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EVOLVE

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

The Revolution in Personal Evolution

By Steven DeSalvo

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Introduction

EVOLVE is a series of books about the discovery of the meaning of life and how we can thrive as responsible adults in a world of extreme change.

How do we go forward on this planet with seven billion people needing housing, work, and food to survive? How do we live in harmony with each other, with the earth, and with other plants and animals? We don't—unless we all do our part to make human evolution a conscious affair, one in which each of us takes responsibility for living together in harmony and peace.

A world of harmony and peace is possible. As humans we have the awareness to make our world a utopia, but only if we step up to the challenge and EVOLVE. Without this, humans could easily regress into complete chaos, foraging and killing whatever stands in the way for food and survival, much as starving apes might. We are teetering on the brink of our civilization's collapse, facing the possibility of a world in which survival of the fittest is all that matters. Accepting the diversity of expression of all human life—not just what is deemed acceptable to one class, race, or religion—will help us avoid this tragedy.

We like to take credit when life goes well, but when life does not go well, that's something else altogether. We often take a victim stance. We want to get up and walk away, and often we believe we are being victimized by life. But the truth is, no matter what emotions life's challenges invoke, we are personally responsible for our lives.

Who is a candidate for the EVOLVE program? Anyone who wants to follow a path to discover their fullest potential as a human being qualifies. EVOLVE is a tool anyone can use to recalibrate, reconnect, and retrain oneself to the true power of living.

This series presents the means for you to observe your own life objectively and see how your decisions relate to outcomes, your beliefs map to your behaviors, and your goals present as your successes. EVOLVE is a tool to see how taking back responsibility for your own life through increased personal awareness causes a shift, a shift so radical it could be considered a step forward in evolution of the human species.

If you are seeking to take back responsibility for living your life, responsibility that is often given away knowingly or taken unknowingly, then EVOLVE will bring back what you desire: a life experience where personal responsibility empowers you to effect positive change in your own life, in the lives of those around you, and in the world.

TRANSILIENCE

How many of us can honestly say we have not experienced at least one of the following:

- Uncertainty about the direction of life
- Feelings of being out of control
- Relationships do not work for reasons we do not understand
- Periods of depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem that are unexplainable
- Unfulfilled dreams or goals
- Being overly critical of yourself or others
- Feeling alone or disconnected
- Uncertainty regarding how to navigate change or loss
- Having a desire to change your self or change the world, but not knowing how to begin.

If you were to seek advice for any of the above, you would likely be prescribed pills or told you need years of therapy or psychiatric care to find answers and get your life back on track. Such treatments can be helpful, but often there are issues we can solve on our own to get to the root of the problem. If we are given the *tools* and the *information* that increase our awareness of when we struggle or what presents as obstacles to our growth and forward momentum, we can be empowered to find solutions to our problems. The impact of living a modern life leaves us little time to figure out what is working and what is not working in our lives. The result is that we end up emotionally bankrupt, trying to stay on track, but not really knowing which direction to turn, or where things went wrong, or even what is not working for us. Without the proper personal tools, experience, and guidance, we can wander through life aimlessly without direction and purpose.

EVOLVE gives you revolutionary new tools and ideas to increase awareness that will, in turn, help you take back control for your happiness. You are offered the guidance, the means, and the experience to design your own *personal evolution* toward a life of joy and true fulfillment. EVOLVE presents a new way to engage with life by *increasing awareness* of all the facets of your life in which you can achieve personal change. Personal awareness leads to change, change based on the radical idea that you can take responsibility for your *personal evolution*. EVOLVE is not about evolution that is going to take millenniums to happen, but an evolutionary process that you as an individual can take responsibility for and be a part of now. The time has arrived for each of us to become personally responsible for our individual evolution, and collectively for the evolution of all humankind.

Our modern problems and chaos often result when we relinquish authority for our personal choices to others, allowing decisions to be made for us, decisions that are not always in our best interests. Over time we find decisions have gradually been made for us that all along we should have been making for ourselves.

EVOLVE is a new approach to living that not only serves our need to know how to navigate the various stages of our lives, but also shows us how to continually nurture ourselves and others through sustainable and regenerative living.

EVOLVE applies concepts related to permaculture—ideas such as observation, resilience and sustainability—not only to how we interact with the world around us, but also how we interact with ourselves, with each other, and within our communities to create regenerative systems capable of perpetual sustainability for generations to come. Every step taken toward implementing the concepts and processes presented in EVOLVE is not only a major step toward your own personal fulfillment, but also changes the lives of those around you, your community, and eventually the world.

The life-changing program offered by EVOLVE takes you back to the basics to restore that which belongs to you: **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**. Through personal responsibility, you can discover a new way of living in harmony with yourself and with the world around you, bringing with it the enjoyment and vitality of life and the peace of mind to know what you desire for yourself can be balanced with the needs of others.

Note to Reader:

The books in EVOLVE are not the result of any psychological trials or years of therapeutic experience. EVOLVE is the result of years of observing myself in my relationships with others, my successes, my failures all distilled into information that is now yours to receive. EVOLVE is what I aspire to, not where I am. I am merely human like you, aspiring to live by what I have observed, learned and written here. The first book is an honest expression of my journey into the harrowing domain of relationships, and the ensuing lessons garnered along the way. I became an observer of my own life who wanted to learn from my mistakes and successes that I write about and then share them here to help you. I do not have all of the answers, but like you, I am still seeking and learning what it means to grow up and become an *Adult*.

The writing is meant to be conversational in nature and as such is not academic so as to be accessible by a broader audience that will connect with its meaning.

This book and the related writings in EVOLVE will challenge your beliefs about how you approach and live your life. It has mine. For this reason, it can be uncomfortable at times if the information

goes beyond beliefs that are outside of your comfort zone. If you experience prolonged periods of depression, anxiety, or are not able to feel comfortable with the material presented here, consider seeking the assistance of a qualified professional therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist to assist you in this journey of personal evolution.

Why EVOLVE?

Like millions of other people, you live your life in a day-to-day routine, often supporting a system that increasingly denies the unique qualities and creative abilities that define you as an individual. Our struggle to survive in current capitalist systems leaves us little time to get to know ourselves, to know others, to know our true desires, and to understand the unique qualities that each of us brings to this world. Perhaps you are longing for something different, but you're not sure how this box you find yourself in was created or, more importantly, how you get out.

You are not alone. Millions of Americans, like millions of others worldwide, are doing the same thing: living and working in systems that sustain corporations and world powers, all the while removing the freedom and autonomy of the individual. They, like you, are asking more important questions about life and living.

"Activities" are what seem to define happiness for most people today. We think we are happy when we are engaged in activities. Happiness, however, is beyond the activities and work we perform, much deeper, and even when we feel we are happy, we may also feel something is missing or not quite right. These states of "not knowing" are times when we can get the answers we need from EVOLVE by discovering where we are blocked, where we are stuck, or where we need help moving in a new direction.

You may have reached an age or stage in your life that many consider the stage of being "adult" or "adulthood," but there is still a part of you seeking something more. Is there something more that will take you from being a supposed "adult" to becoming an actual *Adult*?

Yes, there is!

First, however, you may need help in figuring out how you got where you are. This book offers not only insights into the life you have created for yourself, but also how you can begin to contribute to a new world in which we are all valued and share in the abundance this planet offers. You want not only to survive, but also to thrive in this new world and to understand how your relationships can work beyond the chaos of complications, drama, and dysfunction.

You may want to feel more of a spiritual connection within yourself but have yet to find a religion or practice that suits your needs. Perhaps you want to discover a pace for living, one that provides time to know your true desires, or maybe you need help in discovering how money works and why it is needed. In the process, however, you may discover that what money cannot buy is exactly what you seek above all else.

EVOLVE is a system of writings and tools comprising all of the facets of your life and the discovery of how they work together. Three concepts define EVOLVE:

1. No one gave us a manual for how to become an *Adult*.
2. By learning the behaviors that define how we move from an “adult” to an “*Adult*” we can live more fulfilling lives.
3. Our evolution depends on our ability to figure out how we can thrive as individuals and envision a new world where everyone is free.

Any step taken through EVOLVE toward personal responsibility will have positive results on you and those around you. Over the long term of working with these writings and tools they have the cumulative effect of increasing your awareness, and awareness is the key to evolve! The tools offered in EVOLVE bring awareness to all areas of life that require your care and attention, and then provide the means to get you further in your journey toward happiness, health, and joy. In effect, you are being given the tools for taking personal responsibility for your *personal evolution*, and through this process you affect the evolution of human consciousness.

Books on self-help and spirituality are found everywhere as more and more people are seeking deeper meaning in their lives. EVOLVE takes you right to the heart of figuring out what is needed, and then gives you the tools to get you there. No one can do the work for you, but you need the tools found here to give you awareness of the work required.

It all begins with an understanding of *relationship*—relationship to your self and relationship to others and the world around us. This first book in the EVOLVE series provides a comprehensive foundation for building awareness of every aspect of relationship, including the discovery of the ten elements of healthy relationships, how we develop intimacy, the expression of our sexuality, and how to care for and maintain sustainable relationships. Also included are how to create healthy boundaries in relationships, how to recognize and manage drama, the development of conflict resolution skills, and how we decide the best possible outcomes for relationships that no longer serve us.

CHAPTER ONE

Reclaiming Personal Responsibility

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The natural order of the universe may be one of chaos, but humans have worked throughout history to bring order to the chaos so living might make some sense to us. Many of our attempts are aimed at making us feel we are more in control of our lives. Disorder and dysfunction arise when we do not have control or things do not go the way we planned, but this is all just the natural tendency of the ego to project expectations onto life, rather than the natural humility to live in harmony with life. Until we shift our awareness away from the ego, it will continually control us and, ultimately, destroy us.

There is a trend today to subjugate people through information that fails to inform with true knowledge or to teach us what we need to know. In essence, we are lulled into deep sleep and then work tirelessly to support the systems that have put us in that sleep state. Our goal is to awaken to truth and to our authentic selves by increasing our awareness that a life thus lived is possible. A *shift* in awareness is needed so each of us begins to take personal responsibility for our

awakened consciousness.

One way to shift our focus away from ego-centered living is through *self-observation*.

Self-observation is the process of observing our thoughts and emotions, and then observing any actions or behaviors resulting from those thoughts or emotions. The process of self-observation is what allows us to move to a new state of awareness and to make lasting changes in our behaviors and how we live.

Before we get to any new state of awareness, we first have to take the necessary steps to set the stage for something new to occur. The magic happens when we open ourselves to new possibilities. What's interesting about the stage we are setting here is we observe the drama gradually unfold, fold back on itself, and completely disappear.

Self-observation begins now as you read the following scenario:

You are invited to a play, but what the play is about is not disclosed to you in the invitation. Your ticket is provided and only one request is made: you must watch this play from beginning to end without leaving. You agree to these conditions.

Now, imagine yourself walking into the theater. At first, the stage is dark, and then the curtains come up gradually, revealing a stage set ready for a scene played by actors who are now assuming their places and roles. As the curtains open and the story unfolds, the play is a series of scenes that each show a current point in time as an adult, and then a flashback to the point in time as a child or young adult who gave shape to what is being portrayed. As the play begins to unfold, it all starts to feel very familiar. At a certain point you realize this story includes all of the significant events in your own life—the painful events as well as the joyful ones. The complex cast of characters enacts all aspects of yourself: the hurts, the pains, the happiness, and the sadness. You observe how all your significant relationships came in and out of your life, as well as your repetitive patterns in relationships, both healthy and destructive. The flashbacks portray exactly where the seeds of all your beliefs and behaviors originated and took form, but to see it all presented objectively on this stage with you as the observer gives you more insight, insight into yourself and into your beliefs.

At first it feels strange, but these feelings grow to include confusion and shock as you watch your life being played out right in front of you with everyone in the theater watching.

It all feels so uncomfortable that at several points you almost decide to break your agreement to watch it and are tempted to leave. But as you continue to watch, you see yourself start to shift from reacting to what is being presented to watching it more intensely with detachment and curiosity. You see yourself objectively with *Detached Perspective* as you watch all the characters from a distance play out your life, and you start to see how all your hopes, fears, and desires became your goals, successes, and failures.

As you continue to watch the story unfold with more objectivity and detachment, you start to become more engaged with the story, *your* story. As the story progresses, you can see how all of your choices and decisions, both bad and good, have led up to this point right now and have formed the you who walked into this theater. You see that it was all perfect, neither bad nor good.

Now you can see the motivations behind your actions, how they led you down certain paths, and even how you avoided responsibility for what was happening in your life. All along, all the lessons

you needed to learn were presenting themselves, and for whatever reason at the time of presentation it had not been clear that a gift was being given. The only thing missing during the pivotal moments in your life was the ability to consciously and objectively observe what was really happening and how it might affect you and others. If you had had the awareness to make better decisions, then you would have made different decisions—and better choices.

You come to the current point in time of observing your life on stage and realize the life portrayed before you has arrived at the exact point where you walked into the theater. The play ends on stage, but your life will be different when you leave. In fact, it feels in some sense that your life is just beginning. You've seen your life up to this point portrayed on that stage, and now you want to actively engage in changing your life going forward.

How do you make this lifetime the best performance you can? This is the question now living in you.

EVOLVE is about setting the stage for you to participate in the grandest theater production ever imagined: the theater of your life. And now you are conscious that you are the director of the play. In this new life, you know where the boundaries of the stage lie, how to set the stage with the scenes that support you, and which characters play key roles with you on that stage.

With more awareness of how you got to now, from this point you can see how to take full responsibility for how your life unfolds going forward. Personal responsibility is about making the effort to increase your awareness now so you can make better-informed decisions for living your life as you move forward. Now, you can take responsibility to write the script of your life: the central themes you want to play out; how the participants enter and exit; how the mood is set in each scene; and even how you choose to end this story of your life. EVOLVE will take you to the goal of personal responsibility and awareness.

The EVOLVE Audit

Answer the questions on this list, and make a note of your “yes” answers.

- Have you ever wanted to say “Grow Up” to other adults?
- Does something seem off in your life?
- Do you experience periods of depression or sadness without understanding the cause?
- Do you ever find yourself feeling alone or lonely?
- Do you believe other people have it better than you?
- Do you get pulled into other people’s drama?

- Do you wish for a better life for yourself?
- Do your personal relationships enrich your life experience?
- Is there drama or dysfunction in your relationships?
- Do people respect your boundaries?
- Do you have a hard time respecting the boundaries of others?
- Do you desire to be a parent or want to be a better parent?
- Do you have difficult relationships with your family?
- Do other people not meet your expectations?
- Are you single and would like to initiate a romantic relationship, but feel you don't know how?
- Do you find you are not able to sustain healthy relationships with others?
- Do you give too much to others and often find yourself depleted?
- Do you fail to keep your commitments to others?
- Do others fail to keep their commitments to you?
- Does the world feel overwhelming or chaotic?
- Do you have difficulty making decisions?
- Do you feel helpless or powerless to solve the problems of the world?
- Do you feel helpless or powerless to solve your own problems?
- Have you or someone you cared about experienced a life threatening illness?
- Are you living paycheck to paycheck and don't see a way to financial freedom?
- Do you want to be more spiritual, but you are not sure how to make that connection?
- Are you willing to raise your consciousness if it resulted in an evolution of human consciousness?

Many of the items on this list are symptoms of personal issues that manifest outwardly as unrest and discontent. It's hard to find anyone who doesn't answer "yes" to at least one or two of these questions. Some people find they have many more "yes" answers than not. Whatever your response, affirmative answers to more than one of these questions indicates you would benefit highly from EVOLVE, which has been proven to improve and help solve these issues and many others.

EVOLVE is not a magic bullet. It is not designed to address every life circumstance you encounter. It is designed as a jump-start that gets your life back on track through the writings here and through self-observation, helping you to engage with life in more healthy ways. More importantly, it gives

you the knowledge and awareness in certain areas of your life needing your attention to get them back on track to health and happiness. Once you have completed any book in EVOLVE, you will discover changes in your life that positively affect you and eventually those around you. EVOLVE can then be used to create an ongoing plan of well-being that can lead you to true happiness and peace. All it takes is a willingness to read these pages and an openness to new ideas that result in change: changes that improve your life.

Becoming a *Real Adult*

There are five ways we interact with life: through our senses, through our thoughts, through our actions and behaviors, through our relationship with ourselves, and through our relationships with others. How we choose to engage with life in each of these five areas determines our peace and happiness. Our peace and happiness are determined by the level of awareness we achieve in each of these five interactions with life.

We come into this lifetime with trauma from our births, or through our life experiences we become injured and find we may need healing at the emotional level, the psychological level, or the physical level. My own quest for healing at the emotional, spiritual and physical levels led me to discover what it meant to be a happy, healthy, and thriving *Adult*.

Reaching the *age* of adulthood as an adult is different from reaching the stage of maturity I term *Adult* with a capital "A." Reaching the *age* of adulthood is not necessarily reaching the full awareness and maturity of true *Adulthood*. This distinction is used throughout the book to delineate between the two.

Most people perceive becoming an *Adult* as some kind of burden that is not fun, that removes our playfulness or spontaneity. The definition I am proposing of *Adulthood* is a person who has figured out how to engage with and navigate the major areas of life in healthy constructive ways, thus achieving freedom from the dysfunction of life. Along the way such an individual finds that happiness and spontaneity are actually always present and available. One does not exist just *living*, but actively engages in life *thriving*.

Becoming an *Adult* is not an artificial standard of superiority to which we adhere that means we do not have fun or we do not enjoy life. Contrary to this, becoming an *Adult* is about removing the behaviors and beliefs we learned from family and social contexts, which we find are actually now in the way of living purposeful and fulfilling lives. When we approach life as an authentic *Adult*, we step out of the *drama* and *dysfunction* that cause suffering for us and for others. We free up energy that was spent living life having to struggle and instead find new paradigms of living to becoming peaceful and harmonious. This newfound energy can then be applied to other forms of creativity and doing what we love.

Life becomes fun and joyful again when we are not weighed down by drama, dysfunction, and difficulties of life as an adult, and when these do come up, we have the tools to work through them...as an *Adult*!

EVOLVE is about going a stage further from what we previously considered adult and stepping into a new paradigm that represents a shift in our thinking and being to become all we were destined to be as *Adults*. When we become *Adults*, we are prepared for all the changes that occur in our lives, and there are going to be many.

With EVOLVE we learn how to live in these turbulent times within a toxic world. But more importantly, EVOLVE supplies the tools to reactivate life to its fullest potential in the face of change and uncertainty, giving us deeper meaning, greater purpose, and renewed confidence restoring our lives to peaceful, happy, and purposeful existence.

While change is inevitable, when we take back responsibility for key areas of our lives, we gain the confidence to deal with the changes that are continually occurring to us and around us. When we hold on too tightly to what we think we know or what we expect, we stifle our ability to grow, change, and ultimately to EVOLVE.

When we step into our full potential for the first time in our lives and experience what it truly means to live life fully, we can begin to take full responsibility, individually and collectively, for our conscious evolution. Gautama Buddha's words were interpreted to say "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path."[\[1\]](#)

Within each of us is a treasure of gifts we offer the world. Discovering that treasure is about digging deeper into one's self and uncovering what "is," which is already and always there. These skills aren't magic, but neither are they obvious, or we wouldn't see the chaos and separation that exists in the world today.

When we do not realize our full potential, it is as if we are under water without any way to resurface and see the light of day. This manifests as having no clear direction, feeling our lives are meaningless, and feeling disconnected from our selves or others. For some, the water is deeper and murkier. For others, there may be occasional glimpses of that light we are trying to reach; however, once we begin to realize our potential and get more clarity, we can fully place ourselves on a path that enables us to navigate our lives differently.

Evolutionary Transfiguration

Self-help books and modern spirituality have tried to bring us to the peace and happiness we seek. Yet we still find ourselves blind to how we apply an actual value system that works for everyday living in this modern world. With EVOLVE we learn new skills and techniques that can be incorporated into daily life and that serve us now and in the future. We look at specific behaviors while increasing our awareness of interactions with others and the surrounding world. The shift in perspective we experience is revolutionary in its ability to transform us into *Adults* who not only exist but also live in self-fulfillment. Without learning these tools, we continue to wonder why our lives feel out of sorts, disharmonious, or unhappy. With these tools, an *Evolutionary Transfiguration* is possible that truly helps us to evolve to higher levels of awareness and *being*. Only through the mechanisms of increased awareness and commitment to personal change can a higher level of self-responsibility emerge that collectively will change the world.

Transfiguration is the state we seek and the state we are capable of achieving. Our transfiguration is met when we fully engage in the process of utilizing the tools of EVOLVE to evaluate, self-reflect, realign, and execute. Information, work, addictive behaviors, and substance abuse have lulled us into a dream state in which we do not even recognize how unhappy we are . . . until we start to awaken to what living can become when we are truly alive and aware.

The word "transfiguration" is from the Latin *transfigurationem* (nominative *transfiguration*) and means "a change of form," in this case from one type of human being to another type of human

being. The change from an adult to an *Adult* is that extreme, that distinct.

Throughout the series we see this as a shift from *yourself* to *yourSelf*. This transformation from merely knowing ourselves as a body, a personality, and a mind to experiencing the truth of ourselves as a vessel of vast, eternal love with infinite potential is what we seek, no matter what age we may choose to seek it or even if we're not consciously aware that we are seeking it.

At the heart of this transformation is our capacity for intimacy and our ability to show up in our relationships with transparency and undefended love. In today's complex world we have become to some degree disenfranchised from ourselves and from each other, and therefore the need for intimate relationships has never been greater in the evolution of humankind. We are at a critical point in time during which we must evolve as a human species so we can live together in harmony with ourselves and with the planet. Without this evolution, we face possible extinction of the human species, or at a minimum extreme changes in the way we live going forward.

CHAPTER TWO

Healthy Relationships

The first book of the EVOLVE series, *Relationship Dynamics*, shows us how we can re-establish the direct connections we seek with the people and the world around us to bring us back into balance with the most important aspect of living: our relationships.

When we stop and ask ourselves why we feel empty or what is missing from our lives, we realize our immediate *connection* to the world around us has been removed. Instead, we are connected through devices that tell us how to experience the world around us, or newsfeeds that tell us what we are to believe or how we are to engage. We have also accepted living in a society of distraction, and moving from one distraction to another has become the norm for how we believe life is to be lived.

Relationships necessitate a shared language for how we are to navigate how we engage and communicate with each other. Without a shared common language, we do not have a foundation from which we can agree on how we are to engage with each other. *Relationship Dynamics* provides the common foundation and language from which we can build lasting and resilient relationships.

Through our relationships we see the reflections of our priorities and values. We look at not only the elements of healthy relationships, but also the dysfunction preventing us from experiencing our full ability to relate in healthy ways with others. Each of us has areas of strength, and areas of weakness that require more of our attention. The areas we will look at include:

- Developing deeper intimacy through effective communication
- Assessing how we make and keep commitments to one another
- Realizing how drama affects our interactions

- Identifying and resolving conflicts
- Setting and respecting boundaries
- Managing expectations, assumptions, and projections
- Learning how respect and trust affect our position of influence
- Realizing how judgmentalism affects us and our view of others

These skills are not solely focused on relationships with others, but also include the most critical relationship of all, your relationship with yourself. It is from your relationship with yourself that all other relationships originate and evolve.

You will have many relationships throughout life, some for your entire life and some for only brief periods. Some relationships will end, some will restart and some will completely transform. Learning how you interact in your relationships to create long-term, healthy, sustainable, and fulfilling connections with others is the goal of *Relationship Dynamics*.

Outside of the relationship with your self, at least two people are needed to begin and sustain a relationship. Your relationships are many and varied, and if you accept each as different and bringing different aspects to your life, you enjoy each unique relationship you encounter and what it brings during your lifetime.

Friends, family, and community may meet all of a person's individual needs for connection with others. Through our shared interactions and life experiences, we learn our common areas of compatibility. The areas of compatibility discovered in any relationship are the levels of shared intimacy, shared interests, shared relationships, and shared goals. Money, status and position alone do not form a basis for sustainable relationships.

There are three entities in any relationship: you, the person you are involved with, and the relationship between the two. All three entities must be cared for and nurtured at all times, or the relationship fails.

We are all continually changing, and our relationships also change over time. As we each individually change, our relationships also change, and all parties must be aware of allowing these changes to occur, while continually revisiting areas that are unhealthy or fail to serve the needs of both people and the entity of the relationship itself. The most loving thing you can do for another is to allow the space for them to evolve to whoever they are intended to be, even if this means they evolve in ways that cause the relationship to end. A relationship's value can only be measured based on the level of honesty, trust, and intimacy shared within the relationship. A given relationship does not need comparison to any other relationship to consider its value, as each brings unique and distinct gifts. While all relationships may not have the same value, everyone deserves basic decency and respect.

The best relationships occur when we feel completely free and comfortable to be ourselves, and we set others free to be themselves. The pretense of being anything other than yourself always takes more energy. Showing up as your authentic self allows a direct relationship to form. Similarly, limiting expectations of others, which in turn lessens or removes their ability to *be* or *express* themselves freely, does not serve their best interests or your relationship to them. Either pretense or expectations that limit another lead inevitably to problems both for you and for the relationship.

Rather than relating to one another as fellow human beings with reasonable expectations of living in harmony, we live in a world that encourages doing as little as possible for others rather than doing what is right and fair. Learning to have healthy and equitable expectations of one another is key to healthy relationships. When relationships become unhealthy, there is usually some associated failed expectation or an expectation that has failed repeatedly. You can only begin the process of moving your relationships to a healthier place if the people you're in relationship with are willing to make this movement with you. With this shared willingness the movement toward healthier relationships is possible.

Why Do We Seek Relationships?

Humans seek out the company of other humans for connection. Through our connections we feel validated, and our humanity expresses itself. The sense of connection we desire is the fabric of life existing within and between all living beings. Connection is our natural state of being. We are tribal by nature and created to handle life's challenges with others, rather than struggling alone. Feeling separate from our true self and from others goes against our natural state of being. Since we are in the deepest sense connected as one *Being*, we continually seek to actualize this connection with one another and with all of life to renew and restore our alignment to the fabric of life.

Through our desire for connection, we also desire to belong, to be accepted, to be liked, and to be loved. The human condition seeks relationships, some for the company of other humans with similar interests and common goals, and some simply for the pleasure of companionship. Each connection may perform multiple functions or fulfill multiple needs including emotional, intellectual, physical, social, or economic.

There are the relationships we choose, and there are the relationships chosen for us, such as our family of origin. Our family relationships are the first social structures that begin to define how we interact in relationships throughout life. No matter how good or bad life with our family of origin may have been, and whether those family members remain present in our lives or are absent, our family of origin shapes our lives and our approach to other relationships.

For some, a focus on family and a few friends may be all of the relationships needed to feel connection and intimacy with others. Others may find themselves open to many possible connections and choose to experience a multitude of relationships throughout their lifetimes.

Relationships succeed when we invest our care, our time, and our energy into them. Balancing one's needs with the needs of the other person may be an obvious requirement, but the fact that the relationship itself has needs is often overlooked. The needs of the relationship include regular communication and showing up through caring, giving support, resolving conflicts, keeping commitments, negotiating needs, and listening. When a relationship fails, you lose not only the other person involved, but also the corresponding connection of support, care, and other gifts you received from the relationship itself.

Introductions and First Impressions

If you are observant, your initial encounter with a person tells you everything you need to know about how a relationship will unfold. You only get one chance to make a first impression, so let it count and lead with your best impression. The words you choose to say in that moment and how you acknowledge and welcome another into your life create the potential for a romantic relationship or a lifetime friendship. Introductions are a time to observe a person to see how open they are to receiving you. Is there a willingness to listen? Do you find you want to hear what the person is saying? Is there a desire to engage? You can also observe openness through body language and the feelings you receive. These first interactions have an emotional quality that either draws us closer together or moves us apart. Being attuned to the emotional dynamics in introductions allows us to intuit where our next friendship or romantic relationship may begin.

We often meet people through introductions from other people, so what is the role of the person who introduces you to a new relationship? The person who introduces you is not responsible for your new relationship and how it unfolds from the point of introduction forward. Similarly, after the introduction is made, there is no further obligation by you to the person who made the introduction. The only obligation we have to others who introduce us to new relationships is to say “thank you.” In business, there may be reciprocal agreements to share contacts and obligations to make introductions. While this works in business relationships, it does not apply to personal relationships and can lead to tampering into the relationships of others.

Handling introductions with care, respect, and openness brings forth the full potential from which a relationship can begin. We cannot be friends with everyone, and no one has the time to engage with everyone they meet. Knowing with whom you want to engage is about you getting clear on what is most important to you in relationships, and then having the willingness to be vulnerable and put yourself out there with compelling introductions and first impressions that reveal who you are as a person and what you bring to a potential relationship.

Your Relationship with You

The most important relationship you have in this lifetime is the relationship with yourself. You might make the argument that the only true relationship you ever have in this life is the relationship with yourself, for it is from this relationship that all other relationships originate and evolve. Your relationship with yourself is the longest lasting relationship you will have, and the only relationship over which you have any control regarding how it unfolds.

Your relationship with yourself is the rich canvas upon which you create the being you were created to be. Socrates stated this eloquently when he said, “Know thyself.^[2]” He was not talking about knowing what your neighbor thinks, thinks of you, or knowing what the media is saying. Knowing thyself teaches you everything you need to know about other people and the world around you. Knowing your self is also the precursor to loving your self.

The fast pace of our lives today leaves little time to reflect on our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We can live in a state of reactivity to the demands of day-to-day life, without taking time to

know oneself in the process. Engaging in relationship with yourself occurs primarily from the internal dialogue you have with yourself and its resultant behaviors. Your relationship with your own being can be anything from healthy and supportive to destructive and limiting. At some point it is important to stop and invest time in your relationship with yourself and become mindful of what you are thinking and feeling in any given moment and to observe the motivations behind your behaviors.

Do you take time to observe what you think and feel? Do you believe everything you think or feel, especially when those thoughts and feelings are based in fear, uncertainty, or doubt? How about anger, jealousy, or judgment toward others? Do your thoughts have any elements of self-degradation or harshness toward yourself? Do you judge or criticize yourself or others? Do you believe the media's or others' views about who you are more than you believe yourself? This last question and your answer are particularly important, because if you believe and trust in yourself, then you develop confidence to express what you think and feel without deferring externally to others for validation. Other people's positions and opinions matter, but no more, or less, than your own.

Learning self-observation is key to gaining a clearer understanding of who we are. Most of our waking moments are spent focusing outward on the world around us or pondering what our next move will be in the world. However, through self-observation you can turn your attention inward and inquire, "What am I thinking about right now?" "What am I feeling?" "What do I truly desire for myself?" Do your words and behaviors align with your values and beliefs? Self-observation begins the process of learning to assume personal responsibility for who we are and who we become, by stepping into full awareness of our thoughts, our choices, and our subsequent actions or behaviors.

Most people are able to observe their thoughts fairly adeptly, but fewer people are able to observe their feelings and clearly articulate them. Both are required for you to know yourself and develop a relationship with yourself. As you begin to understand your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, you can then start to observe yourself in different interactions: "Why did I respond that way?" or "Why do I behave this way each time I feel or think this?"

You may at any time question the motives, values, or beliefs driving your behavior in any interaction. Only through this kind of observation can you decide which motives, values, and beliefs truly serve the highest good for yourself and others, and then align your behavior accordingly. Cultivating a relationship with yourself develops from deepening personal integrity, self-respect, understanding personal desires, setting achievable goals, and finding comfort with yourself and how you express yourself, either in the presence of others or alone.

All of your relationships with other people take shape and unfold from this foundational relationship of how you treat yourself. Learning to love yourself communicates to the world that you are loveable and capable of loving others. Accepting yourself without judgment allows you to be non-judgmental of others. Keeping commitments to yourself is critical to fulfilling commitments with others. Fair and reasonable expectations of yourself will cultivate your fair and reasonable expectations of others. Understanding personal boundaries allows you to honor the boundaries of others. Self-observation of our thoughts and feelings and their resultant behaviors creates a foundation of self-value and self-respect we can draw upon to navigate our lives confidently in relationship with others. Your relationship with you is the most fulfilling relationship you have if you take the time to observe it, nurture it, learn from it, and allow it to unfold as all it was meant to be.

Self-Value and Self-Respect

We have intrinsic value simply because we are born into human form, and this same value is granted to any life on this planet. Rather than searching for our value outside ourselves, we realize our value is divinely given and always here. Seeking external validations of ourselves through other people, through our jobs or in the world around us, clouds our ability to find the peace of knowing our true self-value. Developing self-love, self-trust, and self-respect allows us to build a personal image of self-worth. This self-worth cannot be disrupted by others or by the adversities life presents us. *

Relationship Dynamics "This book is life-changing! I'd buy one for every person on the planet if I could." -GoodReads.com Andrea Norton (Reviewer)

Relationships just got easier with this new tool for you and answers the question "How can you engage in healthier relationship dynamics?" This book delivers on its promise of providing the help and advice you seek for healthy relationships-from romantic relationships, to family and friendships. Why do we need a new book on relationships? Because we all need relationship advice occasionally, and this book provides all of the information you need to step into healthier relationship dynamics now!

Some of the many areas of relationships covered include: The 10 Elements of Healthy Relationship you can incorporate today How to develop deeper intimacy in all of your relationships Why we need healthy boundaries How to identify and step out of drama with others Conflict resolution skills that work for you, and your relationships "Everything this book promises, it keeps." GoodReads.com Andrea Norton (Reviewer)

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Collaborative Teams - Dr. Firestone discusses how to avoid getting into the wrong
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