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EC76-548 Be Your Own Best Friend

Ron Daly

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BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND



EXTENSION WORK IN "AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS AND SUBJECTS RELATING THERETO,"
THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN, COOPERATING WITH THE COUNTIES AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
LEO E. LUCAS, DIRECTOR

BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND

By Ron Daly
Extension Specialist (Family Life)

"I'm a 'monster' Created by a nagging, Criticizing father and a let-mother-do-it 'mother'."

"My feelings stay hidden inside. I'm afraid to really reach out. I don't know how to make a relationship work. I was never taught how when I was a little girl."

"I don't know why I do it, I just can't help myself."

"There is so much to do and so many demands, that I never have time for myself."

To me all these statements have a common theme: a feeling of helplessness and that others are responsible for what's happening.

Many parents with the best of intentions did things that hindered rather than helped our development. As a result we carry many false ideas

about our capabilities and inadequacies. These often become self-imposed chains that keep us from reaching out, risking and discovering more of ourselves. Each of us has a reservoir of untapped potential. We'll never really know what that is unless we break out and discard those chains.

SELF-IMPOSED RESTRAINTS

For most of us, it's easy to blame the past, or someone else, and find a sense of comfort in self-pity and suffering. We continue on in the same old way rather than experiencing the excitement and joy that comes from being responsible and taking charge of our own lives.

We approach life as if we are waiting for someone to give us permission to start living fully. We search for happiness in the wrong places. We assume that some *thing* will make us happy. The true source of happiness comes from within. There is no magic switch we can push or pill we can take. Each of us must come to the realization that he does have a choice. We can wallow in self-pity, act in ways that are self-defeating, or make the choice to be our own best friend and find true happiness.

The following experience relates how a woman looked for happiness in the wrong place. She expected someone else to make it "happen" instead of finding the source of it within herself.



One summer, my husband scheduled a two-week business trip at a distant university. I was thrilled when I learned that family accommodations were available and that our four children and I would be able to go with him. "It will be a great vacation," I thought.

Things didn't turn out that way, though. We settled into a hot, crowded basement apartment, and I soon learned that my husband's schedule wouldn't allow him much time with us.

He began enjoying his stay, and I became lonely and miserable.

I blamed him for my misery and was angry with him for leaving me with the full responsibility of the children. I wallowed in self-reproach and self-pity. After all, wasn't *he* supposed to make *me* happy!?

During the second week, my husband discovered he had an afternoon free. He turned down an invitation to play golf and announced to me that the next day he would spend this time with the family.

"How gallant of you!" I smirked to myself, and a mean little plan began to cook in my mind. I'd decided I'd found my chance to make my husband as miserable and lonely as I had been.

About 2 pm, just before he came home, the children and I left the apartment with a picnic dinner and headed for the canyons and hills about 15 miles away.

The mountains were beautiful beyond compare. We splashed in a mountain lake and hiked down a steep trail. We collected rocks and enjoyed the mountain breeze. The children and I were doing the very things we really loved to do—hiking, exploring, searching, singing. But I kept thinking about my husband. If only he were with us to enjoy it!

On the way back we stopped for pizza, then went to the double feature at the local drive-in. We arrived home about 1 a.m.

My husband had come home for his afternoon with us and found an empty apartment. At first he was confused, then worried, and finally angry. By the time we came home, he was over his initial anger and had figured out what I had tried to do. He had felt as miserable as I. We were able to talk about our feelings that very night, and a new kind of understanding grew between us.

I wish I could say that I changed that night and could see the folly of my thoughts and actions. But the simple truth is, I didn't. It wasn't until some years had passed that I could look back and see plainly that *I myself held the key to my own happiness during those two weeks*. Each day could have been spent hiking and exploring. My world would have been full and new and beautiful to me and my children. The chains that bound me in misery and loneliness were inner chains of my own making.

When she came to the awareness that she had a choice and was able to cast off the inner chains, life opened up and there was a whole new view as to what she could experience. *She had a choice.* The time that was spent wallowing in self-pity and blaming others could now be invested in new and fulfilling activities.

WE MUST BE RESPONSIBLE

Becoming your own best friend requires more than just thinking about it. It takes positive action. We must begin by taking an in-depth look at ourselves and our behavior. John Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, stressed how difficult this can be. He said, "It is not only the most difficult thing to know oneself, but the most inconvenient one, too. Human beings have always employed an enormous variety of clever devices for running away from themselves."



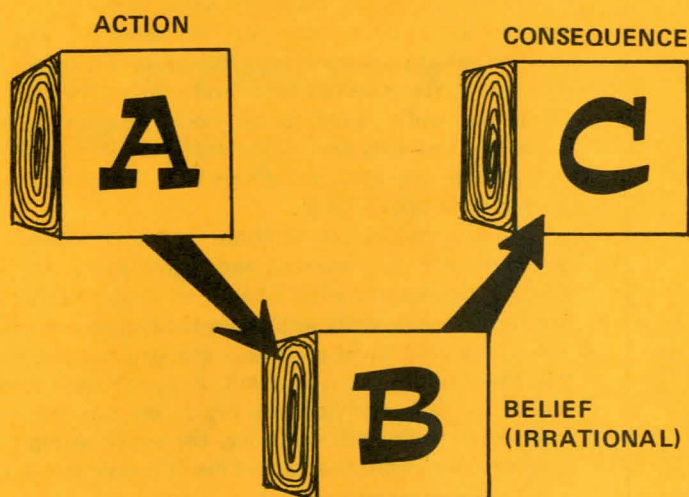
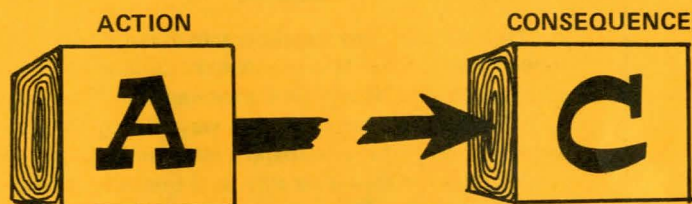
UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

Psychologist Albert Ellis uses a simple A-B-C-D-E approach that I have found helpful in understanding human behavior. Each letter represents one of the following concepts.

A—Activating Experience	D—Dispute
B—Belief System	E—Effects
C—Consequence	

Typically, we wrongly assume that A, the Activating Experience, directly causes C, the Consequence. This is not true. C is really caused by our individual B, Belief System.

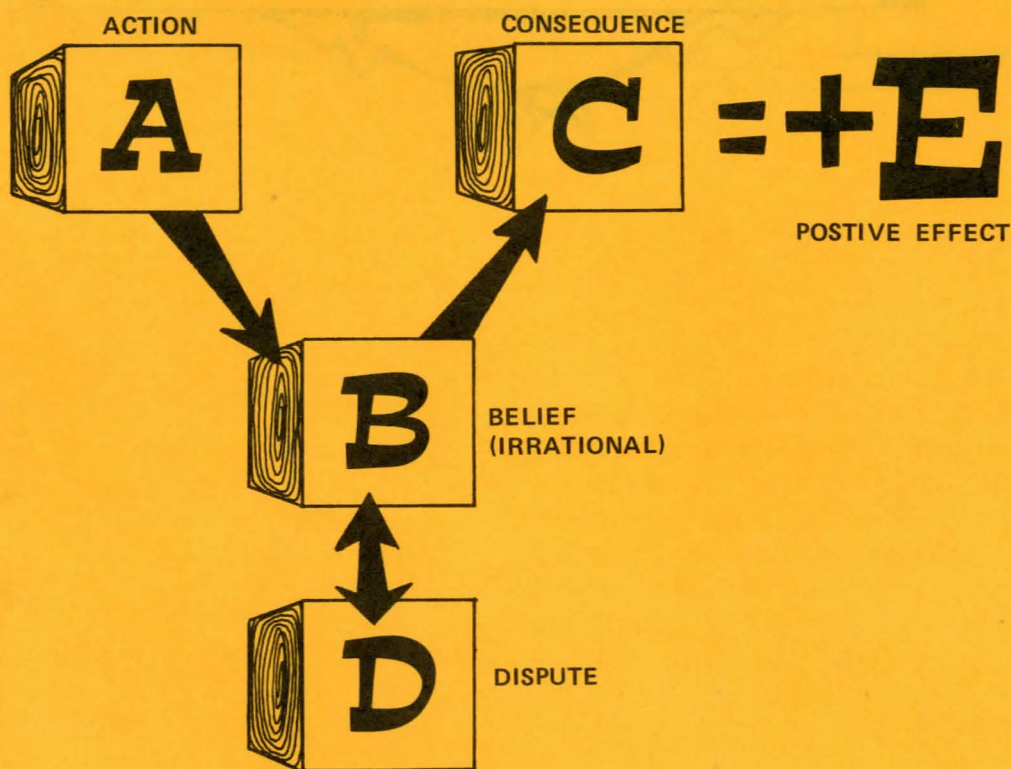
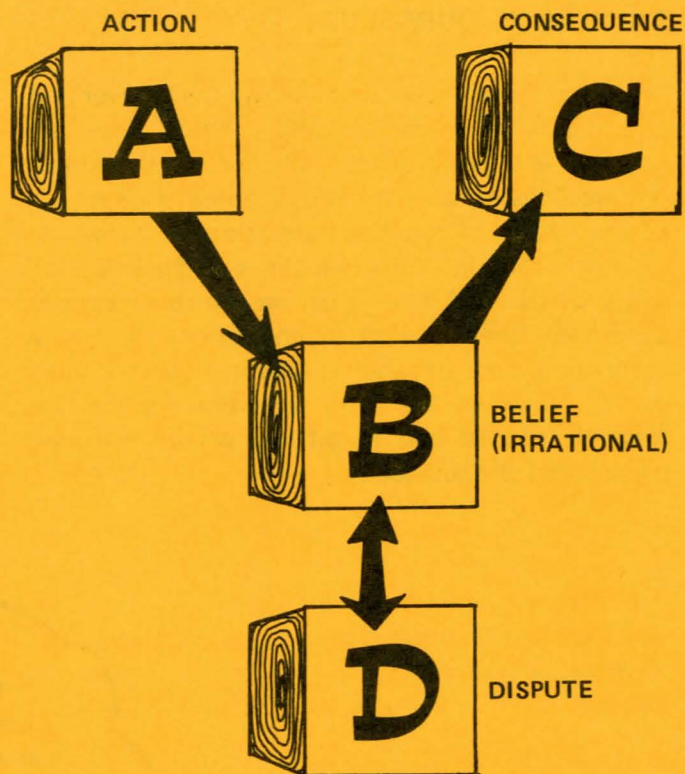
For example, you're overly tired, the pressure has been building for some time, and you are really feeling used. A good friend asks you to help with an upcoming activity. You say yes, but dislike her and become angry with yourself for adding another burden. If A, the request for your help caused C, dislike for her and anger with self, every request would have the same C, consequence. Rather, C is caused by B, your individual belief system at that moment. At another time, when you're not so rushed and pressured, you might welcome the opportunity to help.



Another example: You're preparing something to be placed in competition. A, the activating experience, is the judge's decision. C, the consequence, is feelings of pride, joy, or disappointment and anger. The real cause of your feelings is B, your belief system. You know the quality of your work and that not all entries can receive first place. Judges are human and have limitations and preferences.

This brings us to D, disputing irrational beliefs. Sometimes we feel like we have to accept every responsibility and say "yes" to every demand or request made of us. If we say no, we believe we're a bad person. This is irrational. We can't do everything and we need to realize sometimes it's better for all concerned to say "No."

To get the positive effect, E, we need to look at the many irrational beliefs that we hold about ourselves. Would you tolerate a "best" friend who continually knocked you and told you in many ways you were worthless, weak, terrible, etc.? Why do to yourself what you wouldn't tolerate in a friend?



TALKING TO OURSELVES

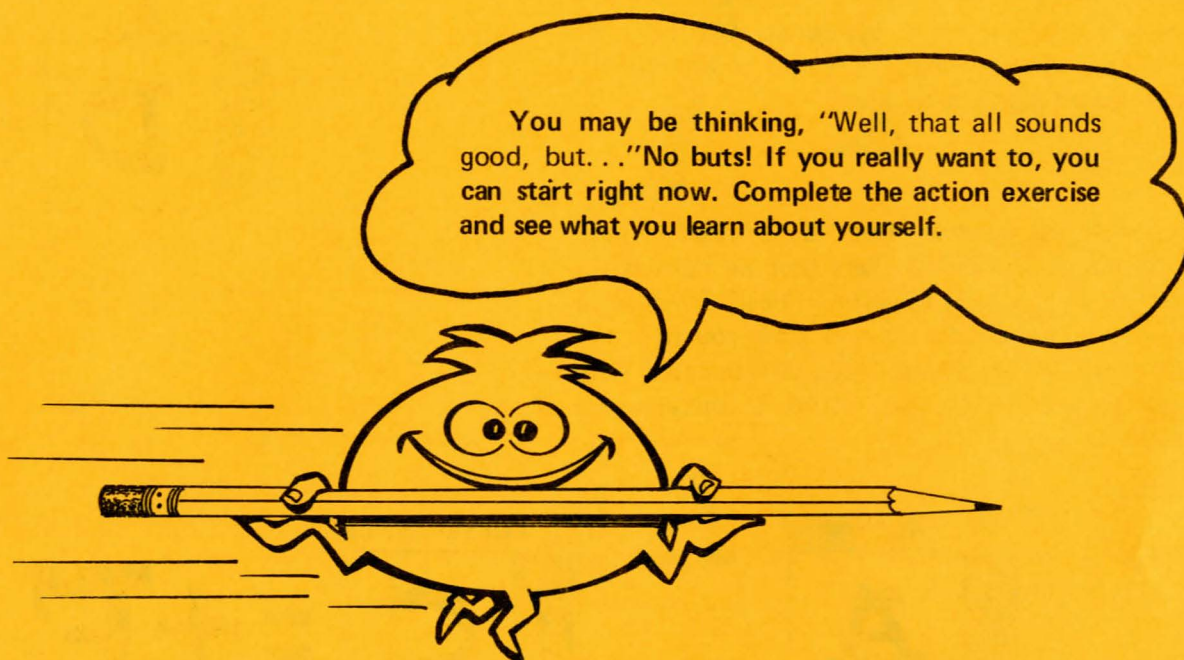
We all have statements that we repeat over and over again to ourselves. Many times they are negative and have to do with our worthlessness, our weaknesses, our limitations. Some of us actually use a form of negative hypnotism on ourselves.

For example, losing weight is a challenge for many of us. It is easy to get on the roller coaster syndrome: down and up, up and down. It's so easy to break a diet and then dislike ourselves or even punish ourselves. We keep remembering the one time we slipped and forget the whole week we persevered so courageously.

When we find ourselves engaging in such self-defeating thoughts or acts, we need to take positive action to break that cycle. *We do have a choice.* We either can focus on our successes and strengths or bemoan our failures and weaknesses.

Let's learn to praise ourselves, acknowledge our accomplishments, and relish the experience. If we want to become all that it is possible for us to become, we have to use every resource we have—our feelings, our thoughts, our talents, and our will power—our whole self.

Make the choice. Take charge of yourself, *Become your own best friend.*



You may be thinking, "Well, that all sounds good, but..." "No buts! If you really want to, you can start right now. Complete the action exercise and see what you learn about yourself."

Yours for Action !

Many of us think, feel and act in ways that are self-defeating. Place an "X" at the point that represents your present self.

I often blame
and punish my-
self and others.

--	--	--	--	--	--

I try to understand
why things go wrong
and make changes.

I often feel help-
less and unable
to make changes.

--	--	--	--	--	--

I can do things to
change a situation.

I strive for
perfection in
everything I do.

--	--	--	--	--	--

I do my best, but
some things are more
important to me than
others.

I don't have any
control over how I
express my feelings.

--	--	--	--	--	--

I can't control the
circumstances, but I
do have a say in how
I react.

Think for a moment. What statements do you say to yourself over and over again about your worth as a person, your competence, appearance, lovability, effectiveness, etc.? Write one of these statements in the space provided.

Is it a valid statement? Comment.

Is it helping you achieve the things that are important to you? Comment.

If things aren't the way you want them to be,

Remember, You Do Have A Choice !



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