

How to Beat **SHYNESS**



**Secrets to a Happy,
Confident Life!**

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How to Beat Shyness

Secrets to a Happy, Confident Life

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Introduction

As hard as it may be to believe, **everyone** feels shy at some point in their life, even movie stars and corporate executives. No one is born with great self-confidence. It's a quality we all must cultivate.

While this ebook provides important truths on how to overcome shyness attitudes that are holding you back, ultimately the task is yours to perform. But this is something you **can** do, no matter what's happened to you in the past. The past, in fact, is a factor we **all** need to rise above too, and that's not easy.

Maybe you view your self-talk like an old vinyl record album (I'm really showing my age here). You believe that once it's been recorded, there's nothing you can do to change it. But the real truth is that your self-talk is more like space on your hard drive: the message on it **can** be erased, recorded over and changed. Once you accept that truth, you're on your way to making real progress in your life.

Even though this book was written for single people, married folks can benefit from it too. As you're no doubt aware, getting married doesn't solve all your problems. Your spouse has the power to build or tear down your self-confidence. ***Ultimately, your self-confidence is not based on another person's approval.*** That's a truth that once grasped, will catapult you forward in ways you never imagined.

You can find more helpful information at: www.inspiration-for-singles.com.

Ready? Let's get started!

PART 1: How to Win Over Shyness

Chapter 1: What's Behind Shyness—Really?

Whether we want to admit it or not, all of us are concerned about what other people think of us. Much of shyness stems from worrying that someone will believe we're stupid or inept.

To avoid the potential of embarrassment, we don't even try. Better to experience the pain of loneliness than the pain of feeling like an idiot, we think. Shyness has become a legitimate excuse for not trying.

I should know. For much of my life, I was a shy person. I didn't date until I was in college, and even then it was very difficult for me. I held back, always worried about what other people might think of me.

Finally graduation from college came, and it was time to look for a job. I had majored in English, had trained as a writer, and seemed to have a natural talent for it—or so my instructors had told me. When a job opened up on my hometown newspaper as a reporter, I applied for it and was hired.

That would have been great except for one thing: A reporter has to **talk** to people. **Lots** of people. Almost overnight, I had to go from being shy all my life to being aggressive. I simply had to change because my job depended on it.

The first thing I learned was that I had to **develop a thicker skin**. I couldn't let criticism stop me nor could I be afraid of what people thought of me. If I wanted to get the story, I had to be pushy sometimes, even to the point of being rude. Within days, I discovered that the power of the newspaper was intimidating. I certainly wasn't—I was a 125-pound rookie, fresh out of college, with thick glasses and a shaky voice. However, it didn't take me long to see that people

wanted to look good in the newspaper, and the way they could do that was to be polite to me and answer the questions I asked. Otherwise my story might make it look as if they had something to hide or, worse yet, that they were deliberately rude to a reporter and their business got bad publicity because of them. That would be hard for them to explain to their boss.

Within no time, I figured out that my shyness did not serve me well in my new job. In fact, it was a major detriment. And so shyness is in most things in life.

When you use shyness as an excuse for not trying, it lowers your odds of getting what you want out of life. **You can't succeed if you don't try.**

Of course, that seems perfectly logical, but most people hold onto their shyness because it's become an acceptable excuse for not trying. People may smile sadly and say, "She's just shy," as if we have some sort of tragic disease.

Until you recognize that shyness is **not** some sort of tragic disease that you can't help, it will bully you into retreating from life. In fact, you may even be angry that I'm stating that shyness is something you can overcome. You may honestly believe that you **were** born shy.

But I say that life's lamest excuse is: "That's just the way I am."

You may be that way now. You may have been that way all your life, but people are capable of change. This is what you must believe and accept if this book is to help you: "I can change, and with perseverance and God's help, my life can become better."

It's crucial that you recognize that people **are** capable of change. **You** are capable of change. We should always be trying to improve our character and personality, weeding out those traits that are offensive or destructive, and let's

face it, shyness is destructive. It keeps you from growing. Growth is healthy; stagnation is not.

One of the benefits of books like this is that you can learn from **my** experiences. If you approach this with an open mind, you'll see that it's not only quicker but less painful to learn from **my** mistakes than to have to make them yourself. I tell visitors to my web site, www.inspiration-for-singles.com, "**My** pain, **your** gain."

Earlier we noted that much of shyness comes from the fear of being perceived as stupid or inept by other people. Equally important is the way we were raised. Some kids have an adventurous childhood while others are more protected. Some are involved in many school activities; others are not.

And while it's true that some of us are extroverts and some introverts, nobody is 100% one or the other. We're all a mixture. Certainly I was more introverted before I became a reporter. Today I'm primarily an introvert, but I do enjoy talking with people and attending the occasional party.

So don't believe that because you're basically an introverted type that you can't change. It's simply a question of shifting the balance and building up the extrovert part of your nature.

Easier said than done, you say? Well, it's true that it's not going to occur with a snap of the fingers, but as I said earlier, you're not required to do this overnight. You can work on building your confidence as a body builder works on developing his or her muscles. Progress may be slow, but it's steady.

One more thing lies behind shyness, and that's your self-talk. We all have a constant monologue going inside our head, questioning, evaluating, and passing judgment. Too often shy people use the word **can't** in regard to themselves:

- “I **can’t** ask her out. She’ll turn me down.”
- “I **can’t** go to college. I’m not smart enough.”
- “I **can’t** try for that promotion. I’m too shy to work in sales.”
- “I **can’t** go to that party. Nobody will talk to me.”
- “I **can’t** speak at the company meeting. I’m too shy.”

Every day we tell ourselves things like that hundreds of times, **assuming that they’re true**. When we have the “I can’t” mindset, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for a good reason: We **believe** we can’t, so we don’t even try. You’ll never get what you’re after if you don’t try. You have to **try** to succeed.

In **How to Beat Shyness**, we’re going to look at **what** needs changed, **how** to change it, and how to **live your life** so you don’t go back to being the shy person you once were.

If that sounds like a tall order, don’t be scared. We’re going to proceed in small steps, slowly, so the change will be gradual. I may have had to change overnight when I got the job as a reporter, but in your case things are going to move ahead slower. That way you’ll experience less anxiety.

Why Singles Have Shyness Problems

Being [single](#) presents a unique set of problems and challenges. One of those problems is that you have more time to think about things and worry about them. You replay painful events and conversations in your head, fantasizing about what you **should** have said or how you **could** have reacted.

All these **shoulda-woulda-coulda** thoughts produce a lot of guilt, and in the long run are self-destructive. Don’t you wish you could stop the endless cycle of mentally [beating yourself up](#) over something that happened a few days, months or even years ago?

Over time, this self-torture takes a heavy toll. If you have a preconceived notion that you don't [measure up](#), these punishing thoughts only re-enforce it. Maybe a relative, teacher, or other authority figure told you at some point that you were worthless, stupid, or didn't meet their expectations. As a child, or a sensitive adult, you believed them. Now, unfortunately, you see every failure or setback as proof that they were right. You hold back, not wanting to repeat mistakes.

But it doesn't have to stay that way.

As a single person, you don't have a spouse to correct your thinking patterns or encourage you. So you have to take on that tough task **yourself**. Too often we singles are prisoners of our own perspective, looking at life with tunnel vision. Stepping back and viewing your life objectively is hard to do. But it's something you **must** do if you want to change the way things have been going.

Besides [thinking negatively](#), singles often believe that they must not be attractive or worthwhile as a person because no one has "chosen" them for marriage. But that's a judgment society or your parents or friends might have made about you, and the bottom line truth is that this conclusion is **just plain wrong!**

Marriage is **not** the criteria for whether a person has value. Society doesn't think children are worthless because they're not married. It doesn't think widows or widowers are worthless because they're not married. People are worthwhile because they're people, period. Human life at **every** stage is important, precious, and valuable.

Yet another reason for shyness among singles is the artificial pressure put on us by advertising. As someone who used to **write** advertising, I know all the techniques copywriters use to get people to buy. One of the most effective

methods is to create the perception of a **problem** among people, and offer your product as the **solution** to that problem.

So we have billions of dollars spent before Valentine's Day on very sophisticated advertising that makes single people believe that the only way we can be happy and fulfilled is to be in a romantic relationship. We see TV commercials of couples walking hand-in-hand on beaches, men and women hugging and kissing, and other idealized scenes that imply you're less as a person if that's not what's going on in your life. And what a coincidence that their product—perfume, jewelry, whatever—will make life peachy-keen!

It's easy to let yourself get manipulated. See enough of these ads and you'll be firmly convinced that you're not "normal" because that's not the way **your** life is.

Granted, it **is** fun and fulfilling to be in a strong, romantic relationship, but you can't let your self-esteem and confidence erode if, at the current moment, you're **not** with somebody.

Finally, let's remember that it hasn't been all that long that women have been liberated from the stereotyped notions of what they're "supposed" to do: have children and keep house.

While countries like England, Israel, Germany, and India have had a female in their top leadership position, the United States has not, yet. One of the reasons for that is that a large segment of the U.S. population still doesn't give women the respect and prominence they deserve.

If you're a woman, and a single woman at that, you undoubtedly experience a lot of esteem-damaging prejudice. No matter who says it or how many say it, a lie is still a lie. That's why objective, clear-thinking [self-talk](#) is so crucial. Even in the

21st century, single women who do not fit the homemaker/mother stereotype still have a big hurdle to overcome.

Single men often catch a break in society's expectations, but let a man pass the age of 40 without being married, and gossip immediately starts that he's gay or that there's something "wrong" with him because he's [single](#).

As funny as it may sound, many people—both men and women—still get married because their friends have gotten married, or because they feel pressured by [society's expectations](#). Leaping into marriage for those reasons is a recipe for disaster. Any person in a miserable marriage will tell you that you're infinitely better off being single than putting up with that.

Finally, the issue of body image and personal appearance comes up. The United States, especially, is a culture obsessed with thinness. Diet books are perennial bestsellers. Celebrities and supermodels are marketed as the standard for beauty. Style is usually touted over substance.

Being overweight is a catch-22 situation. You're [depressed](#) because you're overweight, so you eat when you're depressed, which makes you **more** overweight... While we each have our own unique metabolism, being overweight does cause serious health risks. The **good** news is that as your self-confidence rises, your weight can fall, because you grab control of your life and begin to diet for all the right reasons. More on that later.

Next, I'll reveal the most powerful self-confidence secret of all time. When you make this truth an integral part of your personal wisdom, you'll never view life the same way again.

Chapter 2: **THE Self-Confidence Secret of All Time**

Do you read biographies and autobiographies? Have you read some of the classic self-help books by writers like Dale Carnegie (*How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*) Maxwell Maltz (*Psycho-cybernetics*), or Nathaniel Branden (*The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*)?

If you're not in the habit of reading biographies, it's time to start. You'll find enough of them at your public library to last a lifetime. You'll also find the self-help books listed above, or the librarian will be happy to order them for you through interlibrary loan—a free service.

My own discovery of this self-confidence secret took many, many years. In fact, at first I doubted that it was true, until I began to carefully observe people and some of them shared their worries with me.

Here's what you need to know:



Everyone is putting on a front.

Oh, we all know a **few** people whom this is true of. But the **real** secret, the part that most people never grasp, is that **everyone** is putting on a front. *Every person, without exception.*

This is so powerful that I need to repeat it: **Everyone is putting on a front.**

Single people can draw special strength from this truth. You may dream of being as self-confident and relaxed as some of your friends, but the truth is that what you see in public is only the tip of their iceberg. There's a lot more going on under the surface, and if you knew what it is, you'd be shocked.

Although Dale Carnegie's and other classic self-help books may seem dated in places, their principles are still sound, and the stories they tell about men and women are as typical today as they were 60 years ago. Carnegie reveals how seemingly poised men and women confessed to him that they were nervous wrecks on the inside.

High-powered executives and business people have hidden fears. Everyone from presidents and prime ministers to babysitters has secret shortcomings that they worry about. Celebrities, rock stars, and actors are especially susceptible.

I'm a big fan of the late Elvis Presley, but read any biography of him and you'll find a sad story of insecurities, frustration, and emotional pain that led him to abuse drugs. The same has been true of singer James Taylor. You can see the same thing today in celebrities who are alcoholics and drug addicts.

Strong, seemingly self-assured politicians may act as if nothing bothers them, but in secret they worry about polls, their popularity, and how they'll be viewed in history.

In my own life, I've had to remind myself of this truth in the workplace and at parties. The same people who may be laughing and joking in social situations may cry themselves to sleep at night.

The value in knowing that everyone is putting on a front is **not** so you can feel a sense of superiority over other people. The value in knowing this comes in realizing that ***you're not alone in feeling this way.***

Once you grasp this, it can relieve a lot of anxiety and guilt in your life. And even more important, it motivates you to be [kind](#) to other people. It helps you understand why people do the things they do—often out of fear or anxiety or a

desire to win approval. Shyness and uncertainty are more common than we suspect.

Suddenly you understand that it's **okay** to feel nervous before you make a presentation at work. It's **okay** to do something dumb on a first date. It's **okay** to feel apprehensive at a party. You're not so hard on yourself any more, thinking you're weak because you feel that way. You realize that **everybody** has feelings of inadequacy at times. **Everybody**. *Without exception.*

In his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda quotes his mentor, Sri Yukteswar, an old Indian swami, as saying:

“Some men try to be tall by cutting off the heads of others.”

Doesn't that truth explain much of the sarcasm, criticism, bullying, and pettiness that comes out of other people's mouths? A person who is confident, assured, and poised has no need to make himself or herself seem more important by attacking another.

Of course, that doesn't necessarily **spare** us from the verbal assaults of others, but it goes a long way toward helping us understand **why** they act that way.

As you read the biographies and autobiographies of great men and women, you'll see a pattern of self-doubt and questioning. In the 1970s, one of the popular phrases was “Fake it 'til you make it,” meaning that if you got hired in a job that was beyond your abilities, you were supposed to act as if you knew what you were doing until you caught on.

In a way, it's true. A first-term President of the United States has no experience running the country, but did you ever see one who said, “Boy, I'm really out of my league here. I'm so clueless, I feel like a complete idiot.”

No! They talk and act with supreme confidence, as if they know exactly what they're doing every minute. The fact is that they certainly **don't**.

Take this truth to heart. Learn from it. Observe it happening in the world around you.



Everyone is putting on a front.

When you finally make this reality part of your personal wisdom, your self-confidence will rise several notches. And when you're in a stressful, intimidating situation, bring this truth to mind.

It will level the playing field for you and help you realize that you're not alone in feeling anxious. Some of us are just better actors than others

Chapter 3: More than positive thinking

In 1952, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale published his bestselling book, **The Power of Positive Thinking**. Since that time, this classic has sold more than 20 million copies and has been translated into 41 languages.

If you haven't read this book, you're in for a treat. Peale was far ahead of his time, with his assertion that our thoughts control our destiny. His advice is especially relevant for singles, since so many of us have a tendency to think negative thoughts.

Even so, Peale has more than his share of detractors. Their strongest criticism of his philosophy is that more than positive thinking is necessary to bring about change. We also need positive **action**.

That's true. But in fairness to Peale, we can't engage in positive action unless we first do some positive **thinking** about the situation. You're not going to inspire yourself to positive action by thinking negatively.

Peale's book was groundbreaking for two reasons: first, he introduced the concept that your world is largely self-created. That is, **you** live in **your** own little world, which is colored by how **you** react to and [think](#) about the situations **you** find yourself in. It sounds so simple and so obvious that most people don't appreciate the importance of that truth.

Suppose you're in a department store and a clerk is short and rude to you. Your first reaction might be taking offense and looking for the manager to complain about the nasty way she treated you. The positive thinker, on the other hand, might realize that it's nothing personal. The positive thinker might suspect that the clerk is having problems at home or is ill, or under a great deal of stress, or

is unhappy with her life and just happens to be taking it out on whatever person is handy.

From that example, it's easy to see how positive thinking can help you overcome shyness. Many of the "slights" we encounter in life are unintentional. We just happened to be the closest target at the time and it wasn't anything we did to provoke it. Past snubs shouldn't cause us to retreat into the shell of shyness.

Now don't get me wrong. You shouldn't let yourself become a doormat because some upset, angry, or rude person chooses to unload on you. Part of strong self-confidence is healthy self-respect, and if you don't respect yourself, how can you expect others to?

Positive thinking is valuable because it changes your perspective. It takes you out of that "victim" mentality and helps you recognize and appreciate the [good things](#) that happen to you instead of focusing on the bad. It changes you from being a whiner and complainer into a hopeful, happier person.

It's often been said that an optimist sees the glass as half full. The pessimist sees it as half empty. The pessimistic single person sees it as half empty, dirty, and with a crack in it.

Positive thinking provides a solid foundation on which single people can tackle their shyness. Negative thinkers expect defeat. Positive thinkers view problems as opportunities or challenges to serve someone or to do something better. Thomas Edison, the world famous inventor, was a good example of a positive thinker. Instead of saying that he failed 10,000 times in his search for an efficient, practical light bulb, he said that he discovered 10,000 ways **not** to make a light bulb. All joking aside, if Edison had not been a positive thinker, he would have given up after the 100th try.

So how can **you**, as a single person, benefit from positive thinking, and what else can you do along with it to build your self-confidence?

Well, by focusing on all the things you **do** have instead of on the things you **don't** have, you transform yourself from an ungrateful, downhearted person to a hopeful, excited person. You begin to live with a sense of [expectancy](#) about the **good** things that will happen to you every day, instead of dreading what bad things may occur. You become more [appreciative](#). You become more joyful. You become more fun to be around.

Aha! ***And that makes you more attractive!***

As you grow in appreciation and joy, your self-confidence magically begins to grow too. As you change from negative thinking to positive thinking, you become more forgiving toward other people (because unhappiness motivates much of their bad behavior), and you become more forgiving toward **yourself**.

Thinking positively about yourself helps you recognize that you're not perfect, but you're making progress. You don't **need** to be perfect, as long as you're making progress. Beating shyness is a step-by-step battle.

You lose the "victim" outlook on life, and you also lose the chip on your shoulder that you had when you believed everyone was out to get you. Your self-respect dictates that you protect yourself and use reasonable caution, so you develop a [thicker skin](#). Things don't frighten you like they used to.

The benefit of thinking positively about yourself and your prospects is that you take more risks and seize more opportunities. No longer are you scared to try something because "things always turn out bad for me." You recognize the wrongness in that assumption. You're not demolished if you fail at something.

You give yourself credit for trying and congratulate yourself for having the [courage to step out](#).

And the more often you [step out](#), the more successes you'll have because you now tilt the odds in your favor. Oh sure, you'll still have failures, but you finally understand the difference: Because you **have** failures doesn't mean that **you** are a failure. Like Edison, you're just discovering ways **not** to do something!

Thinking positively allows you to look in the mirror at night and say, "Nice going today, old friend. We didn't succeed at everything we tried, but we had success anyway ***because we had the courage to try!***"



Just having the courage to try is a form of success.

By thinking positively, you turn the corner. You leave behind the "shy me" mentality, you appreciate yourself for the good things you accomplish—no matter how few or how small they may be—and you refuse to let small slights chip away at your self-respect.

You've got a solid foundation on which to build unshakeable self-confidence.

Chapter 4: How to be comfortable with your looks

Never in history has society been so obsessed with how people look. Single people catch the down side of this if they feel they don't measure up to the "standard."

Magazines, television, movies, and even the Internet are saturated with "beautiful" people—wispy-thin women, muscular, sculpted men. The message may be unspoken but it's perfectly clear: "If you don't look like this, you're inferior."

Baloney.

Have you ever seen photos of the magazine **editors** or TV and movie **producers** who serve up this nonsense? They're pretty common, everyday-looking people. Even **they** don't measure up to the standards that they, themselves, set!

We singles buy into this bilge because we're insecure or because we view these media outlets as authorities, as if they're entitled to dictate to us what we should look like and how we should live. The truth, however, is that they foster these unreachable standards to sell ads.

Think about it. Women's fashion magazines and even home/life magazines feature ads for hair coloring, cosmetics, diet programs, teeth whiteners and a host of other products designed to make women more attractive. The articles in the magazines create the perceived need and the products in the ads supposedly solve the "problems."

Many men's magazines are no better. Many feature articles about sex—and ads for products that supposedly make you more sexy.

Maybe the saddest part of this is that we all fall for it. No matter how intelligent, sophisticated, discriminating, or perceptive we may be, we look in the mirror and think, “Boy. I just don’t measure up. I’d better do something about that.”

Here’s an experiment I’d like you to try. If you live in a city small enough that your newspaper features photos of wedding anniversaries, start paying close attention to these pictures. Study them for a couple weeks. These are people who managed to stay together, with a strong, abiding love, for 25, 40, or even 50 years. These are folks who have what many of us desire: a happy, successful marriage.

Aren’t they just common, everyday people in the photos? Isn’t it extremely **rare** to find a husband and wife who both look like models?

What’s going on here?

It’s a stunning revelation that the “beautiful people,” the ones that society holds up as standards for the rest of us to aspire to, **don’t** seem to have long, enduring marriages.



Being attractive involves something other than looks.

What’s especially revealing are the original engagement photos some newspapers run of couples who are celebrating their 25th or 50th wedding anniversary. Even then, before these two people aged, they may not have looked like models. ***But something about them is attractive.***

We tend to forget that one of the reasons that people are in magazines or on TV or in movies is that they’re a rarity. Stunningly beautiful women or handsome men are the exception, not the rule. The trouble is that we see so many of them on TV that we start to assume that they **are** the rule, and we’re not.

We singles, almost without exception, tend to be [too hard on ourselves](#). We think we're ugly or unattractive when we're really not. We measure ourselves by the wrong standards. If we think we don't measure up, it adds to our shyness.

To become comfortable with your looks, you need to consider the feature that bothers you, then decide whether you want to do something about it. Is it wrong to have cosmetic surgery?

Not necessarily. Most reputable cosmetic surgeons will discuss your reasons for wanting the procedure. They will be realistic in telling you what to expect. Some may even inform you that you don't need to make a change at all.

What about weight? If you're overweight, you need to accept, first of all, that it's a health risk. Whether you will be able to lose weight or keep it off depends on how committed you are to change. If you're absolutely determined to the point of being sick and tired of your condition, you'll do what it takes to improve. You won't let yourself use the excuse, "I can't help it. That's just the way I am."

Most of us don't need plastic surgery on our looks. We need plastic surgery on our **attitude**. I would highly recommend that you read the book **Psycho Cybernetics**, by Dr. Maxwell Maltz. It changed my life and it will change yours, too.

Maltz, himself a plastic surgeon, wondered why some of his patients' self-confidence did not improve, even after extensive plastic surgery. The longer he studied the problem, the more convinced he became that a change in **attitude** is the key. When we first fix the person on the **inside**, the person on the **outside** will inevitably improve too.

Also, a large part of being comfortable with your looks comes with age and maturity. When we're teenagers, or even in our 20's and 30's, we're more susceptible to the dictates of advertising and peer pressure. But as we get older and start to look around, we realize that some of us actually look **better** as we get older. This is especially true with women who would have characterized themselves as "plain" when they were in their 20's. Remarkably, their features take on a softness over time, and their acceptance of themselves makes them stunningly attractive.

Someone once said that "Self esteem is an inside job." By first accepting and healing what's going on **inside**, you'll be able to view your looks with [compassion](#) and understanding. Over time, you'll learn to tune out the critical voices and be comfortable with the truth.

Chapter 5: How to Create Your Own Enthusiasm

Rarely do you meet a person with strong assertiveness who is not enthusiastic. Is it like the chicken or egg question? What comes first, strong assertiveness or enthusiasm?

Maybe it's a little of both. The more enthusiasm you have about life, the more your self-confidence level rises. And the more self-confidence you have, the more enthusiastic you are about your future.

But how do you create your own [enthusiasm](#) if your self-confidence is low? How do you pick yourself up when you've fallen down?

The most intelligent, happiest people eventually come to the conclusion that you can largely forge your life through your **attitude**. You can gripe all the time and be pessimistic, thinking life never cuts you a break or gives you an opportunity, and you will steer yourself into a self-fulfilling prophecy. You **won't** get opportunities or breaks because you're not **looking** for them. And, you won't **create** any opportunities because you think that only happens to **other** people.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, and a man revered by many as the greatest of all the presidents, was only an attorney in Springfield, Illinois when he said, "I will prepare, and my chance will come."

Lincoln's life reads like a cavalcade of failure. He met with one political defeat after another, and saw two of his sons die in childhood. But Lincoln **learned** from tragedy and defeat. He wrung every lesson he could from his setbacks. He used them to prepare himself. Finally his chance **did** come. He was elected president of the United States and steered the nation through a bloody civil war that threatened to destroy the country.

Throughout my life, I have read hundreds of self-help books. A handful were terrific, most were good, and some were lousy. But when I embarked on a lifetime of self-improvement, I determined that even the lousiest book would have at least **one** useful lesson to teach me.

Each of us creates his or her own little world. We see our life not through our eyeglasses, contact lenses or eyes, but **through our interpretation of the events that happen to us**. And so we become either embittered or enthusiastic.

Many people are enthusiastic when young and claim that the troubles of their life knocked the enthusiasm out of them. Others lose their enthusiasm for living during a crisis, clicking into a “wait and see” mode until the problem passes. Still others come to the wise conclusion that **“I have survived everything so far and I will survive this, too.”**

If you want to be enthusiastic about your life and your future, you must learn to live with a sense of expectancy. You must expect good things to happen to you—and more good things than bad. Surely bad things **will** happen. Only a witless Pollyanna believes that everything is rosy and nothing bad will ever occur.

To maintain your enthusiasm, or to recover it, you must steel yourself to get through the hard times, knowing that they will not last forever. And if they are slower in departing than you would like, you must crank yourself up to be enthusiastic in **spite** of them.

As bad as the Great Depression was in the 1930s, did all men and women postpone getting married because times were bad? Did they postpone having children because the country was in dire shape? Did they put their lives on hold, waiting for things to get better?

No. They carried on as best they could. The successful ones had an indomitable [spirit](#) that they were going to get through it. Millions of Americans were immigrants who had escaped poverty and persecution in their native countries. They knew that if you didn't laugh, you'd cry.

Creating your own enthusiasm can be a hard job. It's especially difficult when you're seriously ill. I know, because I survived cancer. It's difficult too, when you get laid off from your job and you can't find work. I know, because I survived that, too. It's difficult when you lose someone you love. I know because that's happened to me a **couple** times.

But I survived it all and am enthusiastic about my life and my future. I don't really believe in luck. As Charles Stanley says, "You won't find the word luck in the Bible. It isn't there."

But I **do** know that life is more fun when you're happy rather than sad. And I know that a sense of humor can see you through many of life's toughest struggles. You can't always control what happens to you, but you **can** control how you [react](#) to it and how you interpret it.

Creating your own enthusiasm requires that you force yourself to laugh sometimes when you feel like crying. It requires that you see steep odds against you but you believe that anything can be tackled, [a little bit at a time](#).

Creating your own enthusiasm means that you concentrate on the victories and progress rather than on failures and setbacks. You take a break. You rest. You [recover](#) and recuperate and build your physical and mental strength up again, but you get back in the ring for another round, and another, and another, [determined](#) to go the distance.

Creating your own enthusiasm means that you see your goals as reachable, and obstacles as [merely detours](#) or delays. As soon as possible, you reset your rudder, fix your eye on the destination again, and resume sailing.

Enthusiasm is crucial to strong self-confidence, because it encourages you to congratulate yourself for your advances. Success builds upon success, and as you master one skill or process, you're able to move ahead to the next one.

You can't help but be enthusiastic when you're making progress, no matter how slow that progress may be.

You create your own enthusiasm by reading the biographies of successful people to learn how they overcame many setbacks. You realize that **you** share that same indomitable human spirit that refuses to accept anything short of your goal.

If your goal [stretches you](#) but is realistic, soon your self-confidence and your enthusiasm will begin to reinforce each other. You feel better every time you achieve a sub-goal, which in turn builds your confidence that the **next** sub-goal is achievable.

Don't settle for an ordinary, shrunken, shriveled-up life. Decide that you'll inject **enthusiasm**, your secret weapon, into the battle, and you'll find yourself in an [adventure](#) that takes you higher and farther than you ever dreamed possible.

PART 2: How to Maintain Your Self-confidence

Chapter 6: Bouncing Back from Discouragement

Married people have a definite advantage over singles when it comes to the matter of discouragement. They have someone to buck them up, to encourage them, to help them rise above their disappointments and rejections.

We singles have to do our **own** cheerleading when we're the victim of a discouraging event. That's even harder if we lose our perspective because we're too close to the problem.

I've known a **lot** of rejection over the past 30-odd years. While I've had four of my novels published, I've actually written **20**, which gives me a lifetime batting average of .200—hardly qualifying me for the major leagues. If you've never attempted it, researching and writing a 300 to 600 page manuscript is a terrifically time-consuming and emotionally draining task. It's not unusual for a writer to spend two or more years on a major project. When you can't find a publisher for it, you get very discouraged.

But we **all** meet with discouragement on the job, in a variety of forms. Whether you miss a promotion you expected, get chewed out by the boss, or lose your job because of a layoff (all things I've experienced, by the way), it can be pretty disheartening. Before you know it, your self-confidence has tanked.

The breakup of a promising relationship can also be a source for discouragement too. When we don't expect it, a breakup can be emotionally devastating.

No matter what the reason for it, [discouragement](#) can leave you feeling as if somebody pulled the rug out from under you. You berate yourself with the unanswerable “Why me?” question, or you beat yourself up for some mistake you made that started things spiraling downhill.

So how do you bounce back from something like that? How do you repair your [broken self-confidence](#) so you can regain your happiness and enthusiasm for life?

First, I think you have to accept that fact that it's going to be a **gradual** process. You're not going to start thinking happy thoughts or repeat positive affirmations and pull yourself out of it in a few hours or even a few days. It's going to take some time, and if you acknowledge that, you won't be so hard on yourself when the progress **is** very gradual.

Second—and this is a really hard step—you have to convince yourself that it's **not** the end of the world. We often feel this way when a romantic relationship ends, especially if we think we've [lost](#) the perfect person for us and that we'll never find another one as great. The truth is that there **is** another one—many in fact—out there, if we start looking.

The same holds true with lost jobs. When I got laid off from a high-paying, exciting job, I thought I'd never find one like that again. Five months later I got a better job that eventually paid better and had great benefits. I got to work with some terrific people and stayed there for 16 years. Keep reminding yourself that it's a big world and that if you [persevere](#), you can often do better than you did before.

Third, detach yourself from the situation and give yourself some time to heal. Just as we have to understand that bouncing back is going to take time, we have to avoid falling into a “victim” mentality. If you get caught in a layoff or reduction

in force, it was nothing personal, although at first that's exactly how it feels. I used to believe I was an unlucky, jinxed person who couldn't catch a break. But that wasn't true, and only by taking several steps back and seeing my life objectively could I see the falseness of that attitude. Don't let a bad event make you feel unworthy.



**You're still the same worthwhile person
you were before the event happened.**

Finally, just as it takes time to repair your bruised ego and start feeling positive again, it's crucial to forgive yourself for any wrongs you may have done. We're often harder on ourselves than we are with other people. [Compassion](#) is a wonderful quality, but you can't be compassionate toward others unless you first practice it on **yourself**. Why [beat yourself up](#)? It doesn't help, and only makes the situation worse.

You know what your mother used to say when you had a scab: "Stop picking at it or it'll never heal!" The same goes true for scars and scabs on your heart. Leave them alone. Don't pick at yourself. In time, these wounds will heal too. How fast they heal depends on the size of the loss.

Grief is necessary after a loss, but you have to put a limit on it. Wearing black clothes and eating tons of ice cream after someone breaks up with you doesn't put you on the road to [recovery](#). Be kind to yourself, yes. Look for positive activities that will help you heal inside, yes. But realize, before some well-meaning friend has to **tell** you, that life goes on and you need to get back in the swing of things again.

Don't be your own worst enemy. Be your own best friend. Give yourself time, but keep in mind that your goal is **recovery**, not perpetual grief. Other wonderful

opportunities are waiting out there for you. But you can't grab onto them if you won't let go of the past.

Chapter 7: How to Deal with Criticism

If there's one thing you can count on in life, it's that someone is going to criticize you. And, the more you do and the more visible you become, the more criticism you're going to attract.

Sometimes shy people hang back to avoid criticism. After all, if you don't try, if you don't assert yourself, you can't get criticized. But if you want to beat shyness, you simply **must** learn how to deal with criticism.

Single people often get criticized by married people. People who have unhappy marriages may resent the freedom that singles enjoy. They may be jealous of the way we spend our money or our time.

One of the chief reasons people criticize others is that misery loves company. If a critic is an unhappy person, they may try to make you unhappy too, by attacking anything from your behavior and mannerisms to the way you dress.

Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of our 31st president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, caught more than her share of criticism. But she was a very wise and mature woman and here's what she said:

“Do what you feel in your heart to be right--for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be damned if you do, and damned if you don't.”

A sure way to stunt your growth, in your career, emotionally, and spiritually, is to pay undue attention to criticism. And if you constantly [worry](#) what others think and whether you're meeting their [approval](#), you'll be plagued with an anxiety that can make your life [miserable](#).

So how **can** you handle criticism? What can you do to keep verbal attacks from eating away at your self-confidence?

Again, it's a bit of a catch-22: How can you **build** high self-confidence to shrug off criticism when worrying about criticism **lowers** your self-confidence?

Mrs. Roosevelt hit on the secret. You must be absolutely certain in your heart that you're doing what is right. But how do you develop that certainty? You have to rely on unassailable standards that are outside yourself.

Here's a good example. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was leading the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, he did not waver under vicious criticism **because he knew in his heart that he was doing what was right**. King's model, Mahatma Gandhi, who freed India from British rule in the 1940s, also withstood withering criticism with the same attitude. When King was arrested, he did not let it stop him. He knew that the prejudiced laws were wrong. To achieve equality for black Americans, he knew that he would have to get wrong laws overturned and replaced with right laws.

If we can't always trust the law, what standard **can** we use? The **Bible** is a solid standard for right and wrong. The Ten Commandments, often criticized as being antiquated and restrictive, are still be best standard for righteous action.

You and I probably will never be criticized for anything as monumental as trying to change the civil rights laws. But we will catch personal attacks in the [workplace](#), and from our family members and friends, and sometimes from people we don't even know.

Besides doing what we know is right, a second way to deal with criticism is to develop a [thicker skin](#). If you've ever played a stringed instrument, you know that over time, from making chords, your left hand will develop calluses, or caps, on

your fingertips. At first, your fingers will be sore from pressing down on the strings, but in a few weeks, the skin thickens and toughens so much that you don't feel any pain at all.

Handling criticism is much the same. It hurts at first. It may hurt for a long time. Gradually, however, as you realize that it won't kill you and that you're not going to let it stop you from doing what's right, you'll develop a thick "skin" that's invulnerable to it. That may take years. But it **will** come.

Another secret to handling criticism successfully is to consider the source. You may notice that your critic is critical of every**thing** and every**body**. They believe that delivering criticism is their role in life and they're determined to "straighten people out" and make them see things their way. Frequently these people are working from a position of **low** self-esteem. As we learned in Chapter 2, "Some men try to be tall by cutting off the heads of others." Habitual critics try to make up for what they lack by knocking other people down.

So here are the three pillars of dealing with criticism:

- 1. Make sure that what you're doing is right.**
- 2. Develop a thicker skin.**
- 3. Understand the critic's motivation.**

But what if the critic has a valid point? What if the critic is your boss, your parent, a relative, or a trusted friend? What if the criticism hurts, but you know deep down that there's some truth to it?

Constructive criticism can sometimes be the hardest to take, because it makes you realize you're not perfect. You may be trying your best, but your best isn't good enough. What do you do then?

Your first reaction may be to get defensive with your critic. If your self-confidence is wobbly anyway, this kind of criticism can be heartbreaking, even if you know it's valid. It doesn't help matters that your critic may be blunt, insensitive, and even hurtful.

Everyone has a hard time admitting they're wrong. You're too close to the situation to be objective. You can't seem to get past the hurt to follow through on the advice.

It's wise to take some time and let the smoke clear. Right at the moment that you're criticized, you can't think straight, you're shocked and disappointed, and you're not sure how to respond. By taking some time, however, thinking about the matter and acknowledging to yourself that the criticism **is** valid, you'll be able to put it in the proper perspective.

Once you accept the fact that you **do** need to make a change, then you can decide on the best course of action. After all, if you're sincere about growing and making progress in your life, you **are** going to have to [change](#) some things. You need to eliminate what's not working and move on to what does.

But here's the hidden benefit: If you are able to accept valid criticism and use it to make positive changes in your life, **you are a rare and wise person!** Most people **never** master that ability. They become bogged down in the initial hurt and never manage to bring something good out of the situation.

Handling criticism isn't easy. It's not something you learn overnight. Also, you can believe that you've got it under control and out of the blue, a criticism can wound you deeply. That's all part of being human. When that happens, it's crucial to be kind to yourself. Don't beat yourself up because you think you should be "above it."

Building strong self-confidence is a lifelong job. So is dealing with criticism. But you're making progress. You're so much better than you used to be. Now you know what you need to do: **Learn whatever lesson can be learned, and *move on.***

Chapter 8: The Secret of Never-ending Learning

One of the most overlooked secrets for maintaining strong self-confidence is [never-ending learning](#).

If you had trouble with school or were a poor student, you may find this idea distasteful. But it's so important to beating shyness and **staying** victorious over it that you really do need to appreciate its worth.

The beauty of never-ending learning is that **you** choose the field you wish to master, **you** choose the pace, and **you** control your success.

When I started work on my web site, www.inspiration-for-singles.com, I had only a basic knowledge of the Worldwide Web. I knew no HTML (hypertext markup language—the code you use to build a web page), I knew nothing about keywords, and I knew nothing about search engine optimization.

But I learned! And I learn something new every day. I didn't let the fact that I was 54 years old at the time stop me. I don't pick up things as quickly as I did in college, but I firmly believe there is no age limit on learning.

How can never-ending learning help maintain strong self-confidence? It will help you in three ways:

1. Over time, you'll become an expert in your field.

Sound far-fetched? It's not, and here's why: The key is in your **focus**. In high school or college, you focused on a broad variety of subjects. If you went on to college, you probably spent two or three years on your major. When you set up your own learning program, you'll not only be able to zero in on a narrower area,

you'll be able to specialize to the degree that within a relatively short time, you'll have a firm grasp of every area of that niche.

No more irrelevant courses. No more fluff. No more busywork assignments because some tenured professor has to fill classes.

Another exciting aspect of never-ending learning is that you'll be able to tap the knowledge of other experts and share your knowledge with them. Keep reminding yourself that nobody became an expert in his or her field overnight. They all had to start at the bottom, like you. So don't let it intimidate you if they know much more about the field than you do. You'll reach their level someday—and you'll exceed it!

2. Achieving a high level of competency in your field will do wonders for your self-confidence.

Talking and corresponding with other experts will also boost your confidence in yourself. Mutual respect will result when you share your discoveries and ideas. Every expert is eager to learn more.

You have more ways to learn than ever before in history. You can take college courses, you can read books from your public library (or they can borrow books from other libraries throughout the country in your narrowed field of expertise), and you can learn a wealth of information through the Internet.

No matter what field you choose to become an expert in, you'll find web sites devoted to it, professional or trade associations or clubs, user groups and forums, and ebooks you can download.

When you choose a field that you're passionate about, learning will be a privilege instead of a chore. The more you learn, the more you'll [want to learn](#).

Setting out to become an expert in your field and doing the reading and studying to achieve it will separate you from people who just do the minimum to get by.

3. You'll contribute to your field and the overall knowledge in it.

While you'll always be a student in one sense, you'll rise to the rank of **teacher**, even if that title is not formally conferred on you. As you pursue your passion, opportunities will arise, almost like magic. You'll feel a happy duty to help others in the same way that others helped you.

It's become a cliché to say that "Knowledge is power," but it's true. The more **learning** you have, combined with **experience**, the wiser you will choose. You'll learn from the mistakes of others so you can avoid those time-wasting detours. And you'll gladly share **your** missteps so others can benefit from you.

Never-ending learning is not a burden, but an opportunity. As you do it, you can't help but grow. You become a more worthwhile person, a steadier person, a person who exercises the privilege of helping others along this exciting path.

The more people you come in contact with, the less fear you will have. As your fear evaporates over time, so will your shyness. You will discover the thrilling truth that when approached in a spirit of friendliness, the great majority of people will return that friendliness.

Chapter 9: Why You are More Than What You Do

Throughout *How to Beat Shyness*, we've talked about achievements, and how they can build your self-confidence. We've just talked about never-ending learning, a process that can help you maintain your self-confidence.

Now, in what seems to be a direct contradiction of things we have discussed before, I'd like to make this emphatic statement:



You are more than what you do

What? What does **this** mean and why is it so important in maintaining your self-confidence?

Simply this: You are not your job, you are not your profession, you are much, much **more** than [what you do](#) for a living.

This truth is vital to your self-confidence because the odds are almost certain that you will not be at the same job all your life. In fact, you may not even be in the same profession all your life.

I had to learn this truth the hard way, when I was laid off from a job I loved. It was a simple downsizing, yet it affected me more than it should have because my identity was so wrapped up in my work.

Sooner or later, one way or another, you are going to be **out** of that job that you now hold. Businesses fail, offices and factories are eliminated, positions are cut back. If you base your self-confidence on something **other** than your job, you have a much better chance of weathering such a storm.

That said, what **can** you base your self-confidence on, besides what you do for a living?

You can base it on [your worth to God](#). *That* is something that never changes, regardless of your employment or financial state.

If you don't believe in God or do not practice any religion, what do you have left? Your nationality—your worth as a citizen? Your intrinsic worth as a human being? Your worth as a parent, son or daughter? Your [wealth](#)?

People who anchor their self-confidence on their job are setting themselves up for a fall. Even if you don't get laid off, fired, or downsized, some day you **will** retire. Many people are directionless in retirement because their self-confidence was based on what they did for a living. They feel that the best part of their life is over or that they are no longer important. This is especially true with men.

I knew a wealthy CEO who ran into that problem when he retired. Although he no longer worked, he still based his worth on his wealth. Then he got sick. When his condition worsened, his wealth did him no good. It couldn't save him. He was no better than a man who died broke.

We see this problem frequently with movie or TV stars. When their career starts to wane—as the popularity of almost everyone and everything inevitably does—they spiral into a cycle of [depression](#), drugs, alcohol and self-destructive behavior. Their great wealth or glorious past is no consolation. They based their self-worth so completely on public adulation that their world collapses when that fades.

If true worth were based on accomplishments or some sort of proficiency, then what could we say about quadriplegics, the developmentally disabled, the blind,

or other disabled people who do not have the same kind of achievements as able-bodied people?

Is a professional baseball player a more worthwhile person than a young Christian husband and father who plays softball on his business's team? Is the chairman of the board more worthwhile than the clerk in the company's mail room? If you can't play the guitar as well as Eric Clapton, does that mean you're not as worthwhile as him? Are you not as worthwhile because you're not as pretty as the current reigning actress?

No, your worth as a person is **not** based on what you do, what you earn, what possessions you own, or how you look. To base your self-worth on any of those things is like building a castle on a foundation of sand.

You are much more than what you do. Never forget that, because I guarantee the day will come when you will need to fall back on that [truth](#).

Chapter 10: Lessons to Live By

A book like this is worthless if you forget everything you read and go on with your life the same way you've always done things. You will never beat shyness unless you **apply** what you've learned in these pages.

I encourage you to go back and read this entire book a second time, a third time, and even more to make sure that it sinks in. If you print it out, make notes on it or write in the margins.

If you manage to take just **one** of the lessons here and sincerely apply it, I believe it can change your life. To make that easier, I've tailored this final chapter with some short—and I hope memorable—take-away lessons you can use to make a measurable improvement in your self-confidence.

Lesson #1: Be patient with yourself

Don't expect overnight results in improving your self-confidence. Most worthwhile things take [time](#). Our "instant gratification" culture expects instant results, but life isn't a microwave oven. Even more important than patience with other people is patience with yourself. **Don't** beat yourself up when you have setbacks (and you will), but **do** celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how minor.

Lesson #2: Write down your successes

That's right. Record your achievements and successes in a secret journal or scrapbook that no one else is permitted to see. Reviewing and remembering how you succeeded in the past is more powerful than any pep talk you could

ever give yourself. We all tend to forget. Keeping a success diary is a surefire reminder that if you overcame obstacles in the past, you can do it in the future, too.

Lesson #3: Build on small victories

The secret to achieving any goal is to break it down into small, doable [steps](#). Skyscrapers are put up **one brick at a time**. A project as important as building your self-confidence is too big and intimidating to do in large chunks. Stretch yourself a little every day. If you hit an obstacle, step back and try to analyze what happened. Then try breaking that task down into smaller, more manageable steps. If you still have trouble, break your steps down even further.

Lesson #4: Do this as a gift to yourself

We singles often buy ourselves clothes, knickknacks, CDs, and other material things to “reward” ourselves. But when you finally come to the understanding that you **deserve** strong self-confidence and that it’s one of the most worthwhile gifts you can give yourself, then you’ve really turned the corner. This realization will not only make the process easier, but more fulfilling as well.

Lesson #5: Never give up

Building and maintaining strong self-confidence is a lifelong process. But it’s worth it. You may get discouraged. You may have to take a break now and then. But never give up. High self-confidence is so important to your enjoyment of life that you can’t afford to quit. It doesn’t matter if no one else has faith in you. God has faith in you. ***God never gives up on you—so never give up on yourself!***

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