

PART I

What Is Self-Coaching?

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A New Self-Therapy

Why are you reading this book? Maybe you worry too much, or perhaps lately you've been struggling with panicky, out-of-control feelings that leave you anxious and frustrated. You may snap at others. Perhaps your sleep isn't what it used to be, and you always seem to be in a bad mood. Maybe you've become depressed; you feel tired, hopeless, or just plain defeated. Sometimes you want to give up.

You may feel confused, but one thing you're sure of. Life's not supposed to be this hard. You want answers—now! The last thing you want is to waste time.

So let's get started. The following self-quiz will show you how you can benefit from this book.

Is Self-Coaching for Me?

Identify each sentence as either mostly true or mostly false:

- T F I often start my thoughts with “what if.”
- T F I usually see the glass as being half empty.
- T F I worry too much.
- T F I'm often fatigued.
- T F I have difficulty concentrating.
- T F I have trouble meeting deadlines.

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- T F I worry about my health.
- T F I generally feel as if I'm on edge.
- T F I'm often sad.
- T F I have trouble falling asleep.
- T F I have trouble trusting my perceptions (e.g., Did I lock that door? Did I talk too much?).
- T F I have too much doubt.
- T F I would say I'm insecure.
- T F I wake up too early.
- T F My worst time of the day is mornings.
- T F I dread having things go wrong.
- T F I'm too concerned with my looks.
- T F I have to have things done my way.
- T F I can't relax.
- T F I'm never on time.
- T F You can never be safe enough.
- T F I exaggerate problems.
- T F I experience panic.
- T F I feel safest when I'm in bed.
- T F I'm too sensitive.
- T F I often wish I were someone else.
- T F I fear growing older.
- T F Life is one problem after another.
- T F I don't have much hope of feeling better.
- T F I constantly fidget.
- T F I'm prone to road rage.
- T F I have phobias (e.g., intense fear of closed spaces, bridges, open spaces, social encounters).

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Total your “true” responses. A score of 12 or fewer suggests that you are a relatively well-adjusted individual. Self-coaching can teach you to shake off life’s setbacks. You can expect your social and personal effectiveness to improve as you begin to become less tripped-up by emotional interference. Mostly, you can expect to enhance your already healthy personality with a more dynamic approach to life.

A score between 13 and 22 suggests that you have a moderate degree of personality erosion. Self-coaching can quickly and simply teach you to get beyond the self-limiting effects of anxiety or depression, realizing a more spontaneous, natural way of life.

If your score was above 22, you have significant difficulty with anxiety and/or depression. For you, Self-coaching needs to become a priority. With patience and practice, you can learn to live your life symptom free.

As beleaguered as you are, I don’t expect you to be convinced easily. For now, just recognize that regardless of how anxious or depressed you are, something in you is managing to read these words. That something, the part of you that hasn’t quit, that healthy part of your personality that’s still willing to try to solve the riddle that has become your life—that’s the healthy person in you that Self-coaching wants to reach.

Self-Coaching, the Program

It took me twenty-three years of clinical work to write this book. That’s not because I’m particularly slow or lazy (far from it), but because it takes a long time, a really long time, to see through the deceptive mist that shrouds anxiety and depression. What’s interesting, once you understand the nature of faulty perceptions, is that anxiety and depression actually begin to make sense. As irrational as your particular symptoms may feel, when you learn the punch line, the riddle becomes apparent. You’ll see. These insights were the catalyst for a new form of therapy I developed to teach patients what they could do to make themselves better. (I dislike the term “patient,” but I like “client” even less, so I’ll use “patient” throughout the book.) I consider this method,

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which I call Self-coaching (Self, with a capital S), my most significant accomplishment.

Symptoms of anxiety and depression are parts of normal day-to-day living. Getting uptight if you're late for an appointment or feeling upset over an argument with a friend are inescapable parts of life. The problems occur when your anxiety and depression progress to a point beyond your immediate life circumstances, so that these feelings float for days, weeks, or months.

As a psychologist, the talent I value most is my intuition. Intuition is the ability, as Carl Gustav Jung once said, to see around corners. In contrast to the intellect, intuition is much less deliberate—it just happens. When it comes to psychology, strong intuitions are about as important as a telescope is to an astronomer. Just as the surface of the moon turns into pockmarked craters under a telescope's magnification, intuition can begin to reveal the hidden aspects of anxiety or depression.

Once I had magnified my view of anxiety and depression, I found myself reacting to my patients differently. Instead of treating them in a traditionally passive way, I responded to them in an active, rather spirited way. This wasn't a conscious or deliberate strategy. I just allowed my intuition to guide me. With depressed patients, for example, I sensed that they were missing a vital energy necessary to combat their difficulties. Using my energy, my optimism, and my enthusiasm, I would model the attitude necessary to conquer the negativity, despair, and inertia. Essentially, I was reflecting what I perceived to be lacking in my patients.

With anxiety patients, I followed my intuition, too. For these patients I became the voice of encouragement and conviction. I pushed hard for courage and risk taking against life's worries and fears. Anxiety-prone people need to overcome self-doubt while building trust in themselves.

Both anxiety and depression are weeds that grow from the fertile soil of insecurity. So I became a role model of a can-do attitude. Without inner confidence, everything becomes a struggle.

I realized that my new approach was a dramatic departure from the more traditional therapeutic methods I usually employed, yet I

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couldn't seem to put my finger on exactly what it was that I was doing. One day, while working with a young man who had been struggling with anxiety and panic attacks, I heard myself telling him, "You keep looking to me to make your anxiety go away. I can't do that for you. Think of me more as your coach than your psychologist." There it was. I was *coaching!*—not analyzing, not passively listening, not reflecting. I was coaching strength, confidence, and a sense of empowerment. My patient quickly and easily related to this simple concept. Rather than seeing me as parent-authority-healer, he clearly understood my new, revitalized role—I was coaching *his* efforts, *his* determination, and most importantly *his* need to overcome anxiety and depression.

The ease with which my patient and I progressed convinced me that approaching problems as a coach rather than a therapist could have far-reaching implications. By coaching the healing attitude that was missing in my patients, and using a fail-safe technique I call Self-talk, they were able to stop anxiety and depression where it began, in the thoughts that preceded and fertilized these conditions. *Self-talk* is a method of replacing faulty, destructive thinking with healthy, liberated thinking. This method was first introduced in my book *Healing Your Habits*, where I called it "Directed Imagination."

It doesn't matter whether you're exercising to lose a few pounds, working to improve fitness through power walking, or preparing as a serious athlete for a big race, effective training always involves following a program of repetition and progressive effort. Psychological training is no different—requiring repetition and progressive effort. Self-talk will become the core of your training program, demanding a similar commitment—no magic, no gifts, no abracadabra insights, just plain old hard work—hard work that pays off.

As I continued to develop my program, I found that the concept of training was particularly appealing to my highly motivated anxiety-prone patients. They usually struggle with traditional therapy's passive approach, especially when they aren't seeing results. A well-thought-out training program was clearly something they could sink their teeth into.

Depressed people face a different challenge. Depression makes it hard to muster the energy to do anything. How could I motivate

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depressed patients to want to train? Depression is like driving a car with one foot on the gas (i.e., healthy desires) and one foot on the brake (i.e., negative distortions)—you're forever feeling stuck, frustrated, and discouraged. I knew that if my method was going to be successful, the training program had to offer release from the braking effects of depression—and that's exactly what happened. By replacing negative thoughts with more objective, reality-based thinking, Self-talk, in combination with a coached attitude of optimism, made the difference. Once patients got a taste of being unstuck, the necessary motivation for continued training was no longer a problem.

This training approach to therapy also explains why results are contingent not on therapeutic insights and aha! experiences, but on consistent, daily workouts using my Self-talk approach. If you walked into a gym expecting that ten minutes on the treadmill would take two inches off your waist, no doubt you'd be very discouraged. In contrast, what if you approached the treadmill with a more realistic attitude, combined with a genuine desire to begin training? First off, you'd realize that one treadmill session is just that, one treadmill session. Only after repeated training sessions over time would you begin to reap the accumulated benefits of your efforts—but the benefits would come. Whether in the gym or in therapy, a training approach both requires and teaches three essential things:

1. Patience
2. Realistic understanding of the dynamics of change
3. Self-reliance

This coaching/training program, using my Self-talk technique for breaking destructive thought patterns, became the heart and soul of the book you hold in your hands—with, of course, one major modification. Rather than having me be your coach, you become your own coach, directing your own liberation. Understand that the potential for healing, real healing, always resides within you. Remember, the best psychologist in the world can't make you better. No one can. Only you can, and Self-coaching will teach you how.

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Becoming a Self-Coach

Noticing how quickly and easily my patients responded to coaching, I wondered how effective this method would be in a self-help format. Could what I was doing for my patients be presented in a book? Had it not been for a cousin who asked me what she could do for her anxiety, I might not have pursued this possibility. I discussed my technique of Self-talk with her and gave her a number of the handouts I had prepared for my patients, describing a few simple strategies and exercises. When she called me a few months later reporting that her anxiety was gone, I was more convinced than ever that coaching could, in fact, make the transition to Self-coaching. It didn't take me long to make my final decision to start writing, but what finally convinced me wasn't my cousin's success.

I Think I Can, I Thought I Could

Somewhere back in my late thirties I had an inexplicable urge to run the New York City Marathon. I couldn't tell you why I wanted to run it. Maybe I did because it just sounded so impossible—26 miles! Perhaps I just wanted to know whether I had it in me. Whatever the reason, I decided to give it a shot. I didn't give my training much thought. After all, I had been a recreational, couple-of-miles-a-day jogger for years, what could be the problem? You just run longer and longer distances. Right?

Fast forward six months.

The first couple of hours of the marathon were terrific. I was high-fiving the kids along Brooklyn's Fourth Avenue, enjoying the crowd, my adrenalin, and the race. Why hadn't I done this before? By the third hour however, more than halfway through the race and chugging through Queens, my high-fiving long since abandoned, I began to notice a deepening fatigue. Four hours into the race, the Bronx began to fade as all my attention became focused on the squish, squish of blisters. The fatigue that began ten miles earlier had become all consuming by the fifth hour as I entered Central Park. My mind was taken

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over by a survival instinct that sought only to stop the pain and cramping. Somehow, I hung on and finished, five hours and twenty minutes after I had started. I shuffled through the chutes at the end of the race, trying not to think about the preceding three hours of my life.

After recovering for a few months (months in which I vowed never, ever to entertain the notion of running another race), I began talking to a friend who had run the same marathon at a much more respectable pace. He couldn't believe that I did all my training on the track. "What, no hill work? No speed work?" I realized how terribly flawed my training had been. I also realized that some things in life aren't apparent—at least not at first.

More months passed. I came across a great book written by two former coaches and marathoners *The Competitive Runner's Handbook*. The book explained and analyzed elements of training in a comprehensive program. In spite of my resolve never to think about another marathon, I found myself devouring the book. I began to understand why my legs had become stiff, why I had cramped, why I had fallen apart the last half of the race, and even why my feet had blistered. These problems, I learned, could all be eliminated by proper training. Given the proper program to follow, it should be possible to overcome the breakdowns that I had experienced. What had been a humiliating and chaotic experience could actually be deciphered, anticipated, prepared for, and—most importantly—conquered. I liked that. I was eager to put my self-coaching to the test.

To date, I've run three marathons, and I'm currently training for my fourth. My times have dropped, not by minutes, but by hours. If I say so myself, I've learned a lot about self-coaching. My self-coached marathon experiences proved invaluable as I pondered the possibility of putting my experience coaching patients into a Self-coached format.

Whether you're anxious or depressed, Self-coaching can teach you how to do what's necessary to eliminate your problems. Our minds, as well as our bodies, deteriorate if we allow ourselves to follow destructive patterns. That's what anxiety and depression are. They are pat-

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The Seven Principles of Self-Coaching Healing

The heart and soul of Self-coached healing can be condensed into seven basic principles. Although you've already had an overview of these ideas in Chapter 1, now, as your training gets underway, you will consolidate them into specific principles to support all your training efforts. With practical, daily use, these truths will become more apparent. For now, in preparation for the training that's ahead, it's important that you gain a feel for these principles. I recommend that you write these seven principles down on a slip of paper and keep them in your wallet or purse. Occasionally, just read through the list, allowing yourself to absorb them and reflect on them. As soon as you have a casual, working awareness of them, you're ready to begin Part II—the problems Self-coaching can heal.

Principle 1: Everyone Has a Legacy of Insecurity, the Insecure Child

Growing up human means growing up with some degree of insecurity. It's inevitable. Children are ill equipped to cope with—much less make sense of—early traumas, conflicts, misunderstandings, or loss. When children feel out of control and vulnerable, they resort to any strategy that offers relief: tantrums, whining, sulking—whatever works. These are primitive tactics designed to reduce vulnerability by gaining more control.

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Over time, your strategies as a child become habits, and your personality is shaped accordingly. These habits make your here-and-now thinking—when threatened—become primitive and coarse, reminiscent of your earliest struggles. With practice, you can begin to be attuned to these simple-minded, tormented reactions to life. I call the “voice” in you that spews fear and panic the Insecure Child. Differentiating your Insecure Child’s voice from your healthy thinking is the first step to a more mature, liberated, healthy life.

Chapter 3 will introduce you to a technique called Self-talk, which will teach you how to break the habit of listening to the dictates of your Insecure Child.

Principle 2: Thoughts Precede Feelings, Anxieties, and Depressions

Most people, when it comes to feeling anxious or depressed, see themselves as victims: “She called me a jerk, so of course I’m depressed. Wouldn’t you be?” or “See, now you got me upset. Are you satisfied?” or “How could you stay out so late? I was worried sick.” Victims feel they have no choice; someone or something is always “making” them worry, panic, get upset, or unhappy. “How can I stop worrying? With my crazy job, I have no choice!”

Sometimes, when a mood or anxiety seems to appear without rhyme or reason, you feel like a victim of fate: “I wasn’t doing anything, I was just driving to work and I got this panic attack.” When feeling like a victim, it never occurs to you that you can do anything about how you feel.

Once you realize that thoughts precede feelings, you can understand that you’re not powerless. There is something you can do. You can change how you think and simultaneously discover that you’re beginning to feel better. Self-coaching can teach you how to take responsibility for your thoughts and change that victim attitude—especially the thoughts produced by your Insecure Child. If left unchallenged, your Insecure Child will ruin your life. Learning to challenge the primitive thoughts of your Insecure Child is how you’ll reclaim your life.

Principle 3: Anxiety and Depression Are Misguided Attempts to Control Life

When insecurity leaves you feeling vulnerable and helpless, anxiety and depression are nothing more than misguided attempts to regain control. Anxiety does this through an expenditure of energy (worry, panic, rumination, “what-iffing,” etc.), depression by a withdrawal of energy (isolation and withdrawal, fatigue, avoidance, not caring, etc.). Unfortunately, rather than helping, anxiety and depression become part of the problem, a big part.

It may seem strange to view anxiety and depression as coping strategies trying to protect you from perceived harm. Rather than coping strategies, you can view them as “controlling strategies.” Anxiety mobilizes all your anticipatory resources trying to brace (i.e., control) you for a collision. Depression, on the other hand, controls through disengagement from what you perceive as a threat. Whether you wind up depressed or anxious really isn’t important—either way, you lose. Either way, you’re being duped by your Insecure Child.

Principle 4: Control Is an Illusion, Not an Answer

Insecurity creates a feeling of vulnerability. When you feel vulnerable, wanting to be in control seems like a natural, constructive desire. It may start out as a constructive desire, but a controlled life always invites anxiety and depression. Insecurity is greedy: The more control you have, the more you seek. Nothing ever makes you feel secure enough. You’re doomed to chase control’s carrot. As you grow desperate and pursue your “carrots” with increased agitation, you can’t help but notice that depression and anxiety are becoming permanent fixtures in your life.

The truth is that life cannot be controlled. What confuses most is the fact that control does give temporary relief. If you’ve managed to manipulate or cajole life into appearing tamed and controlled, you do feel relief—for the moment. When you’re desperate, this temporary relief is spelled with a capital “R.” If you’re honest, however, you know

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that control is only and always an illusion. Like the eye of a hurricane, it's a false sense of calm before the remainder of the storm.

If controlling life is an impossibility—nothing more than a dangling carrot—then what's the answer? The answer is to resurrect a feeling of self-trust and confidence so that instead of controlling life, we are courageous enough just to live it.

Principle 5: Insecurity Is a Habit, and Any Habit Can Be Broken

You weren't born insecure; you learned it. Because children are ill equipped to adequately cope with early traumas, conflicts, misunderstandings, or loss, some amount of insecurity is inescapable. We learn self-doubt and self-distrust, and if these destructive attitudes are reinforced, they become habits. Habits are difficult to break because, like any muscle, given enough exercise, they grow in strength.

Self-coaching will give you the strength, technique, and willpower to break your habits of insecurity. Start convincing yourself now that what you learned can be unlearned. No question about it—any habit can be broken. All that's needed is a plan, a little patience, and a Self-coached determination.

Principle 6: Healthy Thinking Is a Choice

You may not realize it (not yet), but you have a choice not to be hammered by anxiety or depression. Perhaps you can't control thoughts from popping into your mind, but you don't have to follow them around like an obedient puppy. If, for example, you have the thought, "I can't do it; I'm going to fail," you're obviously being challenged by your Insecure Child. Here is where you have the choice. Do you continue with this thought, "What if I fail? What will I do? This is terrible . . .," or do you stop the Insecure Child in her or his tracks? If you realize you have a choice, then you can insist, "This is my Insecure Child talking, and I refuse to listen. I *choose* not to be bullied by these thoughts." Self-talk will make it crystal clear how you build the necessary muscle to choose healthy thinking.

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Principle 7: A Good Coach Is a Good Motivator

The best coach in the world must also be a good motivator. Technique, skill, and conditioning will get you so far, but without proper motivation, your results will be disappointing. Nowhere is this more important than in Self-coached healing. If you're suffering from anxiety or depression, then your Insecure Child has all the muscle (i.e., habit strength). This puts your emotional health at a grave disadvantage. Why? Because your Child has been constantly undermining your attempts to feel better. In order to turn the tide—building healthy muscle/habit to resist the distortions of insecurity—you must keep yourself pumped up for the challenge.

You're going to learn to disregard your Insecure Child's resistance, using Self-coaching tools to bring out the best in yourself. Fighting the good fight requires two things: the right attitude and proper motivation. Attitude is simply having the right, positive frame of mind, and motivation is infusing this can-do attitude with energy. Motivation is what allows you to sustain your efforts and go the distance. Start shifting that attitude right now. Begin with some positive affirmations—"I'm going to beat this."



TRAINING SUGGESTION

Because anxiety and depression have a tendency to confuse and disorient you, be sure to write down these seven principles on a slip of paper.

You might find it helpful in moments of stress or struggle to read through the list. These principles will become your mantra for success. Read and repeat them to yourself often.

