

THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING
from **ILONA L. TOBIN, ED.D.**
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Self-Responsibility Starts with an "I"

Josie is a woman in her twenties. She lives at home with her mother who makes all of Josie's important decisions: how to spend her money, who to go out with, even what clothes to wear. Josie is anxious and depressed.

Matt ordered a new printer for his office. When it arrived he discovered it wasn't compatible with his computer. "Those idiots," he ranted, "why didn't they tell me this was the wrong printer?"

Sally and Jerry had a fight. Now Sally's tossing and turning in the bedroom while Jerry beds down on the sofa. Neither is getting any sleep and both think the other should make the first move to apologize.

Josie, Matt, Sally and Jerry all have in common a lack of self-responsibility that leaves them dependent, impotent and victimized. They're caught up in blaming others for their problems and waiting for somebody else to come along and make their life all right. Unfortunately, they're going to have a long wait because, in the words of self-esteem expert Nathaniel Branden, "No one is coming."

That is the good news. Your life is in your hands. You get to make the choices, elect the options and take the actions that come with self-responsibility. It's through the door of self-responsibility that personal power and independence enter, often hand-in-hand, bearing gifts of confidence and self-esteem.

Be clear though, self-responsibility is not the same as feeling responsible or accepting the blame for bad things that have happened or situations that are painful. We don't all enter the world with the same trappings, and

people, events or circumstances have caused wounds from which many are recovering. Self-responsibility means that when you have worked through your grief or anger or other issues, you can ask yourself: Now what am I going to do? What options do I have?

At the other end, self-responsibility doesn't mean becoming so self-reliant that you don't ask for help when you need it or seek others' opinions or points of view. And it certainly doesn't mean you have to know everything, make every decision alone or take on the world single-handedly.

Rather than a heavy burden, self-responsibility can be a source of joy. Knowing you can create the life you want by accepting responsibility for yourself is a great freedom. Even saying the words aloud can produce a feeling of power and strength. Try it.

- I am responsible for my choices and actions.
- I am responsible for how I use my time.
- I am responsible for my behavior and communication with others.
- I am responsible for achieving my desires, dreams and wishes.
- I am responsible for the work I do and the quality I bring to that work.
- I am responsible for the values I live by and standards I set.

Accepting and acting out of self-responsibility takes practice and working through and making mistakes and falling back and, again, finding yourself in a place you didn't want to be. But that's the thing about personal growth, the place to start is where you are. *

10 Ways to Simplify Your Life

These days a chorus of thousands has taken up Henry David Thoreau's advice to "Simplify, simplify." And for good reason. Few among us would deny our lives are too complicated and filled with too much stress.

Simplicity is about eliminating clutter—from your mind, your home, your relationships and your lifestyle. Following are ten ways to begin.

- 1. Get a clear idea of what you want your life to look like.** This picture will help you discover what you must eliminate.
- 2. Let go of projects,** roles or self-imposed obligations that take up time and keep you away from what you really want.
- 3. Say "no" to what you don't want in your life.** Say "yes" to what you do want.
- 4. Schedule "break" days** for yourself where you don't do anything but what you really want. Don't cancel them.
- 5. Make a "to-do" day** and get all those chores and errands done in a single day.
- 6. Create space.** File away or toss.
- 7. Make and return phone calls only during certain hours.**
- 8. Shop only when you have to.** Question your purchases.
- 9. Ask for and accept help.** Delegate chores. Hire work out when possible.
- 10. Remember to breathe,** to ground yourself and be physically present. *

A Letter From

Hlona L. Tobin, Ed.D.



We are likely to agree that self-responsibility is desirable. After all, who wouldn't want the confidence and sense of empowerment that results when we are fully responsible for ourselves?

In practice, however, it can be challenging to strike the right balance. We may feel that we're not capable of handling life on our own and thus tend to depend on others. Or, we may go to the other extreme and feel that we must handle everything ourselves, never asking for help. The cover article explores the topic of self-responsibility and offers an exercise for feeling the joy of being self-responsible.

Few situations are more devastating to a relationship than an affair. The betrayal and loss of trust often strike a fatal blow to the marriage or partnership. But what if you feel that the relationship still has hope and you want to repair it? The article on page 3 explores this issue: how to determine if the relationship is worth saving and how to begin the healing process.

Also in this issue are 10 ways to simplify your life, as well as the quiz, which asks how well you manage when your buttons get pushed. Finally, on page 4, is an article about making New Year's Resolutions that stick.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

May this year bring you a greater sense of personal power, self-love and choice.

When Your Buttons Get Pushed, How Well Do You Manage?

When you have an automatic, negative response to something, this often indicates a hypersensitivity that's referred to as "getting your buttons pushed." Usually these sensitivities have developed due to hurtful childhood experiences, such as repeatedly being criticized, rejected or controlled. For example, if your parents were very controlling, when someone tells you to do something you may resist—often subconsciously. Answer the following two sets of questions to discover how well you manage your buttons being pushed.



True False

Set 1

- ☐ ☐ 1. When my buttons get pushed, I tend to shut down and withdraw.
- ☐ ☐ 2. When someone hurts me—even when I know it was unintentional—I lash out at them or blame myself.
- ☐ ☐ 3. I hate it when someone tells me I'm "too sensitive."
- ☐ ☐ 4. When someone says or does something that triggers the feelings connected to an old emotional pain, it takes me a long time to let go of it and feel centered again. I often carry a resentment.
- ☐ ☐ 5. Sometimes I have no idea why I do what I do—I just can't control myself.
- ☐ ☐ 6. Once someone pushes my buttons, that's it—my wall goes up and stays up. I feel like a powerless little kid.

Set 2

- ☐ ☐ 1. When old feelings are triggered by something in the present, I take a deep breath, acknowledge that old feelings have been activated, get myself to a safe and comfortable environment and seek the support I need.
- ☐ ☐ 2. Rather than feeling victimized and blaming someone for pushing my buttons, I, again, take a deep breath, and then take an honest look at myself to see what I can learn from the situation.
- ☐ ☐ 3. I've worked to uncover old, painful issues so that I can release what was triggered and not feel at the mercy of my emotional response.
- ☐ ☐ 4. When I feel triggered, it often has nothing to do with the person who pushed my buttons.
- ☐ ☐ 5. I'm familiar with my most common "buttons"; I recognize them more quickly now and am less reactive.
- ☐ ☐ 6. When my buttons do get pushed now, I am able to see the unresolved issues needing my attention.
- ☐ ☐ 7. I feel like an empowered adult when I can courageously look at my emotional triggers and work through them.

*If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to learn how to deal more effectively when your buttons get pushed and how to release their charge. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue further. **

Repairing a Relationship after an Affair

Alison and Frank have been married for 12 years and have three children. One day, after taking their son to school, Alison spotted Frank in a coffee shop holding hands with another woman and whispering intimately. She felt as though the ground was slipping away beneath her. How could this be happening? How would they ever recover?

Exact numbers are hard to come by, but some studies reveal that about half of married people in the U.S. will engage in infidelity at some point during their marriage. What do you do when it happens in your relationship? How do you know if your relationship is worth saving? And how can you repair such a catastrophic betrayal?

The Trauma of Discovery

When infidelity invades a relationship, it often permeates the atmosphere long before the affair is discovered. While one partner may cope with suspicion, low self-esteem and resentment, the other partner may wrestle with guilt and the fear of being caught.

When the affair is actually confirmed and brought into the open, it is a traumatic event for both people. For the person who discovers the affair, there is the agony of betrayal. For the one having the affair, there may be a sickening mixture of remorse and relief—at least now the secrecy can end.

The First Stage of Healing

Before any talk of next steps for the relationship, marriage or family, some fundamental healing must take place. The person who discovered the affair must be allowed to vent his or her feelings in a safe way and with plenty of support.

The one who is having the affair needs to first and foremost end the affair—no healing can happen until that step is complete. He or she also must give the other partner the time and space needed to find enough balance to continue to the next stage.

Each person would benefit from individual therapy. However, couples therapy is crucial in this process for healing to take place.

Assessing the Relationship

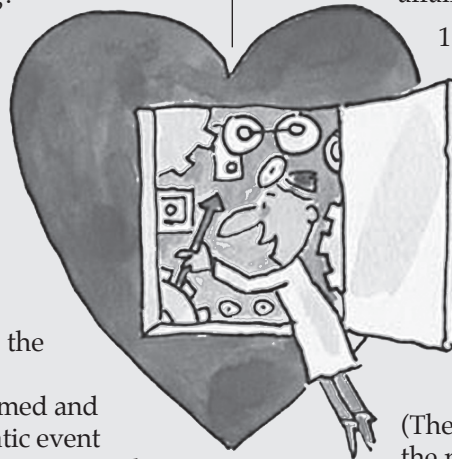
The discovery of an affair highlights underlying issues that had been threatening the relationship. With these issues having been brought to light, the couple can decide if the relationship is worth

repairing.

In therapy, Frank faced his feelings of resentment about Alison's long work hours, and Alison received support coping with feelings of betrayal that harkened back to her father's affair when she was a teenager.

Like others who have discovered an affair, Alison got plenty of advice to leave the marriage. It was an emotional, confusing time that shook the foundation of her whole life.

Ultimately, the decision to leave the relationship or marriage is yours alone, but here are four important questions that can guide you if you have discovered an affair:



1. Has your partner or spouse taken responsibility and expressed remorse?
 2. Has your partner or spouse ended the affair?
 3. Is he or she willing to attend couples therapy?
 4. Do you share the same values and goals for the future? Is this someone you are excited about spending the rest of your life with?
- (These last questions are just as crucial for the person who had the affair.)

Repairing the Relationship

Ultimately, Alison and Frank decided to stay together, partly because of their three children. And their healing had to include the whole family. Each child attended individual therapy as well as group sessions with everyone.

This process can be exhausting but illuminating, and families who go through this type of trauma often come out with stronger bonds and a deeper understanding of each other.

Here, finally, is a summary of the healing steps to take after the discovery of an affair:

- 1. Get support.** Make sure each partner has adequate support to individually express their feelings.
- 2. Get to the bottom.** Work separately and together to look at the root causes of the affair and the health of the relationship.
- 3. Get together.** Use the therapy process to communicate honestly and respectfully about whether you will stay together or move on.
- 4. Get better.** Involve each person in strengthening the family bond. *

New Year's Resolutions: How To Make Them So You Can Keep Them

For the past four years, Betty has made a New Year's Resolution to exercise more. She's also vowed to lose weight (an annual resolution since 2000), and to finally start that novel (this one goes all the way back to 1995.)

Like two out of every five Americans, Betty begins every new year with stout resolve and good intentions. But like most who make New Year's Resolutions, by the time the spring fashions hit the shop windows, all that resolve has gone the way of last year's colors. No exercise program. No weight loss and, sadly, no novel. Not even a beginning chapter.

What goes wrong?

Betty's problem and the difficulty most people face in keeping their resolutions is that changing behavior involves more than simply vowing to do so. A lot more. So, whether you want to do more or less of something, quit something altogether or start something new, here are a few tips that can help.

1. Be sure the change you vow to make is something you really want, not just something you think you should do. Altering habits is hard work; if you're not going after something you really want, you set yourself up for failure.

2. Be specific. Instead of vowing to "lose weight," state that you want to lose five pounds by March 15. State your goal in incremental, measurable, specific terms. Be certain it's attainable, too. To go from a sitting



position to running a marathon in six weeks may be too long a distance to travel in that short a time.

3. Accentuate the positive. When you just say no, you're reminding yourself of what you can't have or can't do. Instead of saying "no fatty foods," say "nonfat milk and fruit for dessert."

4. Believe in yourself. Positive self-talk, affirmations and encouragement really do help. Even if you fail the first time, that doesn't mean you're doomed to failure. Be easy on yourself if you lapse. Change is often a two-steps-forward, one-step-back process.

5. Easy does it. Set your goals in short, manageable steps rather than one giant leap. Start slowly: go to the gym twice a week instead of four times; walk a block instead of a mile.

As for Betty and her novel, at last report, she planned to commit to a page a day, three days a week. At that rate, by the end of the year, she'll be well on her way to a first draft.

If Betty can do it, you can too. What change do you truly long to make in your life this year? *

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