

## **Things You Can Do to Help Ensure Success**

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The psychoanalytic insights contained here are offered with no knowledge of where you are in your life right now. So the things I will say will hit home only now and then. This unavoidably intermittent level of connection will delay your progress to an extent. But that doesn't mean that you should sit back until you have a clear vision of the road ahead. Here are some suggestions of what you should do while reading this book to bring your personal obstacles into the sharpest focus possible.

### **1. Become curious about your feelings and emotions.**

Become curious about your feelings, thoughts, emotions, and actions and start looking to understand how they might relate to each other and your past experiences, particularly those of your childhood. Everything should fit together logically. Be patient. It'll take a while to sort everything out. In the meanwhile, stay curious particularly about things in your behavior that strike you as odd, such as any odd thoughts or feelings or emotions that surface out of proportion to the situations that provoked them. These things don't mean that you're weird. They are merely somehow related to what you have learned. Keep them at the top of the list of things you want to investigate, because they could very well be related to what's stopping you. Your aim should be to develop an almost out-of-body perspective from which you can experience your thoughts, feelings, and emotions nearly as if they belonged to someone else.

If you are lucky enough to have psychological anxiety attacks, try to see what might have provoked them. It may be something someone said or the way the person said it. Or it may be just something you casually observed or a thought or a remembrance. There are generally triggers, although sometimes they are very subtle. Look to something that occurred within a minute of the appearance of the attack. While in the grip of the panic attack, pay as close attention as possible to the thoughts that come to mind. What do they say is fearful? What do they tell you to do to feel better? What is the net effect of the anxiety attack—what does the occurrence of such attacks keep you from doing in your life? What goals do they prevent you from achieving? How are the fears that arise similar to fears that were provoked in the past? In what sorts of situations were those fears provoked? How are those situations similar to what you are facing now? Who provoked them? How is that person similar to the person who participated in triggering the fears now?

I say that you would be lucky to have psychological anxiety attacks because it would show that your psychological engine is still running, since the attacks indicate that you are continuing to fight for a better life. The anxiety gives you a handy point of focus for starting your self-analysis. Use your own judgment, but, if possible, don't combat the anxiety with drugs or alcohol; it's infinitely better to use the anxiety as an aid in getting at yourself, even though it's not very pleasant. Your anxiety will gradually go away as you begin to understand what provoked it and how these influences operate in other ways in your life. The lessening of anxiety won't necessarily mean that you have altogether beaten the influences. There will still be more work to do. But it will mean that you have

opened enough of a window to your unconscious to communicate with yourself more in terms of thoughts and remembrances than terrifying symptoms.

## **2. Keep a notebook handy.**

I always hated it when self-help books would tell me to keep a diary, and I refused to do it at first. So I understand if you refuse, too. But once I became committed to self-analysis, I began to see that a notebook of some sort was essential. One reason is that insights will come to mind at odd moments, and it's important to keep a record of them because you will forget them if you don't and it may be years before you will remember them again. I used a small spiral notebook that fit into my back pocket. It got pretty battered by the time I filled it with remembrances and thoughts, but it did its job because it enabled me to recall insights that I later could remember in no other way.

Also use the notebook to keep track of the time you spend actively working toward your goal. Very often, we spent a lot of time thinking and worrying about a goal and only a little time actually working on it. That tends to be discouraging because our memories mix the worrying and work times together, leaving us feeling that we spent a tremendous time working and got nowhere. What you will find when you begin logging in the start time of a period of active work and then logging out when you stop is that you spent a miniscule period of time actually working toward your goal. This is kind of comforting because it shows exactly why you aren't making progress.

## **3. Set aside a period for reflection each day.**

Set aside half an hour each day for quiet reflection. Begin by getting yourself in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and then check over each part of your body to make sure it is relaxed. Now think of nothing. That's right, nothing. Don't try to think about anything at all. In fact, try to keep your mind as blank as possible. Imagine that your eyes are looking into the backs of your shut eyelids. If thoughts or memories rise, let them, but don't force the issue. If nothing comes to mind, that's fine too. Just try to maintain a state of undirected consciousness for a half hour. There, you have just learned Transcendental Meditation, boiled down to its essentials. Even if no insights come to mind, you will find that you feel mentally and physically refreshed and reinvigorated at the end of the half hour.

When it feels natural to do so, use your relaxation periods to think about your life and the direction it is taking. Try to define the track you would like it to be on and what more you could be doing to get it there. Don't think in terms of what you "should be" doing. Think rather in terms of what you "want to" do. Using "should be" language often takes us off focus because it starts us thinking about what other people want us to do. To hell with what other people think you should be doing! Stay focused on what you want to do. Don't stray from the realization that you are keeping yourself from doing something important you want.

At times while you are relaxing, thoughts or memories may float into consciousness that you suspect might be psychologically significant. It's good to break out of the meditative state to pursue what they might mean. The best time to come upon such memories is right after waking up from a night of sleep, so try to lie in bed for a while after the alarm rings, if that's possible for you. The memories that come to the surface should be searched for

the lessons that were learned from the experiences being remembered. That is, try to imagine what the experiences may have meant to you and what life lessons you may have taken from them. Then try to relate the experiences to what is happening to your life in the present. The memories that you catch onto when you wake up remain easily accessible because they participated in your last dream of sleep. The purpose of that dream was to help you deal with the day that awaits you. So look to the lessons contained in the memories you remember upon waking for information about what you tried to tell yourself the night before.

#### **4. Outline your life story.**

Another thing to do on occasion is try to outline your life story. This story should be told in terms of your aspirations and what happened to them over the years. Update this story to the present and project it into the future. If you can think of no goals you had as a child except getting by, realize that your true goals got buried in reaction to negative experiences as you grew up. Another approach would be to ask yourself what has always interested you. Sometimes we don't connect our interests with our goals when the possibility of doing what interests us seems out of reach. Try to define how your deepest dreams got buried. Look also to see what parts of your old dreams can be salvaged and would bring new meaning to your life if you began pursuing them today. Realize that all is not well if you are an adult with children of your own and all you can think to dream about now is how you can provide a better life for your kids. You should be dreaming about that, but not only that. Your life is important in itself, too.

#### **5. Develop a provisional life plan.**

Once you have brought your life story up to date and have decided on dreams that you want to achieve in the future, start thinking about the steps you will need to take to make those dreams a reality. Think especially of your first small steps. Again, these should be things you want to do, not things you feel you should do. Put yourself first, for a change. The people who depend on you will survive.

#### **6. Learn to live on the edge.**

As you consider the possibility of changing your life, you will begin to appreciate why you haven't made the changes before. One reason, you will discover, lies with your feelings. You will anticipate that taking the first small steps will make you anxious or at least uncomfortable. That's no reason to not take those steps. Growing psychologically means stretching yourself, and when you do that, alarm bells do go off inside, because your life is no longer on old ground. Not to worry. The feelings will go away either as you become accustomed to the new ground or as you learn to deal with the feelings through psychoanalysis.

#### **7. Seek out dream buddies.**

The first rule about significantly changing your life on your own is, don't. It's much easier to accomplish if you have someone with whom you can share your fears, hopes, and dreams and who will respect them and react sympathetically to them. If you can find such people among your relatives and old friends, so much the better. But if those from your past wouldn't understand, seek out new friends who would. Depending on your religious beliefs, God also could serve as such a special friend.

## **8. Rid your life of dream busters.**

Those old friends who wouldn't understand, are they casual friends whom you see only occasionally or are they people you see a good deal? If they are the latter, turn them into the former, because they are a drain on your life. Do it now.

## **9. Don't give up!**

It's okay to give up for a while. Do it a thousand times, if you must. Give up for a day or a week or even a month or two, but don't ever give up for good. Remember, you have only one life, and with each passing day, you have a little less left. What you do with what remains is what's important. There is time enough to give up, but no point to ever giving up permanently. Growing psychologically is a lot like making sourdough bread the old-fashioned way, by taking a moldering piece of dough from a previous batch to serve as a starter for a new loaf. Oftentimes, when we have made progress, we can't capitalize on it right away. We need to let it sit a while and work its way into our psyches before applying it to the direction we should seek. Frequently it will turn out that you "gave up" merely to give yourself psychological distance from decisions that would have taken you in a wrong direction.

As you look at the road ahead, it possibly seems impossible that anything significant can happen to change the way you feel about yourself now. That is all natural and normal and to be expected because your personality has been built around failure or at least very limited success. As you start accumulating successes, however, your personality will change because those new experiences will become incorporated into who you are. This will happen slowly and gradually, and it will become difficult for you to remember how you formerly were. Experiences reorganize our personalities. So you should not allow yourself to be guided by your present estimates of success because those estimates speak more of the past than they do of the future. If you put in the necessary work, it is impossible for change to not happen. Change for the better is inevitable. You just need to stick with the program.

This points up the truth behind something that Rudy of the famous Rudy movie once wrote: "Act as if you were absolutely certain that you will succeed." What happens very often is that people try halfheartedly because they cannot envision themselves succeeding, and guess what, they don't succeed. They don't succeed precisely because they tried only halfheartedly. To change yourself, you need to succeed where you once failed. This means that you need to put yourself in the kind of situations that you have been dodging through the years and then make damn sure that you succeed this time. It's too much to expect that you will feel certain of success beforehand, but that should not be your excuse for trying halfheartedly.