

## Introduction

In the 1960s, a rare and beautiful white tiger, Mohini, was given to President Eisenhower as a gift. This magnificent young tiger was sent to live in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., where, as was typical of zoos at that time, she was put into a twelve-foot by twelve-foot cage with a hard concrete floor and heavy steel bars spaced apart just far enough so that visitors could see in—but Mohini could not get out. For many years, Mohini spent her days pacing back and forth in an endless figure eight, brushing against the bars of her cage. In time, a wealthy benefactor took pity on this wonderful creature and gave the zoo enough money to build her a more natural habitat: several acres of trees, hills, and caves with a pond and grassy areas. The media was called in and stood poised to film Mohini's first moments in her lovely new surroundings. And do you know what Mohini did? As soon as she entered her beautiful, spacious habitat, she dashed to a far corner by the wall and marked off a twelve-foot square for herself. She stayed in that square, pacing until the area was worn bare, for the rest of her days.

This is a poignant example of *classic conditioning*. Mohini was a magnificent, beautiful, powerful creature who was convinced that she must live within the boundaries of her invisible twelve by twelve cage. Despite the abundant space all around her, she confined herself to much less. Staying within that small space was not just a fleeting idea to her; Mohini surely felt as if her very survival depended on it. I'm certain that whenever Mohini even thought of leaving her small area, her heartbeat raced, her breathing became labored, and her entire physiology told her that it was unsafe.

Classic conditioning does not just occur in tigers or hamsters or Pavlov's dogs. We humans run our lives by it also. Conditioning itself is benign, neutral. It is the way in which the brain organizes its power to move us toward what we desire or to affirm what we believe to be true. Conditioning can support mental and emotional cages that limit life experience (as in Mohini's case) or unleash unlimited potential. *Conscious empowering conditioning* can often overcome cages that most of us would consider quite real and unconquerable, as exemplified by Helen Keller.

**Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up. —Pablo Picasso**

Helen Keller was deaf and blind from infancy, yet this brilliant woman graduated magna cum laude from Radcliffe in 1904 and could read in five languages. During her long active lifetime, she wrote twelve books and many articles, became an international speaker and an influential political activist, helping to found the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and lived a rich and full life. Helen Keller, against all odds, freed her Mohini from the barriers that many would consider insurmountable.

How did she do it? With the help of a dedicated teacher, Helen Keller used *conscious conditioning*, beliefs deeply embedded in her brain, to determine the course of her life. To get a glimpse of what those critical beliefs were, here's what Helen Keller had to say about life:

*Be of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow.*

*You have set yourself a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles.*

*We can do anything we want to if we stick to it long enough.*

*It is for us to pray not for tasks equal to our powers, but for powers equal to our tasks, to go forward with a great desire forever beating at the door of our hearts as we travel toward our distant goal.*

In this book, I want to convince you of three things: First, that we are all Mohinis: magnificent, powerful, beautiful—whether we acknowledge it or not. Second, that the mental and emotional cages that hold us back are not *real* limitations but unconscious, nonproductive conditioning that has been hardwired into our brains. And third, that you can use the recent discoveries of neuropsychology to retrain your brain so that its incredible power can support whatever you desire to be, do, and have out of life.

Cages come in different sizes. A world-class athlete may feel caged because she cannot seem to break her own record. A salesperson may feel caged because no matter how much energy he puts into his job, he just cannot seem to close his quota of sales. You may feel caged because of feelings of complacency that seem to block you from doing the things you know you should be doing to achieve your dreams. We all have cages. But the good news is that once we understand our cages for what they are—merely the conditioning of our brains—we can dismantle them.

To truly experience the transformation waiting for you, I suggest that you approach this book as an experiential workshop rather than a theoretical lecture. Read the chapters and examples with the sense that they are about *you*. Resist the temptation to apply this knowledge to how you perceive your neighbor or cousin or significant other. Take the time to experience the exercises for yourself and ruminate over the questions. Rather than inhaling the facts of the science, absorb the feeling of the practices.

This is not magic; it's neuroscience. And the goal of this book is to make this science accessible to you on a practical level so you can create magical results and free your own Mohini.

## **Chapter One**

### ***Bridging the Chasm***

*Warning: The contents of this book may, unlike previous self-improvement prescriptions you have taken, actually change your life and help you attain your goals.*

#### **Looking Across the Chasm**

We can see it: that bright future, those wonderful possibilities life has to offer. We can almost taste what it would feel like to attain our desires. And yet for many of us, our goals and dreams remain elusive. We get inspired by the latest motivational speaker or sure-fire improvement plan. But more often than not, we slip back into the same old ruts.

Have you tried myriad self-improvement programs? Struggled to correct bad habits or tap your potential? Have you spent hours affirming abundance, joy, and health only to manifest lack, boredom, and illness?

Let me tell you a secret that every life coach, human potential guru, and motivational speaker knows: *self-improvement programs rarely work in the long run.* Whether it's about losing weight or getting comfortable making sales calls, we just do not seem to make much headway no matter how many techniques we try. I call it the chasm: that huge divide between your current reality and who you wish to be. Whether it's losing weight, attracting a lover, creating the career we desire, or improving our golf game, more often than not we do not bridge this huge gap and fall short of getting where we want to be.

#### **Research Sidebar**

A study commissioned by Medicare, published in the *Journal of the American Psychological Association* (April 2007), found that one-third to two-thirds of obese dieters regained more than they lost within a one-year period. The authors, a group of UCLA researchers, found that only a small minority of dieters sustained weight loss while the vast majority regained all of their weight and more.

Those who study human potential do not often discuss this, but it's true: despite the fact that you have desires and goals you are eager to achieve; despite the fact that you know that your life is not working out as it could or even if you are living a life that is very painful to you; and despite the hundreds or thousands of dollars and countless hours you've spent trying to make positive changes. Despite your intelligence, sincerity, and determination, you will still run into resistance when you begin the practices that I *know* (and research has proven) can make a tremendous difference in your life. Why?

#### **Research Sidebar:**

A study was commissioned by Werner Erhard and Associates (*Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1989) regarding the effectiveness of large group awareness training, specifically those who had attended The Forum, the successor to the est training, and at present the most widespread program for advancing human potential. The study concluded that The Forum had minimal lasting effects, positive or negative, on participants' self-perception.

*If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere. —*

## Frank A. Clark

It is not that we're lazy or stupid or unmotivated. It is not because what we desire to have or be or do is impossible. It is not even because the self-improvement programs out there are invalid. It's because the internal mechanism—*our brain's conditioning*—that needs to be modified to create lasting change is the very same internal mechanism that is resisting the change we are trying to make!

It's a Catch-22, right? The very thing that needs to change so you can reach your goals is the same thing that will fight that change. All of the improvements you wish to make or goals you desire to reach are perfectly attainable for you except for one thing: Your brain will reject them.

Similar to the way that your body will reject a donor organ that is incompatible, your brain will activate all of its power to battle against any thoughts, ideas, or possibilities that feel foreign or incompatible to it. If you're convinced that you are disorganized, your brain will enlist its awesome force to ensure that no time or space efficiency program in the world will work for you. If you believe that you are unattractive, your brain will make sure you see "ugly" in the mirror no matter how many plastic surgeries you have. Are you convinced that weight loss is difficult? Your brain will make sure that it is *impossible* for you!

Your brain is just doing its job.

Your brain's job is to make sure that all of your systems—your visual perception, hormones, blood flow, breathing, muscle movements, and emotions—respond to and support *what you believe to be true*. It works overtime, diligently producing the reality you accept as valid.

So how does the brain know what you believe to be true? Your brain refers to the beliefs that have been *conditioned* or hardwired into it. We will delve into the mechanics and dynamics of conditioning in the next chapter. But for now, think of conditioning as a set of deep-seated, oft-repeated, unwavering, and undeniable beliefs. These are not just random or fleeting thoughts; conditioned beliefs are embedded in your physiology. They affect everything from your heartbeat to your hearing, your sweat glands to your sense of smell.

Whether unconscious or conscious, your conditioned beliefs determine your life path. They hold the key to your joy and misery. Your *conditioning* is the insidious force that controls your life—usually without your knowledge or permission. And, via the awesome power of your brain, your conditioning will block anything that runs counter to it. It can be your very best friend or your most powerful foe.

Scary, huh?

Truth is, it's only scary if we do not understand conditioning and do not know how to work with it. In the next chapters, I will:

1. Help you understand what conditioning is and how it works
2. Show you how to discover *your own specific* conditioning and how it is running (or ruining) your life
3. Train you to *consciously change your conditioning*.

The point is to get your conditioning to work *for* you, not *against* you. You will align your conditioning and the awesome power of your brain with what you desire.

So how do you know if your conditioned beliefs are supporting your efforts toward your goals or sabotaging them? In general, if you're having trouble making a

change that is important to you, there is some conditioned belief blocking you. And that limiting conditioned belief could take a number of forms.

### **Disbelief in Change**

Though many of us yearn for positive change and transformation, our conscious or unconscious conditioned beliefs may tell us that we really do not have the ability to become substantially different or better than who we have been. Do any of these statements ring true to you?

*You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*

*This is just the way life is; we have to accept it.*

*You have to be born in the right place at the right time to make it.*

*You have to get the breaks and the right circumstances to be successful.*

*You cannot have it all. Getting by is good enough.*

*Most of us just are not cut out for greatness.*

Some of us firmly believe these statements to be true. Others claim that they believe in unlimited human potential. But when it gets right down to it, almost all of us honestly *experience* life in terms of one or more of the limiting statements above.

Human potential is the *hope* but life's limitations feel like the *reality*.

You may not ever say these statements out loud. You may even argue against them using the positive self-talk of recent decades. But take a moment: In your heart of hearts, do any of those statements seem like the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Deep down, do you trust these "reality" statements more than the possibility of transformation? If so, these beliefs have been hardwired into your brain and will sabotage any personal growth program you begin—and probably have done so in the past.

### **EXERCISE: What Popped Your Balloon?**

Note: All of the exercises in this book are also on the accompanying CD.

Take a moment to think about something you've tried to change or improve in the past. It could be putting more money into savings, exercising more regularly, or overcoming shyness. We usually start out an improvement program with a bang then fade in our enthusiasm. Remember back to when your enthusiasm was fading. Do any of these sound familiar? "Circumstances are in the way. I won't be able to \_\_\_\_\_ until my circumstances change." "Being \_\_\_\_\_ is just in my DNA. I can't change that." "If \_\_\_\_\_ was meant to be, it would not feel so hard." Maybe you cannot remember a conscious message, but can you remember how you felt? Discouraged? Resigned? This is your conditioned beliefs at work to keep you stuck!

I am not asking you to just believe and trust in the possibility of your own transformation. Those limiting "reality" statements, like all conditioning, are hardwired in and need to be processed to release their power. But for now, however, I ask only that you hold them lightly and stay open.

### **The Known Is Painful—But the Unknown Is Terrifying!**

*Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.*

—T.S. Elliot, American poet

Maybe you really *do* believe that you can transform yourself. But as sincerely as you *want* to change, there is that part of your brain that really *does not* want to change!

One of the most basic functions of the brain is survival: making sure that we stay out of harm's way. And if we do find ourselves in danger, our brains will work as hard as

they can to get us back to safety. This survival instinct supersedes just about any other function of the brain.

Change of any kind means uncertainty, perhaps losing control of a life that you are just barely able to manage. Your current life may not be perfect, but it's familiar. Your brain has invested much time and energy learning to cope and adapt to this life of yours. Many of us feel that we are stretched so thin by our adapting and coping that any additional change would send us over the edge!

Philosophers often say that we are fearful of the unknown. In my opinion, we are much more frightened by the *loss of the known*. We think and say that we want to make more money, have happier and more romantic relationships, be less stressed at work, have more time with our children, have a healthy and attractive physique. But more strongly than all of this, we want to survive—and most of us are pretty darn good at knowing how to survive under our current circumstances. It's tough to give that up.

For instance, on the surface, attaining extraordinary professional success certainly does not appear to threaten your survival. But what if unconsciously you connect being at the top with loneliness? What if you believe that this success will require a crazy time commitment and create painful imbalance in your life? What if you hold an underlying belief that highly successful people in your profession have to be slightly unethical or at least cutthroat? These deep-seated, often unconscious beliefs notify your brain that becoming a professional success is indeed very dangerous to your well-being.

In truth, change is inevitable. As Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all. Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature." No one, no circumstance, no state remains totally static—so you might as well choose your changes! But conscious change usually means stepping out of your comfort zone, that invisible twelve-foot cage that your brain perceives as safe for you. In the next chapters, I will give you techniques to help when you feel the fear to make the change anyway.

*One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.*

—Abraham Maslow, American psychologist

### **Specific Negative Beliefs**

You undoubtedly have conditioned limiting beliefs specific to that aspect of yourself you would like to change. Keep in mind that a conditioned belief is not just a fleeting thought. It feels and seems to be the truth. Do any of these sound familiar?

*{UL}I just was not born with the talent, intelligence, or raw ability to be, do, or have what I want.*

*Genetically, I am predisposed to be overweight/unhealthy/a loner/bad with numbers/nervous in front of people.*

*To get my desires, I would have to be credentialed/have more money/be physically stronger/be better looking/be smarter.*

*Maybe if I had started earlier in life, but now it is too late to go after my dreams.{/UL}*

In my years of practice, I have heard all kinds of limiting beliefs, from "I've always been the fat one in my family" to "I just do not have enough killer instinct to be successful." Whether conscious or unconscious, these specific deep-seated beliefs will definitely take up arms to fight any effort to contradict them!

Often we argue for our limitations: “But I really did grow up in a dysfunctional family!” “But I really did flunk out of PE in junior high!” “Even my mom will tell you that I’m not photogenic!” As Richard Bach wrote, “Argue for your limitations and, sure enough, they’re yours!” But how real are these “real” limitations?

Most of us would agree that you cannot be five feet seven inches and play professional basketball. But Spud Webb is only that tall and played twelve seasons with the NBA, and he was the shortest person ever to win the Slam Dunk contest. Can a double amputee climb Mt. Everest? New Zealander Mark Inglis was able to do it, some twenty years after both of his legs had been amputated during a similar climb. Stephen Hawking, a quadriplegic who can only speak through a voice synthesizer is a brilliant theoretical physicist, author, and university professor. Oprah Winfrey, born into poverty and sexually molested as a child, is one of the wealthiest and most influential people in today’s world.

So were the limitations of these people really real? Most of us would say so. Yet something was more powerful than their real limitations, and I would argue that it was not their talent, strength, intelligence, or luck. That powerful something was the hardwiring of their brains, the conditioned beliefs they held that allowed them to break through these real limitations.

*Success is often achieved by those who don't know that failure is inevitable.*  
—Coco Chanel, French couturier

### **Your Conditioning: A Ferocious Warrior**

It is extremely difficult to get yourself to do or be something that is counter to your conditioned beliefs. This is both the good and the bad news. It is the good news because once you have rewired your brain with beliefs that support what you desire, you’ll have all of the incredible power of your brain working for you, and it will be extremely difficult to fail! The bad news is that as long as your brain is wired with the negative, limiting conditioning that has held you back, you’re fighting an uphill battle against your own physiology.

### **The Problem with Affirmations**

Remember that song from the musical version of *Peter Pan*? The children are encouraged to “just think lovely thoughts” in order to fly. Though it worked on stage (with the assistance of hidden guide wires), few of us who have tried to lose weight or stop bad habits using the “just think lovely thoughts” formula have any success at all. Why? If you’ve spent forty years of your life thinking of yourself as a dismal failure, simply announcing that “I’m terrific and successful in all I do!” will not cut it. It’s like spraying a stinky bathroom with air freshener: the stink is still there and the combination is almost worse! That happy, fluffy thought sounds good, but the grimy, nasty belief is much stronger and more convincing. As you say “terrific and successful,” your entire physiology continues to experience and react to “loser!”

### **EXERCISE: Test Your Conditioning**

Try this out with one of your own limiting beliefs. Pick something negative that you say about yourself: *I’m too short. I’m too old. I’m not very smart. Other people have more talent than I have.* Choose one that seems painfully true to you. Now create an opposite statement: *I’m just the right height. I’m the perfect age. I have plenty of intelligence. I’m as talented as the next guy.* Say your positive statement out loud at least twenty times in a row.

So, are you convinced now that your positive statement is true? Do you feel fully capable of taking the actions that your negative belief prevented you from taking in the past? Or do you still feel the discouragement, resistance, or fear that you felt before? Do you still hear the voice of your limiting belief arguing against the validity of your affirmative statement, giving you proof to support its claim?

I am not saying that there is no power in affirmations. There is a way to make them effective. But to do so, you need to cleanse or at least soften the negative conditioned belief that runs counter to the affirmation. We'll delve into that process in Chapter 7.

### **Limitations of Willpower**

Often we chide ourselves for our inability to change: If I just had more strength of character! If I just had more willpower! Full of enthusiasm and determination, we embark on a new exercise program and healthy-eating regime—only to find ourselves sprawled on the couch inhaling a dozen HoHo's two months later.

Willpower is a stronger, more determined voice than an affirmation. But it still has to contend with the deep-seated conditioned belief that is resistant to change. Trying to overcome a conditioned belief with willpower is like trying to keep an inflated beach ball submerged in a swimming pool. As soon as you release your grip on it, it pops right back up. When you try to make a change in your life by toughing it out via willpower, the dynamic is the same: as long as willpower remains vigilant, the limiting belief stays submerged. But as soon as your willpower relaxes its grip, that limiting belief pops back to the surface and back into control.

This is the dynamic that plagues those infamous yo-yo dieters: As long as the dieter remains vigilant and determined, he or she loses weight. But willpower can be exhausting, so we often relax that tense grip of willpower as soon as our weight goal has been met. And when we do, our negative conditioned belief resurfaces and takes over: *I've always been a little chubby. People are more comfortable around me if I'm fluffy, not skinny. Food is comforting, a reward after a hard day. Some of us just aren't made to be slim.* Unless willpower grits its teeth and reasserts itself, the behavior that made us pudgy shows up with all thirty-one flavors!

And it is not just in thoughts that the dieter's conditioned belief pops back up. It's in the taste buds and visual perception: foods that add weight will tend to taste better and look more attractive than those that do not. It's in the cravings: rather than craving fresh, crisp salad, the body will yearn for double layer, triple-chocolate fudge cake. It's in the emotions: eating will bring a sense of calm, while not eating will create a sense of anxiety. No wonder willpower feels like such a struggle!

*Those who are afraid to take the next step will have wasted their entire previous journey. Baron von Richthofen, German aviator*

### **The Bridge over the Chasm**

If you can't fight 'em, join 'em! The path to lasting change is to work with the brain's physiology, to rewire it so that it will support the changes you seek. Doesn't it make sense that you would want the most powerful muscle in your body, the control center of your entire physical system, to work for you, not against you? This does not happen instantly or overnight. But through the next several chapters, I will show you exactly how you can recondition your brain and harness its power.



As you begin to rewire your brain, you *will* run into the chasm, resistance from your old conditioning. It may make the distance between where you are and where you want to be seem to be huge. It might appear to have obstacles that are extraordinarily difficult or impossible to overcome. These are the invisible bars that seemed so very real to Mohini. So before you have rewired your brain with more positive, life-affirming beliefs, use the following exercises to keep you moving forward when that resistance from your old conditioning rears its ugly head:

**EXERCISE: Finding the *Why***

Write a list of things you would like to change in your life. Some people find that it helps to organize desires into a few categories: Health, Relationships, Career, Finances, Spiritual. Include everything on this list, large or small, without censoring.

Next, pick out a few desires that feel particularly important or maybe urgent. Write each of those on a separate list, describing *why* that goal or desire is critical to you. Get to the heart of it. For instance, you may have the desire to begin an exercise program because you want to reduce your blood pressure. But *why* do you want to reduce your blood pressure? Is it so you can be around to watch your kids grow up? So you can finish that book you've always wanted to write? So you can climb Mt. Everest? Dig into your motives until you find a reason that is really compelling to you. (Hint: If you cannot find a compelling reason, the odds of actually attaining that desire are slim to none!)

Finally, find a place to post this list so that you see it daily. Some clients print three by five inch cards and post them on their bathrooms mirrors. Others make their list into a screen saver. Some attach their lists to areas that relate to their goals, that is, on their refrigerator doors, on their telephones, or in their checkbooks.

**EXERCISE: Teaming Up with Cheerleaders**

One of the most effective aspects of any program of change is enlisting others to help you hold the course. You see this in everything from the Twelve Step programs to friends and family who cheer marathoners along the course. Find someone or a few people who will support you as you work with these processes. You might even invoke the buddy system and do the exercises together. However you arrange it, the idea is to set up a regular check-in system so that your cheerleader can help hold you accountable and cheer your progress along the way. And it's your cheerleader's job to take the other side when your old negative conditioning pops up to tell you how impossible your vision is.

Who can be your cheerleader? Just about anyone. But it must be someone you trust, who you feel comfortable with, and who believes in you and your dream. Clearly, you do not want to choose your most cynical friend or someone who might be threatened by your success!

**EXERCISE: Make Me a Deal**

Just about all of us are willing to do something, even if it's a bit difficult, when we know it is only for a limited time. For instance housecleaning: Imagine that I asked you to clean your entire house, top to bottom. Most of us groan and ache at the mere thought! But what if I asked you to spend just fifteen minutes each day doing a little cleaning? That does not sound so bad, does it? And what if I told you that if you continue this practice for thirty days, your house would be substantially tidier and more pleasant to live in? Starting to sound pretty good, right? Most of us could find that amount of time on a regular basis no matter how busy we think we are.

Well, that's what I'm asking of you. Not that you spend fifteen minutes per day cleaning your house, but you spend that same amount of time cleaning up your brain! I'd like you to make me a deal that you will spend fifteen minutes per day for thirty days working with the exercises in this book and on the CD. Schedule this fifteen minutes on your calendar or in your day planner. Ink it in, do not pencil it in! Consider this daily fifteen minutes an appointment with yourself that you keep, no matter what pops up. Trust me. You'll be pleased with the result.

*Right now you are one choice away from a new beginning—one that leads you toward becoming the fullest human being you can be.*

Oprah Winfrey