

# How to Take Control of Your Life

## ***We take control of our lives through:***

- Knowing what we want
- Taking skillful action to achieve it

However, at the outset we need to understand what we can control and what we can not control.

## **There are three essential things we deal with in life: Thoughts, feelings and actions**

Of these three the first two are things that are not in our direct control. You can't immediately control what you think or what you feel. The good news is that you don't need to in order to act in a meaningful way in life. That is determined through your actions, which are within your control although we may sometimes lose sight of this.

Actions include what we say as well as what we do with our hands and feet. Understanding this is the starting point. Thoughts and feelings can be bothersome but we don't need to act in response (or in reaction) to them. Once we realize we can have feelings or thoughts without necessarily acting in a certain way we can look a little bit deeper into the processes by which we come to make a decision to act.

This decision is based on certain perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Sometimes its useful to think of this like incoming information to a central circuit board. The way that circuit board is wired will determine whether an action is taken. For example if the assessment is that there is a threat present and the belief system (a complex set of thoughts) is wired to say that threats must be responded to quickly and vigorously then many quick reactions will occur in an aggressive manner to situations perceived as threatening. Whether a person perceives a situation as threatening will often depend on early conditioning, beliefs about the world and the strength or fragility of the self construct. Young men from rough backgrounds often react quickly and aggressively because there is a wide perception of threats along with a belief system that instructs them that a vigorous defense/attack is necessary to all perceptions of threat.

The important thing here is that the mental forces shaping the decision to act are usually unconscious. That means that they happen automatically ~ outside awareness. If you want to change or take control of your life one needs to develop enough awareness to notice the processes. Then one can skillfully intervene at the exact point in the circuit board where the change is needed.

If we find the decision making process is not working for us we need to develop the capacity to go in and adjust the program that process is running on. This is like the ability to go in and adjust your computer's functioning – a bit like having the authority to access the “administrator” function.

As an “administrator” you can go in and change certain settings in your computer so it works more in keeping with your preferences.

To develop your own personal “administrator” function you need to be able to switch from “unconscious” to “conscious” mode. This means watching and noticing the internal mental environment to understand what leads to what and the crucial stage where a green light is flashed before an action is taken. This is the “final permission” that occurs in your mind before the action is taken. It is here that preventative loops can be installed while more important long-lasting changes are made to the belief systems and other functions. For example there might be a generalized over-perception of threat or there may be a very fragile sense of self. There may also be family and cultural belief systems that suggest a particular action is required in a certain circumstance. These can be changed.

None of this work can be done without developing the skill to be aware of mental processes. This is generally known as mindfulness, the ability to watch without reaction.

A good preventative “loop” or safety circuit is the use of the “THINK” technique: If you can catch yourself before acting/speaking, ask these five questions; if you can answer yes to all of them then the contemplated action is likely to be beneficial and effective...

**T = is it true?**

**H = is it helpful?**

**I = is it inspiring or dignified?**

**N = is it necessary?**

**K = is it kind?**

## ***Knowing What You Want***

Knowing what you want can be quite personal but a general compass can be derived from thinking about the kind of person you want to be. When we think about the kind of person we want to be it is most useful in this context to define the characteristics that define us in terms of enduring qualities. These are thought of as our essential values. If you think of someone you really admire and think about the values that they reflect you can get an idea of what values you want to in your life.

These values (people often mention, being loving, loyal, kind, supportive, determined, considerate) are living values that you can do now and keep on doing. You can always be them a little bit more. You can examine your actions and ask whether they are in accord with these personal values – whether they reflect the qualities you want be defined by.