

## 1. Introduction

My story begins on a dusty, dirt road on the outskirts of Fort Wayne, IN. I was recently divorced, living alone, trying to make ends meet. I had to give up my business in the divorce and was working a part time job, trying to make it into a full time job. I was stressed, depressed, angry, resentful, bitter, lonely, tired, over-weight and out of shape. I was out on my bike, trying to get some exercise (my therapist had suggested it) and trying to think about something in my life that just might be a little bit positive. I was coming up empty.

I had gotten into therapy, somewhat reluctantly - after all, therapy was for people who were *weak*, and just couldn't get things together on their own. Yet I was desperate, so I had given it a try. My therapist wanted me to journal, I hated writing. Not only was I not good at it, but it made no sense to me. She had suggested that instead of writing down what I *was* feeling I should imagine what I *wanted to be* feeling, that I should *imagine how I wanted my life to be and write about that*. Are you kidding me? What kind of nonsense is that? My life is a mess. It just seemed ridiculous.

Besides, it really didn't seem to be helping at all. By this time I had filled a dozen spiral-bound notebooks with my musings about life. Often I would start off writing about how crappy I felt, but then I would remember what I was *supposed* to be doing and switch over to how I *wanted* to be feeling. I would feel better for a bit, but then as soon as I was done, my brain would run back to all of the crap that my life really was. It all seemed so futile; I was ready to give up.

But then something strange happened. As I was riding my bike down that lonely country road I began to notice a few things. It was a rather nice day, actually a gorgeous day. It was early summer, the flowers were beginning to bloom, the sun was shining and my brain started to take an inventory of all that was still good. I was healthy (except for being over-weight), no cancer, no mental illness. My kids were healthy. I had a home, a job, food on the table. I began to think a bit about all of those things *that I still had*. Then my brain began to think about all of the possibilities I had ahead of me, the things I *wanted* to do, the way I *wanted* my life to be. It was as if all of those things I had been forcing myself to write about were suddenly trickling into my thoughts. It was just a trickle at first, but soon it turned into a stream of thoughts. It was surreal.

I remembered my childhood days when I was sitting in church with my family and the pastor would pray for a 'peace that passed all understanding'. For the first time in my life I was experiencing this peace that passed all understanding. I began to cry, not out of sadness, but out of joy. It was a strange but lovely feeling. I wasn't sure exactly what was happening, but I liked it. The longer I rode, the better I felt. I am not sure how far I rode that day, but it was a long way. I didn't want that feeling to end. It did, of course, and when it did I was worried that I wouldn't get it back again. Yet, somehow, deep down, I knew that if I could tap into it once, I could tap it again. Somewhere in the recesses of my brain I understood that this was the result of what I had been writing, day after day, week after week.

So I kept right on writing (and riding). I wrote about that day, I wrote about *wanting* to feel that way every day. I wrote about every possible thing I could think of that was good. And low and behold, it happened again. The more I wrote, the more frequently I felt those periods of peace. Again; and again; and again! I was hooked. Nearly 2 decades later I am still writing and feeling

better and better as I go. I should mention too, that, among other things I have been at my goal weight for 15 years, have quit smoking and I work out every single day. Still writing, still riding! As a matter of fact I have written the majority of this book while riding. (More on that later.)

Go figure? Who would have thought?? Such a simple exercise...such a profound outcome. Back then I had no idea what was happening to me, I just knew it worked and I wasn't about to stop. Today I am a licensed therapist, trained in the very methods I was being introduced to way back when. I own a thriving private practice and make a living teaching people the art of cognitive therapy, the most powerful therapeutic strategy known to mankind.

The difference now is that I know exactly what was happening that day and why. I have spent over a decade researching the neuroscience behind what happened to me on that lonely, dusty road decades ago. This book is the culmination of many years of personal experience, education, research and clinical experience, perfecting the art of bringing about this experience in the lives of others.

This manual is the incarnation of that experience, brought to life in words that can be understood and put into practice immediately. My aim is to bring together research, neuroscience and modern technology to create a strategy that can be readily employed by anyone, anytime, anywhere. On the pages that follow are strategies to live a full and happy life along with personal experiences and vignettes to illustrate the process.

The manual is divided into 3 main parts. The first part covers the process of change from the cognitive-behavioral perspective and the neurobiological perspective. Knowledge is power! The more one knows about how the brain actually works, the closer one is to making that powerful organ work for him rather than against.

The second part is a series of practical applications of the process to actual issues; from managing stress to learning how to think like one who exercises. No matter what the issue might be, making changes begins with changing the thought process. Once the *process* itself is learned it can be used to change literally anything one desires to change about self. All change begins deep within the brain.

The third part is a collection of ideas having to do with the process, essentially a glossary of useful ideas that explain concepts and facets of the process. The purpose of this section is to expand knowledge and understanding. There are an infinite number of ways to look at, or perceive, virtually any situation or concept. For any thought or set of thoughts one has about something, there are plenty of alternative ways of thinking about it. The more one has of those alternative options, the easier this process becomes. My goal is to establish a robust 'database' of alternative thoughts that just keeps on growing. No matter how many positive ways of looking at life one can commandeer, there is always room for more - plenty more.

With that I commence to offer you the keys to living your life exactly how you want to. I invite you to read on and step into the world of cognitive strategy - it will change your life forever.

See you on the other side!