

A close-up of a human hand, palm facing forward, holding a bright, glowing white lightning bolt. The lightning bolt is jagged and energetic, with a red and orange glow at the point of contact with the hand. The background is a dark, solid blue.

Take Charge of Your Life

By Dr. Scott Terry

Dr. Scott Terry
Website: www.ardentcenter.com
Email: info@ardentcenter.com

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"It is easier to act one's way into right thinking than to think one's way into right acting."
Rabbi Zedick

My soul purpose with this book is to make a difference in your life, now, right now. Like a meteor, I am here to help create the changes in your life that you have always dreamed about creating for yourself, today. I want to help you to create these changes in a very practical and meaningful way.

I am not here to fix you. How could I? How could anyone but yourself know what you truly need to help you grow? All that anyone can do, is remind you that you have that power. You have the intelligence and drive to fix yourself despite what has happened before. Albert Einstein once said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. The key to change is to break that pattern and voluntarily take charge of creating a new pattern that will allow you to have the freedom to put "you" back in charge of "you".

My job as a systemic therapist is not to be the "answer man". My job is to look for patterns that you can change, for new ways and opportunities that you can choose for yourself, so that you can recreate yourself, as you need to be. This is so you can fully choose, with a clear mind and healthy body, to develop your spirit in a way that enlivens you everyday to seek something larger than yourself.

You can be so much more of who you need to be. You are not here to adhere to my vision of what you can be. You are here to create yourself as you are choosing to become. My job is just to get you thinking, help your brainstorming along, and help you to develop a plan to make it happen. Please do not do everything in this book. Just let it trigger your own thinking, so that you can modify it and tailor it for yourself.

With this book I am aiming to offer you enough suggestions that will hopefully jar you a bit into action to take back control of your life. The goal is to create actions that change you enough so that you can then take the reigns of control and say, "Right, got it, now I need to do it this way and make it so much better for myself". Only the "new you" can then work out the best image for you. Your former self may not have had the vision to see forward.

These are guidelines to try to set up some pattern change in your life, so you can then see what will actually work for you or not. But as they say, for a new habit to take hold, you have to do it for three or four weeks, or something like that. When trying these changes out, work with them for a while. Modify them and create your own. Creating your own way of doing any of these exercises is essential for making them last.

Don't be afraid to rock your boat, just a little, or maybe a whole lot, and take the plunge, and actually do what you know needs to get done, to make your life work, now, and for the rest of your life.

When we think of taking charge of our lives, we must ask why we're creating new habits, new ways of acting and being? To create new routines last, you have to have them based on something larger and more meaningful. You need a larger purpose and intent as to why you are doing what you are doing. You need to feel a greater meaning for the life that is before you which you can remember every day without guilt, shame, judgment, or remorse. This can spur you on to stick to your exercise regime or whatever.

What do you envision your life to be? What did you, when you were younger and freer, what did you then believe you could do, and what are you waiting for, to get you there, now? What do you want your life to become?

This is a very practical book to look at what you can actually do today to start regaining back control of your life, your mind, and your body, now, right now.

Let's start with the standard disclaimer. You have to check with your qualified medical professional before engaging in any physical activities or following any diets mentioned in this book. I am not a medical doctor. I am a licensed mental health practitioner.

I am writing this to get you to look at your life and make the changes that you need to do, to make a real difference in your life. But I have not, and cannot examine you to see what condition you are in and what you need to work on, only you and your doctor can do that. Thus when I say to look at your exercise and to connect more to your body in motion, then consider what kind of exercise is right for you at this time. This is only a guide to get you to consider a number of things to see what might or might not work for you. But only you know what is best for you. Now is the time to consider what is best for you, now?

This book will help you to begin to look at:

1. **What is holding you back?** What do you need to change in order for your life to function in the way that you would like it to work? What habits do you need to get rid of in your life, so you can just be a bit healthier in your mind and body? Are you ready to let go of old ways of operating? Maybe you are still working under coping patterns that you created as a child and these no longer work for you. Now is the time to think, what am I really ready to let go of, now?
2. **What new ways of being do you need to create,** or new habits do you need to manifest, in order for your life to be better? Or rather, how do I want to actually be in my life? What kind of person do I wish to become?
3. **What do you need to do to maintain this new lifestyle?** What new habits, routines, or structures do I need to put in place, so that I can lead this incredible life that I am supposed to lead? What support along the way will I need so that I can be the person that I wish to become, and live as, now?

The reasons you need to start doing this today

By doing these types of activities, with yourself, or with someone else, you will change your way of being with your self and others, and make profound differences in your life. You will reduce your stress, and thus, give yourself the chance to actually change the things that are bothering you.

Most importantly, it gives a clear and direct signal to yourself that you are taking control of you – now – that you are no longer running away from yourself or from what is bothering you and that you are going to make your life better.

Instead of just wishing for things to change, you are actually changing the things that you want to change. You are in control of you – no one else – just you. You are not in control of anyone else. Everyone has autonomy for himself or herself. You cannot change anyone (not for long). No one can change you (not for long, not really). You need to start now. Doing a few physical things to show yourself that you are back in the driver seat will start you on the road to making the difference that you need, for you (and by changing you, you will influence others to change themselves, for themselves).

Look at your reasons for doing things. Are you eating lot of sugar because you crave stimulation and you are not getting the fulfillment you need in your life? Are you a "stim junkie"?

Balance. It is not just about finding your center again, but finding a balance for yourself between the confusions in your life.

We say we all want change. No cost. No hassle. No time. But our choices really are, what are we really willing to take control of ourselves to make that positive shift happen? It takes effort to get healthy and to stay healthy.

It is up to us to start to make things happen for ourselves. As a therapist, I can help, but you have to on some level, start to want change, for change to start to happen for you. None of the principles below will be enough of what you want to grow and change for yourself, but they are a start on the path back to you.

These are the basics. This is what I say to just about every person who walks in my door. This is what I have said to my mother. Start here. It won't solve all your problems, but it will put you back on the road to being in control of you.

But be careful of turning these changes into a weapon against yourself. Cleaning up your diet is great – but living only for food, only to eat, is getting lost. Stress reduction is essential – joining a cult is not. Exercising is fantastic way to treat depression and many other things, but if you exercise too much, you will just damage yourself and this will take you away from what you needed to feel in the first place. Sleeping all day is just getting lost. The word is, "balance", "balance" for you, you, now.

Window dressing

It is not enough to change the plates on the table, when the whole meal doesn't work. It is not enough to change just a little, when a radical overhaul is what's required. It is another way to run away, to change a little something, when a lot of the right thing is required.

Stop. Stop. Stop with all your destructive habits. You are not a child anymore, so stop running away from what you need to do for you – be it stopping the drugs and alcohol or just not being so self-indulgent. Come back to who you need you to be, for you, now.

Completing the charts

In the following sections, there are a number of charts. These are sample charts only. You may need to custom design your own chart and make one that works for you.

We recommend that you begin by monitoring where you are now. In this book are some simple charts you can use to see where you are.

There are charts for:

- diet
- stress reduction techniques
- sleep
- exercise
- relationships
- past, present, and future
- therapy.

You do not have to complete all the charts in this book. This is a sampling of what you can chart. It is not meant to be complete or comprehensive, but to lead you to what you may need to keep track of for you. And generally you should only need to monitor each item for a few weeks once you get into a good routine. However, the therapy, past, present and future and relationship charts you can use more long term.

How to answer the questions

If a particular question is not relevant for you, just ignore it or put a line through it.

You should complete the charts relatively quickly, without much analysis, and no rumination. If you don't have any problem in a particular area, you can skip it (eg if you have no sleep difficulties, you can ignore the sleep chart). But it could be that you aren't as perfect as you think you are in some of the areas, so it might be worthwhile for you to do the charts just so you can realize this.

Once you have monitored your current state for a period of time, you should read the rest of the sections for some information that may help you improve yourself in that area.

NO SELF JUDGMENTS! There is no good and bad here, just a process. This charting is here just to track your process to help create the “you” that you want to create.

Get active. Create your own growth process. This is not about your thoughts, feelings, concentrating, trying, working at “the problem”, some fantasy or something you are afraid of. This is not about what happened to you before or what you would like to do. This is about what is really there for you today. And what you are actually doing to make your life better now. This is about action, action that you did today. It is your time, now!

The purpose of the tools in this book

The purpose of the various tools is multifold:

- you will feel better by doing these things
- your brain will function better (which will be the way to make your heart feel so much better too)
- you will be less stressed
- you will be more in control of you
- you will have a clearer direction
- a lot of the secondary symptoms of life, the ones that are causing you so much pain, from being a bit to anxious, to being a bit to much depressed, will get better, if you honestly and fully use the tools presented in this book
- you will create what is known as a “pattern change”. This means you will disrupt your normal way of doing things, and introduce a new, healthier way to be.

A summary of the structure of this book

Change

Before you can change, you have to understand the nature of change.

Creating a vision

Take in where you are at, then and now. Being able to look at your vision statement that you are declaring to the world (or at least to yourself), that you want to be creating for yourself?

What are your goals?

In order to progress, you have to work out your goals and aspirations for yourself.

What is your game plan?

How are you going to pull it all together? How can you develop a concrete plan of action to follow day-by-day, to make it all happen? The key to creating this concrete plan of action is looking at your key actions that will help support this transformation that you are wishing to create for yourself.

Then what is the day-to-day to-do list, to make it real and actually happen, day by day?

The key is not just looking at reducing stress, anxiety, or depressive experiences, but to enhance a new way to live that will carry you forward for years to come. To that end, after looking at your plan of action, we will look at specific techniques or tools to help make this all happen.

Diet

Look at how you are eating and how you can improve your diet.

Stress

Check your stress level and find out how you can use meditation to enhance your connection to your sense of self.

Sleep

Improving your sleep and looking for sleep difficulties.

Exercise

Exercising in a way to not just get your heart rate up, but to connect you to your body.

Relationships

Connecting to yourself, to others, and to your environment in which you live each day.

Time

Connecting to your memory and your projections, or to yourself in-terms of time (your past, present and future), with some therapeutic exercises that you might find helpful, or at least a jumping off point to create your own exercises and charts of what you wish to create for yourself.

Therapy

Here are some therapeutic exercises to help in your process of discovery and growth. They are here for you to explore and find what might be useful to you, so that you might gain insight into your life, and direction in which you might choose to change.

Schedule

Finally, we will show you a sample chart of what your typical day and week could look like, from when you get up in the morning, to when you would go to sleep at night, and how you might structure your typical, or ideal day for yourself. This “typical day” will look at each of the techniques mentioned above, and how to implement them on our weekly, daily, and hourly schedules, for each of the tools of our growth that we have started you going into.

Other resources

Please see our website www.ardentcenter.com for further details. We can also refer you to a number of excellent resources such as books on a range of topics. If you require information about a particular concern or you would like to receive therapy from us, please email us via info@ardentcenter.com.

*"To think is easy. To act is difficult.
To act as one thinks is the most difficult."*
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I have been practicing various modalities of psychotherapy for about 16 years now. I have been a professor, supervisor, writer and researcher, and now run this very large group (from a group private practice perspective), and through it all, the one question that seems at the heart of everything, is change.

How do I change? But generally people think of it as, how do I get them to do the changing for me?

Such a strange question, since we all know why to change, don't we? Like, I don't want live any longer like this, I want to live healthier, I want to be there for my partner and kids, I want to think clearer and enjoy life more, and on and on.

Then, what to change? Some of us need to eat less junk food, quit smoking, exercise, be less stressed or get more sleep at night.

And then, we get to the nitty gritty of how to change? I stop eating the crap and eat the good stuff. I will go to my doctor to learn how to quit smoking and get something to help make it happen so I don't go back to it, ever. I get over my stereotypes on meditation, so I can learn to reduce my stress, so I can feel much better and sleep at night.

It is better to think about changing your overall lifestyle rather than just changing one thing at a time because everything is interconnected. For example, by joining a gym and learning how to exercise properly and doing it 3-4 times a week, I may find that at night, because my body is tired, that I sleep better and that I am refreshed all day. By eating better all day and eating earlier at night, I am able to digest my meal before I sleep, thus enhancing my sleep quality. By meditating, so that my elevated stress level is eliminated, and I am not thinking about my thinking and going crazy when I want to not be thinking at all, my sleep may also improve. By not watching hyper TV late at night, my brain is not still running, when I want to shut it off. And I will sleep and really enjoy it.

And you know the rest of why you need to change, what you want to change, and how to do it. And if you don't know, you can find out, and actually do what needs to get done.

So why don't you do it? What is preventing you from being who you want to become? What's stopping you from doing what you know will be the best thing for you, and those that you love? This book is about finding out, but mostly, it is about letting go of whatever it is, even if you never figure it out, so you can create whatever it is you want to now create for yourself.

Here is one little secret that you probably were never told. Knowing the answer does not mean that you will do what you know, or know to be right, or best. Knowing something will not make your life change or make it better. In fact, sometimes, our big brains are our worst enemies, because they make you think of every reason under the sun for why you shouldn't change or do this or that.

We all get a bit too complacent with what we are used to, what we know, what we have been living with. None of us wants to change, ever. And our big heads tell us, that we don't have to, shouldn't, that there are things to be afraid of if we change. It's because we don't want to face that really scary thing – the unknown.

Our big heads are just bursting out giving us lots of nasty excuses for everything. So what do we do? You can't run from your own head. Stop running, period.

Your life is not about justifications or reasons to be better. It is about the actions that make us better. Don't ignore the thoughts, the reasoning's, the confusions and doubts. Just notice them. Acknowledge them. Wave to them and then say, yes, I see you, I hear you, I understand you, and go to sleep now.

It's time to act, and do what needs to get done. Just like when I child screams for ice cream, without eating anything healthy, or just candy all day, you listen, you have compassion, you hear the child say what they want, you let them know they have been heard, and then you ask calmly, I know you want ice cream so, what would you like now, broccoli or spinach? You make the healthy choices for the child, and the child learns from your healthy boundaries, what they should do, so they can get a good sense of self. They don't always get what they want, but as the song goes, they get what they need. And then they learn to be happy, because they feel better getting what they need. So isn't it time that you too got what you need? So let's create the best of all worlds, for you, now.