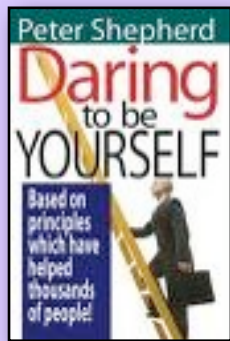


Turning problems into challenges

by **Peter Shepherd**



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PETER SHEPHERD
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Find out who you really are!

The mark of a successful individual is not whether or not they have problems, it is whether or not they have the same problems they had last year! In other words, do they understand problems? And are they solving them? Or are they just worrying and fretting and doing nothing?

Everybody has problems. Whenever we have a goal, there are barriers to achieving that goal - otherwise it would be too easy and no fun. The goal blocked by the barrier is a problem. Overcoming the barrier and attaining the goal is the game of life. This is also called problem solving. Without problems as challenges, life would be boring indeed! Problems are the essence of life. Difficulties arise when you are at the effect of a problem - when a problem has you, not when you have a problem. Then you experience stress and worry.

When a problem has you, you don't realize that you are creating it. You don't know that you, and only you, have to do something about the problem - that is, if you want to solve it. You are waiting for something to happen or someone else to solve the problem for you, or for it to fizzle out. You aren't looking clearly, facing up to the reality,

seeing the truth and therefore being able to solve the problem. And it isn't fun. This is also called not taking responsibility and being at effect.

When you have a problem, you know that you made it because you wanted something - you have a goal - and there are always barriers to attaining every goal. So you have a goal opposed by a barrier - a problem! So you know you have to do something about the problem - to overcome the barriers and move forward toward the goal. And you have to do it (no one else can). And you are doing it! You are solving the problem. And it's fun! This is also called taking responsibility and being at cause.

There are always problems in life. The question is are you going to have problems or are problems going to have you? Better to let your problems become challenges, a game you can enjoy.

First you need to identify the problems in your life and there are inevitably lots of them! The following technique will help you identify some problems that you may not even be aware of, perhaps because you have just got so accustomed to them...

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Ask yourself the following questions:

1. 'What are you doing in your life that you want to do?'

2. 'What are you not-doing in your life that you want to do?' In other words, what do you wish you were doing and are nevertheless not doing?

3. 'What are you doing in your life that you do not want to be doing?'

4. 'What are you not doing in your life that you indeed do not want to do?' This question identifies those things that a person really does not want to do and therefore is not making a part of his life. For example, he does not want to work for somebody else, and in this way he limits his options.

Ask yourself these questions until you have run out of answers.

Now look at what you've got. The answers that you have written down for questions 2 and 3 are the problem areas of your life. Question 4 may also represent an unresolved problem. With this data - hopefully an increased clarity on your situation - you will be able to take action on the real underlying source of the problems.

Note: If lack of energy is a problem, realize that you can promote mental fitness by becoming physically fit, and exercise gives you more energy not less. Also, you can talk yourself into exhaustion; most people are about as tired as they make up their minds to be.


If you have practical problems, take action to resolve the problem, rather than worry and complain about things. Most problems have simple solutions: you can lose weight by eating less, you can stop smoking by simply stopping. Simple enough but not easy to do, otherwise you would have done it already.

To resolve the impasse you need to look at the counter-intention that is holding you back. I like eating and I like smoking, yes, but why? Normally the why is unmet needs, that the compulsion has become a substitute for. What is not being confronted here? Look for the real underlying problem and sort that out first. Try to gain more clarity about it, to identify your thought-distortions that have been making the problem seem more of a barrier than it actually is.

Then what is required is intentional daily effort, focused toward a goal that you genuinely feel is worthwhile. Observe yourself in the process and when you become distracted bring yourself back on task. Refocus and begin again.

When you are working toward a goal, something that you want to achieve, it helps greatly to do two things. Firstly, to get a very clear picture in your mind of where you are going, and what it will be like when you get there. Feel it with all your senses, as if you have already achieved it.

Secondly, measure your progress, not by how far you still have to go to reach that target, but instead, how far you have already come. Realize how important your first steps are. Keep doing that and you will get there.



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