposite of empathy is narcissism.

The more suppressed you are, the more narcissistic you are in relationships. Your narcissism might be the extraverted kind, where you crave the spotlight in conversation, dominate others by getting your way, or are basically unconcerned with the feelings of others.

Or, your narcissism might be the introverted kind, where you are exquisitely sensitive to rejection and assume peoples' actions are about you. You are easily hurt and prone to shyness. It is difficult for you to accept others, because you feel hurt by them often.

In both types of narcissism, you unconsciously view other people as an extension of you, not as having a separate existence of their own. This is due to a lack of empathy on your part.

Being narcissistic in creates tremendous stress in relationships, because people want you to nurture and accept them, yet these are difficult for you to do.

Self-acceptance and empathy

By experiencing your feelings instead of suppressing them, you dramatically increase your ability to connect using empathy. Empathy is the basis for success in leadership, marriage, sales, and parenting. You develop an affinity for all people, because you understand their struggles are the same as your own. You radiate benevolence.

You also dramatically lower your fear of rejection; people gravitate towards you because they sense your compassion and goodwill.

Exercise: Is there anyone you find it difficult to empathize with? What feelings would being more empathic trigger in you?

Suppression side effect #5: low confidence

Confidence is not a quality or a character trait. It is an emotion.

You don't *lose* your confidence. It's not under your bed, in your car, or at the office.

You *suppress* your confidence. It is within you, and it always will be. It's just that we don't have the luxury of being able to suppress only negative emotions. When you mute your feeling function to avoid emotional pain, it is difficult to connect to your confidence, joy, and pride.

Here's how it works. To perceive emotions, we compare them. Here are some common opposite pairs:

<u>Positive pole</u>	<u>Negative pole</u>
Love	Loss
Pride	Shame
Powerful	Powerless
Adequate	Inadequate
Connected	Alone
Accepted	Rejected
Safe	Insecure
Confidence	Fear

Suppress negative feelings, and you suppress positive feelings. Suppress fear, and we suppress confidence. Suppress sadness, and we suppress joy. Suppress shame, and we suppress pride.⁹

Case Study: Scott

Scott was charismatic young manager earmarked for greatness. An exceptional communicator, Scotty had a flair for bringing out the best in his staff.

Despite his talent, Scotty was plagued by a lack of personal confidence. He knew that management was grooming him for senior positions, but he just couldn't summon the confidence to apply for any of them. On weekends, Scotty passed the time by dreaming of becoming a rich entrepreneur or Hollywood producer.

By the time Scotty found his way to my seminar, he was in despair about his career. He'd stayed in his job 8 years longer than he wanted, paralyzed to make a change.

Scott knew his confidence was low, but he had no idea why. He decided to open to his feelings of inadequacy. What were they trying to tell him?

Scott recalled the last time he felt a strong fear of failure. "It was when my boss pointed out errors in the budget. I don't know how to use an excel spreadsheet, and math was never my strong suit, so I hadn't properly scrutinized it," Scotty confessed.

I asked Scott to specifically list all the areas that evoked inadequacy in him. He was surprised to discover they were all technical: reading financial statements, using computer software programs, and assessing blueprints.

By facing his inadequacy directly—and learning its source—Scott recovered a calm confidence about upgrading his skills...and creating the career he'd always wanted.

Case Study: LB

In the spring of 2001, my team was on the verge of a major victory in ringette.

We were playing our arch-rivals, Edmonton, for the Provincial title. They had been winning since 1999, and it was as close as any sporting event could be.

I had been cut from the National team the previous summer, which led me to doubt my ability for a few months. I decided to come back the following season and extract some revenge.

I was nervous. At 34 years old, I was the veteran on the team—a player my teammates might look to for some courage.

My nerves surprised me a little. They were as strong as I could ever remember in 28 years of competing. I was having trouble just swallowing normally.

I decided I needed a short-term strategy to manage the butterflies. I knew fighting my fear would never work, so I quietly said to myself, “Lisa, it’s OK to be afraid.”

Skating on to the ice, I said to myself, “Lisa it’s OK to be afraid.”

In between whistles, I said to myself, “Lisa, it’s OK to be afraid.”

Every time I said this, I relaxed more. I scored a goal on the first shift, and my team went on to win the Provincial final and the National Championship. When my name was called to receive the first team all-star award at the Nationals, my coach leaned over and whispered in my ear, “No one deserves this more.”

I guess it is OK to be afraid.

Low confidence and success

Confidence is central to long-term success. When you lack confidence in any area, you avoid risks and become paralyzed with self-doubt. Eventually, your inaction erodes your confidence more, leading to a vicious cycle of underachievement.

Self-acceptance and confidence

When you accept that inadequacy, doubt, and failure are a natural part of life, and open to them, you learn what you don't know (and what you don't know you don't know). This sets the stage for learning, which boosts your confidence dramatically.

Exercise: What specific areas of your problem do you wish to re-access confidence in? What do you need to learn in order to raise your confidence?

Suppression side effect #6: self-sabotage

Here's a pop quiz for you:

Have you ever been embarrassed upon receiving a lavish compliment?

(Pride awakens suppressed shame).

Have you ever visualized success only to become nervous about performing? (Confidence awakens suppressed performance anxiety).

Have you ever given an excellent performance only to feel let down the next day?

(Adequacy awakens suppressed fear of inadequacy).

Have your eyes ever filled with tears upon receiving a sweet card?

(Joy of connection awakens suppressed sadness).

Have you ever felt suffocated or annoyed by another's devotion to you?

(Love awakens suppressed fear of loss).

These experiences are genuinely confusing. Why are positive experiences so often followed by negative feelings?

I've explained that when we suppress, we suppress both positive and negative emotions. The only way to push negative feelings away is to mute our feeling function.

We avert our pain, but we also avert our joy.

But, when we succeed, we experience an intense rush of positive feelings: pride, success, love, and confidence. Suddenly, our feeling function comes alive, and *all* our feelings come rushing back into consciousness ...including the suppressed negative ones we are holding.

Therefore, success—and its corresponding positive feelings--can trigger suppressed negative ones.

Self-sabotage and underachievement

The more suppressed you are, the more suppressed you want to stay. Unconsciously, you will avoid extraordinary feats in love and work because they open your emotional floodgates.

You may long for success, but you can only tolerate it in small doses. Your ability to *receive* is blocked, because your feeling function is muted.

Here are some classic examples:

Money

- You are comfortable at a certain level of income, but as soon as you exceed it, you spend--or give—money away. You see this as a virtue: “I guess I’m just not very materialistic.”

Money evokes feelings of security, which triggers suppressed feelings of lack. Uncomfortable with these feelings, you quickly divest yourself of the money.

Romantic love

- You enjoy dating, but as soon as the relationship gets really serious, you lose your attraction to the person and want out. You think, “It will be different when I find my soul mate.”
- You enjoy a wonderful connection to your spouse, but frequent love-making makes you uncomfortable, and you avoid it. You assuage your guilt by thinking, “I prefer quality to quantity.”

Connectedness evokes feelings of love, which triggers suppressed fear of loss. You quickly reject the source of the love to regain your equilibrium.

Career & Leadership

- You convene a series of meetings that your boss raves about. When he invites you to apply for senior management, you decline, thinking, “I don’t want people to expect that kind of performance all the time.”

Sport

- You've amassed 28 points in the first half of your basketball final game. Suddenly, you lose your motivation to score. "Let my teammates shine," you tell yourself as you pass the ball.

Success brings up suppressed feelings of inadequacy. Annoyed, you avoid opportunities for major accomplishments.

- After a pressure-filled tournament, you finally win the national badminton championship. Instead of feeling joy, you feel relieved. "Is this all there is?" you ask yourself.

Security triggers suppressed performance anxiety, and you feel irritated at having to feel this way after having already won.

Self-sabotage is an unconscious way of keeping the pace of success manageable so you do not have to face the chaos within. Instead of cultivating a prosperity mentality that attracts success, you feel ambivalent about it, and your slow pace of success reflects your mixed feelings.

Exercise: Do you slow down the pace of success? Are there any positive experiences you struggle to handle?

Why accept ourselves?

You can see that opening to your feelings instead of accepting them will give you immense benefit...here is a brief overview of these benefits:

Benefit #1: Love affair with the self

What you resist, persists

Resist an energetic force, and it will intensify. When it comes to energy, ‘what you resist persists.’

When you silence your feelings by suppressing them, your body intensifies them to gain your attention. Put a lid on hot water, and it will boil. Resist your desire for chocolate, and you want it more. Tell yourself to sleep (resist your impulse to stay up), and you lay awake.

This is why it is dangerous to suppress any feeling long-term. When your desires are in jeopardy, *your body wants you to know* so you can evolve and succeed. Your unhappiness will build until you listen to what it is telling you—

**The greatest need of our soul is to be listened to, understood,
and accepted.**

All too often, we look to others for compassion and neglect the most potent source: our inner self.

Above all else, on the same grim conditions, you must remain a friend to yourself. It is a tremendous relief to let go of our cultivated self-image and experience our feelings freely, without censorship or commentary. Self-acceptance is both the most gratifying, rewarding form of self-nurturing.

Benefit #2: Self-acceptance can heal you of any trauma

Sometimes, you are faced with loss, and winning is simply not possible. In these cases, self-acceptance does not set the stage for success. It sets the stage for healing.

At summer ringette camp, we took the youngest group rollerblading. The youngest girl, a 5-year-old named Lyndsay, soon realized that none of the rollerblades fit her. Her lip started to quiver when she realized she wouldn't be able to go.

About this time, her mother showed up with another baby in her arms. Her mother was clearly tired; when she saw Lyndsay crying, she became impatient.

"Lyndsay, stop crying," she said in exasperation. Lyndsay's crying turned into hysterical sobs. The mother lost her patience completely: "If you keep this up, I'm going to take you home and not bring you back tomorrow."

The little girl sat down and paused. After a few moments, she looked up at her mother and said, "I just want to cry a little."

She was only 5, but she got it. The crying IS the healing.

Healing is a passive activity that occurs in the silence of awareness. When winning isn't possible, you cannot *try* to heal yourself with vigorous action; you can only put your mental attention on your feelings and quiet them with compassion.

Benefit #3: Self-acceptance paves the way for winning

The simple act of letting in reality elevates us to a higher consciousness. By accepting our feelings, thoughts, and intuitions, we spontaneously gain new insights about the problem we are facing. We finally see the problem's real nature and how to move through it.

You eliminate the problems of suppression and learn how to win. This produces more happiness in you, because you are getting what you want more often and not creating frustration for yourself.

Benefit #4: Self-acceptance leads to acceptance of others, a part of love

When you truly, deeply understand self-acceptance, it is easier to accept others. Accepting another person does not mean condoning his or her insensitive ways. In practical terms, accepting another person means:

- a) you stop expecting this person to be any different than he has been in the past
- b) you experience your sadness, loss, or disappointment when this person acts in ways you do not like

However: accepting another person does not mean that you passively accept selfishness, rudeness or hostility. You still ask for what you want in the relationship; in fact, facing the reality of this person helps you be assertive in a healthy way.

Invoking Self-Acceptance

Here are 4 mental toughness exercises I have used with thousands of people to cultivate self-acceptance.

1: Record Your Fears

Write down your worst fears about the relationship, career, or financial problem you are facing. This simple exercise will reveal the unconscious learned helplessness you are holding about your problem.

Ask yourself: "What do I feel helpless to create?"

#2: Accept Your Fears

This exercise will re-train your mind in self-acceptance with respect to your problem. Write 5-10 different endings to this sentence every day for 2 weeks, not including weekends. Do not be alarmed if you see repetition in your endings; simply continue this exercise.

“If were 5% more accepting of my fears today—“

At the end of two weeks, re-do the first exercise. You will be surprised to find that you have brought new layers of helplessness into conscious view.

#3: Emotional Visualization

Three days per week for the next three weeks, set aside 15 minutes per day to open to your feelings using the following exercise.

I have separated these exercises into three categories: career, relationships, and finances.

Career/Work

Sit in a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Close your eyes and relax. Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply. Once you are relaxed, **go back to a performance in your mind at work when you felt confident, valued, powerful, and significant.** Re-run this scene in your mind. Allow the feeling to grow stronger as an energetic experience. Re-access the positive energy you had at that time. Continue this for at least 10 minutes. If negative feelings surface, explore them by trying to make them stronger as an energetic experience. Try to sustain the negative feelings for at least 10-15 minutes.

Relationships

Sit in a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Close your eyes and relax. Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply. Once you are relaxed, **go back to a time when you felt loved, appreciated, and accepted BY another *or* loving, accepting and connected TOWARDS another person**). **Note: if you are using this course to repair or improve a relationship with a specific person, select this person for this exercise.** Re-run this scene in your mind. Allow the feeling to grow stronger as an energetic experience. Re-access the positive energy you had at that time. Continue this for at least 10 minutes. If negative feelings surface, explore them by trying to make them stronger as an energetic experience. Try to sustain the negative feelings for at least 10-15 minutes.

Finances

Sit in a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Close your eyes and relax. Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply. Once you are relaxed, **go back to time in your life when you felt financially powerful and abundant.** Re-run this scene in your mind. Allow the feeling to grow stronger as an energetic experience. Re-access the positive energy you had at that time. Continue this for at least 10 minutes. If negative feelings surface, explore them by trying to make them stronger as an energetic experience. Try to sustain the negative feelings for at least 10-15 minutes.

At the end of every session, write a brief description of the negative emotions you brought into conscious view. Put a name to each one and ask yourself again: "What am I feeling helpless about?"

#4: Essay on your strengths

Write an essay on your strengths in the area of life you are struggling in: sport, relationships, leadership, career, or money. For example, if you are having problems supervising an employee, write an essay detailing your strengths as a leader.

Do not try to be humble or hold back on anything positive about yourself at all. As you write it, make sure you 'let in' whatever negative feelings this exercise generates in you. If you need to weep as you are writing it, let yourself have the sadness. If you experience any negativity – doubt, anxiety, sadness, or anger – record the source of your helplessness.

Self-acceptance, not self-pity

When first opening to your feelings, you may feel despair or sadness about events from your past – insensitive parents, unrequited love, or career disappointments.

Because you are new to self-acceptance—and still conditioned to admonish yourself for negativity—you may wonder, “What is the point of dredging up my feelings about the past?”

By opening to your feelings, you protect yourself from the side effects of suppression (depression, addictions, overreactions, lack of empathy, self-sabotage, and low confidence). Rather than let your unconscious negativity control your life, you have brought it into consciousness to guide you out of your helplessness.

Most negative feelings are not overwhelming, nor do they last very long. If you find that your feelings are extraordinarily strong, it is likely you are resisting them and feeling sorry for yourself. This is fine, as long as you do not stay in this stage too long.

If your feelings persist despite the fact that you are experiencing them and understand their source, then it is likely that you are still in the throes of a major relationship, career, or financial problem, and this challenge is creating emotional pain in you. As you learn how to solve your problem, these painful feelings will subside.

Final Thought

Do not let the simplicity of self-acceptance fool you. This practice will allow you to nurture yourself on a level that is unprecedented. Through self-acceptance, you will eliminate confusion in your emotional life and move through challenges at lightening speed.

Summary

1. All problems are confusing at first, particularly when our actions and goals do not match. When this happens, we can be sure our unconscious mind is not aligned with our conscious mind.
2. To win, we must make our helplessness conscious so we can discover its source.
3. Self-acceptance is the ability to experience yourself just as you are. This includes your thoughts, feelings, and results.
4. You begin accepting yourself by refusing to suppress. Suppression is pushing our thoughts and feelings outside our conscious awareness.
5. We are usually not aware of suppression; we are aware only of its side effects.
6. The side effects of suppression include mild depression and de-motivation, addictions, overreactions, low confidence, lack of empathy and self-sabotage. None of them is conducive to high achievement.
7. The benefits of self-acceptance are personal transformation, peace of mind, the capacity for love, self-nurturing, and the ability to win.

8. To invoke the practice of self-acceptance, you can use emotional visualization, sentence completions, and written reflections on your strengths.

Footnotes

^{1,2,5,6,9} Ruskan, John. Emotional Clearing, 2000.

³ Freud, Sigmund. The Interpretation of Dreams, 1899.

⁴ Berger, Jan. Emotional Fitness, 1990.

⁷ Trudeau, Kevin. Natural Cures They Don't Want You to Know About, 2004.

³ Laut, Phil. Money is My Friend, 1978.

⁸ His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Art of Happiness, 1998.