

10. Conditioned Responses

Past experiences determine your view

Every time you form a view, on any subject, you are calling upon your lifetime of experiences, both good and bad, to determine that view. Your memory can bring your experiences to the surface so that you can qualify your views. However, they will be views from your conscience, your character, and your beliefs of what's right and wrong. If you doubt that, try taking a view contrary to your conscience and see how bad you feel. Even if your life has been one of abuse, degradation or rejection, you still know in your heart the real difference between right and wrong. Your view may appear less charitable because of your experiences, but you still know what is really right and wrong.

It is your own spirituality, guiding your knowledge of right and wrong, which will determine how willingly you may respect your individuality. It is your spirituality that confirms to you that you are distinct while providing you with the assertiveness for all of your exploits, no matter how small.

Make no mistake. Your inner self provides you with intuitive accomplishment and self-esteem, but what does life do to your reserves of self-belief? Life provides constant hurdles, all likely to deplete your faith in your own abilities and drag you away from the *Cycle of Confidence*.

Take a previous example, the baby that smiles, looking for some recognition for performance and finding that pure drop of self-assurance from their fountain of life. As a parent, would you yell at the baby to get down, when they have just pulled themselves to their feet for the first time? Of course you would not want to discourage them. You are aware of the effect that you could have on their sense of fulfilment and their boldness. You would more

appropriately get all emotional yourself as you share in the reflected glory of their magnificent accomplishment.

You can make a difference

Those of you with young children will know that for the next few times that baby climbs to their feet, they will look and smile waiting for your appreciation, so that their teaspoons of pure faith in themselves start to become tablespoons. Their journey of life has taken an important turn. But wait, can it last? No, sadly it won't. Their certainty is under constant attack, as is yours. They face a barrage of confidence sapping moments that are as unavoidable as are your own. They face discipline and being told not to do what they are doing. They're told not to climb to those places that they aspire to, they're told that they can't have what they want, and they're told not to put into their mouths things that might taste really good.

The first time their best little friend strikes out at them, or takes their favourite fluffy toy, something happens. Their level of certainty starts to become depleted. All this before they even go to pre-school. You should be starting to see a pattern developing.

It is imperative that those of you with children come to the realisation of how important it is to continually reinforce their individuality to them, and to encourage them to regard that separateness highly from a very young age. Does anyone really believe that children as young as fourteen can win gold medals for their respective countries in sports such as gymnastics, without the recognition and respect for their distinctiveness? The reinforcement of their originality and the encouragement to embrace that uniqueness by their families, as shown by the story of Wilma Rudolph, is always paramount to their current and future success. Of course training, diet and rest are all necessary ingredients to get to the top,

but unless they have a view of themselves as being someone special, that they can like, the other ingredients would be useless.

The early positive reinforcement from family will always be the catalyst for their success. Fortunately, anyone who has not had early positive reinforcement about their individuality, and more importantly about how to willingly accept and like who they are, will come to appreciate that they can still enhance their self-image. They could still be successful, by following the logic of the five critical steps laid out here. That view should easily be reinforced by your knowledge of how the first three critical steps are already working for you.

Early conditioning

The children are now starting school and patterns of behaviour, success or failure, are developing. You may even be reminded of your own early schooldays. Everything in your children's lives is geared towards accomplishment. Suddenly there is competition; in learning, in sport, in social interactions. Exams are competitive. Some students do well without study; others study very hard for average results. That can sap confidence. Why is it that so many students have felt knots in their stomachs before exams? The level of effort doesn't always get reflected in the results.

Unfortunately their personal need for performance increases the tension they're suffering. It's easy to feel anxious if you don't believe you are in complete control of everything in your life. Some children may be great athletes but are less gifted as scholars than their peers. Some children may still suffer defeat and disappointment if they're great scholars, if they are less gifted at athletic endeavours. Most competitors are not going to be easy winners in either field.

All these daily occurrences are contributing to the erosion of their self-image. How many of you have had a sensitive child come home from school and tearfully tell you that her

best friend doesn't like her any more? How painful is that? For both of you. For having a friend is an achievement too. This is a continuing pattern throughout schooling. Then comes adolescence where they now have to cope with pimples, dating, sexuality, independence, responsibility, and expectations of family and peers. Every day of their lives and yours, people and circumstances are working to deplete your respective levels of self-belief.

Adult conditioning

You go to work and you may choose to compete for the top job; you have to put up with whatever boss you get and you have to put up with whatever associates are in the company. Sometimes you're lucky. At other times you are not.

What if you stay home to raise your children? Your physical dimension is being fed. Responsible parents are run off their feet. What about your mental and social dimensions? As a parent have you at one time or another put your head between your knees, your hands over your ears, and screamed out for a break? Or at least felt like doing that?

You don't love your children any less; you may just feel frustrated with the impotence of your situation at that moment. You could easily arrive at the opinion that you have no control over your life and circumstances. The world is conspiring to make sure you will not spend a day of the rest of your lives without your level of self-reliance being eroded, which leads you to actually question your efforts, even in the raising of your own children.

There are lots of people who believe that as they get older the adventure is supposed to stop. They appear more comfortable spending the time contemplating the almighty disappointments that represent a life of regret. Many people have been so harshly treated by life day in and day out, year after year, that they don't have the emotional strength to continue to extol life. Can you think of friends you have known for many years that you recall were

once so full of life compared to now? What has their life done to them? Could it be that they have let falsehoods about their real value become acceptable truths?

Conditioning can be changed

Fortunately, they too can learn that the adventure never really stops. The choice will always be entirely theirs. If you think that life is not a rehearsal, that no matter how many times you've been rejected, or no matter how abusive your life has been, that there can be something better, then you are being encouraged to accept that view.

For instance, there are bungee or parachute jumps with buddies for the more adventurous. For those who don't need that level of excitement there are bush walks, theatre and musical concerts — often free of charge — museums and libraries. All developed to cater for the needs of the elderly or infirmed and often for those with financial constraints.

Confidence building will put your expectations of life into perspective. Even if you have had a life of encouragement and support, you are entitled to believe that your personal improvement is progressive, and that it is not yet complete. Your progression will be more obvious to you when you find yourself taking responsibility for your responses to situations. That will support the critical steps to ensure less feelings of guilt and fewer fluctuations in your self-belief.

Suppose you were wake to find that you have a sick child in the house. Depending on your immediate perception of the gravity of the illness, as a parent you could decide that the school, a sibling or someone else could attend to the child because you have other important engagements. In the morning rush to do other things, how quickly would you make that decision? You're under pressure to go about your business, and passing the problem over to others is the quick, easy option. However, even as the child recovers while you are elsewhere, there can easily be feelings of guilt and self-doubt about your decision to be absent.

Now suppose your Vision Statement says that you put your children first, even before your work. Irrespective of others who may be available, or the outcome at your previously arranged appointments, the responsibility is yours, so you tell others to go about their business without you as you have a sick child that you will be attending to yourself. Irrespective of how quickly your child recovers, you know that because you took responsibility you will have no feelings of guilt or self-doubt. When you face the people with whom you had previous arrangements you will do it confidently because you upheld your responsibilities, to yourself through your Vision Statement, and to your child who has priority in your life. Another advantage of your responsible decision is the firming of the bond between yourself and your child who will have detected, however fleetingly, your sacrifice and concerns.

You will find that you can take pleasure in your work and enjoy the company of your family and friends, even if things don't always appear to run smoothly. You will find that you can start every day with the knowledge that it only gets better as the day goes on.

The process of character building that develops because of the critical steps here will ensure that you can raise your level of self-belief to be able to use all of your past experiences, good and bad, to your benefit. It is when you feel positive that you will find everything starting to go well in your life. This is because it is faith in yourself that will give you the impetus to fulfil the expectations of your choices and decisions. It is then that your choices and decisions eventually become achievements.

The self-fulfilling prophecy

Choices and decisions becoming accomplishments are reflected in the working out of the self-fulfilling prophecy. What that means is that once an expectation is set, even if it isn't completely accurate, you will tend to behave in ways that are consistent with that expectation. Once you have given currency to that expectation it usually comes true.

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy can be summarised in five key principles:

1. You all have expectations of yourselves and each other,
2. You communicate those expectations in various ways,
3. You respond to those expectations by adjusting your behaviour to match them,
4. This makes the original expectations come true and
5. This creates the self-fulfilling prophecy.

This means that people's current circumstances could be seen as reflective of some of the choices they have made for themselves. How often have you heard people blame their parents or upbringing for their current circumstances? Remember that whenever people blame someone else, they are refusing to take any responsibility for themselves.

If you know people who have low self-esteem it may be because their parents had a low self-image and couldn't teach them otherwise. If their parents didn't love themselves, how could the children possibly be taught by their parents to have faith in themselves? They couldn't teach it to their children because they didn't know it themselves. If children are raised in a home where anger, abuse, fear and guilt were commonplace, then they will have been taught to be angry, abusive and frightened, and to feel guilty. If children are raised in a home where love, trust, support and sharing are commonplace, then they will have been taught to love, trust, support and share.

Think about your own childhood to confirm what you've just read and think about the type of upbringing you would like to provide for your children. You know that your children only deserve to be provided with a loving, trusting, supporting and sharing environment.

Are you responding to conditioning?

Suppose you don't have children yet or are unlikely to have any. You can still relate the self-fulfilling prophecy to your own circumstances. If you understand the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy and know that you would like to teach others that they have some value, then that theory dictates that you need initially to believe in respect for your own value. You must have belief in yourself first. That belief is guaranteed by maintaining the *Cycle of Confidence*.

The type of upbringing you had could determine how you relate to everyone you ever meet. If you show anger, abuse, fear and guilt to the world, what sort of reaction do you believe you'll get back? What types of friends will you attract and what will your relationships be like? Is it not probable that you will surround yourself with people who are most accustomed to anger, abuse, fear and guilt because that's what you all know and are prepared to accept? More appropriately, if you show love, trust, support and sharing to the world, surely that is what you can expect to get back.

It then stands to reason that your relationships and the type of friends you attract should be loving, trusting, supporting and sharing. If you can see yourself as loving, trusting, supportive and sharing and yet your friends and relationships are full of anger, abuse, fear and guilt then you may need to think more deeply about yourself to recognise what you were taught to accept. If you have been taught a set of principles different to the way you actually see yourself that could account for any feelings of guilt and confusion within your life and thoughts. Others may not be seeing you the way you see yourself.

However, if you are certain that you survived a tough upbringing, it can be used as a positive attribute. You can choose to be grateful that you were taught negative emotions

because if you can cope with those awful lessons of what not to do or feel from others, you know that you can teach positive emotions to others.

It is those who have suffered the most that have the most to teach. Fortunately you will find that following the five critical steps laid out here, that lock you into the *Cycle of Confidence*, will assist you enormously to align the person you see yourself as, to the person you will become and the person everyone else will then see and relate to as well.

The point should be made that if you can still see the qualities of love, trust, support and sharing within yourself while your life is surrounded by the opposite of some of those principles, that is in itself a wonderful realisation that you should proclaim. That means you have not lost the value of your originality, irrespective of your circumstances. The point where you really like and trust in the person that you are, by the appreciation of that separateness, is close at hand. When you really like yourself and portray that certainty publicly, you are then completing the cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Conviction will give you the ability to alter any previous negative patterns of behaviour within your life.

Nurturing self-confidence

How do you learn to nurture self-confidence? You have read that it will come initially from achievement. Additionally, any time you celebrate any exploits you will be nurturing your self-image. When you recognise the quality of the choices you used to bring about those triumphs, you will further nurture your self-belief.

Fortunately a better self-image comes from many other areas of your existence. You can get it when you perform an act of accomplishment without anyone else observing you complete whatever it was that you attempted. You can get it from positive comments delivered by those you respect, both friends and enemies. However, because you now know that self-belief comes from your spiritual dimension, its most powerful supply will come from

the choices you make, choices that set you apart from the pressures and/or influences of the world around you. They are choices that you know will be supported by your own inner voice telling you to choose that path, or stick to that decision because you know it to be right. That is when your level of self-assurance is most easily advanced, and most obviously being nurtured.

But how hard is that? You are being conditioned every day of your life, from before pre-school to the grave, to give in to the decisions and pressures of almost everything and everyone else. It is not uncommon to start to question your own inner voice. It is the questioning of your own conscience that has already been shown to be an erosion of your self-trust.

Either you make the choices or others will

Every minute of every day you must make choices such as reading on for one more chapter, with the expectation for an opportunity that will improve your life. Remember that if you don't make choices for yourself then others will make choices for you. The point should be understood here, that other people will be making choices that affect you, and those choices will require responses from you.

You know that life won't stand still for you at any time. If you can't decide where you're going, you will be dragged along by the choices made by others. A good example is if your boss comes in and says you're no longer employed, for whatever reason. What will be your response? Do you want revenge, or justice through industrial courts? Do you feel anger, panic, defiance, challenge, disappointment, complete submission or a combination of those emotions? Even if you don't feel you want to respond, you have to choose something, because you can't just keep turning up at work if there's no job.

Supposing in a work or home situation someone asks you to do something that in your heart you know is not safe or right. Your job or your relationship may be dependent on your response. You feel like you're being blackmailed. One problem with blackmail is that while you're feeling that this is wrong, the perpetrator may believe, "no, this is a fair swap". There is about to be an uncomfortable interaction between you. You want to be able to make a responsible choice about the request or order.

Taking responsibility for choices

You should now look at how best to do that. It has to do with the word "responsible". Being responsible makes you accountable for your actions and decisions. *Responsible* is derived from two roots, "response" and "able". In other words you are *able to respond* in any number of ways that you choose. You can respond by compliance or you can respond with refusal; compliance, even though you may be doing what you know in your heart to be wrong; refusal, by finding the courage to say no. Which is easier? Which of those responses have you been conditioned to give into and why? You have independent will. You have a conscience.

You know what your spiritual nature is telling you, and that is why you may have at some time experienced that sick feeling from the pit of your stomach up to your throat. You may feel sick because you know what is right and you feel sick because of the confrontation you are about to have if you stand up for yourself. You will give in to whichever of the two forces is greater, the scale of the request or order, and how much damage to your supply of self-belief you can accept. If you have spent the greater part of your life giving in to the demands of others, you'll give in. Even though part of you knows it's not right.

A good, yet extreme, example of that was originally termed the Nuremburg defence. Nazis went on trial for the terrible atrocities committed in concentration camps during the

Second World War. Those on trial were part of the planning and setting up of the infrastructures to support those atrocities. At their trial they put their hands up to say that they were not responsible because they were just following orders. However, the rest of the world said very clearly that they were responsible. They had been able to respond differently. They had chosen the path themselves.

Around the world today when atrocities are committed, you hear exactly the same argument. You know the perpetrators know the difference between right and wrong. They have chosen their path; possibly for personal gain, or because they feared the consequences of saying no or some combination of such carrots and sticks. It was always their choice. They had the power of independent will, just as you do, and they have had to take responsibility for their choices, just as you have the independent will to make choices that only you are responsible for, and for which you will be held accountable.

It is important for you to know how to make the right choices more easily and more often. You never have to do something wrong to make someone else feel right. You can always use the argument that there are many causes for the wrong things that you do, but those causes will still not excuse you. People have been known, during their court case, to give the explanation that they had done something bad because they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. That may have been a contributing factor. That may even have been the immediate cause for their actions, but it still does not excuse them. You know that they are ultimately responsible and accountable for what they say or do, just as you are.

You have the free will to make good or bad choices, and you know the difference, because your conscience tells you; and how you live, or have been forced to live, the circumstances of your life now or in the past, determines how clearly you can hear your inner voice. That clarity of your inner voice is determined by how depleted your level of self-confidence has become because of your previous life experiences. That past determines how

comfortable it is for you to say *no*, if and when you need to, even though you are aware of the difference between right and wrong.

Believe to succeed

While your subconscious mind will accept whatever you choose to believe is right and wrong, you will act out those beliefs about life and yourself. That is why the first critical step to self-confidence was the recognition and embracing of your uniqueness. It was important to believe in personal individuality first. It was then important to appreciate the value of that originality. It is when you know that you are distinct, and have accepted and value that uniqueness as a trusted friend to yourself, you will start to believe it.

That's important because knowledge provides belief, and it is belief from knowledge that has no doubts. Hence, whatever you choose to believe about life and yourself will become true for you. That is part of the self-fulfilling prophecy that you have read about previously. You have unlimited choices about what to think and every thought you have will be creating your future. Remember you're not being asked merely to think that you are incomparable and that you will eagerly and willingly accept yourself as a friend you can trust. This does not represent the personality reinforcement techniques, mentioned previously, used by some motivational trainers to cultivate belief. You're not being asked to say those things to yourself so that the self-fulfilling prophecy assists the belief to eventuate.

Rather, you must know that you are unequalled. You must be absolute in the knowledge that you are prepared to respect your unmistakable separateness, and you must believe in your determination to celebrate any and all of your achievements. It is then that your actions and the results of your actions won't often surprise you. What you believe you can do you will do, and what you choose to believe you cannot do, will result in failure. You can always find lots of reasons to blame others or circumstances for failures, but deep down

you know that there are no excuses, except for the lack of trust in yourself to succeed. When you are displaying yourself as a more assertive and caring person because you believe it to be true, it is then that you will find that because of the self-fulfilling prophecy, you have actually become what you project.

The critical steps to your self-belief will ensure you take full responsibility for your choices and decisions. Those steps, when applied, will use the choices put before you by others, and those you create yourself, to actually advance your levels of self-trust. Your levels of self-confidence will be raised because you're *able* to provide a better *response* than previously to choices and decisions. You have been given — you have given yourself — the tool, specifically your Vision Statement, that when utilised will show you how those choices will maintain the purity of your inner voice.

The decisions on choices will always be yours. Your destiny is being shaped at the time of making decisions and choices. You should now know the ethical values you have chosen to be reflected in your Vision Statement will ensure you will make the right choices much more often and much more easily. You should now also see how those choices will help you to nurture the inner creation that is your incontestable gift to yourself. You are forever linked to the *Cycle of Confidence*.

Summary

- a) Past experiences determine your view.
- b) Previous conditioning can be changed.
- c) Choices and decisions become achievements when you have faith in yourself.
- d) The self-fulfilling prophecy dictates that you must have respect for your own value before you can teach it to others.
- e) Making the right decisions will enhance your self-esteem.

- f) The character ethic of your Vision Statement will ensure you make the right choices and decisions much more often.
- g) You will succeed at what you believe you can do.

The next chapter will show you the dangers of attempting to live without the process of self-examination that is responsible for channelling your self-belief and exploits towards the building and strengthening of your character.