

Already
WISE

OUR INBORN ABILITY TO
MAKE THE BEST CHOICES

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*This book is dedicated to
everyone who is willing to consider the possibility
that reason is more important than emotions,
that solutions to problems can be found,
that values really are important,
and that making better choices
will make our lives better.*

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Without Jack Barnard, coach, mentor, and virtual brother, and my wife Gloria, Sophia and soul mate, this book would simply never have happened. They kept me focused on two things. Jack on “What is the essence of your message, and can your audience hear your message in what you are saying?” He understood my message long before I could give it the voice it now has. And Gloria, the ultimately patient person in my life, was always willing to listen constructively to what I thought was my message and in being the person she is, daily demonstrate that Love in Action IS Wisdom.

To contact Jack for your project, click here [Jack Barnard](#)

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PREFACE

When I was a young man, I was not a happy one. My personal world was filled with “unresolved” issues. That’s a nice way to say I was a frustrated, maybe even angry, young man. I was married with two darling daughters, had a great profession as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA), and a nice home in the mountains of Colorado. All those things should have brought me much joy, and to the rest of the world it appeared to, but my interior world was one of frustration and discontent.

One Friday evening I drove my daughter to her best friend’s house to stay the night. Her friend’s father was a psychologist. Driving there I wondered if he might be able to help me, so after depositing my daughter, I said to him, “Louie, I think I may need to see you professionally.” He, of course, asked why I thought so. I proceeded to tell him about my inner world of frustration and angst. He calmly listened and then directed me to the back porch. He disappeared into the kitchen, only to arrive shortly on the back porch with a couple of cold beers.

We sat in silence watching the sun go down, just enjoying the moment. Louie broke the silence: “Doug, you don’t need therapy. You need to learn to relax. You need to learn to meditate. Human beings are built to take a huge amount of stress for short periods of time, but your high stress level

can't be maintained. It has to be broken, or bad things can happen.”

So I took his advice and taught myself to meditate. Within a few weeks I could drop into a profound meditative state and remain there as long as I wanted.

Meditation taught me that Peace and Infinity exist and that, in a wonderful way, we are all connected within that Infinity.

BUT, when I walked out of the bedroom where I meditated, the same old world was right there waiting for me: the same people, the same problems, and the same emotions. Meditation was wonderful, but not what I felt I needed. Also, my being able to meditate for an hour a day did not appear to be a great benefit to those around me, either. I was unable to bring the benefits of meditation into the non-meditative part of my life.

After about a year, I had an epiphany. During meditation, while I was NOT thinking, Peace and Contentment were my reality. But when I started thinking again, uncertainty and emotionality reigned. I concluded there must be something wrong with my thinking.

So I decided to give up meditation as a daily practice. I had learned beyond a shadow of a doubt that true Peace and Harmony do exist. But meditation, I concluded, was not a practical solution for myself or for the rest of us in the “real” world who have “responsibilities” and cannot meditate 24/7.

My search began. The goal was to figure out how to bring the Peace and Harmony we can easily experience during

meditation into our daily life. My guides would be the Masters who have walked in our shoes yet were able to live profoundly different lives than the rest of us. Either their messages were true, or they were lies. I chose to believe they were true. Accepting that as a foundation meant I must abandon what I thought I knew about the subject, because the evidence clearly indicated I only knew a couple of things that worked and didn't really understand how those worked at all.

The key, I reasoned, would be in developing a real understanding of how we think. My theory was that if we could learn to think clearly and accurately, the results would be also. Part two of the theory was that faulty thinking causes negative emotions. As it turns out, only a very small percentage of our thinking results in those things, but that part creates almost all of our problems.

Soon after reaching this conclusion I had a patient who was simply terrified of anesthesia. I reasoned with him, explaining that anesthesia was safe. I tried to get him to laugh, but that didn't distract him either. Nothing worked. His inability to keep his fear in perspective led me to conclude that fear would be an important factor in my "faulty thinking is the cause of most problems" theory.

I began talking with friends about fear. What scared them? What did they do when they were scared? What did they do to control it or avoid it? After a while I concluded that fear and reason are two totally separate processes. When we fear, we are less able to reason. When we are really scared, we cannot reason at all. It also seemed a reasonable conclusion that all negative emotions arise, in one form or another, from fear.

I spent the next twenty years studying, interviewing, reading, and pondering how people think, and I eventually came to a point of being able to describe human thought processes in general terms. I wrote a book about it titled *Mental Mechanics: A Repair Manual*. Our thought processes are really not that complex, and understanding our thinking processes empowers each of us to attain a higher level of control over our own thoughts and emotions. Whether or not we choose to do so remains problematic.

Still, I searched, not satisfied I had reached my goal. I still was not as calm inside as I had thought I would be and my thinking was not yet as clear, reasonable, or predictable as I expected it to be. So I returned to the beginnings of my search and asked, “What exactly was I seeking when I walked out of that bedroom so long ago?”

I just about missed it. I had walked around it, climbed over it, crawled under it, waded through it, and bathed in it so many times and had not seen it for what it was. By now I knew for certain that Conscious Choice played a huge part in it whatever it was, but the actual “it” remained clouded until one afternoon when a friend and I were talking about funny lines in movies.

To me, one of the funniest lines ever delivered on screen was in *Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade*. The Old Knight had instructed Indiana when choosing among the chalices to “Choose Wisely, for just as the true cup will give you life, the false one will take it from you.” In the next scene the villain has chosen the wrong chalice and is self-destructing. The Old Knight sighs and says, “He chose . . . poorly.”

In the midst of a huge laugh about that line, it hit me. “Choose Wisely,” the Old Knight had said. WISELY! Wisdom was it!!!! Wisdom was what I had been searching for all these years.

In that incredible instant of realization I also realized I not only knew what Wisdom was, I knew how wisdom worked. And I knew I could help others learn it.

Understanding how we think, how we value, and how we can make the best possible decisions with the information we have at hand is a process, a teachable process I had looked at from every possible angle for many years. I understood wisdom like a person knows an old friend. It is not even a difficult process. Had my father been there he would certainly have replied with a grin as he often did when I had said something really obvious, saying, “Any dummy can see that. I can see that.”

INTRODUCTION

HOW I GOT HERE

When you hear the word “Wisdom” you may think you know what wisdom is. You may recognize wisdom when you see it. You may even be fortunate enough to know someone who is wise, but an honest look at your life and your world indicates you don’t know what wisdom really is and you don’t know how to make wise decisions.

This book is about wisdom, what it really is, how it works, why it is important, and how you can become wise.

*Wisdom is the freedom and ability
to make the kinds of decisions
that move your life forward
and contribute to the planet.*

The introductory chapters, ***What is Wisdom?*** and ***Why Wisdom?***, make the case that wisdom can cure the vast majority of problems facing you today, from your individual physical and emotional health and relationships to providing a global platform for the actualization of peace on earth and sustainable economies.

Until now, if you have thought about it at all, you have looked upon the people who attained wisdom as unique and somehow above you, or at least they were capable of achieving significantly more with their lives than you could with yours.

Wisdom is seen as esoteric and mysterious. Indeed, many of the truly gifted wise decided to write about life from their perspective, and such beautiful works they have produced. If one reads James Allen, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Henry David Thoreau, it is obvious they are connected to the soul of all mankind.

When we read Rumi, Tagore, or Gibran, their poetry makes our hearts sing, and sometimes we weep because we understand that their pain and their joy is the same as ours.

The sages and poets did not come to tell us what to do; they came to teach us how to think, knowing if we knew how to think we would also know what to do. You do not have to study the sages and philosophers to become wise. **You already are wise.** Wisdom is, in the ultimate analysis, a habit of using the best thinking skills you have.

This book is written in everyday terms for everyday living. It is a book about how to bring the understanding of the poets and sages into your everyday life. You probably can't often see the poetry in your job, relationships, children, or financial matters in your life that require so much tending. You do them every day, and some days are not easy. Some of your work is difficult, but you do it anyway, and you will do it again tomorrow.

In a day's time, you have a huge number of decisions to make about your life, your family, and your work. Above and beyond those, you make decisions that determine what kind of world you will have and what shape it will be in for your children. You have no choice about making decisions, because life demands you do. Your actions follow your decisions, and you must act.

Wisdom is the process by which you can make the very best of those decisions. It is the same process used by the sages and the poets. You may not be a poet, but your life is your story, and it can be as meaningful, valuable, and uniquely beautiful as any poem. With just a bit more wisdom, you will be able to see your days for what they really are: opportunities to lead a peaceful, fulfilling life and be a source of peace and joy to the world around you.

So we are going to have a conversation about wisdom. A lot of our conversation will be about how you can make better choices in the FOUR areas of your life that cause the majority of your problems. You and I will explore each of them from the perspective that developing mastery in those areas IS possible and will greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the problems they cause. At least half of personal Peace and Contentment comes about when we give up the negative emotions that keep us in turmoil.

The four areas are:

IDENTITY – Just who are you, anyway? Are you what you know? Are you what you do? Have you ever thought about “who” makes the choices in your life and how those choices are made? Learning more about how you think will empower you to understand that it is not what you know, but how you choose to use what you know that determines who you are.

HABITS – If you do not understand how much of your life is run by automatic habits and how you can manage or change those habits, you will continue to make the same choices and remain a slave to the yesterdays of your conditioned reactions. If you cannot learn to change your habits, you will never be free to have the kind of life you once dreamed you would have.

EMOTIONS – Until you learn to master your emotions, they will continue to interfere with your intentions to think wisely and drive your decisions into self-centered, unreasonable, and indefensible choices. Negative emotions are the engine of almost all your truly unwise and self-destructive habits.

VALUES – “Your actions are your values made visible.” If you value cheap and easy solutions and material wealth above all else, how can you expect anything lasting or worthy to find its way into your life?

Gandhi said, “**Be the change that you want to see in the world.**” His life demonstrates beyond any doubt the impact just one person can have on the planet. Your life can have a real and lasting impact on the planet as well. So this is a book about wisdom for you, the individual.

Until you are mentally and emotionally healthy, you cannot expect to enjoy good health and good relationships. Until you become a better adult, you cannot raise better children. And until you fix yourself, you cannot hope to fix your neighbor, the government, or the planet. So you and I will begin where you and I should: by understanding our own hearts and minds.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Before beginning, something needs to be made clear. The format of this book is a conversation between two people, you and me. I talk, and you listen.

I chose this format for many reasons.

If there was ever a conversation you should have had early in your life, this is it. Imagine having a conversation that can help free you to start making the kinds of decisions that can truly lead to a life of peace and prosperity.

You are very important to me, even though we are not acquainted. You are the most important person I know, and you are the most important person in everyone else's life also, so I want to talk with you directly. No one is more important to the future of mankind than you are.

Since "you" are the only other participant in this conversation, the message is direct. The use of "we" or "they" might allow "us" to think "we" are somehow not included or that "we" might be able to avoid the responsibility and accountability for "our" choices.

The only focus of this book is you and the choices you can make in your life.

This conversation was written as a dialogue between the

two of us so that it can serve as an outline for the internal conversations you are always having with yourself.

Since the choices you make are important, it is vital that you accept not only the responsibility, but also the authority, to choose wisely.

Wisdom is desperately needed. You need to be wise for yourself. Your loved ones need you to be wise for them. The world needs you to be wise for those you do not know.

What currently passes for thinking is really nothing more than one side of your brain talking to the other side. Your conscious brain is entirely capable of taking both sides of an emotional issue and arguing itself into exhaustion or illness.

BUT—both sides of your brain are actually getting their information from your subconscious brain, which is a vast collection of your habits.

In reality, you are the only one involved in the conversation. You are both sides of the argument. Even when you are having a conversation with another person, the majority of the “real” conversation going on is between your conscious brain and your subconscious brain trying to figure out what the other party is meaning and what your response should be.

Since all your conversations are actually with yourself, it seems to be a really good idea for one side of your brain to tell the other side to just sit down and be quiet until you can say something intelligent to yourself.

I want to save you from the stage of life almost all of us

eventually go through; you know, the one where you will hear yourself saying stuff like, “I wish I were twenty-five again but know what I know now,” or “I am okay now, so every decision I made, even the bad ones, were necessary to get me here, so they were really good ones.” I want desperately to save you those years of heartache, frustration, and anger.

My grown children are light years in front of where I was at their ages, not because I was able to help them when they were small, because I wasn't any wiser then than they were. By the time they were adults though, I had learned enough that they recognized, as all young adults can, the difference between junk and really good advice. I had become a real source of help to those I loved the most.

Maybe you are already in that stage or maybe even past it, but it is never too late to make your life better. So this book is for you. I truly believe if you know how you can make better choices, you will do so. As you do, your life will change for the better and the world around you will also.

Granted, the world has huge problems, but “we” can only solve the world's problems one person at a time, and “we” can only solve them if “I” can solve my own problems first.

As in any conversation, when I really want you to get the point, I will either repeat it, or refer you back to the most important point which is this:

Wisdom is the freedom AND the ability to make the kinds of choices that move your life forward and benefit those around you at the same time.

NOTE: When you encounter a text box, it will contain a short story illustrating the important point in the chapter. I have tried to choose stories in which you might be able to see yourself as one of the participants. I have also tried to use stories that require you to use both sides of your brain, the intellectual/analytical, and the emotional side, to see the whole picture.

In some chapters the point is really obvious, and in others you might have to think about it a bit more. That's okay. This is, after all, a book about change.

The most amazing part of this conversation will be demonstrating over and over again that you already know how to be wise. You already know how to do this.

There is nothing new in this book.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS WISDOM?

One of the biggest challenges in writing this book was designing the sequence of explanations and examples so they lead you to the inescapable conclusion that Wisdom is a skill worth learning, worth doing, and worth being.

There are countless wonderful quotes about Wisdom, or by wise people, that you can grasp in your heart but can't explain with your brain. That will change during the course of reading this manual. It will change, because being wise only depends on being able to make choices at a different level than the one you currently accept as adequate. Learning to make choices at that different level also brings with it greater understanding of yourself and the world in which you live.

I picked five quotes about Wisdom, not because of their beauty or their ability to tug at your heart strings, but for their relationships to the lessons presented in the following chapters. Each quote reflects a different aspect of wisdom. By the time you finish the lessons, not only will you understand these quotes from a very different level, you will understand WHY all the beautiful quotes touch your heart as they do.

Science is organized knowledge.

Wisdom is organized life.

—*Immanuel Kant*

**The wisdom of life consists in the
elimination of non-essentials.**

—*Lin Yutang*

**We are all addicted to our own thinking;
the wise to finding solutions, the rest of us
to dwelling on our problems.**

—*Douglas McKee*

Knowledge cuts up the world.

Wisdom makes it whole.

—*Brazilian Proverb*

**Knowledge is power,
but only wisdom is liberty.**

—*Will Durant*

Being able to recognize there is wisdom in these quotes indicates you are closer to being wise than you realize. However, recognizing wisdom is not the same as being wise, any more than recognizing a car is the same as the ability to drive one. Learning to drive, although it takes practice, is not very difficult, and learning to be wise, although it also takes practice, is not very difficult either.

If you set out to learn wisdom by yourself, one of the first steps would be to define wisdom. Most likely you would turn to a dictionary where you would find many definitions for wisdom. Among them are these three which demonstrate the current understanding of Wisdom:

- “Making the best possible choices with the available information.”
- “The discretionary use of information for the greatest good.”
- “The ability to optimally apply perceptions and knowledge to produce the desired results.”

These appear to be simple definitions. You can quickly recognize the truth in them. These definitions, however, leave you holding an empty sack, because you don't really know what wisdom is. You know it's really important, but you have no earthly idea how to become wise yourself.

For 2,500 years, since the great sages began writing about wisdom, the rest of us have struggled to understand what they were talking about. Their great words have indeed, inspired many and occasionally even motivated some of us to make changes in our lives.

The problem with their writings is they fail to provide instructions on how you can use “available information” in a “discretionary” way to end up with something resembling the “greatest good.” You simply can't get “there” from where you are now.

Without the most important aspect of wisdom which would give you the ability to “get there” and use it in your own life, you will eventually just give up believing you can be wise.

That missing aspect is **“HOW”** is wisdom accomplished? **How** are wise people able to be wise? What is different about what they do when compared to what you do? Why,

A teenager asked her father if they could go for a walk. Something in her voice drew an immediate “yes” from the father, so out they went into a foggy night for a walk. After a while of walking in silence, the daughter asked, “When you were young, did you ever think about committing suicide?”

The father’s heart sank. After a few more paces he responded, “Yes, I did. And I believe if they were honest, most adults would admit they had also thought about it but, thankfully, chose not to.”

“Why didn’t you?”

He took a deep breath and responded, “I decided not to for a couple reasons. When a person commits suicide it transfers all their pain, despair, and desperation to the family who are left trying to figure out “Why.” And since they can never figure it out, their pain never goes away.

But the primary reason is that I knew if I did, I would never have another chance to make my life better. That would be the last decision I would ever make. Maybe it was the only time in my life I had looked at my life clearly, but I decided nothing could be so bad that ending my life was the decision I should make.”

They walked in silence for some time and then she asked him softly, “Don’t you just love the fog?”

sometimes, do the most unwise among us make incredibly wise decisions?

What is Wisdom? Above, in the brief exchange between a teenager and her father are two clear examples of wisdom in

action.

The fact that the daughter asked the question shows she knew she truly needed an alternative choice before making a disastrous decision. Her father's honesty, courage, and hope was the wisest counsel he could offer. He let her know she was not alone in her pain and that she could change her life for the better.

So, sometimes wisdom is simply knowing you must find a better solution than the one you are planning, and at other times it is realizing that absolute honesty is required.

This book focuses on the "HOW" of Wisdom. Like everything else you do in life, if you are taught "how" to do a skill and practice it, you can do it. With more practice you can master it.

In the INTRODUCTION, I defined Wisdom as: "the freedom and ability to make the kinds of decisions that move your life forward and contribute to the planet." That definition focuses your thinking in a direction to see Wisdom as having to do with making special kinds of decisions. It still doesn't quite define the "how" of wisdom.

The process behind Wise thinking is both empowering and attainable. This is "how" to "do" Wisdom.

*Wisdom is the altruistic use of your
best critical thinking skills.*

Altruism, according to Wikipedia, "focuses on a motivation to help others or a desire to do 'good' without reward." Altruism is a vital aspect of wisdom. When you

make altruistic decisions, you focus all your energies on one thing: “What is the very best decision that can be made in this situation?” You set aside your own personal wants, desires, biases, and prejudices to make the very best decision.

Critical thinking is also an important aspect of the wisdom process because it requires you to rely on the facts and evidence of the situation to guide your decision making.

The experts do agree that Wisdom “can be learned and increases with age” Wisdom can indeed be learned.

Wisdom is a thinking skill.

If that sounds difficult, remember this as you read:

*You actually already know
how to be wise.*

How do I know that? It is obviously true, because “**You exhibit wise thinking tens of thousands of times each day as part of your automatic unconscious habits.**” This will be explained in detail in later chapters and you will be amazed to discover just how wise you already are.

What does being wise look like in your everyday life? It looks like this:

*The choices you make are
moving your life forward and
benefiting those around you.*

**Happiness is when what you think, what you say,
and what you do are in harmony.**

—*Gandhi*

CHAPTER TWO

WHY WISDOM?

The truth of Wisdom ALWAYS comes down to your freedom and ability to make decisions that evolve your life and contribute to the planet.

Since ancient times we have been instructed to “Get Wisdom.” Wisdom, according to many is more important than anything else, especially money or fame. Will getting Wisdom solve many, if not most, of your problems? To answer that question, looking at the results of lives lacking wisdom will give us a baseline from which to begin.

The Problem

Do any of these look like your life, or a friend’s life?

- You dated the girl/guy of your dreams but the relationship failed.

- You married the prince/princess, but they have turned into a frog.
- You married the girl/guy of your dreams but are now divorced.
- You have children and they are turning out to be just like you.
- You simply don't have enough time to do the things you want to do.
- You don't have the energy to do the things you want to do.
- You simply don't think you will ever have enough money.
- You have plenty of money but still aren't satisfied.
- You have plenty of money coming in but spend more than that.
- You have it all—money, fame, relationship—and then add drugs or affairs.
- You are really good at one aspect of your life, but think you aren't everywhere else.

If you look around, the lack of wisdom is evident in every aspect of your problems. If you are an average American or were raised in a First World country, you are frequently making decisions in your personal life which either create more problems or make a bad situation worse. Your problems, though, are basically the same as those that are causing a great deal of stress in every aspect of your culture.

There are a lot of “Why Wisdoms” in the following story. Had he had more Wisdom, he would not have become an alcoholic. Had she had more Wisdom, she would have divorced him much sooner. But the truly amazing part of this story is that he, with his life in shambles, rose to a level of amazing Wisdom and made a choice for his children even

I have a couple friends who had both divorced. She had divorced because of her husband's chronic, severe problems with alcohol and drugs. Her husband had been emotionally and verbally abusive, unreliable, and if he had any money, he spent it on his friends. To top it all off, he was unfaithful. My other friend had divorced because he realized he and his wife were never going to be able to make their relationship work.

My two friends met, fell deeply in love, and got married. She had two children from her first marriage. After about a year, her new husband wanted to adopt the children.

After repeated attempts to make arrangements to meet with the "ex" so he could sign papers giving up all parental rights to the children, the couple finally decided just to catch him outside his apartment, which they did.

He was sober, and—much to their surprise—the "ex" did the right thing. He made the wisest and most altruistic decision possible. He signed the documents. After he had signed all the papers, he said to the new husband, "I know you will be a better father to the children than I can be." He did it all with an amazing amount of dignity and grace.

though it was emotionally devastating to him personally.

One of the clearest indicators that the lack of wisdom creates serious problems is the health status of our population because it directly reflects the results of the stress created—either directly or indirectly—by unwise decisions.

A 2006 Harvard University pamphlet states, **“Surveys indicate that over 60 percent of visits to health care professionals are for conditions caused or exacerbated**

by stress.” Much of the current literature puts that figure closer to 90 percent, but the link between unwise choices and stress is evident.

In the U.S., according to the latest government report, Health U.S. 2009, 47 percent of the adult population is on at least one type of prescription medication. Do those drugs cure the conditions for which they are prescribed, like antibiotics do? No, they don't. In the vast majority of chronic health conditions, the medications help to control the condition so it is not rapidly fatal.

The World Health Organization predicts, **“By the year 2020, depression is projected to reach second place of the ranking of DALYs¹ calculated for all ages, both sexes. Today, depression is already the second cause of DALYs in the age category 15–44 years for both sexes combined.**

Being dependent on medication to get through a day means you have become dependent on external forces for the most important aspect of your life: your health. Without good health and the sense of well-being that comes from living wisely, you are in serious trouble. The following statistics clearly indicate how emotionally and physically destructive and stressful the lack of wisdom can be in your life.

Of the **235 million** Americans age eighteen and over . . .

. . . 70 million have high blood pressure.

. . . 59 million have divorced at least once.

¹ DALYs = Disability Adjusted Life Years – The sum of years of potential life lost due to premature mortality and the years of productive life lost due to disability.

- ... 47.5 million smoke.
- ... 46 million suffer from anxiety.
- ... 45 million have drug problems.
- ... 45 million are dieting.
- ... 43 million are depressed.
- ... 39 million are unemployed.
- ... 26 million are currently divorced.
- ... 20 million can't sleep.
- ... 18.5 million are alcoholics.
- ... 16 million have road rage.
- ... 3 million are in prison and jails.

As if the list of problems is not bad enough, from a higher perspective wisdom is even more important now than ever! If one is a student of history, the stupidity and shortsightedness of greed, imperialism, religious persecution, and empire building clearly demonstrates why all great civilizations have failed.

No civilization has ever made it past the point in development where we are today, the point at which a government started wars it could not win and vast social programs with money it did not have, and in doing so bankrupted future generations by taxing the middle class out of existence to pay for them.

Our chances for survival are not looking very good. We are faced with the same problems all advanced civilizations have encountered, and we are handling them just as they did. We are doing nothing to prevent the eventual collapse of civilization as we know it. A culture is the sum of the decisions, both good and bad, being made by the individuals in that culture.

In our dash for cash we have forgotten the fundamental purposes of our lives. Nothing is more important than raising our children and the stewardship of the world we will eventually leave to them and their children. Our decisions must be wise, not only for our sake, but for theirs.

We have been also been conditioned to believe it is okay to have unlimited desires in a world of limited resources. This simply is a fantasy. As the world becomes more “Westernized,” the competition for resources will continue to grow and there simply are not enough resources to support a First World lifestyle for everyone.

We have never been so close to losing it all. We have made so many poor choices that even with the wisest choices we can make, it will take a real effort to repair the damage. We will need to change our ways.

The Solution

Since this is a book about Wisdom, the solution to your problems and the solution for the world’s problems is to become wise, to begin making decisions that actually can move your life forward in valid directions and that don’t create more problems you then have to face.

You are desperately needed by the rest of the world. Your choice and commitment to become Wise will greatly improve your personal life, and you will be able to part of the solution for the world’s problems rather than continue being part of the problem.

When my own children were young, they often didn’t ask for my advice, because it meant a lecture of undisclosed

length would be forthcoming. **When I really started using the tools and techniques gained by studying Wisdom, not only did they start asking my advice, they started taking it.**

Creating a down-to-earth list in a form you can use on a day-to-day basis yields a bunch of good reasons to become wise.

- You may amass a fortune, but without Wisdom you will not be able to keep it or use it well.
- You may begin a wonderful relationship but without Wisdom you will not be able to make it last.
- Wisdom allows you to experience peace and contentment in your everyday life.
- Wisdom is how to make the best decisions when you want to or need to.
- Wisdom gives you the best relationships with your spouses, children, friends, and coworkers.
- Wisdom can decrease your stress levels by about 80 percent.
- Wisdom increases your level of health and well-being.
- Wisdom helps you avoid making the very decisions that create the majority of your problems.
- You may have children, but without Wisdom you cannot be the example from which they should learn
- There is nothing more important you can teach your children to prepare them for adult life.
- With Wisdom you can really enjoy the good things that happen in life
- When you are Wise you know how to deal effectively and efficiently with situations that aren't.

Wisdom can empower you to make the kinds of choices

that can result in lasting peace and prosperity. Wisdom is a habit of making really good choices.

Wisdom has now been defined in today's terms so you can see that you actually can reach it, and empower others to reach it. It is vital that you do so, for Wisdom is the only thing standing between your world today and certain destruction.

The next chapters reveal what science has learned about your thinking processes in recent years. I truly believe the lessons are the most empowering of all time, because they point out the following, which is a truth you would not expect:

*You are already wise.
You already know how to do this.*

**It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the captain of my fate;
I am the master of my soul.**
—from Invictus by William Earnest Henley, 1875

**The difference between what we do
and what we are capable of doing
would suffice to solve most of the world's problems.**
—Gandhi

CHAPTER THREE

S.W.S.W.S.W.N.!

Some Will, Some Won't, So What? . . . Next!

—*John W. McKee, Jr.*

*It doesn't really matter
what other people say or do
because it isn't their life,
it's yours.*

*What you say or do next
is what matters.*

The challenge of this book is to demonstrate how each chapter relates to Wisdom and how the contents of the chapter will help you become wiser. Even though each chapter is short, I will remind you two or three times of the relationship. The reason for this is simple. You are used to reading lots of pages to get to an important point. Since all aspects of becoming wise ARE important, the relationships must be crystal clear. The relationships are not difficult, just vital to your understanding.

Every well designed ad contains three elements: a Problem, a Solution, and a Takeaway. This book will follow the same format with the notable exception being a “Solution.” The solutions offered are not in my vested interest, they are in yours. This book is also an ad; an ad for Wisdom.

Let’s go to work. I’ve already defined Wisdom in a way that shows it is a skill you already use unconsciously and that you can learn to use consciously. The next chapter described why Wisdom is important. That is simple. You want to live a happy, peaceful, and prosperous life and want the same for your children and everyone else.

The next chapters will deal with aspects of your life in which you can usually find the problems that interfere with making the kinds of decisions that can truly move your life forward. You have the ability to be wise, but something always seems to step in and sabotage your hopes, dreams, and plans. The four most likely candidates keeping us locked in repeating yesterday are your “Identity, Habits, Emotions, and Values.”

If you are thinking, “I don’t have the time to do this,” I respond, “NOT TRUE!” You have twenty-four hours in your day just as I do. You begin your day with 100 percent of the energy available for that day just like everyone else. How you use your energy is up to you. It is a choice. If you spend it wisely, your life advances and also the lives of those around you.

**The history of free men is never really written
by chance but by choice; their choice!**

— *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

This is a comparison of two Registered Nurses with whom I worked a few years ago. They were both excellent nurses. One was married, had three children, worked full-time, and was working on her master's degree. She was so stressed out that she was ready to quit working on her master's thesis, which was almost complete, just to escape the stress.

The other was divorced, her children were grown, and she worked regular shift hours. You knew when she arrived at work, because you could hear her stomping down the hallway muttering as she walked toward the nursing station. She complained bitterly about the patients, her coworkers, and the administration continuously until she left, exhausted, at shift change.

I explained to each of them that what was going on in her mind was an imaginary conversation she was having with herself, a mental soap opera in which she played the victim. In her imagination she wrote the script and played the part of the victim. All she needed to do to get rid of the stress was to change the script, or better yet, change the "channel" by thinking about something else, or just stop having the conversation altogether.

My advice to each was simply "Stop having these stress-creating conversations with yourself. NO MORE SOAP OPERAS!"

Fast forward three months. I saw the married RN in a restaurant. When she saw me she jumped up and shouted "NO MORE SOAP OPERAS," and gave me a great big hug. She had completed her master's degree and was excitedly preparing to start a new job.

The other RN had quit working in the hospital where she had been working for years, because her coworkers "stabbed her in the back, the administration didn't care, and it was never going to change, so she had no other choice than to leave."

In the story above, it is pretty obvious, isn't it, who changed her conversation?

You and I are going to dissect Wisdom to look at its aspects and figure out how they work together in a way that your life can be what you once thought it would be.

When it comes to Wisdom in your personal life you are already a combination of three things:

- You are unconsciously making wise decisions most the time.
- You occasionally make wise decisions consciously and, wow, you really know it when you do.
- You are locked in habits, emotions, and beliefs that keep you in a cage.

How do these relate to Wisdom? Your habits, emotions, and values either lead you to making wise decisions OR they keep you from it. If you are wise, the number of valid options you have in your life is huge. If you aren't, you basically have no choices; you are limited to yesterday's habits.

**Men are anxious to improve their circumstances,
but are unwilling to improve themselves;
they therefore remain bound.**

—*James Allen*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THINKER IS NOT THE THOUGHT

I**DENTITY** – Just who are you anyway? Are you what you know? Are you what you do? Have you ever thought about “who” makes the choices in your life and how those choices are made? Learning more about how you think will empower you to understand it is not what you know, but how you choose to use what you know that determines who you are.

RELATIONSHIP – You may not currently even realize you have the ability to make radically better choices. Your habits limit you to your experiences. The only way to correct that is to demonstrate that you, the individual, are separate from and greater than your experiences, emotions, and habits. Being separate empowers you to make choices. Exactly “WHO” makes the choices in your life? What is your true identity?

The Problem

You have numerous identities. You have one for work,

one for family, one for the bedroom, one for the boardroom, one for the bathroom, one for your chosen field, one for the playing field, one for your friends and one for your enemies. You can switch effortlessly from one to another in mid-stride, or mid-thought, as the case may be, to react appropriately in the situation of the moment. You really wouldn't want your bedroom identity in charge while you are at a PTA meeting, would you?

Each different identity is actually the result of processing your huge database of information, experiences, and emotions according to habits unique to that identity. If you are at work for instance, you use your work identity habits and behave as though you are at work. As the Thinker you choose when and where to use an identity, even if that choice is a habit.

Many of the identities we have developed in childhood and contain habits that are appropriate for children but not for adults. **As a young child, almost all your decisions are made for you.** For some parents, making all the decisions in a child's life becomes a habit and the child learns to depend on an external source for control.

Maybe you frequently heard, "When you are an adult you will get to make your own decisions," so you missed many opportunities to practice relying on your own authority and abilities to make responsible decisions. This has led some "grownups" to hold their parents or someone else responsible for "everything that is wrong with my life" because their habits put them in a position of always being controlled. As an adult you believe you are to make your own decisions, but if you have no experience in decision making because you are used to having someone else make them for you, how can you?

The obvious purpose of parenting is to raise your children to be the best adults possible. This should be accomplished by teaching the child good decision-making skills and then moving the location of control and decision making from the parents (external), to the child (internal), as the child matures.

**The object of teaching a child is to enable him
to get along without his teacher.**

—*Elbert Hubbard*

This chapter is actually that lesson. The lesson states, **“The Thinker always has a choice.”** Maybe it is your habit to be controlled, but the reality is that your Thinker is always in charge because your brain only thinks what you command it to, or what you allow it to. Every time you choose a thought or react to a situation you are creating the reality in which you will live.

You have only two options when it comes to your knowledge. Either you are its Master or you are its slave. My goal is to explain how Wisdom works and give you the tools that empower you to “realize” Wisdom in your life. Once again, what is Wisdom?

*Wisdom is the freedom and ability
to make the kinds of decisions
that move your life forward
and contribute to the planet.*

The Solution

In order to become wiser you need to establish a different relationship with your knowledge, experiences, and emotions. The kind of relationship you can develop separates you, the living breathing individual, from the information you have accumulated. This empowers you to be able to consciously choose which information you use and choose how you use it; not just be confined to reacting according to your habit-directed use of it.

You are not your thoughts or the object of your thoughts. Your information is not who you are; it is not your identity.

You are the Thinker. How you choose to process information in a given situation determines your identity in that situation.

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.

—*William James*

An analogy may help you grasp the difference. When you learned to drive, you learned a large number of new skills that combined to create a new identity—that of “driver”—for you. You add that new identity to the numerous ones you already have. Whenever you need to drive, you choose your driver identity, because it contains all the appropriate knowledge and skills for driving.

The most important aspect of this analogy is that it is “The Thinker” who chooses which identity to use for a specific task or situation. The Thinker is greater than and separate from the thoughts that are part of the identity. **The Thinker uses thoughts as tools to navigate this thing called life.**

In that kind of relationship, you can easily see that the following parameters apply to the information stored in your brain but not to you as an individual.

- All your knowledge, experiences, and emotions actually exist in your brain as stored data.
- You use a mental process called thinking to assemble bits and pieces of your stored data and information into things you call conclusions.
- Once you use (think) a conclusion for a period of time, that conclusion becomes a habit and becomes automatic.
- Once a conclusion becomes a habit, you no longer think about the bits and pieces that made up the conclusion. A food dislike—such as a child trying broccoli—is a good example.
- You choose actions, or react to a situation, based on your conclusion habits.
- You set goals based on your habitual conclusions as in “I can do that,” or “I want that.”
- You choose actions from your habits you believe will enable you to reach a goal.
- Reaching or not reaching a goal depends on the accuracy of your plans and conclusions.

**Adopting the right attitude can convert
a negative stress into a positive one.**

—Hans Selye

How does this relate to Wisdom? As “The Thinker” you have the authority, ability, and responsibility for making all the choices in your life. You have the authority to repair or

get rid of the habits that do not serve you or that you should have left behind in childhood or the ones you should not have picked up along the way. True freedom lies in accepting complete and total responsibility for every choice in your life.

Last year, a young man's fiancée asked me to talk with him. She was on the verge of breaking off their engagement, because his temper would flare up at the slightest thing and he would start an argument.

He worked in what can only be described as a pressure cooker environment, and it had become really frustrating to him, so frustrating that he wanted to quit and change jobs to get away from it. Many nights he was unable to sleep, because he was still mad about what happened at work. Drinking seemed to be, for him, the only way he could get some sleep, but he was still always exhausted.

We talked about work, and after he vented for a while, I talked about the conversation that goes on in our head, pointing out that his conversation was about work. His coworkers were lazy and didn't do their work. They weren't honest, they didn't care, they went home early, they didn't come in on time, etc. His work depended on their doing their part, so he had to do it and there wasn't enough time to do everyone else's work and his own.

I asked him if he ever discussed this with his coworkers. He said no. I then asked about who he had these conversations with. With myself. Who starts those conversations? I do. Who chooses what you think about? I guess I do. Since you are the only one having the conversation, when you feel yourself beginning to get angry, can you change the conversation, or can YOU choose NOT to have the conversation at all? Can you say to yourself instead, "I don't have to go there. I can choose what to think about."

A few weeks later we talked again. He said, "It was really hard at first, but now, when I start feeling frustrated, I just say, "I don't have to go there, and I just don't. The things that really used to bother me don't seem to bother me much anymore." "So work is better, less frustrating?" I asked. "It's like I'm working for a different company." In a way he was.

In the story on the previous page, because the young man was less frustrated he was able to sleep again and to drink

only socially. His relationship with his fiancée went back on track and they were to be married soon after.

Two quotes from Viktor Frankl sum up the reality of the Thinker:

A human being is a deciding being.

**Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.**

These are two of the most empowering statements ever made. One might ask, “Why are they so empowering?” The simplest, and the ultimate, answer to it is this:

*When you are wise you can choose
the kind of life you live.*

What are your real choices? The options available to your habitual self and those available to your wise self are vastly different.

CURRENT OPTIONS

Habit
Fear
Anxiety
Sadness

WISE OPTIONS

Freedom
Completion
Possibility
Contentment

The Takeaway

The wise only differ from you in the choices they make. They usually appear calm, peaceful, and if you ask them, they will tell you they are generally content with life.

Have you seen *Tuesdays With Morrie*? How about *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch? Have you read *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl? What did those people have in common? Morrie Schwartz and Randy Pausch “lived” with cancer. They both learned the wisest lessons and used what remaining time they had in sharing their message.

After living through over three years of horror in the Nazi death camps, Viktor Frankl put it this way:

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

These are real expressions of the potential you have as a wise human. As you become wiser, more and more often you will “choose your attitude and choose your own way.” Thankfully, you don't have to develop terminal illnesses as Morrie and Randy did, or spend years in a Nazi death camp to realize your potential. You can do it now.

To become wise you must develop some mastery of three important domains that are part of life: Habits, Emotions, and Values, because those general areas are the most likely

sources of errors in your decision making.

Once you learn how to do them correctly, the world becomes a marvelous experience and you can move through it with grace and ease.

**You are today where your thoughts have brought you;
you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.**

—*James Allen*

CHAPTER FIVE

YOUR HABIT-FORMING BRAIN

HABITS – If you do not understand how much of your life is run by automatic habits and how you can manage or change those habits, you will continue to make the same choices and remain a slave to the yesterdays of your conditioned reactions. If you cannot learn to change your habits, you will never be free to have the kind of life you once dreamed you would have.

Your habits either empower you to be wise or they don't. If they don't, you will never be free to use the vast potential your life actually contains. If your life is on autopilot, you don't really make choices. How can you choose to make your life better if all you do is react automatically?

*Wisdom is the altruistic use of
your best critical thinking skills.*

The human brain is an incredible organ, the ultimate expression of potential yet to be manifest on this planet. For all its potential however, it has some functions that have currently stalled the advance of our species and keep us from maximizing our true potential.

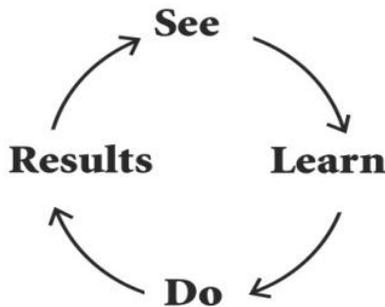
The Problem

You are frequently stuck in a replay loop making the same mistakes over and over again. The vast majority of today's are repeats of your yesterdays, and the same will be said when tomorrow is completed. This is not a mistake. It is at one time the most significant advance in our evolution and it is also the biggest hurdle you must overcome to restart your forward progress. That hurdle is HABIT.

**Habits dominate and virtually control
every aspect of your life.**

—Dan Nielsen

To understand how you create habits and how you can change them is not as difficult as you have been led to believe. Habits are learned, so a quick overview of the learning process will get you started on the path to mastering your habits. Here is an illustration of how you learn. It shows that the learning process is actually cyclical.



**What you see is what you learn is what you do,
which produces the results you see.**

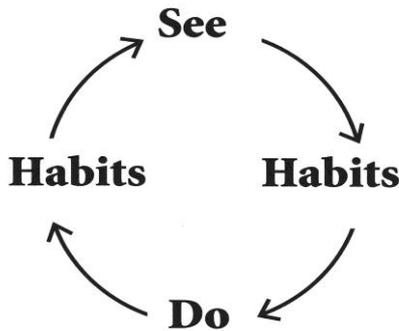
Your brain has the ability to quickly and efficiently turn learning experiences into fully automated habits. When you create a habit you use the same process as learning; you just repeat the activity frequently enough that your brain automates it and stores it. Then the steps in the learning process fade from your conscious memory because recalling them is no longer necessary. The habit now contains all the steps.

This huge advance allows the smart part of your brain to be as available as possible for new experiences and to learn new skills. Pause for a second and think about what the ability to turn a learning experience into a habit actually means to you.

You can learn a new skill, such as driving, and after you have learned it you don't really have to think about how to do it. The new skill has become automatically available to you whenever you need it. Your ability to acquire new habits is one of the most important contributors to the magnificent potential of humanity.

However, that same ability to create habits can be the biggest limiting factor of your existence, especially if you accept your habits without question. Once you have formed your Thought-habits, and many are formed as toddlers, you refer to your mental database of habits to interpret what you "SEE," but what you see depends entirely on what your Interpretation-habits tell you what you are seeing.

You then look to your database of Do-habits which tells you how to react to what you are seeing. So what really happens is that what you see is a habit and what you do is also a habit: You SEE HABITS and DO HABITS. All of these reactions are automatic.



If you accept those habits as accurate, you are limited to whatever thoughts and conclusions are included in those habits. Maybe your unquestioned habits have limiting conclusions about gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. Maybe your accepted limitation habits are much more personal such as height, weight, appearance, affluence, or poverty. Maybe they are ultra-personal limitations as in conclusions about your own abilities, capacities, or intelligence.

Just because you create belief habits does not guarantee those habits are true and accurate definitions of the world; they only describe your individual conclusions about your individual experiences with the world. Your brain will automate all your thinking, including dysfunctional and emotionally harmful habits just as quickly and just as well as good ones.

If you accept your limiting habits you will continue to be locked into your current belief systems. Unless you learn how to change your habits you will never be free to make the kinds of empowering and beautiful choices that wisdom allows you to make.

A college student who had panic attacks was driving home from class on a busy freeway when she recognized the beginning symptoms of an episode. She called her father using her cell phone. When he answered she blurted out, "I'm going to have a panic attack."

He said, "Okay, sit down and calm down." She cried, "But I'm on the freeway headed home."

He thought for a couple seconds and then yelled into the phone, "That's the stupidest thing you can do. On the freeway? What the hell do you think you are doing?"

She immediately angrily yelled back, "What? Why are you yelling at me?"

He responded, "I had to get you to think of something else really fast, and making you mad was the only thing I could be sure would do it. How's your panic attack?"

Long pause. "Gone," she replied.

"Good," he said, "Love you. Call me when you get home."

Habit formation is also the same process which day by day and step by step changed the reality for many from, "I am so in love with this person that we are going to get married and spend the rest of our lives together," into, "This is the most miserable person on earth, and I can't wait until the divorce is final!"

The habits you developed that use negative emotions as important factors in your decision-making process, such as anxiety, depression, or anger, are the ones that really need to be inspected and changed. These are the habits that cause you the most problems. Your brain created these habits, and you can use the exact same process to change or eliminate them.

Habits can be easily cast as Angels or Demons, depending on one's perspective and how a particular situation is going at the moment. On one hand, you habituated multiple functional experiences into automated functional choices and activities. On the other hand, you habituated multiple dysfunctional experiences into automated dysfunctional choices and activities. It's the same process either way. Your brain is not concerned with the "functionality" or "dysfunctionality" of the habit it creates, it is just busy creating thought habits out of information you use frequently.

The Solution

You are always living on the edge of Wisdom. The vast majority of your daily decisions are wise. Those two statements may appear to fly in the face of reason given your ability to become totally irrational and unwise on a second's notice, but they are actually true. Understanding how your brain already wisely processes information is the key to being able to use Wisdom when you need it.

Successful habits resulted in your ability to make the many thousands of accurate decisions that got you out of bed, showered, clothed, fed, and driven to work on time without any conscious effort, all while you are focused on other, "more important" things. If you were to consciously look at the things you are thinking about, you might decide they actually are not "more important" at all. You might decide they are irrelevant to moving your life forward.

The point is that you are not conscious of all the amazing processes going on in your brain and how much information you are processing automatically while you are busy thinking about other things. This is because you had successfully

completed the tasks or skills frequently enough for them to become automatic habits.

Successful habit formation process is the reason two hundred million Americans can drive 3,000,000,000,000 (that's three trillion) miles a year with so few accidents.

Since our successful habits result in tens of thousands of accurate decisions daily, it seems reasonable to conclude that being able to apply the same processes to our Conscious thinking would also yield accurate results. If we dissect our successful habits there appear to be up to ten different processes which might be involved.

I refer to the ten processes as the Wisdom Processes. Used consciously they would look like this: “When I am being wise, I . . .”

- . . . choose what I will think about.
- . . . base my decisions on verifiable facts.
- . . . monitor my thoughts.
- . . . control my negative emotions.
- . . . choose my response.
- . . . keep my problems in perspective.
- . . . use my energy to find solutions.
- . . . almost always plan my future.
- . . . am able to respond to opportunity.
- . . . enjoy my success.

The Takeaway

If you look at every wise decision you have ever made, you will see you have used some or all of the Wisdom Processes in their making. These processes will almost always

lead to the best potential outcome. The only difference between your successful habits and the Wisdom Process is that your habits are unconscious and automatic, and the Wisdom Processes are used by Conscious Choice.

If you were to consistently use just three of these ten processes, your life would be immeasurably better. **If you were to base your decisions on verifiable facts (#2), control your negative emotions (#4), and use your energy to find solutions (#7), your decisions would be clearer, better, and the negative emotions that cause you so many problems would be significantly decreased.**

That may sound difficult, but remember you are already using the wise processes while you are making successful decisions tens of thousands of times daily. You are just making them unconsciously. You also use the same processes Consciously whenever you make accurate decisions. So the processes are nothing new.

Once you truly understand how your brain forms habits you are armed with the knowledge of how to use the same procedure to change or replace the habits you have.

So, as Emerson said, “You are wiser than you know.” Maybe you often think your life is one poor decision after another but that is not true. The truth is you make wise decisions about 95 percent of the time.

Every man is a damn fool for at least five minutes every day; wisdom consists in not exceeding the limit.

—*Elbert Hubbard*

You actually are “making the kinds of decisions that could move your life forward and contribute to the planet.” You are just making them unconsciously. This does not allow you to experience the real potential you have. The goal of this book is to help you learn to be wise consciously. It is not a big leap.

Your brain is actually hardwired to make wise decisions. Recent studies indicate way down deep your brain is genetically programmed to make you feel good whenever you make a wise decision. Because of the altruistic nature of wisdom, you biologically “know” a wise decision extends beyond you as an individual and benefits everyone around you.

**The only difference between those who have failed
and those who have succeeded lies
in the difference of their habits.**

—Og Mandino

CHAPTER SIX

EMOTIONS

EMOTIONS – Until you learn to master your emotions, they will continue to interfere with your efforts and intentions to think wisely and drive your decisions into self-centered, unreasonable, and indefensible choices. Negative emotions are the engine of almost all your truly unwise and self-destructive habits. To truly gain emotional control requires you to understand how your emotions work.

Feelings and emotions are not the same. You have heard them used interchangeably but would be better served by seeing them as being quite different. When you are dealing with an external event, feelings are the raw sensory experience as it is happening. Your five senses are always available to record what is happening to your body. Not too long ago a friend asked me what the difference is between feelings and emotions.

The example I used to demonstrate the difference was this one: “If your lover or significant other walks up and gently pats you on your backside, you would ‘feel’ the same sensation as if it was a stranger, but the emotion would be very different.” **Emotions are the meanings we apply to**

certain feelings we experience. The difference between feelings and emotions is their position in the thought process. We can have feelings without emotions, but we cannot have emotions without feeling the changes in our bodies that emotions produce.

There are different kinds of emotions. Some emotions are reactions from your genetically programmed fight-or-flight response. They developed as we evolved to alert you to danger and react quickly so you can try to get to safety. In those emotions your brain is “feeling” something “long” before your conscious brain becomes involved in figuring out what is going on. A primitive part of your brain is directing your body to react without your involvement or consent.

If you have ever been in an automobile accident, you might remember it was afterward when the shakes and heart pounding emotions set in. During the accident itself, your subconscious was working to capacity but nothing much was going on in your conscious brain.

The emotions encountered during traumatic injuries are in response to the changes going on in your body. They are not the cause of the changes. It is not those emotions over which you can exert any degree of conscious control. They are what enable you to react to danger and get out of the way. For example, if someone comes up behind you and startles you so badly you spill your drink or do something you haven’t done since you were a toddler, it is not your fault. Your fight-or-flight system was responsible.

We were all born with the “fight or flight” mechanism. However, we are the only species that worries constantly when there is nothing to fight and no reason to flee.

—*Douglas McKee*

The little farming community in north central Kansas where I grew up was incredibly musical. The junior high school performed an operetta every spring. The year I was in the eighth grade the operetta was going to be *The HMS Pinafore*. I was already singing solos in church choir and loved to sing.

I had to go through the audition process just like all the others, and for some reason the thought of the audition became really frightening to me. I can remember thinking more and more often as the audition neared, "When you get out there you probably will open your mouth and nothing will come out, you won't be able to make a sound." You can imagine what happened.

The pianist started three times and I couldn't do it, I couldn't make a sound. I remember looking down from the stage at our teacher, and he had such a look of disbelief on his face. I too was in a state of shock. Needless to say, I didn't get the lead.

Some emotions, however, are not caused by danger or trauma. They are caused by repeatedly thinking about a particular subject that has emotional content. These are the ones you empower with your imagination and they are the ones that cause you problems, because they become habitual reactions. These emotions are the ones over which you can learn to exert a great deal of control.

When I auditioned, I made the same mistake most of us make frequently every day. I believed what I was thinking was true, when it really wasn't. I chose to let my fears convince me that I could not sing. I allowed my negative emotions to sabotage my dream to sing the lead in the operetta.

A very important aspect of these kinds of emotions is that they are not absolutes. Many times negative emotions generated by your imagination feel very real and very powerful. They do so for a very explainable reason. Dr. John Medina makes the point that emotions “command” our attention more than any other kind of thought, and he is correct. The reason is that emotions are the “physical feelings” part of a memory. When you think of something that contains emotional content, your brain produces those same chemicals, and you physically feel the same sensations as you did then.

Just because they feel powerful and real however, does not make them either real or powerful, as explained in the chapter on emotions from *Mental Mechanics: A Repair Manual*:

“Can emotions exist apart from thoughts? Is fear a real entity? Does it have an existence of its own, like a tree, a dog, or a shirt? Are anger, loneliness, doubt, pleasure, or any other of the emotions any different? No! They are not! These are feelings we have only while we are thinking about ‘something.’ This is very important and bears repeating. An emotion is a feeling we have about something only while we are thinking about it. When we stop thinking about it, the feeling goes away.”

Knowledge is power, but only wisdom is liberty.

—*Will Durant*

Your brain, as advanced as it is, cannot automatically distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. It cannot tell you, for instance, that almost all your distress is just a kind of soap opera drama and you should stop it before you get high blood pressure.

The brain just produces the chemicals called for in the thought or memory. That is the reason scary movies make you feel scared, happy movies make you laugh, sad movies make you cry, and hot, steamy, sexy, romantic movies make you hurry home.

*Emotions are just as likely
to become automatic habits
as any other kind of data.*

Thankfully, you can keep most of your emotions in perspective and under control. You are able to do so because you have a number of concepts, conclusions, and habits that are really good and really functional.

Your good habits got you here, they will get you through this day, and, barring anything lethal happening to you, you will be ready to rely on the same successful skill set tomorrow.

The subject matter of an emotion may be based entirely on a factual experience, such as a child being bitten by a dog. That event took place, but there is no reason for that child to fear dogs for the rest of his or her life.

William James said we cannot create a full-blown physical reaction just by thinking about an emotional scenario, and he is correct.

However, in the long run, chronically negative thinking can obviously create enough bad-acting chemicals to cause significant damage to our health. That's why 47 percent of adults in the U.S. are on prescription medications for chronic

health problems.

Any of the chronic emotional states, such as depression, anxiety, pessimism, road rage, guilt, and shame—to list a few—are the result of habituation of specific types of negative thinking. These states can be changed by changing the thinking process that creates them. Thinking that way became a habit, which changed the biochemistry of the brain. Those changes will last as long as you continue to think that way.

Once again you have both the authority and the ability to make different choices. What is needed is the lesson on “How can I change my emotional habits?” Here’s the lesson: All habits are made the same way, and they can all be changed the same way. One of the greatest benefits of wisdom is a huge decrease in negative emotions in our lives.

If you are reading this book you are included in a truly fortunate group. You are fed and housed better than most of the people on the planet. You have plenty of opportunities to have a life of real worth filled with love and happiness. The only reason you don’t is that you listen to your negative emotions telling you that you can’t.

Getting rid of the negative energy wasted in your negative habits, thoughts, and conclusions frees up a huge amount of energy for joy, happiness, advancement, fulfillment, completion, exploration, or expansion; all kinds of things for which you do not currently have the energy or the perspective to enjoy.

**The wisdom of life consists in the
elimination of non-essentials.**

—*Lin Yutang*

Negative emotional habits are a lot like jumping off a cliff. Once you have jumped, you are committed to the fall. Once you have lost control, the damage is done. So choose not to go there. Stay on mentally neutral ground.

The vast majority of your negative thinking does not serve you in any way. Almost all your distress is, on examination, not essential to your life. Wisdom can help you change or eliminate most of it.

**Anger and intolerance are the enemies
of correct understanding.**

—Gandhi

CHAPTER SEVEN

VALUES

VALUES – Your actions are your values made visible. If you value cheap and easy solutions and material wealth above all else, how can you expect anything lasting or worthy to find its way?

The Problem

Your individual habits of applying values are unlike being taught arithmetic or language according to globally accepted rules. Your values are basically self-taught. They also tend to be very local in nature, unless you are educated to a wider worldview. Since you develop your own value system, there are many opportunities for individual variations and errors.

Your values and your coping skills are, for all intents and purposes, genetic. Your physical genome obviously dictates your physical form. The family and environment into which you were born, forms your “environmental genome,” if you will. In a very real sense, you “inherit” your value system from the people in your environment.

Life surrounds you with people who generally have similar

habits. They share similar diets, behaviors, values, faiths, and worldviews. You learn almost everything you know about relating to your environment from them. They are either open to new ideas and change, or they are closed. They can either cope with stress functionally, or not. They can respect, or they can control. They can love, or they can fear. Of course those are not “either/or” absolutes, but they are the spectrum of environments.

That’s how you developed your value system, which is just another collection of habits. And now that you are an adult you are unconsciously teaching those value habits to your children by your day-to-day choices. You are showing your children what your true value system is. What you say is usually not important, and they know that. The only things

Some friends hosted foreign exchange students a number of times. One student was a Muslim from Jordan. Her father was a high-ranking official during the Six Day War against Israel, so she had been raised in a seriously hateful anti-Jewish environment.

After settling in for a while she took a trip with her U.S. “parents.” On the trip they stopped in for a visit with some friends of the family. She was unaware the family was Jewish. It just so happened the visit coincided with a Jewish holiday and a religious celebration took place in the home during the visit.

The next evening the student asked her U.S. “dad” if she could speak to him in private. She asked him, “Are these people really Jews?” “Yes,” he answered. She asked, “All of them?” He said, “Yes, they all are.” “But,” she went on to say, “I needed to ask you to make sure, because they are all so nice.”

that are truly important to you are the things you place enough value on to take action.

This story on the previous page is amazing, because of all the different values and different kinds of values that are involved.

On one hand there are the relative cultural, political, and religious values that have kept many parts of the world in a constant state of war and terrorism for generations. On the other hand are the values which transcend all those relative values. People are people, and when judged outside the organizations and agendas we support, we are pretty much the same.

The evidence is all around you, reflecting exactly what you do value. According to all the evidence, your current value system places material wealth above everything else, including relationships, health, children, even the future survival of your species. You work long hours to provide your children with the latest gadgets and comforts—which only keep them distracted—but, according to the latest Nielsen Report, you spend less than five minutes of quality time with them each day.

Our actions are our values made visible.

—Douglas McKee

Should you wonder then, why your culture is in so much trouble? The lessons your children are learning are not wise at all, and if you fail to start making wiser decisions now, the world you leave your children will be broken and poisoned far beyond their skills to repair it. Should you be surprised there is such unrest and violence around the planet? Should you be

amazed the young are so adamantly rejecting your lifestyle?

You fail to be able to share with them a higher perspective that can keep them emotionally balanced and mentally healthy, because you cannot teach them what you do not know. This is the root cause of most of your own stress and illness.

There is a second childhood wound that apparently happens during adolescence. As a young child you were taught that values are the foundation for living, and they are, and you prepared to live your life based on fairness, honesty, hard work, and patience. You were wounded when you discovered most adults apparently not only don't believe in values, they ignore them. The consequence: **You had to grow up and go through life knowing what to do, but doing something else and not feeling right about it.**

There are some values we all share. There are some values of such importance to us as a species that they are simply not open to debate. If you deny them, you deny there is an agenda for our species other than separation, greed, warfare, and famine.

**Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three
universally recognized moral qualities of men.**

—*Confucius*

The Solution

**Knowledge cuts up the world.
Wisdom makes it whole.**

—*Brazilian Proverb*

The solution is to live the values you recognize as important, because no act exists in a vacuum. Every action affects those around us and those around them. Even though you may see yourself as an individual, our species needs you to see yourself as sharing an agenda that unites us and that unity is greater than any one of us. You do not, in reality, differ very much from other people. After all, are the life experiences of other individuals all that different from yours? No, they aren't. Your experiences are basically similar and so are your values, at least the ones that truly matter.

As a species, our only hope for a future that even vaguely resembles the life you have now lies in the vitally important process of making a habit of acting in accord with the values you know are truly important to all of us as individuals, families, communities, societies, and global citizens.

What are your values? What do your actions declare them to be? Would it really take that much more effort to do the "right" thing? What would it "cost" you to do so? Compare that to what it would cost you in the short AND long run, not to. Many times you "know" the right thing to do but end up doing something else. If you would just take a little more time to consider the best choice you can make, that choice will be obviously so much better that the drive and the courage to make it will be part of the decision.

**A people that values its privileges
above its principles soon loses both.**

—*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Cicero defined wisdom as: "**understanding how the eternal truths can be applied to life.**" I believe the "eternal truths" to which Cicero referred have been staring us in the

face since man first became man, but we have been too blind or too busy to see them for what they truly are. The eternal truths are the principles by which the brightest and best of us lived, and live. The choices we make change with the times, but “HOW” we make wise choices has not changed in thousands of years.

Today the eternal truths would be referred to as values or principles. They could also be considered literally as “Words of Wisdom.” Cophorne MacDonald is one of the world’s bright lights when it comes to wisdom. He points out that the words of wisdom are characteristics found in people we consider wise. His observation is right on.

Wouldn’t you like to have your life described by words in this list?

Accepting, Accountable, Alert, Appreciative, Balanced, Calm, Caring, Cautious, Compassionate, Cooperative, Courageous, Courteous, Creative, Curious, Defiant, Determined, Devoted, Discrete, Flexible, Focused, Forgiving, Generous, Gentle, Grateful, Honest, Humble, Humorous, Impartial, Industrious, Innocent, Just, Kind, Magnanimous, Merciful, Moderate, Modest, Nurturing, Obedient, Open, Optimistic, Patient, Peaceful, Prudent, Purposeful, Receptive, Reliable, Respectable, Responsible, Respectful, Sensitive, Simple, Sincere, Sober, Spontaneous, Steadfast, Strong, Striving, Thoughtful, Tolerant, Tough, Tranquil, Trustworthy, Truthful, Understanding

As you become wiser, the Words of Wisdom apply more and more to your behavior and to your life. You certainly don’t have to be all of them all the time. If you would just practice “being” one of the list each day would, you would soon find your life greatly changed.

How values actually work appears to have been the real secret all along. Values are classified in the dictionary as nouns, but in everyday life, values are adverbs.

They are adverbs, because they are instructions about HOW to use your knowledge. They can guide you to the highest possible use of your knowledge, regardless of the situation in which they are to be used. How you choose to do something is at least as important as the choice to do it.

*Values are the mirror you hold
your decisions up to that reflects
their worth; the higher their value,
the greater their worth.*

The **Words of Wisdom** describe the best values mankind has developed. Using them as a framework for your thinking guides you in making the best decisions leading to the best possible outcomes.

Wisdom also helps you consider how your chosen plan may affect what options may become available in the future. It answers the question “Is it better to act now, later, or maybe not even act at all?” Sometimes, maybe even frequently, the wisest decision is to do nothing.

Living in accord with time-honored values lets you look in the mirror knowing you will approve of the goodness in the person you see. Wisdom can heal the second childhood wound and restore the wholeness you lost.

The Words of Wisdom should be the foundation for

teaching your children how to make the best decisions. Having said that, however, you can only teach values by example.

As I said before, this book contains nothing new. You already know this.

Live truth instead of professing it.

—*Elbert Hubbard*

CHAPTER EIGHT

DECONSTRUCTION

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

—*Marcel Proust*

Let's put everything we have talked about so far into a formula that supports the development of wisdom. I call this formula "DECONSTRUCTION."

Deconstruction is the conscious disassembly of your thoughts and conclusions. You consciously take them apart to reveal the information and the steps you used to reach them. Doing this enables you to:

1. Assess the validity, accuracy, and usability of your thoughts and conclusions;
2. Accept the ones that are valid, accurate, and useful;
3. Discard or modify the ones that are not; and
4. Construct new ones using Wisdom.

Deconstruction is implemented by consciously becoming involved earlier and earlier in your thought process. Different people might refer to this step as introspection, or awareness;

others might consider it to be mindfulness. Whatever description is applied, your thinker is becoming involved earlier in the thought process. This puts you in the position to choose the best solution instead of just reacting automatically.

There are two things happening as you do this. First, you are moving the location of decision-making control from external events, where the situation dictates your automatic reaction, to the interior, where you are in command. This is a huge step. Instead of simply reacting, you can choose how you will respond.

Second, becoming involved in the decision-making process earlier and earlier will eventually allow you to become consciously involved before the habit content is activated. Think about what that ability could mean in your life. Unwanted habits can, with practice, be controlled or eliminated. Emotional extremes can be avoided. If an emotional habit is activated, it can be managed so it doesn't get out of control. Being wise allows you to avoid creating most of the negative emotions that cause stress and worry.

When confronted by a potentially negative situation or negative thoughts, instead of becoming emotionally involved and creating a "soap opera" of negative emotions, you can simply use a tool like this one I call "Change the Channel":

Telling and re-telling yourself negative stories is like watching a TV program you know will make you miserable. The difference is that your story is being generated in your own brain. Since it is your story, you can change the channel on your imaginary negative program and think about something else, or just turn off the program.

After practicing this for a while, when negative feelings begin to creep in, a simple “Change the Channel” is often all that is needed to stop the process. Some people prefer statements such as: “I don’t need to go there. I can choose where I want to go.” Sometimes we just lose it. At times like those, try using this tool.

The “Stop, Drop, and Roll” Technique for Putting Out Your Emotional Fires:

When you get upset it is like finding yourself on fire. You are suddenly out of control. “Stop, Drop, and Roll,” like the time-proven fire safety technique, can be used to put your conscious self back in control of your thoughts. STOP means just that. Stop thinking about whatever it is that is causing you to be upset. DROP would mean drop back or mentally back up to a previous thinking position. And then ROLL out your new decision in a different direction, like a red carpet.

Wisdom also recognizes there is a big difference between danger and worry. If there is danger, the smart thing is to get away. If there is no danger, the wise will not worry. By being able to avoid negative emotional thinking, the wise avoid the kind of stress that is killing the rest of us.

Almost all our emotional distress is simply the result of stories we tell ourselves about our life. If you want to prove this for yourself, when you are feeling fearful or distressed just look around. If you can see something that is actually dangerous, run for safety. If there is no danger, the distress is coming from your story.

As you practice deconstructing your conclusions you begin to focus on the real “facts” of a situation. Facts have no emotions. They are what they are. When you use facts you can arrive at the potentially best conclusion, because you are using the most accurate information available.

By taking apart your conclusions you can look at the skill sets, habits, conclusions, and symbols you currently accept as accurate descriptions of your world. If you have any doubts while evaluating your thoughts for accuracy, the three most important processes to apply are: **1) Base my decisions on verifiable facts, 2) Control my emotions, and 3) Use my energy to find solutions.**

What would that do for those among us whose habits include anxiety, depression, or road rage—to name just a few? Negative emotional states don’t deal with facts, don’t control emotions, and are not focused on solutions.

**We are all addicted to our own thinking;
the wise to finding solutions, the rest
of us to dwelling on our problems.**

—Douglas McKee

If Wisdom were no different than establishing any new habit, all you would need to do is “do Wisdom” for a certain number of times and, presto, the brain would make it a new habit.

However, this is the foundation thinking process upon which all others depend, so you need to approach it a bit differently. Keep in mind you are already doing it thousands of times a day, but now you are going to practice doing it consciously.

The easiest way we can learn to change our fundamental thinking habit is to take every one of our thoughts apart, to “deconstruct” them into their component pieces and processes. You might think this will take entirely too much time, but the truth is your brain is so busy now thinking negative nonsense that decreasing the chatter results in greater awareness and time to actually consider your matters.

Deconstruction puts you consciously in charge, and in doing so you learn to manage your thinking-habit processes. After practicing deconstructing every thought you can for a while, your brain will automatically start to apply the process in reverse, and begin constructing your thoughts much more wisely.

All you are doing is using processes already in use in your brain, re-training it to consciously make decisions more wisely until thinking wisely becomes your new habit.

**We are made wise not by the recollection of our past,
but by the responsibility for our future.**

—*George Bernard Shaw*

Our eating habits provide a potent example of the deconstruction approach. Obese people don't actually have problems with food itself. Obesity is an example of poor automatic eating habits. When we practice Deconstructing the when, where, what, how, and why we are eating and replace the unwise choices we are making with good eating habits, weight takes care of itself.

While practicing deconstruction, one of your realizations

will be that most of your habits don't need to be changed; they are fine the way they are. You can get out of bed, shower, and clothe yourself without trying to take those habits apart. (Although in my case, based on my choices of colors and patterns, my wife occasionally voices some doubt about my ability to clothe myself. I can also drive well, but am eternally grateful there is not a brake pedal on her side of the car.)

Another realization will be that as you disassemble your thinking into its parts and steps, you will recognize the procedure you have used for making correct decisions and realize you have been using it your entire life. It is the approach behind all of your positive decisions without you even being aware of it.

Driving is a really good example. When you drive, you automatically stop on red, go on green, obey the signs and signals, stay in your lane, check before turning, backing, or changing lanes, and make a large number of other decisions without consciously thinking about them.

If viewed from the perspective of HOW you are processing your knowledge about driving, the Wisdom Processes from the chapter “Your Habit Forming Brain” make it easy to see.

“When I am being wise, I . . .”

- . . . choose what I will think about.
- . . . base my decisions on verifiable facts.
- . . . monitor my thoughts.
- . . . control my negative emotions.

- ... choose my response.
- ... keep my problems in perspective.
- ... use my energy to find solutions.
- ... almost always plan my future.
- ... am able to respond to opportunity.
- ... enjoy my success.

Use the wisdom processes to recognize how they relate to your driving to work. Then see how many you can identify in your other daily habits. Some of them are part of everything you do.

A third benefit of deconstruction is that you will not be as impulsive as before. You will take more time and arrive at better decisions. I cannot think of a single spouse, parent, or child who would not welcome that.

The ability to choose your thoughts wisely is where you want to be and where you can be. All it takes is practice. Your brain will do the rest for you, automatically. Using Deconstruction is a lot like fixing your car. Diagnose, repair, or replace, then drive on toward the destination of your choice.

Science is organized knowledge.

Wisdom is organized life.

—*Immanuel Kant*

Wisdom frees and empowers you to make the kinds of decisions that move your life toward the goals you choose.

**I do not want the peace which passeth understanding,
I want the understanding which bringeth peace.**

—*Helen Keller*

CHAPTER NINE

WISDOM IS THE NEXT STEP IN HUMAN EVOLUTION

You have been really patient and attentive while I have been explaining this. Before we end our conversation I want to make one more really strong pitch for wisdom, not to convince you that I am right, but to try to convince you that YOU can be right most of the time.

*Wisdom is the next step
in human evolution.*

The human brain is in a transition period. It has developed the ability to reason, but we almost always allow very primitive thinking processes to override our reasoning capacity and interfere with our decision making.

The human brain is actually a collection of brains, some of which are still as primitive as the brain of a reptile as in the negative emotions generated by fight or flight. Some are a bit more advanced as in the primitive mammals, something either feels pleasant or it feels unpleasant.

The miracle of our “advanced” brain is that it has developed the capacity to reason. It has the ability to choose.

A couple of days ago I was watching a master mechanic teaching a student how to do something new. The student apologized for taking so long to perform the task. The mechanic replied, "Don't worry. You'll get quicker and more proficient as you learn which steps you are doing now that you can leave out. When you have eliminated all the unnecessary steps, you will be as efficient as you can be."

If you would like your thinking to be as efficient as possible, what steps that you are doing now in your thinking can you leave out?

What steps are really necessary to get you from here to your next best choice? Wisdom is all about making the best choices you can.

If you have determined you are not in danger, then any fear-based fight or flight thinking is simply not relevant, so it is not necessary. If you are intent on making the best choice you can, your personal preferences, your likes or dislikes, aren't really relevant, so they are not necessary either.

So I would suggest that you can leave out the primitive brain thinking processes that have nothing to do with determining your best choice about what to do next.

*Wisdom is the next step
in human evolution.*

What would your life look like if you left out those primitive thinking steps? According to a recent report, 46 percent of our waking day is spent thinking about something other than what we are doing, and that 46 percent is usually negative.

What could you do with 46 percent more time and energy in your day? How about maybe even half that, 23 percent, more time and energy to pursue your goals and dreams? That would make a huge difference.

Here is one more tool you can use, called **What Should Your Best Friend Do?**

Not long ago I was counseling a young lady who had relationship problems. She had been in the relationship for eight years, and it was going nowhere. She thought she should leave, but she really “loved” the guy. She was in tears, losing sleep, and unable to concentrate. I asked her to imagine it was her very best friend who came to her seeking advice, because she was in the same position. What would she advise her friend to do? She laughed loudly and without hesitation said, “That’s easy! She should face the facts, drop the guy immediately, and move on.”

She already knew what to do, didn’t she? She just kept allowing her emotions and wants to dictate her choices.

Practicing Deconstruction is a good way to learn to override and control your primitive thinking processes, so you can use your ability to reason and arrive at your best choice.

Each time you consciously override your primitive brain you are more empowered. Each time you choose reason over habit, you enhance your freedom and ability to make the kinds of choices that evolve your life and benefit the planet.

Okay, I'm done now. Any questions?

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

The Whisper in the Wind

Douglas McKee, CRNA

If one listens quietly, there is a Whisper in the wind, the grass, the trees, the way we pass each other, and the look of yearning we cannot conceal in our eyes.

This is the Message from those who have gone before to those of us who are here now and to generations yet born.

The Whisper says we can live in Peace and Harmony with each other, that the eyes I am looking into can share with me something more important than my own life, and that I, in turn, can share that gift with another.

Wisdom is that Whisper, the path of the Progress of Man. Should we not learn from those who have toiled before? What did they hope and dream for us, and what do we hope and dream for those we will leave behind?

To listen to the Whisper is to hear the Wisdom of the Ages. What is right and true has not changed.

When we choose wisely, the world becomes a marvelous place to be.

It's as though all mankind holds its collective breath waiting for just one of us to make a right decision before moving on, always on, toward the final goal of Unity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Somewhere in the publishing process is a “rule” saying the author has to have a biography. To tell you where I have been does not tell you who I am now. This book will tell you who I am. It is the story of my life and it is your story also. We were born wise and then educated and conditioned to be unwise. We then struggle the rest of our lives trying to regain the youthful excitement and contentment we lost along the way.

Too few of us make it because we haven't been given everyday tools to make our lives better.

It is my joy to be able to share with you the first explicit How-To Manual for Wisdom. The messages in it are not new. They are as old as our species. We have heard them all before, and they are true. I truly believe the next step for our species will be defined not by what we can have but by what we can be.

Sincerest Thanks,
Doug

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