

Chapter 1

There Has to Be a Smarter Way!



*But there is another way that the
discipline of psychology can be put to use.
It is in helping answer the question: Given that
we are who we are, with whatever
hang-ups and repressions, what can we
do to improve our future?*

- Mihaly Csikszentmihaly

A traveler once asked a farmer for directions to a nearby town.

The farmer replied, “Well, after you go down the road for three miles, turn right at the fork in the road. No, that won’t work.

“Why don’t you turn around and drive for a mile until you get to the gas station, then turn left...” the farmer continued. “No, that won’t work either.”

The farmer paused to think, then said, “You know what, my friend? You can’t get there from here!”

Well, of course we know this isn’t true, you can always get to where you’re going. You just have to know what principles to follow to get to where you want to be in your life’s journey.

As a clinical psychologist, I often work with people who are seeking to get there from here. How about you? From where are you starting and where is it that you want to be?

- Do you feel like a second-class citizen?
- Do you feel as if you have no control over your life at work or at home?
- Do you back down to keep the peace rather than assert yourself?
- Do you feel as if life is a catastrophe always seeking you out?
- Do you feel as if you are more adept at enduring your unhappiness rather than creating your own well-being?
- Do you feel as if you are always at the mercy of somebody else’s good-will in order for you to get your emotional needs met?

- Do you feel at work as if you do your work and the work of your co-workers as well?
- Do you feel as if you are emotionally drowning from all the responsibility you take on in your life?
- Do you turn to substances such as food, drugs, or alcohol to gloss over the pain you are experiencing?
- Do you wish you could regain control of your life from those who seek to run it for you?

For those of you who answered yes to any of these questions, you need not despair. Though you may feel helpless, you’re not without power. Though you may have lost faith, you’re not without hope. Though you may feel lost, your life is not without purpose. In this book you’ll discover a path that will both inspire and empower you to overcome your fears and reclaim your destiny.

We all search for ways to get there from here. Our life is a journey of searching, stumbling, becoming stuck, overcoming obstacles, mastering ourselves and our world, and growing beyond our self-imposed limits.

We all seek ways to expand our lives through maintaining our emotional well-being, creating a life rich with purpose, and empowering ourselves to live life on our terms.

We all seek to create a life in which we feel autonomous. We long to feel liberated from all the influences that hold us back, as well as create the circumstances that will support our continued development.

We all seek to create an atmosphere of control in our lives—to be the captains of our ship. We long to develop a feeling of accomplishment and achievement.

We all search for ways to develop meaningful relationships with people in which we feel valued and cared for.

The universal principles of personal empowerment presented in this book are the embodiment of how you can get there from here!

Personal empowerment is not just a catchy phrase. Personal empowerment is a life force. It is the process through which we can emancipate, elevate, and expand our lives. It is the process of thought and action combined that moves people along in their personal journey. This book identifies specific concrete principles you can apply to any specific life challenge you meet.

But personal empowerment is more than just a life force. It is a state of mind, an attitude toward life. As an attitude, it communicates courage, adaptability, an eagerness and willingness to experiment and grow. This attitude embodies a spirit of purpose, direction, and perseverance.

Personal empowerment is an emotional state. It is a state of well-being and self-confidence that enables you to overcome obstacles and develop a sense of mastery over everyday challenges. We recognize this emotional state when we feel self-reliant, autonomous, and in control of our life. We see it in our life when we experience life as balanced in terms of manageability, control, growth, fulfillment, and challenge.

But it is even more than all of these things. Personal empowerment describes both who you are and what your life is becoming. Personal empowerment connotes

confidence, pride, assertiveness, accomplishment, and being at ease with yourself. It describes a life balanced with purpose, meaning, accomplishment, and emotional well-being.

So, my question to you is simple. Is your life shaped by your dreams, hopes, wants, and desires? Or is it built on the expectations of others? Do you live your life as a bold adventure or in fear and timidity?

So many people grapple with these questions.

I know the principles I present to you in this book will liberate and empower you from whatever trap in which you may currently find yourself ensnared.

After all, that's what it's all about. You grow. You continue to grow. And when you feel empowered, the tides move in new directions, you let go easier, you move with the currents, you are no longer paralyzed by so much fear and anxiety. You may still experience the pain of fear and anxiety, but you will no longer be frozen in it, fixed in it, unable to see what's going on around you. By developing personal empowerment your life will change. You will be able to go with the tides instead of drowning in them.

When you start to see yourself putting things in black-and-white terms, when you find yourself suffocating in a situation where you don't see any other options, you will be able to know how to step back and reframe it. This will mean a great deal in the simple day-to-day stuff of life. You will no longer have a bad day before most people even make it to work!

You will no longer have to look at things so stubbornly, so single mindedly, so one way. You will know what to do. You will know how to back off of some-

thing, look away, or step back long enough to gain another perspective. As soon as you find one other point of view, it's a lot easier to see a third, and a fourth, and the multitude of perspectives that exist in every moment of every situation.

You know what you want for yourself in your life. You know where you are today in relationship to where you want to be. The thing you are seeking is a bridge between those two points. That bridge is embracing the process that propels you forward on your journey.

My principles for personal empowerment embody the bridge which is the very life force that can get you there from here.

A young woman came to see me for the first time. She walked into the office, looked around and sat down in the black leather chair in the corner. After about two minutes of composing herself, she began to talk.

"I've never been to a clinical psychologist before. But I need to talk to someone.

"Most of what I need to say may not make any sense, but I came to you to make some sense of it all, so here goes," she said.

"Yesterday, I was at work. My friend, Sue, had been unkind to me at lunch. She picked on the color of my blouse and the way my hair looked.

"Then, around three o'clock, my supervisor came up to me and told me that we had more work this week than last week. He asked me to work later and come in earlier until Friday.

"He later came back to tell me that no one else could come in and help, so I should plan on coming in on Saturday too. I sat there when he left, put my pen down,

and started to cry."

She looked into my eyes with intense determination and said, "It was right then that I realized that I had had enough. Something inside said 'Stop!' I thought of how all my life I have done stuff because other people have asked me to do it. I ate all my food as a kid, because my mom said to. I wore special clothes because my daddy liked them. I hung out with friends and acted like they acted.

"And somewhere I got lost. I let my husband have too much control in our marriage. I love my children but sometimes things are out of balance with them."

I was amazed at this woman's presence of mind.

"When I was a little girl, I was scared that if I did not do what other people wanted me to, they would not like me any more. Deep down, I was afraid they would leave and I would be alone."

By this time she was crying and talking at the same time, so her words were more difficult to understand.

"But when this guy at work wanted me to stay late," she said, "and when I thought he asked me because I was the easiest to push around, I realized that if I ever have a chance to change, it's now."

She had found a moment of clarity in a lifetime built around accepting the will of others.

"I have to find out who I am," she said. "And I'm willing to work hard to do it."

I told her I was amazed and proud of what she had done in my office that day. By being pushed into questioning the reasons for the choices she made in her life, she had taken a huge step toward changing the quality of her existence.

For many of us, life has been a constant parade of backing down, and letting fear make decisions for us. In any given situation, we may pick the choice that ensures momentary relief but may promote long-term pain. And in doing so, we compromise part of ourselves.

So often, we have our personal power taken from us or we give it away. We settle for a life where endurance of pain is valued over the joy of personal freedom. Subjugation and obedience replace personal freedom and empowerment.

If you are like the thousands of people I have met throughout the years, you share the same hopes, dreams and frustrations. Moreover, you possess the same capacity to empower your life by embracing these very simple principles of empowerment, as they have done before you.