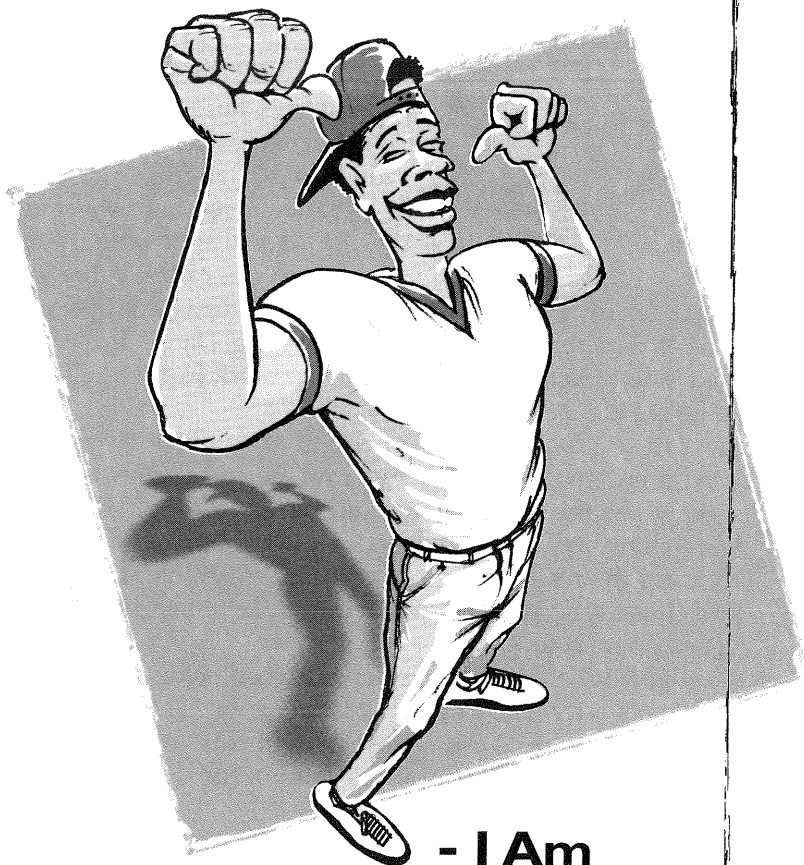


H A B I T

Be Proactive



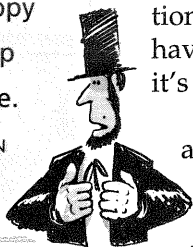
- I Am
the Force

Growing up in my home was at times a big pain. Why? Because my dad always made me take responsibility for everything in my life.

Whenever I said something like “Dad, my girlfriend makes me so mad,” without fail Dad would come back with: “Now come on, Sean, no one can make you mad unless you let them. It’s your choice. You choose to be mad.”

People are
just about as happy
as they make up
their mind to be.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
U.S. PRESIDENT



Or if I said, “My new biology teacher stinks. I’m never going to learn a thing,” Dad would say, “Why don’t you go to your teacher and give him some suggestions? Change teachers. Get a tutor if you have to. If you don’t learn biology, Sean, it’s your own fault, not your teacher’s.”

He never let me off the hook. He was always challenging me, making sure that I never blamed someone else for the way I acted. Luckily my mom let me blame other people and things for my problems or I might have turned out psycho.

I often screamed back, “You’re wrong, Dad! I didn’t choose to be mad. She MADE, MADE, MADE me mad. Just get off my back and leave me alone.”

You see, Dad’s idea that you are responsible for your life was hard medicine for me to swallow as a teenager. But, with hindsight, I see the wisdom in what he was doing. He wanted me to learn that there are two types of people in this world—the proactive and the reactive—those who take responsibility for their lives and those who blame; those who make it happen and those who get happened to.

Habit 1, Be Proactive, is the key to unlocking all the other habits and that’s why it comes first. Habit 1 says “I am the force. I am the captain of my life. I can choose my attitude. I’m responsible for my own happiness or unhappiness. I am in the driver’s seat of my destiny, not just a passenger.”

Being proactive is the first step toward achieving the private victory. Can you imagine doing algebra before learning addition and subtraction? Not gonna happen. The same goes for the 7 Habits. You can’t do habits 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 before doing Habit 1. That’s because until you feel you are in charge of your own life, nothing else is really possible, now, is it? Hmmm ...

Proactive or Reactive... the Choice Is Yours

Each day you and I have about 100 chances to choose whether to be

proactive or reactive. In any given day, the weather is bad, you can't find a job, your sister steals your blouse, you lose an election at school, your friend talks behind your back, someone calls you names, your parents don't let you take the car (for no reason), you get a parking ticket on campus, and you flunk a test. So what are you going to do about it? Are you in the habit of reacting to these kinds of everyday things, or are you proactive? The choice is yours. It really is. You don't have to respond the way everyone else does or the way people think you should.

How many times have you been driving down the road when suddenly somebody cuts in front of you, making you slam on your brakes? What do you do? Do you fly off at the mouth? Give 'em the bird? Let it ruin your day? Lose bladder control?

Or do you just let it go? Laugh about it. Move on.

The choice is yours.

Reactive people make choices based on impulse. They are like a can of soda pop. If life shakes them up a bit, the pressure builds and they suddenly explode.

"Hey, you stupid jerk! Get out of my lane!"

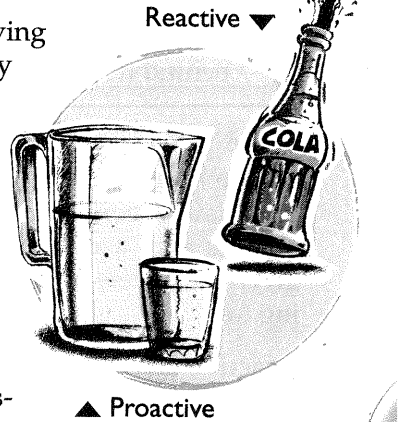
Proactive people make choices based on values. They *think* before they act. They recognize they can't control everything that happens to them, but they can control *what they do about it*. Unlike reactive people who are full of carbonation, proactive people are like water. Shake them up all you want, take off the lid, and nothing. No fizzing, no bubbling, no pressure. They are calm, cool, and in control.

"I'm not going to let that guy get me upset and ruin my day."

A great way to understand the proactive mind-set is to compare proactive and reactive responses to situations that happen all the time.

Scene One:

You overhear your best friend bad-mouthing you in front of a group. She doesn't know you overheard the conversation. Just five minutes ago, this same friend was sweet-talking you to your face. You feel hurt and betrayed.



Reactive choices

- Tell her off. Then hit her.
- Go into a deep depression because you feel so bad about what she said.
- Decide that she's a two-faced liar and give her the silent treatment for two months.
- Spread vicious rumors about her. After all, she did it to you.

Proactive choices

- Forgive her.
- Confront her and calmly share how you feel.
- Ignore it and give her a second chance. Realize that she has weaknesses just like you and that occasionally you talk behind her back without really meaning any harm.

Scene Two:

You've been working at your job in the store for over a year now and have been extremely committed and dependable. Three months ago, a new employee joined the crew. Recently, he was given the coveted Saturday afternoon shift, the shift you were hoping for.

Reactive choices

- Spend half your waking hours complaining to everyone and their dog about how unfair this decision was.
- Scrutinize the new employee and find his every weakness.
- Become convinced your supervisor has formed a conspiracy and is out to get you.
- Begin to slack off while working your shift.

Proactive choices

- Talk with your supervisor about why the new employee got the better shift.
- Continue to be a hard-working employee.
- Learn what you can do to improve your performance.
- If you determine you are in a dead-end job, begin looking for a new one.

● **LISTEN TO YOUR LANGUAGE**

You can usually hear the difference between proactive and reactive people by the type of language they use. Reactive language usually sounds like this:

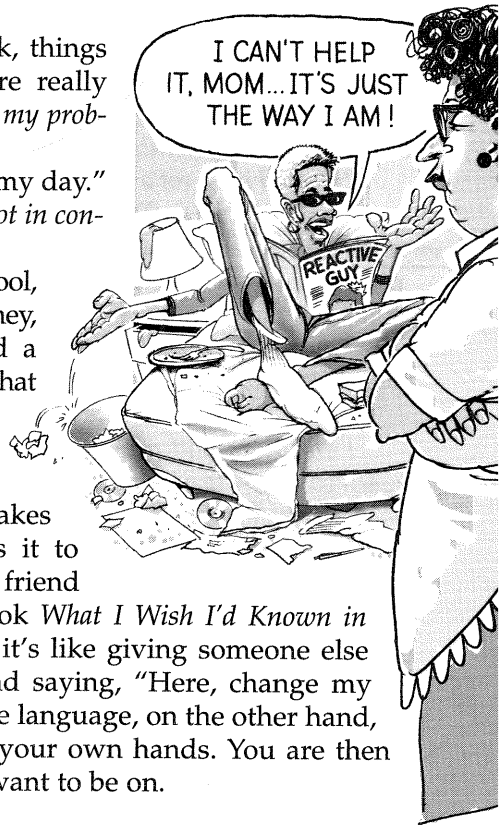
"That's me. That's just the way I am." What they're really saying is, *I'm not responsible for the way I act. I can't change. I was pre-determined to be this way.*

"If my boss wasn't such a jerk, things would be different." What they're really saying is, *My boss is the cause of all my problems, not me.*

"Thanks a lot. You just ruined my day." What they're really saying is, *I'm not in control of my own moods. You are.*

"If only I attended a different school, had better friends, made more money, lived in a different apartment, had a boyfriend ... then I'd be happy." What they're really saying is, *I'm not in control of my own happiness, "things" are. I must have things to be happy.*

Notice that reactive language takes power away from you and gives it to something or someone else. As my friend John Bytheway explains in his book *What I Wish I'd Known in High School*, when you're reactive it's like giving someone else the remote control to your life and saying, "Here, change my mood anytime you wish." Proactive language, on the other hand, puts the remote control back into your own hands. You are then free to choose which channel you want to be on.



REACTIVE LANGUAGE	PROACTIVE LANGUAGE
<i>I'll try</i>	<i>I'll do it</i>
<i>That's just the way I am</i>	<i>I can do better than that</i>
<i>There's nothing I can do</i>	<i>Let's look at all our options</i>
<i>I have to</i>	<i>I choose to</i>
<i>I can't</i>	<i>There's gotta be a way</i>
<i>You ruined my day</i>	<i>I'm not going to let your bad mood rub off on me</i>

● THE VICTIMITIS VIRUS

Some people suffer from a contagious virus I call “victimitis.” Perhaps you’ve seen it. People infected with victimitis believe that everyone has it in for them and that the world owes them something ... which isn’t the case at all. I like the way author Mark Twain put it: “Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.”

I played college football with a guy who, unfortunately, became infected. His comments drove me crazy:

“I would be starting, but the coaches have something against me.”

“I was about to intercept the ball, but somebody cut me off.”

“I would have got a better 40-yard-dash time, but my shoes came loose.”

“Yeah, sure,” I always felt like saying. “And I’d be President if my dad weren’t bald.” To me, it was little wonder that he never played. In his mind, the problem was always “out there.” He never considered that perhaps *his* attitude was the problem.

Adreana, an honor student from Chicago, grew up in a home plagued by victimitis:

I am black and proud of it. Color has not stood in my way and I learn so much from white and black teachers and counselors alike. But in my own home it’s a different thing. My mother, who dominates the family, is fifty years old, came from the South, and still acts as though slavery was just abolished. She sees my doing good in school as a threat, as if I am joining the “white folks.” She still uses language like “the man is keeping us from doing this and that. He is keeping us boxed up and won’t let us do anything.”

I always rebut with “No man is keeping you from doing anything, only yourself, because you keep thinking the way you think.” Even my boyfriend falls into the white-man-is-holding-me-back attitude. When he was recently trying to purchase a car and the sale didn’t go through, he remarked with frustration, “The white man doesn’t want us to get anything.” I almost lost it and confronted him with how silly that kind of thinking was. But it only resulted in him feeling that I was taking the side of the white man.

I remain convinced that the only person who can hold you back is yourself.

Besides feeling like victims, reactive people:

- Are easily offended
- Blame others
- Get angry and say things they later regret

- Whine and complain
- Wait for things to happen to them
- Change only when they have to

● IT PAYS TO BE PROACTIVE

Proactive people are a different breed. Proactive people:

- Are not easily offended
- Take responsibility for their choices
- Think before they act
- Bounce back when something bad happens
- Always find a way to make it happen
- Focus on things they can do something about, and don't worry about things they can't

I remember starting a new job and working with a guy named Randy. I don't know what his problem was, but for some reason Randy didn't like me, and he wanted me to know it. He'd say rude and insulting things to me. He was constantly talking behind my back and getting others to side with him against me. I remember returning from a vacation one time and a friend telling me, "Boy, Sean, if you only knew what Randy has been saying about you. You'd better watch your back."

There were times I wanted to pound the guy, but I somehow managed to keep my cool and ignore his silly attacks. Whenever he insulted me, I made it a personal challenge to treat him well in return. I had faith that things would work out in the end if I acted this way.

In a matter of a few months things began to change. Randy could see that I wasn't going to play his game and began to lighten up. He even told me one time, "I've tried to offend you, but you won't take offense." After being at the company for about a year, we became friends and gained respect for each other. Had I reacted to his attacks, which was my feline instinct, I'm certain we wouldn't be friends today. Often all it takes is one person to create a friendship.

Mary Beth discovered for herself the benefits of being proactive:

I had taken a class at school where we had talked about proactivity, and I had wondered about how to really apply it. One day as I was checking groceries for a guy, he suddenly told me that the groceries I had just rung up weren't his. My first reaction was to say, "You idiot," then put the bar down between the other customer's groceries. "Why

didn't you stop me sooner?" So I have to delete it all and call to get the changes approved by a supervisor while he just stands there and thinks it's funny. Meanwhile the air is rising and I'm getting real irritated. To top it off he then has the nerve to question the price I charged him for the broccoli.

To my horror, I discovered that he was right. I had put the wrong code numbers in the register for the broccoli. Now I was extra irritated and so tempted to lash out at him to cover for my own mistake. But then this idea popped into my mind: "Be Proactive."

So I said, "You are right, sir. It's completely my fault. I will correct the pricing. It will just take a couple of seconds." I also remembered that being proactive doesn't mean you're a doormat, so I reminded him nicely that to avoid this kind of thing in the future he would need to always put the bar down that separates orders.

It felt so good. I had apologized, but I had also said what I wanted to say. It was such a simple little thing, but it gave me such inner conversion and confidence in this habit.

At this point you're probably ready to shoot me and say, "Now come on, Sean. It's not that easy." I won't argue with you. Being reactive is so much easier. It's easy to lose your cool. That doesn't take any control. And it's easy to whine and complain. Without question, being proactive is the higher road.

But, remember, you don't have to be perfect. In reality, you and I aren't either completely proactive or reactive but probably somewhere in between. The key then is to get in the habit of being proactive so you can run on autopilot and not even have to think about it. If you're choosing to be proactive 20 out of 100 times on average each day, try doing it 30 out of 100 times. Then 40. Never underestimate the huge difference small changes can make.

● **WE CAN CONTROL ONLY ONE THING**

The fact is, we can't control everything that happens to us. We can't control the color of our skin, who will win the NBA finals, where we were born, who our parents are, how much tuition will be next fall, or how others might treat us. But there is one thing we *can* control: *how we respond to what happens to us*. And that is what counts! This is why we need to stop worrying about things we can't control and start worrying about things we *can*.

Picture two circles. The inner circle is our circle of control. It includes things we have control over, such as ourselves, our attitudes, our choices, our response to whatever happens to us.

Surrounding the circle of control is the circle of no control. It includes the thousands of things we can't do anything about.

Now, what will happen if we spend our time and energy worrying about things we can't control, like a rude comment, a past mistake, or the weather? You guessed it! We'll feel even more out of control, as if we were victims. For instance, if your sister bugs you and you're always complaining about her weaknesses (something you have no control over), that won't do anything to fix the problem. It'll only cause you to blame your problems on her and lose power yourself.



Renatha told me a story that illustrates this point. A week before her upcoming volleyball game, Renatha learned that the mother of a player on the opposing team had made fun of Renatha's volleyball skills. Instead of ignoring the comments, Renatha became angry and spent the rest of the week stewing. When the game arrived, her only goal was to prove to this mother that she was a good player. To make a long story short, Renatha played poorly, spent much of her time on the bench, and her team lost the game. She was so focused on something she couldn't control (what was said about her) that she lost control of the only thing she could, herself.

Proactive people, on the other hand, focus elsewhere ... on the things they *can* control. By doing so they experience inner peace and gain more control of their lives. They learn to smile about and live with the many things they can't do anything about. They may not like them, but they know it's no use worrying.

● TURNING SETBACKS INTO TRIUMPHS

Life often deals us a bad hand and it is up to us to control how we respond. Every time we have a setback, it's an opportunity for us to turn it into a triumph, as this account by Brad Lemley from *Parade* magazine illustrates:

"It's not what happens to you in life, it's what you do about it," or so says W. Mitchell, a self-made millionaire, a sought-after speaker, a former mayor, a river rafter and sky-diver. And he accomplished all this after his accidents.

If you saw Mitchell you'd find this hard to believe. You see, this guy's face is a patchwork of multi-colored skin grafts, the fingers of both his hands are either missing or mere stubs, and his paralyzed legs lie thin and useless under his slacks. Mitchell says sometimes people try to guess how he was injured. A car wreck? Vietnam? The real story is more astounding than one could ever imagine. On June 19, 1971, he was on top of the world. The day before, he had bought a beautiful new motorcycle. That morning, he soloed in an airplane for the first time. He was young, healthy, and popular.

"That afternoon, I got on that motorcycle to ride to work," he recalls, "and at an intersection, a laundry truck and I collided. The bike went down, crushed my elbow and fractured my pelvis, and the gas can popped open on the motorcycle. The gas poured out, the heat of the engine ignited it, and I got burned over 65 percent of my body." Fortunately, a quick-thinking man in a nearby car lot doused Mitchell with a fire extinguisher and saved his life.

Even so, Mitchell's face had been burned off, his fingers were black, charred, and twisted, his legs were nothing but raw, red flesh. It was common for first-time visitors to look at him and faint. He was unconscious for two weeks, and then he awakened.

Over four months, he had 13 transfusions, 16 skin-graft operations, and several other surgeries. Four years later, after spending months in rehabilitation and years learning to adapt to his new handicaps, the unthinkable happened. Mitchell was involved in a freak airplane crash, and was paralyzed from the waist down. "When I tell people there were two separate accidents," he says, "they can hardly stand it."

After his paralyzing plane crash accident, Mitchell recalls meeting a nineteen-year-old patient in the hospital's gymnasium. "This guy had also been paralyzed. He had been a mountain climber, a skier, an active outdoors person, and he was convinced his life was over. Finally, I went over to this guy and said, 'You know something? Before all this happened to me, there were 10,000 things I could do. Now there are 9,000. I could spend the rest of my life dwelling on the 1,000 that I lost, but I choose to focus on the 9,000 that are left.'"

Mitchell says his secret is twofold. First is the love and encouragement of friends and family, and second is a personal philosophy he has gleaned from various sources. He realized he did not have to buy society's notion that one must be handsome and healthy to be happy. "I am in charge of my own spaceship," he states emphatically. "It is my up, my down. I could choose to see this situation as a setback or a starting point."

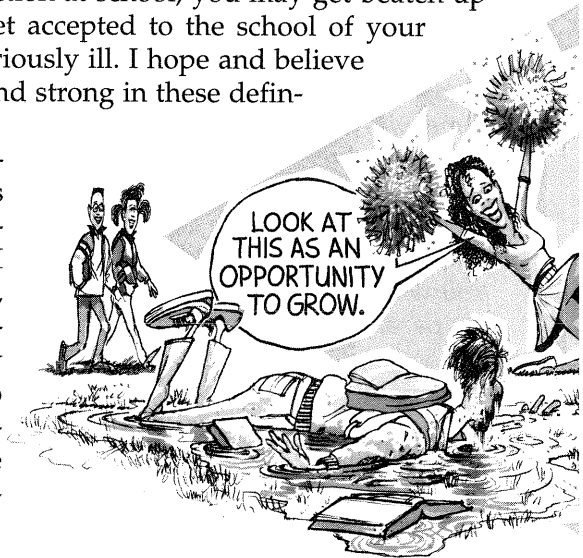
I like how Helen Keller put it, "So much has been given to me. I have no time to ponder that which has been denied."

Although most of our setbacks won't be as severe as Mitchell's, all of us will have our fair share. You might get dumped by a girlfriend, you may lose an election at school, you may get beaten up by a gang, you may not get accepted to the school of your choice, you may become seriously ill. I hope and believe that you will be proactive and strong in these defining moments.

I remember a major setback of my own. Two years after I had become the starting quarterback in college, I seriously injured my knee, fell behind, and subsequently lost my position. I vividly recall Coach calling me into his office just before the season began and telling me they were handing the starting job to someone else.

I felt sick. I had worked my whole life to get to this position. It was my senior year. This *wasn't* supposed to happen.

As a backup, I had a choice to make. I could complain, bad-mouth the new guy, and feel sorry for myself. Or ... I could make the most of the situation.



Luckily, I decided to deal with it. I was no longer throwing touchdowns, but I could help in other ways. So I swallowed my pride and began supporting the new guy and the rest of the team. I worked hard and prepared myself for each game as if I were the starter. And, more significant, I chose to keep my chin up.

Was it easy? Not at all. I often felt like a failure. Sitting out every game after being the starter was humiliating. And keeping a good attitude was a constant struggle.

Was it the right choice? Definitely. Even though I wore out my bum on the bench all year, I contributed to the team in other ways. Most important, I took responsibility for my attitude. I cannot begin to tell you what a positive difference this singular decision made in my life.

● **RISING ABOVE ABUSE**

One of the hardest setbacks of all is coping with abuse. I'll never forget the morning I spent with a group of teens who had been sexually abused as children, were victims of date rape or were otherwise abused emotionally or physically.

Heather told me this story:

I was sexually abused at fourteen. It happened when I was at a fair. A boy from school came up to me and said, "I really need to talk to you, come with me for a few minutes." I never suspected anything because this kid was my friend and had always been really nice to me. He took me on a long walk and we ended up down at the dugouts at the high school. That was where he forced and raped me.

He kept telling me, "If you tell anyone, no one will believe you. You wanted this to happen to you anyway." He also told me that my parents would be so ashamed of me. I kept quiet about it for two years.

Finally, I was attending a help session where people who were abused told their stories and this one girl got up and told a story similar to mine. When she said the name of the boy that abused her, I started to cry because it was the same one who had raped me. It turned out that there were six of us who were victimized by him.

Fortunately, Heather is now on the road to recovery and has found tremendous strength in being part of a teen group that is trying to help other abuse victims. By coming forward, she has also put a stop to more people being hurt by the same boy.

Bridgett's story, unfortunately, is very common:

At the age of five I was sexually abused by a family member. Too afraid to tell anyone I tried to bury my hurt and anger. Now that I have come to terms with what happened, I look back on my life and can see how it has affected everything. In trying to hide something terrible I ended up hiding myself. It wasn't until thirteen years later that I finally confronted my childhood nightmare.

Many people have been through the same experience as I have or something that is related. Most hide it. Why? Some are afraid for their lives. Others want to protect themselves or someone else. But whatever the reason, hiding it isn't the answer. It only leaves a cut so deep in the soul that it seems that there's no way of healing it. Confronting it is the only way to sew up that bleeding gash. Find someone to talk to, someone you feel comfortable with, someone you can trust. It is a long and difficult process, but once you come to terms with it, it's only then that you can start to live.

If you have been abused, it's not your fault. And the truth has to be told. Abuse thrives in secrecy. By telling another person, you immediately divide your problem in half. Talk with a loved one or friend you can trust, take part in a help session, or visit a professional therapist. If the first person you share your troubles with isn't receptive, don't give up—keep sharing until you find someone who is. Sharing your secret with another is an important step in the healing and forgiving process. Be proactive. Take the initiative to do it. You don't need to live with this burden for one day longer. (Please refer to the abuse hotlines listed at the back of the book for help or information.)

● **BECOMING A CHANGE AGENT**

I once asked a group of teenagers, *Who are your role models?* One girl mentioned her mother. Another kid talked about his brother. And so on. One guy was noticeably silent. I asked him whom he admired. He said quietly, "I don't have a role model." All he wanted to do was make sure he didn't turn out like the people who should have been his role models. Unfortunately, this is the case with many teens. They come from messed-up families and may not have anyone to pattern their lives after.

The scary thing is that bad habits such as abuse, alcoholism, and welfare dependency are often passed down from parents to kids, and, as a result, dysfunctional families keep repeating themselves.

For example, if you have been abused as a child, the statistics show that you are likely to become an abuser as well. Sometimes these problems go back for generations. You may come from a long line of alcohol or drug abusers. You may come from a long line of dependency on welfare. Perhaps no one in your family has ever graduated from college or even high school.

The good news is that you can stop the cycle. Because you are proactive, you can stop these bad habits from being passed on. You can become a "change agent" and pass on good habits to future generations, starting with your own kids.

A tenacious young girl named Hilda shared with me how she has become a change agent in her family. Education was never valued in her home, and Hilda could see the consequences of it. Says Hilda: "My mom worked in a factory sewing, for very little money, and my father worked for slightly over minimum wage. I would hear them arguing over the money and how they were going to pay the rent. The highest grade my parents went to in school was the sixth grade."

As a young girl, Hilda vividly remembers her dad being unable to help her with her homework because he couldn't read English. This was hard on her.

When Hilda was in junior high, her family moved from California back to Mexico. Hilda soon realized that there were limited educational options for her there, so she asked if she could move back to the States to live with her aunt. For the next several years Hilda made great sacrifices to stay in school.

"It was hard to be crowded into a room with my cousin," she says, "and have to share a bed and work to pay them rent as well as go to school, but it was worth it.

"Even though I had a kid and got married in high school, I kept going to school and working toward finishing my education. I wanted to prove to my dad that no matter what, he was wrong when he said no one in our family could become a professional."

Hilda will soon be graduating with a university degree in finance. She wants her educational values to be passed on to her kids: "Today, every time I can, when I am not in school, I sit on the sofa and I read to my son. I am teaching him how to speak English and Spanish. I'm trying to save money for his education. One day he will need help with his homework, and I will be there to help him read it."



Whether I fail
or succeed shall be
no man's doing
but my own.
I am the force.

ELAINE MAXWELL



I interviewed another sixteen-year-old kid named Shane from the Midwest who is also becoming a change agent in his family. Shane lives with his parents and two siblings in a poor section of town called the projects. Although his parents are still together, they're constantly fighting and accusing each other of having affairs. His dad drives a truck and is never home. His mom smokes weed with his twelve-year-old sister. His older brother failed two years of high school and finally dropped out. At one point Shane had lost hope.

Just when he'd thought he had hit rock bottom, he got involved in a character development class at school (that taught the 7 Habits), and he began to see that there were things he could do to seize control of his life and create a future for himself.

Fortunately, Shane's grandfather owned the upstairs apartment where Shane's family lived, so Shane paid him one hundred dollars a month rent, and he moved to that apartment. He now has his own sanctuary and is able to block out everything he doesn't want to be part of on the floor below. Says Shane: "Things have gotten better now for me. I treat myself better and I show myself respect. My family doesn't have very much respect for themselves. Although nobody in my family has ever gone to college, I have been accepted to three different universities. Everything I do now is for my future. My future is going to be different. I know I won't sit down with my twelve-year-old daughter and smoke weed."

You have the power within you to rise above whatever may have been passed down to you. You may not have the option of moving upstairs to escape from it all as Shane did, but you can figuratively move upstairs in your mind. No matter how bad your predicament is, you can become a change agent and create a new life for yourself and whatever may follow.

● GROWING YOUR PROACTIVE MUSCLES

The following poem is a great summary of what it means to take responsibility for one's life and how a person can gradually move from a reactive to a proactive frame of mind.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN
FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

From *There's a Hole in My Sidewalk*
by Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in. It's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

You, too, can take responsibility for your life and stay away from potholes by flexing your proactive muscles. It's a "break-through" habit that will save your bacon more often than you could ever imagine!



CAN-DO

Being proactive really means two things. First, you take responsibility for your life. Second, you have a "can-do" attitude. Can-do is very different from "no-can-do." Just take a peek.

CAN-DO PEOPLE

NO-CAN-DO PEOPLE

Take initiative to make it happen

Wait for something to happen to them

Think about solutions and options

Think about problems and barriers

Act

Are acted upon

If you think can-do, and you're creative and persistent, it's amazing what you can accomplish. During college, I remember being told that to fulfill my language requirement, I would "have to" take a class that I had no interest in and was meaningless to me. Instead of taking this class, however, I decided to create my own. So I put together a list of books I would read and the assignments I would do and found a teacher to sponsor me. I then went to the dean of the school and presented my case. He bought into my idea and I completed my language requirement by taking my self-built course.

American aviator Elinor Smith once said, "It has long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

It's so true. To reach your goals in life, you must seize the initiative. If you're feeling bad about not being asked out on dates, don't just sit around and sulk, do something about it. Find ways to meet people. Be friendly and try smiling a lot. Ask *them* out. They may not know how great you are.

Don't wait for that perfect job to fall in your lap, go after it. Send out your résumé, network, volunteer to work for free.

If you're at a store and need assistance, don't wait for the salesperson to find you, you find them.

Some people mistake can-do for being pushy, aggressive, or obnoxious. Wrong. Can-do is courageous, persistent, and smart. Others think can-do people stretch the rules and make their own laws. Not so. Can-do thinkers are creative, enterprising, and extremely resourceful.

Pia, a work associate of mine, shared the following story. Although it took place a long time ago, the principle of can-do is the same:

I was a young journalist in a big city in Europe, working full-time as a reporter for United Press International. I was inexperienced and always nervous that I wouldn't be able to live up to the expectations of a tough and much older male press crew. The Beatles were coming to town, and to my amazement I was appointed to cover their stay. (My editor didn't know how big they were.) They were the hottest thing in Europe in those days. Girls fainted by the hundreds just by their presence, and here I was going to cover their press conference.

The press conference was exciting and I was elated to be there, but I realized that everyone would have the same story—I needed something more, something meaty, something that really would make front page. I just couldn't waste this opportunity. One by one, all the experienced reporters went back to their papers to report and the Beatles went up to their rooms. I stayed behind. I've got to figure out a way to get to these guys, I thought. And there's no time to lose.

I walked to the hotel lobby, picked up the house phone, and dialed the penthouse. I guessed they would be staying there. Their manager answered. "This is Pia Jensen from United Press International. I would like to come talk to the Beatles," I said confidently. (What did I have to lose?)

To my amazement he said, "Come on up."

Trembling and feeling like I had hit the jackpot, I entered the elevator and went up to the royal suites of the hotel. I was led into an area as big as an entire floor—and here they all sat, Ringo, Paul, John, and George. I gulped down my nervousness and inexperience and tried to act like a world-class reporter.

I spent the next two hours laughing, listening, talking, writing, and having the best time of my life. They treated me royally and gave me all the attention in the world!

My story was splashed on the front page of the leading newspaper in the country the next morning. And my more extended interviews with each of the Beatles appeared as a feature in most of the newspapers of the world within the next few days. When the Rolling Stones came to town after that—guess who they sent? Me, a young, female, inexperienced reporter. I used the same approach with them and it worked again. I soon realized what I could accomplish by being pleasantly persistent. A pattern was set in my mind, and I was convinced anything was possible. With this approach, I usually got the best story, and my news career took on a new dimension.

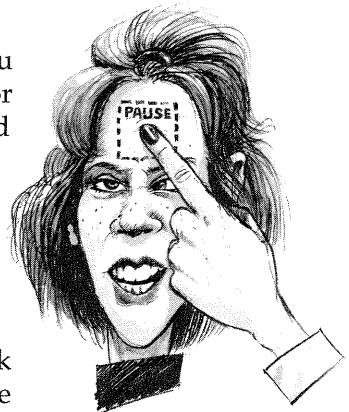
George Bernard Shaw, the English playwright, knew all about can-do. Listen to how he said it: “People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can’t find them, make them.”

Pay attention to how Denise was able to create the circumstances she wanted:

I know it’s strange for a teenager to want to work in a library, but I really wanted that job—more than I had ever wanted anything, but they weren’t hiring. I would go to the library every day and read, hang out with my friends, and just get away from home—what better place to work than someplace I already hung out at? Although I didn’t have a job there, I got to know the office staff, and I volunteered for special events and pretty soon I was one of the regulars. It paid off. When they finally had an opening, I was their first choice, and I found one of the best jobs I ever had.

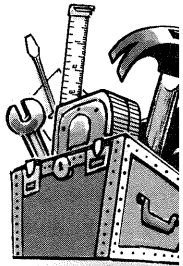
● JUST PUSH PAUSE

So when someone is rude to you, where do you get the power to resist being rude back? For starters, just push pause. Yep, just reach up and push the pause button to your life just as you would on your remote control. (If I remember right, the pause button is found somewhere in the middle of your forehead.) Sometimes life is moving so fast that we instantly react to everything out of sheer habit. If you can learn to pause, get control, and think about how you want to respond, you’ll make



smarter decisions. Yes, your childhood, your parents, your genes, and your environment *influence you* to act in certain ways, but they can't *make you* do anything. You are not determined but are free to choose.

While your life is on pause, open up your toolbox (the one that you were born with) and use your four human tools to help you decide what to do. Animals don't have these tools and that's why you're smarter than your dog. These tools are self-awareness, conscience, imagination, and willpower. You might want to call them your power tools.



SELF-AWARENESS: *I can stand apart from myself and observe my thoughts and actions.*



CONSCIENCE: *I can listen to my inner voice to know right from wrong.*



IMAGINATION: *I can envision new possibilities.*



WILLPOWER: *I have the power to choose.*

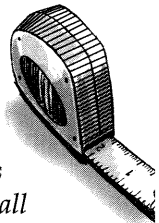
Let's illustrate these tools by imagining a teen named Rosa and her dog, Woof, as they go for a walk:

"Here, boy. What say we go outside," says Rosa as Woof leaps up and down, wagging his tail.

It's been a rough week for Rosa. Not only has she just broken up with her boyfriend, Eric, but she and her mom are barely on speaking terms.

As she strolls down the sidewalk, Rosa begins thinking about the past week. "You know what?" she muses to herself. "Breaking up with Eric has really been tough on me. It's probably why I've been so rude to Mom and taking out all my frustrations on her."

*You see what Rosa is doing? She's standing apart from herself and evaluating and measuring her actions. This process is called **self-awareness**. It's a tool that is native to all humanoids. By using her self-awareness, Rosa is able to recognize that she's allowing her breakup with Eric to affect her relationship with her mom. This observation is the first step to changing the way she has been treating her mother.*



Meanwhile, Woof sees a cat up ahead and instinctively takes off in a frenzy after it.

Although Woof is a loyal dog, he is completely unaware of himself. He doesn't even know that he is a dog. He is incapable of standing apart from himself and saying, "You know what? Ever since Suzy (his dog friend next door) moved, I've been taking out my anger on all the neighborhood cats."

As she continues her stroll, Rosa's thoughts begin to wander. She can hardly wait for the school concert tomorrow, when she will be performing a solo. Music is her life. Rosa imagines herself singing at the concert. She sees herself dazzling the audience, then bowing to receive a rousing standing ovation from all of her friends and teachers ... and, of course, all the cute guys.



*In this scene, Rosa is using another one of her human tools, **imagination**. It is a remarkable gift. It allows us to escape our present circumstances and create new possibilities in our heads. It gives us a chance to visualize our futures and dream up what we would like to become.*

While Rosa is imagining visions of grandeur, Woof is busily digging up the earth trying to get at a worm.

Woof's imagination is about as alive as a rock. Zilch. He can't think beyond the moment. He can't envision new possibilities. Can you imagine Woof thinking, "Someday, I'm going to make Lassie look like chopped liver"?



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"Hi, Rosa, whatcha doin'?" says Heide, pulling up alongside Rosa in her car.

"Oh, hello, Heide," replies a startled Rosa, as she brings her thoughts back to earth. "You surprised me. I'm just taking Woof for a walk."

"Hey, I heard about you and Eric. What a bummer."

Rosa is bothered by Heide's reference to Eric. It's none of her business. Although she is tempted to be curt with Heide, she knows Heide is new at school and desperately in need of friends. Rosa feels that being warm and friendly is the right thing to do.

"Yeah, breaking up with Eric has been tough. So how are things with you, Heide?"

Rosa has just used her human tool called *conscience*. A conscience is an "inner voice" that will always teach us right from wrong. Each of us has a conscience. And it will either grow or shrink depending upon whether or not we follow its promptings.



Meanwhile, Woof is relieving himself on Mr. Newman's newly painted white picket fence.

Woof has absolutely no moral sense of right and wrong. After all, he is just a dog. And dogs will do whatever their instincts compel them to do.

Rosa's walk with Woof comes to an end. As she opens the front door to her house, she hears her mom yell from the other room, "Rosa, just where have you been? I've been looking all over for you."

Rosa had already made up her mind to not lose her cool with her mom, so, despite wanting to yell back "Get out of my face," she responds calmly, "Just out for a walk with Woof, Mom ..."



"Woof! Woof! Come back here," screams Rosa as Woof darts out the open door to chase the local paper boy on his bike.

While Rosa is using her fourth human tool of *willpower* to control her anger, Woof, who has been told not to chase the paper boy, is overcome by his instincts. Willpower is the power to act. It says that we have the power to choose, to control our emotions, and to overcome our habits and instincts.

As you can see in the above example, we either use or fail to use our four human tools every day of our lives. The more we use them, the stronger they become and the more power we have to be proactive. However, if we fail to use them, we tend to *react* by instinct like a dog and not *act* by choice like a human.



● HUMAN TOOLS IN ACTION

Dermell Reed once told me how his proactive response to a family crisis changed his life forever. Dermell was raised in one of East Oakland's roughest neighborhoods, the fourth in a family of seven kids. No one in the Reed family had ever graduated from high school before, and Dermell wasn't about to be the first. Dermell was unsure about his future. His family was struggling. His street was filled with gangs and drug dealers. Could he ever get out? While in his house, on a still summer night before his senior year, Dermell heard a series of gunshots.

"It's an everyday thing to hear gunshots, and I didn't pay it no mind," said Dermell.

Suddenly one of his friends, who'd been shot in the leg, burst through the door and began hollering that Dermell's little brother, Kevin, had just been shot and killed in a drive-by shooting.

"I was upset and I was angry and I was hurt and I lost somebody I ain't never going to see again in my life," Dermell told me. "He was only thirteen years old. And he was shot over a petty little street scuffle. I can't explain how life went after that. It was just straight downhill for the whole family."

Dermell's natural reaction was to kill the murderer. After all, Dermell was raised in the streets and this was the only real way he could pay back his dead brother. The police were still trying to figure out who did it, but Dermell knew. On a muggy August night, a few weeks after Kevin's death, Dermell got hold of a .38 caliber revolver and went out in the streets to get revenge on Tony "Fat Tone" Davis, the crack dealer who had killed his brother.

"It was dark. Davis and his friends couldn't see me. There he was sitting, talking, laughing, having fun, and here I am within fifty feet of him, crouched behind a car with a loaded gun. I was sitting there thinking, 'I could just pull this little trigger and kill the guy who killed my brother.'"

Big decision.

At this point, Dermell pushed pause and caught hold of himself. Using his *imagination*, he thought about his past and his future. "I thought about my life in a matter of seconds. I weighed my options. I weighed the chances of me escaping, not getting caught, the police trying to figure out who I was. I thought about the times Kevin would come watch me play football. He always told me I was going to be a pro football player. I thought about my future, about going to college. About what I wanted to make of my life."

Pausing, Dermell listened to his *conscience*. "I'm holding a gun, I'm shaking, and I think the good side of me told me to get up and go home and go to school. If I took revenge, I'd be throwing away my future. I'd be no better than the guy who shot my brother."

Using raw *willpower*, Dermell, instead of giving in to his anger and throwing away his life, got up, walked home, and vowed that he would finish college for his dead brother.

Nine months later Reed had made the honor roll and was graduating from high school. People in his school couldn't believe it. Five years later, Reed had become a college football star and a college graduate.

Like Dermell, each of us will face an extraordinary challenge or two along the way, and we can *choose* whether to rise to those challenges or to be conquered by them.

Elaine Maxwell sums up the entire matter quite well: "Whether I fail or succeed shall be no man's doing but my own. I am the force; I can clear any obstacle before me or I can be lost in the maze. My choice, my responsibility; win or lose, only I hold the key to my destiny."

It's kind of like the old Volkswagen commercials. "On the road of life, there are passengers and there are drivers ... Drivers wanted!"

So let me ask you, are you in the driver's seat of your life or are you merely a passenger? Are you conducting your symphony or simply being played? Are you acting like a can of soda pop or a bottle of water?

After all that's been said and done, *the choice is yours!*



COMING ATTRACTIONS

In the chapter that follows, I'll take you on a ride you'll never forget called The Great Discovery. Come along. It's a thrill a minute!

BABY STEPS



1 The next time someone flips you off, give them the peace sign back.

2 Listen carefully to your words today. Count how many times you use reactive language, such as "You make me ..." "I have to ..." "Why can't they ..." "I can't ..."

Reactive language I use most:

.....

.....



3 Do something today that you have wanted to do but never dared. Leave your comfort zone and go for it. Ask someone out on a date, raise your hand in class, or join a team.

4 Write yourself a Post-it note: "I will not let"

.....
decide how I'm going to feel." Place it in your locker, on your mirror, or in your planner and refer to it often.

5 At the next party, don't just sit against the wall and wait for excitement to find you, you find it. Walk up and introduce yourself to someone new.



6 The next time you receive a grade that you think is unfair, don't blow it off or cry about it, make an appointment with the teacher to discuss it and then see what you can learn.

7 If you get in a fight with a parent or a friend, be the first to apologize.

BABY STEPS

8

Identify something in your circle of no control that you are always worrying about. Decide now to drop it.

Thing that I can't control that I always worry about:

.....
.....

9

Push the pause button before you react to someone who bumps into you in the hall, calls you a name, or cuts in line.



10

Use your tool of self-awareness right now by asking yourself, "What is my most unhealthy habit?" Make up your mind to do something about it.

Most unhealthy habit:

.....

What I'm going to do about it:

.....

.....

.....