



Chapter One

Realize Who You Are

No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he has arrived at his present place.

— **MAYA ANGELOU, POET, EDUCATOR, HISTORIAN**

Why is having confidence in ourselves and our abilities so hard? Why do many of us have the tendency to overestimate other people's abilities and power and underestimate our own? Why are we so concerned with what other people will think about us?

If we are to understand these things, first we need to understand why we think, feel, and act the way we do. We need to understand why and how we have become who we are, as well as why we react or respond in certain ways. When we understand ourselves, we can either accept the way we are or make changes so we will be able to accept ourselves.

What we believe and accept about ourselves determines our behavior and performance. These, in turn, create our results and our results affect our confidence levels.

We behave in accordance with our beliefs about ourselves. If we have self-limiting beliefs, we will have self-limiting behaviors. If we have self-empowering beliefs, we will have self-empowering behaviors. In other words, if we think we can, we can and if we think we can't, we can't. If we think we can, we will find a way. We perform as well as we believe we are capable of performing.

Most of our beliefs about ourselves have come from outside sources: people, education, and experiences. Many of us have allowed the opinions

of others to become our opinions of ourselves. We've listened to people tell us we are incompetent, inadequate, unworthy, bad, or stupid. We've internalized, processed, and often believed what others have told us.

There is a direct correlation between the quality of our relationships and our levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. If we are like most people, how we feel about ourselves, good or bad, is largely dependent upon the degree of acceptance we have felt from the influential people in our lives.

In the beginning, we learned our beliefs and values from our parents. If our parents' self-esteem levels were low or they had poor self-concepts, values, and beliefs, then that's what we learned. If they felt inferior, inadequate, or unworthy, we probably adopted those qualities. When we are children, we go through an "imprint period" where we formulate our behavior patterns based on what is impressed upon our thought patterns by the adults who are instrumental in our development.

If we were told "you are a bad girl," it really meant our behavior was unacceptable, but most of us didn't hear it that way. We internalized it to mean that **we** were unacceptable. Most parents don't realize how important it is to separate the act from the individual. Instead of saying, "You're usually so graceful; I'm surprised you tripped and fell. Are you okay?" they will say, "You're so clumsy!" They don't understand the deep, negative impact this has on a child.

If we were compared negatively to other children, especially children outside of our immediate family, we might have believed those children had more abilities and were more popular than we were. That is when feelings of inferiority start to set in. If we didn't receive appreciation or recognition for our achievements then, we may believe others are smarter, stronger, or better than we are now.

If my grandmother told me once, she told me a hundred times that my cousin, Bobbie, was smarter, cuter, and more popular than I was. After the first ten times, she really didn't have to tell me anymore. I already believed it! So if Bobbie took dance classes, I didn't want to take dance classes, because I knew before I started I would never be as good as she was. If Bobbie tried out for a part in the school play, I wouldn't try out, because I could never be as good as Bobbie. If Bobbie ran for student coun-

cil, I certainly wouldn't be able to achieve what she achieved, so why bother? There was no point in being homecoming queen, because Bobbie had already worn that crown.

If we had parents who tried to realize their unfulfilled dreams through us and our accomplishments, they may have pushed us beyond our abilities or our desires in particular areas, making us feel "less than" we could have been or should have been. Or maybe they even instilled such a drive in us to be what they wanted us to be, that we didn't learn how to be assertive and stand up for what *we* wanted.

My friend, Sue, didn't want to play softball, but her father was the girls' softball coach and a jock to boot, so he insisted Sue become a pitcher and a home-run hitter. He pushed and pushed until she was in tears after every game and she quit before the end of the season! When she was in Girl Scouts and they went on a hike, Sue somehow wandered away from the others and became lost. Once found, her father said to her, "Don't tell anyone you couldn't find your way out of the woods." When they would go fishing, he would say to her before they ever got to the dock, "I know you are going to be sick, so just deal with it!" Today Sue works at a job she doesn't really enjoy, because she still hopes to win her father's approval and when she faces challenges in life, she sometimes cries, has a tendency to get sick, often quits things before learning to do them well and most of all, tries to "just deal with it." In other instances, she takes on risky assignments in an attempt to get her father to see how brave and strong she has become! Occasionally, I hear her reference how well she has done for a girl who can't find her way out of the woods. Is it as obvious to you as it is to me where these coping mechanisms were learned? Isn't it sad that her father's early harsh criticisms have stayed with her all of her life?

If our parents or peers were obsessed with physical appearance, they may have pushed us into a life that devalued us. Jeanette was a beautiful teenager. Her parents pushed her into every beauty contest they could find. They were determined, because she was so beautiful, she should have only the best of everything. They moved to the most exclusive neighborhood in the city, so she could go to the right school with a "higher class" of students. They joined the country club at great expense, so

she could mingle with the “right” people; then they worked around the clock to pay for it. When she had the opportunity to meet young men, her mother would say, “Stand up and meet the boy.” So Jeanette would stand up, stick out her breasts, suck in her stomach and put on her most seductive smile, so the boy could look her over and see what a good catch she would be. She married the man they chose for her who didn’t appreciate her “standing up” to meet all his friends and business associates. She lived a miserable life and finally got divorced. Then she found herself back in the limelight standing up for the “right” men to meet her again. Unfortunately, as she grew older, her looks faded and she was no longer the beauty she had been. Because she relied completely on her beauty, she never developed any of the other interests, virtues, or qualities one might seek in a mate. She died bitter and alone — surrounded by her beauty pageant trophies.

Children of parents who are obsessed with physical appearance usually develop a major case of low self-esteem. In addition, the media puts so much emphasis on beauty and being thin that many girls, and even supposedly intelligent grown women, develop eating disorders and poor health in an effort to keep up their appearances.

If our parents placed a very high value on possessions and having money in the bank, whether they had it or not, the emphasis on materialism we learned could lead us to a life of overachievement and striving for wealth and material goods. We may even marry someone for his possessions, wealth, or stature.

Mary’s occupation is marrying wealthy men. I say “men,” because she has married four men of considerable means and found out after each wedding ceremony that she didn’t even like them. Eventually each “wonderful” marriage ended up in a bitter, nasty divorce. How many of these do you think she’ll go through before she realizes what she is doing? My father used to say, “If you marry someone, be sure you like the person and you can love him even if he loses everything he has, because that’s the person you’ll be stuck with.” Times have changed since my father’s day, and in today’s world where two out of three marriages end in divorce, you no longer need to stay stuck in a bad relationship. You can

get a divorce without the stigma it carried in my father's time, but why would you want to put yourself through all that turmoil and emotional drama? It's certainly hard on one's self-esteem. We shouldn't use up even one moment of our lives dealing with negative emotional feelings that we can avoid by making better choices in the first place.

If parents are unable to cope with tragedy, their child may feel as if whatever happened was her fault. A young woman of a family I was counseling revealed to me she had been raped several years before, but had not had any previous therapy. Upon inquiry, her father said, "Well, it was her own fault. She runs around with the wrong people and was in the wrong place at the wrong time." Rape is not the victim's fault! It is a crime of violence and it is a horrible experience. The victim must get counseling. She must be helped to understand that she is a person with great personal worth and given as much support as possible to help regain her self-esteem and self-confidence.

Parents very often cripple their children emotionally and cause their children to feel inadequate, not because they mean to, but because they are overly permissive or overly possessive. In many cases, these children never learn self-discipline, self-reliance or responsibility. These are the very characteristics that help us achieve. Achievement builds self-esteem.

When I was modeling, there was another model I worked with whose daughter was an absolute terror. Whenever this model would bring her daughter into the agency or backstage at a fashion show, the child would create havoc. The kid was into everything. She ran through the building screaming and would often hang on the racks which were full of clothing for the shows. Occasionally, this child would even pull designer gowns off the rack and onto the floor. Her mother would tell her to stop, sit down and behave, but of course, she never did and it was never reinforced. As a teenager, her mother let her run wild. She went where she wanted with whomever she wanted. She had no curfew and was seldom disciplined. She became pregnant, quit school, and moved in with her boyfriend. A year later she was arrested, along with the boyfriend, for drug dealing and sentenced to two years in prison. Her mother accepted

no responsibility. She told everyone she could never do anything with the girl, because her daughter had inherited her father's genes.

Accepting hand-me-down Feelings

Am I saying we can inherit our self-esteem or lack of it? No. Not through the genes anyway. What I'm saying is if we are not aware and don't consciously do something about it, we can pass our level of self-esteem from one generation to the next. That's okay if we have high self-esteem, but if we have low self-esteem, it's often disastrous.

Low self-esteem brings with it some behavioral problems which are exhibited in our everyday lives. It is important we recognize whether or not we demonstrate any of these behaviors.

Negativity seeking

People with low self-esteem often find fault with others. If we don't like ourselves, we tend not to like other people, either. We may think if we can find something wrong with others, it will make us better. We are actually making ourselves feel better at their expense. Coincidentally, the traits we don't like in other people are usually the very same traits we don't like in ourselves. If you are a fault-finder, here's a homework assignment for you. Try to get through the next 24 hours without expressing one negative comment about anyone or anything. You need to break the habit of seeking negativity. When you see something you don't like about someone, immediately make yourself look for something good about that same person. The more you look for good, the more you will find.

Hungry For attention

Most people enjoy other people showing an interest in them. People with low self-esteem and a lack of confidence sometimes make every effort to be the center of attention. They talk incessantly about themselves, their accomplishments, what they own, who they know, and where they have been. There is no exchange of information. It is all about "me, myself, and I." If they do ask a question, they usually want to know what you think about them. This is really just a cry for acceptance. They are impressed with you and want your approval. They want you to believe

they are someone worth knowing. Unfortunately, their behavior usually has the opposite effect.

If you find you are one of these people, instead of trying to get all the attention, make an effort to make other people feel special. In this day and age, people are so caught up in themselves they don't put any effort into making others feel important.

Stop and think. When was the last time someone really made you feel special? What can you do to show other people you are glad they are in your world?

The biggest psychological need most people have is to be understood. Why not start by listening to others? Ask them questions about themselves and about their lives, and then listen attentively. Show interest in what they have to say. Lean forward. Comment on what they have said before you start telling your own story. Compliment them on things they do well.

The more you make other people feel special, the more attention you will receive and that will build your confidence.

In Jesse Ferrell's book, *How You Leave Them Feeling*, he shares a story of a call he received from a college buddy he had not seen in over six years. After talking about their lives and how glad they were to talk again, the college buddy said he needed to ask Jesse a favor. It seems the buddy's mother was dying of cancer and when he asked his mother if she had any last wishes, she said, "If I could see Jesse Ferrell just one more time before I die, that would be great. Jesse's positive attitude helped me so much whenever I was around him during your college days and my transition to this big city. That would truly make me happy."

Jesse must feel wonderful knowing he made such a positive impact on someone's life that even after more than six years, her last request was to see him one more time. Would that give you confidence? Would that let you know your life had purpose? It certainly would me.

Choosing to be a loner

Loners usually don't like to be around other people because they lack the confidence to handle themselves in social situations. They are more comfortable being alone, because it is easier than expending the energy to have a pleasing personality or show interest in other people. In many

cases, they don't know how to be a friend. They really don't care about anyone else. When they do get around people, they are often aggressive, critical, or have an obsessive need to be right.

People who have a need to be "right" are in some way trying to convince themselves they are as good as or better than the next person. This is simply a lack of self-esteem.

My neighbor's husband died nine years ago. Before his death, they had eyes only for each other and didn't socialize much. After his death, she became reclusive. I kept inviting her for lunch or dinner and, eventually, she would accept. As the years went by, she came to dinner when someone insisted, but she always dominated the conversation, interrupted and corrected other guests, and often talked loudly over other people's conversations. Her contributions to the conversations were about herself and her illnesses, aches, and pains. She didn't read a newspaper, watch television, or listen to the radio, so if anyone attempted to talk about current events, she would change the conversation back to her past. Then the next day, she would call me to criticize everything, including how much she disliked most of the other people I invited. The neighbor who lived on the other side of her also invited her to dinner or to go shopping and to lunch. This woman would occasionally go, never offer to pay, and then would call me to complain about the woman who invited her.

She often mentioned how much she liked to be alone and how she deliberately didn't answer the phone or return calls, because she didn't want to talk to people. She never invited anyone to do anything with her or to visit her home. She didn't volunteer or participate in any groups. Her actions pushed people away. When we tried to find out what she might be interested in, she would tell us she had no desire to do anything but "sit on the sofa and think."

Feeling depressed

Let's face it, life is not always easy, and for some people, depression very often takes over. We get depressed when we are discouraged or disappointed in ourselves or our lives. We start to feel as though we can't live up to the expectations of others . . . or even our own expectations. We feel inadequate to handle what needs to be handled, to do what needs to be done, or to be what we think we should be. The attempt to live up

to these expectations can be both a cause of low self-esteem and an effect of low self-esteem. It can even lead to overindulgence in food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or sex in an attempt to satisfy some need we have to make ourselves feel better in some way, or to dull the pain we are feeling. Ironically, this overindulgence simply adds to our feelings of worthlessness. We criticize ourselves for being weak and indulging in unhealthy practices. This self-criticism feeds the depression even more. It's a vicious cycle.

People who are depressed sometimes try to escape . . . from themselves and from the world. I knew a young woman some years ago who used sleeping pills to "escape" from the difficulties she was having. Her situation became worse because she couldn't or wouldn't face her realities. Eventually, she had to be hospitalized. At one point, she wouldn't even comb her hair. Because she got professional help, today she is a fully functioning executive with a happy personal relationship and two well-adjusted adult children.

If you are caught up in depression, get some therapy right away. Severe depression can develop into self-hate, self-rejection, and a desire to end your own life, possibly even the reality of acting on that desire. This is not how you should live. Your life experience should be a wonderful journey, full of joy and excitement. Get professional help now, so you can get back to yourself, the self you know you can be . . . a person with a purpose and passion for living.

Need to control

When one person has a compulsive need to control, dominate, possess, or run another person's life, it is usually because of an incredible need to be loved. This person's extremely low self-esteem causes her to feel inadequate and insecure. In an attempt not to let anyone know how she really feels, she becomes greedy and self-centered. She is not really interested in the welfare of others. She is attempting to fill her own need for self-worth. Unfortunately, it is usually done at the expense of others.

Jane knows something about everything. No matter what you want to do or where you want to go, she tells you of something or some place better. She tells you how to run your family, your career, your organization, and your business. She tells you where you should eat dinner and which

restaurants have gotten too many demerits by the health department, so you shouldn't eat in any of those. She insists on driving, and whenever you are going anywhere together, she picks you up in her car because she must be able to leave when she is ready. Conversation is always about her – her life, her successes, or how much better she could have done what you just did. She chooses the outing, provides the tickets, and then calls to tell you she's already done it for you, without checking to see if you would like to go or not. If you say you can't go, she begs and pleads, becomes angry, accuses you of being ungrateful, and makes it your fault. Because she has no personal self-confidence, she has to show herself and everyone else she is in control. She's not a happy person. She's not happy with her life. She's not happy with her relationships, which never last very long anyway. Most of all, she's not happy with herself.

Trying to be perfect

Another type of control freak is the perfectionist. She is trying to control her own life to make sure she, and everything she does, is always perfect. She must have the perfect house, the perfect car, the perfect kids, the perfect husband, the perfect friends, the perfect personal grooming, and the perfect outfit. Absolutely everything must be perfect. This puts a lot of pressure on everyone around her, as well as on herself. The quest for perfection is a nightmare. It can lead to extreme stress and to procrastination. If she can't do it perfectly, then she'll just put it off, believing she will have the time to do it perfectly later on, although that time never comes. In the meantime, a lot of tasks remain undone. She starts to feel bad about them not getting done, becomes more stressed, and her self-esteem suffers. She doesn't have the confidence to go forward, because she's not perfect. If this describes you in any way, you need to realize that perfection is an implausible goal. Given the speed at which our lives are being lived, it is impossible to do everything perfectly. Give yourself a break and get over this need for perfection. Excellence is good enough.

Wallowing in self-pity

Low self-esteem sometimes manifests itself as “pity parties.” This type of person thinks, “I can't seem to get control over my life so, therefore, I am at the mercy of people, circumstances, and conditions that keep me

from doing, being, and having what I really want.” These people look for something or someone to blame so they don’t have to take charge or do something about their situation! My mom used to tell me that, “People can’t let you down unless you are leaning on them.” It is up to you to be a confident person. No one else can hurt your feelings, upset you, or make you angry. It is your choice whether or not you become affected by what other people say or do. What you think about what they say or do dictates your reaction. If you want to be a confident person, then change your thoughts. You, and only you, are responsible for your thoughts, your feelings, and your life.

When I was visiting one of my friends recently, her sister was also visiting. Her sister was there to seek comfort, because her husband had left her for her best friend. She dwelled on this day and night and talked of nothing else. I felt very sorry for her and tried to console her. She spoke about how she was determined to get him back. It wasn’t until the end of my trip, two weeks later, that I learned it had been seven years since her husband left her. In fact, he had married the other woman six years ago. Her chances of getting him back were slim and none. My friend’s sister was stuck in her pity party and wouldn’t move on with her life. It got in the way of her joy, her success, and her ability to establish new relationships. Why is she stuck? Why does she choose to live in the past? She is more comfortable in her familiar discomfort than she would be in a new, unfamiliar world of dating and meeting someone new. She knows how to wallow in her grief and self-pity, so she does. Unfortunately, her repetitive, sad story became tiresome and boring to others.

Expressing criticism

Whenever I hear someone say, “Would you like a little constructive criticism?” I cringe. I don’t believe there is any such thing as constructive criticism! All criticism is destructive.

When we criticize another person, it undermines that person. No one wants to hear someone say, “Let me tell you what’s wrong with you.” That’s what criticism does. Telling someone what’s wrong with her can add to any feelings of inadequacy or incompetence she may already have. She may get her feelings hurt, get angry, or have a need to retaliate. None of this is helpful.

When a child gets criticized, it causes self-doubt, creates poor self-image and can even break her spirit, causing her to give up on her dreams, ambitions, and desires. In addition, it teaches her to criticize herself, creating feelings of inferiority — feeling she is not “good enough” and she learns to run herself down. When someone offers her a genuine compliment or accolade, she has trouble believing it to be true. Criticism undermines self-esteem and decreases effectiveness.

The mother of one of my friends has a tendency to be overly direct and not at all tactful. Whenever the mother is confronted by her criticism of others, she says, “Well, it’s better to tell them the truth and let them deal with it.” As a consequence of her mother’s outspoken criticism, my friend often has the feeling she is “less than.” When I asked her what “less than” meant to her, she said, “Not good enough. Less than my mother expects. Less than my sister is. Less than I probably could be.” I know her mother is proud of her. I don’t believe this mother ever intended to make her daughter feel insecure, but that’s what criticism does . . . especially if it is constant.

If your desire is truly to help someone become better, to have more, or to improve her performance, then say, “Would you like an idea of how you might do that easier? Or quicker? Or better?” Or, “May I suggest how you could improve your performance?” Most of us welcome suggestions and ideas. These are conducive to building self-esteem and confidence.

If someone offers you some constructive criticism, why not smile and say in a warm tone of voice, “I would welcome any suggestions you have for how I could improve. I would appreciate you keeping any criticism to a minimum.”

Making conscious choices

We can improve our confidence by modifying our destructive behaviors. We can accomplish this by making conscious choices to think about ourselves in a more positive manner. We must reprogram the subconscious portion of our minds. This part of our minds has no judging function; it only processes information. It follows our instructions. It is up to us to instruct it properly in order to create the self-image and self-confidence we wish to have.

One of the most effective ways to help your subconscious see things differently is the use of affirmations. An affirmation is a statement you make to yourself to affirm something is true, even in the face of all evidence to the contrary. Human thought can only affirm, for even when it denies, it is affirming that denial to be true.

Repeating an affirmation leads the mind to a state of consciousness that accepts what you wish it to believe. If you wish to be confident, then use the affirmation, “I am a confident person.” Don’t say, “I am nervous or afraid,” because you would be affirming the opposite of what you truly desire, which is to be confident. Write out your affirmation and put it where you will see it over and over throughout the day. Look at it, read it, think about it, and what it can mean to your life. Do this every day to ensure positive changes taking place in your consciousness, attitude, and environment.

Don’t expect this to be easy. Your subconscious has had years of programming to get it to perform the way it does at this time. You aren’t going to undo all of that overnight. If you want to be confident and successful and you are willing to do the work, it will happen!

Stop criticizing yourself

Stop talking about your negative traits. The more you concentrate on them, the more they hang on. What we put our attention to is what multiplies in our lives. Instead of criticizing, look for things you like about yourself.

If you have actual limitations you can’t do anything about, then you need to accept them. The things most of us complain about are the things we **can** do something about.

If you feel you are too short or too tall, there is nothing you can do about that. You might as well learn to look at the advantages of being short or tall. I saw Michael J. Fox interviewed on television early in his career. The interviewer asked Michael how he felt about being so short, just 5 feet, 4 inches. Michael became animated and shared how he has always seen his size as an advantage! Most of us know someone with a “Napoleonic Complex” or feelings of inadequacy directly related to being short. Those people usually try to compensate by driving big cars, having

big desks, or acting just plain nasty. Instead, Michael J. Fox was proud of his height and shared how much he enjoys being smaller. He said when he was younger, his family got locked out of the house and he was the one who could squeeze through the basement window to let everyone in. He has embraced a characteristic over which he has no control.

If you feel you are too heavy or too thin, you can do something about that. If you don't like the color of your skin or the texture of your hair, that's too bad. You'd be smart to realize the advantages you have being the way you are. If you don't like the shape of your eyebrows, the color of your hair, or even the size of your breasts, in this day and age, there's no reason not to change those into what you want. If your body isn't shaped the way you want it, change your diet or go to the gym. If you don't make enough money to have a gym membership, walk around the block, go to the YWCA, or better still, find a better paying job, so you can afford to go to the gym and have the other things you desire as well. You could move into an apartment or condominium complex that has a gym, get a job with a company that has a gym, or go online to find out all of the ways you can exercise that don't cost a dime. Concentrate on what you **can** do, not what you can't.

If there is something you can change to make you feel better about yourself, then for goodness sake, change it. Don't whine about it.

People don't want to be around someone who whines and complains all the time. Most of the things we complain about are things other people wouldn't have even noticed until we brought them to their attention. How can you be self-confident when you keep focusing on what's wrong with you? The image you have of yourself influences all of your experiences.

False images of ourselves

Somewhere along the line you may have come to believe you are not good enough to be the person you want to be or have the things you want. Somehow your attitudes, feelings, possessions, and what you do have gotten all mixed up with who you are. You may **feel** if you don't **do** something exceptionally well, you can't **be** someone exceptionally good. When you feel you are competent or above average at what you do, this reinforces the feeling you are someone of value. The more you accomplish, the better you feel about yourself.