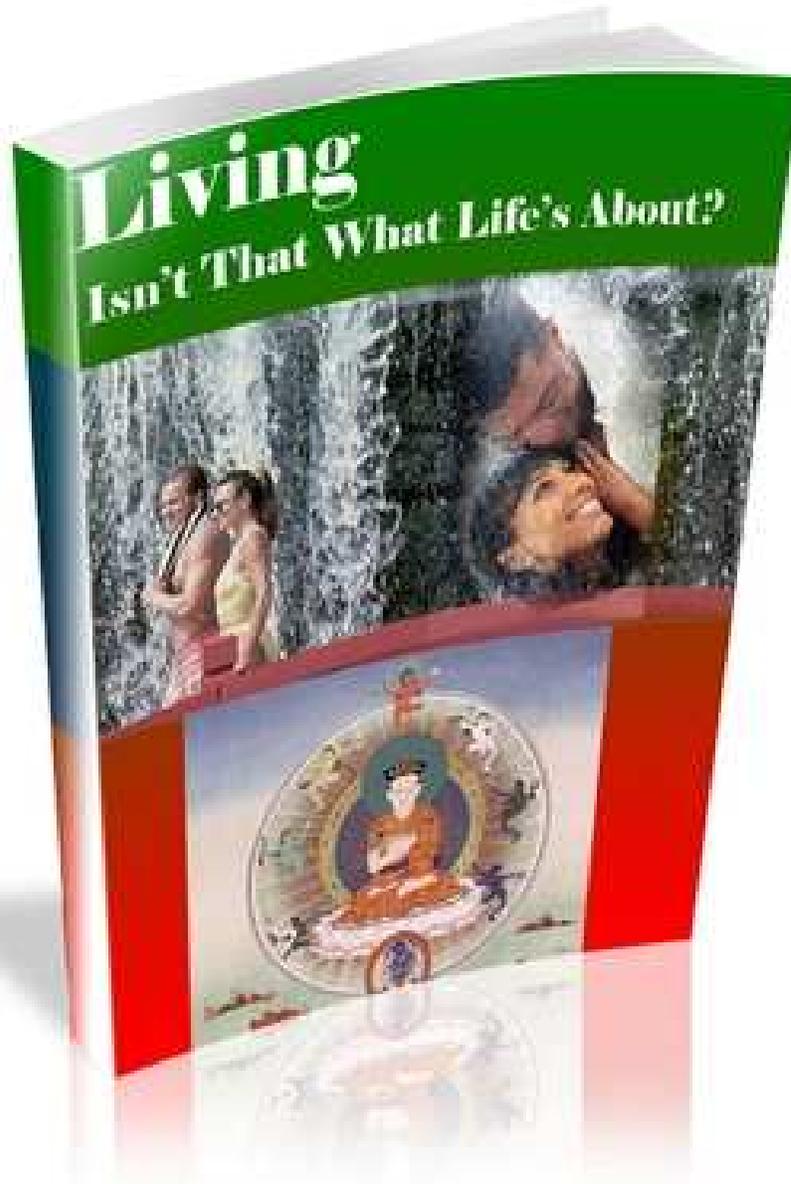


Living - Isn't That What Lifes About?

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Here is what you will discover inside
"Living - Isn't that what life's about?"

10 preparations towards self Improvement
10 ways to empower your communications
 10 ways to start taking control
 7 days to a better you
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The secret to being Genuinely Happy
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Creative Notions

People seem to have the misconception that only a select few are able to unleash a steady flow of creative genius. That is not true at all. The fact is, creativity is very much like a muscle that needs to be exercised in order to consistently give out great results. If you don't practice harnessing creative thinking, this skill will very much atrophy into inexistence. But keep working and this skill will soon come to you in a snap.

So how do you unleash your creative thinking? Well, the first thing is to become a human leech. No, we're not talking about just sucking the blood out of every living being available, we're saying that you should take in as much knowledge and learning you can find. Read everything available -- good and bad, and keep your mind open to the infinite possibilities of the universe. The more you know, the more you'll want to know, and the more your faculty of wonder will be exercised. Prepare to be amazed at little facts that add a bit of color into your life.

Focus on a creative activity everyday. Yes, it's an effort. Even doodling is a creative activity. Don't let anything hinder you. Mindlessness may be a creative activity, but for people who are just starting out to unleash a little bit of creative thinking in their lives, it is helpful and encouraging to have concrete evidence, that, "hey, what I'm doing is getting somewhere." So why don't you try it. Practice drawing for a couple of minutes each day. Bring out your old camera and start snapping photos like crazy. Keep a journal and make a point to write in it religiously. Another cool idea is to write by describing something with your five senses. Try to avoid vague adjectives like "marvelous," "amazing," and "delicious." Before you know it, you'll have built yourself a tiny portfolio, and you'll be amazed at the growth you've undertaken after amassing all those works of art. Who knows, you might actually take to liking those things you do everyday. Pretty soon those things will become a part of you and you'll be addicted to these creative exercises.

Think out of the box -- or don't. Sometimes, constraints are actually a good thing. Limitations discipline you to work within your means. It enables you to be more resourceful. Creative freedom is great, but limitations enforce discipline.

Try something new everyday and let your experiences broaden your perspective. Explore a new district in your neighborhood. Spend an afternoon in a museum to which you've never been before. Chat up someone on the bus. Open up to the people around you. As you thrust yourself out of your comfort zone more and more each day, your sense of adventure grows and so does your zest for life. Think about it. When was the last time you did something for the first time? If it's been a while, I tell you, you've been missing out on a whole lot of experiences that could've added to your growth, emotionally, mentally, physically, or spiritually. Why don't you try bungee jumping today? Not only will you learn, but you will also have plenty of stories to share, enabling you to practice your storytelling skills and making you the life of the party.

Embrace insanity. No, not to the point of practically admitting yourself into the mental ward. As John Russell once said, "Sanity calms, but madness is more interesting." Exactly! Every creative thought was once deemed insanity by other "normal" people at one time or another. Luckily, that didn't stop the creative geniuses from standing by them. The thing is, sanity or being normal confines people to think... well, normally. Withink limits. Creativity is essentially breaking through barriers. Yes, this includes the bizzarre and the downright strange. I'm not saying that you yourself should develop a creative personality. That might go haywire. An example of a creative personality would be George Washington, who often rode into battle naked, or James Joyce, who wrote "Dubliners" with beetle juice for an intense fear of ink, or Albert Einstein, who thought his cat was a spy sent by his rival (or in thinking creatively in this case, the term could probably be "archnemesis.") It's important that your creativity doesn't get you detached from the real world completely.

I hope this article has inspired you to start thinking beyond your "limits." If you follow these steps pretty soon you'll be living a life full of interesting adventures. Unleashing your creative thinking will bring about a new zest for living life.

Daily Relaxation

Stress is the curse of living in modern times. Everyone suffers from stress. And the stress we suffer takes a heavy toll on our bodies, emotions and minds.

Feeling stressed out, worn out by fatigue or just simply having a miserable day, the best thing to do is relax.

Watching television may be a form of relaxation for some, but is not a recommended method by experts. When we watch TV we are bombarded with commercials, ads, sounds and images. So how do we achieve relaxation? If there are thousands of ways we can get stressed, one of them is not meeting deadlines, there are also many ways we can relax.

In recent studies, experts have determined that heart disease is linked to anger and irritability is linked to mental stress. Too much stress brings about ischemia that can lead to or cause a heart attack. Relaxation takes on added importance in light of this matter. Managing your anger and attitude is significant to heart health, and relaxation can help you manage stress.

One way of relaxation is transcendental meditation. Recent studies have also shown that this method might reduce artery blockage, which is a major cause for heart attack and stroke. People practice transcendental meditation by repeating uttering soothing sounds while meditating, this is to achieve total relaxation. The researchers found that practitioners of transcendental meditation significantly reduced the thickness of their arterial wall compared with those who didn't practice transcendental meditation.

Another study on another method of relaxation, acupuncture, seems to reduce high blood pressure by initiating several body functions for the brain to release chemical compounds known as endorphins. Endorphin helps to relax muscles, ease panic, decrease pain, and reduce anxiety.

Yoga is also another method for relaxation and may also have similar effects like acupuncture. In another study, participants were subjected to several minutes of mental stress. Then they were subjected to various relaxation techniques, such as listening to nature sounds or classical music. Only those who did Yoga significantly reduced the time it took for their blood pressures to go back to normal. Yoga is a form of progressive relaxation.

Breathing is one of the easiest methods to relax. Breathing influences almost all aspects of us, it affects our mind, our moods and our body. Simply focus on your breathing, after some time you can feel its effects right away.

There are several breathing techniques that can help you reduce stress.

Another easy way to achieve relaxation is exercise. If you feel irritated a simple half-hour of exercise will often settle things down. Although exercise is a great way to lose weight, it does not show you how to manage stress appropriately. Exercise should also be used in conjunction with other exercise method.

One great way of relaxation is getting a massage. To gain full relaxation, you need to totally surrender to the handling and touch of a professional therapist.

There are several types of massages that also give different levels of relaxation.

Another method of relaxation is Biofeedback. The usual biofeedback-training program includes a 10-hour sessions that is often spaced one week apart.

Hypnosis is one controversial relaxation technique. It is a good alternative for people who think that they have no idea what it feels like to be relaxed. It is also a good alternative for people with stress related health problems.

Drugs are extreme alternatives to relaxation. They are sometimes not safe and are not effective like the other relaxation methods. This method is only used by trained medical professionals on their patients.

These relaxation techniques are just some of the ways you can achieve relaxation. Another reason why we need to relax, aside from lowering blood pressure in people and decreasing the chances of a stroke or a heart attack, is because stress produces hormones that suppress the immune system, relaxation gives the immune system time to recover and in doing so function more efficiently.

Relaxation lowers the activities within the brains' limbic system; this is the emotional center of our brain.

Furthermore, the brain has a periodic need for a more pronounced activity on the right-hemisphere. Relaxation is one way of achieving this.

Relaxation can really be of good use once a relaxation technique is regularly built into your lifestyle. Choose a technique that you believe you can do regularly.

Hobbies Prevent Boredom

Have you ever played one too many computer game or watched one too many old rerun? You just can't get into another mystery and you just feel flat? Maybe you are suffering from boredom, that familiar accomaniment to our automated, precooked lifestyles. If so, you need to check out these hobby ideas. Hobbies have been found to be therapeutic as they relieve stress and get the mind active. In this article, you'll find hobby ideas for every sort of person, from the intellectual to the athlete, from the homemaker to the attorney.

Many times we are bored because we have become too inactive. If this is your problem, you might like a sports hobby. Have you ever tried tennis? How about golf? Many people simply love bowling until it becomes an important part of their lives. Sports hobbies get you out of the house and often are a way to make friends with others. Then again, some active hobbies can be enjoyed in our own homes, such as weight lifting and doing aerobic dance to a video.

Speaking of aerobic dance, dancing is another great pastime. When you think of hobby ideas, don't forget the many forms of dance. Square dancing is fun for people who like getting together with groups, while ballet and modern dance appeal to the more contemplative souls. And while we're on contemplation, you might enjoy doing yoga stretches as a hobby.

Maybe we're feeling bored and listless because we've been cooped up in the house too long. If that's the problem, here are a few hobby ideas to get you out in the fresh air. Have you ever thought of taking up canoeing, hiking, or trapping? How about getting involved with an environmental group? In many states, you can form groups to clean riverbanks and monitor water quality, and the state will provide perks such as t-shirts, work gloves, and first-aid kits. Or maybe you'd like studying the flora and fauna of your region. It can be great fun to stroll through the woods and fields with a field guide, learning to identify each wildflower, insect, tree, and bird.

There are almost as many hobby ideas as there are bored people in the world, because everyone puts their own spin on their favorite hobbies. Maybe you'd enjoy decorating

your house with antiques, or learning to bake specialty breads from around the World. Maybe you'd like to take part in a little theatre production, or learn to play guitar. What about the fine arts of weaving tapestries or painting with oils? Candle making, soap making, and many other old-time crafts are being enjoyed again. Truly, with all these hobby ideas, there is no reason to stay bored for long!

Improve Yourself

Sometimes, when all our doubts, fears and insecurities wrap ourselves up, we always come up with the idea of “I wish I was somebody else.” More often than not, we think and believe that someone or rather, most people are better than us.- when in reality, the fact is, most people are more scared than us.

You spot a totally eye-catching girl sitting by herself at a party, casually sipping on a glass of Asti Spumanti. You think to yourself, “she looks so perfectly calm and confident.” But if you could read thru her transparent mind, you would see a bunch of clouds of thoughts and you might just be amazed that she’s thinking “are people talking about why I am seated here alone?... Why don’t guys find me attractive? ...I don’t like my ankles, they look too skinny... I wish I was as intelligent as my best friend.”

We look at a young business entrepreneur and say “Wooh... what else could he ask for?” He stares at himself at the mirror and murmur to himself, “I hate my big eyes... I wonder why my friends won’t talk to me... I hope mom and dad would still work things out.”

Isn’t it funny? We look at other people, envy them for looking so outrageously perfect and wish we could trade places with them, while they look at us and thinks of the same thing. We are insecure of other people who themselves are insecure of us. We suffer from low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and lose hope in self improvement because we are enveloped in quiet desperation.

Sometimes, you notice that you have an irritating habit like biting off your finger nails, having a foul mouth, and you – of all people, is the last to know.

I have a friend who never gets tired of talking. And in most conversations, she is the only one who seems to be interested in the things she has to say. So all of our other friends tend to avoid the circles whenever she’s around, and she doesn’t notices how badly she became socially handicapped – gradually affecting the people in her environment.

One key to self improvement is to LISTEN and TALK to a trusted friend. Find someone who you find comfort in opening up with even the most gentle topics you want to discuss. Ask questions like “do you think I am ill-mannered?”, “Do I always sound so argumentative?”, “Do I talk too loud?”, “Does my breath smell?”, “Do I ever bore you when were together?”. In this way, the other person will obviously know that you are interested in the process of self improvement. Lend her your ears for comments and

criticisms and don't give her answers like "Don't exaggerate! That's just the way I am!" Open up your mind and heart as well. And in return, you may want to help your friend with constructive criticism that will also help her improve her self.

One of Whitney Houston's songs says "Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all." True enough. In order to love others, you must love yourself too. Remember, you cannot give what you do not have.

Before telling other people some ways on how to improve themselves, let them see that you yourself is a representation and a product of self improvement. Self improvement makes us better people, we then inspire other people, and then the rest of the world will follow.

Stop thinking of yourselves as second-rate beings. Forget the repetitive thought of "If only I was richer... if only I was thinner" and so on. Accepting your true self is the first step to self improvement. We need to stop comparing ourselves to others only to find out at the end that we've got 10 more reasons to envy them.

We all have our insecurities. Nobody is perfect. We always wish we had better things, better features, better body parts, etc. But life need not to be perfect for people to be happy about themselves. Self improvement and loving yourself is not a matter of shouting to the whole world that you are perfect and you are the best. It's the virtue of acceptance and contentment. When we begin to improve ourselves, we then begin to feel contented and happy.

Just Dream Your Life

Everyone, at some point of his or her life, has dreamed of being somebody special, somebody big. Who hasn't fantasized about being the one who hits the game-winning homer? Who hasn't dreamed of being the homecoming queen? And how many times have we dreamed of being rich, or successful, or happy with our relationships?

Often, we dream big dreams and have great aspirations. Unfortunately, our dreams remain just that – dreams. And our aspirations easily collect dust in our attic.

This is a sad turn of events in our life. Instead of experiencing exciting adventures in self actualization, we get caught up in the humdrum of living from day-to-day just barely existing.

But you know what? Life could be so much better, if only we learned to aim higher.

The most common problem to setting goals is the word impossible. Most people get hung up thinking I can't do this. It's too hard. It's too impossible. No one can do this.

However, if everyone thought that, there would be no inventions, no innovations, and no breakthroughs in human accomplishment.

Remember that scientists were baffled when they took a look at the humble bumblebee. Theoretically, they said, it was impossible for the bumblebee to fly. Unfortunately for the bumble, bee no one has told it so. So fly it does.

On the other hand, some people suffer from dreaming totally outrageous dreams and not acting on them. The result? Broken dreams, and tattered aspirations.

If you limit yourself with self-doubt, and self-limiting assumptions, you will never be able to break past what you deem impossible. If you reach too far out into the sky without working towards your goal, you will find yourself clinging on to the impossible dream.

Try this exercise. Take a piece of paper and write down some goals in your life. Under one header, list down things 'you know you can do'. Under another header, write the things 'you might be able to do.' And under one more, list the things that that are 'impossible for you to do.'

Now look at all the headers strive every day to accomplish the goals that are under things 'you know you can do'. Check them when you are able to accomplish them. As you slowly are able to check all of your goals under that heading, try accomplishing the goals under the other header-the one that reads 'you might be able to do.'

As of the items you wrote under things I could do are accomplished, you can move the goals that are under things that are 'impossible for you to do' to the list of things 'you might be able to do.'

As you iterate through this process, you will find out that the goals you thought were impossible become easier to accomplish. And the impossible begin to seem possible after all.

You see, the technique here is not to limit your imagination. It is to aim high, and start working towards that goal little by little. However, it also is unwise to set a goal that is truly unrealistic.

Those who just dream towards a goal without working hard end up disappointed and disillusioned.

On the other hand, if you told someone a hundred years ago that it was possible for man to be on the moon, they would laugh at you. If you had told them that you could send mail from here to the other side of the world in a few seconds, they would say you were out of your mind. But, through sheer desire and perseverance, these impossible dreams are now realities.

Thomas Edison once said that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Nothing could be truer. For one to accomplish his or her dreams, there has to be hard work and discipline. But take note that that 1% has to be a think-big dream, and not some easily accomplished one.

Ask any gym rat and he or she will tell you that there can be no gains unless you are put out of your comfort zone. Remember the saying, "No pain, no gain"? That is as true as it can be.

So dream on, friend! Don't get caught up with your perceived limitations. Think big and work hard to attain those dreams. As you step up the ladder of progress, you will just about find out that the impossible has just become a little bit more possible.

Keeping Romance Alive

What woman doesn't want to be treated to a little romance every once in a while? Many women will agree that romance is all about the details. Small gestures really do make a normal night out into something romantic. So listen up...because these tips will sure earn you some points...

The key to being romantic is thoughtfulness...so start being a little less selfish. Learn that mood, location, situation and ambience can heighten romance with dramatic effect. Communicate with your partner on every level and anticipate their desires and needs. Look at your partner when they are talking and hold their gaze.

Try doing little things to get right at your partner's soft spot. Phone just to say hello, I love you and give your partner a nice surprise. Send them notes and small cards telling them you are thinking of them. Be spontaneous and do little deeds that show you care. Bring home take out from their favorite restaurant or take them to their favorite ice cream shop. Flowers are always a nice touch at any time of year. Be creative and pick out their favorite colors and types for a personal touch. Remember birthdays, anniversaries and landmark days such as the day your first met or first kissed, and plan something...maybe a return to the first date location. Listen to clues that your partner might drop, such as their favorite dessert or books they like, and surprise them with little gifts.

Learn how to hug, cuddle and make physical contact. Dance together when the occasion arises. Hold hands and do anything to make your partner feel close to you.

Write him/her a letter and let them know that you love them and you mean it. Use nice stationery, or make your own card, which shows thought and inspiration.

In terms of dates, learn how to cook your partner's favorite dish. Plan a surprise candlelit dinner followed by a romantic movie. Take your partner on a picnic to the park or beach and prepare in advance without involving them. This initiative is very romantic.

Leadership

Much has been written about leadership: rules, pointers, styles, and biographies of inspiring leaders throughout world history. But there are certain leadership ideas that we ourselves fail to recognize and realize in the course of reading books. Here is a short list of things you thought you knew about leadership.

1. Leaders come in different flavors.

There are different types of leaders and you will probably encounter more than one type in your lifetime. Formal leaders are those we elect into positions or offices such as the senators, congressmen, and presidents of the local clubs. Informal leaders or those we look up to by virtue of their wisdom and experience such as in the case of the elders of a tribe, or our grandparents; or by virtue of their expertise and contribution on a given field such as Albert Einstein in the field of Theoretical Physics and Leonardo da Vinci in the field of the Arts. Both formal and informal leaders practice a combination of leadership styles.

- Lewin's three basic leadership styles – authoritative, participative, and delegative
- Likert's four leadership styles – exploitive authoritative, benevolent authoritative, consultative, and participative
- Goleman's six emotional leadership styles - visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding.

2. Leadership is a process of becoming.

Although certain people seem to be born with innate leadership qualities, without the right environment and exposure, they may fail to develop their full potential. So like learning how to ride a bicycle, you can also learn how to become a leader and hone your leadership abilities. Knowledge on leadership theories and skills may be formally gained by enrolling in leadership seminars, workshops, and conferences. Daily interactions with people provide the opportunity to observe and practice leadership theories. Together, formal and informal learning will help you gain leadership attitudes, gain leadership insights, and thus furthering the cycle of learning. You do not become a leader in one day and just stop. Life-long learning is important in becoming a good leader for each day brings new experiences that put your knowledge, skills, and attitude to a test.

3. Leadership starts with you.

The best way to develop leadership qualities is to apply it to your own life. As an adage goes "action speaks louder than words." Leaders are always in the limelight. Keep in mind that your credibility as a leader depends much on your actions: your interaction with your family, friends, and co-workers; your way of managing your personal and organizational responsibilities; and even the way you talk with the newspaper vendor across the street. Repeated actions become habits. Habits in turn form a person's

character. Steven Covey's book entitled 7 Habits of Highly Effective People provides good insights on how you can achieve personal leadership.

4. Leadership is shared.

Leadership is not the sole responsibility of one person, but rather a shared responsibility among members of an emerging team. A leader belongs to a group. Each member has responsibilities to fulfill. Formal leadership positions are merely added responsibilities aside from their responsibilities as members of the team. Effective leadership requires members to do their share of work. Starting as a mere group of individuals, members and leaders work towards the formation of an effective team. In this light, social interaction plays a major role in leadership. To learn how to work together requires a great deal of trust between and among leaders and members of an emerging team. Trust is built upon actions and not merely on words. When mutual respect exists, trust is fostered and confidence is built.

5. Leadership styles depend on the situation.

How come dictatorship works for Singapore but not in the United States of America? Aside from culture, beliefs, value system, and form of government, the current situation of a nation also affects the leadership styles used by its formal leaders. There is no rule that only one style can be used. Most of the time, leaders employ a combination of leadership styles depending on the situation. In emergency situations such as periods of war and calamity, decision-making is a matter of life and death. Thus, a nation's leader cannot afford to consult with all departments to arrive at crucial decisions. The case is of course different in times of peace and order---different sectors and other branches of government can freely interact and participate in governance. Another case in point is in leading organizations. When the staffs are highly motivated and competent, a combination of high delegative and moderate participative styles of leadership is most appropriate. But if the staffs have low competence and low commitment, a combination of high coaching, high supporting, and high directing behavior from organizational leaders is required.

Now that you are reminded of these things, keep in mind that there are always ideas that we think we already know; concepts we take for granted, but are actually the most useful insights on leadership.

Life Choices

Life is like a road. There are long and short roads; smooth and rocky roads; crooked and straight paths. In our life many roads would come our way as we journey through life. There are roads that lead to a life of single blessedness, marriage, and religious vocation. There are also roads that lead to fame and fortune on one hand, or isolation and poverty

on the other. There are roads to happiness as there are roads to sadness, roads towards victory and jubilation, and roads leading to defeat and disappointment.

Just like any road, there are corners, detours, and crossroads in life. Perhaps the most perplexing road that you would encounter is a crossroad. With four roads to choose from and with limited knowledge on where they would go, which road will you take? What is the guarantee that we would choose the right one along the way? Would you take any road, or just stay where you are: in front of a crossroad?

There are no guarantees.

You do not really know where a road will lead you until you take it. There are no guarantees. This is one of the most important things you need to realize about life. Nobody said that choosing to do the right thing all the time would always lead you to happiness. Loving someone with all your heart does not guarantee that it would be returned. Gaining fame and fortune does not guarantee happiness. Accepting a good word from an influential superior to cut your trip short up the career ladder is not always bad, especially if you are highly qualified and competent. There are too many possible outcomes, which you really cannot control. The only thing you have power over is the decisions that you will make, and how you would act and react to different situations.

Wrong decisions are always at hindsight.

Had you known that you were making a wrong decision, would you have gone along with it? Perhaps not, why would you choose a certain path when you know it would get you lost? Why make a certain decision if you knew from the very beginning that it is not the right one. It is only after you have made a decision and reflected on it that you realize its soundness. If the consequences or outcomes are good for you, then you have decided correctly. Otherwise, your decision was wrong.

Take the risk: decide.

Since life offers no guarantee and you would never know that your decision would be wrong until you have made it, then you might as well take the risk and decide. It is definitely better than keeping yourself in limbo. Although it is true that one wrong turn could get you lost, it could also be that such a turn could be an opportunity for an adventure, moreover open more roads. It is all a matter of perspective. You have the choice between being a lost traveller or an accidental tourist of life. But take caution that you do not make decisions haphazardly. Taking risks is not about being careless and stupid. Here are some pointers that could help you choose the best option in the face of life's crossroads:

- Get as many information as you can about your situation.

You cannot find the confidence to decide when you know so little about what you are faced with. Just like any news reporter, ask the 5 W's: what, who, when, where, and why. What is the situation? Who are the people involved? When did this happen? Where is this leading? Why are you in this situation? These are just some of the possible questions to ask to know more about your situation. This is important. Oftentimes, the reason for indecision is the lack of information about a situation.

- Identify and create options.

What options do the situation give you? Sometimes the options are few, but sometimes they are numerous. But what do you do when you think that the situation offers no options? This is the time that you create your own. Make your creative mind work. From the most simplistic to the most complicated, entertain all ideas. Do not shoot anything down when an idea comes to your head. Sometimes the most outrageous idea could prove to be the right one in the end. You can ask a friend to help you identify options and even make more options if you encounter some difficulty, but make sure that you make the decision yourself in the end.

- Weigh the pros and cons of every option.

Assess each option by looking at the advantages and disadvantages it offers you. In this way, you get more insights about the consequences of such an option.

- Trust yourself and make that decision.

Now that you have assessed your options, it is now time to trust yourself. Remember that there are no guarantees and wrong decisions are always at hindsight. So choose... decide... believe that you are choosing the best option at this point in time.

Now that you have made a decision, be ready to face its consequences: good and bad. It may take you to a place of promise or to a land of problems. But the important thing is that you have chosen to live your life instead of remaining a bystander or a passive audience to your own life. Whether it is the right decision or not, only time can tell. But do not regret it whatever the outcome. Instead, learn from it and remember that you always have the chance to make better decisions in the future.

Map Out Your Life

Success is more than economic gains, titles, and degrees. Planning for success is about mapping out all the aspects of your life. Similar to a map, you need to define the following details: origin, destination, vehicle, backpack, landmarks, and route.

Origin: Who you are

A map has a starting point. Your origin is who you are right now. Most people when asked to introduce themselves would say, “Hi, I’m Jean and I am a 17-year old, senior highschool student.” It does not tell you about who Jean is; it only tells you her present preoccupation. To gain insights about yourself, you need to look closely at your beliefs, values, and principles aside from your economic, professional, cultural, and civil status. Moreover, you can also reflect on your experiences to give you insights on your good and not-so-good traits, skills, knowledge, strengths, and weaknesses. Upon introspection, Jean realized that she was highly motivated, generous, service-oriented, but impatient. Her inclination was in the biological-medical field. Furthermore, she believed that life must serve a purpose, and that wars were destructive to human dignity.

Destination: A vision of who you want to be

“Who do want to be?” this is your vision. Now it is important that you know yourself so that you would have a clearer idea of who you want to be; and the things you want to change whether they are attitudes, habits, or points of view. If you hardly know yourself, then your vision and targets for the future would also be unclear. Your destination should cover all the aspects of your being: the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Continuing Jean’s story, after she defined her beliefs, values, and principles in life, she decided that she wanted to have a life dedicated in serving her fellowmen.

Vehicle: Your Mission

A vehicle is the means by which you can reach your destination. It can be analogized to your mission or vocation in life. To a great extent, your mission would depend on what you know about yourself. Bases on Jean’s self-assessment, she decided that she was suited to become a doctor, and that she wanted to become one. Her chosen vocation was a medical doctor. Describing her vision-mission fully: it was to live a life dedicated to serving her fellowmen as a doctor in conflict-areas.

Travel Bag: Your knowledge, skills, and attitude

Food, drinks, medicines, and other travelling necessities are contained in a bag. Applying this concept to your life map, you also bring with you certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These determine your competence and help you in attaining your vision. Given such, there is a need for you to assess what knowledge, skills, and attitudes you have at present and what you need to gain along the way. This two-fold assessment will give you insights on your landmarks or measures of success. Jean realized that she needed to gain professional knowledge and skills on medicine so that she could become a doctor. She knew that she was a bit impatient with people so she realized that this was something she wanted to change.

Landmarks and Route: S.M.A.R.T. objectives

Landmarks confirm if you are on the right track while the route determines the travel time. Thus, in planning out your life, you also need to have landmarks and a route. These landmarks are your measures of success. These measures must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound. Thus you cannot set two major landmarks such as earning a master's degree and a doctorate degree within a period of three years, since the minimum number of years to complete a master's degree is two years. Going back to Jean as an example, she identified the following landmarks in her life map: completing a bachelor's degree in biology by the age of 21; completing medicine by the age of 27; earning her specialization in infectious diseases by the age of 30; getting deployed in local public hospitals of their town by the age of 32; and serving as doctor in war-torn areas by the age of 35.

Anticipate Turns, Detours, and Potholes

The purpose of your life map is to minimize hasty and spur-of-the-moment decisions that can make you lose your way. But oftentimes our plans are modified along the way due to some inconveniences, delays, and other situations beyond our control. Like in any path, there are turns, detours, and potholes thus; we must anticipate them and adjust accordingly.

Meditation Methods

Meditation refers to a state where your body and mind are consciously relaxed and focused. Practitioners of this art report increased awareness, focus, and concentration, as well as a more positive outlook in life.

Meditation is most commonly associated with monks, mystics and other spiritual disciplines. However, you don't have to be a monk or mystic to enjoy its benefits. And you don't even have to be in a special place to practice it. You could even try it in your own living room!

Although there are many different approaches to meditation, the fundamental principles remain the same. The most important among these principles is that of removing obstructive, negative, and wandering thoughts and fantasies, and calming the mind with a deep sense of focus. This clears the mind of debris and prepares it for a higher quality of activity.

The negative thoughts you have – those of noisy neighbors, bossy officemates, that parking ticket you got, and unwanted spam– are said to contribute to the 'polluting' of the mind, and shutting them out is allows for the 'cleansing' of the mind so that it may focus on deeper, more meaningful thoughts.

Some practitioners even shut out all sensory input – no sights, no sounds, and nothing to touch – and try to detach themselves from the commotion around them. You may now focus on a deep, profound thought if this is your goal. It may seem deafening at first,

since we are all too accustomed to constantly hearing and seeing things, but as you continue this exercise you will find yourself becoming more aware of everything around you.

If you find the meditating positions you see on television threatening – those with impossibly arched backs, and painful-looking contortions – you need not worry. The principle here is to be in a comfortable position conducive to concentration. This may be while sitting cross-legged, standing, lying down, and even walking.

If the position allows you to relax and focus, then that would be a good starting point. While sitting or standing, the back should be straight, but not tense or tight. In other positions, the only no-no is slouching and falling asleep.

Loose, comfortable clothes help a lot in the process since tight fitting clothes have a tendency to choke you up and make you feel tense.

The place you perform meditation should have a soothing atmosphere. It may be in your living room, or bedroom, or any place that you feel comfortable in. You might want an exercise mat if you plan to take on the more challenging positions (if you feel more focused doing so, and if the contortionist in you is screaming for release). You may want to have the place arranged so that it is soothing to your senses.

Silence helps most people relax and meditate, so you may want a quiet, isolated area far from the ringing of the phone or the humming of the washing machine. Pleasing scents also help in that regard, so stocking up on aromatic candles isn't such a bad idea either.

The monks you see on television making those monotonous sounds are actually performing their mantra. This, in simple terms, is a short creed, a simple sound which, for these practitioners, holds a mystic value.

You do not need to perform such; however, it would pay to note that focusing on repeated actions such as breathing, and humming help the practitioner enter a higher state of consciousness.

The principle here is focus. You could also try focusing on a certain object or thought, or even, while keeping your eyes open, focus on a single sight.

One sample routine would be to – while in a meditative state – silently name every part of your body and focusing your consciousness on that part. While doing this you should be aware of any tension on any part of your body. Mentally visualize releasing this tension. It works wonders.

In all, meditation is a relatively risk-free practice and its benefits are well worth the effort (or non-effort – remember we're relaxing).

Studies have shown that meditation does bring about beneficial physiologic effects to the body. And there has been a growing consensus in the medical community to further study the effects of such. So in the near future, who knows, that mystical, esoteric thing we call meditation might become a science itself!

Motivate to Self Improvement

Pain may sometimes be the reason why people change. Getting flunked grades make us realize that we need to study. Debts remind us of our inability to look for a source of income. Being humiliated gives us the 'push' to speak up and fight for ourselves to save our face from the next embarrassments. It may be a bitter experience, a friend's tragic story, a great movie, or an inspiring book that will help us get up and get just the right amount of motivation we need in order to improve ourselves.

With the countless negativities the world brings about, how do we keep motivated? Try on the tips I prepared from A to Z...

A - Achieve your dreams. Avoid negative people, things and places. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

B - Believe in your self, and in what you can do.

C – Consider things on every angle and aspect. Motivation comes from determination. To be able to understand life, you should feel the sun from both sides.

D – Don't give up and don't give in. Thomas Edison failed once, twice, more than thrice before he came up with his invention and perfected the incandescent light bulb. Make motivation as your steering wheel.

E – Enjoy. Work as if you don't need money. Dance as if nobody's watching. Love as if you never cried. Learn as if you'll live forever. Motivation takes place when people are happy.

F – Family and Friends – are life's greatest 'F' treasures. Don't loose sight of them.

G – Give more than what is enough. Where does motivation and self improvement take place at work? At home? At school? When you exert extra effort in doing things.

H – Hang on to your dreams. They may dangle in there for a moment, but these little stars will be your driving force.

I – Ignore those who try to destroy you. Don't let other people to get the best of you. Stay out of toxic people – the kind of friends who hates to hear about your success.

J – Just be yourself. The key to success is to be yourself. And the key to failure is to try to please everyone.

K – keep trying no matter how hard life may seem. When a person is motivated, eventually he sees a harsh life finally clearing out, paving the way to self improvement.

L – Learn to love your self. Now isn't that easy?

M – Make things happen. Motivation is when your dreams are put into work clothes.

N – Never lie, cheat or steal. Always play a fair game.

O – Open your eyes. People should learn the horse attitude and horse sense. They see things in 2 ways – how they want things to be, and how they should be.

P – Practice makes perfect. Practice is about motivation. It lets us learn repertoire and ways on how can we recover from our mistakes.

Q – Quitters never win. And winners never quit. So, choose your fate – are you going to be a quitter? Or a winner?

R – Ready yourself. Motivation is also about preparation. We must hear the little voice within us telling us to get started before others will get on their feet and try to push us around. Remember, it wasn't raining when Noah build the ark.

S – Stop procrastinating.

T – Take control of your life. Discipline or self control gives synonymously with motivation. Both are key factors in self improvement.

U – Understand others. If you know very well how to talk, you should also learn how to listen. Yearn to understand first, and to be understood the second.

V – Visualize it. Motivation without vision is like a boat on a dry land.

W – Want it more than anything. Dreaming means believing. And to believe is something that is rooted out from the roots of motivation and self improvement.

X – X Factor is what will make you different from the others. When you are motivated, you tend to put on “extras” on your life like extra time for family, extra help at work, extra care for friends, and so on.

Y – You are unique. No one in this world looks, acts, or talks like you. Value your life and existence, because you're just going to spend it once.

Z – Zero in on your dreams and go for it!!!

Self Improvement Power

When we look at a certain object, a painting for example – we won't be able to appreciate what's in it, what is painted and what else goes with it if the painting is just an inch away from our face. But if we try to take it a little further, we'll have a clearer vision of the whole art work.

We reach a point in our life when we are ready for change and a whole bunch of information that will help us unlock our self improvement power. Until then, something can be staring us right under our nose but we don't see it. The only time we think of unlocking our self improvement power is when everything got worst. Take the frog principle for example –

Try placing Frog A in a pot of boiling water. What happens? He twerps! He jumps off! Why? Because he is not able to tolerate sudden change in his environment – the water's temperature. Then try Frog B: place him in a luke warm water, then turn the gas stove on. Wait til the water reaches a certain boiling point. Frog B then thinks "Ooh... it's a bit warm in here".

People are like Frog B in general. Today, Anna thinks Carl hates her. Tomorrow, Patrick walks up to her and told her he hates her. Anna stays the same and doesn't mind her what her friends says. The next day, she learned that Kim and John also abhors her. Anna doesn't realize at once the importance and the need for self improvement until the entire community hates her.

We learn our lessons when we experience pain. We finally see the warning signs and signals when things get rough and tough. When do we realize that we need to change diets? When none of our jeans and shirts would fit us. When do we stop eating candies and chocolates? When all of our teeth has fallen off. When do we realize that we need to stop smoking? When our lungs have gone bad. When do we pray and ask for help? When we realize that we're gonna die tomorrow.

The only time most of us ever learn about unlocking our self improvement power is when the whole world is crashing and falling apart. We think and feel this way because it is not easy to change. But change becomes more painful when we ignore it.

Change will happen, like it or hate it. At one point or another, we are all going to experience different turning points in our life – and we are all going to eventually unlock our self improvement power not because the world says so, not because our friends are nagging us, but because we realized its for our own good.

Happy people don't just accept change, they embrace it. Now, you don't have to feel a tremendous heat before realizing the need for self improvement. Unlocking your self improvement power means unlocking yourself up in the cage of thought that "its just the way I am". It is such a poor excuse for people who fear and resist change. Most of us program our minds like computers.

Jen repeatedly tells everyone that she doesn't have the guts to be around groups of people. She heard her mom, her dad, her sister, her teacher tell the same things about her to other people. Over the years, that is what Jen believes. She believes its her story. And what happens? Every time a great crowd would troop over their house, in school, and in the community – she tends to step back, shy away and lock herself up in a room. Jen didn't only believed in her story, she lived it.

Jen has to realize that she is not what she is in her story. Instead of having her story post around her face for everyone to remember, she has to have the spirit and show people "I am an important person and I should be treated accordingly!"

Self improvement may not be everybody's favorite word, but if we look at things in a different point of view, we might have greater chances of enjoying the whole process instead of counting the days until we are fully improved. Three sessions in a week at the gym would result to a healthier life, reading books instead of looking at porns will shape up a more profound knowledge, going out with friends and peers will help you take a step back from work and unwind. And just when you are enjoying the whole process of unlocking your self improvement power, you'll realize that you're beginning to take things light and become happy.

Unlock Your social Potential

Have you come across a person who is so naturally friendly that when you put him inside a room of strangers, he'll be friends with almost everyone in no time? We call such a people-person, someone unbelievably nice and charismatic that he can charm anyone into doing anything.

A socially-empowered person achieves so much greatness, basically because of the people that catapult him to success. He earns the trust and all-out support of the people, whom he had helped before. He never runs out of help. He can do anything with the plethora of people behind him. All because he knows he maximizes his social potential!

See, if you know your social skills and you make use of them, you will reach self-empowerment. Self-empowerment is making a general overhaul in your life and turning yourself into a happier and more successful person. If you can be one of those people-

persons, then I can't see any reason why you will not succeed. You just have to know how to start.

1. Be genuine.

Hypocrisy will just bring you all the way down. Be genuinely nice and interested to people. Once they perceive that you are Mr. Hypocrite with selfish intentions, you might as well say goodbye to self-empowerment.

2. Be the greatest listener that you can be.

To earn the love and trust of the people, listen to their problems and sympathize with them. Do not just hear them out, listen to them with your heart. Make eye contact when the person talks to you. Listen as if every word matters, and it does. Brownie points when they find out that there is a confidante in you.

3. Laugh out loud.

I do not mean that you force yourself to laugh for every joke cracked by someone, albeit you do not find it funny at all. This means finding humor in things and not being too darn serious. A person oozing with an awesome sense of humor attracts crowds and eventually, attracts success.

4. Don't forget yourself.

In the process of fluttering around like a social butterfly, you might forget yourself, allowing everyone to push you over. Remember, love and value yourself before anyone else. If you deem yourself respectable and worthy of affection, people will flock to you and not trample on you.

5. Do random acts of kindness.

You don't have to do a John Rockefeller and blow your savings to charity. Little acts of kindness matters the most, and this can be as simple as giving someone a surprise you-take-care card or helping an elderly cross the street. When we were kindergarten students, kindness was taught to us and greatly practiced. Now is the time to revive the good deeds and this time, let them stay for good.

6. Contact your old friends.

Sad how some friendships are destined to goodbye, but thanks to technology, you can do something about it. Relive the good old days by flipping your yearbook and look for the great people whom you want to communicate with again. Adding these old friends to your roster of support peers will surely make you feel good all over.

7. Develop your personality.

Are you grouchy, grumpy and generally morose? Whoa, you can't go through life with those. Get rid of the bad traits and habits that perpetually hamper your growth. And really, who wants a grouchy friend anyway?

8. Be confident.

Be able to stride to the other corner of the room and introduce yourself to people with that winning smile of yours. Just remember: be confident, not arrogant.

9. Practice control.

When angry, don't snap at anyone. Never throw a tantrum. Stay calm and collected. Be adult enough to take control of situation and transform your anger into something more productive and passive. As soon as people think your anger goes to volcanic proportions easily, they will find it hard to come to you.

10. Keep nurturing your relationships.

Your relationship with your family, friends and significant others is too precious that you must not neglect it whatever happens. Go out and have fun with them. Do things together. Happiness will never fly from your side as long as the people who matter the most are close to you.

In the end, using people for self-empowerment means becoming a better and more lovable person. It's a win-win situation: the people know they can turn to you anytime and vice versa.

What Innovation Can Do to Your Life

It's a talent that everyone has, yet they think they don't. The power of innovation. If you've ever marvelled at somebody's creative prowess, guess what, you can create and innovate too. It just takes time. Everyone is born creative. The box of crayons in kindergarten were not limited to those who possessed potential; because the truth is, everybody has potential.

You know how long it took to learn to ride a bike or drive or to never commit the same mistake again? It's the same with innovation. It takes a bit of practice and a lot of time before this mind function comes easily when called. This article will teach you a few tips on how to bring innovation into your life.

Don't listen to what other people say. Follow the beat of your own drum. Allowing for the input of other people will only bring cacophony to the music you are trying to make. If you have an original idea, don't waste your time and effort trying to make people

understand. They won't. And the help you will probably get comes in the form of negative feedback. If all those geniuses listened to their peers, we would probably still be living in the middle ages.

Spend time on it. I cannot stress that enough, although, please do not mistake this tip to tell you to quit your day job entirely. Do not. This involves some tricky time management but with a little discipline you'll be able to squeeze both in.

Exercise. Take a walk. Run a mile or two. Send all those endorphins coursing through your veins. Exercising certainly clears and relaxes your mind and allows for anything to pop up.

Record your dreams. Aren't some of them just the craziest things that your conscious mind would never have thought of? If you've had these dreams before, and I'm sure have, this only shows you the untapped innovative power you have lying within. So jot down those notes. Those dreams may just create an innovative spark in you.

Find your own style. You can always tell a Van Gogh from a Matisse. You'll know Hemingway wrote something by the choice of words on the paper. So it is the same with you. People will appreciate your innovation more because it is uniquely yours and that no one else would have thought of what you were thinking. That will let people see how valuable an asset you are.

Don't hide behind nifty gadgets or tools. You don't need the most expensive set of paints to produce a masterpiece. The same way with writing. You don't need some expensive fountain pen and really smooth paper for a bestseller. In fact, J.K. Rowling wrote the first book of the Harry Potter Series on bits of tissue. So what if you've got an expensive SLR camera if you're a crappy photographer? Who cares if you've got a blinging laptop if you can't write at all? The artist actually reduces the number of tools he has as he gets better at his craft: he knows what works and what doesn't.

Nothing will work without passion. What wakes you up in the mornings? What keeps the flame burning? What is the one thing that you'll die if you don't do? Sometimes people with talent are overtaken by the people who want it more. Think the hare and the tortoise. Ellen Degeneres once said that if you're not doing something that you want to do, then you don't really want to do it. And that's true. Sometimes you just want something so bad you become a virtual unstoppable. And that is passion. Passion will keep you going.

Don't worry about inspiration. You can't force it; inspiration hits when you least expect it to, for those unpredictable yet inevitable moments you should prepare. An idea could strike you on the subway, yet alas, you poor unfortunate soul; you have no sheet of paper to scribble down a thought that could change the world. Avoid these disasters. Have a pen and paper within your arm's reach at all times.

I hope this article has helped you bring more innovation into your life. Keep in mind that you're doing these things for your own satisfaction and not anybody else's. But soon enough they will notice, and everything should snowball from there.

What To Do When You Retire

Most people only plan for their 'working life,' the years including education for a career, setting professional goals, having a family, but retirement demands just as much planning, if not more, than a career. Every stage in a person or couple's lives should be addressed and you should try to gain the optimal satisfaction from each stage.

In most cases, preparation for retirement should not start later than age 59 for a woman and between 62 and 64 for a man. In today's advanced society, people are beginning to live longer, and following retirement at these ideal ages, they may have 20 to 25 vibrant years left...so don't put all that time to waste.

There are countless options for what you want to do with your retirement. It can act as a continuation of your 'old' life; you can work on or finish projects there was never time for before. It can also be perceived as a whole new life—much more enjoyable than the old skin you shed. If you want to do this, you have to set some goals for yourselves:

Do you want to...?

- Obtain a degree you never completed or started before?
- Join a club...from chess to hiking?
- Travel to new countries or even states?
- Learn ballroom dancing with your partner?
- Learn to play an instrument...the guitar or piano?
- Volunteer at a charity organization?
- Become more involved in your church?
- Take an art or ceramics class?
- Start a new business?

Make sure to do something that you're passionate about. You are finally free to be yourself. You might have followed in your parents' footsteps when you were younger. Now you are ripe, and know exactly what interests you and don't need to follow other people's dreams.

Associate with other people your age who have similar interests as you and your spouse. Start a small group that meets weekly for lunch or Bible study. You've got plenty of time, so have a few set appointments that you want to attend...an aerobics class twice a week and a sewing class. This will give you something to look forward to and will probably give you some 'homework' to occupy your time during the week. The best part is...you don't have to worry about getting a grade on that work!

Your Power of Attraction

“Opposites attract” is a law of attraction, at least where electromagnetism is concerned. But are there laws about attraction between two people? “In a world that is full of strangers” as a line in a famous song of the 1980’s goes, is there a clear set of rules that allows two people to fall for each other?

Is attraction a matter of chemistry?

Maybe. According to scientists, the attraction between animals of the opposite sex is all about chemicals called pheromones. The effect of pheromones in behavior of insects is the most studied to date. It has been observed, at least in some experiments, that pheromones are responsible for communication among same species and colony of ants. The horrible odor released by skunks to ward off enemies is said to be a kind of pheromone. Some species of apes rub pheromone-containing urine on the feet of potential mates to attract them. Some scientists believe that animals (usually the females) such as insects and mammals send out these chemical signals to tell the male of their species that their genes are different from theirs. This gene diversity is important in producing offspring with better chances of survival. The perfume industry has capitalized on pheromones as a means to increase one’s sexual attractiveness to the opposite sex. Animals such as the whale and the musk deer were hunted down for these chemicals.

Lately, scientists are looking into the existence of human pheromones and its role in mate selection. There are many conflicting views in the realm of biology, chemistry, genetics, and psychology. Most scientists would assert that these do not exist, or if they do, do not play a role in sexual attraction between a man and a woman. But new researches such as that conducted by Swiss researchers from the University of Bern led by Klaus Wedekind are slowly making these scientists rethink their stand. Their experiment involved women sniffing the cotton shirts of different men during their ovulation period. It was found out that women prefer the smell of men’s shirts that were genetically different, but also shared similarities with the women’s genes. This, like in the case of insects and other mammals, was to ensure better and healthier characteristics for their future children. But researchers also cautioned that preference for a male odor is affected by the women’s ovulation period, the food that men eat, perfumes and other scented body products, and the use of contraceptive pills.

Does personality figure in sexual attraction?

Yes, but so does your perception of a potential mate’s personality. According to a research conducted by Klohnen, E.C., & S. Luo in 2003 on interpersonal attraction and personality, a person’s sense of self-security and at least the person’s perception of his/her partner were found to be strong determinants of attraction in hypothetical situations. What does this tell us? We prefer a certain personality type, which attracts you to a person. But aside from the actual personality of the person, which can only be verified through close interaction through time, it is your perception of your potential

partner that attracts you to him/her, whether the person of your affection truly has that kind of personality or not. This could probably account for a statement commonly heard from men and women on their failed relationships: “I thought he/she was this kind of person.”

So how does attraction figure in relationships?

You have probably heard that attraction is a prelude, or a factor towards a relationship. Most probably, at least in the beginning; but attraction alone cannot make a relationship work. It is that attraction that makes you notice a person from the opposite sex, but once you get to know the person more, attraction is just one consideration. Shared values, dreams, and passions become more significant in long-term relationships.

So should I stop trying to become attractive?

More than trying to become physically attractive, work on all aspects of your health: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Physical attraction is still a precursor. Remember, biology predisposes us to choose the partner with the healthiest genes. Where your emotions are concerned, just ask this to yourself: would you want to spend time with a person who feels insecure about him/herself? Probably not! There is wisdom in knowing yourself: who you are, your beliefs, values, and dreams. And do not pretend to be someone you are not. Fooling another person by making him/her think that you share the same values and beliefs is only going to cause you both disappointments. When you are healthy in all aspects, attractiveness becomes a consequence and not an end. As mentioned in the Klohnen and Luo’s research, a person’s sense of self-security matters, perhaps even beyond attraction. But remember: do these things for yourself and not for other people. Only then can you truly harness your attractiveness as a person.

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