

7. Deal with your ego. Daily, begin to observe your egocentric thinking in action by contemplating questions like these: As I reflect upon my behavior today, did I ever become irritable over small things? Did I do or say anything irrational to get my way? Did I try to impose my will upon others? Did I ever fail to speak my mind when I felt strongly about something and then later feel resentment?

Once you identify egocentric thinking in operation, you can work to replace it with more rational thought through systematic reflection. What would a rational person feel in this or that situation? What would a rational person do? How does that compare with what you did? (Hint: If you find that you continually conclude that a rational person would behave just as you behaved, you probably are engaging in self-deception.) (See Chapter 11 for more ways to identify egocentric thinking.)

8. Redefine the way you see things. We live in a world, both personal and social, in which every situation is defined; it is given a fundamental meaning. How a situation is defined determines how we feel about it, how we act in it, and what implications it has for us. Virtually every situation, however, can be defined in more than one way. This fact carries with it tremendous opportunities for all of us to make our life more of what we want it to be. In principle, it lies within your power to make your life much happier and more fulfilling than it is.

Many of the negative definitions we apply to situations in our lives could, in principle, be transformed into positive definitions. As a result, we can gain when otherwise we would have lost. We can be happy when otherwise we would have been sad. We can be fulfilled when otherwise we would have been frustrated. In this game plan, we practice redefining the way we see things, turning negatives into positives, dead-ends into new beginnings, mistakes into opportunities to learn. To make this game plan practical, we should create some specific guidelines for ourselves. For example, we might make ourselves a list of five to ten recurring negative situations in which we feel frustrated, angry, unhappy, or worried. We then could identify the definition in each case that is at the root of the negative emotion. Next, we would choose a plausible alternative definition for each and plan for our new responses as well as our new emotions.

Suppose you have a roommate who gets on your nerves by continually telling you about all the insignificant events in his or her life. Your present definition of the situation is, "What a bore! How am I going to last a whole semester listening to that brainless soap opera?" Your response might be: "Since I have to do a required research project for my introduction to psychology class, I will focus my project on the psychology of my roommate." Now, instead of passively listening to the daily blow-by-blow description of your roommate's day, you actively question him or her to gather information you can use in your psychology paper. Because you are now directing the conversation, your roommate is not able to bore you with the details of his or her day, and you transform your interactions into a learning experience.

Another possibility is to redefine an "impossibly difficult class" into a "challenge to figure out new fundamental concepts and a new way of thinking." For example: You redefine your initial approach to a member of the other sex not in terms of the definition, "His/her response will determine whether I am an attractive

person," but, instead, in terms of the definition, "Let me test to see if I am initially drawn to me, given the way he or she perceives me."

With the first definition in mind, you feel personally put down. With the second definition, you explicitly recognize that people initially respond not to the way a stranger *is* but, rather, to the way a stranger *looks* to the other. You therefore do not perceive someone's lack of interest in you as a defect in you.

9. Get in touch with your emotions. Whenever you feel some negative emotion, systematically ask yourself, "What, exactly, is the thinking that is causing this emotion? How might this thinking be flawed? What am I assuming? What information is my thinking based on? What information is my thinking based on?" and so on. (See Chapters 3 and 16.)

10. Analyze group influences on your life. Closely analyze the behavior that has encouraged and discouraged you in the groups to which you belong. For what are you required or expected to believe? What are your "forbidden" behaviors? If you conclude that your group does not require you to believe anything, you can conclude that you have not deeply analyzed the group. If you gain insight into the process of socialization and group membership, you can gain insight into the process of socialization and group membership. (See Chapter 11.)

Integrating Strategies One by One

When designing strategies, the key point is to engage in an experiment. Try out strategies in your personal life, integrating them, and building on them. Your actual experience. All strategies have advantages and disadvantages. A sensible way to do this is to work with all the strategies on the following list.

1. Use "wasted" time.
2. Handle a problem a day.
3. Internalize intellectual standards.
4. Keep an intellectual journal.
5. Practice intellectual strategies.
6. Reshape your character.
7. Deal with your ego.
8. Redefine the way you see things.
9. Get in touch with your emotions.
10. Analyze group influences on your life.

As you design strategies to improve the quality of your life, support the strategy "Redefine the way you see things" to be intuitive to you. This is a good strategy to begin with. As you focus intently on this idea and apply it to your life, you begin to notice social definitions within groups. You begin