THE SELF-EMPOWERMENT SEQUENCE

A Guidebook for
Solving Your Own Problems
and Actualizing Your Aspirations

This is a guidebook for learning how to empower yourself by solving your own problems. The method you will learn is called The Self-Empowerment Sequence. The best way to learn how to use it is to try it out on a real problem you currently have.

Each time you use The Self-Empowem1ent Sequence, you ·will understand yourself better, you -will identify and remove inner barriers to your own well-being, and you will discover new resources and options for moving toward your goals. The more you use it, the better you will get at applying it in a wide range of situations in your life.

Be aware, however, that this is not a substitute for counseling or professional consultation, and that whatever you decide to do is your own responsibility.

The Model: Seven Stages of Problem-Solving

Research indicates that people who are successful in dealing with issues and problems tend to go through a seven-stage sequence. At each stage there is a qualitative shift in the way they think about, talk about, or write about their problems. This sequence is easy to understand and to use, and yet it provides a powerful and effective way to solve problems and to develop self-understanding and self-esteem. What is required is a willingness to be honest with yourself and to explore fully and deeply your own answers to the questions presented by each stage of the Sequence. (A summary of the stages and questions is shown after page 9.)

The sequence of stages is cumulative; each stage builds on the previous one. It doesn't work to just skip to the later stages. Only by completing the work of each stage can one uncover the potential in the next stage.

How to Use this Guidebook.

On the following pages you will find a set of guiding questions based on the Self-Empowerment Sequence stages. You can use each question to start the reflective thinking required by each stage.1vfost people find that it helps to write about these questions, using a journal style. You might think of this as a personal, caring letter to yourself. Writing space is provided after each question; use as much or as little as you need. If you need more than is provided, just continue on the back of the next page.

Stage Zero: No Problems

There is certainly more to life than problems and problem-solving. 11uch of the time one is just doing things, or talking with people, or just relaxing. There are times, though, when one or n1ore problems are engaging much of one's attention and energy. Because they tend to be challenging and even stressful, we may be tempted to just not think about them. This is especially true for problems that evoke anxiety in us, or that frustrate us because initial efforts to deal with them have not worked.

It is sometimes useful to put problems aside temporarily, and to let our minds percolate in the background about them. Creative new approaches sometimes emerge this way. Some problems, too, really do just go away with time! On the other hand, pressing problems that are denied from awareness can get worse, or lead to additional problems. At some point one chooses to acknowledge them and to deal with them directly.

When you don't acknowledge a problem you are in <u>Stage Zero</u> of the Sequence. You move to <u>Stage One</u> simply by acknowledging the problem, especially when you talk about it or ·write about it.

Stage One: Genera; Problem Statements

You may bring one or more problems into <u>Stage One</u> by identifying them as problems. A problem is anything you care about or is important to you that is not the way you want it to be. This can include negative situations such as conflict with someone at home or work; it can also be a positive problem such as your desire to develop new skills or to complete an important project.

Use the space below to list one or more problems you might want to work on. The more important these problems are to you, the more significant will be the results of this Self-Empowerment Sequence.

Problems to Work On:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Prioritizing.

Now choose one of the problems you've listed to continue working on here. Consider which one is most important to you right now, and draw a circle around it.

Stage Two: Acknowledging my Ownership

To move into Stage Two of the Self-Empowerment Sequence you need to consider in what ways you "own" the problem you've selected to focus on. This involves spelling out how the problem is important to you, or what stake you have in the problem and its resolution.

The actual words one uses are indicative of how one is thinking about a problem. Each stage in the Self-Empowerment Sequence is characterized by a different set of words. For example, a problem statement such as *"Some managers just find fault with their employees' work."* is a Stage One statement. It describes a general situation, without referring explicitly to the speaker, or his/her stake in the situation.

A Stage Two statement explicitly refers to the speaker and describes his/her actual involvement in the situation: *"I really care about doing excellent work, but my manager is terribly critical of everything I do."*

Take some time now to explore your own stake in the problem situation you've selected to work on. Write about the problem using words which refer to **yourself,** describing how you own the problem or how it is particularly important to **you**.

My stake in this problem is that:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Stage Three: Expressing my Feelings

Once you have clarified your stake in the problem situation it becomes possible for you to focus on the feelings the problem evokes in you. This is an important step, because most problems do include a significant emotional component. By articulating and expressing the feelings you have, even in a journal like this, you free up energy that has been bound up in the problem, and you get a clearer perspective of your own reactions in the situation.

For example, having said, *"I really care about doing excellent work, but my manager is terribly critical of everything I do,"* the speaker may now become aware of the next part of the problem: "This makes me so nervous and upset that I start making mistakes. I get angry at her and at myself and can't concentrate well on the task."

Take some time now to consider what you feel in the problem situation. In the space below, restate your problem, now using words which actually name the **feelings** you experience when you are in that situation.

The problem, including my feelings, is…:

_____

_____

_____

Stage Four: Recognizing my Contribution

This can be a "break-through" in understanding and dealing with your problem. Having clarified your ownership of the problem, and the feelings it evokes in you, you are in a position to consider how you may be contributing to the problem, by either what you do or say, or what you don't do or say in the situation.

For example, remember the person who said that the manager's criticism *"...makes me so nervous and upset that I start making mistakes. I get angry at her and at myself and can't concentrate well on the task."* With this awareness s/he could now continue: *"I wonder if she is aware that her constant criticism only makes it harder for me to perform well. I guess I've been trying to live up to her high expectations by looking like I'm confident and know my job. So she probably has no idea of the effect she has on me. The more I try to look confident, the more she seems to criticize me..."*

This kind of awareness can uncover new resources and options for dealing with the problem-approaches which were literally not available from the previous perspective.

Continue now with your exploration of the problem situation you are working on by writing about your own contribution.

My own contribution to the problem situation may be that:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Stage Five: My Emerging Understanding

When you have worked through the preceding stages you may find that you now have a more useful and meaningful perspective of your problem. Your own stake in the situation may be clearer; your own feelings about it may be more available and yet less burdensome; your power to make the situation worse or better may have become clearer. You may also recognize this problem as fitting into a larger pattern of situations that you have a tendency to get yourself into.

This new awareness and understanding is very important. It provides the doorway to new options for dealing with the current problem situation, and for preventing such problems in the future. Take some time now to consider and write about any changes in your awareness and understanding of yourself in this type of situation.

In light of what I've written about this problem so far it now seems clear that:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Stage Six: New Options and Next Steps

With this new perspective and understanding you probably are aware of, or can easily think of one or more new approaches for dealing with your problem. It may be helpful to describe these new approaches in concrete terms as intentions, plans, or next steps. In the space below, write about what you will do, and when you will do it.

What I will do/say (or stop doing/saying): _____When_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Stage Seven: Actual Resolution

You now have a plan for dealing with the problem situation; your next step is to carry it out. When you have done so, you may want to complete the last part of this guidebook by describing what you did and what the outcome was.

Solving your own problems is a continuing learning process. Your ability to deal with future problem-solving situations may be enhanced by reflecting upon how you actually carried out your plans and intentions and what was resolved. You can also enjoy the satisfaction of closure and completion.

> Here is what I actually did/said, and how the situation has been resolved:
>
> _____
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> _____
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> _____
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> _____
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> _____
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> _____
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> _____

Now that you have used this process you have a basic understanding of how it works. You may want to use it again to work through one of the other problem topics you identified on page 3. You may also want to use it with other problems that will emerge in the future. In either case, you don't have to go through all the explanations in this booklet again. The following short form summarizes the seven stages of The Self-Empowerment Sequence, and the questions that need to be addressed at each stage.

Guideline Questions for Solving Your Own Problems

1. General Problem Statement. What is the problem I want to work on right now?

2. Acknowledging My Ownership. What is my own stake in the situation; how is it important to me; in what ways do I own it?

3 Expressing My Feelings. What are the feelings this evokes in me; what is my inner emotional response to the situation?

4. Recognizing My Contribution. In what ways do I contribute to creating, maintaining, or making the problem worse, by what I say/do or don't say/do?

5. My Emerging Understanding. As I respond to these questions/ what new awareness and understanding is emerging for me about myself and my behavior patterns in this type of situation?

6. New Options and Next Steps, what will I do; how will my inner experience and outer behavior change in the situation?

7. **Resolution.** What I actually did/said/ and how the situation has been resolved:

RESOURCES
For Reference and Further Reading

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The Self-Empowerment Sequence was developed by Saul Eisen. It is based on the research of Carl Rogers and Ferdinand van der Veen, as well as Dr. Eisen's own teaching and consulting experience. Dr. van der Veen developed and validated the Problem-Expression Scale, which is adapted with his permission as the basis for the Self-Empowern.1ent Sequence.

Dr. Eisen provides executive coaching and conducts in-house programs to improve the effectiveness of whole teams and organizations.

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