
YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Using Positive Self-Talk
to Change Your Life

Dr. David Stoop



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 1982, 1996 by David Stoop

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Paperback edition published 2017

Previously published in 1982 and 1996 under the title *Self-Talk: Key to Personal Growth*

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data for the previous edition is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2836-6

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked TLB is taken from The Living Bible © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked KJV is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture marked PHILLIPS is taken from The New Testament in Modern English, revised edition—J. B. Phillips, translator. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

The cartoon on page 133 is © 1979 by the Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



It is to Jan, with love,
that I dedicate “our” book

Contents

1. The Search for Self-Control 9
 2. I Am What I Think 29
 3. Self-Talk: *Words of Faith* 47
 4. What Shapes Our Self-Talk? 57
 5. Self-Talk and Anger 77
 6. Self-Talk and Depression 105
 7. Self-Talk and Guilt 127
 8. Self-Talk, Worry, and Anxiety 141
 9. Gaining Control of Stress 153
 10. Assertive Living through Self-Talk 167
 11. Self-Talk: *Faith or Presumption?* 179
 12. Self-Talk and Self-Control 193
- Notes 203

ONE

The Search for Self-Control

A man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls.

Proverbs 25:28 TLB

Attitude is everything!" Every motivational speaker underlines that message. All coaches hammer that truth home to their players. Anyone working with other people knows how important attitude is in determining the successful outcome of any task. The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of our attitude when he wrote, "Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better" (Eph. 4:23 TLB).

The importance of attitude seems so clear to us when we look at other people. How often do we think or say about one of our children or our husband or wife, "They have an attitude problem!" We see people who have the greatest intentions and whose motives

are spiritually and morally sound but who cannot succeed because their attitude is negative and self-critical.

Paradoxically, we want God's very best for ourselves and our relationships. We have right and good intentions; and we prayerfully and thoughtfully set goals for ourselves. But then we fall again and again into the same routines and patterns of behavior that keep us right where we've always been—where we don't want to be. Experience has proven over and over that good intentions and the best goal-setting skills simply aren't enough.

Knowledge is never enough either. Lots of people have all kinds of impressive credentials and have accumulated volumes of important knowledge and skills, but they have never really been able to get their lives moving in any direction. We look at them and shake our heads, thinking of all that wasted potential, and wonder why they put all that effort into "getting ready" when it appears to everyone watching that they don't intend to ever "get started."

The one thing, from a human perspective, that seems to make the difference between those who succeed and those who fail is attitude. No matter who you are, attitude really is everything—it's what makes the difference in every aspect of life.

OK, but even if we agree that attitude is everything, it still sounds so superficial. "When I face a problem," we protest, "I immediately want to work on my goals or on expanding my knowledge base. It can't be as simple as changing my attitude!" What we can so clearly see as the issue in someone else just doesn't seem to be that evident, or important, when we look at ourselves. Perhaps it's because our own attitudes are so much a part of us that we really can't identify them. Or if and when we do recognize a problem with our attitude, it just frustrates us because we don't know how to change it.

Our World Feels Out of Control

All too often our attitudes are the by-product of our experiences in an out-of-control world. And when pressed to change our attitudes, our internal response may be, “How? I feel so helpless, so out of control!” And really, how can a person feel in control when the newspapers confront us every day with increasing evidence that the world *out there* is out of control? Prices soar unchecked. The national debt reaches beyond the incomprehensible figure of a trillion dollars. The environment is rapidly being depleted of its resources. The air is polluted, water is contaminated, and our food increasingly needs enrichment.

But the evidence of an outer world beyond our control pales in significance when compared to our inner feelings of not being able to control our own personal lives. Every day I encounter this in my work with people.

Families are out of control. Divorces have outnumbered marriages for several years. Young adults shy away from marriage on the premise that they can't find any examples of happily married couples. Children from fractured homes feel divided and powerless—how can a child possibly keep track of four sets of grandparents and all the step-relationships within an ever-changing family structure? Too many children grow up in a chaotic world and know they are out of control.

How do kids cope with these feelings? Many, sadly, slip into the drug culture. The statistics are frightening. Did you know that the money generated through the sale of drugs tops that of even our country's largest corporations?

Because of the chaos and stress, many of us end up not feeling well. Over 40 million Americans suffer from allergies; and 30 million suffer from sleep-onset insomnia. It's estimated that 25 million people in the United States are afflicted with hypertension (high blood pressure). Around 20 million of us have ulcers, and too

many millions suffer from jagged nerves to the point of needing tranquilizers. And more than that, one out of three persons has a weight problem, creating unhealthy cycles of weight loss and gain.

Health specialists used to argue over which diseases could be classified as psychosomatic (beginning in the mind). Today most medical research indicates that between 75 and 90 percent of all illness is caused by the stresses of modern life. In fact, many researchers no longer ask *which* diseases are stress related; instead, they ask how much of *every* disease is stress related.

We can numb our pain, distract ourselves from it, project it, and try to deny it's even there; but none of these escapes can truly relieve our pain. Only an honest understanding of ourselves and our God can do that.

Understanding Our Emotions

Psychologists have traditionally agreed that we all experience three basic emotions: love, anger, and fear. We can liken these to the three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. Every color, shade, and hue we see is one of these three primary colors or some combination of them. In the same way, every feeling we experience in life is one of the primary emotions or, more likely, some combination of them.

To better understand the three primary emotions, it helps to see that each one has movement and direction. Love is the emotion that always moves us *toward* someone or something. When I love someone, I want to be with that person. I move toward him or her. I want to hear his or her voice and feel his or her touch. If I am in love with something—for example, chocolate—I find that I always end up at the candy store whenever I go to the mall. Love for chocolate draws me there, and I may not even be aware of it until my senses tell me I am there.

The movement of anger is not only toward but also *against* someone or something. Anger is a separating emotion. I move toward the object of my anger, but with a marked intensity that either strikes out against that object or pushes it away.

The movement of fear is always *away* from someone or something. If I am afraid, I back away. I want to get away from the object of my fear. If I am afraid to ride in elevators, I keep my distance from them. If I am afraid of confrontation, I will back away from the person involved and avoid any possible conflict with him or her.

Anger and fear, emotions that are opposite in direction, have been called the emotions that trigger the fight/flight syndrome. Anger prepares me to fight—to move against and push away. Fear prepares me to take flight—to move away from the threat. Both anger and fear are reactions to a threat. Interestingly, what takes place physiologically (in my body) when I am angry is identical to what happens when I am fearful. The difference is in my perception of the threat—how I see that which is threatening me.

For example, let's say you are visiting a friend of yours in a distant city. He lives in a part of the town that seems scary and dangerous to you. One evening you borrow his car and return to his home quite late. You can find a parking space only several blocks away.

As you lock the car and start walking toward your friend's house, you hear footsteps behind you. You momentarily slow down; so do the footsteps. You speed up; so do they. You start running; so do they. What would any normal human being experience in that situation? Fear! Lots of it!

You run toward your friend's house, but just as you get the key in the door, the footsteps come up behind you and stop. A voice behind you says, "Ha! I gotcha!" You turn around and see that the footsteps belong to your friend. Now what do you feel? Anger! Instantly!

What happened? For one thing, your emotions changed from fear to anger in a split second. And the reason they did is based on the other thing that changed—your perception of the threat. When the threat was the unknown, the pursuing footsteps, you imagined all kinds of horrible things that could happen if your pursuer caught up with you. When the threat became known and was seen to no longer be a threat, anger became the natural response.

If that friend is also your fiancé, you can see how the three primary emotions of love, anger, and fear can get all mixed up, and we can move from love to fear to anger—and back and forth between them—in a confusing pattern.

When we add to these three emotions the myriad of feelings we experience, it gets even more complex. We use the term *feelings* to describe worry, guilt, anxiety, sadness, depression, happiness, joy, contentment, and so forth. But I can better understand this myriad of feelings if I can understand the three basic emotions and how they work. My understanding of their movement will also help me sort out what I am experiencing emotionally when I am in a sequence of events like those described above that have all three emotions working at the same time.

Another important point to understand about the three basic emotions is how they are related to self-control. The emotions of anger and fear are reactions to threatening situations or people. Love is the emotion of self-control, for when love is our response, we are able to act, not react, to life.

Overwhelmed or Overcontrolling

We respond in one of two ways when we are confused by our feelings and emotions. We either become overwhelmed, allowing our feelings to spill over onto those around us and draw them into a

confusing drama; or we become overcontrolling, holding a tight rein on any expression of our feelings or emotions while also attempting to carefully control everything that goes on around us.

When we are overwhelmed by our world, we retreat into something that appears safe—a place to hide. But we soon discover that we are still out of control and need to find new places to hide or new ways to escape.

Marge is a good example of someone overwhelmed by life. She's friendly and caring, always taking the time to listen to her friend's problems. But lately she finds herself drained by the experience. As she lies awake at night, unable to sleep, her mind races back over all the things she needed to get done that day but didn't. Or she lies there wrestling with possible solutions to help her friend. Anything but sleep.

When she drags herself out of bed in the morning, she's confronted with yesterday's dirty dishes—plus a few from the day before. The pile of dirty clothes seems to touch the ceiling. And then the phone starts to ring. In between calls Marge collapses on the sofa, paralyzed by the thought of all that needs to be done. Or in desperation she heads out to the shopping mall just to try to get away from everyone and everything.

When she tries to discipline her kids, they use a variety of ways to distract her attention until she finally gives in, throwing her hands up in despair. Her kids learned long ago how to hook into her feeling of being overwhelmed and work it to their advantage.

Marge's craft room spills over into other rooms in the house. She's interested in different projects, starting them with enthusiasm but seldom seeing anything through to completion. She wishes she weren't such a procrastinator.

Occasionally Marge gets her work all caught up and feels a degree of control over her life. She vows never to let things get out

of control again—a vow that is usually broken in a couple of days. She longs for an effective way to organize her life, but she doesn't have any idea how to begin.

Sometimes the feeling of being overwhelmed takes the form of a phobia, as in Donna's case. She is afraid of crowds, afraid of heights, and afraid of being closed in. When she first came to my office, she sat on the edge of the couch with her eyes glued to the door. As we talked she related how her fears had recently intensified.

Usually her family adapts to her phobias. They know they will have to arrive at church late so she can stand in the back near the door. They also know they will leave early so Donna can avoid having to talk with anyone.

Her husband, Fred, doesn't schedule many social commitments. When he must, Donna has to ensure her safety with the same tactic—arrive late and leave early. Lately they have had to leave several social engagements earlier than planned, for Donna has experienced anxiety attacks that included fainting spells.

Her phobias appear to be aggravated by Fred's upcoming promotion to head up his company's new plant. Donna's phobias no longer appear to be a safe place for her to hide, for Fred's new position will make new and threatening demands on her.

Inside, Donna's emotions rage like a hurricane. She obviously doesn't faint on purpose. And she really can't control her phobias. Every time she tries to socialize, her anxiety attacks get worse. She is overwhelmed by emotions and feelings she can't even begin to understand. Her family's empathy only adds feelings of guilt to her fears.

Marge and Donna are examples of two people overwhelmed by emotions and feelings. From outward appearances you might not recognize that either of them is out of control. But inside, their

emotions and feelings swing violently, adding to their fears and feelings of frustration.

The other response, becoming overcontrolling, can be just as devastating. But overcontrolling people are even better at hiding the conflict. This method of coping leads such people to push themselves and to push those around them. And they will push until something snaps, usually their health. Then they are even more out of control.

Peggy is an expert at overcontrolling her emotions. Her attempts at control push her to the point of feeling as though she will explode. But outwardly Peggy is regarded as Mrs. Efficient! Her home is always spotless, even though she would be quick to point out the less-than-perfect spot. Her meals are always on time and look as though a dietitian planned them. Younger mothers and wives look at Peggy with feelings of awe and envy. Everything she does is done well. And she stays so busy that she wears everyone else out just watching her.

Everyone in the family toes the line. Her kids are afraid to step out of line for fear of being put on restriction. Whenever they try to protest, they are put into a “lose” position and forced to retreat. Even her husband seems to be afraid to challenge her routine. So he quietly fits into Peggy’s scheduling of the household.

Underneath the surface, though, Peggy is a churning sea of questions and self-doubt. She wonders if she can do anything right. She’s never satisfied with the way her house looks, the way the kids behave, or the way her life is headed. Sometimes she wishes she could die so she could relieve her family of the burden she feels she is to them. Suicide often appears to her to be the only way she can escape the responsibilities of her life.

But Peggy presses on. She must not let up. So she dutifully structures every moment of every day. And if anyone fails to keep to her

schedule or causes her to change it, she feels as if her whole world is threatened. And it is, for any change brings with it the possibility that she will lose control. And that she can't afford to do!

Arnie also overcontrols his life in an effort to retain control. Lately his wife has really been on his case. Her latest effort was to threaten separation if he didn't agree to counseling. As far as he's concerned, everything's fine. It's his wife who has the problem. "I'm only here because she needs help," he insisted. After a couple of frustrating sessions, I asked Arnie to come in for some sessions alone. Gradually the following facts began to emerge.

Arnie is having a tough time at work. His boss has been putting a lot of pressure on him because his sales are down, and Arnie doesn't need the added pressure from his wife right now. He sincerely seems to feel that everything in the marriage is fine, suggesting his wife's problem might be due to the beginning of menopause.

Only once in nearly four hours of conversation did Arnie show even the slightest hint of any feelings. While talking about his oldest son, Arnie had to stop for a few moments in order to regain control of his emotions. His son is a disappointment. He left home when he was seventeen, and Arnie and his wife haven't heard from him in five years. His lips quivered as he shared that information, and his eyes seemed to cloud. But in a few moments Arnie had everything back under control and was ready to talk about anything—except his son.

All through the conversation Arnie had a smile on his face. "Nothing wrong with me that I can't take care of," he asserted. Then he added, "You just help my wife get herself back together. She's the one with problems." He has it all under control—everything but his son and his ulcer. Arnie insists the ulcer came with the job. No one could convince him that it came with the way he handled his emotions.

Arnie and Peggy manage to cope with their world by overcontrolling their emotions. But they walk a tightrope. There is always the possibility that something will push them off and they will lose control. Their solution is simply to expand the areas they control, including everyone around them.

Another way to look at these two basic attempts to retain control of our lives is to imagine ourselves driving a special car. Only we know how to drive it. As we travel down the highway, we suddenly feel overwhelmed, so we decide to put the car into cruise control and jump into the backseat. Then we yell at God, our spouse, our children, our parents, or all of the above. "You take over! I can't drive anymore!"

As the car goes careening down the highway, hitting other cars, running over other people, and bouncing off buildings, we sit there in a panic, saying, "Somebody better get control of this thing!" Perhaps God is sitting with us in the backseat. But all he can say is, "I can't help you back here!" And he explains, "I can't do anything as long as you are sitting in the backseat. I can only help if you're in the driver's seat—if *you* are in control."

If we are overcontrolling, we do just the opposite. We *never* leave the driver's seat. But as we drive along, God, or whoever is close to us, suggests we stop or slow down. But instead we panic and hit the gas pedal, swerving to avoid a collision. Or if we need to turn left, we freeze and our arms become like cement. We can't turn, so we end up hitting the brick wall.

The only way to drive the car is to remain in control. That way if someone with us suggests we slow down, we can slow down. If we need to make a turn, we are not only aware of the directions given to us, we can make the turn. That's self-control. That's the way we are meant to live: exercising self-control in order to be in control! But something's gone wrong; it's not working that way.

Over the years, I've heard many Bible studies and sermons about allowing God to take control of our lives. For many listeners, that's like telling the overwhelmed person in the backseat to let God drive the car. We've already seen that God can't when we won't. Or it's like telling the overcontrolling person to listen to the directions. He can't—he's panicked. Few of those sermons or studies ever point out that God cannot take control of someone who is out of control. That's why we are so often frustrated in our attempts to let God guide us. If we're out of control, we place ourselves beyond the help God wants to give.

One of the basic points in the New Testament is that the follower of Christ is to exercise self-control. In Galatians 5:23 Paul lists self-control as one of the fruits of the Spirit. Being in control—self-control—is the way God means life to be lived. That's why we long to regain control in an out-of-control world.

The reference to Proverbs 25:28 at the beginning of this chapter tells us that “a man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls” (TLB). All through history a city's survival often depended on the strength of its walls. The Israelites knew that fact when they saw Jericho. They looked at those huge walls and thought that city to be secure against their efforts. But God brought the walls tumbling down, and without them, Jericho was defenseless.

I remember visiting the city of Quebec, Canada. I was fascinated by the old section of the city contained within a massive wall. Quebec is the only walled city in North America. As I stood on the top of the wall overlooking the Saint Lawrence River, I remembered some of the history of that place.

During the American Revolution, the American troops chased after the British army. They marched through upstate New York and on into Canada. The British reached Quebec and stopped there. In the battle that followed, the Americans failed miserably, returning

home defeated. The reason—Quebec was a walled city. The Americans couldn't penetrate the walls, and the British, inside the walls, successfully defended the city. The walls were a good defense.

This book is about how to get in control of your life. Obviously you can't change everything in your world. What you can do is look for weaknesses in your "walls" and then build a strategy for self-control. Which style of coping do you use when the pressure mounts and you feel control slipping through your fingers? Do you tend to overcontrol or be overwhelmed?

Coping-Style Questionnaire

To help you identify your coping style, let this short questionnaire guide you in discovering how you respond to out-of-control feelings. Now it doesn't just identify weaknesses; it identifies positive things about your style too. The nine items are adapted from an extensive personality test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Respond to each item as quickly as you can. Mark the answer that represents the way you feel most of the time or that represents what feels most comfortable for you.

Coping-Style Questionnaire

- | | A | B |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I usually prefer to | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (A) take time to list the things to be done. | | |
| (B) just plunge in. | | |
| 2. I usually | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (A) find waiting to the last minute nerve-racking. | | |
| (B) prefer to do things at the last minute. | | |
| 3. The word that appeals to me the most is | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (A) orderly. | | |
| (B) easy going. | | |

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

4. I am bothered more by
(A) constant change.
(B) routine.
5. I am more comfortable when
(A) dates, parties, events are planned far ahead.
(B) I am free to do whatever comes up.
6. Following a schedule
(A) appeals to me.
(B) cramps my style.
7. I am challenged more by
(A) facing something unexpected and quickly seeing what
must be done.
(B) following a careful plan to its conclusion.
8. I am generally more
(A) systematic.
(B) casual.
9. I am more
(A) punctual.
(B) leisurely.

Total answers for A and B

Now count the number of answers you have marked *A* and enter that number in the box below the *As*. Then count the number of answers you have marked *B* and enter that number in the box under the *Bs*. To help you see how strong your tendency is one way or the other, place an *X* on the line below at the point that represents your score. For example, if you had six answers for *A* and three answers for *B*, then put an *X* at that point on the line. See next page.

If your scores are to the right of the center line, then you tend to prefer to keep your options open. You are more comfortable before a decision is made, sometimes even resisting making a decision. You seem to have a play ethic about life. You can postpone work in order to enjoy some other activity or simply to rest. You're a treasure

	Decisive/Orderly					Spontaneous/Flexible				
A =	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
B =	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

hunter, always looking for what might happen. When faced with deadlines, you may set some artificial ones earlier in order to put some pressure on, but usually you wait until the last minute and then work like crazy. You are more interested in the process that leads to a result than in the result itself.

If you're on the left side of the center line, you are more comfortable after a decision is made. You like things to be fixed and settled. You must work before you can play. So you have a strong emphasis on finishing a task. You like things planned, completed. You want to get the show on the road. Deadlines are serious to your type of person, so you usually plan your work in order to be finished in plenty of time.

People on the left side of the line look at people on the right side and say to them, "You are indecisive, a procrastinator, and you don't have any purpose in life except to mess around!" The people on the right side of the line look at those on the left side and counter, "You are driven and driving, much too task oriented, and you make decisions too quickly!"

Yet being on either side of the line is OK! That's the way you are made. That's your comfort zone. Of course, with every strength there is usually a corresponding weakness. And both sides of the line have weaknesses.

Spontaneous/Flexible people are the ones with the tendency to become overwhelmed and buried by the pressures of life. Because there are so many things they would like to do at any given point in time, they will often postpone mowing the lawn. Then

when they see how much the grass has grown, they experience that overwhelmed feeling. Because they often wait too long, they are overwhelmed by the scope of the task and the time available. Donna and Marge would probably score on this side of the line. Marge's score might be eight answers for *B* and one answer for *A*. Donna's score might be closer to the center.

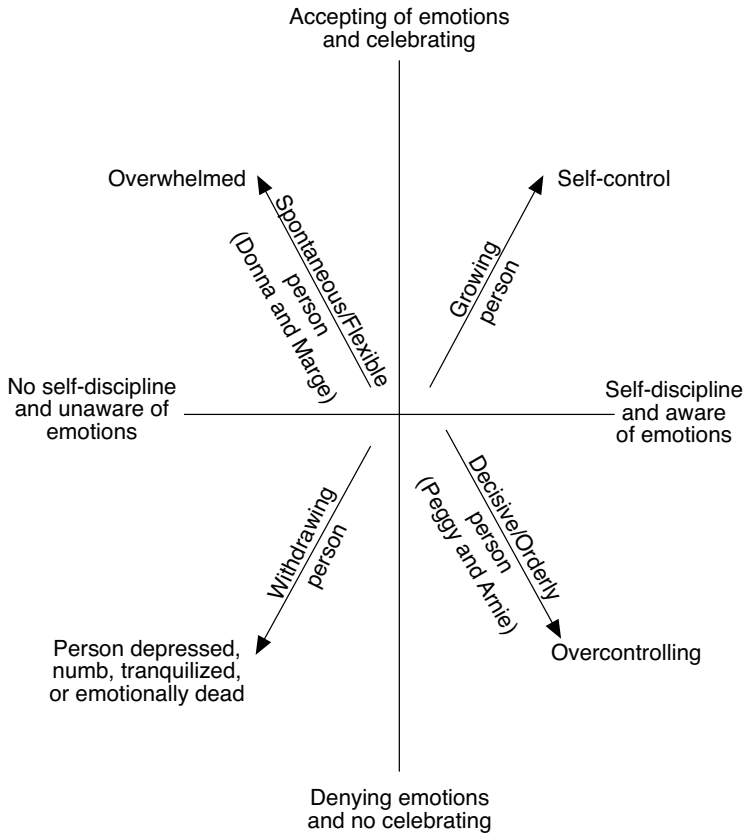
Decisive/Orderly people are subject to the tendency to over-control, to become compulsive and harried about life. They always look for the right outcome to every event. When they have a day off, they have to work furiously to get all the odd jobs done before they can relax and enjoy the day. They are usually concerned that everyone else in the family gets his or her work done as well. Urgency is their watchword, and overcontrolling is their weakness. Peggy and Arnie are both examples of people on this side of the scale. Arnie might score something like nine answers for *A* and no answers for *B*. Peggy's score wouldn't be as pronounced; perhaps she would answer seven statements for *A* and two for *B*.

Another way to look at these two types of coping styles would be to say that Spontaneous/Flexible people are strong in the art of celebrating life and weak in the area of self-discipline. They are good at enjoying life but weak in the area of ordering it.

Decisive/Orderly people can be described as strong in self-discipline but uncomfortable with the art of celebrating life. When they participate in the celebrations of life, such as holidays and special events, everything must follow a schedule; they become uncomfortable with the unexpected. These two patterns of coping can be shown on a grid.

Because overwhelmed people are accepting of their emotions but lack the self-discipline to experience self-control, they often find themselves in the upper left-hand portion of the grid along with Donna and Marge. They experience these overwhelmed feelings

The Search for Self-Control



because they are caught in a conflict between emotions they are accepting but are unaware of. They ignore these emotions until it is too late—and they're overwhelmed! Both Donna and Marge are aware of their emotions. Donna knows she has phobias. But they catch her unaware and then overwhelm her. When she has an anxiety attack, it's too late. She's already overwhelmed.

At the opposite corner of the grid, overcontrolling people are aware of certain feelings and emotions, but they want to deny these feelings and emotions. In order to do that, they overcontrol

everything that's going on around them. Arnie obviously knows he has strong feelings about his son, but he works hard at denying these feelings. He is certain that if he accepts the reality of these feelings, he will lose control. So he works hard at maintaining a cool, detached outlook on life that is forced to deny any feelings or emotions.

The bottom left corner of the grid is reserved for those who try to escape life by remaining unaware of any emotions and denying the possible existence of these feelings. Usually they can accomplish this only by withdrawing from life through some form of drug or alcohol abuse, developing psychosis, or sinking into a lifestyle of victimization. People in this corner of the grid may spend all day rehearsing over and over the terrible things that have happened to them. They may even cry bitterly over their dilemma. But they tell the same story for years. As you turn off in your awareness what they are complaining about, you may even wonder if you've become calloused to their pain—until you realize that their “pain” has become a way of life, a way to avoid living. They love to talk about their problem, but solving the problem is everyone else's task, never theirs.

Emotional deadness may also be experienced as you have lunch with someone and find that you are suddenly quite sleepy. You're not tired, but as you listen to your friend you keep trying to stifle a yawn and struggle to stay awake. As you leave your luncheon, and leave your emotionally dead friend, you find you are no longer sleepy. Your sleepy reaction was a reaction to your friend's emotional deadness. Your friend's choice is one of hopelessness and increasing despair.

But there is a fourth option—the path of growth in the direction of self-control. This option is open to everyone. Just because your score on the questionnaire shows you as either a Spontaneous/

Flexible person or as a Decisive/Orderly person, you are not doomed to a lifetime of being overwhelmed by or overcontrolling of your emotions and feelings. Your score only indicates your area of comfort, or the general tendency of your personality and temperament. The potential for growth is available to anyone willing to develop the self-discipline and the ability to celebrate life that lead to self-control.

The rest of this book is about the key that can unlock the gate to that exciting, life-changing pathway of *growth*. And the process revolves around an exciting concept: Self-Talk.

Questions for Personal Growth and Discussion

1. In what area of your life would you like to experience more self-control?
2. What are some of the good features about your coping style? What are some of the negative features?
3. Where are you on the grid? Describe some of your feelings and actions when you are either overwhelmed by or overcontrolling of your emotions.