

# Walking the Path to Personal Peace

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Guide To Self

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Over a decade ago, the Loma Prieta earthquake hit the San Francisco Bay Area where I live, changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of people forever.

As I watched the aftermath of the disaster, as a young adult, I realized that some people possessed an amazing trait of resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back quickly from a tragedy, trauma or hardship. This resiliency allowed certain earthquake survivors to reach deep into their heart and pull out humor, love and self-sacrifice at a time when no one felt safe or cheerful.

Since that time, I have spent over fifteen years studying human behavior and identified ten steps in the path to a fulfilling life. Each of us harbors ten qualities that may be used to establish a solid foundation of inner peace built upon personal resiliency. I like to think of each one as a step along the path the personal peace. Walking this path allows one to remain calm and centered, even when surrounded by chaos and conflict.

## 1. MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS

Mastery of your emotions consists of four parts: emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, relationship management, and social awareness. **Emotional awareness** is the ability to recognize your emotions as they occur and the impact that they have on your performance. It also entails a realistic optimism based on your past accomplishments. **Emotional self-control** consists of trustworthiness, self-discipline, and being calm under fire. It is primarily the capacity to keep negative emotions in check. **Social awareness** is the ability to sense and understand the emotional and political undercurrents of groups, whether they be your family or your work group. It also involves an awareness of other peoples' concerns and emotions. **Relationship management** exists when you can effectively give and take emotionally-laden information. When you can deal with difficult issues in a straightforward manner, then you can use your emotions to inspire and motivate others. The step of emotional mastery is listed first since poor emotional control can cloud bright dreams and block optimistic thoughts.

As emotions underlie every thought, perception and action you have, you must be able to accurately identify which emotion you are feeling as you are experiencing it. This takes practice. When you feel an emotion coming on, ask yourself, "What do I notice happening within my body?" and "What happened right before this emotion to possibly trigger it?"

**Example:** My wife and I are parents of three children – one daughter and two sons. My children frequently teach me lessons in emotional awareness and self-control. At one point, my oldest son, who is seven, was ashamed to cry. He felt boys weren't supposed to cry. I told him that crying was fine for all of us. That wasn't good enough for him. He asked to see me cry. A few months ago, I was hobbled by sciatica. Sciatica is a pinched nerve that causes shooting pain that cannot be dulled by medication, ice or heat. One night, I was lying in my bed on ice packs to control the pain. The pain was so intense that tears began to run down my face. My wife sat by my side and watched with quiet compassion, knowing there was nothing she could do to help. Suddenly, I remembered my commitment to my son to share my tears with him. I asked my wife to get my son so he could see me cry. Both my son and daughter ran into the room to see my tears. Upon seeing my tears, he was filled with concern. The simple act of witnessing my tears had a tremendous impact on him. Now, he is much more comfortable and less ashamed when he cries.

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As a child, were you given permission to express your feelings? For most of us, the answer is “No.” If we are to act as role models for our children, friends, and coworkers, we must be willing to share our emotions openly as long as they are not harmful to others. This is especially critical for men and boys who have not been given permission in the past to express emotions freely. Think of it as a shift in generational paradigm. Earlier generations were taught not to show emotions. We now know that emotions exist for a purpose. Those who are skilled in recognizing, honoring and controlling their emotions are well on their way to success in their life. Teach yourself and those around you how to recognize and manage their emotions and everyone will benefit.

## **2. MASTER YOUR THOUGHTS**

Think positively. Control your negative thoughts. Surround your mind with great thoughts. You will never go any higher than you think. Thoughts, and the words that come from them, can distort the way you view reality. You are your own worst enemy. You can beat your self merely by *thinking* of defeat over and over. You can make yourself sad by constantly *talking* about your sorrows. Words to beware of include always, never, should, could, and ought. These are all words that lead to judgmental thinking or all-or-nothing thinking. Both types of thoughts are dangerous.

Briefly, here's how the brain works: You have a thought. Your brain releases chemicals. Electrical and chemical messengers pass through your brain. You become aware of what you are thinking. Every time you have a negative thought, your brain releases negative chemicals that make your body feel bad. When you get mad, for example, your muscles tense, your heart beats faster, your hands start to sweat, and your brain freezes. Your body reacts to every positive and negative thought you have. Beliefs drive behavior. For example, some may believe they are doomed to have poor interpersonal relationships, because that is what happened in the past. The goal is to change the negative thoughts and beliefs to positive ones. Research has shown that happy, hopeful thoughts have an overall calming effect on the brain, while negative thoughts lead to depression and anxiety. Your thoughts matter. Coaching is very powerful in helping individuals improve their mastery over thoughts as well as emotions.

We have been granted control over one thing in our lives - our thoughts – and it is a powerful gift. Albert Einstein stated, “The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” Buddha wrote, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think we become.” If you want to change your world, begin by mastering your thinking.

## **3. BELIEVE IN A HIGHER POWER**

The third step on the path to a peaceful existence is faith in a higher power. Faith cannot be arrived at by means of the intellect. It must be approached at an emotional level. In my experience, emotional awareness is necessary for true faith. Originally, I approached spirituality from a purely intellectual view. The intellectual approach merely allowed me to become familiar with the concepts of world religions. It provided me with a distant connection to something greater than myself. However, it did not lead to a satisfying personal relationship with a higher power. There is a huge difference between connecting to a higher power with your heart rather than your head.

In order to have a true relationship with a higher power, I had to first become more emotionally aware. I spent over a decade developing my emotional abilities. I now believe that true faith can only happen via an emotion connection. True faith is a highly personal relationship with your higher power. This means that you communicate, or pray, with your higher power several times a day. Typically, people begin this relationship by praying once every few days, then once a day, and ultimately several times a day.

Mindful prayer allows us to give up our fears, anger, sadness, doubt and limitations to our higher power. Faith allows us to relinquish our need for control. When things are going well, a personal relationship with a power greater than ourselves enables us to see the beauty in the smallest of happenings – an eagle flying overhead, a sunrise, a child’s smile. Progress results from persistence with purpose. And purpose comes from belief in a higher power. To be successful in this world, it is necessary to accept it as it is and to rise above it.

#### 4. LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

Dr. Joyce Brothers said, “When you come right down to it, the secret of having it all is *loving* it all.” Unconditional love is the intentional choice to look for the best in people, other living creatures and any part of nature. Other people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. By noticing the beauty that surrounds us everyday, we can lift up ourselves and others.

##### ***How to Foster Unconditional Love:***

**1.) Seek Out the Good in Others:** Actively look for good traits and noble deeds in other people. Only use positive and supportive language. When you compliment other people, be specific about the behavior you are praising. For example, rather than saying “Nice work,” you might say, “Hey, you did a fantastic job closing the sale with Acme!” Remind those around you of their unique talents on a daily basis.

**2.) Stop Judging Others:** Secondly, let go of your negative judgments. Judgments are deadly. Judgments create negative emotions such as guilt and shame and tear down self-esteem. Judgments are unfair. You can never be aware of the circumstances that have led another person to a particular point in their life. So you are never in a position to judge their actions and decisions.

#### 5. SUPPORT AND FOLLOW DREAMS

Follow your dreams and support the dreams of those you love. While this is a difficult step, it is an omission to live life without a mission. Your dreams provide you with mission and purpose. This step enables you to focus on that which inspires or uplifts us, letting us play a part in forming a better world as we receive good intentions and carry them out. The famous psychologist, Erich Fromm wrote, “Man’s main task in life is to give birth to himself.” The way in which we give birth to ourselves is by listening to and following our dreams.

##### ***How to Access Your Dreams: Ask yourself...***

- What would make me happy?
- Why would it make me happy, and why is it important to me?
- How will it benefit other people?
- When do I want it to happen?

Keep a journal by your bed to write down your thoughts and feelings. Over time your dreams will reveal themselves to you.

#### 6. FOSTER COURAGE. CONQUER YOUR FEARS.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is overcoming your fear. This step involves taking concrete actions to help us achieve our dreams. By reframing the question as, "What am I willing to try?" you can make change exciting, rather than paralyzing. Whenever you feel fearful, find out what it is that is making you feel that way. Then, go after the fear-inducing situation.

**Example:** I had a fear of speaking in public. I figured out that my fear was holding me back personally and professionally. I decided to attack the fear by becoming president of a human resources organization. This forced me to speak in front of a crowd at least once a month. It also forced me to socialize with others which lead to other speaking engagements. After one year, I'm happy to report that my fear of public speaking is under control. I'm currently doing biweekly interviews on the radio as well as regular public speaking engagements.

## 7. APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE

This step lets us be content with what we have created, showing us that we are not here just to carry on but to satisfy our souls and arouse others to do the same. In your journal, write about what makes you joyful every day. *Answer the questions...*

- What is going right today?
- How does it make me happy?
- How can I best further my happiness?

## 8. DEVELOP AND TRUST YOUR INTUITION

"As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live," wrote the author Goethe. Trusting yourself is at the heart of the intuition.

Intuition is the ability to be aware of or know something without having to discover or perceive it. Intuition is our internal radar system that aligns our thoughts, feelings and actions for the purpose of helping us grow and keeping us from harm.

**How to Develop Intuition:** When you feel stressed or anxious, take a moment and close your eyes, relax, and breathe deeply. Take 3 deep, slow breaths. Ask yourself what your best course of action is. Listen to your head. Listen to your body. Most men sense their intuition in their stomach, or "gut", as in a "gut feeling." Most women sense it in their heart, or their chest. Learn where your intuition can be heard. Intuition is very quiet when you first start listening. Be quiet. Be still. Breathe. Listen.

## 9. NEVER COMPROMISE YOUR INTEGRITY

This step involves understanding who you are now and who you want to be. Integrity reminds us of our authentic self and our unique role in the universe.

All of us benefit from a series of ethical guideposts which we can use to steer our actions towards the greater good. With that in mind, here is a framework that has been helpful for millions of people. This framework is based on five steps:

- 1) Define the situation
- 2) Gather data from different sources,
- 3) Identify your options,
- 4) Weigh the various outcomes, and

5) Make a decision.

Always remember that the best courses of action rely on intuition, emotion (your “gut” feeling), data from your senses, data from trusted sources, and what you know is right in the larger scheme of things. It is also helpful to write down your top 5 values (e.g., family, work, money, happiness, etc.) and to prioritize them. Trouble arises when your values come into conflict with one another. If you know what your values are and how they compare to one another, there is less chance of compromising your values. The more you think and act with integrity, the more you become an ethical person.

## 10. EXERCISE DAILY

The final step focuses on physical exercise to enhance your physical, emotional and psychological well-being. The goal is to exercise vigorously for a minimum of 20-30 minutes at least 5 days a week. A few of the benefits of exercise include a happier mood, a healthier immune system, reduced weight, and a better functioning brain. The type of exercise that you prefer doesn't matter. Even brisk walking has tremendous positive benefits.

**Summary:** All change begins with awareness and intention. These ten steps to a personal peace may be overwhelming if taken all at once. The idea is to address one area at a time. Focus on the area which you would like to improve and pay attention to it every day for one month. Change is inevitable. By following these ten steps, you too may find a personal peace. If you would like additional help and coaching, feel free to email me at [John@GuideToSelf.com](mailto:John@GuideToSelf.com).

*“He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.”*  
**Lao Tzu**