

Messages

Messages:
Self Help Through Popular Culture

By

Michael Brody and Lawrence Rubin

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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For Shelley, David , Jonathan, James, and Barbara
—MB

For Randi, Zach, and Rebecca
—LR

“The Medium is the Message”
—Marshall McLuhan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	xi
Michael Brody	
Introduction	xv
Lawrence Rubin	
Chapter One.....	1
Safety and Security	
Chapter Two	13
Identity	
Chapter Three	25
Family	
Chapter Four.....	37
Relationships	
Chapter Five	47
Work	
Chapter Six	59
Money	
Chapter Seven.....	71
Culture	
Chapter Eight.....	83
Education	

Chapter Nine.....	95
Technology	
Chapter Ten	107
Health	
Chapter Eleven	119
Mortality	
Index of Quotes and Taglines.....	131

PREFACE

The quotes and catchphrases used in this book are not meant to represent a complete list. At the same time, the topics chosen for self-help are not a perfect inventory. It is the hope of the authors that readers will develop their own insights for successful living through their own experiences with and interpretations of popular culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for this book came from my “teachers” Lenore Terr, Kathryn Montgomery, and Larry Mintz. I am extremely grateful for the editing help and many suggestions I received from David Brody. It was also my good fortune to have Larry Rubin as a co-author, whose patience and good humor are assets for any project. Most importantly, this book could not have been written without the support and judgment of my wife, Shelley.

—Dr. Brody

I think it was those dreamy weekend mornings in front of the television of my childhood that inspired me to co-author this book... although I did not know it at the time. Popular culture has formed the fabric of my interests since I can remember and remains so today. Movies, television, music, magazines, the Net — you name it. I acknowledge all things popular, but even more so, I thank my parents Esther and Herb, who indulged my then-burgeoning pop culture interests and obsessions; my wife Randi and my two children, Zachary and Rebecca, who keep it all fresh, both past and present; and finally to Mike Brody, my fellow pop culturalist, who graciously invited me to share this adventure with him.

—Dr. Rubin

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL BRODY

In my clinical practice and in my teaching, references to movies, TV, and music serve as an excellent guide to understanding the world. “Love means never having to say you’re sorry,” from the film, *Love Story*, can underscore a number of relationship problems, while *Batman* can better illustrate psychic trauma than trying to decipher CAT-scan studies of the brain.

I developed this connection to popular culture as a child while sitting in the palace-like movie theatres of yesteryear. In these remarkable spaces I was often by myself, but never without my tasty Peanut Chews. I was seeking not only entertainment but useful information as I stared at the screen in wonderment. I started these journeys at a young age when my grandmother would take me to see John Garfield, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis. I have a vague recollection of her striking some type of deal with the guy at the ticket counter, who was supposedly a good friend of one of her cousins. Most of these films were way over my head, with themes of adultery, murder, and betrayal, Film Noir, which were made darker and even more incomprehensible to my six year-old psyche by the constant commentary of my nana. “In real life, the blonde up there on the screen just had an affair with Errol Flynn; that’s the actress that really murdered her sister-in-law; he doesn’t know that’s not his child.” Affairs, rejection, paternity; what was she talking about?

While not really understanding all the “adult” stuff, I did learn from the movies that there was an alternate universe, different than the strange one I lived in. I didn’t care that the grass was always greener on the large screen, after all, where I lived we had no grass. And, for that matter, I never saw “The Tree” that supposedly grew in my Brooklyn. The actors were beautiful and they didn’t scream when they spoke. They went to night clubs and concerts and when they smoked it didn’t cause me to cough. The people on the screen filled a parental void.

The visual images of faraway places, dinner parties, and tough guys loyal to their friends held my interest and nourished my future plans. I had enough of just the sound from the gigantic RCA radio in our “living room.” I tried to imagine the Lone Ranger riding on his great horse Silver, but I kept putting him on my street with the deli and newsstand. I loved Captain Midnight, Buster Brown, and The Green Hornet, but they only played to my auditory sense.

The pictures in the Golden Age comics that I consumed were a help, especially my favorite, Batman. While he was a superhero without super powers, he had a huge house, a laboratory, and a cool secret identity as Bruce Wayne. I didn’t know what a “playboy” was, but Bruce sure did have a lot of stuff. More importantly, through effort and persistence, he built up his mind and body to fight crime. Hard work rewarded was a great lesson for an eleven year old. But the caped crusader was just a simple colored drawing, which even my friend Seymour could copy. The same with the books I took out of the Brownsville Children’s Library, like *Treasure Island*, *Robin Hood*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. They contained mystery, escape, and inspiration, but they were still pages of words. The pictures in my mind of pirates and knights weren’t as vivid as those on the Loew’s big screen.

Television changed everything. It didn’t matter that the puppets looked like rags (when you saw them in person, as I did when I went to see *Howdy Doody* live) or that the white male hosts seemed depressed, there were now pictures shown in black and white, only a few feet from where you were sitting. Animals, detectives, and Superman, even though only 10 inches tall, could visit your home. The cowboy shows were really cannibalized versions of the same good guys and bad guys we saw at the movies, as were the cartoons. Nothing new needed to be created for us kids, as we loved repetition and familiarity. When a show was fresh and new we truly appreciated it. Since this was the era of “Duck and Cover,” sci-fi dramas with mad scientists and space ships like *Captain Video* and *Flash Gordon* were the rage. Sci-fi, now a staple of TV, sparked a passion in me for real science.

As I grew into adolescence, my new media mentors were James Dean and Elvis. Rock and roll music seemed to harmonize with my hormones and validate some of my impure thoughts. As a young adult, still a movie fan, I learned about romance, work, and evil from *Giant*, *The Graduate*, and

Where the Boys Are. Even my choice of a career in child psychiatry was influenced by *The Bad Seed*, *Three Faces of Eve* and *David and Lisa*.

Having my own kids allowed me to pass down the education I received from popular culture, as discussions about the lessons learned from various TV shows and films became a regular follow-up to any shared media. *Mad Max* and *What's Up, Doc?* as well as *Grease* seemed to contain many truths about loyalty, honesty, courage, and even academics.

When I began my profession, I often used my interest in popular culture to both connect to and understand the workings of my clients' minds. I have used popular culture as a teaching device, since for most people what appears on a screen is real world information. Allusions to popular culture clarify and instruct. I would use *The Wonder Years* and *Beverly Hills 90210* to discuss adolescence with high schoolers and *E.T.* and *Bambi* to describe separation fears to nursery-school teachers. I have even used the Cookie Monster to demonstrate Freud's concept of the oral stage of development. Superheroes seem to appear with regularity in my patients' dreams and associations.

Because popular culture had such an impact on me, and the fact that kids spend upwards of 4-5 hours a day looking at screens, I became an advocate for a sensitive children's media helping to pass federal legislation like the COPPA (Children's On-line Privacy and Protection Act) and the Children's Educational Television Act of 1996.

Popular culture does not just impact children; all of us are what we read, listen to, and watch. Popular culture through a 24/7 media pervades our lives with millions of electronic images and accompanying sound. It not only defines and disseminates the norms of behavior (think fashion, humor, and dance), but also delineates the very boundaries of both culture and society. What we watch and how we watch reveals our very identities and place in society. What we all enjoy as entertainment says something about our psychology and what we value.

As a psychiatrist, I have been fortunate to vicariously live many different lives, accumulating a reservoir of diverse and helpful experiences. It is my goal with *Messages* to share what I have learned from both my clinical work and popular culture. It is my belief that popular culture, like psychology, not only creates changes in our society and laws through movies, books, television, and music, but also promotes individual

transformations. It is freeing for me to step out of my therapist's "cone-of-silence" interpretations about one's unconscious and transferences to give **Direct Advice**, providing a compass to the human condition through the ever-intriguing lens of popular culture.

INTRODUCTION

LAWRENCE RUBIN

It is not uncommon for a therapist to query a client regarding his or her earliest memory, as such might provide valuable insights for self-understanding. As I organized my thoughts for this volume, I tried to recall my earliest “popular culture” memory. Was it the Beatles album my mother grudgingly bought for me, when the 45 rpm of *A Hard Day’s Night* just wouldn’t do? Was it the Lionel trains that I passively watched my older brother operate in front of me while I was banished to the cheap seats? Or, was it the Steif monkey hand puppet named Jocko that I received for my fourth birthday party (who sleeps eternally in my bedroom closet in a Stride Rite shoe box)?

Actually, and as best as I can recall, it is the song *Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini* by Brian Hyland, which dates to my then burgeoning awareness of the inescapable sights, sounds, objects and people of the popular culture of my youth. In retrospect, the litany of my interests, possessions, passions, and subsequent low-brow collecting obsessions reads like the confessions of a baby boomer pop culture junkie; which unashamedly it is.

To name a few, and in semi chronological order spanning almost five decades up to and including the present: Beatles records, later albums; a twice-built (thanks to my brother) five-foot highly detailed and meticulously hand painted (a feat for an ADHD child) multi-stage replica of the Saturn-5 rocket; baseball cards (oh, and did I have good ones — Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, and Roberto Clemente, to name a few); plastic Aurora models of the MGM monsters (Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolfman); beer cans (including the entire, yes entire 21-can *Schmidt’s Outdoor Collection*, Melamine (aka Melmac) dishes, including a pristine set of Russell Wright Dinnerware; Chuck Taylor high-top sneakers (my collection has dwindled from 87 to the current 17 pairs); Schwinn 5-speed Stingray Fastback bicycles (with a long and very dangerous crotch level gear shifter-ride); Superhero comic books (mostly the ones highlighting

deep psychological themes, of course), rich golden Heywood-Wakefield Mid-Century Modern office and home furniture; paint-by-number “artwork” (if you can call it that, and many refuse to); and an unrelenting obsession to own yet another curvaceous Volvo 1800 sports car, you know, the one Roger Moore drove in the 1960s television show, *The Saint!*

I’ve long since and very sadly sold off my baseball cards; and my precious monster models, Saturn 5 rockets, and comic books are slowly decomposing in some faraway landfill, along with the childhood memories and possessions of a legion of other children. However, I still wear “Cons”, love superheroes, ride around the neighborhood on my Stingray, work out of a paneled office adorned with paint-by-number pictures, eagerly await the latest installment of *24*, the *Family Guy*, and the newest *Star Trek* movie, and type out this introduction while seated at my Heywood-Wakefield Kneehole desk.

For me, the stuff of popular culture is clearly, at least in part, about a romanticized tie to my past. But it still pervades every aspect of my current life. While I may not as avidly collect objects of popular culture, I am always on the lookout for connections between vocation and avocation; in my case, psychology and popular culture; not so much in object, as in word and thought. I have written scholarly articles for both mainstream psychology and popular culture journals, taken therapists on a how-to adventure of bringing popular culture into their clinical work through a series of books, and travel here and there discussing superheroes to anyone who will listen as well as those interested in bringing these colorful and powerful figures into their therapeutic work.

In my actual clinical work, popular culture is never far away. It is not uncommon for a client to reflect on a movie scene, song lyric, or television show episode that poignantly captures a sentiment, focuses a memory, or highlights a conflict with which they are struggling. Similarly, I may ask a client if they have seen this or that movie, heard a particular song, or read a specific book that I believe addresses a concern that they are currently addressing. While popular culture is clearly the context of our shared experience, we are able to borrow from it to do the important and often difficult work of therapeutic change.

Interestingly, and perhaps prophetically, the stuff of my scholarly and clinical work often revolves around and includes tangible pop culture

objects such as pharmaceutical advertising merchandise, superhero action figures, and comics, as well as lava lamps, vintage radios, Lincoln Logs, and Teen/Soap Opera magazines from the 1950s and 1960s. I have, in many ways, come full circle. And the center of that circle seems to be, as it always seems to have been... popular culture.

There is much popular culture has taught me about society, life, and myself. It is not now, nor has it ever been, for me as it is for others, a base and corrupting influence in my life, but instead an important source of identity. I would like to share what popular culture has taught me with the readers of this book. Toward this end, Mike and I have pooled our collective passions, playfulness, love of all things popular, and wisdom gleaned over 60 years of combined clinical practice and (well) over a hundred years of living and breathing popular culture, in hopes of offering humble wisdoms to you.

CHAPTER ONE

SAFETY AND SECURITY

We all want to feel secure. However, the ever changing real world makes it impossible to feel totally SAFE.

“Nobody’s Perfect!”

—*Some Like it Hot*, 1959

Joey E. Brown as Osgood Fielding III gives this answer to Jack Lemmon as Jerry/Daphne after Jerry/Daphne tells him that he is not a woman, but a man.

Message: Not being critical helps one to feel secure and have peace of mind.

We are human and make mistakes. But we all have the capability to make bad situations worse by second guessing and harboring regrets. Evaluating past experiences can be helpful, but not when the result points a harsh finger at our own blunders. There are so many opportunities to penalize ourselves — not sleeping enough, not exercising, not enjoying ourselves — but the number one punishment is SELF CRITICISM. We are often too severe. Marge was often berated as a child for not following “house rules.” Now, as an adult she obsesses about every decision, always feeling that she is doing the “wrong” thing.

Advice: Harsh self criticism often leads to insecurity.

Question: Do you really benefit from self-flagellation?

“Rosebud!”
—*Citizen Kane*, 1941

Charles Foster Kane, played by Orson Welles, utters this dying word, referring to his lost treasured childhood sled.

Message: We all yearn for a safe, innocent, protected childhood.

Stability in childhood leads to a strong foundation for later life. It is in these early stages of life that we gain a sense of trust in the world. This TRUST extends to not only others but to ourselves. Too many losses (death, illness, and divorce) and separations shatter one’s faith in people, the future, and ourselves. Because of childhood tragedies, we as adults attempt to build a false sense of security and well-being, based on status and money.

Advice: Friends, creativity, and self-satisfaction, rather than material objects, are the cornerstones to having a basic trust in ourselves and in our lives.

Question: What kind of images can bring you to a place of safety and security?

“Fasten Your Seat Belts, This is Going to be a Bumpy Night”
—*All About Eve*, 1950

After a bit too much alcohol, Bette Davis as Margo Channing warns “her friends” that she is about to become very, very “nasty”.

Message: Life is constantly changing and we are all subject to the pushes and pulls of forces, both internal and external.

There is absolutely no certainty in life. While it is wise to plan, health, accidents, the weather, and even good fortune alter everything. We all exist in a dynamic context. Not only do people and world events impact on our lives, but our very bodies are always vulnerable. As we age we may become less muscular, but wiser. Change brings loss but also gain. Robert was “miserable” that his business was now so stable, that it could “run” without him. His success created a loss of purpose, but also a freedom to get involved in other projects that interested him.

Advice: Don’t dwell on the unfairness of change. Use your energy to adapt to it.

Question: What big changes occurred in your life in the past year and how were you able to respond effectively?

“As God is My Witness, I’ll Never Go Hungry Again”
—*Gone with the Wind*, 1939

Reaching a low point in her life, Vivian Leigh as Scarlett O’Hara makes this bold assertion.

Message: Beyond having “more”, it is often unclear as to what financial security really means.

Financial well-being usually indicates being out of debt, having some emergency cash and savings invested for your kid’s education and your retirement. For some there is a “magic number” that signifies that you have reached “Money Nirvana,” where there is no more worry about money. You now have the ability to do what you want, when you want to, and with whom you want. This “number” can be translated into a sense of freedom. This is a great motivation to help you save, as it moves using your investments from the distant retirement future, to a nearer liberated present. Your nest egg has the power to represent an unconstrained “present” rather than just a pile of money for some far-off old age that might not, in fact, be the golden years.

Advice: Save enough to guarantee some financial freedom, even for the short term, rather than for the end of life.

Question: What is your “number?”

“Is it Safe?”

—*Marathon Man*, 1976

Trying to determine if his wartime trove of diamonds is secure, Laurence Olivier as Nazi Dr. Szell uses dental torture on Dustin Hoffman, who plays Thomas Levy.

Message: There are only a number of variables we can control to promote our physical and psychological well-being.

While it is true that wearing a seat belt, not smoking, and having regular medical check-ups do help with personal safety, too much energy can be otherwise misplaced in attempts to bring us even greater piece of mind. Money provides security, but when overwork excludes family life, friends, and leisure, it is counter-productive. Keeping firearms in the home to protect family can literally backfire on us fatally, unnecessary medical tests bring more anxiety than positive results, and even exercise routines and health food regimens can cause injury. Attempts to manage the behavior of others also create wear and tear on our own minds and bodies.

Advice: Be careful about being careful. Too much of a good thing may not be good.

Question: If I could create a shortlist of behaviors that would ensure health and safety, what would be on that list?

“We are Two Wild and Crazy Guys”
—*Saturday Night Live*

Catch-phrase of the famed TV show in which Steve Martin and Dan Aykroyd perform as clueless Czech playboys.

Message: Spoof, satire, and silliness are a healthy antidote to the seriousness of life.

We never seem to be in short supply of things to worry about. To name a few — bills, kids, our health, terrorism, gasoline prices, war, crooked politicians, and scandals, both at home and abroad. Woody Allen once said that he worries when there is nothing to worry about. While anxiety is hard wired into the machinery of our brains and bodies, worrying is our own construction. We decide when, where, and how much to worry, as well as what to worry about. And some of us are masters of the painful art of rumination, which seems to keep us up at night, drives us to the refrigerator or worse, and erodes our self-confidence and both physical and mental health. Stoicism and calm seem easy enough to accomplish, but in reality take practice. Looking at the lighter side, as the *National Lampoon* often does, gives us perspective and distance, and most importantly, the chance to laugh... even at serious things. Laughter is good. Laughter is necessary. Laughter grounds us and enhances our sense of security.

Advice: Seek out the lighter side in life. A comedy, a bad joke, a funny friend. Laughter helps us breath.

Question: Remember the last time you laughed... really laughed?

“Say the Secret Word”
—Groucho Marx

On the wildly popular and often risqué 1950s television game show, *You Bet Your Life*, contestants won money and prizes if they mentioned a word augered by a duck, which magically appeared from above.

Message: Safety and security are not commodities to be won on a game show. They must be earned.

We are led to believe by politicians, drug manufacturers, and new age gurus that well-being can be had by voting for the right person, taking the right pill, or attending the right church. Line up behind the right cause, purchase the right car, and eat the right foods, and both our bodies and spirit will join a greater cosmic energy resulting in that ever-elusive peace of mind. But, follow-the-leader is a childhood game in which we learn that if we do not do as we are told, an ill fate will befall us. While we may not be absolute masters of our own fates, we certainly have a greater capacity for control and change than we often give ourselves credit for. Setting attainable goals, mapping out steps to reach them, gathering a support team and moving forward are far more important, and in the end, meaningful than waiting for a sign, swallowing a pill, or waiting for Godot.

Advice: Forget the magical thinking of childhood that good things come to those who wait, and take action, now!

Question: What have I been waiting for and why... what keeps me from going after it?

“Danger, Will Robinson”

—Robot from TV show *Lost in Space*, 1965-68

The helpful friendly Robot (Bob May) warns the Robinson son, young Will, played by Billy Mummy, of an outside threat to the Robinson family.

Message: While there are always forces that threaten our security and safety, the real enemy is our fear and inability to conquer it.

Just as we eagerly anticipate joyful events and plan for rewarding experiences, we also anticipate and often dread that over which we believe we have no control or that can in some way harm us. We avoid studying for exams for fear of failure, deny our feelings as we believe that they will go unacknowledged, resist challenges because we are convinced that they are outside of our capabilities, and look over our shoulder for something gaining on us. As a result, we remain inert, unmoving, and in a constant state of fear, and confuse this with a sense of safety and security. In actuality, we stop growing, and start hiding from life. Our fears become our greatest enemies, when in reality they can be our greatest allies, by providing useful clues for conquering them.

Advice: Fear is only half of the equation, not all of it. You have succeeded in the past, if even in a small way, and can do so again.

Question: Of the ten things I am most afraid of, how many of these can really harm me, and what do I need to do to begin to overcome them?

“Houston, We Have a Problem”
—Crew of Apollo 13

Upon discovering a potentially life-threatening mechanical problem, the astronauts reached out across the blackness of space to alert Mission Control for guidance.

Message: It is important to ask for help.

The history of humanity is storied by solitary heroes; rugged individualists who overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles in order to achieve their goal. From ancient mythologies in which mere mortals dared to oppose the gods, to the more contemporary adventures of the frontiersmen, superheroes, and astronauts, we have learned to admire him or her who dares to defy all odds... on their own. The implicit message in each of these tales is that it is far more heroic to go it alone than to reach out for help, as it somehow diminishes us. However, the true hero is the one who recognizes their limitations and who reaches out beyond themselves to the helping hand of another.

Advice: Create a safety net for yourself by reaching out to trusted friends in times of need. Seek their strength.

Question: Who can I count on in a pinch?

“Let’s Be Careful Out There”
—*Hill Street Blues*, 1981-1987

At the end of the morning briefing, Sgt. Phil Esterhaus (Michael Conrad) of this television police drama offers these words of caution to the beat cops before they hit the mean streets.

Message: The world is a dangerous place, and it’s easy, but not necessarily rewarding, to hide from it.

Some of us find security and safety in our homes; some of us do so in a bottle. Still others cleave to relationships, rituals, or possessions as if oxygen. As children, we intuitively know that a blanket, threadbare stuffed friend, or pacifier can get us through the night; and when these fail, there is always the warmth of our parents’ bed. But for others, the world has indeed been a dangerous, scary, and painful place in which relationships have failed, accidents have happened, and losses have been very real. Retreating from new encounters and challenges seems to make sense. At least we won’t be hurt if we hide. But in the hiding, avoidance, and retreat, we lessen, if not make impossible, the chance to learn, grow, and live a fuller life.

Advice: Challenges are just that... there for the trying. Try one!

Question: What is the worst that could happen if I tried and failed, and what is the best that could happen if I tried and succeeded?

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY

Who we are is defined not only by how others see us, but also by how we see ourselves. Identity reflects both our inner-self and outer-personality.

“I Am What I Am”
—Popeye

After his victories, Popeye, the self-effacing spinach-gulping cartoon hero, humbly proclaims, “I am what I am”, and in doing so, asserts the singular truth of his simple, yet profound sense of self.

Message: While we may think of ourselves as complex individuals, who we really are at the core can be more simply understood, expressed, and valued.

In the course of our daily lives, we interact with many people: friends, co-workers, relatives, and intimates. Each of these people defines us somewhat differently, depending on shared history and the context of the relationship—work, play, home, church. In turn, we may act differently depending on who we are with, the demands of the situation, and the expectations placed upon us as well as those we place upon ourselves. At times we may wonder, “who am I really”, as our definition of “I” changes. It becomes that much more important to develop a clear sense of who we truly are, at the core... when we are alone.

Advice: Identify and affirm the most important and positive aspects of your own sense of self.

Question: “What qualities of my personality do I most value?”

“Thanks for the Memories”
—Bob Hope

Theme Song of Comedian/Actor/Humanitarian, Bob Hope

Message: We should be thankful for our memories because they form the very fabric of our being.

Like our need to connect with others, who we are, our identity, is preconscious. It's close to our awareness, but we don't think about it all the time. Our race, gender, occupation, nationality, and religion are all important external objective labels, but our memories are the real internal markers. We are the sum of our memories. Memory gives stability to who we are and is the foundation of our identity. Memories are not just images and words, but emotions. They are the story of our past and the preamble to our futures.

Advice: Use the power of your memories to motivate, guide, and understand the directions of your life.

Question: While thinking of a recent memory what emotions do you feel?

“Just When I Thought I Was Out, They Pull Me Back In”
—*The Godfather: Part III*, 1990

Al Pacino as Michael Corleone laments the fact that he can't escape the family business, even though he tries.

Message: It is almost impossible to escape the values and obligations of our past selves.

Our identity is made up of a number of factors: talents, experiences, memories, sublimations (activities), defenses (how we handle anxiety), and significant identifications (models). It also is made up of INTROJECTS – messages from parental and authority figures, dictating how we should feel and act. These commands are hard wired, embedded in our minds and difficult to eliminate. They are the “shoulds” and the “oughts.” They can be helpful, as well as destructive. While often the origin of morality, these rules are also the creators of guilt. Let's think of the example of Betty, the oldest of three children who was always “mother's helper,” a role she compulsively plays out. As an adult with friends and family, Betty often takes time and energy away from her own desires and needs.

Advice: Be aware that introjects exist that can be harmful to you.

Question: Which of your introjects help, and which ones hurt you?

“It’s Not Who You Are Underneath, It’s What You Do that Defines You”
—*Batman Begins*, 2005

Katie Holmes as Rachel Dawes to Christian Bale as Bruce Wayne/Batman in *Batman Begins*.

Message: While Bruce says that he wants to do good deeds, all Rachel sees is him acting as a foolish playboy jumping in fountains with attractive models. She does not know he is Batman.

Our identity is not only based on inner subjective constructs, but on how we behave. Our actions are more telling than the image we wish to portray. How we act can become a constant and develop into a personality. As we walk the walk, not just talk the talk, our personality becomes more fixed. What we do becomes part of us. The nature of our work and who we associate with often defines us.

Advice: Although we live in our heads, be mindful of how others may perceive us through our behavior. Personality is an external concept.

Question: What is the main difference between what you think of yourself and how you act?

“Wherever You Go, That’s Where You Will Be”
—*The Adventures of Buckaroo Bonzai Across the Fifth Dimension*, 1984

Peter Weller as Buckaroo Bonzai tries to help Ellen Barkin as Penney Priddy with “Zen like” philosophy in a bizarre futuristic tale.

Message: It doesn’t matter where you go, you take yourself with you.

Often we look for quick external solutions to our problems. Geography is one such fast fix. We forget the stability of our self and the sturdiness of our psychological make-up. A change in a place or a person will not always alter basic problems. A fresh start, new job, a different wife, or a new school may not shed light on why things didn’t work out. We heal nothing and are doomed to continue our destructive routines. This enduring repetitive cycle often becomes an unexamined unsatisfactory life.

Advice: As difficult as it is, put YOURSELF in the mix as to why things go wrong, before looking at externals. Look inward.

Question: Where do you look when things go wrong?

“Swim, Swim, Swim; Just Keep Swimming”
—*Finding Nemo*, 2003

Struggling with the disability of short-term memory impairment and on her own in a vast ocean wilderness, Dory (Ellen DeGeneres) the resilient, optimistic little fish and guardian of the film’s protagonist, Nemo, offers a morsel of survival wisdom.

Message: Life takes work and a commitment to moving forward.

Moving forward in spite of fear and obstacles provides us the opportunity for growth, self awareness and even change of self. If life is like an ocean, there will be tides and currents that propel us forward as well as those that push against us. There will be obstacles both small and great, as well as dangers lurking in the depths. If we become complacent or seek solace and comfort in familiarity, barnacles may attach themselves to us and weigh us down. In addition, we may lose sight of who we can become. The ocean of life is a large and often uncharted place. It is also a sea of opportunity.

Advice: Identify immediate and long-term obstacles in your course, and chart a path by establishing short and long-term goals at work, home, and play. We are a sum total of our risks, failures... and successes!

Question: What is the last obstacle I overcame, how did I do it, and how did it make me feel about myself?

“Who Was That Masked Man?”

—*The Lone Ranger*, 1933-1953 (Radio), 1949-1957 (TV)

Usually uttered by a bystander asking about the true identity of the Lone Ranger at the end of each episode of either the radio or television show.

Message: We often have to wear public masks to shield us and those close to us from harm.

Because we are buried in a constant blitz of messages and requests, it is often necessary for our own sanity to filter, tune out, and have “private time.” Labels that cling to us are often filled with obligations and expectations. Our identities need separation from the world. This is most difficult in our 24/7 society where the blurring of our public and private lives become who we are. We have to not only shut down our cell phones and Blackberries, but also some of our inner obsessions and worries to get to our real self.

Advice: Allocate the time and space to reach that sacred private solitude away from the world.

Question: What do you do to nurture your private self?

“Famous for Being Famous”

This “Paris Hilton Rule” describes in a pejorative manner “celebrities” without any talent or ability, except for being seen and heard in all media outlets.

Message: Fame is fleeting, celebrity ephemeral, and popularity unpredictable. Only our inner core remains stable.

It can be argued that there is no “I” in “self”. Our definition of self does not exist in a vacuum. We rely on others to evaluate us, and in turn build our self-concept in a public sphere, turning to others to determine our worth. It is important for many of us to be regarded positively by peers, family, and intimates, so much so that in the absence of validation and compliments, we may evaluate ourselves poorly... in spite of real accomplishments and evidence of self worth. As a result, we may fall into the trap of equating self-worth with outward and observable proof, rather than private and personal qualities such as honesty, morality, diligence, and responsibility.

Advice: While we like to be regarded highly by others, reliance only upon external evaluation can lead to a shaky self-concept.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, rate your reliance on others from 1 (I do not need others to tell me how important I am) to 5 (I very much need others to tell me how important I am), and determine how satisfied you are with your response.

You Got Mail

—Advertising Phrase of AOL (America Online)

Touting its revolutionary and constantly evolving e-mail capability, Time-Warner's AOL promises that you will always be in touch and connected... anywhere in the world (as long as you have their Internet connectivity).

Message: As Descartes might have interpreted it, "I send and receive e-mail, therefore I am."

In our hyper-technological era, ever-expanding telecom businesses compete for market share through seductive advertising that targets children, teens, and families. "Who's in your fave-five file?" asks T-Mobile. Cell phones have mind-numbing call, texting, and Internet capabilities, all designed to keep us in touch. And in touch we have become, to the point of an endless societal preoccupation with sending and receiving e-mail and text messages, which can be stored on our phone, sent home to our computer, and logged onto our MySpace account for all to see. It is not uncommon to see groups of teens walking side-by-side, each on their cell phone talking to someone else. Self becomes diffused, and self-importance is evaluated based on how connected we are, how many text or e-mail messages we have waiting in our in-box.

Advice: You are more than the number of messages you have in your in-box and how many friends you have on Facebook. Who we are is far more than the sum total of our e-scorecard.

Question: Ask yourself, "How does the flood of e-mails I send and receive really enhance my relationships and sense of who I am?" If I do not receive e-mails, do I still exist, and am I still important?

“One Small Step”
—Astronaut Neil Armstrong

“This is one small step for man, and one giant leap for mankind”, was heard around the world as the lunar pioneer stepped onto the surface of the moon and into history on July 21, 1969.

Message: Seemingly small accomplishments may indeed represent large personal gains.

We live in a society that values achievement, competition, and success. The more we do, the faster we do it and the more we accrue in terms of money and material goods, the better we feel about ourselves. This unfortunately defines who we are. At least, that seems to be the American way. If an achievement doesn't translate into something tangible, or is not immediately obvious to others around us, we may feel diminished. More, however, is not always better. It is as important to be able to set, move toward, and accomplish self-satisfying small goals.

Advice: Achievement, success, and self-worth can be elusive if one focuses on big and long-term goals.

Question: What accomplishments, large and small, of the past week have added to your sense of self?

CHAPTER THREE

FAMILY

Families are complicated systems. They are no longer Ozzie and Harriet, the father, mother, and 2.5 children.

“I Have a Dream”
—Martin Luther King

Spoken from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963, King inspired generations with his poignant and powerful prose, and actions in support of racial equality.

Message: The family that we are born into sometimes falls short of the dream family that others seem to have or that we think we deserve.

Families are made up of people, each of whom struggles in efforts to be happy, wrestle with daily challenges and even inescapable demons such as alcohol, mental illness, abuse, and poverty. Childhoods are often sacrificed on the altar of family dysfunction, and as adults we often look back over our lives and lament the dreams that never came true in our families, such as being close with our siblings or parents. We carry the heavy burden of these unrealized dreams into relationships with our own spouses and children and become stuck in the past, failing to see the good things and people right there in front of us.

Advice: Seek out the positives in your current family relationships, and don't expect them to fail, as have some of those from the past.

Question: How are my current family relationships different, and better than those of the past?

Just Like Ozzie and Harriet
—1950s Television Show

The *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, an ABC sitcom that aired between 1952 and 1966, featured the All-American family: Ozzie, Harriet, and their two sons Ricky and David and idyllic white, middle-class suburban living.

Message: Somewhere out there (at least we would like to believe), there is the ideal *Leave it to Beaver* family.

Keeping up with the Jones's is difficult when it comes to lawns, cars, and accomplishments; but even more so when it comes to family living. Sometimes, it seems that the house is always calmer; the kids better adjusted and even the dog more well-mannered on the other side of the fence. As a result, we turn a critical eye (which isn't always a bad thing, per se) to the inadequacies, shortcomings, and failures of our own brood. We judge ourselves harshly because after all, who can compare their family to that of Bill Cosby's Huxtable clan or save the children of the world like Brad and Angelina. We inevitably fall short in our own estimation.

Advice: Don't assume that the family next door, you know, the one that is always together smiling and laughing, is doing any better than yours. You will miss seeing all that is good and healthy.

Question: What do I like about my own family?

“I Am Your Father”
—*The Empire Strikes Back*, 1980

Darth Vader, played by James Earl Jones, reveals himself to his son Luke Skywalker, played by Mark Hamill, in order to have him join the “Dark Side.”

Message: The biological label of “father” may not confer an automatic psychological bond with a child.

There is more to parenting than genetics. Children take a parent’s DNA but they also need nurturing to develop and grow. Parenting is more than conception and delivery. For a psychological tie to evolve, the dyad of parent and child needs time, contact, and support. Irresponsible parents coming and going through a child’s life create instability, not connection. The term biological parent is not as strong as psychological parent. Jen, for instance, who is only three, confronts her father about his long absences. “It’s unfair to mommy and me,” she cries as her dad attempts to distract her with one of her toys while speaking on his cell phone.

Advice: Involvement with a child provides many rewards for both her and you.

Question: What is the true level of connection between you and your children?

“I Like Children... If they're Properly Cooked”
—W.C. Fields

Self affirmed and inveterate misanthrope, this famous American comedian was proud to boast that he hated children.

Message: Certainly, children are an immeasurably priceless part of family life, but raising them is equally tiring and incessantly demanding.

We are programmed to give all, be all, and sacrifice all for our children. After all, children need their parents, particularly in the early part of life, to provide affection, guidance, and support. We are both genetically wired and socialized to love our children, for it is only through love that they will grow to love in turn. Thinking of the inevitable, “I can’t stand you”, I wish I didn’t have children”, and “I am not cut out to be a parent” fills us with guilt and self-recrimination. However, if we do not acknowledge the frustrations and absolute angst that is part of parenting, and take care of our own needs from time to time, resentments and, of course, exhaustion will invariably follow.

Advice: Self-care and attention to our own individual needs as people is crucial for effective parenting.

Question: How have I taken care of my own needs this week, and how can I carve an hour out for myself in the next week in which I think only about myself?

Married... with Children
—TV Show

The popular TV sit-com that aired between 1987 and 1997 highlights the misadventures of the dysfunctional Bundy family, for whom marital ties and child rearing are often in conflict.

Message: Balancing a family's priorities between marriage and children is often difficult.

There seems to be never enough time, money, or energy where family is concerned. Raising kids is a process that can't wait. It is a temporal crisis and being there is the least of it. Children need our focus and emotional availability. Children also need to see a strong marital bond. The marital relationship is the emotional anchor of the family unit. It functions as a barrier to not only the outside world, but to the irrational desires of children. Kids need to know their place. A successful family is not a democracy, but a benevolent monarchy ruled by parents.

Advice: In order to be a good parent, one must first be a good wife or husband.

Question: What kind of governance manages your family and how can you make it more effective?

“A Spoonful of Sugar Makes the Medicine Go Down”
—*Mary Poppins*, 1964

Mary Poppins, that forever optimistic and always magical nanny of this Disney classic adaptation of the P.L. Travers book series, offers this quaint and potent remedy for the otherwise awful taste of 19th century cold medicine.

Message: The saying, “you can catch more flies with honey” goes for family living as well; in that no one in a family benefits from harsh criticism, punitive parenting, or unrelenting conflict.

Over and over again, research as well as anecdotes have proven that critical, harsh, and punitive parenting results in unhappy, rebellious, and often aggressive children who grow up to doubt themselves and treat others similarly. While setting limits and providing consequences for misbehavior are critical for the development of healthy, happy, and productive citizens, it is critical not to break a child’s spirit in the course of teaching them life’s lessons. Humanity, compassion, genuine concern and, most importantly, respect are far more potent ingredients in the recipe of childrearing.

Advice: It is far more important in the development of psychologically healthy children to build rather than break their zeal and damage self-esteem

Question: How do you temper criticism with caring, and your punishment with compassion?

“She’s My Sister, She’s My Daughter, She’s My Sister.”
—*Chinatown*, 1974

Faye Dunaway as Evelyn Cross Mulwray reveals her secret of incest to Jack Nicholson, who plays the private investigator Jake Gittes.

Message: All too often, roles are reversed in families where child and parent assume each other’s jobs.

There seems to be a major inconsistency when it comes to the child’s role in today’s family. While not being asked to remove themselves from their video games or TV, to mow the lawn or do the dishes, children are now being burdened with new jobs as parental confidantes and emotional supports. Children are exposed to far too many adult issues. This reversal of duties is difficult and ultimately destructive, as children do not have the objectivity or tools to cope with their parent’s problems. The end result of these burdens is often anxiety and guilt.

Advice: Children are not small adults, they have limited capacity to deal with their parent’s problems, let alone take them on.

Question: Do you believe that certain issues should not be shared between adults and children, and if so, which?

“Sing Out Loud Louise, Sing Out!”
—*Gypsy*, 1959 (Musical).

Ethel Merman as Mama Rose pushes Sandra Church as Louise/Gypsy to “stand out” as an entertainer so that she may become a star.

Message: Parents want their children to be the best, sometimes not for the child’s good, but for the parents own enhancement.

Children today are under a great deal of pressure. Free time is out, along with recess. Structured activities and organized sports are in. Kids are now like expensive cars and big houses, principal objects of status and enhancement. Sure, we want to be proud of our children, but not at their emotional expense. Jon, a teenager, tries hard to please his father by excelling at soccer. Because of his own failings, Jon’s dad keeps moving him up to more competitive teams and intense lessons with “tough” coaches. Jon is not having much fun during his presumed “fun time.”

Advice: Our kids don’t exist to resolve our problems and to fulfill our unfulfilled life goals. As parents we should help our youngsters gain a balance between achievement and fun.

Question: How much time do your kids spend doing “nothing” or “vegging?”

“They Cut the Turkey Without Me!”
—*Avalon*, 1990

Uncle, Gabriel Krichinsky, played by Lou Jacobi, is enraged that his brother, Sam, played by Armin Mueller-Stahl, did not wait for him on Thanksgiving to start the meal, which in turn, leads to the dissolution of all family ties.

Message: Because of competition, rivalry, and past hurts, the connections of an extended family can be so strained that the last straw for once close relatives can be broken by an otherwise trivial act.

The almost mystical significance of “family” is more often in the mind of the older parents than their children. It would be nice to be part of a Norman Rockwell painting, where jealousy and envy are absent, but this is not reality. Family dynamics change with time and interests. Close siblings become distant as circumstances, children, and spouses promote conflict. Minor slights become major insults and years go by with little contact.

Advice: Understand that family is fertile ground for clashes, but it may also be a source of support.

Question: Have you had a meaningful conversation with your brother or sister recently?

“Duck and Cover”
—DOD Warning

Amidst the threat of atomic annihilation following the detonation of the Atomic Bomb, the United States Department of Defense offered this simple euphemism for students in the event of atomic attack.

Message: Family conflicts and misunderstanding can sometimes erupt into all-out warfare, sending us running from each other.

Face it! Home and family, as comforting as they can be, can at other times be extremely uncomfortable and even painful. We vent frustrations of the day on loved ones, pick on each other mercilessly, and even attack when hurt or slighted. Wounds from unfinished business and conflicts run deep and often fester for weeks, months, and years. Unexpressed feelings remain so, grudges harden into avoidance, and self protection results in cutting ourselves off from those we love, or at least loved. We become afraid of expressing pain for fear it will fall on deaf ears and remain unhealed.

Advice: Hiding from minor conflicts, particularly with family members, deepens isolation, pain, and can evolve into a major attack.

Question: Take inventory of the wrongs you have been dealt and loved ones you have avoided, and ask, “how can I re-establish connection?”

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONSHIPS

Romance makes our lives richer, yet more painful. The following chapter deals with popular culture truths that shed some light on the beginning, middle and ending of romantic relationships.

“Hello Dave”

—*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968

In Stanley Kubrick’s futuristic world, computers and humans are both intimate partners and strange bedfellows.

Message: Technology has the power to create and destroy relationships.

Meeting and dating have been swept up into the electronic revolution. E-profiles, digitized photos, and immediate access have swelled dating pools into oceans of choices. E-matchmakers, e-mail and text messaging keep us in contact and the communication flowing. However, Photoshop can make Mr. Wrong look like Mr. Right, while call-waiting and cell phones set on vibrate can create an unmanageable and dizzying world of possibilities. True romance may be virtually impossible in this new virtual world.

Advice: *Caveat emptor!* Use the new technology wisely, but be wary of doctored JPEGs, e-mail Casanovas, and cell phones that go bump in the night.

Question: What would dating be like if you simply unplugged?

“Deal or No Deal”
—Howie Mandel

Under pressure from friends, family, and millions of viewers, contestants must choose between a sure payoff and the possibility of more, much more, on the game show of the same name!

Message: In search of the perfect partner, you may very well overlook and take for granted your current relationship.

Choices are everywhere. Well meaning friends and loved ones always have your perfect partner just waiting to meet you. Dating and Internet matchmaking services promise to tailor make our next relationship into the love of our life. Sometimes, particularly when relationships hit rocky points, it's easier to look for the door rather than at and within ourselves. Relationships, like electronics, have limited shelf lives, unless we work at them... constantly.

Advice: Rainbows are pretty to look at but vanish with the changing weather.

Question: In what ways does my partner meet my needs and I theirs?

“It’s Always Something”
—*Saturday Night Live*

Comedienne Gilda Radner’s outspoken yet usually politically incorrect character always has a way of putting things in their proper context.

Message: Relationships are dynamic and forever changing.

Life happens! Relationships are both comedy and drama; evolving stories, constantly put to the test by creatures and forces both great and small. In-laws, infidelities, indecision, illness, and ennui challenge us. Crises of faith, both in our selves and our partners, threaten intimacy. Winds of change blow from all directions. Every romance has its own narrative arc, its own past, present, and future.

Advice: Scripts and happy endings make good television. Reality requires improvisation.

Question: What would threaten your coupledom and how can you address this threat?

“I Can’t Get No Satisfaction”
—Mick Jagger

Written in an era marked by social upheaval, these prophetic lyrics of the song *Satisfaction* validate a generation’s restlessness and insatiability.

Message: Satisfaction lies inside and now rather than outside and ahead.

I want! I want! I want! These words seem to be a national anthem these days and still, we are unsatisfied. We surround ourselves with toys, friends, and hectic schedules in hopes of reaching that higher plane of contentment, but we never quite get there. Toys break, schedules exhaust us, and superficial relationships end, leaving us feeling hollow, resentful, angry, and sad. But still, we look outside of ourselves for peace of mind, rather than enjoy the moment or the people who really count.

Advice: As difficult as it might seem, value the moment, yourself, your accomplishments, and those most close to you.

Question: What is a satisfying relationship?

What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas
—Ad Slogan

Advertising tagline by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority suggests that in sin city, anything can and will happen, but it will remain a secret.

Message: Everyone has secrets, and relationships are not necessarily improved by them being revealed.

Disclosure can destroy relationships. Words can, in fact, kill. Flirtations, past indiscretions, and unspoken thoughts about your partner's looks and weight are often better kept close to the vest. If you are concerned about telling, reconsider. Shame and humiliation are powerful forces that should be respected. The same applies to intrusive questions that may offend your husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Don't ask, and don't tell can have merit in most situations.

Advice: Filter your thoughts and check your secrets at the bedroom door, unless you are prepared to end, or severely damage, a relationship.

Question: I would not want my partner to know that _____ (clue: DO NOT write the answer in the blank).

“It Ain’t Over Till It’s Over”
—Yogi Berra

Witticism by the Baseball Hall of Fame catcher and off-the-cuff philosopher.

Message: Ending relationships can be agonizing.

Death may be final, but break-ups can last indefinitely. Guilt and regrets can keep a couple’s flame on high, even though both know the burner should have been long ago turned off. As the song says, “breaking up is hard to do”. Is it the fear of having to start anew, anxiety over the final rejection, or perennial hope that keeps us answering the phone, emails, and text messages? Yesterday’s “no” may be tomorrow’s “yes.” Hope may spring eternal

Advice: If it is truly time to call it quits, then avoid contact — birthday wishes, e-mails, calls to his or her sister — and do not start with the “let’s just be friends” talk.

Question: My biggest fear in breaking it off completely is that _____.

“Frankly Scarlet, I Don’t a Give Damn”
—*Gone with the Wind*, 1939

Clark Gable as Rhett Butler to Scarlet O’Hara in the classic epic.

Message: Emotional detachment is bound to happen when one person in a relationship goes too far, or the number of infractions — incidents of bad behavior — pileup into an intolerable mass.

There comes a point when there has been too much hurt. Passion and rage give way to indifference. The couple bond grows cold, as one person simply becomes fed up. Enough becomes truly enough. Even the most loyal (or the most masochistic), have a point of no return. Past psychological wounds flare-up and the betrayed looks down from the staircase of life and declares, “Adios, sayonara, I’m just not interested anymore.”

Advice: Be aware of what your last straw would be and think of ways of rectifying the situation before your emotional attachment grows cold. Or, get out when the getting is good!

Question: I give second chances except _____

“I Want to be Alone”
—*Grand Hotel*, 1932

Tired and disillusioned by her life and those around her, Greta Garbo’s character Grusinkaya offers the above lament.

Message: One of the hardest things to do in relationships is to walk away, and particularly for the wrong reasons, such as out of anger or fear of commitment. Even more difficult is staying for the wrong reasons, such as guilt or fear of being on your own. However, flying solo does give you the opportunity to explore the world through your own eyes, and to become re-acquainted with yourself, perhaps for the first time.

Advice: Look around your life, assess the benefits and drawbacks of ending your current relationship, from your own rather than your partners’ perspective.

Question: Ask yourself how your life would be better if you were not currently involved in a romantic relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORK

Work provides us with the means to feed, clothe, entertain, and shelter ourselves and our loved ones. Work also adds meaning and purpose to our lives.

“Eighty Percent of Success is Just Showing Up”
—Woody Allen

Asked in an interview about his incredible success, the comedian remarked about the importance of just being there.

Message: Being available and responding quickly at work may be your most critical job skill.

People who are lucky, finding themselves in the right place at the right time, sometimes promote this good fortune by being available. The authors attribute most of their own success as therapists to their policy of just returning phone calls. Opportunity not answered can turn quickly to regret. Rob, an overworked, competent young attorney decides to miss a management meeting of his firm in order to finish several important documents. He is passed over to be on a high-profile career-making case because a senior partner’s field of vision sees another associate at the meeting.

Advice: Put yourself in situations where opportunities are a possibility and make them yours.

Question: Describe both a missed and a seized opportunity.

Just Do It
—Nike Slogan

Ad tag line for the Nike brand to STOP thinking about starting an exercise or sports program and just BEGIN.

Message: Starting any project requires action, not just talk. Procrastination and its pal, obsessing, create little result, except worry and a cluttered mind.

Effective work requires some form of compartmentalization. Hunger, sex, regrets, bodily functions, and entertainment have to be put aside to focus on the task. There are so many distractions and so little time. Pulling the trigger, by just **starting** a project goes a long way to finishing a task. Start by free forming (write or draw anything, phrase questions, outline, associate). **Shape** your thoughts. Self-imposed **deadlines** are also effective, especially if unrealistic, as they create a tension where the only focus is the chore at hand. Sarah has a memo to prepare. By allowing herself only 2 hours to complete the task that would normally take her 4 hours, her mind focuses on writing, rather than the Happy Hour she was looking forward to.

Advice: Just “beginning” often pushes us along.

Question: What techniques do you use or have seen others use to get started?

“Genius is One Percent Inspiration and Ninety-Nine Percent Perspiration”
—Thomas Alva Edison

When asked about his success as an inventor, Edison offered the above surprising, yet humble response.

Message: While work often seems (and very well may be) an endless, repetitive and unrewarding series of mind-numbing tasks, kernels of fulfillment may be within grasp.

When we think about (if we do indeed think about) Thomas Edison, we reflect on his world-changing inventions. A hundred years after Edison brought light and sound to the world, light bulbs have become unrecognizable and phonographs have yielded to iPods. Will history record, and can we even conceive of the thousands of hours Edison and other like him, both past and present, spent and spend on bringing creations to light, no pun intended. Often, we pass up inspirations and calls to action because the effort required seems daunting, if not impossible.

Advice: Don't sit around waiting for that elusive windfall or flash of brilliance... work for it... follow your passion!

Question: What is the last great, creative idea you had, and what stopped you from pursuing it?

“I’m Not a Crook”
—Richard Nixon

In the wake of the Watergate scandal, and under increasing scrutiny and the possibility of impeachment, the 37th president of the United States went on national television to reiterate his conviction that, “I’m not a crook; I’ve earned everything I’ve got.”

Message: In order to succeed in the workplace and in life, hard and honest work is necessary.

We don’t need to fill our pockets with paper clips, pens, restricted information, or even money that doesn’t belong to us to be thieves. Every day in the workplace, people steal from their employers in numerous and creative ways because they think they are “owed something.” Feeling underpaid, undervalued and unappreciated, workers take extra long lunch breaks, call in sick, surf the Internet and yes, do less than they are capable, desire, or are required to.

Advice: An honest day’s work is far more than showing up and collecting a paycheck.

Question: Have I been an honest worker and, if not, how may I boost my WIQ (worker integrity quotient)?

“No Soup for You”
—*Seinfeld*, 1990-1998

The Soup Nazi is the owner of the corner store that serves indescribably wonderful soups. The only rule is “do whatever the Soup Nazi commands, and don’t complain. When George Costanza (Jason Alexander) dares to ask for bread with his soup, the Soup Nazi bellows “no soup for you!” and kicks him out of the store.

Message: Greed is public (and private) enemy number one.

For the most part, we are socialized to want more. Psycho-evangelist John Bradshaw drew the distinction between “human beings” and “human doings”. He often asked his audiences to reflect on the qualities of humanness and to avoid evaluating ourselves solely on the basis of what we do or accomplish, particularly in the workplace. Even more problematic is defining and valuing ourselves on the basis of what we “have” in terms of money and material goods. There is always the danger of overlooking our wonderful qualities as people simply because we do not earn enough or have enough. Wanting and having more becomes our goal in life, rather than “being” more.

Advice: Tally those qualities of personhood that you value and that others value in you.

Question: What qualities of “self” really count on the tally sheet of life and how can I push my self into the “black”?

“That’s Where the Money Is”
—Willie Sutton

Explanation given by the notorious yet famed bank robber when asked by a reporter why he robs banks.

Message: Money is more plentiful not only in certain locations, but in certain careers.

With greater frequency, an outraged media publicizes hedge fund profits and Wall Street salaries and bonuses. There are outcries from both Congress and the public. We seem to forget that jobs in finance involve money, big money. Those “managing” money, making and even losing it, consider their work as having high economic worth. They therefore have no problem keeping a large share of it for themselves. We often forget that remuneration for work done is not determined by “value” to society (high value=teachers and doctors) but what the free market decides (football players and CEOs).

Advice: If money is your principal goal, choose work that pays.

Question: Are you truly satisfied with the money you are paid and are your “material goals” possible in your current line of work?

“Time to Make the Donuts”
—The Dunkin Donuts Guy

Message: Rivaled in (lack of) personality only by the Maytag Man, the television baker of Dunkin Donuts delicacies rises dutifully from his warm bed to another day of labor in the kitchen.

Message: Work is not always fun, but it must get done!

Superheroes are an interesting bunch. They fly, travel through time, save worlds, and perform feats of incalculable strength, all before lunchtime, while the rest of us go about our daily grind. They are indeed a tough act to follow. It seems that they are, for the most part, spared the mundane tasks of everyday living: laundry, carpooling, childrearing, dishwashing, and punching a time clock. Certainly, the kind of work that they do is beyond our abilities, and who would want the responsibility of saving the world anyway? But beds must be made, children must be cared for, shopping must get done, and the trash must go out... every day! These are the acts of heroism that we mere mortals perform, spandex notwithstanding.

Advice: Showing up to work every day is certainly a heroic accomplishment!

Question: How can I boost my attitude about work to a new level?

“How YOU Doing?”
—*Friends*, 1994-2004

Routinely used as a pick up line by Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc) who is simple and to the point.

Message: Recognition, feedback, and gratitude at work are often absent.

One of the ways school does not prepare us for work is the number of grades per semester. Midterms, finals, and papers offer constant feedback. This doesn't happen in the world of work. Even annual reviews are sometimes rushed, inadequate, message less, and without helpful criticism. Josh, a recent college graduate, spent days and weekends on his first project. Expecting to hear from his supervisors about the quality of his final product, he was disappointed to learn that after several months they hadn't even looked at all his hard work.

Advice: The ability for self evaluation is essential to develop, as often it is the only analysis of your work that you will receive.

Question: Who do you work for? Yourself? Others?

“Who Loves Ya Baby?”
—*Kojak*, 1973-1978

Star Telly Savalas’s catchphrase of endearment to everyone he meets, as Lt. Kojak, a NYC detective.

Message: As part of any job evaluation or annual review, it is important to understand that interpersonal skills count.

The difference between a promotion and firing often falls in the vague area of personality. Paths to job success are paved by image, sense of humor, and civility. These traits often count for more than hard work. Since people spend so much of their day at their job, they would prefer being with easy going, considerate co-workers. The absence of arrogance, sexism, aggression, and anger goes a long way to enhancing the workplace atmosphere, as well as your career.

Advice: Good relations make work and life easier and more enjoyable.

Question: What one personality trait of yours causes you the most trouble at work?

“You’re Fired”
—*The Apprentice*, 2004—

On the reality show, Donald Trump watches as contestants go toe-to-toe in a cutthroat corporate-based competition to claim the grand prize of \$250,000, and the privilege of presiding over one of Trump’s many companies. Unsuccessful contestants are ushered offstage with the now-famous “you’re fired” ringing in their ears.

Message: In today’s competitive marketplace where downsizing, outsourcing, layoffs, foreign competition, massive unemployment, and inexpensive labor threaten the worker, the fear of these two words looms larger than ever.

Life throws us curves, and often quite unexpectedly. Psychologists tell us that of the various life changes that are most stressful in both the short and long run, losing a job ranks quite high, just below the end of a valued relationship, divorce, and death. Losing a job threatens us at many levels from the ability to take care of our daily needs to crushing our self-esteem and hopes for the future. On the other hand, it may free us from a dead-end career, and open us up to a world of possibilities, as enticing and frightening as that may be.

Advice: When one door closes, another may open... but you have to look for it rather than using your limited energy to mourn or be angry over your loss.

Question: Should I look around for other possible jobs and/or career opportunities or wait until I am fired?

CHAPTER SIX

MONEY

Money has a powerful influence on all our lives. Spending, lending and investing define our interpersonal, as well as our personal selves. It has been said that money is the root of all evil. Or is it the pursuit of money that causes us such stress? In either case, many of us are rightfully worried about money matters.

“Live Long and Prosper”
—*Star Trek*, 1966-1969

Uttered by Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock in the TV series and subsequent *Star Trek* movies, the phrase accompanies a friendly gesture of departure in which the hand is offered palm out, with the fingers parted between the middle and ring fingers, and the thumb extended. Nimoy reportedly based it upon the Jewish “Priestly Blessing”.

Message: It is indeed a blessing to have a long healthy life and to flourish in our humanity.

What does the word prosper really mean? Is it a function of how much we have accrued in our bank account, or our retirement fund? Can we judge success in life on the sole basis of the income we generate or in material wealth? What about status? Keeping up with the Joneses is tiring work, because they always seem to be one step ahead of us, have a bigger house, a new car, take longer vacations, and have smarter kids.

Advice: Broaden your definition of prosperity to include health, friends, your ability to live in the moment, to laugh, to appreciate the natural world, and to play

Question: Do you regularly take inventory of your non-monetary wealth?

“What, Me Worry?!”
—*MAD* magazine

The big-eared, gamely icon in red high-tops sneakers was a comic existentialist. He seemed unflappable, in spite of the numerous challenges he faced in the zany pages of *MAD* magazine since its introduction in 1955.

Message: Worrying about money takes too much time and energy.

Many of us count our money... incessantly. We ruminate over the ups and downs in the stock market, panic when the needle on our gas gauge darts toward empty, and bolt from sleep choking with anxiety because we equate money with oxygen. Will I have enough to pay the bills this month? Will the price of gasoline ever come down? Are they taking enough out of my paycheck to ensure a reasonable retirement account? Even when we have it, we worry about what to buy with it, where to invest it, and how to protect it.

Advice: Take regular and realistic inventory of your finances, meet occasionally with a trusted financial planner, budget... and once in a while spend some money, no matter how little, frivolously.

Question: What could I be thinking about if I wasn't obsessing about money? Something better and more productive, perhaps!

“You Can’t Handle the Truth”
—*A Few Good Men*, 1992

Jack Nicholson as Col. Jessep to Tom Cruise as Lt. Kaffee, who pushes the colonel to the breaking point in court.

Message: It is a frightening truth that although dependent on the logic of numbers, money is often handled in a illogical manner.

Money represents power, freedom, status, and even health. It can also foster lack of perspective and magical thinking. We make important financial decisions based on the sources of our money, rather than its absolute value. We compartmentalize its value based on context. While every dollar is clearly equal to every other dollar, those lost/gained(less) gambling in Vegas or in the stock market seem different from dollars used to pay for a tank of gas (more). Why are windfalls spent recklessly? Why are we more careful spending an inheritance? Why will we spend a fortune on a vacation and yet refuse to have a bellhop bring our bags to our room in order to avoid a tip?

Advice: How we choose to use money is colored by our individual perspectives, but since all money is an INTERCHANGABLE method of exchange, we should treat all dollars the same, no matter their origin or destination. Do the math.

Question: What goods or activities do you have trouble paying for? What commodities are easy to purchase?

“Greed is Good”
—*Wall Street*, 1987

Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas), the ultimate crooked Wall Street wheeler-dealer, wins control over a tumultuous stockholders meeting, by extolling the virtues of greed.

Message: While greed may be good for markets and capitalism, it may not be good for one’s health.

The underlying motivation of desiring MORE often creates a never-ending cycle of dissatisfaction and despair. Every economic downturn stems from overreaching greed. MORE needs risk, often fueled with debt: homeowners borrowing on their houses to buy more vacations, another car or cosmetic surgery; stockholders borrowing on margin to buy more stocks. Debt always requires payback, as projected future earnings soon turn into real Now dollars. Futures are mortgaged, as retirement and children’s education evaporate. Safe assets turn into dangerous debt.

Advice: Financial markets are driven by both greed and fear. Control your greed before it turns into fear.

Question: How much is peace of mind worth, when calculating your net worth?

“Show Me the Money!”
—*Jerry Maguire*, 1996

Rod, played by Cuba Gooding, Jr., as a star athlete, tells Jerry, played by Tom Cruise, struggling sports agent, that he is tired of his sales pitches and pie in the sky unrealistic promises; he wants to see real dollars.

Message: We are all subjected to salesmanship.

Promises are not only made by our stockbroker, but by 24/7 cable and TV that hypes the market with attractive anchors and pretty data visuals. Unsophisticated risk based on complex financial instruments, like hedge funds, sub-prime, and junk bonds often follow a path to simple terms like no cash and broke. But we all want to participate, get in on the action, and make a buck. Greed and fear aren't the only motivating factors driving the market. Inclusion is another variable. People want in. Grandiose promises, which involve risk, go hand-in-hand with capitalism and sometimes success. They can also lead to loss. Projections, prospectus, and promises using vague financial babble often lead to more projections, prospectuses, and promises. Like Las Vegas, where chips are used, paper losses in end-of-month statements translate into real dollar loss and defunct dreams. “Playing” the market is a very bad phrase, as your money should never be part of a game.

Advice: Be a consistent diversified SAVER who is conservative and informed. Risk is not for everyone, especially when the terms need a microscope and tax attorney to interpret.

Question: What happened to the old-fashioned bank book?

“There’s a Sucker Born Every Minute”
—P.T. Barnum

Cynical but true offering by the legendary businessman and showman.

Message: There will never be a short supply of gullible people who can be duped out of their hard earned money by the false promises of advertisements and hucksters.

These days, the Internet offers a portal for opportunistic entre-predators, television infomercials promise miracle cures and dazzling business opportunities, and the postwoman always rings twice, especially when she has tantalizing credit card offers. Which of these seductive opportunities will magically transform us from a “have-not” to a “have?” How do I choose, for surely one of these must be the opportunity I have been waiting for?

Advice: If a business opportunity, credit card offer, or product claim, whether for pain management, erectile dysfunction, or hair re-growth seems too good to be true...it probably is.

Question: Who can I turn to or consult with before making what could be a dangerous investment?

“I’ll Make Him an Offer He Can’t Refuse “
—*The Godfather*, 1972

Marlon Brando as the Don to actor Al Martino playing Johnny Fontaine, who wants a role in an upcoming film, speaking about his method of persuasion (threat) to the film’s producer.

Message: Surprisingly, we are more often placed in compromising situations because of loyalty than because of actual threats of violence.

Requests are made of us, sometimes for money, where our refusal might impair a relationship with a close friend or family member. Loaning money to friends and family is a bad idea, as we quickly morph into bankers, landlords, and bookkeepers. We soon become angry auditors, resenting the invitation to watch the Super Bowl on our debtor’s new Plasma 50-inch TV. The debtors miss payments, but they are packing to go to Disney World. So who is being disloyal now? We fortunately live in a society where there is a safety net for basic needs of medical care, food, and housing. Most loan demands, when looked at carefully, are usually for lifestyle and comforting extras.

Advice: Sometimes agreeing to help a friend or relative financially ends that relationship or, at the very least, changes the dynamics for the negative.

Question or thought: How would you feel about just GIVING the money rather than LENDING?

Money Honey
—Maria Bartiromo

The CNBC financial news anchor's sexual appeal often wraps financial news into an overly attractive and seductive package... her presentation is as seductive as the "gift" of the Trojan Horse.

Message: Beware, as monetary gifts may present more dilemmas than meet the eye.

From childhood, we have been socialized to admire and covet money. We look in greeting cards for the possibility of something green, or perhaps one of those wonderfully versatile store gift cards that allow us to embark on a mini shopping spree. Our mind races with the possibilities of the windfall. Often, however, we are paralyzed by the possibilities or lament that the gift was not just a bit larger. Be careful of your wishes!

Advice: Give gifts that are meaningful at a personal level. Monetary gifts can be impersonal.

Question: What gifts have I received in my life that have been most meaningful and in turn, what kind of gifts do I want to give to others?

Money Makes the World Go Round
—*Cabaret*, 1972

In the acclaimed musical, the vaudevillians poke fun at the sad but honest reality regarding the importance of money.

Message: If your wallet isn't full and retirement is a pipe dream, life has no meaning

It is so easy to equate success as a person with success on the job. The more money we generate, the more successful we consider ourselves to be. Conversely, the less money we earn, the more we potentially consider ourselves to be failures. Corporate downsizing, outsourcing, and overseas manufacturing constantly threaten our sense of security and income. We worry about being fired. This impacts on our self esteem, which probably should be based on more than our job: friends, family, good deeds.

Advice: Evaluate your life and job performance by regularly taking stock, and giving yourself a harsh reality check, but consider that income is only one facet of who you are.

Question: Is there something you can make, sell or invest in, to supplement your income in the event that your job status stalls? What makes up your self worth?

Priceless

—Tag Line for MasterCard

MasterCard helps you purchase many different items whose sum exceeds mere monetary value and becomes part of a mystical peak experience.

Message: We use money as a measure of value, which may work for material things but not all experiences.

A perfect storm of people close to you in a fun-filled activity that transcends your usual existence, offers a memorable, yet not expensive experience: the family outing that leads to a hole-in-the-wall restaurant, where the cheeseburgers are heaven; a class where the students share creative insights; a game or match where both sides are lost in the movement and execution of the play and not the score; watching your child accomplish almost any task.

Advice: Not all Priceless phenomena require money or credit cards, just the right combination of activity, environment, and people.

Question: Name a Priceless experience that you had?

CHAPTER SEVEN

CULTURE

Many of our personal concerns are a reflection of the cultural context in which we live.

It Keeps Going and Going and Going
—Energizer Batteries

Tagline for Energizer Batteries, declaring its long-lasting power capability.

Message: As our lives become busier and more hectic, we try to keep up, racing with an ever-faster external clock.

Time is money in our culture. Multitasking seems to be the only way to go. We are frenetic at work and play. Even vacations require activity and “adventure.” What happened to relaxation and winding down? So much to do — family, jobs, and entertainment — yet so little time. The Internet and 24/7 cable have destroyed the bio-rhythms of day and night, and the sacred division between work and leisure. Are we afraid of not filling every minute and being alone, or is it the fear of missing something? There is no time for reflection or thought. Our lives are fuller, but at what cost?

Advice: Maybe slowing down would actually help us expand time. Being in the present, instead of anticipating the next activity in the future, is truly being ALIVE in time.

Question: How often do you look at the clock each day? Is time an enemy or a friend?

“Do You Believe in Miracles?”

—Al Michaels

The Russian loss to the United States hockey team in the 1980 Olympic Games was so unexpected that it was described as a “miracle” by the exuberant ABC sports commentator.

Message: Sports has transcended its function as entertainment; it is the new religion of our culture.

Sports are not only a great diversion, but positive for one’s health. But, perhaps we are taking them too seriously, as we worship at the altar of great athletes with sacrifices of money, fame, and second chances. Is it really necessary for whole cities and universities to pray for their teams and people to bet their rent money on the Super Bowl and March Madness? The pressure to win has unfortunately replaced the wonderful feeling of movement and fun. It also is certainly sad that sports news is now filled with domestic abuse, illegal gun possession, and even animal cruelty. Families become fragmented as dads disappear into ESPN, emerging only to push their kids to hit, run, and throw harder. Steve, age 11, loved playing goalie on his local soccer team. After each game he and his friends would have pizza. It was fun, but it soon “stopped” as his dad insisted that he join a “traveling team” with increased coaching, practices, and pressure.

Advice: Sports are only one aspect of a balanced life.

Question: Can you enjoy playing at something without winning?

“Mrs. Robinson, You’re Trying to Seduce Me!”
—*The Graduate*, 1967

Dustin Hoffman as Benjamin Braddock to Anne Bancroft as Mrs. Robinson, who is slowly undressing.

Message: Sex may be everywhere in our society, but in many ways it’s still a mystery.

Victoria’s Secret is in every mall. Porn pop-ups invade every Internet interaction. Network-TV pushes the sexual boundaries already violated on cable. The often staid pages of *The New York Times* have models posing in inappropriate clothing. Young girls play with Bratz “slut” fashion dolls and kids’ video games combine sex with their usual violence. So why are ads for male enhancers and help for erectile dysfunction so prevalent? Are expectations too high? Or has our fantasy life been compromised by “open marketing” of sex in our culture?

Advice: Sexual fantasies are private and valuable, but not shameful. They are the fuel of one’s desires.

Question: What turns you on sexually?

“I’m Not a Doctor, But I Play One On Television”
—Vicks 44 Commercial

Television ad claiming that the “spokesperson” knows what he is talking about because he “acts” as a doctor on TV.

Message: Drugs may make our lives healthier and happier, but they should be prescribed by qualified physicians, not media ads.

Medication has modified the misery inherent in all forms of mental illness. Anxiety, mood disorders, and jumbled thinking may be helped with the right psychotropic cocktail. But pharmaceuticals are only one path to a healthier you. Counseling, diet, exercise, and education can also be effective modalities of prevention and treatment. It is unfortunate to see all those direct-to-consumer TV and Internet ads hawking pills as cures for depression, insomnia, and mood swings. There seems to be medication for everything: social anxiety, dry eyes, and erectile dysfunction. Charles, a six-year-old boy, during a “well visit” to the pediatrician asked for a prescription for Viagra.

Advice: Medication has benefits and risks, which are best assessed by medical specialists.

Question: How do the ads on TV for drugs influence you?

“Baby, You’re the Greatest”
—*The Honeymooners*, 1955-1956

This line, uttered by Ralph Cramden (Jackie Gleason), usually ended each episode of *The Honeymooners*, and served as a “reconciliation” between him and his much wiser wife, Alice (Audrey Meadows).

Message: As a culture we are obsessed with our children, which is creating a generation of entitlement.

Children are fawned upon with Mercedes-like strollers, sun block 180, and even cell phones. We live and die by their developmental milestone charts (“only 5 words and he is 3 months old”) and their nursery school interview. It is illegal, not to mention a crime, that could lead to stoning by one’s peers, if you travel anywhere without a car seat. There are now cable networks devoted to infants that represent a large market for “educational toys.” Every celebrity has a line of children’s clothing and what child has not seen a live ice show featuring their favorite TV character? Is it any wonder that kids don’t know their place? It is cruel to have them believe that they are the center of the universe — “The Greatest.” Even babies need limits. Kyle, 4 months old, was having difficulty sleeping through the night. His parents put him between them and this worked fine (every one slept) until at 7 months (Kyle was now taking up too much space) the parents tried to put him back into his own bed. No one slept for a week until Kyle settled, unfortunately, back into “his” spot in his parents’ bed.

Advice: Babies need care (food, changes, hugs) NOT over-stimulation, being the boss, and tons of stuff.

Question: What is your definition of a spoiled child and how are you taking steps to prevent raising one?

“The Medium is the Message”
—Marshal McLuhan

In 1964, McLuhan wrote *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, in which he suggested that it is not the powerful news story, the entertaining radio program, or even the dramatic television show that is significant. Instead, he implored us to consider that it is these various forms of media that have transformed and continue to influence our lives.

Message: Cell phones, newspapers like *USA Today*, 24/7 cable news shows, and the Internet keep us updated on news and information around the world... but do they really serve us?

With a flick of the remote, a quick scan of Wikipedia, a browse-through of news-byte laden publications such as *USA Today*, we are continually in the loop and informed of events happening down the street and across the world. More than any generation before us, we have access to unheralded amounts of information and knowledge. Yet, are we really better informed, any smarter, or deeper thinkers for it? Are we training ourselves to think and know at only the most superficial level, sacrificing quality of knowing for quantity known?

Advice: Look at the references and research at the bottom of Wikipedia entries, take time to read complete newspaper articles, engage in deeper conversations with family, friends, and co-workers, watch educational, scientific, and historical programming... visit a museum.

Question: What would I like to know MORE about?

Garbage In, Garbage Out
—Computer Wisdom

Attributed to IBM programmer George Fuechsel, this simple message suggests that in life, as in the world of computing, erroneous and illogical information does not become magically transformed into truth.

Message: A foundation of faulty knowledge and misinformation leads to poor decisions.

Desktops, laptops, and hand-helds can crunch numbers at warp speed, do our taxes (and garner refunds), clean up our spelling, keep track of our appointments, help us find our way on a lonely country road, and bring a world of goodies to our doorstep. It is very seductive to be able to keep all of the information about our lives in one place, and to be able to take it with us everywhere. But at what cost? We are at risk for forgetting how to spell, to calculate the waiter's tip, to organize our own activities, and to think critically. One mistaken entry can topple bank accounts, threaten our cherished credit reports, and even lead to the theft of our identity.

Advice: Write a letter to a friend, take a paper and pencil with you and jot down some interesting observations of the world around you, turn off the computer for an hour a day, think deep thoughts, go to a store.

Question: What really prevents you from thinking deep thoughts and having a conversation with yourself or a friend?

“In the Future, Everyone Will Be Famous for 15 Minutes!”
—Andy Warhol

Avante garde artist by trade and reluctant messiah by demand, Warhol offered this piece of wisdom when queried about creativity, fame, and legacy.

Message: Even with the advent of the Internet and mass media, building a legacy is not as easy as opening a can of soup.

My Space, Facebook, and YouTube have made everyone an artist, writer, and movie director. Recently, a woman broadcasted her dismay about an impending divorce over the Internet and everyone in the world instantly knew about it. No doubt a book contract and made-for-television movie will follow, not to mention a spot on Ellen, Oprah and Dr. Phil. We can now sit back in the comfort of our living rooms and watch D-list celebrities detox, dance and song hopefuls contend on national television, and bicep-laden weekend warriors swing from ropes and beat each other senseless with foam contrivances.

Advice: Fame is truly fleeting. It is never too early to begin building a legacy based on compassion, good deeds, a moral life, and close ties.

Question: What do I truly want to be remembered for by those close to me?

“Smile, You’re On Candid Camera”
—*Candid Camera*, 1948-1950

Created in 1948 by Allen Funt, this zany television show staged ludicrous but good-natured social prank situations in order to catch unsuspecting participants reacting as naturally as they could under the circumstances.

Message: In an era of cell phones, digital, hand-held cameras, and even wiretaps, privacy, even in the most private corners of our lives, is becoming a thing of the past.

With industrialization has come urbanization. Main Street is slowly disappearing, towns are morphing into cities before our eyes, and population in urban centers is exploding. While this seemingly irreversible trend brings people closer together, it makes it virtually impossible to “get away” from others, and to enjoy peace and quiet. Cities are installing street cameras in the name of safety and federally authorized wiretaps in the name of national security are increasingly allowed. The fear of Big Brother watching and listening looms ever larger.

Advice: Make a space in your life for quiet — away from others and all forms of stimulation — at least once a week, even if it is in your mind.

Question: Where is your private “get-away” where you can breath, think, and just be?

Everything Old is New Again
—Fashionable Truism

While adapted by Peter Allen in the 1970s as the title of his popular song, this expression seems to be universal and has been applied in the areas of philosophy, religion, and popular culture.

Message: New fashion, musical, political, and even parenting trends seem to arise every day. But are there really so many future ideas out there, or just recycled old ones?

We are constantly bombarded by the fashionistas, foodies, politicians, and come-and-go experts promising new ways to look, feel, eat, and think. Cultural revolutions are everywhere and a dime-a-dozen, all promising better than we had before.

Advice: Be your own trendsetter! Dare to be different... dare to be you!

Question: When was the last time you wore a “strange” piece of clothing, ate something different, or introduced yourself to a new person?

CHAPTER EIGHT

EDUCATION

Education, often hard to obtain, is one of the main keys to success in our society.

Book Him, Danno!
—*Hawaii Five-O*, 1968-1980

Jack Lord as Steve McGarrett, head of an elite police unit, to James MacArthur as Danny Williams, his second in command, upon apprehending a criminal and thus ending another investigation.

Message: What children NEED to learn is the single most important question facing childhood education.

The basic curriculum is constantly in flux. Language used to be considered imperative, but now its technology and math that rule our classrooms. Writing and communication are skills that are important for any career. Where do the arts or music fit in? While obtaining solid fundamental content and academic skills, including critical thinking, there should also be an emphasis on social and emotional competence. Children should have sensitivity training, lessons in civility, and experience in playing and working in groups. In our information obsessed world, projects and success are achieved more and more by teams. Phil was a math wiz but his first job ended in a lay-off. This was the result of his inability to get along with anyone, from the secretaries to his boss. His anxiety in social situations was often perceived as arrogant behavior.

Advice: Being the brightest in the room is not enough. To get things done requires social skills and emotional self control, which can be taught even in kindergarten.

Question: What are the most important social LESSONS you learned in school and how do you apply them in your life?

Blackboard Jungle
—Fifties Film

Title of a 1955 film in which an idealistic new teacher (Glenn Ford) tries to deal with his class in a violent inner-city school.

Message: School has become a perilous journey, a place where it is all about survival of the fittest, not only for kids but parents as well.

For kids to receive a good education, a number of tasks need to be overcome and sacrifices made by the whole family. New Math, no recess, and pressure to succeed even in extracurricular activities, all create a tense learning atmosphere both at school and at home. Parents have to invest time and money in their child's success. Private tutors are charging enormous sums of money and saving for college overrides retirement concerns. Every child needs a computer and smaller classes, which costs. Summer is now a time for pricey specialty camps to increase skills or enhance resumes, not a time to swim and play. Add to this, the endless time parents spend with flash cards and science projects and one wonders if family life has become nothing more than Career Development.

Advice: Enjoy your children, don't drive them. As much as possible, and as early possible, kids should take on the responsibility for their own success.

Question: What is most important, a HAPPY family or an ACHIEVING child?

Location, Location, Location!
—Real Estate Truism

Well worn catchphrase that the worth of real estate is where it is located. Origin unknown.

Message: To high school students and their parents, Name Brand colleges are the place to be Accepted at any cost.

It begins as three and four-year-olds apply to the best pre-nursery. Non crankiness and good play skills are necessary at the early onset of this Darwinian quest for a place that can lead to college gold. It ends as high school seniors apply to the same 50 colleges and universities, based on News and World Report's "yields" (acceptance data). Ratings, cities the schools are in, even an appearance in a film or in the Final Four leads to more applicants. It's all subjective and based on hype. How "hot" a school is varies from to year to year, but entrance to the Ivy League is the ultimate victory. To gain admission to these Northeast loci of status, wealth, and connected friendships requires hard work, constant studying, phenomenal stress, taking a million AP courses, and "enrichment every summer." You "play" a sport or participate in an extracurricular activity to enhance your resume, not necessarily your life. No parties for you. A boyfriend, forget it. Friends? There is no blank on the application for "plays well with others".

Advice: While there exists a good college for everyone, it's not always easy to learn the skill of balancing work and fun.

Question: What are some of the other advantages of high school, other than getting into college?

“So Much Time and So Little to Do!”
—*Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, 1971

Gene Wilder as visionary confectioner Willy Wonka uses this statement to keep the kids in the story moving along on a guided tour of his wonder-filled factory.

Message: More studying gets done when time is limited.

When a student sits down to study, many urges and thoughts seem to intrude, blocking concentration. Biologically you feel hungry, want to use the bathroom, feel tired or experience weird sexual tensions. You start to think about the party you are missing, the new girl you met, the money your buddy owes you, or the class you missed earlier. You become anxious preparing for an upcoming test. It can mean the difference between an A and B. You consider its impact on your transcript and possibly its influence on a graduate school application. Your whole life now hinges on this one exam. Your room suddenly feels warm, small, and noisy as someone down the hall is playing Pearl Jam too loudly. How can you study?

Advice: Before you begin, figure out how long it will take to learn the material — **Estimate**.

Now **cut** the time allowed in half. Six hours for your psych test, ALLOW ONLY 3. By cutting back on the time, you now have to **RACE** against the clock to finish and this will put you in a zone or cone of focus, keeping out all irrelevant, unwanted thoughts and urges.

Question: Are you ready to try this method of less time=better concentration?

Lassie Come Home
—Classic Children's Tale

A classic 1943 film that relates the adventures of a heroic collie that treks from Scotland to England to reunite with her young master.

Message: Separation is part of the high school college transition.

Delivery from the womb, weaning from the breast, riding the school bus, overnights, camp and even driving are independence markers of a child's normal lifecycle. The leaving of parents peaks in the senior year of high school, when kids prepare to depart from the comfort and security of their own rooms for smaller digs in a college dormitory. Parents sometimes have as much trouble handling this process as their kids, as a normal life task may grow into a major crisis. Anger, passivity, and procrastination all create an unpleasant atmosphere. Unresolved divorces, parental loss, and illness issues can exacerbate dependency conflicts, as does acting out instead of communicating. All concerned should understand that like 50th birthdays, anniversaries or weddings, moving on to college is an important milestone for the family that brings up hidden memories, jealousies, and conflicts.

Advice: Both children and their parents should recognize the psychological importance of this separation milestone and talk about their feelings of loss. This will go a long way to success at college.

Question: What life tasks do your kids or you need to master before the college experience?

“The Thrill of Victory, the Agony of Defeat”
—Wide World of Sports

Who can forget those images of athletic mastery and failure on television’s iconic sports variety show that aired on ABC for over three decades and was hosted by Jim McCay?

Message: Having formal educational credentials does not indicate being smart.

As the Wizard of Oz told the Scarecrow, who desperately wanted a brain, “some people without brains do an awful lot of talking.” Conversely, it can be argued that some people with an awful lot of brains have very little to say, but believe it is their right because they have a diploma, or a degree. Having academic credentials is certainly not the same as being wise, which only comes with a life fully lived.

Advice: An academic degree may certify that you possess greater knowledge, but does not make you a better person. Working throughout your life to be a better person does.

Question: In what areas of your life have you earned a doctorate degree? Parenthood? Friendship? Worker?

“Sock It to Me”

—*Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In*, 1968-1973

Tag line on the 1968-1973 comedy variety show that, once uttered, resulted in someone getting tagged, literally, with a boxing glove, pie, or pocket book.

Message: Protect your children (and yourselves) from getting hit over the head with education.

More and more educators and education administrators are pressuring children to learn more and to do it faster and earlier: reading fluency by second grade; multiplication tables by third; career choices by tenth; and college credits well before high school graduation. Some children and teens rise to the challenge; however, most cannot and do not. Yet, we push, and drag, and browbeat and “sock it to them” before they are developmentally ready. And when they fail, which many inevitably do, we blame the children for not learning or achieving. In this way, we contribute insidiously to a generation of depressed kids, school-haters, and drop outs, dumping them on the doorstep of adulthood... unprepared. We can do better by slowing down, appreciating, and practicing the notion that education is ongoing, and most importantly must be individually tailored to each child’s abilities and challenges

Advice: The hurried child will not get ahead, and will not get along with the “sock it to me” parent. The patient and caring parent will have a relationship with their “successful child.”

Question: In what ways are you rushing your child to learn, achieve, and accomplish, and how can you take a breath and step back?

“We’ve Got a Really Big Show”
—Ed Sullivan

The television variety show host never failed to live up to this promise as he brought the best of the world of entertainment into our living rooms every Sunday evening at 8 pm for over two decades.

Message: The computer screen, distant cousin to the television set, is a portal into a world of limitless educational opportunities... if we use it wisely.

The savvy Internet user can find just about anything he or she desires in terms of information and knowledge. WebMD brings the world of medicine to our fingertips, Wikipedia offers us an instantaneous virtual encyclopedia, and more and more colleges and universities are offering online degrees from Bachelors all the way to Doctorates. But as with any commodity, *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! There may indeed be shortcuts to knowledge, but life is not a game of *Jeopardy* where the contestant with the most trivia wins. Wisdom, and the ability to use knowledge for better living, is a lifelong course of study where human in-person interactions are as valued as a relationship with a computer.

Advice: Be a smart shopper. Check credentials of online schools and inquire about supplementary or complementary, face-to-face interactions with teachers or advisors.

Question: When is the last time that you questioned what was on your computer screen and how did you do so?

“Read My Lips”
—George H. W. Bush

In a stirring speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention, the then presidential nominee stared America in the eye and made powerful promises that some argue he later broke.

Message: We promise ourselves that we will read a new book, take an interesting-sounding course, or attend a workshop or seminar, and then we veg out in front of the TV.

Elementary education is mandatory, and technically so is high school. But the reality is that many of us either didn't have the opportunity to complete high school and college, or chose, for a variety of reasons, not to. Life, with all of its demands and pressures, stepped in and got in the way of our formal education. And while we learn skills to succeed at work, it is often easy to neglect new learning and lessons that are not necessarily related to our jobs. Education is a lifelong career that pays not in money per se, but in personal enrichment, an expanded worldview, and a feeling of confidence.

Advice: Look around for adult education classes, creative workshops and meetings, interesting museums, and consider a hobby. Never stop learning

Question: What would you like to learn and how can you go about re-enrolling in the process of self-education?

You Can't Take It With You
—Kaufman and Hart, 1936

Wildly famous comedic Broadway play.

Message: While the above play's title probably refers to money, it is equally as valid for the wealth of experience and wisdom the elderly have to offer.

We all marvel at centenarians, those incredible people who have lived over a hundred years. We marvel at their physical longevity, and are amazed when, in addition, they are vital, aware, and articulate. These are our living encyclopedias, capable of educating us about life and living. These fountains of experience and wisdom can guide us in our travels. These are our teachers as are the countless aged among us. They have an obligation to share their insights, as much as we have the responsibility to ourselves to listen.

Advice: Seek out the wisdom of age... find a mentor.

Question: From whom in your life can you seek wisdom and knowledge?

CHAPTER NINE

TECHNOLOGY

Technology brings us health, leisure time, entertainment and some aggravation.

“What We Got Here is a Failure to Communicate”
—*Cool Hand Luke*, 1967

Strother Martin as the warden speaks these words to Paul Newman as Luke Jackson, a prisoner, in a sinister tone, telling him that trying to escape from his prison is a very bad idea.

Message: Many of us feel immobilized when we are disconnected from our cell phone or the Internet.

It started as a status symbol. Only doctors carried pagers because they had to be **Available** for life and death emergencies. Now all of us seem to have enough drama in our lives to warrant being in touch at all times. One wonders if this attempt at not missing anything is actually such a major distraction that it is causing us to miss everything. These devices also allow us not have to deal in person with unpleasant exchanges like break-ups, performance reviews, and missed meetings. One-sided conversations without lengthy explanations are also a benefit of voice and e-mails. Is this electronic connection actually decreasing human interaction? It is sad, as the authors walk through the universities where they teach, and notice students talking together, not to each other, but on their cell phones.

Advice: Reconnect with others directly. Regularly turn off that cell and Blackberry.

Question: How do you feel when you are disconnected from your electronics and how can you truly enjoy these unconnected moments?

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking
—Ad Slogan for the *Yellow Pages*

Almost synonymous with print advertising, this world-famous tag line promises that with the real *Yellow Pages*, people can find everything and anything they want at the tip of their fingers.

Message: Science and technology offer many wonders, but at what cost to our happiness, contentment, and peace of mind.

Life without cell phones has become inconceivable, but fears of brain tumors and neurological damage, despite the lack of evidence, still abound. Microwave ovens can zap us a fantastic feast in seconds, but woe betide the diner with a pacemaker. Digital cameras can store thousands of images on a peanut-sized chip and computers can make us magnificent multi-taskers; but we spend an inestimable number of hours squinting at LED screens and displays. Broadband, hi-definition and satellite television can bring thousand of choices into our living rooms, and we ask ourselves, “why leave the house?” Hand-held and online video games tantalize our children, who have forgotten how to play catch and run... for fun!

Advice: Tune out, turn off, and unplug, at least once a day.

Question: What can I do in the course of my week for enjoyment that does not involve electronic gadgets?

“Baby Steps”

The title of Dr. Leo Marvin’s (Richard Dreyfuss) book as well as his advice to his patient Bob Wiley (Bill Murray) from the 1991 film *What About Bob?*

Message: Ancient wisdom reminds us that even the longest journey begins with a single step.

Buy the right pair of sneakers, and just do it; eat the right kind of food and just feel it; take the right kind of drug, and just become it. And if these don’t work, contact the right plastic surgeon and just fix it; seek out the right guru and just believe it; spend enough money, and just have it... all! We are led to believe that we can have it all, do it all and be it all by taking just the right shortcut, made all the more easy with just the right machine, labor-saving device, food, or pharmaceutical. In the process, we have lost the value of hard work, sustained effort, and even the hard-won lessons that failure can bring us. The greatest accomplishments are the result of countless hours of hard work.

Advice: Forgo shortcuts on the road to health and happiness. Get your hands dirty, break a sweat.

Question: What accomplishment am I most proud of?

Space, the Final Frontier
—*Star Trek*, 1966-1969

In 1966, Gene Rodenberry created a universe of the future with his visionary television series, *Star Trek*, each episode of which opened with these words by William Shatner as Captain James T. Kirk.

Message: Shall we look to the heavens and technology's ability to take us there for salvation?

The universe is vast! Orbiting telescopes and remote mountaintop observatories provide us with a glimpse into the infinite and the possible. In just 40 years, we have gone from unmanned rockets to manned space stations, capable of sustaining small colonies for months and years at a time. The galaxy is within reach and our explorations have deepened our belief that life exists somewhere out there, and that when we have depleted the resources of mother earth, there will surely be other welcoming worlds. As a result, we have come to treat our celestial home as we do most of our massed produced commodities... dispensable and disposable. We litter, congest, and pollute our lives. We are tuned more into electronic signals than the beating of our heart and the cadence of our breathing.

Advice: At least once a day, spend time looking at your home, the trees, the animals, and the people around it... and breath deeply.

Question: What can I do to reconnect with nature, and the rhythms of my body and world?

I Want My MTV
—Ad Slogan

In the 1980s, music fans the world over were able to tune into a new phenomenon, music television... without commercials!

Message: Live concerts, as exciting as they are, may not always be accessible or affordable.

In-home, wall-to-wall, surround-sound stereo centers make every home an entertainment castle. iPods allow us to carry thousands of songs with us everywhere. Satellite radio brings even more musical possibilities to our lives and daily commute. Music is everywhere... a digital deluge! Barely a decade ago, Muzak and elevator music seemed intrusive; now, there is virtually no escape from what MTV hath wrought. While no one would question the beauty of a Mozart aria or the tantalizing twang of a good old country love song, silence brings its own sweet sound.

Advice: Make your own music... whistle, hum, listen to the birds... and once in a while, surround yourself with the sounds of silence.

Question: Is there time in my day for absolute quiet?

“What is it You Don’t Like About Yourself?”

—*Nip/Tuck*, 2003-present

Question asked by either Dr. Sean McNamara (Dylan Walsh) or Dr. Christian Troy (Julian McMahon) as plastic surgeons, to any new patient at the beginning of each show.

Message: Because of better technology, media representations of beauty, and society’s expectations of people, many women feel inadequate about their appearance, which has created a huge market for plastic surgery.

Make-up, clothes, exercise, and hair coloring are not enough in our image-conscious world. A quicker route to better looks is through the knife. In our beauty celebrity youth obsessed culture, looking younger is an imperative. The market for plastic surgery has grown to even include adolescents, where body image is self image and physical risk does not seem to be a consideration. Surgery has unfortunately become as common as SAT tutoring. Procedures for the young are not confined to just nose jobs, as breast reductions and liposuction are now fairly common. Barb, age 16, pushed her parents to have “some lipo” on her thighs. Though expensive and not without risks, her parents agreed, only to have Barb wage another campaign just 5 months after the surgery, for breast enhancements.

Advice: Looks are important, but in this day and age we can radically alter our physical self without dangerous surgery.

Question: What do you like about yourself?

“Say Hello to My Little Friend”
—*Scarface*, 1983

The gangster Tony Montana, played by Al Pacino, uses this threat before shooting his enemies with a very large machine gun.

Message: There is always a “next big thing” in electronics, which in reality seems to be smaller and smaller in size.

All electronics, after a short time, become obsolete. Remember transistor radios? They were replaced by the Sony Walkman, which was supplanted by iPods. From analog to digital and land-lines to cellular, we as consumers are lost in a maze of choice, with new products, instructions and “contracts.” The learning curve to use these electronics is steep and often best understood by the M (for media or millennium) generation. And just when the programming of one of these tech marvels is mastered, along comes a more complicated version with more bells and whistles, usually tinier. Nanotechnology will eventually allow these devices to be implanted on our bodies, not just hanging from our ear or attached to our belt. Is this a master plan for us to all become Cyborgs (part machine)? Or is this simply a marketing strategy to keep these devices in the forefront of consciousness?

Advice: Is it necessary for you to have the newest and smallest electronic gadget? It may be expensive, in terms of time (to figure out how to program it) and money.

Question: Do you read the instruction manuals for all the electronics you own?

“ET Phone Home”

—*ET - The Extraterrestrial*, 1982

Adorable space alien’s **brief** declaration to indicate he is separated from “home” and wants to return.

Message: Cell phone use has gotten out of hand. No longer used for emergencies or a critical business transaction, these technological marvels have their drawbacks.

Cell phones give and take. Gone are the days of waiting in line at a phone booth. We can talk and conduct business from almost anywhere. This makes us always available to children, parents, bosses, and spouses. Cell phones act as electronic umbilical chords, keeping us securely tethered. We are also often captured as a reluctant audience to meaningless conversations. People use cell phones to talk about personal matters in inappropriate venues (elevator, bus, class) in exhibitivive fashion. These talkers seem to have a need to document all the trivial aspects of their mundane lives to friends and family. Do we have to be a party to these boring details?

Advice: Use cell phones for your benefit, while being respectful of those around you.

Question: What do you use your cell phone for, and what percent of this use is really necessary?

Better Living through Chemistry
—E.I. Dupont Company

In the 1930s, when the laboratory and industry teamed up to revolutionize our lives, Dupont, a leader in the field, promised “better things for better living... through chemistry.

Message: The more we know about the way these mysterious micro-sized compounds influence our lives, the healthier and happier we can become by adding them to the food chain... at least in principle.

One need not stray too far from the television, the Internet or magazines to learn about all the wonder foods and beverages available at the local specialty health food store, and to an ever-increasing degree, in traditional supermarkets. Nutrient and vitamin-fortified water, high-energy snack and fruit bars, and genetically “improved” fish, fowl, and flesh are modern day nectars and ambrosias. Visions of sugar plums have been replaced by mouthfuls of miraculous comestibles. The joy of biting into a fresh crunchy apple, downing a glass of cool, crisp water, and eating from the land is becoming a thing of the past. We need college degrees to know how and what to eat, and anxiety has become a main staple in our diets.

Advice: Make sure the number of words on the food/drink label does not exceed the calorie count.

Question: When is the last time I bit into or drank something truly natural, and how did I feel about the experience?

“Let’s Get Ready to Rumble”

—Michael Buffer, Sports Announcer

Usually before a major boxing match, after the introductions and rules, Michael in his classic tux, shouts out his catchphrase to fire up the fans and fighters to begin the match.

Message: As the technology becomes more advanced, the sights and sounds of video gaming become both more real and violent.

A major share of the video games industry is based on First Person Shooter Games. Unlike TV, the VG audience is literally embedded in the media. Blood, decapitation, and the murder of innocents are all part of the Darwinian Mean World of video games. You win by the number of kills. There is no altruism in *Halo* or *Grand Theft Auto*. It is no wonder that the military uses these “games” to simulate warfare where the Zen of killing is practiced. There is no time to curse a miss or celebrate a hit, as you must move on to the next target. The joystick or mouse enhances the interactive effect, promoting habit-forming and even addictive behavior.

Advice: Video games are fun and even cathartic, but they fortunately do not portray the real world.

Question: Are there any video or even board games you can play with family and friends that focus on cooperation and relationships?

CHAPTER TEN

HEALTH

Health is everything.

“What’s Up Doc?”
—Bugs Bunny

He wasn’t called “Bugs” for nothing. This zany cartoon rabbit, a mainstay of the Warner Bros. family, was always one hop ahead of the perennially outsmarted Elmer Fudd.

Message: You, more than any physician, are in control of your health.

Physicians have always been placed on pedestals, almost godlike in their abilities to heal and even cure. Ever-ready with a prescription, laboratory test or referral, we have come to rely upon doctors as our go-to guys (and gals) in times of health crises. So much so that we often overlook the wisdom of our own bodies in guiding us and the power of good eating to balance us. And while, perhaps, we have tamed nature (or so we think), we have not fully learned from it how to heal ourselves.

Advice: Pay attention to your body’s signals, including those that are encouraging you to seek a healthy lifestyle or call a doctor.

Question: In looking around your life, what activities, foods, and experiences help you to feel physically strong?

It Takes a Licking
—Ad Slogan for Timex Watches

Touted as the most durable of all commercially available wristwatches, the Timex could survive a swan dive off of a waterfall or a ride on the propeller of an airplane.

Message: Our bodies are miraculous machines, capable of incredible resilience.

Barring serious illness, our bodies seem almost limitlessly capable of mending themselves. With the right care, and even sometimes without it, cuts and scrapes heal. Our metabolism re-adjusts itself; and absent over-indulgence and self-destructive habits and vices, we can recover from most illness. While we may indeed become frailer and less physically capable as we age, commitment to self-care and exercise over the long haul can help us remain active and relatively fit.

Advice: Our bodies are not fragile but they do need some maintenance.

Question: In what ways have I been able to rely on my body over the years and what does it need from me?

“I Know Nothing, Nothing!”
—*Hogan’s Heroes*, 1965-1971

Catchphrase stammered by Sergeant Schultz played by John Banner, when he didn’t want to know what his prisoners were really up to.

Message: Many people seek their medical advice from the Internet.

Before getting medical help from a real live health care giver, we now go first to cyberspace. As a result, we may not only obtain false information, but also misinterpret the facts. Medical information mishandled can promote new fears, fueling existing worries or even creating absurd rationalizations, diffusing anxiety concerning potentially dangerous symptoms. This is no different than doctors treating themselves or members of their families. Objectivity is lost and serious illness minimized. The Internet can even give first, second and even third medical opinions, until you obtain the one you want. This is risky, as you and your web server are not experienced doctors. One diagnosis or pill does not fit every clinical situation. Sandy was having lower abdominal pain. She surfed the Net, which mentioned several possibilities including the flu, gall bladder and appendix problems. Not understanding the dire implications of belly pain and delaying seeing her doctor, she became quite ill and an elective operation turned into emergency surgery.

Advice: The Internet has a great deal of medical information, but it sometimes has to be filtered through the eyes of an objective clinician.

Question: Does medical information on the Internet make you more or less anxious?

“Do the Math!”
—???

Popular catchphrase used in many different contexts to describe an irrefutable truth, but of origin unknown.

Message: Unfortunately, health care has become a numbers game, where indices (blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose) and insurance codes have supplanted compassion.

While blood chemistries and a numbered diagnosis are important, human beings are more than a sum of figures. Clinical evaluation of the state of our health requires an understanding of who we are as people. Our work, relationships, activity level, stresses, and diet all contribute to our degree of well-being. Obsessing over good and bad lipids, sugar levels, and pulse rates create as much stress as worrying about hours slept or number of bowel movements per day. Dehumanizing ourselves with these absolute numbers may be worse for one's health than any test result.

Advice: Get a doctor who practices on people, not numbers.

Question: Does your doctor take the time to get to know you?

“Up Your Nose with a Rubber Hose”
—*Welcome Back Kotter*, 1975-1979

Vinnie Barbarino’s (John Travolta) number one “rank” (insult) to put down an adversary during his classroom follies.

Message: There is a lack of civility in health care.

There has been a major change in health care. Technology in concert with managed care insurance coverage has produced a system of profit centers, rather than cures. We are now consumers instead of patients. Volume rules with shorter and more abrupt visits. There is little loyalty between patient and doctor. Patients come and go, based on their constantly shrinking coverage and physicians spend their time thinking about early retirement instead of a diagnosis. This all makes for a broken system of care with poor doctor-patient relations as well as bad physician-to-physician interactions. A harsh public policy on privacy (HIPPA), as well as non payment for consultations, creates a dysfunctional team approach, leading to rudeness and mismanagement. Unfortunately, going to the doctor has become as unpleasant and impersonal as air travel.

Advice: Make an effort to develop a relationship with your primary care physician. It is imperative for your well-being.

Question: Do you know anything about your doctor? Where is she from? What are her interests?

A Little Dab'll Do Ya
—Haircream Advertising Slogan

Not to be confused with Fred Flintstone's "yabba dabba do", this expression was the advertising tagline for Brylcreem, a gooey gel guaranteed to keep your hair in place almost indefinitely.

Message: Exercise, healthy food, and medication can help, but in moderation.

Exercise-gym centers are everywhere; sprouting like mushrooms after a rainstorm. Magazines, cable shows, books, and endless streams of advertising dedicated to better food and eating are enough to guilt us into anorexia. In addition, there are lifestyle drugs to enhance erections, sexual response, and hair growth, as well as to quell restless leg syndrome, peripheral artery syndrome and a myriad of psychological ills. Where do we draw the line? How much exercise do we really need? Do we need to mortgage our homes, our children's education, and our future so we can afford to shop in so-called Health stores? Do doctors really understand the impact to the body of taking so many pills that are often cross-prescribed for seemingly opposite problems?

Advice: Everything in moderation!

Question: Do you spend too much time obsessing about diet, food, exercise and pills, when you could be enjoying other activities and the company of friends?

Have It Your Way
—Fast Food Advertising Slogan

Always trying to stay one step ahead of the competition, in thinking outside the bun, Burger King created the above ad slogan to sum up the difference between them and McDonald's.

Message: Fast food is tasty... it lures you from miles away; but eater beware!

In an era of fast-everything, including Internet connection, cars and morals, fast-food tops the list. And the menu is limitless. Salted and seasoned fries, triple-stacked burgers, deep-fried chicken, sugar-saturated soft drinks and thick-as-a-brick shakes are often irresistible. With regard to calories, cholesterol and carcinogens, the sky is clearly the limit. While we can indeed have it our way; which way do we actually want it... toxic or healthy? More and more, fast food menus are including healthy alternatives including salads, skim milk, veggie burgers, and fruit.

Advice: If you must eat and run, or drive-through, read the "whole menu", not just the tasty treats in bold print.

Question: Which deadly delicacies can you live without... and how can you replace them with healthy alternatives?

“I’ll Have What She’s Having”
—*When Harry Met Sally*, 1989

After Sally, played by Meg Ryan, fakes an orgasm in a deli, an older woman looking on makes the above request of the waiter.

Message: Sex is an important aspect of both physical and mental health.

When speaking of health, you hear a great deal about diet and exercise, but not enough about the value of sex. Sex is essential for psychological and physical well-being. Sex decreases both internal and external tensions. The act of sex provides a positive atmosphere between you and your partner, all of which diffuses stress and promotes good health. Good sex is playful and engages our fantasy life, keeping our minds active. Role playing and make believe (together or alone) in sex, sustains not only desire, but imagination, which adds to the richness of our mental lives.

Advice: Make sex an active and positive part of your life, not an obligation and of course keep it SAFE.

Question: Is sex a subject you and your partner can discuss?

“Life is a Banquet and Most Poor Suckers are Starving to Death!”
—*Auntie Mame*, 1958

Rosalind Russell as Mame Dennis spouts her hedonistic philosophy of life to her secretary Agnes Gooch (Peggy Cass).

Message: Depression sucks the energy from everything.

One the most common threats to good health is depression. Throughout the lifecycle, depression shows itself in different ways: babies fail to thrive; young children are hyperactive or accident prone; teens complain about all sorts of physical worries; the elderly complain about insomnia and constipation. Most of the time, there is no explanation as to why you are feeling sad, pessimistic, or hopeless as depression may not be associated with a clear external cause. While loss or failure may lead to simple grief, there is more anger in depression, often turned against oneself. A small loss, may, however, represent significant issues at an unconscious or symbolic level, and turn into an overwhelming depression. For some, depression appears and leaves as a fast-moving wave, while for others, it stays as an unfortunate imprint on the mind's landscape. Depression is associated with many physical disabilities, including heart disease, GI disturbances, and even cancer. Depression can be modified with psychotherapy and drugs, but not cured. It is a chronic illness that needs to be monitored.

Message: Depression is a serious illness.

Question: Do you understand the difference between being sad and depressed?

“And That’s the Way It Is”
—Walter Cronkite

Considered at the time to be the most trusted man in America, the legendary newsman signed off from each of his CBS Evening News broadcasts with this terse, yet powerful summation.

Message: Sometimes, regardless of our best efforts to stay healthy and fit, illnesses and disease happen.

In the face of adversity, and sickness in particular, it is not uncommon to ask why bad things happen to good people. And how exactly is it that illness can befall an otherwise healthy person, or disease can afflict someone who takes all precautions against it. Truth be told, there are many factors over which we have little control, from our complex genes, ever-evolving micro-organisms to yet undiscovered pollutants. While this may indeed be a frightening prospect, we should not be daunted in living the healthiest life possible and building a lifestyle that supports it.

Advice: If you can’t be in the health you love, love the health you’re in.

Question: What did I do the last time I was ill or hurt in order to gain strength and regain health?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MORTALITY

The end of life encourages both evaluation and fear.

May the Force Be With You
—*Star Wars*, 1977

Traditional valediction between Jedi Knights in the *Star Wars* universe.

Message: Whether of divine origin or inexplicable forces of nature, energy binds all living creatures, even beyond death.

One of the true mysteries of the universe is what happens to us after we die. Some take comfort in the belief that whatever it is that comprises our “selves” simply dissolves into atoms upon our death. Ashes to ashes! Others believe that our “essence”, or soul, passes into other living forms. Or perhaps, as physicists suggest, since energy cannot be created... or destroyed, that part of us which is energy returns to a great immeasurable reservoir to be tapped by all living things. In the end, quite literally, we may never know, but great comfort may be derived from believing that in whatever form, we do continue.

Advice: Have conversations with friends about this very important notion.

Question: Which of these notions gives you the most comfort in the face of death?

“Get Busy Living or Get Busy Dying”
—*The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994

Tim Robbins (Andy Dufresne) tells Morgan Freeman (Red) his philosophy of life.

Message: Worrying about dying wastes your ‘being alive’ time.

Much too much time is spent fearing the unknown perils of death. We do understand the physiological basics of death, but what about the mind? And what about the “soul?” There have been no news reports from the great beyond. Religion, which thrives on its ability to know the ultimate truth (heaven, virgins, fire) about death, is filled with beliefs, but is lacking in the fact department. The meaning and phenomena of death, one of the main questions of philosophy, studied for hundreds of years by the greatest of thinkers, offers no answers. Due to a lack of objective data, death is scary. While working as an intern in a large city hospital, one of the authors often asked recently-resuscitated patients who had near death experiences, “so what happened?” The answers were always vague and fuzzy. “There was no light or levitation, just nothing.”

Advice: Life is finite. Treat it as something to be used and enjoyed.

Question: Do you understand that what you think happens when you die is based on belief, not fact?

“I Coulda Been a Contender”
—*On the Waterfront*, 1954

Lamenting his regret for listening to his brother and taking a “dive” in a boxing match, Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy utters these famous words to his brother Charlie, played by Rod Steiger.

Message: Regrets will always be a part of life.

In evaluating one’s life, there are going to be feelings of remorse: “I wish I had spent more time with family, and less time at the office;” “I should have bought that building;” “ Why did I stay married?”

While we can learn from bad experiences or missed opportunities, events cannot be undone. The past is the past. It is a waste of time and energy to go over past mistakes again and again. It is sad, at the end of life, to realize that many risks were not taken or experiences tried. But it is only with the hindsight of old age that we do understand that life is finite and that safety does not always provide happiness. The unknown can sometimes be fun. Obligations, and our need for achievement, can take away from the vitality of living. Alan spent his entire life building his business “for his family.” Depriving them and himself of vacations and basic comforts as well as his time, he achieved his goal of a mega-manufacturing empire. He won, creating a foundation in his family’s name, which made him beloved to the many that benefited from his charity. This happened, however, at the expense of his own family and his own enjoyment of life. Looking back, Alan grew into a bitter old man.

Advice: A life may be worthwhile but not worth living. Find the Golden Mean between fun and achievement.

Question: What are some of your regrets and what can you do to resolve them... in the present?

Yadda, Yadda, Yadda
—*Seinfeld*, 1990-1998

Overused, dismissive, vague, and short-cut phrase created by George's (Jason Alexander) dishonest girlfriend so she could leave out important information.

Message: Successful retirement requires concrete planning; it can't be just a vague concept.

The realities of retirement usually focus on one question, "Do you have enough money?" And yet after a lifetime of 50-60-hour work weeks, the question should be, "How will I fill my time?" Golf, volunteer work, babysitting the grand kids are all worthwhile activities, but do they provide enough structure?

Lee hated the micro managing of his young supervisor, so when an early retirement package was offered, he jumped at it. He, like many, had only one vision of retirement: "no alarm clock and plenty of time to read the whole newspaper every morning." He soon realized that without the structure of work, he felt at a loss and all the days of the week seemed the same. After feeling depressed for a few months, he accepted the need to "do something." He took up biking and soon got a part-time job in a restaurant where he was surrounded by people. He now gets to read the paper only twice a week.

Advice: Retirement is an important stage of life and needs to be thoughtfully and clearly planned, containing as much structure as free time.

Question: How do you envision your retirement and what can you do to move toward it?

“I’ve Fallen... and I Can’t Get Up”
—Ad for Medical Alert Device

Ad line for the Life Alert medical alarm system, demonstrating the importance of getting help quickly.

Message: As we get older, we may fear disability more than death.

Being incapacitated physically or mentally is among our greatest fears. It raises dependency and loss-of-control issues. Being ill places a burden on our loved ones and depletes our finances. It may signal the end of privacy and the loss of our sense of dignity, as even bodily functions become exposed to the world. While death is final and quick, severe disability can last for years. Joan was an independent single mom. Late in life she developed a form of Parkinsonism. Unable to continue working, she was taken in by her only child. Seeing the strain her care was taking on her daughter’s family, she asked to be placed in a nursing home. Unlike her dreaded fantasies of what it would be like there, the care facility provided her not only with better and appropriate care, but also with new friendships.

Advice: Old age and infirmity are part of life, we can either try to adapt to it, or give up.

Question: What do you envision when you think about “the end of life?”

“I’ll Be Back”
—*The Terminator*, 1984

After being refused entry into a police station, Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator returns by crashing a police car through the station doors.

Message: We all, to a greater or lesser extent, would like to return in some way, after our death.

We have grown accustomed to believing that only the famous among us — the movie star, the athlete, the politician — will be remembered into perpetuity. Who remembers the common man (and woman)? Most of us may well be forgotten by the world. On the other hand, it is important to consider that we will be remembered not necessarily for what we did, but for who we were, and how we touched the lives of others.

Advice: Take regular stock of who you are and how you affect others... this will form your true legacy.

Question: How do you want to be remembered?

“Is That Your Final Answer?”

—*Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, 1999-2002

TV personality and host Regis Philbin asks the above question to make sure of the contestant’s response, on the wildly famous TV quiz show.

Message: There are limits to wills, bequests, and other traces, after death.

We all want to be remembered. Leaving a trace or an imprint indicates some victory over death. Most of us crave more than a good eulogy or perfectly engraved tombstone. We want to be immortal, or at least symbolically live on. The rich endow schools and charities to keep their name alive, as most of us leave our material possessions to our children. Treasured objects, heirlooms, houses, and even money imbued with the departed can be a source of comfort as well as conflict for the grieving. When Wills are very complex and filled with many strings tangled over several generations, one suspects an attempt at control from beyond the grave.

Advice: The legacy of having been a good, kind, loving, interested family member is the best insurance to being remembered, as well as the best inheritance for your family.

Question: What would you like your legacy to be?

That's All Folks!
—Porky Pig

The famous sign-off of Warner Bros' stuttering swine, Porky Pig.

Message: Life ends... death comes to all, and while preparation may not always be possible, forethought is helpful.

Joan and Seymour were married for decades and had, in many ways, grown together in habits, mannerisms, interests, and even personality characteristics. At restaurants, Seymour would simply say "whatever she's having." When it came to Sunday afternoon movies, Joan would make the choice and Seymour would gladly acquiesce, trusting his wife's judgment. However, when it came time late in their lives to pre-plan their funeral arrangements, Joan was reluctant out of fear of death. Seymour continued to wait for Joan to make this important decision, which never happened as she was killed in a freak accident at home.

Advice: It's never too early to plan; death sometimes comes unexpectedly.

Question: Have you made arrangements for your passing, and if not, what keeps you from doing so?

Good to the Last Drop
—Ad for Maxwell House

Advertising slogan of Maxwell House coffee

Message: Life is a gift, to be treasured and valued.

Life has a way of throwing curves at us; illness, loss, setbacks, disappointments and day-to-day frustrations challenge us at the deepest level to remain confident, optimistic, and engaged in living. As we move through life, from childhood to old age, we inevitably slow down, give up certain dreams, and say goodbye to friends and loved ones. The cynics say that we begin dying at the moment of birth, but to believe in this dark philosophy only deprives us of the pleasures, joys, and possibilities in life. Yes, we all die; and for some, it comes tragically, unexpectedly, unfairly and well before the “last drop” has been wringed from life. What choice do we really have but to live fully, savoring each relationship, each experience, each day?

Advice: Make a “bucket list” and begin checking off those things you would like to do that are within your grasp, and within reason. Don’t wait.

Question: What would I like to accomplish? Who would I like to be? Who would I like to meet?

Can You Hear Me Now?
—Phone Ad

While we don't even know his name, the humble, plain-clad television spokesman for Verizon Communications introduced us to the power of wireless telephone to keep us in touch, no matter how great the distance.

Message: While death separates us from loved ones, we can still communicate with them in meaningful ways.

Some of us go to great lengths to maintain connection with departed loved ones; even to the point of seeking out the assistance of those who profess clairvoyance and paranormal abilities. For the rest of us, death brings a most definite end to the physical connection to those we love. However, cherished memories, pictures, videos, and even sentimental objects can help us to maintain the bond. Rituals of remembrance, both solitary and shared, as well as creative activities including letter writing to and conversations with lost loved ones, or simply playing a favorite shared tune, can provide us with an opportunity to stay connected at a deep emotional level.

Advice: Maintaining a connection with lost loved ones is part of living.

Question: Who in my life that I have lost would I like to share a thought with or memory of?

INDEX OF QUOTES AND TAGLINES

- A Little Dab'll Do Ya 113
A Spoonful of Sugar Makes the
Medicine Go Down 31
And That's the Way It Is 117
As God is My Witness, I'll Never
Go Hungry Again 5
Baby Steps 98
Baby, You're the Greatest 76
Better Living through Chemistry
104
Blackboard Jungle (Movie Title) 85
Book Him, Danno 84
Can You Hear Me Now? 129
Danger, Will Robinson 9
Deal or No Deal 39
Do the Math 111
Do You Believe in Miracles? 73
Duck and Cover 35
Eighty Percent of Success is Just
Showing Up 48
E.T. Phone Home 103
Everything Old is New Again 81
Famous for Being Famous, 21
Fasten Your Seat Belts, This is
Going to be a Bumpy Night 4
Frankly Scarlet, I Don't Give a
Damn 44
Garbage In, Garbage Out 78
Genius is One Percent Inspiration
and Ninety-Nine Percent
Perspiration 50
Get Busy Living or Get Busy Dying
121
Good to the Last Drop 128
Greed is Good 63
Have It Your Way 114
Hello Dave 38
Houston, We Have a Problem 10
How YOU Doing? 55
I Am What I Am 14
I Am Your Father 28
I Can't Get No Satisfaction 41
I Coulda Been a Contender 122
I Have a Dream 26
I Know Nothing, Nothing 110
I Like Children... If They're
Properly Cooked 29
I Want to be Alone 45
I Want My MTV 100
I'll Be Back, 125
I'll Have What She's Having 115
I'll Make Him an Offer He Can't
Refuse 66
I'm Not a Crook 51
I'm Not a Doctor, But I Play One on
Television 75
I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up 124
In the Future, Everyone Will Be
Famous for 15 Minutes 79
Is it Safe? 6
Is That Your Final Answer? 126
It Ain't Over Till It's Over 43
It Keeps Going and Going and
Going 72
It Takes a Licking 109
It's Always Something 40
It's Not Who You Are Underneath,
It's What You Do That Defines
You 17
Just Do It 49
Just Like Ozzie and Harriet 27
Just When I Thought I Was Out,
They Pull Me Back In 16
Lassie Come Home (Movie Title) 88
Let Your Fingers Do the Walking
97
Let's Be Careful Out There 11
Let's Get Ready to Rumble 105

- Life is a Banquet and Most Poor
Suckers are Starving to Death
116
- Live Long and Prosper 60
- Location, Location, Location 86
- Married... with Children* (TV
Show) 30
- May the Force Be With You 120
- Money Honey 67
- Money Makes the World Go Round
68
- Mrs. Robinson, You're Trying to
Seduce Me 74
- No Soup for You 52
- Nobody's Perfect 2
- One Small Step, 23
- Priceless 69
- Read My Lips 92
- Rosebud 3
- Say Hello to My Little Friend 102
- Say the Secret Word 8
- She's My Sister, She's My
Daughter, She's My Sister 32
- Show Me the Money 64
- Sing Out Loud Louise, Sing Out 33
- Smile, You're On Candid Camera
80
- So Much Time and So Little to Do
87
- Sock It to Me 90
- Space, the Final Frontier 99
- Swim, Swim, Swim; Just Keep
Swimming 19
- Thanks for the Memories 15
- That's All Folks 27
- That's Where the Money Is 53
- The Medium is the Message 77
- The Thrill of Victory, the Agony of
Defeat, 89
- There's A Sucker Born Every
Minute 65
- They Cut the Turkey Without Me
34
- Time to Make the Donuts 54
- Up Your Nose with a Rubber Hose
112
- We are Two Wild and Crazy Guys 7
- We've Got a Really Big Show 91
- What Happens in Vegas Stays in
Vegas 42
- What is it You Don't Like About
Yourself? 101
- What We Got Here is a Failure to
Communicate 96
- What, Me Worry? 61
- What's Up Doc? 108
- Wherever You Go, That's Where
You Will Be 18
- Who Loves Ya Baby? 56
- Who Was That Masked Man? 20
- Yadda, Yadda, Yadda 123
- You Can't Handle the Truth 62
- You Can't Take it With You 93
- You Got Mail 22
- You're Fired 57