

# The Psychology of Self-Transformation



## There is No Safe Path – Life is Risky

- “To dare is to lose one’s footing momentarily. Not to dare, is to lose oneself.” (Kierkegaard)
- “You enter the forest at the darkest point, where there is no path. Where there is a way or a path, it is someone else’s path. You are not on your own path. If you follow someone else’s way, you are not going to realize your potential.” (Joseph Campbell)
- “Uncertainty is an uncomfortable position. But certainty is an absurd one.” (Voltaire)
- “It is a hard lesson, because it causes us to realize we have chosen the life we are living right now. It is perhaps frightening for us to think that we have chosen to live our life exactly as it is today. Frightening because we may not like what we find when we look at our lives today. But it is also liberating, because we can now begin to choose what we will find when we look at our life in the tomorrows that lie un-lived before us. What will you see when you look at your life ten years from now? What will you choose?” (The Rhythm of Life, Matthew Kelly)
- “We long for life to “finally settle down” and stop throwing us meaning curveballs. We want not to repeat our mistakes, not to make whopping new mistakes, not to stand before life not knowing what to do next, and not to experience serious doubts and anxieties. But life can’t settle down, existentially speaking. Tomorrow I may lose a parent or a child — that may change everything. Tomorrow I may start on something more ambitious than anything I’ve ever tackled before — naturally I’ll doubt, grow anxious, and make mistakes! We want something like a guarantee out of life: if I reach a certain age or a certain stage I can finally stand in a place of certitude. But only death brings that certitude. Life brings new questions and new challenges.” (Rethinking Depression, Eric Maisel)
- “. . . ask yourself whether a tree that is supposed to grow to a proud height can dispense with bad weather and storms; whether misfortune and eternal resistance, some kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, mistrust, hardness, avarice, and violence do not belong among the *favorable* conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible. The poison of which weaker natures perish strengthens the strong – nor do they call it poison.” (The Gay Science, Friedrich Nietzsche)

- . . . the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell. (The Gay Science, Friedrich Nietzsche)

### **Stagnation Breeds Misery, Happiness and Fulfillment require Change and Personal Growth**

- “The secret of being miserable is to have the leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not.” (George Bernard Shaw)
- “Boredom is often an important indicator that you are making poor choices, or entering new situations with a limiting attitude (perhaps you're being closed-minded, or overly judgmental).” (The Upside of Your Darkside, Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener)
- “In 1932, weighed down by the sorrows and agonies of his self-absorbed and aimless clients, an Australian psychiatrist named W. Béran Wolfe summed up his philosophy like this: ‘If you observe a really happy man you will find him building a boat, writing a symphony, educating his son, growing double dahlias in his garden, or looking for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi Desert.’ He was right. People who strive for something personally significant, whether it's learning a new craft, changing careers, or raising moral children, are far happier than those who don't have strong dreams or aspirations. Find a happy person, and you will find a project.” (The How of Happiness, Sonja Lyubomirsky)
- “The one who would be in constant happiness must frequently change.” (Confucius)
- “At the end of life, most of us will find that we have felt most filled up by the challenges and successful struggles for mastery, creativity, and full expression of our dharma in the world. Fulfillment happens not in retreat from the world, but in advance — and profound engagement.” (The Great Work of Your Life, Stephen Cope)
- “Joy is not gained by asking for it, but only by acting for it.” (Theodore Cuyler)
- “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” (Charles Darwin)

## **Take Action Even if You Don't Feel Up to It**

- “Lanny Bassham, an Olympic gold medal shooter calls this handy precept the “ready, fire, aim” principle. Lanny claims that in sports and in life, people spend too much time aiming at the bull’s-eye and not enough time shooting at it. Rather than placing so much emphasis on getting ready and aiming, go ahead and take a shot. Taking the shot gets you started and also lets you gauge how far off the mark you are. Make adjustments, but keep shooting until you get closer and closer, and eventually you will hit the bull’s eye.” (10-Minute Toughness, Jason Selk)
- “Do you want to know who you are? Don’t ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you.” (Thomas Jefferson)
- “The amateur believes he must first overcome his fear, then he can do his work. The professional knows that fear can never be overcome. He knows there’s no such thing as a fearless warrior or a dread-free artist.” (Steven Pressfield, The War of Art)
- “Our behavior is controllable in a way that our feelings are not. There is a very special satisfaction for the Artist of Living who works within life’s limits to produce a fine self-portrait. The more control we develop over our actions, the more chance we have of producing a self we can be proud of.” (David Reynolds, Constructive Living)
- “The first step in changing reality is to recognize it as it is now. There is no need to wish it were otherwise. It simply is. Pleasant or not, it is. Then comes the behavior that acts on the present reality. Behavior can change what is. We may have visions of what will be. We cannot (and need not) prevent these dreams. But the visions won’t change the future. Action—in the present—changes the future. A trip of ten thousand miles starts out with one step, not with a fantasy about travel.” (David Reynolds, Constructive Living)
- “Many Western therapeutic methods focus on trying to successfully manage or modify our feeling states. The underlying assumption is that if our feelings can be altered [or] reduced, we will be more able to live meaningful and effective lives; that it is our feelings that hold us back. . . [But] is it accurate to assume that we must “overcome” fear to jump off the high dive at the pool, or increase our confidence before we ask someone out

on a date? If it was, most of us would still be waiting to do these things. Our life experience teaches that it is not necessary to change our feelings in order to take action . . . Once we learn to accept our feelings, we find that we can take action without changing our feeling-states.” (James Hill)

- “Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt.” (Shakespeare)

### **Find a Purpose and Embrace the Process**

- “If you focus on growth instead of validation, on making progress instead of proving yourself, you are less likely to get depressed because you won’t see setbacks and failures as reflecting your own self-worth. And you are less likely to stay depressed, because feeling bad makes you want to work harder and keep striving. You get up off the couch, dust off the potato chip crumbs, and get busy getting better.” (Succeed, Heidi Grant Halvorson)
- “What we lack most in the modern world is a sense of a larger purpose to our lives. In the past, it was organized religion that often supplied this. But most of us now live in a secularized world. We human animals are unique – we must build our own world. We do not simply react to events out of biological scripting. But without a sense of direction provided to us, we tend to flounder. We don’t know how to fill up and structure our time. There seems to be no defining purpose to our lives. We are perhaps not conscious of this emptiness, but it infects us in all kinds of ways.
  - Feeling that we are called to accomplish something is the most positive way for us to supply this sense of purpose and direction. It is a religious like quest for each of us. This quest should not be seen as selfish or antisocial. It is in fact connected to something much larger than our individual lives. Our evolution as a species has depended on the creation of a tremendous diversity of skills and ways of thinking. We thrive by the collective activity of people supplying their individual talents. Without such diversity, a culture dies.” (Mastery, Robert Greene)
- “The misery that oppresses you lies not in your profession but in yourself! What man in the world would not find his situation intolerable if he chooses a craft, and art, indeed any form of life, without experiencing an inner calling? Whoever is born with a talent, or to a talent, must surely find

in that the most pleasing of occupations! Everything on this earth has its difficult sides! Only some inner drive – pleasure, love – can help us overcome obstacles, prepare a path, and lift us out of the narrow circle in which others tread out their anguished, miserable existences!” (Goethe)

- “Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” (Carl Bard)
- “All life is an experiment. The more experiments the better.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

### **Stop Caring About Other’s Opinions**

- “I realize now that people are not thinking about you and me or caring what is said about us. They are thinking about themselves—before breakfast, after breakfast, and right on until ten minutes past midnight. They would be a thousand times more concerned about a slight headache of their own than they would about the news of your death or mine.” (How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, Dale Carnegie)
- “All too many people do not live their own lives, and generally they know next to nothing about their real nature. They make convulsive efforts to “adapt”, not to stand out in any way, to do exactly what the opinions, rules, regulations, and habits of the environment demand as being “right”. They are slaves of “what people think”, “what people do”, etc. That this leads to false attitudes and, if the discrepancy between their real nature and their sham nature becomes too great, to neuroses hardly needs stressing. Of such people Schopenhauer rightly says: “. . . the sphere of what we are for other people is their consciousness, not ours; it is the kind of figure we make in their eyes, together with the thoughts which this arouses. . . People in the highest position in life, with all their brilliance, pomp, display, magnificence and general show, may well say: Our happiness lies entirely outside us, it exists only in the heads of others.” (The Way of Individuation, Jolande Jacobi)