

**For women who want to live a happier, healthier,
more personally successful and more meaningful life:**

A Woman's Primer to Better Mood and Energy Management



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Introduction

Do you want to live a happier, healthier, more personally successful and more meaningful life?

Who's going to say no to that?

The real question is - Do you believe that you can have a happier, healthier, more personally successful and more meaningful life?

You can.

And are you willing to do what it takes to achieve it?

Only *you* can answer that. **We can help.**

We believe feeling good is the most important thing you can do for yourself.

How you manage your moods and energy has real life benefits, effects, and consequences.

Did You Know?

- Depression was the fourth leading cause of disease burden in 1990 and by 2020 it is predicted to be the **single leading cause**.
- Research shows that between 60 and 80% of visits to primary care physicians are for stress related problems that are created by behavioral, lifestyle and psychological factors and are **not disease processes**.
- Statistics show that approximately HALF of the 2.1 million deaths in the United States each year are due to lifestyle factors that **could be prevented** by changes in lifestyle behaviors.

Don't become one of those statistics. ☹

Instead, make it the most important thing for you to feel good. Let us help you better manage your moods and energy and feel great!

How well you manage your moods and energy impacts how happy you are, how healthy you are, and how satisfied and successful you feel in the world.

Learn to better manage your moods and energy and you can:

- Get more of what you want out of life
- Be happier
- Feel better about yourself
- Feel better about your life
- Do a better job at whatever you do
- Be more inspired
- Take more actions
- Get more and better results
- Feel better
- Have more energy and vitality
- Be healthier
- Look forward to your day
- Feel satisfied at the end of your day

Learning to better manage your moods and energy puts you in the driver's seat of your life. You don't have to be at the effect of circumstances and other people's good or bad moods. Life for you can become:

"Life by design and not just circumstance."™

To help you get started in learning to better manage your moods and energy we have put together this Primer. It's a collection of essential articles from my ezine:

www.evenstaronline.com/subscribe.html

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and newsletter:

www.evenstaronline.com/maillinglistform.html

plus some important and easy **Action and Support** steps to help you implement key concepts.

Enjoy your introduction to better mood and energy management. We invite you to get to know us better and start using our products and services to help you be happier, healthier, and more personally successful.

If you have any questions and think I can be of any help to you, please contact me. You can call me at 434-263-4996 or email me at maryann@evenstaronline.com. I look forward to connecting with you.

Cheers,



Mary Ann Copson

When a woman reunites with what she really wants - heeds and embraces that direction - life unfolds at its own pace. When harmony is reached events begin and end on time for the benefit of all.

Who is Mary Ann Copson?

Mary Ann Copson is a *Health, Wellness, and Lifestyle Coach*. She is the creator of the Evenstar Mood and Energy Management System www.evenstaronline.com/moodenergy.html in which women use peak performance principles, nutritional medicine, and longevity principles to live a better life through more effective management of their physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual energies. For over 30 years, she has helped women live happier, healthier, personally more successful, and more meaningful lives by reconnecting to their natural rhythms.

A few of Mary Ann's credentials include:

- Masters of Arts in Human Development from the University of Chicago.
- Masters of Arts in Psychology and Counseling from Goddard College.
- Licensed Certified Nutritionist
- American Association of Drugless Practitioners Certified Holistic Health Care Practitioner
- Level II Verified Biochemical Profile Clinician
- Over 30 certifications, professional trainings and apprenticeships

More about Mary Ann: www.evenstaronline.com/mary_ann_copson.html

Section I

Understanding Your Moods and Energy – Key Concepts and Principles

If you are going to better manage your moods and energy, you have to know about and understand what your moods and energy levels are, how they are affected by daily life and what to do when your moods and energy aren't what you want or what serves you best.

Each of the articles in this section highlights key mood and energy management concepts and principles. By working through the action and support steps after each article you can begin applying these to your life and reaping the benefits of better mood and energy management.

How to Get More Done with Better Energy Management

My own story

When it came time to write my Psychology and Counseling Masters thesis the process seemed overwhelming and beyond me. I was so excited about the subject of Positive Psychology. It seemed to encompass all of my interests and be a natural joining of my personal and professional contexts. I thought it would be easy to write the finished product. Yet, I dreaded the writing. I could not organize it. My first draft was a sprawling 250 single-spaced pages – and all my professors wanted was 80 double spaced pages. I could see that I was in a bit off track.

When I wrote my first Masters thesis in Human Development (back in 1973), I had done a research project about parents and early childhood education. In writing that thesis, I also was stuck at a point just as I was ready to have the final version typed (no personal computers back then). Ten years after doing all the work, I finally took the thesis to a typist and she finished the job in about 2 weeks - now there's a lesson in delegating tasks!

So, here I was - "deja vu all over again" – but definitely not willing to wait 10 years to finish this time. So I did the only logical thing – I took a break from the project and just waited.

My thesis advisor got back to me with her comments and a concise outline for organizing the paper. Around the same time, my husband (whose assignment was to make sure

that I stayed focus on finishing the project) said that he would take on the job of editing the paper. His #1 natural strength is as a maximizer and he can easily keep track of all the grammatical details and format requirements.

With these two support systems in place I could do what I did best - compiling all the research into an integrative whole - and my two helpers did what they did best. In about 6 weeks, the thesis was completed – with little suffering for anyone.

I'm not sure what the sticking point is for me in completing a project like a thesis. But I do know that I need to set up the right kind of support systems and manage my energy better when I am involved in that kind of project.

This got me to thinking about the wisdom of managing personal energy.

How can you get more done?

I have a client who had been sick for a very long time and now is healthy and recovering. We recently had a conversation about "personal productive capacity." This is being productive throughout the day - doing what we want to do in the moment. She was talking about how her upbringing was focused on "you do what you have to do". It did not matter if you were tired, if you did not want to do it, or if your interests were elsewhere. It needed to be done and therefore you did it.

We both agreed that there were times when you had to do things that you did not want to do. At times like these, it is best to just suck it up and get on with it.

However, from her experience, she was clear that when this becomes your major mantra for life it becomes draining and

ineffective. Generally, this is poor energy management. Sucking it up and getting on with it has hidden energy costs to you and does not serve your ultimate purpose.

We talked further and identified some important areas that could be leveraged to better manage her energy and increase her personal productive capacity. She identified several energy management areas:

- Sleep
- Diet
- Exercise
- Attitude
- Connection to nature
- Reflection
- Downtime and relaxation
- Routines and rituals

When it feels like it is not worth the effort to try, it's too much to do, it is overwhelming, and there is no sense to keep going- or you are just plain tired and down, then you have reached the limits of your personal productive capacity. The key energy management process is not just to push through and do it anyway. The key energy management process is to look to the important energy management areas and see how to apply more effective and efficient principles in these areas.

Cleaner, better, more effective and efficient energy

I have been reading Wayne Dryer's book, *The Power of Intention*. He writes about living at higher energy frequencies. These higher energy frequencies are faster, cleaner, more effective and efficient sources of energy. They are more easily and closely connected to their ultimate source of power and energy. These faster, cleaner sources of energy always entrain lower, denser energies. Lower

energies move slower and have a greater drag and resistance to them. Higher energy frequencies create more personal productive capacity and lower energies constrict your personal productive energy.

When you are creating higher energy you have available to you more effortless energy. You "naturally" create more personal productive energy. There are many ways to live in the higher energy realm and have more personal productive energy available to you through better energy management.

Some important ways to better manage your energy and to experience higher energy frequencies include the following:

1. Positive emotions and higher energy living

The Heartmath Institute www.evenstaronline.com/heartmath has coined the term physiological coherence. Physiological coherence is a state in the body that is associated with more ordered, synchronized, and harmonious interactions among body systems. In a state of physiological coherence, there is a high degree of order and stability in the rhythmic and oscillating activity within the body and there is a constructive distribution of the energy within the system.

A coherent system operates with increased efficiency and output. It is better able to adapt to the demands and requirements placed on it. A coherent system has greater synchronization throughout the parts of the systems and therefore has increased system-wide efficiency and energy resources.

According to Heartmath research, one of the essential tools for inducing physiological coherence is to focus on experiencing positive emotions such as appreciation, love, and care.

Along the same line, Positive Psychology's Barbara Fredrickson has produced research that shows that experiencing positive emotions creates an upward spiral of greater energy of success, mastery, creativity, exploration, discovery, and more positive emotions. Positive emotions are the foundations that build the experience of life as good and worthwhile. Positive emotions are also the fuel that activates the use of your strengths in life.

When positive emotions are experienced you will reach outward, and broaden and build your resources through the creation of greater energy for exploration and discovery.

2. Peak Performance Principles and increased performance

Certain Peak Performance Principles are important tools for growing a system – a company or an individual- that outperforms and out-produces other, less effective, systems. These include:

- Providing an environment for being inspired
- Bonding to an inspirational dream that is derived from deep conversations and awareness,
- Committing yourself to being the best in the world at what only you can be the best at
- Only doing what you do best and giving up the rest
- Keeping your focus and concentration of energy on actions necessary to achieve that dream
- Sharing the dream through internal and external communication and story telling
- Sharing the dream through the nurturing and development of your strengths

- Investing in long term development to purposely create the future you want
- Creating strong family-like networks, relationships and connections
- Creating rituals and routines that generate a calm, relaxed environment thereby facilitating clarity and high performance
- The creation of an environment that supports calm, confidence and well being which are then reflected in harmony, passion and flow providing the necessary energy for sustained peak performance
- The dedication to practice and performance through a combination of implementing radical change and continual incremental improvements
- The creation and implementation of rituals and routines in which action and awareness can merge - resulting in a sense of pleasure and generation of positive feelings for all involved
- A commitment to anticipating and handling every detail through constant review of activities and awareness of all the tasks needed in the whole
- An emphasis on exceeding your own personal best and a deep commitment to improving your own knowledge, skills and strengths
- The realization that it takes time and effort and resources to become the best

Align yourself with these principles and bring them into action in your life and you will create boundless high-energy living.

3. Rituals, routines and calm energy

Research shows that you can produce a state of calm energy – focused, alert, creative, present energy- by adjusting many of your daily rituals and routines such as:

- Your lifestyle patterns,
- The way you schedule your activities,
- The food you eat,
- When you eat it.

Performance psychologists know that the best performance builds on the fundamentals of quality sleep, diet, and exercise routines along with crucial adherence to the biological and circadian rhythms of the body.

Well-designed daily rituals and routines that are compatible with your natural energy flows provide for the powerful force of rhythm and balance. We each have a powerful natural rhythm that is both universal to all people and unique to each of us. When you get disconnected from your natural rhythm by trying to override your natural rhythm (you know – staying up just a bit later to get that report done, skipping lunch because the baby did not take a nap) you create an energy draining monster. You will have lost your power – given it over to chaos and dysynchronization. You become a jumbled mess and your energy is diverted into untangling the mess and keeping you from going under.

Create daily healthy rituals in important areas of your life such as:

- Sleeping
- Eating
- Exercising
- Resting
- Traveling

- Transitioning from home to work
- Telephone and email contact

This restores the natural balance and rhythm in your body. When this happens, you free up your energy again and you become calmer, more centered, and better able to appropriately direct your energy towards what you want in life. When your daily life is congruent with your natural energy rhythms, you will have restored your energy resources and they will again be available for you to use them to take you where you want to go.

Build your life and work on these fundamental rituals and routines and your performance will gain the needed capacity to meet current demands and requirements and take quantum leaps in personal improvement through more effective and efficient energy use.

Better energy management

These ways of better energy management all point to the same conclusion: if you want to have a lot of energy - if you want to increase your personal productive capacity so that you can do what you want to do when you want to do it - you have to learn how to better manage your physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual energies. You have to learn how to produce more physiological coherence in your body and live in a state of calm energy.

If you want to have greater personal productive capacity – more energy – you can not just push it through – you have to learn what these essential Peak Performance Principles are and how to leverage them. You have to learn how to live at the higher energy levels and avoid being sucked into dense, dragging, resistant, low energy.

You have to want it and you have to make it happen

For my client it meant that when she was at the limit of her personal productive capacity it was time to see if:

- Her sleep routine has been disrupted
- Has she been too lax in following her diet
- Has she set up the right rituals and routines around the task she is engaged in
- Has she spent enough time out in nature
- Has she had the reflection time that she needs

When she better manages these areas, it frees up significantly more energy for her.

For me, when I was writing my thesis, the important energy management principles were to leverage my strengths and to have as partners people with strengths in the areas in which I was blocked. With that done, my personal productive capacity soared and there was no suffering and no hidden energy costs involved in finishing the project.

Since the experience with my thesis, I have been paying more attention to how I use my energy. I know that in order to have clean, sustained energy throughout the day that I have to take breaks. This is a key principle in energy management. I have read research on it, written at length about it, and counseled my clients in depth about the need for a balanced activity - rest cycle.

My constitution is very high energy. My top strength is curiosity and interest in the world. And I am a product of a belief system that highly values hard work and believes that if you are going to get something done in the world it is up to you to do it. Many forces conspire to push me in the

direction of more and more activity – and dropping out the breaks.

I now have more time available to me and I am finding that I have a tendency to overrun my rest cycles with just a bit more activity – you know – just let me get this done and then I will take a break. I have to be very attentive and make myself take a break every 90 minutes. I have to very deliberately stop multi-tasking and keep my focus on one task at a time. I make myself go back and re-read the research about the value of vacations so that I am not tempted to skip the vacation to get extra work done.

I take three days off from work a week because that is what I really need to live a whole, complete and balanced life. And I need that much time so that I can bring my best to my work and the rest of my life. But there is always something important that needs to be done and there are weekends in which I have to sit down and have a good talk with myself to take these days off from work.

It does not always come naturally or easy to manage your energy for the best short term and long term results. Often times the best energy management principle seems counterintuitive to your present purpose. It takes thought, learning, discipline, dedication, and support to be your best and do your best in the world.

All of the work I do with clients is generated from the goal to

"Die young as late in life as possible."

and the maxim

"Manage your physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual energy for peak performance and your time, actions and experience will naturally follow."

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Key Energy Management Areas

I invite you to look at the following key energy management areas in your life and see if you know and are applying the most effective and efficient energy management principles to these areas. Write down what works for you and gives you good clean energy. And write down what does not work for you and drains and depletes your energy.

Five Key Energy Management Areas

- Sleep
- Attitudes
- Rest /activity cycles
- Time management and daily schedule
- Diet

How well are you managing your energy?

Ask yourself -

- Do I know my life purpose and am I living my dreams?
- Do I wake up in the morning looking forward to the day?
- Do I go to bed at night satisfied with my day?
- Do I love the energy I have? Is it the right fit for me?
- Am I living a meaningful life and making my contribution to the world?
- Am I as happy, healthy and personally successful, as I want to be?

If you answered "No" to any of the questions above, learning how to better manage your physical, emotional, mental, psychological or spiritual energy will benefit you.

Support Step

If you are managing your moods and energy well you should have available energy levels that allow your personal productive capacity to soar and your experience of life to be positively happy.

If your energy management principles and follow through leave a bit to be desired and too many things are depleting and draining your energy it is well worth your time and resources to learn and apply more effective and efficient energy management principles.

If you find that you would like to learn to better manage your energy, you can call me and we can talk about what is happening for you. We can look at the options you have for getting the results you want. We can see how you can learn to manage better your energy to have the kind of experience in life you would like to have.

I would love to hear from you with questions, comments, suggestions, and feedback. I am particularly interested in hearing about how you increased your personal productive capacity through better management of your energy.

If I can be of any help to you, feel free to contact me at [434-263-4996](tel:434-263-4996) or maryann@evenstaronline.com

Secrets to Managing Your Energy Effectively

I have a client who lives in Europe and is also a coach. She wanted me to coach her because, although she has a very successful coaching practice, she felt terrible. She had no energy and could hardly get through the day. She confessed to me that she had to drag herself out of bed in the mornings and she was beginning to think that she hated coaching because she dreaded her coaching calls.

She is one of those enthusiastic people who believe that they can take on any exciting project that comes their way. She is full of creative ideas so there were always wonderful projects coming her way. This had worked well for many years. You'd think she was well on her way to living the life of her dreams.

Except that her dream was becoming her nightmare.

She was going to school, serving on several professional boards and was raising two small children. All in addition to running her own private coaching practice

The aim in our coaching sessions was to help her gain more control over her life and for her to get a sense that she was doing what she wanted to do. We began by setting up a system where she would start to build some momentum in her life. She was doing so many things and was so scattered in jumping from one thing to the next that she felt she never had the time to complete anything. She never felt ahead of things. It was the best that she could do just handle the next crisis.

In our lives today, we have too many things to do and we simply can not do all of them. The end result, when we follow a pace of life in which the tempo is too rapid, is overwhelm. This creates a sense of never getting where we want to go. When in that mentality, we think we can cure our overwhelm by multitasking.

But people who multitask do not get more done! And they are vulnerable to blowing out their energy circuits.

The body is always stressed when we multitask. We expect the mind and body to shift often and fast. In one day, you may have many different types of things to do. If you are constantly trying to shift multiple times, you are never going to be able to build momentum. You will always feel behind and hurried!

In our culture, very little attention is paid to pacing and rhythm. So we don't experience building momentum or coming to completion. In order to feel ahead of the constant shift and change that is our life we have to build momentum. You have to allow enough time to build momentum! In order to create momentum you have to create focus.

To build momentum you can create a system of focusing each of your days to one type of activity. There are several different approaches to this system. The one I like the best is found in the book *Work Less Make More* by Jennifer White. In her system, she divides life tasks into three theme categories.

1. **Support** -which is maintenance
The phone calls, going to the bank, cleaning, the work you have to do--the stuff that keeps your life going

2. **Laser** -projects focused around the most important things in your life.

These are the things you never get to-what it is you really want to do - to write that novel. And because you never get to them, you end up feeling not connected to what you really want.

3. **Free time** -days for you only!

Days to get to do what you want to do. These are your rest and fun days. You know the kind of days you never take. This time is needed for reconstitution and for fermentation. Without rest and regeneration, nothing creative ever happens.

To build momentum you designate each day to one of these categories. On that day, during your theme hours, you just focus on the designated type of activity (support, laser or free)...similar type things only. It is too hard on the mind and body, and you lose focus and momentum if you try to cram in other things!

Attempting to do support and laser activities on the same day - like run your errands and write your novel - produces drag and resistance. The dynamic is too hard and does not result in momentum. You just end up feeling frazzled and not accomplishing what you had hoped to.

If you look at your life, you may see that most of your days are support days. You are just trying to keep pace with the essential things that are needed to maintain your status quo. The problem is not necessarily in you but rather in the way you have organized your life.

As you begin to organize your time, attention, focus, resources and energy expenditure around similar kinds of activities you will begin to experience a wonderful sense of being in control of your life. As you employ this approach,

you will be changing yourself. Where you are now is not where you will end up after one, two or three months of living your life with momentum rather than drag and resistance.

Getting back to my client, we set about to divide her days into laser, support and free days to help her build momentum and feel a sense of control and order in her life. She was a quick study (and highly motivated because of the stress in her life) and went right to work setting up her schedule. She soon experienced that, if she did not stay clearly focused on the day's theme, she lost her momentum and the power of the system. And she was again feeling tired, cranky, and overwhelmed.

She was atypical in that she had her whole life revamped in about 7 days. It usually takes much longer than that for people to accept that this is possible and to slowly change things over. She was happily implementing her new schedule, and enjoying its benefits.

In our next session, she decided to dilute the new schedule a bit. She would see "just a couple" of clients on her free day. When I checked on how this went, it turned out that she found herself dreading her appointments on her free days. She had anxiety about it all day, was irritable and felt down all day anticipating these calls. It was clear that she was not enjoying those calls. She was thinking that she didn't want to work with those clients anymore - even though she loved the work she was doing! When it was time for a session with a client, she just wished they would cancel.

In probing more deeply into what was really happening, we articulated a standard that she could use as a guideline to be sure that she was on track. She would check to see if she was enjoying what she was doing. If she was enjoying it,

she was on track. Being on track meant that she was effective, efficient, leveraging the strengths of the moment, being her best and there were no hidden costs to eat up her energy reserves. She discovered that she enjoyed herself most when she did not budge from her schedule. When she stayed faithful to her Laser, Free and Support days she kept herself on track and she enjoyed what she was doing.

When she moved those Free Day clients to their proper time in a Support day, she discovered that she really loved working with those clients and she loved what she was doing. And of course, she then was great at what she did!



There are three lessons here:

If you want to be in control of your life, build momentum with focused activity. Design your life so that you work with your natural and biological pacing and rhythm and not against it. Would your days benefit from more focused organization?

If you are not enjoying what you are doing, then you are compromised in some way. - there are hidden costs eating up your reserves and your performance. Design your life so that you have total integrity and have no drag and resistance. What do you need to do so that you enjoy your life?

If you are dreading, anxious, irritable, nervous or avoiding something, then you are less than you could be and you will never excel. You will continue to squander valuable time, energy, and other reserves. Design your life so that it frees up your strengths and talents. Learn to better manage your physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual

energy. What steps will you take to better manage your moods and energy?

Support Steps

Of course, there will be times when we all have to do things that we don't enjoy. When that happens it is imperative that you compensate for your losses somehow - not just continue to draw on reserves. You know what I mean - give something back to yourself in exchange for what you have lost. How do you compensate for drained energy resources?

The real task, though, is to set up your life in a manner so that, most of the time you are managing your energy effectively. And then you will find that you are enjoying what you are doing.

Remember that enjoying your life is not something you want to ignore or put off for years until you have the time. Every time you are not enjoying something you are costing yourself energy, time, performance, effectiveness, efficiency, health, happiness, good will, etc. etc.

I request that you do what ever it takes to set up a system of energy management so that you enjoy everything you do and when you must do something that you don't enjoy - compensate for it! How can you get help with this?

By the way, my client in Europe now feels a remarkable flow of high energy. She has plenty of time for all of her projects, has gotten rid of all the commitments that she did not fully enjoy and that were dragging her down, has two weeks out of each month where she does not have to work and can spend important time with her family, and is on target to having her business be the main support for her family.

The last time we talked, she was heading out with her family for one of those European 6-week holidays (and that is a topic for another article)

Take Back Your Time

*"In this world, there are two times.
There is mechanical time and there is body time...
The first is unyielding, predetermined.
The second makes up its mind as it goes along...
Each time is true, but the truths are not the same."
--Albert Einstein*

Taking back your time is a theme in Mood and Energy Management.

An organization dedicated to bringing social and political awareness to the take back your time issue is **TAKE BACK YOUR TIME** - a non-partisan initiative to challenge the epidemic of overwork, over-scheduling and time famine that now threatens our health, our families and relationships, our communities and our environment. You can read more about the movement at <http://www.simpleliving.net/timeday/default.asp>

As I see it, at the root of taking back your time is a call to return to your natural rhythms.

In watching one of the news programs reporting on the Asia disaster, I saw an interview with a fisherman. His village lived on the edge of the water and - according to the report - the villagers were more attuned to nature than most. The fisherman said that people in his village heard a sound that they were not used to coming from the ocean. And they noticed the birds becoming very excited. They paid attention to these disturbances in their natural surroundings, heeded

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them, and fled in time. No one in the fisherman's village died.

Okinawan elders are one of the most long-lived people in the world. Their culture tells us a lot about how to live a long, health, and happy life.

Okinawan culture has a particular way of viewing time. They call it Okinawa time - where life unfolds at its own pace. Okinawans respect and live according to the natural rhythms of life around them. Processes take their natural time and there is no push to rush or hurry them so that they fit into an agenda based on mechanical time. Living by Okinawa time is thought to significantly contribute to the long and healthy lives of the elders.

In the Okinawa culture, this is more than a subjective feeling. They live by brining the concept into objective reality. It is common place for starting and ending times of public, major events - such as lectures, symposiums, parties, business meetings - to be delayed – "until the time is right" – until all comes together naturally in the most appropriate harmony. When that harmony is achieved the event begins and ends.

I have been coaching a client who is trying to figure out if she should go back to school to get a job promotion. Typically, these kinds of decisions give this client angst. She can spend endless hours weighing the pros and cons trying to figure out the right decision. In the end, she just gives up exhausted and goes for the path that everyone thinks she ought to take.

She did not want to repeat that process with this decision. She had a sense that something else was going on more basic than just deciding about career advancement.

In our first coaching conversation, I asked her what her life purpose was - after all if you are going to decide on a career advancement you ought to know what that is in service to.

Immediately she replied that she always thought her life purpose had something to do with raising a family and taking care of children. But of course, that could not be it – in this day and age – there had to be more. It had to be something like becoming a doctor, or getting her Ph.D. or becoming a lawyer.

Often people don't recognize their own extraordinary brilliance.

Over the next 4 months we spent most of our time understanding what it is that she really wanted in her life. In the end she took back her time by accepting that what she really did want in her life was to be a mother. She was free to make lots of cool choices about her career but her focus and her energy were dedicated to raising a family and being a mom and this is how she wanted to use her time.

We are all here for only a short time – even the Okinawan elders, who commonly live to be over 100 years old.

The time we are given is OUR time. It is the only time we have and it would be beneficial for us - and our communities - to use it wisely. It is our own time and is not to be given away to circumstances, situations or to others unwisely.

The tsunami disaster has crystallized my own resolve. In addition, to making contributions and sending prayers and healing, I see with renewed clarity my job is providing resources to help women reconnect to their natural rhythms – helping women each find their self and take back the time they are given and using it as they really want.

Taking back your time is about learning to manage your energy according to your natural rhythms rather than about trying to manage mechanical time.



Here are some suggestions for managing your energy better and taking back your time today:

- Pay attention to how much time it actually takes you to eat your lunch – rather than how much time you have to eat your lunch. Which would you rather have in your life? It is your time and you can choose.
- Actually, do something you really want to do.
- If you find yourself reacting to a situation or circumstances – just stop for 3 minutes and pay attention to what really is happening. Then take your time back and chose what you really want to do.

Support Steps

Remind yourself "I do not have to hurry and rush. I have time to do what I am doing."

Listen for what it is you really want to do in the moment. Just recognize what it is.

Letting Go

"The future enters into us in order to transform us, long before it happens."

--Rainer Maria Rilke

Marika and I have been working together on and off for a couple of years. Early in our work, she identified her "dream." She was clear about the details of her dream – although it did take a bit of work for her to embrace it.

She went through a litany of disclaimers: "Life does not really happen like that. This is a fairy tale. I have to be prepared for reality. I am happy like I am – even if I never get my dream. Who am I to know and direct my dream – I have to be prepared for whatever the Universe has in mind for me."

Finally, she stepped out of all of that and acknowledged her dream. In our most recent session, she told me the story of how her dream was becoming a reality – and how she just wanted to shut down and turn away. Looking for what was wrong – the problems with the dream – seemed like a good idea again. Something was wrong with the dream – it had to have a fatal error – and she wanted to find it.

Welcome – again – to the preparation and severance phase of change and transformation. Marika is now engaged in the real work of letting go of her life as she knows it. She is not just imaging the new, great fulfilled dream - she is standing on the threshold of severing from her old life and preparing to enter into her new life. It can be a scary place – especially when you want all the bells, whistles and

amenities of the dream to whisk you away. But before you step into the dream there is some important work to do.

Change/ transformation is a process. It has stages and phases to it and goes through some very predictable stages. The first stage in a transformation process is a Preparation and Severance that is akin to dying to your old life.

The purpose of severance is to separate yourself from all the other crap that has made it difficult to fit in what you want in your life. It is as simple as being willing to say "No" to those things that don't serve you and "Yes" to those things that do serve you. The purpose of preparation is to engage you in activities that bring you to that certain state of mind where you are ready to receive the vision of your new life.

The preparation and severance phase provides the context that readies you to figuratively die and then be reborn. Its purpose is to shift your daily life so that you are consciously engaged in the process of letting go of the life you are in now and getting ready to give birth to the new life you are entering.

You are severing from the old and preparing to go through the initiations that will bring you to the new. Chaos and personal disintegration often characterize this first stage of transformation. In this stage, you begin to think about all you will have to leave as you make the transformation into your new life. Some of it you love and don't want to leave behind, some of it is no longer useful and you are ready to leave behind.

During a Preparation and Severance phase, you will go through a period of letting go of your life. You will be faced with the task of letting go of your identity as you now know it. You will encounter such experiences as seeing your whole life pass in review, melancholy for that which you are

leaving behind, and meeting up with loved ones (and unloved ones) that you need to complete with. There may be many roles that you are leaving behind.

During this time, you may find that you need to grieve the loss of your old self and old life. You will be doing some significant grief work.

This grief work may require that you:

- Slow down
- Take more time to do things – even the mundane things
- Let yourself go through periods of denial
- Feel sad – allowing yourself to feel sad will help your grief dissipate more effectively
- Identify your losses
- Share your feelings

As you are moving through this stage of preparation and severance you should make no big decisions until you are complete with this first stage of change. This is not the time for planning, strategizing and implementing. Skipping ahead too early to planning only serves to short circuit the process and pull you up short from experiencing and completing this stage.

You need time to think and feel before you decide on any course of action. Tell others that you can not commit until you know more about the new life you are headed for. Tell yourself that you must now do the hard work of letting go even before you know exactly where you are going.

As you really "get" what this stage of transformation means for you, you may encounter fear – even good and long

sought after changes can engender a lot of fear at this stage. Guilt is another emotion that may surface at this stage of transformation. As you close up this old stage of your life and move into the new, you will inevitably leave some people behind and your relationship with those who will come into the new life with you will change. If you are transitioning solely because of an inner drive there is not likely to be anyone who understands or approves.

Inner transformations as opposed to external changes that are "imposed" on you (like career promotions) are more likely to lead to social disruptions and self-doubt. Many people will not be so keen on accepting your new choices and new behaviors. They may call you crazy and you may think you are. The only solution here is to hold to your course and stay true to who you are. In the wake of inner transformations, you may be more inclined toward indecision and consumed with a fear of failure. Plus, shame at leaving behind your accumulated successes may visit with you.

Each one of these experiences may feel like enough to turn your course around and have you head back to your old life. This never works, however, and you will need determination, courage, patience, and a lot of hard work to keep from getting sucked back.

Things that help you move through this Preparation and Severance stage include:

- Stay or get engaged with dreaming – keep at it
- You don't have to tell or hang out with those who don't support you
- Gather a supportive team of people, books, environments, artwork, etc.

- Spend a lot of time with yourself – keep checking in with yourself
- Keep checking in with reality – is this what you really want?

This part of the process is about accepting that your old life is over – you are letting it go - and you are on your way to someplace else. Don't move out of this stage until you have really accepted that fact. Trying to hurry things along without fully experiencing the letting go only leads to confusion. So take the time and go through whatever initiations you are presenting yourself with – you still have a bit of a journey ahead of you.

*"Not I, not anyone else, can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself."*

--Walt Whitman



Are you in a preparation / severance phase of transformation?

- You are unsure in which direction your life is heading.
- You have been torn away from a part of your life that you are not ready to leave.
- You are ready to leave behind a life that no longer works for you.
- You are poised on the threshold of beginning something new in your life.
- You feel adrift and without internal guidance.

Support Step

If you answered "yes" to any of the above you might be in a preparation and severance phase of transformation. When you are standing on the cusp of seeing your dream become reality, you might experience your mood and energy slip a bit. If that is the case, take good care of yourself during this preparation and severance phase and contact me to help you design a robust and healthy preparation and severance phase. Call **434-263-4669** or email maryann@evenstaronline.com

Take Care of Yourself while Letting Go

Several subscribers wrote me after the last month's article, *Letting Go*, wanting to know – "How did you know that was happening to me?" Many wanted to know how to take care of themselves during the Letting Go phase of transformation.

"Your mood and energy newsletter really 'hit home'..."

"Standing on the cusp of seeing my dream become reality is becoming kind of scary...Inside, I feel excited...and also a little stressed...the days go by so fast now...there is so much to do...so much to "prepare" for..."

"I know I need to learn to say "no" to things that don't serve me...Instead, I find myself eating (lots and lots of carbs.... not enough fruits and veggies....really feeling very unhealthy...) stuffing my face until I feel full...and then I worry about my health/weight..."

"This eating...that is my warning sign...when I am outwardly stressed/anxious, I eat...and I don't eat well..."

"... I am so concerned about everyone else's reactions toward this dream and all the change that may come with this dream coming true...Why now, in the midst of all this "good stuff", am I having a hard time?"

*“I wake up in the morning with all these good, wonderful intentions...”I will take care of myself today. I will eat well, and spend some quiet time thinking/journaling, etc.”
...but instead, I find myself super - concerned with the needs of others around me...I don't feel balanced...but I do feel the need to get "back on track"...”*

“I am getting lots and lots done and my days are so full...but I feel a longing for a simpler sort of adjustment...a more peaceful -in -my heart feeling as I am going through everyday life...I want to ... move forward with peace in my heart, knowing, really knowing, that everything and everyone involved will be ok, and happy.”

“Is there any sort of ritual/meditation, etc. that can help me move through this dream peacefully...anything I should keep in mind...any thing that will help me move forward with peace and love in my heart...”

The letting go phase of transformation can be chaotic – you know, the old equilibrium has to get tossed around – turned into disequilibrium – until it is time for the new equilibrium to come into existence. While you are in the letting go phase of transformation, it can be important that you create some order around yourself before you get swept away by the process. Establishing this order helps you stay connected to your natural rhythms and allows you to access your wisdom.

Essential action and support steps.

Consistently and deliberately take time each day to journal, meditate, breathe, and reflect.

New insights will be coming all the time and taking time to reflect on your transformation will help you keep pace with the changes you are experiencing. Make time to process all of the internal and external changes that you are going through.

Just to sit and do nothing.

This gives you the space to connect with your newly emerging rhythms.

Track yourself.

What do you *want* to do and what *did* you do.

"Tracking is an essential component of any spiritual practice or discipline. It is an active tool that develops the objective, fair-witnessing mind. In tracking, we focus attention, maintaining curiosity and equanimity as we look at whatever is surfacing in our minds in the moment. This cultivates balance, objectivity, and discernment, allowing us to see courses of action that create positive change for ourselves and others."

- Angeles Arrien

Set up a support system for yourself.

Someone not involved in your changes and transformation will help you keep an outside perspective and help you not get whipped around by your fears and worries. Staying anchored in yourself as you navigate the changes happening to you and others is essential. An outside support system that is focused only on you will help you accomplish this.

Bodywork can be indispensable.

As you make these kinds of transformations, emotions come up to be processed. Emotions are actually anchored in the body - usually in the muscles. You can process them intellectually and even emotionally but unless you also process them physically, emotional residual will linger and cause incompleteness. Some good, regular bodywork can be helpful. Consider massage, cranial sacral work, shiatsu, zero balancing.

Practice a daily balancing ritual.

In order to make really effective decisions that involve your body, your gut, your mind, your heart, your intuition, and all levels of wisdom - you first have to be in a place of balance - a neutral place - where you are not giving undue significance to any one perspective but can encompass all perspectives harmoniously in one whole.

In the book *Transforming Stress*, Doc Childre presents the research done by the Institute of Heartmath www.evenstaronline.com/heartmath regarding how to reach a neutral state and access all levels of your wisdom. He outlines a program for setting up a wonderful practice for transforming stress - a series of very effective heart centered practices. I recommend that you read the book and incorporate each of the techniques into a sincere daily practice. This will open the space for you where you can navigate the changes and transformations in a peaceful, calm manner.

Tie up loose ends.

Bring to completion nagging incompleteness that you would rather not think about but which won't go away - like telling your friend - whom you don't speak to any more - that you are sorry your friendship has ended but you realize it is time

to move on. Make a list and take some action to bring them to a close.

Get rid of tolerations.

Tolerations are things that you say are OK – you will put up with them - but really they just drain the energy out of you. Do you really have to answer the phone while you are eating?

It is important to get rid of all the petty and big annoyances in your life. The most important reason is that tolerations drain your energy. Also, by getting rid of these annoyances you begin to create forward momentum that can replace resistance with energy for change. By getting rid of the tolerations it is much easier to go after the bigger goals and aspirations in your life.

Don't underestimate the power of eliminating annoyances in your life.

Write down all the things you are putting up with. Most people have 50-100 or more. Nothing is too small or insignificant to be a toleration. Write down everything - especially the things that you think you can not change. Get them out of your head - out of your body and on paper.

Once your tolerations are on paper then start getting rid of them. Start with the easiest things first and build momentum and creativity while you reduce resistance. Soon you will notice an increase in energy, balance, and inner peace.

Of course, there is the ever-present need for great nutrition.

Basic Daily Nutritional Guidelines

- Protein –Total for the day - 1 gram for every 2.2 pounds of bodyweight.
- Vegetables – 7- 8 half cups servings (4 cups) of cooked veggies.
- Fruits – 1-3 servings of fresh fruit.
- Grains (emphasize whole grains) and low to moderate glycemic index carbohydrates – at least 225-275 grams of carbohydrates per day.
- Fiber – 35-55 grams per day.
- Calcium Rich foods – 2 servings.
- Water 1/2 oz per pound of body weight.
- Eat organic foods as often as you can.
- Increase the variety of foods that you are eating. Rotate your foods on a 4-day rotation plan.
- Eat until you feel full but not stuffed. A good rule of thumb is to stop when you feel 75% full.
- Keep your blood sugar balanced. Eat a meal or snack every 3 hours.
- Eat soups for satisfaction.
- Include more stews and casseroles – one-pot meals are very satisfying and easy on stressed digestive systems.
- Eat a salad with oil and vinegar or lemon juice dressing at least once a day.

Other important lifestyle routines:

- 8-10 hours of high quality sleep every night – one of the most important things you can do for yourself.
- Plenty of time outside in the light – at least 30 minutes in the early morning.
- Consistent wake-sleep cycles - go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Regular, enjoyable exercise and physical activity.
- Getting rid of clutter and things that do not represent you anymore.

Even as you set up these supportive systems there will still be times when you will be thrown off balance in this process - after all that is the intent of the process - to undo one place of balance and set up the next level of balance. It stands to reason that as your present balanced state is being undone that you will, at times, experience that untangling.

The aim is to keep moving through the process and not get stuck in the process. Allow the completion process to move through you and pass onto the next level - either things and people will move out of your life or reform on the next level - it is scary but also exciting.

And lighten up!

That's a lot of information to take in a once. For questions or help, call [434-263-4669](tel:434-263-4669) or maryann@evenstaronline.com

SECTION II

Leverage a little science

Better mood and energy management isn't something just left to the whims of what seems like a good idea. There is actually some science behind it. And it is to our benefit to leverage that wisdom and knowledge.

By bringing some important empirical wisdom into our daily life, we can shorten the time and effort it takes to become a better manager of our moods and energy.

The following selection of articles introduces you to some proven tactics, strategies, and principles for enjoying the benefits of better mood and energy management.

Benefits of Positive Emotions

Positive Emotions Have Evolutionary Value

We know that negative emotions have an evolutionary value. For the most part, negative emotions are associated with some kind of experience – fear, loss, and attack – that signals the activation of our flight or fight response. When we experience negative emotions we have a feeling of aversion, which acts to activate and set us in motion to identify what is wrong and eliminate it. Negative emotions are related to behaviors and actions that are associated with a sensory alert that activates us to focus on "fight, flight or conserve."

Positive emotions also have an evolutionary advantage. They "broaden and build." Experiencing positive emotions increases our survival chances because positive emotions broaden our intellectual, physical, and social resources and build reserves for us to draw upon.

The presence of positive emotions increases our drive for exploration and discovery and provides the basis for positive social interactions. When we experience positive emotions, we become more tolerant, expansive, and creative. The more positive emotion we experience the more open to new ideas and new experiences we become.

Negative emotions narrow a person's perspective to deal only with the immediate threat. When negative emotions are experienced, our flight or fight response is activated and we withdraw, freeze, or protect. In contrast, when we experience positive emotions, we feel safe and engage in

active, playful exploration, and discovery. Negative emotions contract and positive emotions expand.

Positive emotions form the experiential foundation for mentally healthy people. Positive emotions provide a foundation for growth and exploration and build the intellectual, social and physical capital for further growth and development.

When we experience negative emotions, they tell us to focus on what is wrong and eliminate it. When we experience positive emotions, however, we start looking for the virtues of what is happening. We become constructive, generous, un-defensive, and open to seeing possibilities.

Experiencing positive emotions makes available to us an entirely different way of thinking from a negative mood. A negative mood helps us detect threats in our environment and focus our attention on protection. A positive mood moves us into growth and development, exploration and discovery.

The Three Principles of Positive Emotions

1. Positive Emotions Build Resources and Capital for the Future

The first principle of positive emotion is that positive emotions build the resources and capital that will become the basis for growth and development in years to come. When positive emotions are experienced we will reach outward and broaden our resources by exploration and discovery. In the presence of positive emotions, we are more creative, think quicker, and do not succumb to premature closure or other forms of superficial intellectual processing

Depressed people experience what is called a "downward spiral" of negative emotions. Depressed emotions call forth negative memories that feed more negative thoughts, that feed more negative memories, that feed more depressed emotions. Breaking this downward spiral is crucial to stopping the depression.

Psychologists have found what they call an upward spiral of positive emotion. Positive emotions produce a different way of thinking and acting. The thinking becomes creative and broad-minded, and the actions become adventurous and exploratory. This increased creativity and exploration results in greater expansion.

As positive emotions produce expansion, more successful interactions in the environment produce more useful information about the environment and a sense of greater mastery. These successful interactions in the environment and the greater sense of mastery result in the generation of more positive emotions. These increased positive emotions result in more exploration, creativity and discovery in even more areas of life as the sense of mastery from the successful interactions ripples outward.

2. Positive Emotions Create an Upward Spiral

This upward and outward spiral of positive emotions leads to the second principle of positive emotions: Augment positive emotions in your life and start an upward and outward spiral of even more positive emotions and thus more exploration, discovery, creativity, and insightful thinking and more success and mastery in life.

3. Positive Emotions are Important

The third principle of positive emotions is that positive emotions need to be taken as seriously as negative

emotions. Often negative emotions are taken more seriously because they have been believed to be the evolutionary backbone of human motivation. It was believed that people are motivated primarily to avoid experiencing negative emotions and that positive motivation was merely superficial.

Positive emotions are just as real, authentic and important as negative emotions and equally important for evolutionary development, growth, and success in the world.

Positive Emotions Are Associated with More Successful Interactions in the World

Experiencing positive emotions brings more successful interactions with the world. Developing the art and skill of experiencing more positive emotions will build more friendships, stronger love, better physical health, and more mastery and successful interactions in the world. Growth, positive development, and creative and successful interactions in the world (i.e. mental health) may have their foundations in the experience of positive emotions.

Happy People Are More Effective and Successful in the World

Happy people view themselves as more successful in the world. Happy people think that they have more skill than others think they do. Happy people remember more good events than actually happened and forget more of the bad events that happened. Happy people see success as lasting, personal and pervasive and failure as impersonal, temporary and specific.

Happy people may lose a bit of realism but this does not lock them into ineffective functioning. Happy people are more likely to switch tactics when involved in a task that appears

to be failing. In the normal course of events, happy people rely on their tried and true positive past experiences while less happy people are more skeptical. However, when events are threatening, happy people, more readily than less happy people, switch tactics and adopt a skeptical and analytical frame of mind. Happy people seem to deal better with adversity.

Happier people are markedly more satisfied with their jobs than less happy people. More happiness actually causes more productivity and results in higher income. Happiness also makes gainful employment and higher income more likely. Adults and children who are put in a good mood select higher goals, perform better, and persist longer on a variety of laboratory tasks, such as solving anagrams.

Happy People Are Healthier

Positive emotions result in better physical health. Happy people spend more time playing. Playing has distinct survival benefits and is associated with greater creativity, muscle, and cardiovascular fitness. Positive emotions also predict health and longevity and protect people from the wear and tear of aging. Positive emotions strongly predict who lives longer, who dies earlier and who will become disabled. Happy people seek out and make use of more health risk information. Happy people have better health habits, lower blood pressure, and stronger immune systems than less happy people. They endure pain better and take more health and safety precautions when threatened. Positive emotions are a "prolonger of life and improver of health."

Happy People Are More Connected With Others

The expression of positive emotions results in more secure relationships. Very happy people differ markedly from average people and from unhappy people in one principle way - a rich and fulfilling social life. Happy people have more

close and casual friends, are more likely to be married, and are more involved in group activities than unhappy people. Happy people are also more altruistic. When we are in a good mood we are less focused on ourselves, we like others more and we want to be kinder and share our good fortune more with others. However, when we are experiencing negative emotions we become distrustful, turn inward and become defensive about our own needs.

Focusing on Positive Emotions

Positive emotions undo negative emotions and reduce the negative physical and psychological stresses of negative experiences. Negative emotions tell you that you are facing a win-loss encounter and need to take steps to engage with the obstacles. Positive emotions tell you that you are in a potential win-win situation. Positive emotions guide you to be more expansive, tolerant, and creative so that you can maximize the social, intellectual, and physical benefits of the situation.

It is important to generate and build the experience of positive affective states rather than simply extinguishing negative emotions. Positive affective states become the fuel and the raw material for experiencing more growth and development, more exploration and discovery, more mastery and successful interactions in the world, and building, developing, using and leveraging our strengths.

You can dedicate this month to recognizing the importance of building a core motion towards happiness. You will broaden, build and become more successful in your world (whatever success means for you). Seek to align yourself with the wisdom expressed by the Dali Lama -

"I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness.

That is clear.

Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we are all seeking something better in life.

So I think, the very motion of our life is towards happiness."

Are You Experiencing Positive Emotions?

- Do you begin and end each day feeling excited and grateful?
- Do you experience moments of pleasure throughout the day?
- Do you experience gratification in the life you live and the work you are doing?
- Is it easy for you to write down 5 things you appreciate about your day?
- Do you feel like you are "in flow" for some parts of every day?
- Do you believe that the "very motion of your life is towards happiness"?

If you answered "no" to any of the above, take steps to develop more positive emotions in your life.

Contact me to discuss coaching and consulting options for living a happier life. I can design an individual program aimed at leveraging your resources for bringing more positive emotions into your life and coach you in the implementation of the program. Schedule a service appointment to pinpoint positive emotions that need buffing up. Learn what are your biggest obstacles to increasing your positive emotions and what resources you can leverage to experience more positive emotions. Call **434-263-4669** or email maryann@evenstaronline.com

Top Ten Ways to Generate More Positive Emotions in Your Life

Positive emotions undo negative emotions and reduce the negative physical and psychological stresses of negative experiences. Negative emotions tell you that you are facing a win-loss encounter and need to take steps to engage with the obstacles. Positive emotions tell you that you are in a potential win-win situation. Positive emotions guide you to be more expansive, tolerant, and creative so that you can maximize the social, intellectual, and physical benefits of the situation.

It is important to generate and build the experience of positive affective states rather than simply extinguishing negative emotions. Positive affective states create an "upward spiral" and become the fuel and the raw material for growth and development, exploration and discovery, mastery and successful interactions in the world, and developing and leveraging your strengths.

Positive emotions move you toward happiness. As you generate positive emotions, you will broaden and build upon them. You will become more successful in your world (whatever success means for you) when you align yourself with happiness.

Here are the top ten ways to generate more positive emotions.

1. Increase your happiness about the past by experiencing gratitude.

Gratitude amplifies savoring and appreciation of good events gone by.

Gratitude about the good things in the past intensifies your positive memories about the past and therefore engenders more positive affect and the sense of happiness about the past. Satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride, and serenity - all aspects of happiness about the past - require the experience of gratitude.

Research just completed shows that engaging in a Gratitude Visit has lasting and substantial happiness benefits. This intervention required participants to write a letter and then read it to someone telling them how grateful they were for something the other person had done for them – or just for who they were.

People engaging in the Gratitude Visit were found to be significantly happier and less depressed after the visit and for at least one month afterwards.

Take every opportunity to express authentically your gratitude about past experiences to those around you.

2. Increase your happiness about the past by practicing forgiveness.

Forgiveness undoes bitterness and the desire for vengeance about past transgressions that block your feelings of happiness about the past.

Negative memories can induce bitterness. When these negative memories predominate, the emotions of

contentment, satisfaction, serenity and peace are not experienced and happiness about the past is not available.

When negative memories about the past are fostering negative emotions, the way out is to rewrite your negative memories. Forgiveness is a tool for rewriting our memories of past bad events and opening the door to happiness about our past.

Studies show that adults who use an effective forgiveness tool have less anger, less stress, and are more optimistic and report better health and more happiness.

3. Increase your happiness about the future by building hope and learning to be more optimistic.

The sense of happiness about the future is embedded in the positive emotions of faith, trust, confidence, hope, and optimism.

Optimism is more than just sitting around and thinking positively about things.

Optimistic people have an optimistic explanatory style, which is permanent, pervasive, and personal. Optimists who make permanent and universal explanations for good events and temporary and specific explanations for bad events tend to recover quickly from troubles and get hooked on success.

Learning to be more optimistic builds hope, gives greater direction, and supplies energy for successful future interaction in the world.

Leveraging learned optimism opens the way to experience a sense of happiness about the future and produces the positive emotions of faith, trust, confidence, hope, and greater optimism.

4. Increase your happiness about the present by enjoying the pleasures of the moment.

Pleasures are a route to increasing your experience of positive emotions in the present and opening the gateway to the experience of the sense of happiness in the present. By enjoying the pleasures in your life you pave the way for increased positive feeling throughout your lifetime.

Pleasures are tied to the satisfaction of your biological needs. Pleasures can be honed, nurtured, discovered, and supported. They can be sharpened, amplified, and brought purposely into your experience.

Pleasures are perceived and experienced through your senses and expanded and amplified in your emotions. Pleasures heighten your momentary experience but may not build reserves for the future. Although pleasures are an important contribution to present happiness and increased positive feelings, they are not the route to lasting happiness.

You can enhance your experience of pleasures in the moment and increase your happiness in the present by engaging in a simple practice. Set aside a free day every now and again to indulge in your favorite pleasures. Don't get distracted by all of your practical responsibilities. Design your day of simple pleasures and carry out the plan. Repeat as necessary.

5. Increase your happiness about the present by experiencing gratification.

Gratification results from engagement in activities that exercise your natural strengths. Engaging in the world in a way that produces gratification produces total absorption in the moment and results in a state called flow. Flow builds

psychological capital that can be drawn on in the years to come.

A state of flow arises when:

- You are involved in a task that is challenging and requires skill
- Your natural strengths match the demands of the situation
- The goals of the task are clearly outlined and you know them
- You get immediate feedback about your involvement with the task
- You have a deep, effortless involvement with the task
- You experience a sense of control with regards to the task
- You lose the experience of a separate sense of self
- You have the experience of timelessness

These components result in the experience of gratification and happiness in the present. Identifying, developing and using your natural strengths in as many aspects of your life and as frequently as possible will increase your experience of gratification and enhance your happiness in the present.

6. Increase your positive emotions through appreciation.

For years, New Age self-help books have been telling you to write down things that you appreciate. Turns out they are right. Science verifies the wisdom of that advice.

Research shows that sustained experience of appreciation results in highly ordered brain and heart rate patterns. Appreciation is one of the emotions that reflects order in your neurophysiological systems and produces what is called "physiological coherence."

During states of physiological coherence, your body systems are synchronized, more efficient and in greater harmony. You experience better cognitive performance, more emotional stability, and enhanced emotional and social functioning. In addition, when your body is in a state of physiological coherence you feel more at peace and experience a sense of security.

More new research shows that practicing appreciation does indeed increase your happiness. People who write down three good things that happened during the day every night for one week and answer "Why did this good thing happen?" experience happiness benefits lasting at least three months.

Happiness and satisfaction is highest for those who consciously direct their attention to appreciation.

7. Increase your positive emotions by identifying and nurturing your strengths.

Psychology has discovered that human strengths act as buffers against suffering and ineffective functioning and are pathways toward a meaningful life.

Identifying and nurturing your strengths leads to resolution of ineffective behavior, protects against the occurrence of dysfunctional behavior, and eventually leads to a life of "flourishing."

Break out of a weakness spiral and focus your attention on your natural talents and strengths. Your greatest resources

for achievement, performance, and growth lies in the area of your natural strengths.

Identify your natural strengths by taking the VIA (Values in Action) Survey at <http://authentichappiness.org> and the Strength Finder Profile at <http://strengthfinder.com>.

For greater happiness identify your natural strengths and then nurture and develop your top strengths.

Identifying your strengths is not enough, however. You have to use your strengths...

8. Increase your positive emotions by using your top strengths every day in all areas of your life.

To generate any significant experience of happiness, you have to use your strengths.

People who used their top strengths in new ways every day for only one week experienced substantial happiness benefits for up to 3 months.

The good life is experienced by using your top strengths as much as you can in all areas of your life. By designing different life areas so that your top strengths can be more frequently and more fully exercised, you open the way for the experience of increased positive satisfaction and successful engagement with the world.

Increased life satisfaction comes through being able to use your top strengths every day in win-win situations. Once you are aware of your top strengths, it is possible to design your life and work around your strengths to leverage and capitalize on their unique combination.

9. Increase your positive emotions by leading with your strengths and compensating for your weaknesses.

The old paradigm was that knowing your weaknesses and correcting them would help you improve the most. Now, the fascination with weakness is beginning to fade. Focusing on your strengths is proving to be a more effective paradigm.

Major strides in prevention of dysfunction have resulted from systematically building competency, rather than correcting weakness. Simply correcting your weakness often leads to a dead end. Challenging yourself based on your natural competence with your personal strengths gives you a path to follow and tools and techniques to use that are natural to you.

Leading with weakness, dysfunction and problems has a retrospective view and focuses only on what to move away from. Looking for, finding, and developing your strengths gives you something to move toward.

Your difficulties and problems are best looked at through the filter of your existing strengths. By identifying and developing the strengths you already possess, these strengths can be leveraged as the means of good management of your weaknesses.

Do not simply ignore the dysfunction or weakness. Instead, focus on what strengths you have to leverage to set a new trajectory and to compensate for your weakness.

10. Increase your positive emotions by developing more of the "Key Five" strengths.

The jury is still out on whether or not it is possible to develop a strength that is not one of your natural top

strengths into a top strength. However, through learning and development, it certainly is possible to bring more of a particular strength into your life – even if it can't be turned into one of your top strengths.

Some new research suggests that there are five strengths that are key to leverage for the experience of increased positive emotions and life satisfaction. These Key Five are gratitude, optimism, zest, curiosity, and the ability to love and be loved.

Find yourself a coach, a counselor, a personal development consultant, or a good self-help program and spend some time and resources in bringing more of the Key Five strengths into your life.

Are you experiencing positive emotions?

- Do you begin and end each day feeling excited and grateful?
- Do you experience moments of pleasure throughout the day?
- Do you experience gratification in the life you live and the work you do?
- Is it easy for you to write down five things you appreciate about your day?
- Do you feel like you are "in the flow" for some parts of every day?
- Do you believe that the motion of your life is toward happiness?

If you answered "*no*" to any of the above, take steps to develop more positive emotions in your life.

Contact me to discuss coaching and consulting options for living a happier life. I can design an individual program aimed at leveraging your resources for bringing more positive emotions into your life and coach you in the implementation of the program. We can explore more in depth how to experience more positive emotions and identify and leverage your personal strengths. Call **434-263-4669** or email maryann@evenstaronline.com

Discovering and Nourishing Your Personal Strengths

Excerpted and reformatted from my Master's Thesis in Psychology and Counseling;
*An Exploration of Positive Psychology and the Application of Its Main Tenets to
Mental Health Counseling, 2004*

Major strides in prevention of dysfunction have resulted from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not on correcting weakness (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Positive psychologists have discovered that human strengths act as buffers against mental illness (Keyes and Lopez, 2002).

The basic assumption that operates in regards to human strengths and the Positive Psychology Movement is that the possession and utilization of human strengths buffers against the development of mental illness and is the pathway towards mental health. Developing, nourishing, uncovering and cultivating human strengths is believed to lead to the resolution of mental disorder, protect against the occurrence of mental disorder, leverage the absence of mental disorder into mental health, and eventually lead to a life of "flourishing" (Keyes & Haidt, 2003a). The underlying principle of the Positive Psychology Movement that is related to increased mental health is that one should take one's strengths as seriously as one does one's weaknesses (Lopez, et al., 2003).

The Identification and Development of Human Strengths

Seligman believes that the notion of good character is a core assumption of Positive Psychology. He contends that the

way to "the good life" is centered "around polishing and deploying your strengths, then using them to buffer against your weaknesses and the trials that weaknesses bring" (Seligman, 2002a, p.160).

With the birth of the social sciences, the focus of scientific inquiry shifted from "characterological explanations" for human actions to "positive environmentalism" (Seligman, 2002a, p.127). Human behavior shifted from being explained by good or bad character to being the result of "large and toxic environmental forces beyond the control of mere individuals" (Seligman, 2002a, p. 127). Character was expunged from the science of psychology because it was viewed as "value laden, blame-accruing, religiously inspired, class oppressing notion" (Seligman, 2002a, p.127). Character played no role in the psychology of behaviorism or in the nurturing environment camp. Gordon Allport, the father of modern personality theory, took the concepts of character and virtues into psychology under the more neutral, scientific sounding word - personality (Himmelfarb, 1996).

Seligman maintains that "character... does not come about solely from the environment, and perhaps hardly at all from the environment" (Seligman, 2002a, p.129). He also maintains that it is not psychology's job to be prescriptive but rather to be descriptive. It is not psychology's job to tell which virtues/strengths a person should have but rather to describe the key virtues/strengths and to describe the consequences of these virtues/ strengths.

Values in Action Project

It is generally agreed that before designing interventions that will improve character psychology must first know more about what it is the intervention is designed to improve. Thus, it must first design a classification scheme and a way

of measuring character. This classification of virtues/ strengths – Positive Psychology Movement's answer to the DSM - is the backbone of the Positive Psychology Movement.

The starting place for the Positive Psychology Movement is the creation of an authoritative classification or set of categories reflecting areas of human excellence. Positive clinical psychology can not make much progress as long as it uses the language of disease and deficiency. "The positive classification that is envisioned can be thought of as the un-DSM" (Seligman & Peterson, 2003).

The Positive Psychology Movement has set out to enumerate what characteristics of a person would lead to more positive functioning and experience in life. The Values In Action (VIA) Project (Peterson, 2003), under the direction of Christopher Peterson and George Vaillant, has begun its search for human characteristics that are accepted cross-culturally and are stable across situations and across time. The VIA project has seven criteria it uses to qualify a human characteristic as a strength. These criteria include:

- It has generality across situations and stability across time.
- It is celebrated when present and mourned when absent.
- Parents try to inculcate strengths within their children.
- Society provides institutions and associated rituals for cultivating these strengths.
- Culture provides role models and parables that illustrate a strength in compelling fashion.
- There exist prodigies with respect to a strength.
- It must be recognized and valued in almost every major subculture. (Seligman & Peterson, 2003)

After researching major readings in the various religious and cultural traditions "to our surprise, almost every single one of these traditions flung across three thousand years and the entire face of the earth endorsed six virtues" (Seligman, 2002a, p. 132)

A tentative enumeration of the virtues and strengths is contained in the Values in Action Project (Peterson, 2003). The six virtues include

1. Wisdom and Knowledge
2. Courage
3. Love and Humility
4. Justice
5. Temperance
6. Spirituality and Transcendence

These six virtues are "the core characteristics endorsed by almost all religious and philosophical traditions and taken together they capture the notion of good character" (Seligman, 2002a, p.132). The corresponding strengths for the six virtues-

1. Wisdom and Knowledge:

- curiosity
- interest
- love of learning
- judgment
- critical thinking
- open-mindedness
- perspective

2. Courage:

- valor
- industry
- perseverance
- integrity
- honesty
- authenticity
- zest
- enthusiasm

3. Love and Humility

- intimacy
- reciprocal attachment
- kindness
- generosity
- nurturance
- social intelligence
- personal intelligence
- emotional intelligence

4. Justice

- citizenship
- duty
- loyalty
- teamwork
- equity
- fairness
- leadership

5. Temperance

- forgiveness
- mercy
- modesty

- humility
- prudence
- caution
- self-control
- self-regulation

6. Spirituality and Transcendence

- awe
- wonder
- appreciation of beauty and excellence
- gratitude
- hope
- optimism
- future-mindedness
- playfulness
- humor
- spirituality
- sense of purpose
- faith
- religiousness

These are the means, routes, or pathways to achieve the realization of these virtues (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Each of the strengths is measurable and acquirable.

Signature Strengths

The Values in Action Project distinguishes strengths

- that a person self-consciously owns,
- that are strengths of character,
- that a person is aware of and is happy to be able to do,
- that a person exercises and leverages in his everyday life, and

- that a person ultimately feels is an authentic expression of herself or himself as signature strengths (Peterson, 2003)

Signature strengths should be nourished, supported and used everyday in every aspect of a person's life.

To qualify as signature strength, a strength must meet the following criteria:

- A sense of ownership and authenticity ("This is the real me")
- A feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first
- A rapid learning curve as the strength is first practiced
- Continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength
- A sense of yearning to find new ways to use it
- A feeling of inevitability in using the strength ("Try and stop me")
- Invigoration rather than exhaustion while using the strengths
- The creation and pursuit of personal projects that revolve around it
- Joy, zest, enthusiasm, even ecstasy while using it (Seligman, 2002a, p.160)

Strengths, Talents, Abilities and Beyond

The research still has yet to distinguish between strengths, talents, abilities, and skills. There is a fuzzy and debatable distinction among those characteristics. At this point the major features separating them are:

"...Talents and abilities on the face of it seem more innate, more immutable, and less voluntary than strengths and virtues. There is a limit on how much of a talent you can acquire. Talents are viewed as relatively automatic in that

either you have a talent or you don't. Talents and abilities seem valued more for their tangible consequences (acclaim, wealth) than in their own right." (Seligman & Peterson, 2003, p.309).

The Positive Psychology Movement clearly identifies strengths as moral traits. Talents are viewed as nonmoral and are generally not as buildable as strengths. Strengths "can be built on even frail foundations, and I believe that with enough practice, persistence, good teaching and dedication, they can take root and flourish" (Seligman, 2002a, p.135).

Strengths are "a psychological characteristic that can be seen across different situations and over time" (Seligman, 2002a, p.137). Strengths are valued in their own right. Strengths often produce good outcomes, but it is the strength itself that is valued and not just the outcome. Strengths are undertaken for their own sake and not just for the consequences that are produced by them.

Strengths are qualities and states that we desire for their own sake. Parents wish for their children to have the strengths. Strengths and virtues are enacted in win-win situations. They produce positive emotions in the doer and "elevate and inspire" (Seligman, 2002a, p.138) onlookers. The culture supports the acquisition and development of strengths by providing "institutions, rituals, role models, parables, maxims, and children's stories" (Seligman, 2002a, p.138) that foster these strengths.

The Positive Psychology Movement contends that the VIA strengths compose basic human potential and human dispositions similar to the capacity for language development in humans. Which strength actually forms and takes hold in each individual will depend upon an array of circumstances present during the early years. The entire set

of strengths will drift in the direction of each individual's core set of directions depending on how they are shaped and perceived in the first years of life. One can choose not only to nurture and build his or her strengths but also to acquire them in the first place. The Positive Psychology Movement has the standpoint that any one can acquire the six virtues and their strengths and that each person will have a set of core strengths that can be leveraged and developed (Seligman, 2002a).

There is no evidence for this yet. It may be that each individual has an inherent predisposition for the display of certain strengths over others and regardless of the circumstances these strengths will form as the core set of strengths. Would our time be better spent in identifying and leveraging our key signature strengths and simply compensating for our weaknesses or lack of strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001)? Alternatively, would our time be better spent in fully developing ourselves to display more of the 24 VIA strengths? Both possibilities present interesting lines of future study and research. Until such time as the matter is more fully understood, one should proceed with interest, curiosity and exploration when deciding if it is a worthwhile and noble task or an expensive and frustrating task to educate oneself or another in the obtainment of a strength which one is lacking.

Will and personal responsibility play a paramount role in the exercise of the virtues and strengths. If the goal is to improve the lives of ordinary normal people then it is necessary to leverage the concepts of will and personal responsibility. "Building strengths and virtues and using them in daily life are very much a matter of making choices. Building strength and virtue is not about learning, training or conditioning, but about discovery, creation, and ownership" (Seligman, 2002a, p.136). The identification and exploration of one's strengths and virtues becomes its own intervention.

Will and personal responsibility to lead the best life will take over and lead into "discovery, creation, and ownership" (Seligman, 2002a, p.136).

The Positive Psychology Movement is rooted in a simple formula for experiencing success, mastery and happiness in life: "Use your signature strengths every day in the main realms of your life to bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness" (Seligman, 2002a, p.161). Use your signature strengths in the service of something larger than your personal life to experience the meaningful life.

References available upon request.

Lead with Your Strengths

Psychologists are discovering that human strengths act as buffers against suffering and ineffective action in the world: Strengths such as:

- Optimism
- Courage
- Interpersonal skills
- Future – mindedness
- Faith
- Work ethic
- Hope
- Honesty
- Perseverance
- The capacity for flow
- Insight
- ... to name several.

Much of the task remaining is to understand and learn how to foster these strengths and virtues in all people – young and old.

The acquisition or possession of certain competencies, strengths, positive characteristics, or resilience factors are the elements that lead to developmental trajectories of well-being. These then become the appropriate focus for personal development programs that seek to increase the experience of a life well lived. These personal strengths produce optimal development and support conditions that produce happiness, gratification, well being, and the good and meaningful life. Illuminating each person's strengths and virtues increases their happiness.

Happiness requires more than simply experiencing positive affective states. To fully experience happiness – "the good life" - one must deploy and exercise their personal strengths. The more correct question for governing one's direction in life is not just "How can I be happy?" but rather the question "What is the good life?"

"The good life" is found through the identification and use of each person's individual strengths.

Several years ago, I became intrigued with the notion of leading with your strengths and not trying to correct your weakness. I was fairly aware of my own weaknesses – I have no sense of direction, my math skills are terrible, and I don't feel comfortable at cocktail parties or acting on stage – to name a few.

Trouble was, I was not sure of what my strengths were. I thought I was good at academics but I had a suspicion (as most people do) that any day now "they" were going to discover that I really was not that good after all.

I came across Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton's work presented in their book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. They had been doing some work with the Gallup organization and had developed an assessment tool to help identify personal strengths.

I took their StrengthFinder assessment and it revealed my unarticulated strengths. Strengths I had - but had not recognized.

My top 5 strengths from StrengthFinder turned out to be:

Intellection

People strong in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

Strategic

People strong in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot relevant patterns and issues.

Learner

People strong in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

Relater

People who are strong in the Relater theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Futuristic

People strong in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their visions of the future.

My Strengths Revelation

I was both surprised and relieved. I always knew that intellection and learner were part of who I was – however, I never really thought about them as strengths. They were just always there - and now I could really own them.

I was completely surprised about the strengths strategic and futuristic. They seem like such "grown up" strengths that I had a secret ambition to strive for but thought I was too "soft" to be good at.

Relator – I was happy that at least I had one strength that had something to do with people rather than just ideas – since I have worked with people all of my life.

As I was getting into developing and leveraging my StrengthFinder strengths, the *Values in Action* project began. The Values In Action (VIA) Project, under the direction of Christopher Peterson, had begun its search for human characteristics that are accepted cross-culturally and are stable across situations and across time.

My strengths revealed by the VIA strength survey were:

Curiosity and interest in the world

"You are curious about everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics fascinating. You like exploration and discovery."

Creativity, ingenuity, and originality

"Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible."

Judgment, critical thinking, and open-mindedness

"Thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who you are. You do not jump to conclusions, and you rely only on solid

evidence to make your decisions. You are able to change your mind."

Love of learning

"You love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, reading, and museums-anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn."

Perspective (wisdom)

"Although you may not think of yourself as wise, your friends hold this view of you. They value your perspective on matters and turn to you for advice. You have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and to yourself."

Almost immediately upon discovering my strengths, my whole perception of myself began to rework itself. I claimed my strengths and went forward in the world to learn (the learner) how to use my strengths in as many ways as I could. I set about to develop and nourish my strengths and use them consciously in all the aspects of my life.

To my continual surprise, I noticed myself consistently approaching life from at least one of my strengths instead of being hesitant or holding myself back, I began to relax into using the strength. Amazingly the strength would unfold and I would see myself doing all kinds of things that I never thought I had the predilection for.

As this went on, I became increasingly comfortable with myself. My fears about being revealed as a fraud disappeared. For the first time in my life I truly felt naturally congruent and authentic – I did not have to convince myself – it just was. I felt that I was acquiring a natural mastery.

Giving Up My Weaknesses

The other great thing that happened is that I stopped trying to correct my weaknesses.

One of the strengths defined on the StrengthFinder assessment is the strength of *Woo*. Those strong in this strength enjoy winning people over and getting them to like them. Woo people like meeting new people and strangers are rarely intimidating to them.

I have never been comfortable being a Woo person. But to succeed in business you are told that you need to get out there and be a Woo person. I spent a lot of energy trying to make myself get out there and meet new people. I forced myself and I got good at it – but it never really flowed easily for me - and it had a lot of hidden energy expenses in it for me. It was hard to make myself move against my natural flows of energy.

Now that I knew my strengths, I could give up Wooing people. Instead I nourish and develop my strength of being able to relate to other people – which I like doing a lot more and which comes naturally to me with no hidden costs.

My Top Strength

Another interesting thing I learned about myself had to do with my top strength - *Curiosity* - as revealed by the VIA assessment. Not only is curiosity my top strength but I also am in the 100th percentile of all categories of people who have curiosity as one of their strengths.

This means I am as far out there as you can get in terms of being curious.

Suddenly it explained many things about me. Like:

- How come I am attracted to getting tons of certifications (it was not pathological after all)
- Why I can never settle on just one interest and am always wanting to do many different things
- Why I always have to be involved in multiple projects in order to feel productive
- Why every time I got an idea about something (every second of the day) I felt compelled to try and make it happen.

It became clear to me that this strength– curiosity - had been over used and become a weakness for me. You know, "curiosity killed the cat". Well for me, curiosity could drive me to distraction and undo my focus. A strength over developed and not used in conjunction with your other strengths can become your weakness.

I now know that every brilliant idea that comes into my head is not a message that needs to be followed. It is just my natural curiosity doing its job and I can pick and choose what to follow up on. I am still curious about most everything – but a lot more relaxed.



Nourish, develop, and leverage your strengths in all the areas of your life and you will:

- Be happier
- Be and feel more authentic and genuine
- Develop a new and more appreciative perception of yourself

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- Stop trying to correct your weakness and save yourself lots of hidden energy costs
- Be able to see how your worst weakness can actually be the outcome of using your top strength without balancing it with your other strengths. From there, you can naturally let that weakness take its place in the constellation of your other strengths
- Get things done more efficiently and with less effort because you are riding along on your own flow channels
- Experience a sense of natural mastery and excellence because you are being naturally authentic and leveraging your best self.

The Strengths Surveys

Seeing as you will be looking at how to journey your life it would be handy to have a good idea of what your individual strengths are and how you might be able to leverage your strengths in what you do in the world. There are two strength surveys that I would suggest that you take.

1. Go to www.authentichappiness.com. At the Authentic Happiness web site you will see the VIA Strengths Assessment. You can take this survey for free. It will give you your Top 5 Signature Strengths and rank in order the 24 strengths that are part of the Survey. This is a free online survey. After you take this survey, it will give you the listing of your Top Five Signature Strengths. To get the full listing of all 24 strengths you can go to <http://www.authentichappiness.org/all24> and follow the prompts.

2. Go to www.strengthfinder.com to take the StrengthFinder survey, which was researched by the Gallup organization and provides an additional view when looking at your strengths. Whereas the VIA survey identifies strengths more on the basis of virtues the StrengthFinder survey looks more to the identification of "on the job" strengths.

To take this survey you will need to buy the book *Now Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton (from the Gallup organization). It is a great book to read. It also contains an ID code that will allow you to go online and take the StrengthsFinder Profile that will highlight the 5 areas where you have the greatest potential for a turning a natural talent into a strength.

Having both viewpoints (VIA survey and the StrengthsFinder) of your strengths deepens your awareness of yourself and provides a rich ground for leveraging yourself in the world.

Support Steps:

Are You Leading with Your Strengths?

- I know my strengths and I can name them.
- I am comfortable with my strengths.
- I know how to develop and nourish my strengths.
- I know how to use my strengths in every area of my life.
- I know my weaknesses and I can name them.
- I can see how my greatest weakness is tied to my greatest strength.

- I know how to compensate for my weaknesses,

If you answered "no" to any of the above you could benefit from knowing more about your personal strengths and how to use them for more success, mastery and happiness in life. I would love to speak with you about how to do this.

Science says that there is a simple formula for experiencing success, mastery and happiness in life: Use your personal strengths every day in every way in all the main realms of your life and this will lead you to the experience of happiness, gratification and satisfaction. Use your personal strengths in the service of something larger than your personal life and this will lead you to experience the meaningful life.

If you would like to learn more about your personal strengths and how to leverage them in your life, speak with me about options that are available for you to do this. Contact me at maryann@evenstaronline.com or 434-263-4996.

Turn Your Relationships into Energy Generators Rather than Energy Drainers

*"There is no hope or joy except in human relationships."
-- Antonine de Saint-Exupery*

Women are relationship oriented. Relationships mean a lot to women. A good relationship can give you increased energy and support a positive outlook. A troubled relationship can wear you out.

Your limbic brain controls your physiology and is also your emotional brain. The health and wellbeing of your relationships entrains your emotional brain, which in turn governs your physiological health.

Nothing affects the emotional brain like the quality of your relationships. Research shows that when we feel emotionally disconnected from those with whom we are in relationship, our emotional brain becomes aroused and we move into flight or fight mode. This means we respond only in terms of defense and attack. The results are not good for our relationships and it throws our physiology into chaos.

When you are engaged in disconnected, turbulent, or emotionally unfulfilling relationships, your moods and energy can become drained, negative, and unsustaining.

By contrast, relationship peace and connection can lead to better health and well being, more vital energy and more positive moods. By almost every measure those who have

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close and rewarding relationships do better than those who have turbulent relationships.

Here are some tips to turn your relationships into energy generators instead of energy drainers.

Spend More Time with Your Partner

Marriage researcher John Gottman has found that marriages that work and improve over the years have certain characteristic interactions. Happy couples spend more time on their relationships— an extra 5 hours a week. They engage in:

Partings –saying good bye in the morning and finding out at least one thing that each is going to be doing that day

Reunions –have a low stress reunion conversation at the end of the day

Affection –have more physical contact – about 5 minutes a day - laced with kindness and forgiveness

One weekly date –make time each week - at least 2 hours - to be by themselves in a relaxed atmosphere updating their relationship with each other

Admiration and appreciation - at least once a day couples give each genuine affection and appreciation

Look to Each Other Strengths

One of the more amazing results of research on romance is that the more you hold onto your illusions about your partner's strengths and virtues, the more lasting and stable the relationship and the happier you are. The crucial

measure is the discrepancy between what your friends believe are your strengths and what your partner believes are your strengths. The bigger the discrepancy in what your partner believes about your strengths -- in the positive direction -- the greater the romantic illusion your partner has about you.

Happier couples look on the bright side of the relationship, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses -- believing that bad events that might threaten other couples do not affect them. These couples thrive even when they are actually threatened with such events, and they do so in proportion to the size of their illusions about each other.

Positive illusions are self-fulfilling because the idealized partners actually try to live up to them. They are daily buffers against hassles, since partners forgive each other more easily for the transgressions of daily life and use the alchemy of illusion to downplay faults and elevate shortcomings into strengths.

Be Optimistic

The optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles of each person in the marriage impacts how healthy, stable and viable the relationship is and how workable and happy it is. Any combination of optimism and pessimism can work except when two pessimists get together.

When two pessimists are in a relationship, it is easy for a negative downward spiral to occur – the odds are against them. In such a situation, it is important for one or both of the members of the relationship to change their pessimistic explanatory style into a learned, more optimistic style.

Be A More Responsive and Attentive Listener

Responsive and attentive listening can help make a good relationship better and a poor relationship a good relationship. Validation is a crucial aspect of responsive listening. You should go out of your way to validate what your partner is saying. The more they care about the issue the clearer your validation needs to be.

Validation by the listener ("I see," "Yes, I understand", "OK, I get it.") satisfies the speaker's need to know that she has been understood. It is also important to let the speaker know that you either agree or at least are understanding or sympathetic with what they are saying (nodding, "I agree", "Right" "I can see how you would think that")

Non-responsive listening can be the result of inattention due to external factors such as noise or a distracting situation or internal factors such as fatigue and listening to your own thoughts instead of the speaker, and boredom. To increase your partner's feeling of validation it is important to move past such factors. Your partner will feel invalidated if you are non-responsive.

One internal factor that often gets in the way of responsive listening is the practice of preparing your rebuttal while listening to the speaker. A good way to overcome this habit is to begin your response with a paraphrase of what you heard the speaker say.

Your ongoing emotional state is also a barrier to responsive listening. When you are experiencing negative emotions you are more likely to hear what is wrong with the speaker's point rather than what is right. In this case, the best practice is to admit the negative emotion and ask to put off the conversation or apologize for the non-responsive reply.

By being more responsive as a listener, you show your partner that you are paying more attention to them in a higher quality way and that you care about maintaining the connection with them.

Capitalize On Your Communication

The quality of your response to good or positive news from the other person can turn any good relationship – marriage, parenting, friendship – into a great one. If you react positively and enthusiastically, your relationship is likely to be more committed, more caring, and more satisfying – at the time and later on.

Shelly Gable divides the possible responses to good news into the following four categories:

Do you "react enthusiastically" (*active-constructive*)?
"That's the best news I've heard this week, and I'll bet it's just the first of many big raises you'll get."

Do you "point out the potential problems or down sides of the good event" (*active-destructive*)? "Are you sure you can handle the added responsibility?"

Do you "say little, but convey that you are happy to hear the news" (*passive-constructive*)? "That's very nice, dear."

Do you "seem uninterested" (*passive-destructive*)?
"Isn't all this rain something?"

The first category, active-constructive, capitalizes on the situation, amplifying the pleasure of the good situation contributing to an upward spiral of positive emotion. Capitalizing turns out to be a key to strong relationships.

When your partner in a relationship tells you some good news or something they are excited about, take the time and energy to convey your enthusiastic positive support. Save any downsides that you see until another time.

With just a few targeted changes, you can reap the benefits of stable, connected and satisfying relationships.

"What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other?"

-- George Elliot

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"Will you be there for me when things go right?" Supportive responses to positive event disclosures by Shelly Gable in *Love and Positive Emotions* by Martin Seligman
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Conclusion (or maybe just the beginning)

I hope that this introduction to better mood and energy management for women has been helpful to you. You now have some insights, knowledge, and tools to leverage in your daily life.

I invite you to get more involved with Evenstar to see how we can continue to support you in reconnecting to your natural rhythms and have the mood and energy you want to live the life you want.

About Evenstar

The Evenstar Mood & Energy Center is dedicated to helping women live happier, healthier, more personally successful and more meaningful lives through better mood and energy management. We work with you to leverage –

Peak Performance Principles
Nutritional Medicine and Longevity Health Principles
Contemporized Rites of Passage

- to live a better life through more effective management of your physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual energy.

We offer the Evenstar Mood and Energy Management System in three interdependent modalities to help you:

Live a happier, healthier, more personally successful and more meaningful life.

Feel better, be more energetic, and promote vibrant health, using a natural, comprehensive approach.

Life by Design

Peak Performance Designs for Living and Working

- Produce your desired result.
- Expand your awareness and understand yourself better.
- Get more of what you want with less frustration.
- Be inspired, supported and facilitated by your environments rather than blocked by the people, places, and things around you.
- Reconnect to your natural rhythms.
- Allow your greatest potential to unfold.
- Experience that you are the creative force in your own life.

The **Life by Design** modality offers:

Personal and Professional Life Coaching **Personal Development Assessments** **The Way of Change ecourse**

- Helping you take back your time.
- Helping you discover your life purpose and live it.
- Helping you design a new life

"Life by design and not just by circumstance"[™]

www.evenstaronline.com/lifebydesign

The Wellness Advantage

Nutritional Medicine and Longevity Health Principles

- Feel better now.
- Promote long term health.
- Tap into your own healing energies.
- Effectively manage your physical, mental, psychological, spiritual and emotional energies.
- Add vitality and aliveness to your life.
- Eliminate depletion and energy drains.
- Identify environments that sabotage your health and well-being.
- Design environments that inspire, support, and facilitate you to take better care of yourself.
- Reconnect with your own natural rhythms.
- Call forth your inherent power for health and wholeness.

The **Wellness Advantage** modality offers:

Wellness Advantage Mood and Energy Management Program for Women

Perimenopause Mood & Energy Management Program

Nutritional and Longevity Health Consulting

Health Tests

- Helping you be in charge of your own and your family's health and work effectively with your health care team.
- Helping you embody a natural, holistic and comprehensive approach to healthcare.
- Helping you focus your energy and resources on prevention, health promotion, and longevity.

"Love and take care of the body that is yours!"

www.evenstaronline.com/wellnessadvantage

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Sacred Journeys

Contemporized Rites of Passage for Women

- Take your mythic rite of passage.
- Bring your vision into the world.
- Expand your awareness of your multi-dimensional nature.
- Access wisdom.
- Journey through your levels of initiation.
- Reconnect to your natural rhythms.
- Align with your own power and creative force.

The **Sacred Journeys** modality offers:

A Vision Quest for Women

The Four Shields Rites of Passage

Medicine Walks

-
- Helping you bring the sacred into your everyday life.
- Helping you take a journey back to yourself.
- Helping you bring forth your vision.

"Have you heard the call?"

www.evenstaronline.com/sacredjourneys

Evenstar Herbs

Custom Blended Herbal Formulas for Women and Their Families

www.evenstaronline.com/herbs

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We are Here to Help You

The mission of Evenstar is to help women will find their way back to themselves. My vision is that Evenstar will help women learn how to navigate the unpredictable waters of life and still live as and be connected to the true essence of themselves.

As women learn (or relearn) to manage their own moods and energy in life they will anchor their own experience of life in who they really are. They will recognize that they themselves are the process that makes the meaning in their lives. They will realize that their experience of their life is beyond circumstance and is instead located in themselves. They will know that their dreams are their contribution to the world and the means by which they bring about themselves.

Everything that we do here at Evenstar is created to bring this vision into focus. All of the services that are offered have this one mission in mind – “provide the resources to reconnect women to their natural rhythms” – for in doing that we help them find their way back to themselves.

The Evenstar Mood & Energy Center for Women is a forum for the many ways, means and paths women can use to fully reconnect to their own natural rhythms. When a woman reunites with who she really is and what she really wants – when she heeds and embraces that energy – her life unfolds at its own pace. When harmony is reached within her events begin and end on time for the benefit of all.

We are here to help you achieve this harmony and assist women in living a healthier, happier, more meaningful and more personally successful life.

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We invite you to explore our resources, products, and services and see where we can help you.

What's happening for you and how can I help?

If you would like to find out more about the Evenstar Mood & Energy Wellness Center or our products and services, I am happy to schedule a time to go over your questions and review your situation. Give me a call at [434-263-4996](tel:434-263-4996) or email me at maryann@evenstaronline.com. Of course, there is no obligation.



Almost all of the programs and client follow up at Evenstar are by phone and email. This gives women all over the world access to our services. Sessions on the phone are easy, efficient, effective, ecological, and economical. Email is perfect for quick questions, comprehensive and daily follow-up, and expeditious exchange of documents.

And visit us on site (by appointment only, please) at the Mood & Energy Center in Virginia.

Let's Get Started on Your Journey Towards Better Mood and Energy Management

Here is another great Free resource.

A Woman's Guide to Mood & Energy Management The Evenstar Newsletter

sent *via US Mail.*

Why drag yourself through the day when you can live with vitality and enthusiasm from morning till night?

Joining our mailing list is a great step toward enjoying the mood and energy you want.

The Evenstar Newsletter will help keep you up to date on the most effective, efficient mood and energy management. You'll get vital information that you can use to live a healthier, happier, more meaningful and more personally successful life.

This has distinct and broader content than our **Mood and Energy Management Tips** ezine (subscribe to it at <http://evenstaronline.com/subscribe.html>) on a wider range of lifestyle, personal development, nutritional, longevity, health, and herbal topics. Every issue features a selection of the following topics:

- You in Balance
- Coaching Corner
- Nutrition for the Health of it
- Exercise for the Health of it
- When More Than Food is Needed
- Plants as Teachers, Plants as Healers
- Herbal Spotlights
- Love Yourself Love Your Life
- Personal Foundations and Health

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- Perimenopause Passage and Beyond
- Family Matters
- Sacred Journeys
- The Healing Place
- Health for Life
- Personal Development and Evolution
- Wellness Advantage
- State of the art health tests
- What's new at Evenstar
- Client Stories
- Action Steps
- Questions and Answers

...and more

We try to meet a bi-monthly schedule. And, of course, it comes **absolutely without cost to you**. To start receiving **A Women's Guide to Mood & energy Management** sign up at <http://www.evenstaronline.com/maillinglistform.html> or call **434-263-4996** and you'll be on the road to a better mood and energy management with the very next issue.

One more thing: Many of the books referenced in this primer are available through our Resources page at www.evenstaronline.com/resources.html

EVENSTAR

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