In the Green

Getting the Needle to Move

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Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Meta-Cognition

The Loud Popping Sound

Updating Our Programming

The Ego

The Magnificent 7

Practical Application

Summary

Getting Started

Preface

Back in the spring of 1961 a baby was born. Surprise! It was me. There were minor complications but after a few days they sent mom and me home “healthy and happy”. If you would have plugged me into a wellness meter, it would have registered way up in the green. Most of the time, when nature creates something, it comes into the world clean, serene and in the green. These healthy levels lasted for many years and I felt great.

At thirty, things were changing. I wasn’t feeling as good as usual. Things went down a notch. The next decade continued on a gradual decline. Little by little I started feeling worse. I passed it off as getting older. At forty things were coming to a boil and at forty-three, I was in crisis. My needle was in the red.

The funny thing is, I had a great life. I was blessed with an awesome family, a good living, a roof over our heads, food on the table every night and even enough left over for an extra now and then. Even with all of these good things in my life, I felt terrible. The reason being I was suffering from a number of chronic symptoms.

My blood pressure would spike regularly leaving me pale and weak. Digestive tract disturbances were an every-day occurrence. A bottle of the pink stuff was always within reach. Panic attacks would come out of nowhere and take

the wind out of my sails. I would take the maximum dosage of headache powders every-day to try and take the edge off my chronic neck and shoulder discomfort. In spite of all the over-the-counter medication, my condition was getting worse. This became worrisome.

Willie Nelson said, “nothing is worse for your blood pressure than worrying about your blood pressure.” With no health insurance and being afraid of what they might find, I was reluctant to go to the doctor. The longer I waited, the worse things got. Finally, I bit the bullet and made an appointment.

The Tale of Three Doctors

The first doctor looked me over, ran tests and delivered the bad news, “there’s nothing wrong with you” he said. I tried to ask question but was abruptly dismissed. Believing he must have missed something, I opted for a second opinion.

The second doctor was similar to the first although he had better bedside manner. Just like the first doctor he performed an examination and ran tests. Just like the first doctor he came to the same conclusion. “Your tests came back ok and we could not detect an infection, cancer or any other kind of clinical disease”, he reported. “With no clinical disease to treat, there really isn’t anything else we can do for you.” That was it.

This was confusing. I thought to myself, “how can I feel so lousy and nothing’s wrong?” Not knowing what else to do I

gave the doctor thing one more try. It was either third times a charm or three strikes and I'm out.

Doctors one and two had offices in modern, condo-like medical centers. Doctor three had an old school, free-standing building with a parking lot full of shade trees. (That's a big thing down here in south Florida) Walking into his office brought to mind Archie Bunkers living room in the 1970's T.V. show "All in the Family". After signing in and waiting a few minutes they called my name and led me into an examination room. Before long there was a knock on the door and a tall distinguished looking gentleman in his late fifties entered the room.

Like doctors one and two he performed his examination. Unlike them he asked me a number of questions about my every-day life. When he finished he excused himself, picked up his clipboard and left the room. After a few minutes he came back. He seemed a bit tense as he slowly closed the door behind him. He turned towards me holding his clipboard in front of him like a little shield. His face turned from sunny and pleasant to dark and serious. He took somewhat of a Spartan battle-stance, looked me straight in the eye and said firmly, "son, there's no pill for what's ailing you, your problem is your lifestyle".

He paused briefly and when he saw I was listening, continued. "When we get to forty, things start going downhill pretty quickly if we don't take care of ourselves.

That's your problem. You haven't been taking very good care of yourself, that's why you're not feeling well. You smoke a pack and a half of cigarettes every-day, eat way too much junk-food, get zero exercise and have tons of stress". I must have unconsciously been nodding in agreement because at that moment the tension eased, he lowered his little clipboard shield and broke from his battle-stance.

He leaned in closer and lowered his voice as if he were going to disclose some kind of classified information. He then spoke the fateful words that would forever change my life. "It's not a pill but here's my prescription. Quit smoking those damned cigarettes, eat some fresh food, get some regular exercise and figure a way to cut down on the stress. If you do these things, you'll start feeling better". We said our goodbyes and that was it.

Feeling a bit stunned, I made my way out into the shady parking lot. It was nice to get into a car that wasn't 150 degrees. Suddenly my short-term memory kicked in. Did he say "no pill"? To be honest, that's not what I wanted to hear. In a spontaneous wave of objective awareness, I found myself at a crossroads. For the first time, I could see another path. The question then became, do I ignore the best advice ever and continue on the same downward spiral or make some changes and try taking a step up? Having a clearer view of the way forward, the choice seemed obvious. With my new-found objectivity and a strong sense of

determination, I committed myself to applying the good doctors' prescription.

It was hard but I quit the cigarettes cold turkey. Instead of a number four with a diet soda, I got up early every morning and made my own breakfast with fresh ingredients. An old bicycle was excavated from the shed and with an air pump and a squirt of WD40 the rubber hit the road. In addition, I started drinking a lot of water. Can you guess what happened?

If you said Bob started feeling better, you're right of course. It only took a few days to start feeling a difference. After a few weeks the chronic symptoms from which I suffered for years began to ease and eventually cleared up completely. As my physical health was improving, I noticed my mental health was not. It was still stuck. The good doctor gave me specific things to do to improve my physical health but when it came to my mental health he spoke in general terms. His recommendation was to "figure a way to cut down on the stress". This was something I had to figure out for myself.

In my figuring, I found that much of my overwhelming stress was caused by the many problems in my every-day life. The same way cigarettes, junk food and lack of exercise was disturbing my physical health, the stress from these problems was disturbing my mental health. It made sense that if my mental health was going to improve, it would be the result of solving these problems.

From this perspective, I developed the problem-solving method presented in this book.

Solving my every-day problems significantly reduced the stress that was overwhelming my system. This reduction in stress came with a natural sense of relief. The same way quitting the cigarettes and junk-food improved my physical health, solving my problems improved my mental health. The same principles apply.

This is something anyone can do. Every individual has the equipment and the capability. We just have to think a bit differently and adopt a solution-based approach to every-day life. You don't have to believe anything or follow anyone. No one else real or imagined can do this for you. It's a matter of getting to know yourself a little better and developing some problem solving skills. Getting there requires a measure of learning and practice but it's well worth the effort.

There's no pill for it, it's a skill.

Introduction

The method in this book is based on philosophy, neuroscience and personal experience. It is the result of decades of research and development as well as great deal of trial and error. It is an invention born of necessity. It operates on the laws of cause and effect and our bodies natural ability to heal itself. Should you learn and practice the method in this book, a few things are going to happen.

First, you will get to know yourself a little better. You will come to identify as human. You will discover and develop your meta-cognition which is your mental ability to observe and manage your own thoughts and behaviors. You will use your meta-cognition to update your programming. This update leads to a shift from survival to solution-based thinking. As a result of this update, you will;

A- Become better able to understand and operate the human apparatus and

B-Become a much better problem solver.

When you begin running on the solution-based operating program, your problems get solved and the stress that comes with them dissolves. This reduction in stress (for me it was significant) comes with a natural sense of relief. This is your body's natural ability to heal itself kicking in.

This causes the needle to move.

Meta-Cognition

Meta-cognition is a scientific term used in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. It is often described as, “thinking about thinking”. In the context of this book, we will think of meta-cognition as our mental ability to observe our own thoughts and behaviors. Before it was given a scientific name, this cognitive ability was referred to as “the observer”.

The human mind is a busy street. There’s a lot going on up there. Left unsupervised things can get pretty confusing. Meta-cognition is our mental ability to supervise and manage the activities of our own mind. Every human being comes factory equipped with this “meta” or super cognitive ability yet few ever take it out of the box and put it to use.

Meta-cognition literally means super-thinking. It is the highest level of cognition. Meta-cognition is awareness. It is our innate ability to oversee and manage our own little busy street. When we activate our meta-cognition, we have super vision. We can observe ourselves objectively. We can see.

Many have heard the expressions, “we can’t see the nose on our face” or “we can’t see the forest through the trees”. The operative words are, “we can’t see. Using our meta-cognition, we can see. Without it, we get mixed-up and confused. Being confused keeps us stuck. Using our meta-cognition, we can emerge from the fog of confusion, get

ourselves unstuck and take a step upward. The following are exercises to help warm-up your meta-cognition.

Situational Awareness-look out of your eyes and observe your immediate surroundings. Observe the pictures on the wall, furniture, flooring, lighting and whatever may be on a shelf. Take a mental inventory of what you observe.

Look out the window. What do you see? Observe the sky, trees, grass, houses and what's in the yard. Smell the air, feel the temperature, the ground beneath your feet. Be aware of your breathing. When you are observing, you are using your meta-cognition. Meta-cognition is awareness.

Use you Filter-Have you ever heard someone say, "that person has no filter"? This refers to the idea that people talk without actually thinking. It suggests they are on automatic. We'll be using our meta-cognition for other things as we go along but for now, be aware of your words. Observe your words before you say them. Be the guard at the gate that supervises and oversees the words you are going to say and how you're going to say them.

When we practice situational awareness, we use our meta-cognition to observe what's outside of our head. When we practice using our filter, we use our meta-cognition to observe what's inside our head.

Developing our meta-cognition takes time and practice. It takes a measure of commitment and determination. No-one becomes a black-belt on their first day grasshopper. Ok, now that we are aware of our meta-cognition, let's put it to use.

The Loud Popping Sound

You may be familiar with the expression, “all roads lead to Rome”. In the world of individual human development, all roads lead to the loud popping sound. If you seek a higher understanding of being human, if you have an inner yearning to emerge from the frustration of being stuck, if you are overwhelmed with stress from living in this crazy world and seek some form of relief, all roads lead to the loud popping sound.

The loud popping sound occurs as a result of awareness. It requires the application of our meta-cognition. For the loud popping sound to occur in an individual, they must become acutely aware of 3 things.

1. I am a human being
2. As a human being, I have human problems. (wherever there are human interactions that result in conflict, there are human problems.)
3. I am 100% responsible for either the cause or the solution of my human problems.

If we are ever to solve our human problems and make advancements in the field of being human, we must do so as solution-based, symbiotic human beings.

Stay with me, we’re going somewhere with this.

Updating our Programming

Every human being comes factory-equipped with 2 operating programs. The survival program and the solution-based program. They are both in there together. Left unsupervised they tend to get mixed-up. Being mixed-up is confusing. This confusion leads to conflict and stress. In this chapter we are going to sort them out. In my view, being aware of these 2 programs is the most important and useful thing we can know about ourselves.

This idea is not new. It's been around since ancient times. Plato referred to it as "reason and desire". The Stoics called it "reaction and response". The Chinese have referred to it for thousands of years as "yin and yang". It has been famously portrayed in literature as "the little angel and the little devil" and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". Nietzsche characterized it as "Apollonian and Dionysian". Twentieth century psychologist Daniel Kahneman described the idea as "System 1 and System 2". They may have been presented a bit differently but essentially they were all talking about the same thing. Human beings have 2 distinct operating programs.

Neuroscience has found these 2 programs to exist in different areas of the brain. "Reaction" is an automatic survival program that resides in the limbic system and "Response" is a rational, solution-based program located in the pre-frontal cortex.

Philosophers throughout history have tried to raise awareness of these 2 programs. They've tried to explain how important it is to know this about ourselves and gain a measure of control over them. In spite of their best efforts, the idea hasn't caught on very well. Humanity as a species is still vastly unaware of these 2 programs although there has been a recent convergence on this fundamental information.

Human beings do not come with an owners-manual or instruction book. Chances are our parents didn't teach us about this and we certainly didn't learn it in school. This is something we've got to figure out for ourselves.

Knowing the difference between these 2 programs is essential to becoming able to consciously choose between them. Once we are aware of them, we can update our programming and start solving our human problems. Doing this will help us emerge from the fog of confusion that has been keeping us stuck in the red for so long. Updating to and running on the solution-based operating program is our primary objective. It will help us get ourselves back in the green. Let's sort them out.

The Conflictive Operating Program (C.O.P.)

The conflictive operating program is based on the win/lose kind of thinking. It is rooted in our natural instinct to survive.

It is commonly referred to as our fight or flight reaction. This survival reaction is located in the area of the brain known as

the limbic system. It gets triggered when it senses a threat and automatically shuts down the rational part of our brain. It then floods our system with chemicals like adrenalin and cortisol. This causes an emotional reaction and puts us in defense mode. Once the chemical dump takes place, things can get out of control and it takes a while to get over it.

This automatic survival reaction kept us alive back when we lived in caves and were being chased by sabre-tooth tigers and marauding bands of barbarians. In modern times, problems arise as a result of the survival reaction becoming activated in non-life or death situations.

The limbic system is not the intelligent part of the brain. Without guidance from our rational brain it tends to perceive just about every human interaction as a threat. Unsupervised, it becomes activated over non-life or death situations. This is why we fly of the handle and get emotional over things that, compared to life or death situations, seem trivial. This results in conflict and we are often left wondering, “what are we fighting about”.

Running on The Conflictive Operating Program leads to unnecessary conflict and stress. In my personal experience, it was this kind of stress that was overloading my system.

The Solution-Based Operating Program (S.B.O.P.)

The solution-based operating program is rooted in the win/win kind of thinking. This kind of thinking occurs in the pre-frontal cortex. True to its' name, we use the solution-based operating program to solve problems. We also use it to advance technologies, build relationships, provide services and help each other. The result of the win/win approach is productive, positive, harmonious and symbiotic.

A symbiotic win/win outcome is "good for you, good for me, good for the flower, good for the bee".

Being aware of the solution-based approach give us an option. I like to think of it as Option B. If a situation is not life or death, we can solve instead of fight. We can have harmony instead of conflict, peace instead of stress. Life doesn't always have to be about winning and being right. Solving is not losing, solving is evolving.

These 2 programs have a number of distinct characteristics. Let's do a side-by-side comparison.

C.O.P.	S.B.O.P.
Limbic System	Cerebral Cortex
Survival Instinct	Conscious
Automatically Triggered	On Purpose
Reaction-Fight or Flight	Response-Rational
Win/Lose	Win/Win
Conflictive	Harmonious
Emotional	Serene
Negative	Positive
Toxic	Healthy
Ego	Human
Lower Self-Primal	Higher Self

Study the differences between these 2 operating programs. Sort them out in your mind. Create a membrane of separation between them. Practice recognizing these characteristics as they come up in your every-day life. Don't worry if they slip past you. It takes time and practice to get the hang of it. Try not to be in a hurry. Life will provide an endless stream of opportunities for you to practice this skill.

The Ego

We are all familiar with the term but what does it mean? We may think of an egotistical person as someone who possess narcissistic traits. A person who has an inflated view of themselves. They may act superior to others. They believe they are right and nothing can change their mind. Egotistical people are often abusive, critical and display a lack of empathy. They may seem selfish and always put their own interests first. Some may show it more than others but, the same way every human has a liver, every human has an ego.

Nature put the ego in charge of our survival mechanism. Our ego runs our limbic system. It is our protector. It is our inner warrior. The ego is incapable of kindness, empathy, patience, being nice or any other endearing human quality. The primary function of the ego is to make sure we survive a life or death encounter. If our human part is a little angel, our ego is a little devil. They are both in there together. This is a good thing to know about ourselves. I named my ego Beelzebub.

The ego is exactly like a guard dog. In an ideal relationship between a human and a dog, both are happy. The human is the master and the dog is a faithful companion and guardian. In a troubled relationship, the human suffers at the hand of their protector.

The dog is a pack animal. It is either pack leader or takes its' place in the pecking order. The animal that nature created to be a faithful guardian will instinctively take over as pack leader if it senses the human is not fulfilling the role. When the dog takes charge, life becomes full of conflict and stress. The dog is incapable of solving problems. Every situation becomes combative and emotional. Things get out of control and the human comes to perceive the situation as hopeless. The human becomes desperate and needs help.

The Dog Whisperer

Most people have heard about or watched the T.V. show "The Dog Whisperer". It's about people calling in an expert to help solve their dog problems. When the dog whisperer arrives he recognizes the problem right away. It's the major connecting thread of the show. In just about every case, he finds the human has not embraced and asserted their role as pack leader in the relationship. As a result, the dog has instinctively assumed the role of pack leader. This results in the human unwittingly becoming submissive to the dog.

The dog whisperer knows there is nothing wrong with the dog. It's only following its' natural instincts. If there is any fixing to be done, it's on the human side. This is not an easy task. The dog whisperer tries to point out the problem but the human resists. The human denies responsibility and blames the dog. They have difficulty grasping the concept.

By the end of the episode, with the help of the dog whisperer, the human starts to come out of the fog of denial and begins to see their role in the problem.

Only by becoming aware of their role in the problem can they begin to embrace their role in the solution. The problem is finally solved and the needle moves when the human takes on the role of pack leader and becomes able to control the dog. As such, the human can go on with their life in peace and the dog, no longer in charge, can take its' natural place in the hierarchy. This is a relief to both.

In order to update our programming and start running on the solution-based operating program, we must become aware of and come to terms with our ego. We must guide it with the intelligent part of our brain. Take it off of automatic. Let it know we are taking charge and it can stand down until there is a real life and death situation. This harmonious relationship with our ego is the beginning of inner peace.

The Magnificent 7

Energy as a Substance

In the preparation of any healthy recipe, healthy ingredients are necessary. As developing human beings, it's important we perceive energy as a substance. Energy substances are like material substances in the sense they possess particular qualities, quantities and characteristics. We're already familiar with the words that represent them. We know their names. The next step is to begin using them in our every-day lives. If we are to experience the benefits of these healthy ingredients, it is necessary we apply them in our human interactions. We can't do it with our limbic system. This is why updating our programming is so important.

Here are seven energy substances that are available to you in unlimited quantity. They are helpful in cooking up harmonious outcomes.

1. Respect- A positive feeling or action shown toward someone; to hold in high esteem or regard. (These definitions come right out of the dictionary)

   Respect is the main ingredient in any harmonious human interaction. Treat others the way you would like to be treated. This concept is not new. Many know it as the golden rule. We are all capable of showing respect. When we do, we're generating positive, healthy energy. When

we express respect, we feel respect. What the mind thinks, the heart feels.

Respect is the first on the list because it is what's needed most in the world. Respecting people doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Live and let live is the ancient wisdom that embodies the idea.

To get respect, one must give respect. Don't wait for the world or other people to change. Apply the timeless wisdom handed gifted to us by Gandhi and "be the change". Take the initiative and set the tone in your every-day human interactions by making respect the main ingredient.

2. Patience-calmly tolerating delay, confusion, etc…

How much patience we have can be measured by how long a disturbance takes to get us upset. Patience is a quantitative substance. It's common to hear people say, "I'm about out of patience" or "my patience is wearing thin". On the other hand, "that person has the patience of a saint" or "they must have a ton of patience."

Patience is our defense against flying off the handle in a pressure situation. It's a necessary ingredient in our efforts to over-ride our automatically triggered limbic reactions and avoid the chemical dump. Stoicism recommends responding with a pause and a few deep breaths when we

feel ourselves getting annoyed. Developing patience is a skill. It takes awareness, forethought, self-control and lots of practice.

Patience is a spiritual muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets. Life provides an endless stream of opportunities to exercise our patience. Recognize, appreciate and make the most of them.

3. Kindness-sympathetic, gentle, benevolent etc…

Kindness comes from the heart. It is a conscious human expression. It is often referred to as being nice. It's easy to be nice when everything is going smoothly but when the stuff hits the fan and the limbic reaction kicks-in, being nice goes out the window. This leads to conflict and stress. Back when I was living in the dog eat dog world and swimming with the sharks, there were many times I found myself in situations where other people weren't being kind. They would go into fight mode and use every trick in the book to win and be right.

When I was running on the conflictive operating program, this was likely to trigger a conflictive reaction. Things would often go downhill from there and the stress would pile up. With awareness and determination, I found that in conjunction with respect and patience, I could respond with kindness even in stressful situations. This approach would often disarm the other person, de-escalate the

situation and set the tone for a harmonious outcome. This is especially rewarding when it happens with someone you love.

4. Humility-to lower in pride, make modest

From the win/lose kind of thinking, humility is lowering oneself into a submissive position. (No Bueno!) From the solution-based perspective, there is no dominant or submissive position. In the win/win frame of reference, humility is being eye to eye and in equal standing.

In my own experience, trying to hold a dominant position or allowing myself to become submissive in a relationship resulted in conflict and stress. In my efforts to practice humility, I lowered my position where dominant and elevated it where submissive. Doing this was one of the most significant changes I've ever made. This one skill reduced my stress-load dramatically and the benefits have been on-going.

Humility is placing ourselves in an equal, eye to eye position in all of our non-life or death human interactions.

5. Courage-Bravery

There are different situations where people display courage. We often associate the word with bravery on the battlefield or people risking their lives during a

dangerous rescue mission. What about every-day situations that aren't life or death like dealing with an abusive boss or a sensitive loved one. These areas can be pretty scary to change.

When asked to define the word, the famous actor John Wayne replied, "courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway". It takes a measure of courage to make changes in our lives. Sure we may feel a twinge of fear but saddle up anyway. Courage is an essential ingredient in solving our human problems. Courageously moving forward or being paralyzed with fear, these are our 2 choices.

6. Gratitude-the quality of being thankful, appreciation

Human life has both good and bad things going on simultaneously (Blessings and Problems). One can think of it as heaven and hell happening at the same time. When my mind was focused on the negative, I became disturbed. Complaining and blaming didn't solve anything and for a long time the scale was tipped way over to the negative side. This was stressful and kept the needle in the red.

When I began solving my problems, the reduction in stress made it possible to appreciate my many blessings. (It's hard to feel the joy from your blessings when you're overwhelmed with stress from your problems.) I didn't

have to search very far to find them. They were right here in my every-day life and in the wonderful world around me. When I weighed the good things, the scale began to balance. Gratitude is a vital element in the process of getting the needle to move. The interesting part was the world didn't change. What changed was my perception. It's been said, "perception is reality".

Choosing to appreciate the good things and express gratitude caused a significant rise in my level of happiness. Do what the old standard suggests, "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative".

Gratitude or dissatisfaction, these are our 2 choices.

7. Forgiveness-consciously letting go of feelings of resentment, bitterness, and the desire for vengeance against someone who has caused harm.

Out of the seven, forgiveness is probably the most challenging. It is not possible from the conflictive operating program. From the win/lose, forgiveness is perceived as losing, defeat or weakness. It is especially hard to forgive when the offender hasn't apologized.

Without forgiveness, the wounded party has a tendency to harbor resentment. These harbors can become infected spiritual wounds. They are painful festering sores that never go away. Not only do they not go away,

they get worse! Having one or more of these festering wounds in my view is a form of spiritual leprosy. Yikes!

Nature provides us with all kinds of remedies. Human beings have been using them for thousands of years. Many of todays' modern medicines are derived from these natural substances. A wonderful example is the aloe plant. Where I live in Florida it grows in abundance. It has thick, fleshy leaves that when the skin is peeled back you find a gooey substance inside. It's commonly used on burns.

Aloe helps in the healing process. It soaks into the skin and immediately soothes the affected area. Depending on the severity of the burn, it may have to be applied a number of times but you can't put on too much. When applied regularly, it helps the body's natural abilities do their job and before long the pain subsides and the disturbed area is restored. Forgiveness is to the energy body what aloe is to the physical. Think of forgiveness as spiritual aloe. It is a natural remedy.

Forgiveness I discovered, is not for the benefit of the offender. It is something we do for ourselves. (You could say it's selfish in a good way.) The other person could be far away or no longer living. They may have no idea they hurt you or just don't care. You may never see them again or you

may see them every day. In any case, do not rely on them, rely on yourself.

Sometimes we have to forgive ourselves. It's a common expression, "I could never forgive myself". It's better if you can. Give it a try. Use the substance.

Whether they were caused by another person or yourself, slather a generous amount of forgiveness on your spiritual wounds every day. When you do, they will be naturally restored.

No one can give you these seven substances. They are a part of you. They cannot be explained but they can be observed. They are available in unlimited supply. When applied they cause a measurable effect. Using them causes the needle to move. This is what makes them real.

Practice using these healthy ingredients in your every-day life. When the opportunities present themselves (and they will) summon them. Simply think of the word that represents them and say them in your mind. (Respect! Patience! Kindness! Courage! Humility! Gratitude! Forgiveness!) When you do, they will be available to you in unlimited supply. With practice comes advancement.

Practical Application
The Cell Phone Problem

Cell phones came to be when I was in my mid-thirties. At that time, I was in the middle of raising a family and my life was full of wonderful blessings. I had a spouse, two awesome kids, a relatively successful small business, a roof over our heads, good health, a cat and too many other good things to list. Along with a wealth of blessings, my life was full of problems. My problems were many and of varying degrees but one was the grand-daddy of them all.

My relationship with my spouse was extremely conflictive. We were good people but we fought a lot. We were both from homes that could be described as dysfunctional and had no idea how to solve relationship problems. This wasn't good because we had a bunch. Not only were we unable to solve our problems, we couldn't even talk about them without becoming defensive and emotional.

Unable to solve our problems, things got worse over time. We blamed each other and the cycle of conflict went on and on. This was extremely stressful. The conflict monster reared its' ugly head in just about every aspect of our relationship but our cell phone conversations were particularly toxic. They happened every day and would often leave me seething in anger for hours.

Like clockwork, she would call me every afternoon at three thirty. Knowing they were coming, I would start feeling anxious about three-fifteen. By the time she called, I was primed and ready. Right at three-thirty the phone would ring.

“Hello”, I’d answer. I knew what she was going to say because she said it every day.

“Where are you” she asked.

Those three little words would trigger an automatic limbic reaction every time. Back then I perceived them as an extension of some underlying trust issues we couldn’t resolve. So, I’d snap back in an angry tone,

“What are you conducting some kind of investigation?” This triggered her limbic reaction and she would get emotional and say,

“What’s wrong with you, why are you being such a jerk?” As you can guess, it went off the rails from there.

Around that time, I had been researching this book and exploring the Solution-Based Operating Program. I suddenly realized these cell phone calls were the perfect opportunity to put it into practice. The idea came to mind that instead of thinking of these calls as fights that had to be won, I would think of them as problems to be solved. So instead of blaming her and waiting for her to change, I consciously made the choice to “be the change”.

My goal became for these calls to end harmoniously, relieving some of the stress that had come to overwhelm my system. With the objectivity to see my role in the situation and the will to be the change, I formulated a solution. All the information I needed was already at hand.

It was certain she was going to call at three-thirty.

It was certain she was going to ask, “where are you?

It was certain that if my reaction was the same, the outcome would be the same.

Einstein said,

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results”

Instead of continuing to allow these three little words to trigger a limbic reaction and end up in a fight, I made the conscious choice to solve. It was my intention to interrupt the automatic limbic reaction before it dumped the stress chemicals into my system. Instead of reacting impulsively, I decided to respond with respect, patience and kindness. The universe provided the opportunity for me to practice this skill the very next day. It was a bit surprising that at three-fifteen I wasn’t feeling the usual pre-call anxiety.

Ding-a ling-a ling, (three-thirty, right on time) “Hello”,

my regular answer.

“Where are you”, came a familiar voice from the other end of the line.

This is the precise moment where things would go wrong. Instead of the same old conflictive reaction, I was ready with a solution-based response.

“Hi honey”, I replied in a kind tone. “I’m in my truck driving through Jensen and was planning on stopping by Joey and Dave’s. “What time do you want me home for dinner?” “About six”, she replied.

“Do you need me to pick something up at the store?” I asked nicely.

“No, I have everything we need” she answered.

“Okay”, I said. “See you at six. Bye, bye.”

“Okay, bye”, she replied.

We hung up.

The conversation ended harmoniously. That was my goal. Neither of us were angry. The outcome was significantly improved. Instead of becoming enraged and seething in anger for hours, I was undisturbed. An added bonus was a sense of accomplishment from my success in transforming the outcome. What a relief!

“It’s not my fault” does not solve problems. To solve this problem, I had to embrace the full measure of responsibility

(100%), consciously over-ride my automatic limbic reaction and apply a solution-based response. This was the beginning of a new way of life. A better way of life. A solution-based way of life.

All The Lights Were On Problem

It almost seems ridiculous that something as insignificant as the lights being on would be so disturbing but, for me it was. Back in my family raising days all the lights being on was yet another source of stress on my already overloaded system. Like the cell phone problem, it happened every day.

In the morning the lights would be off because I was the first one up and had shut them off the night before. When I got home from work all the lights were on.

Looking back, it should have come as no surprise. For the five or so years we were together before we had kids, my spouse would leave all the lights on at her place. It only makes sense that the children of a parent that leaves all the lights on would inherit the gene. In any case, it was a problem. Before I applied a solution-based approach, I found myself blaming and complaining. This only made things worse.

My kids weren't intimidated by my rantings in the least. If I made a fuss over the lights being on their typical reaction would be a rolling of the eyes and a smug, "whatever Dad". This only amped up the disturbance level. My life was stressful enough without this nonsense. I didn't need any

extra, unnecessary stress. Resistance was futile so I chose to try and solve this stubborn problem.

I remembered the Stoic philosophy that suggests if it's out of our control, accept it as such and don't allow it to be disturbing. This made sense for big world problems like global warming and inflation but this was happening in my own house. This problem contained elements of both. It was out of my control and it was in my own little world. So now what? Is there a solution? Let's consider the data.

First and foremost, the lights were going to be on. This was a genetic certainty. It was up to me to decide whether or not to allow the lights being on to be disturbing. I could dwell on the questions; Why are these people not listening to me? Why are they disrespecting my feelings? Do they have any idea how much it costs to pay the electric bill?

Asking myself these questions only added weight to an already heavy situation. Being angry and frustrated over such a minor and unchanging problem was getting old. The lights were going to be on so I began accepting the reality of the situation. It was clear other people were not going to change so again, I decided to "be the change".

Instead of complaining, criticizing, blaming and judging my cherished family members, I decided to simply go around the house and turn off the lights myself. I didn't make a big deal about it, just quietly went from room to room happily

bringing down my mountainous electric bill. When reaching in to flick off the switch in the main bathroom, I could see my reflection in the mirror. Instead of an angry look of frustration, I saw a happy look of accomplishment. The lights were still on but the problem was getting solved because it was no longer causing a disturbance in my system. The stress from the problem dissolved. I figured out how to not let it bother me. Yet one more straw off the camels' back. Yay!

This could not be done from the win/lose kind of thinking. Trying to win and be right would make the problem worse. Running on the conflictive operating program could only damage my relationships with the people I loved most.

I didn't want that to happen so I made the conscious choice to solve. I'm glad I did.

The Road Rage Problem

Going back as far as I can remember, I suffered from a severe case of road rage. All it took was an obnoxious beep from the person behind me to trigger the monster (Beelzebub). There were quite a number of instances over the years where my being in a psychotic state of road rage put the safety of my family members and other innocent people at unnecessary risk. Of the dozens of examples in my repertoire, these two are at the top of the list.

My brother and I were driving down I-95 some years ago on our way to visit our mom in Ft. Lauderdale. Some guy in a big

Chrysler came up behind me and was riding right on my bumper (which I hated). I did what I would normally do in that situation which was to take my foot off the gas and slow down until the perpetrator went around me. This tactic pushed his button.

He then sped past me while angrily yelling obscenities. This seemed funny until he cut me off and sent me a universal hand signal (otherwise known as the finger). This triggered a severe limbic reaction. The chemicals came in hard and I descended into the primal kill or be killed state of mind commonly referred to as road rage. In this primal state, I was out of control or more accurately, temporarily insane.

In a psychotic rage, I put the pedal to the metal, sped past him, cut him off as close as I could and slammed on the brakes. It could only have been by divine intervention we didn't wreck. The other guy surely thought I was insane (he was right) and headed for the hills. Luckily, his level of insanity wasn't as high on the scale as mine or there may have been a murder. My poor brother was visibly shaken-up.

Once the chemicals flooded my system and the ego took over, I gave no thought to the consequences of my actions. There was no consideration for the safety of my brother or any other person. There was no formulating a solution-based response. That part of my brain was shut down. In this limbic state, it was all about winning and being right. I had to get

him back for what he did. At the time, I considered this a win. Yikes!

Years later, my spouse and I were driving our daughter to the airport. There was a point where traffic was bumper to bumper in all four lanes. We were completely stopped for a few moments then traffic began to move. Before my foot had time to move from the brake to the gas, there was an obnoxious horn blast coming from directly behind my vehicle. Glancing in my rear-view mirror I saw a guy in a Cadillac yelling and angrily waving his arms. This triggered Beelzebub and the road-rage session was on.

When traffic started to move, I intentionally drove extra slow just to piss him off. After a minute the lane to my right opened up. He swung over, gunned his engine and tried to pass. Seeing this I deliberately swerved out into his lane and he had to slam on his brakes to avoid a collision. I was laughing like a madman and he looked as if his head was going to explode. It was then I noticed the look on my spouses' face. She was always a bit jumpy in the car, even when everything was fine. Being an unwilling participant in this psychotic episode had both her white-knuckled hands vice-gripped to the arm rest.

Finally, I let him come up beside me. We rolled down our windows and screamed obscenities at each other until we were blue in the face. When the screaming subsided, I

noticed he had his wife on the passenger side and what looked to be his elderly mother in the back seat (We were essentially the same guy doing the same stupid thing). After that there was a sense it was over and we rolled up our windows and deliberately put some space between us. After some time to cool off, I realized how insane it was to put my family at risk over something as trivial as getting beeped at in traffic.

With instinctive, limbic reactions, solutions are impossible. The ego is all about winning and being right. When I was running on the Conflictive Operating Program, I believed the problem was not my fault and my reaction, no matter how extreme, was justified. My psychotic limbic reactions were triggered automatically and once the mechanism was engaged, the scenario played through to the end. There was no stopping the madness. It was by embracing the responsibility for my role in the problem and applying the solution-based approach that caused the needle to move.

Now when the horn blows, instead of flying off the handle, becoming enraged (and doing something not smart), I think of the beeper as an old friend just saying hi. Even though Beelzebub may raise his head, I assure him it's not life or death and he keeps cool. This ensures the situation will not escalate out of control and end in tragedy.

Doing this made my life better. Being in traffic has become less stressful. Even in the rare occasion I do become annoyed on the road, the days of being triggered into a psychotic episode seem to be behind me (thank goodness). Now when the horn blows, instead of losing my mind, I smile and wave. By doing this, I enjoy a harmonious outcome and a sense of accomplishment.

Summary

Problems come with stress. Too much stress disturbs our mental health the same way too much junk-food disturbs our physical health. It's an observable scientific fact that reducing junk-food and other unhealthy substances improves our physical health. It is also an observable scientific fact that reducing our stress improves our mental health. Ask any psychologist.

Einstein said "we can't solve our problems with the same kind of thinking we're using to cause them".

When I was running on the conflictive operating program, my system was overloaded with stress. It was impossible to feel the joy from my many blessings under its' crushing weight This caused my needle to descend into the red. When I finally started using my meta-cognition, heard the loud popping sound, updated my programming and started solving my problems, the stress dissolved and my needle moved back up into the green.

This was not a supernatural transformation it was a natural restoration.

Getting Started

Keep a journal. Write a list of your blessings and count them every day. Think about and appreciate them. Doing this will sow the seeds of gratitude. These seeds will bear healthy fruit.

Sort out the big-world problems from the problems in your own little world. If you are compelled, do your part to help with big world problems. Even though they may endure, accept them as part of life and do not allow them to be disturbing. Don't let them bother you. Apply this ancient wisdom passed down to us from the Stoic philosophers.

This leaves us to deal with the human problems in our own little world. Identify your stress causing problems and write them down in your journal. Ask yourself, "are these problems life or death?" If the answer is no, then ask, "how can I solve them?" Use your cerebral cortex to formulate solutions.

If you use the information contained in these pages to solve a problem, please send me your stories. Thank you for reading this book. I hope it helps. Good luck and God Speed!