

# LIVING BY YOUR PERSONAL CODE

How to identify and live by your core  
values in a changing world

**BY BRIAN TRACY**



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-Brian Tracy

## **The Impact of Change**

We are living in a world of the most dynamic change that we have ever seen or experienced in all of human history. And by all accounts, things will change more radically, unpredictably and faster in the future than they are changing in the present. The impact of change on every aspect of your life is something that you must take into consideration with every choice or decision that you make.

At the same time, there must be a central core to your existence. There must be an axle around which the forces of change turn on a day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month basis. There must be something at the center of your being that remains constant if you want to maintain stability and balance in your life and enjoy the sense of inner peace and control that goes along with it.

Sometimes people feel that they are controlled by external circumstances. But the fact is that your life is largely determined by your own personal choices and decisions in every area. You are where you are and what you are because of yourself. You have gotten yourself to where you are as the result of the choices and decisions that you have made in the past. If you want to be somewhere else in the future, it is up to you to make new and better choices and decisions in the present.

## **Action--Defined**

One of the most important discoveries in 20th century thought has been the central role of the actions that you take. An action is defined as something with a consequence. Using this definition, even an *inaction* can be

considered to be an *action*, because inaction, or a failure to act on your part, has a consequence that can dramatically impact your life.

For example, a person who fails to finish school, or fails to read regularly, or to listen to audio tapes and take additional training, is committing to what you might call an “inaction.” But because it has devastating consequences on the future for that person, it can be considered an action as well.

The most important actions that you take in determining the quality of your life revolve around the virtues and values that you decide to embrace and live by. They are as important to your life as breathing in and breathing out. The fact is that everything that you do is largely determined by what you feel to be good and right and true about life and people—your values!

When you are living consistent with your values, you feel good about yourself. When you are living inconsistent with your values, you feel badly about yourself.

### **The Direction of Happiness**

Aristotle, perhaps the greatest of all the philosophers, broke new ground in thinking when he determined that all of human action is aimed at achieving the happiness of the individual. He said that we are all the same in this one respect. We all seek happiness, however we define it. Everything you do is merely a step in the *direction* of achieving the ultimate happiness you seek.

Aristotle did not stop there. He went on to point out that only the *good* can be happy, and only the *virtuous* can be good. Therefore, all happiness is determined by the ability of the individual to establish and live by values and virtues that are life enhancing.

From the earliest days of civilization, the purpose of an education was to instill values into the character of the young. For the first 200 years of American historical development, it was understood that the purpose of the schools was to teach values and the purpose of the home was to teach religion. Young people were instructed by reading the stories, poems and plays of men and women in previous time periods who most demonstrated and illustrated the values by which that person should live if a person wanted to have a happy life.

Aristotle went on to point out that, if you have been brought up *without* clear values, you can *develop* values by deciding upon the kind of person you want to be and then by *acting as if* you had the values that that person *would* have.

### **Sculpt Your Own Future**

The wonderful thing about being a human being is that you are free to shape and sculpt your own character. You can make new choices and decisions at any time of life, especially with regard to your values, and begin acting as if you had those values already.

Perhaps the measure essence of happiness is your ability to achieve the three common goals of self-respect, self-esteem and personal pride that everyone wants. It is only when you have these three in sufficient quantities that you feel really good about yourself. Let me talk about each of them in turn.

E. M. Forester, the great English author of *The Horatio Hornblower* series once wrote that, "I write to earn the respect of the people I respect."

This is a wonderful observation. Probably everything that *you* do in life, to some extent, is to earn and keep the respect of the people *you* respect. In fact, when the Gallop Organization surveyed 1500 of the most successful men and women in America, and asked them what they considered to be the primary rewards of success, almost all mentioned four things.

### **Respect of Your Parents**

The first benefit of success mentioned by most of the respondents to the survey was they felt they had earned the respect of their *parents*. The second benefit was that they felt they had earned the respect of their *spouses*. The third benefit was they felt that they had earned the respect of their *peers* and *colleagues* in their fields. Fourth, they said they felt they had made an important contribution to the lives of others, thereby earning the respect of people in the public at large. In every case, earning and keeping the respect of others was considered a major benefit of having lived a good life and accomplished worthwhile things.

### **Here's a Key Question for You**

Who are the people in your life that *you* respect the most? Who are the people whose respect *for you* is the most important? The very act of identifying the people who you most respect, and then determining how you would need to behave to earn their respect is a turning point for many people.

As a matter of fact, if you change the people that you associate with, you often change the behaviors that are most important to you and to them. If

you associate with people with high standards, you begin to raise your standards to their level and become a better person at the same time.

### **Personal Pride**

The second part of happiness is personal pride. Personal pride comes from knowing that you are living up to the very best that is in you. Personal pride arises when you do an excellent job at something that has been assigned to you, or at something that is important to you.

Mary Lou Retin, the Olympic gold medal winning gymnast recounts how her mother once told her, after she had come in second in a competition that, "Doing your best is more important than being the best." This simple bit of advice changed her entire attitude toward sports.

Shakespeare wrote, "Too thine own self be true and then it must follow, as the night the day, that thou canst not then be false to any man."

If the inner ingredient of personal excellence is integrity, the outer expression of this integrity is quality work. It is only when you do your very best that you know you are being completely true to yourself.

You are always happier when you know that you have done an excellent job at performing one of your responsibilities. In your heart, you know that *personal* excellence, being a fine person in every respect, requires excellent performance in your work and at your tasks.

Everyone in our society acknowledges respects and admires excellent performance, whether it is in sports, music, acting, writing or the production of goods and services. Everyone also knows, in their heart, that second best, or average performance, is not admired or respected by anyone. This is why

you only feel really good about yourself when you know that you are doing what you do in an outstanding fashion.

## **Self-Esteem**

The third ingredient of happiness is self-esteem. Self-esteem, how you *feel* about yourself, is the foundation quality of a happy, highly-effective, high-performance personality. Let me explain.

Your self-concept, the core of your being, which determines how you relate to every part of your life and your world, is made up of three ingredients. The first is your self-ideal. This is the combination of qualities, virtues, behaviors, characteristics and qualities that you most admire in yourself and others. Your self-ideal is your directional mechanism. It largely determines where you go with your life and most of the major decisions that you make.

We know that successful people have very *clear* self-ideals. They know what they believe in and what they stand for. They have very clear virtues and values that they have thought through for themselves. And most of all, they don't compromise their fundamental values or principles for anyone or anything. Men and women with high self-ideals, which they refuse to compromise, are the leaders and the role models in our societies. They usually rise to the top of great organizations. They are our ideals of what an excellent human being can be.

Throughout history, the men and women who have had the highest ideals and values, the *deepest* convictions, from which they have refused to budge, have been the most admired people in all societies.

The second part of your self-concept is your self-image. Your self-image is defined as the way you see yourself and think about yourself in the present, in the "now." How you see yourself largely determines how you perform in any situation.

Men and women with positive self-images tend to be positive, confident people. If you have a positive self-image of yourself as a manager, as a salesperson, as a parent or even as a personality in your interactions with others, whenever you are in one of these situations, you will perform well.

One of the great breakthroughs in psychology in the 20th century is our discovery that you can change your performance by changing your mental pictures. In fact, all improvement in your life *begins* with an improvement in the way you see yourself and *think* about yourself on a minute-to-minute basis. If you take a few moments prior to any event or situation and create a clear mental picture of yourself performing at your best, you will always tend to perform better in that situation than if you neglected to do it.

Your self-esteem is largely determined by how close your current performance is to your self-ideal, for example, if you think that you are a good salesperson and you make an excellent sales call which results in strong forward movement in the account, or even a sale, you feel terrific about yourself. You feel like a winner. You feel happy. This happens because you have a *deep down* feeling that you are moving toward becoming more and more like the person that you most ideally want to be. This is why it is so important for you to have clear ideals in the first place.

The third part of your self-concept is your *self-esteem*. This is how you *feel* about yourself. This is how much you consider yourself to be a valuable and

worthwhile person. And your self-esteem is largely determined, as I just said, by the degree to which you feel your present performance your self-image is moving toward being consistent with your idea of perfect performance, your self-ideal.

Your self-esteem is the most important part of your personality, and it is only when you are living up to the very best within yourself that you enjoy high self-esteem. It is only when you have high self-esteem that you are truly happy.

### **Decide for Yourself**

The starting point of developing and living by your own personal code is for you to decide exactly what it is that you consider to be important and valuable in your life. Take a piece of paper when you have finished listening to this session and write out your five most important values or virtues in life today. Write down the five qualities that are *most* important to you. These can be values like love, freedom, family, success, creativity, music, service, sincerity, generosity, courage, persistence, straight-forwardness and so on.

The starting point of your becoming an outstanding human being is for you to be absolutely clear about the values that make up your own personal code, your own personal philosophy.

Once you have selected five or more values, go over your list and select the one value that is more important to you than anything else. This is the value that will take precedence over all other values if you are ever forced to choose.

And this is a terribly important point. A higher-order value *always* takes precedence over a lower-order value. Once you have picked your first value, pick your second, and then your third. You now have your core values, around which you can build your personal code and your personality.

How can you tell what your values really are? Simple. You always *express* your values in your *actions* and behaviors. It is not what you *say*, or *wish*, or *hope*, or *intend*. It is only what you *do* that counts. It is only your actions, when you are forced to *choose* among options, that demonstrate what you truly believe and what your values really are.

There has been a lot of talk about “values relativity” in the last few years. What this suggests is that no one’s values are any better than anyone else’s values. This implies that it doesn’t matter *what* you value, it is no better or worse than that of someone else. Of course, this is silly. Good values are life-enhancing. Poor values are life destroying. Let me give you an example.

Let us say that we have two people, named “A” and “B”. Both of them have the same three values. Their values are “Family, Health and Career Success.” There is only one small difference. Their order of importance among these values is different.

Person “A” has his values in this order. His first value is his family. His second value is his health. His third value is career success. This means that, when “push comes to shove,” he will always choose his family over his health or career. And when “push comes to shove” he will always choose his health over his career.

Person "B" has the same values, but in a different order. With Person "B", his first value is career success. His second value is his family. And his third value his health. This means that, under pressure, Person "B" will always choose career success over family and health, and always choose career success and family over his health.

### **Now here's the question**

Would there be a difference between the two? Would there be a small difference or a large difference? Which of the two would you like to know and be friends with? And I think the answers are clear. Person "A" has life-enhancing values. When Person "A" lives by and adheres to his values, he or she will have a good life with a good family, good health and a good balance between home and the outside world. Person "B" will always sacrifice his family and health, and probably everything else, to the false idol of career success. Person "B" will be instantly recognizable in any group. Person "B" will be more concerned about what is in it *for him* than anything else. Person "B" will neglect his family and his health if he feels that he can benefit in some way, even in the short term.

Your personal code of values begins with you determining what it is that you really believe in and stand for. A good question for you to ask is this. If your friends and associates were to be interviewed privately and asked, "What would you say *his* or *her* values really are today?" What do you think the people around you would say about *you*?

Thinking about how you are *viewed* by others, about your reputation, is a very important guide to determining who you are today and where you want to go with your character and personality tomorrow. In fact, you can tell the

kind of person that you have been *in the past* by looking at the decisions and choices you made under pressure *in the past*. They were always indicative of what you valued most at that time.

Seneca, the Greek philosopher of stoicism, once wrote that, "If you desire to have a certain reputation among your fellow men, act in all respects as though you already had the reputation that you desire."

Your reputation, the way people *think* about you and *talk* about you when you are not there, is an extremely important measure of the kind of person you really are. And the very best way to design and shape your character and personality is for you to *act as* if you were already the kind of person you would want to be.

### **The Law of Correspondence**

Perhaps the most important discovery of all the mental laws of history is the Law of Correspondence. This says that your outer world will eventually become a reflection of your inner world. It says that if you have an inner world of very high, admirable values and qualities that you adhere to and refuse to compromise, your outer world will soon conform to those values and qualities. The Law of Correspondence explains the Law of Attraction. The Law of Attraction says that you will inevitably attract into your life the people, ideas, circumstances and resources necessary for you to achieve your dominant thoughts and desires.

When you become a thoroughly good person, with high and admirable traits and qualities, you will attract good people and situations into your life. You will see your outer world correspond to or reflect back your inner world in every respect.

The glue that holds relationships together is trust. And trust is always based on the quality of character that you are known for among the people around you.

Here are four questions to help you to develop a personal code of ethics that can help you to become a better and better person in the months and years ahead. The first question is this, "What kind of a *world* would my world be, if everyone in it was just like me?" The second question is, "What kind of a *country* would my country be, if everyone in it was just like me?" The third question is, "What kind of a *company* would my company be, if everyone in it was just like me?" And the fourth question is, "What kind of a *family* would my family be, if everyone in it was just like me?"

If you are being completely honest with yourself, and personal honesty *begins* with personal objectivity, you will probably find that you have some areas where you could improve in one or more of the answers to those questions. The superior person always evaluates his own personal behavior by asking what the world, his country, his company and his family would be like if everyone did exactly the same things he did, in every respect.

When you ask yourself these questions if you're honest with yourself, you realize that you have a lot of work to do. Your next step is to determine the kind of values that you *would* have if you could answer affirmatively to every one of those questions. What kind of a person would you be? What kind of qualities and characteristics would you have? How would you behave in your day-to-day interactions with other people if your conduct and behavior were so exemplary that, if *everyone* adopted it, this would be a much better world in which to live.

The development of a personal code and a personal philosophy of life is one of the most important things you ever do. Your personal values and the virtues that you most admire and believe in form the core of your mission or purpose in life. Your purpose, mission, values and vision for yourself then determine your motivations, your attitudes, your expectations and ultimately, your behavior. This inner core, this personal code that you establish, ultimately determines everything you are and everything you become.

So decide today to define your own personal values clearly. Remember, *you* are the primary creative force in your own life. *You* are the architect of your own destiny. *You* are the captain of your soul and the master of your fate. You can become an outstanding human being by *deciding* to do so, and then by defining for yourself, how an outstanding human being would think, act and behave in every respect. Then, you simply discipline yourself, every hour, every minute of every day, to be that kind of a person.

The most important quality in the development of human character is, and always has been, self-discipline. This is your ability to *make* yourself do what you *should* do, *when* you should do it, whether you *feel* like it or not. It is your ability to determine the values and principles that make up your own personal code and then to stick to those values and principles, no matter what the temptation is to do otherwise.

Everything you are and everything you become is determined by your choices and decisions. And your choices and decisions about what you believe in and what you stand for are at the heart of everything you are or ever will be. When you make a firm, unequivocal decision, in a world of rapid change, to stand up for certain principles and values, and to never

compromise them, you put yourself onto the high road to becoming an outstanding individual. And when you become an outstanding individual, your future will be unlimited.

## **About the Author:**

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

Brian is also a founder of iLearningGlobal, the preeminent online Business Training portal in the world.

Brian's goal is to help you achieve your personal and business goals faster and easier than you ever imagined.

Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 4,000,000 people in 4,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 40 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 45 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

He has written and produced more than 300 audio and video learning programs, including the worldwide, best-selling Psychology of Achievement, which has been translated into more than 20 languages.

He speaks to corporate and public audiences on the subjects of Personal and Professional Development, including the executives and staff of many of America's largest corporations. His exciting talks and seminars on Leadership, Selling, Self-Esteem, Goals, Strategy, Creativity and Success Psychology bring about immediate changes and long-term results.

Prior to founding his company, Brian Tracy International, Brian was the Chief Operating Officer of a \$265 million dollar development company. He has had successful careers in sales and marketing, investments, real estate development and syndication, importation, distribution and management consulting. He has conducted high level consulting assignments with several billion-dollar plus corporations in strategic planning and organizational development.

He has traveled and worked in over 80 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community and national affairs, and is the President of three companies headquartered in Solana Beach, California.

Brian is also the President of Brian Tracy University, a private on-line University for sales and entrepreneurship.

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