

Stage Climbing

**The Shortest Path
To Your Highest Potential**

Michael S. Broder Ph.D.

Stage Climbing™

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Your Highest Potential*

Michael S. Broder, Ph.D.

DrMichaelBroder.com

Stage Climbing™: The Shortest Path to Your Highest Potential

ISBN: 1-889577-24-3

Published by;

Media Psychology Associates

255 South 17th Street

Suite 2900

Philadelphia, PA 19102

Phone (800) 434-8255, (215) 545-7000

Fax (215) 545-7014

For information or to place an order: mpa7777@aol.com

To contact the author: mb@michaelbroder.com

Websites: <http://www.DrMichaelBroder.com>

<http://www.StageClimbing.com>

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Dedication:

To my beloved grandsons Adam and Kyle

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the many colleagues, friends and associates that have helped me both to formulate the concept of *Stage Climbing* and to bring this book to fruition.

There are many people to acknowledge and the list is still growing. So I have posted the ever expanding list of names at StageClimbing.com/acknowledgements. When the list is complete, this page in both this eBook and the forthcoming print version will be revised to include all of the names of those to whom I am so grateful.

MSB

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TO THE READER

“What lies before us and what lies behind us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

----Ralph Waldo Emerson

Welcome to what I hope for you is a life-changing journey, designed to put at your disposal the tools you need to reach your highest potential in virtually any and every area of your life!

If this seems like a daunting task or a promise that's too good to be true, let's begin with the good news:

Within you resides everything you will ever need to get there and in the shortest time possible.

Stage Climbing will show you the way. All you need to do is to make the commitment to yourself to get onboard by learning the process and then applying the strategies you are about to learn that speak to where you want to take your life.

One of the subtitles I considered for *Stage Climbing* was “An Adult's Guide to Help You Get Motivated and Grow Up---Wherever You May Have Stayed Behind”; because yes, this may indeed be the very first self-help book ever to teach adults *exactly*, how to achieve optimal maturity wherever you believe you may not have. **However, “getting motivated” and “growing up” are merely important steps toward the real goal of this process, which is to be operating from what I call “your highest potential”--- wherever you are not already.** You might also think of it as your best life as life, as life rarely gets better.

Thus, the main premise of *Stage Climbing* is simple: Inner peace, optimal motivation, passion, and a life determined by your unique purpose and characterized by excellence are all staples of those parts of you that are being lived at your highest potential. You will soon see how all of this is firmly and naturally within your grasp, once you learn how you are holding yourself back in a certain area (or areas) of your life--- and we all have them---and **how to “grow up”**(as I often refer to it metaphorically) **to your highest potential”.**

Stage Climbing is primarily about you and your life as well as how to take immediate control of it along with the process by which you reach your potential. Secondly, it's about how and why you think and act as you do, how you once were and how you could be. *Stage Climbing* will teach you a set of principles that will also help you deal with anyone who has ever crossed your path or who ever will.

My first mission in writing it is to present to you with a concept that is so powerful that it can enable you to understand, then choose to accept or change virtually every area of your life. I see my secondary mission as being equally important: that this concept I call *Stage Climbing* be an extremely simple one to grasp, very easy to use and one that even puts many things that you might already be familiar with---such as whatever you define for yourself as personal fulfillment, for example--- into a new perspective. That way, it's possible that you will find countless ways to use it to enrich your life and the lives of those you care about; or at the very least, to enhance and clarify the way you view yourself and others. *Stage Climbing* transforms a holistic overview of how you operate into easy to understand action steps you can use anytime you choose. It even bridges the often-murky gaps between self-help, psychology and spirituality.,

So let me begin by asking you a few questions. What part of your life could be better? Where could you feel happier? Operate with a greater level of fulfillment or maturity? Be more motivated? Feel more at peace? Function in a way that's more on target or where you feel more satisfied with your life as it is today? Where do you wish that your contribution to those around you—your family and friends, your community, your profession or the world could be greater? Where could you be or at least feel more successful? Take note of anything that may come to mind as you ponder these questions. Throughout the book, you will find many opportunities to address them all.

Stage Climbing is a brand new way of thinking that can help you to do many things, if you let it. For example, you can think of it as a simple system for understanding exactly how complex you are. It's also a formula to give you insight into where and how you may be stuck in a specific aspect of your life; such as relationships, your career, your self-esteem or your life's calling, mission or purpose. *Stage Climbing*

will also give you powerful strategies for moving forward in those areas. Not only will it help you to find the fulfillment you want, but in addition, to go even beyond that level of fulfillment and onward to a new plateau that until now perhaps you may not even have realized is possible. Again, **you need only pursue and make optimal use of the ideas and strategies in this book that speak to you. They all point toward an aspect of your highest potential.**

Stage Climbing introduces you to a user-friendly system that can give you a fresh and clear perspective on practically any issue, dilemma or personal conflict that you are trying to understand, involving you or someone else in your life. It's then your choice either to change or accept certain things that may have been a source of difficulty up until now.

If you compare yourself to others, this book will help you to stop doing that. Instead, you will clearly see how to make **the only comparison that is truly valid: the one between your life as it is now in one or more areas, and what it could be.** The latter can be thought of as your full or highest potential, as you now see it. Then, by using merely the resources that exist within you which are readily available to you at this moment just waiting to be activated, you are free to reach or get as close to that potential as you are willing to go. For over thirty years, I have used evolving versions of this concept as a clinical tool in my practice as a psychologist to help bring about change with thousands of clients who have represented almost every conceivable population or walk of life.

One of the great mysteries of the mind is something I call psychological farsightedness. So often, we cannot see that to which we are too close. Therefore, I hope you will also consider this book to be a set of psychological “reading glasses”. *Stage Climbing* provides you seven distinct and ascending views or stages that you can apply to any facet of your life. You then have the power to choose to stay where you are or move on to the target stage you select. In the process, you may even find yourself raising the bar on how you define your best or optimal life.

Stage Climbing is a different kind of book. It's about your life in "seven chapters". And since it's about you, **I offer you many examples, but deliberately avoid case studies that would take you away from focusing on your own life story or the story of whomever in your life you may be thinking about.**

Since as humans we are each a unique work in progress, not only will this book have a different meaning for each person who reads it, but it will also offer you benchmarks to help you clearly see how you have advanced through this process, each time you reread or come back to it as a reference. The kaleidoscope is a wonderful metaphor for how the human mind works — the components of a kaleidoscope remain indisputably constant, yet what you see never looks the same way twice. *Stage Climbing* unleashes this phenomenon with all the components of your life.

How we each develop to become the unique individuals we are, is the area of psychology I have always found to be most fascinating. **My life's work has been to help people---often very high achievers--- identify what they see as their potential in one or more areas of their lives; and then do what it takes to make the life changes they've chosen in order to get there as rapidly and effectively as possible.**

I was not yet in the psychology field when my daughter was born and like most parents, found myself mesmerized by watching her very early development. Then in the very earliest part of my training and career as a psychologist, I first became interested in answering for myself the questions *Stage Climbing* addresses. In graduate school, I studied virtually everything I could find on the subject of human development, especially top theorists and their trademark theories such as Sigmund Freud's Psychosexual Development (Strachey, E. and Freud, A.1953), Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development (1963), Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development (1987), Abraham Maslow's Self-Actualization (1987) and many others who in one way or another attempted to explain adult behavior based on how we develop. The problem was that as brilliant and groundbreaking as these concepts were—especially in their heyday—there were many gaps and missing pieces of the puzzle that for me left major questions unanswered. In the end, I was quite disappointed as to how dry developmental psychology could

sometimes be and how unrelated it generally seemed to my interest in creating and mastering the most effective clinical techniques to bring about lasting change in adults. Thus, the field of human psychological development seemed to be much too oriented toward defining problems while hardly at all focusing on *solutions*.

An early mentor of mine, the late Dr. William Swartley, introduced me to an obscure article written in 1958 by Clyde Sullivan, Marguerite Q. Grant and J. Douglas Grant, "The Development of Interpersonal Maturity (1957). Their model was to become an important part of the seed from which *Stage Climbing* was to grow. However, like all the others, it had gaps that left major questions unanswered. Another early mentor, Dr. Albert Ellis, the originator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy--- the original and still a leading cognitive behavioral approach---filled in some of those gaps with his empirically based emphasis on finding solutions by changing beliefs and attitudes directly (Ellis 1962). Other approaches, such as Dr. Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy (1976) and Dr. Arnold Lazarus' Multimodal Therapy (1981) have made the cognitive behavioral approach the most state of the art form of psychotherapy practiced today. These brilliant pioneers continue to be heavy influences on the work I do every day. Once again, however, many gaps became more and more evident to me as I used this stuff when treating patients/clients in the real world. So my mission became twofold: to take as long as necessary to fill in those gaps; and then to keep refining my own model, *Stage Climbing*, until it could be as useful a tool for you, the reader, to bring about rapid and lasting change as it has been to me and all of those I have helped with early versions of it thus far. In the process, I hope you also will find that at last it makes the understanding of human behavior, development, maturity, motivation and potential to be easy and enjoyable.

Before writing this book, I also needed to satisfy myself that I could explain just about any aspect of my own life by using the *Stage Climbing* model. **My life has been one of many twists and turns. Indeed *Stage Climbing* meets this challenge and continues to help me understand and navigate my own life as nothing else ever has; and once you learn the premise and the formula, it will do the same for you.**

In my very early career, I started as an accountant. Within a few short years and in my early twenties, I began my own accounting firm, which quickly became successful and lucrative. Around the same time, I also got married, became a father and seemed to have it all. However, by my mid twenties, I actually became very bored with my career. There was no more passion or challenge in it. Our marriage wasn't working either. So after a lot of contemplation, one-by-one I wound up making a series of major changes in all areas of my life. Over a period of several years, I sold the firm, got divorced, went to graduate school, got a master's degree and doctorate and changed my career to psychology— the field I loved as a hobby, but had never even thought of as a career.

My two careers have very little in common. In fact, that they couldn't be more different. As an accountant, I often became frustrated by the fact that there usually seemed to be only one view and acceptable protocol at a time for doing most things. To me, there was little room or incentive for innovation and creativity. Although that's certainly not how every accountant experiences his or her profession, that's how I did. As a psychologist, I found that the climate was the exact opposite. I quickly discovered that the psychology profession had much to offer to fulfill what up until then had been missing in my career. It was impossible for me not to be challenged and fascinated by the complexity of each individual I worked with as well as the vast and continuously expanding body of knowledge there was to both learn and contribute to.

The practice of psychology is really about teaching people to help themselves; and I have been fortunate enough to have the privilege to do this with an extraordinarily wide range of people and settings. I have had major contracts to work with both criminals and police. I have treated those with severe mental impairments; worked with college students; and with extremely well functioning upscale, prominent and accomplished clients in my private practice. Additionally, I have been a consultant to many business, government and educational organizations and executives; written several popular books as well as many audio programs with major publishers for couples, singles and people in relationship transitions. My audio self-help programs on numerous personal and relationship topics are also used around the world by both lay people and mental health professionals. I have taught graduate students, and trained mental health

professionals extensively and at all levels; and have run an internationally acclaimed training institute. I have hosted my own radio programs both locally and nationally, done *Oprah*, *The Today Show* and scores of other print and electronic media. Most of all, I have enjoyed practically every minute of it! All the while, I have been working behind the scenes at my own pace to put together the concept of *Stage Climbing*. **I decided a long time ago that I would not write this book until I could definitively say that the theory and practice I espouse holds up to virtually any segment of the population or application to which it is applied.** For me personally, this also includes my roles as a husband (in a very successful second marriage), father and grandfather as well as every other type of relationship in which I am involved.

As a strong proponent and author of self-help books and audio programs, I am sadly aware that many people discount self-help psychology as irrelevant. One reason for this is that it is so often contradictory. Do you deal with life circumstances in the “here and now” (or your life as it presently is)? Or do you go back to childhood? Is the answer to be found by shedding light on a problem or by somehow going further into your darkness? When is psychotherapy the best approach versus, for example; medication, meditation, yoga or other spiritual practices? ***Stage Climbing* honors it all and demonstrates that just about any approach to understanding human behavior and making your life work better for you has its pluses and minuses. However, there needs to be clear criteria for when, how, and why each approach is effective. *Stage Climbing* provides you a simple model for sorting this out.**

Thus, *Stage Climbing* will offer you a very handy and---even more importantly---a non-dogmatic model to understand and choose the best path for you with any given issue. **You may also find it apt to consider *Stage Climbing* an encyclopedia of choices. In addition to providing you the proverbial “meal” as most self-help books do, it teaches you “how to fish”.** Everything you might have been exposed to up until now, has its place in the *Stage Climbing* process. For that reason, don’t throw away any of your favorite self help books or audios, even those that may not have yet produced lasting results, as you may find a new level of meaning and application for them once you see how they fit into your life, via the principles of *Stage Climbing*. Thus, if you have been overwhelmed, confused or disappointed up until

now by the sheer number of approaches out there to changing your life or how effective they've been with you, please read on; and be open to the possibility that once you understand your *Stage Climbing* process, they will deliver those results.

Because the concept of *Stage Climbing* is so simple (as opposed, of course, to simplistic), you may find yourself challenging it. I both welcome and honor that. I was so concerned that its simplicity was too good to be true that I consulted many of my friends and colleagues who are mental health professionals. I asked them to look at outlines and early drafts of this book in an effort to get their views on the soundness of *Stage Climbing* from their perspective and to help me spot any inconsistencies with its principles. Their feedback continues to be extremely important to me. **I am now able to say that once you see how *Stage Climbing* works, it will become an invaluable tool not only for you personally, but also for helping or understanding all of those around you, and without labels or blame; regardless of your lifestyle, gender, race, ethnicity demographics or life experiences.** Of course, that is only to the extent that you put it to work for you. There has never been any one approach that flawlessly provides the answer to every possible question or dilemma you may have, despite the claims that so many of the originators and promoters of them make. *Stage Climbing* doesn't claim to achieve that impossible standard either. However, it does fill in many glaring gaps that been left unaddressed up until now.

In addition, this book will give you a fresh perspective on some issues that may touch any or every important aspect of your life:

- Why are we so often conflicted about the things that make us feel happy, successful, motivated and fulfilled? (Short answer: The seven stages present us with seven levels of happiness, fulfillment, success, motivation and spirituality from which to choose. Each comes with a different vision; but often they clash. However, by understanding them, you will see them as an enormous and wonderful set of choices, rather than conflicts.)
- What do the most successful, accomplished, happiest or seemingly most fulfilled; as well as the truly great men and women who've managed most to change the world have that you

don't---not only our contemporaries, but throughout history? (Short answer: Very little that you cannot also choose to develop and learn to access in *your* own unique way, just as they do or did. One mission of this book is to teach you many of the strategies and ways of thinking that can help you integrate into your life the highest qualities of functioning and self-perception that you might associate with those icons. You can apply it all to your own life immediately. *Stage Climbing* gives you the action steps you need to do this.)

- What keeps us in unfulfilling relationships, jobs or lifestyles? (Short answer: The problematic hooks to our lower stages that you will now learn to dismantle and bring under your control.)
- How do I know my mission or purpose in life, and what is the role of spirituality in making that determination? (Short answer: Purpose and spirituality are different at each stage. This is what can make it seem so confusing! *Stage Climbing* sorts this all out. Consider it a tool that teaches you the options, and then shows you how to fine tune and navigate them. Along the way, you will access inner resources---which may have been dormant up until now---that will clarify this. Then, simply commit yourself to honor and pursue the choices you make.)

Whether you are sitting high atop the pinnacle of success and affluence trying to make a blessed life even better, in a jail cell where you believe you have little or no control over your life or anywhere in between; the principles of *Stage Climbing* are waiting for you to put them into action and change your life. **I believe that boundless fulfillment, exceptional happiness and even personal greatness are within everyone's reach.** *Stage Climbing* will give you a formula to define those virtues, along with strategies to raise the bar higher and higher for what you think of as your best.

We have all had to rise to some occasion, even if simply to deal with a crisis or help someone else. *Stage Climbing* will show you how to access those inner resources to do it practically every time, as it introduces to you this model of seven-stages or visions of yourself and just about everything that's important to you.

The stages span from infancy to beyond even what you may now imagine could ever be your best possible or optimal existence.

As Emerson said, “We are wiser than we know.” To tap into your own wisdom and end all forms of self-sabotage is the essence of *Stage Climbing*. Then watch miracles happen!

How to Use This Book: A Quick Start Guide

There are two ways to get the most out of this book. One, of course, is to read *Stage Climbing* straight through as you would any book. That's the best way to gain *maximum* understanding of yourself via the *Stage Climbing* process and all of its applications, to virtually any part of your life. I also suggest that you read one chapter at a time and let the material “sink in”, before going to the next chapter. **This Quick Start Guide will then simply give you a “cheat sheet” overview of what *Stage Climbing* is about and the terms unique to it.**

The other way is to **follow this Quick Start Guide for the “short version” of the book and then skim the book by reading the bold print, charts and boxes in Part I. This way, you will find the book to be a very quick read.** Of course, I also recommend that you refer to the full text for any elaboration you might need as you go along. **Then use the pages and strategies in Part II that apply to what you are interested in learning about yourself and those around you, and to carry out your *Stage Climbing* process.** This can be an effective way both to get the gist and to use the *Stage Climbing* process and the specific strategies most applicable to you in order to understand and resolve a specific issue or to learn specific applications. The detailed Table of Contents starting on [Page 4](#) will point you to the application(s) in Part II most relevant to you whenever you need them.

To get the most when reading Part I, think of *Stage Climbing* as reading a book about your life in seven chapters. Expect to read many things about yourself. Some things may seem exhilarating, others painful (especially in Chapters 1 to 4) and still others might put you in touch with new possibilities you may eagerly wish to explore. Every reader will experience Part I differently. As you read, many things in your life will come together more and more. Your past becomes clearer and in reading about the target stages (Chapters 6 & 7), you will get a glimpse into what I refer to as “your highest potential”. **The action steps at the end of each chapter can be taken before going to the next chapter or you can come back to them later.** Just be sure that at some point, you to make optimal use of those exercises that speak to you. **The exercises and strategies hold the key to lasting change.** Reread Part I or the relevant stage(s) anytime you would like to understand a particular era or another aspect of your life (or even when you are trying to gain some insight about someone else).

Part II is designed to give you a look at many of the *Stage Climbing* applications, by calibrating numerous categories of life, by the stages. For this reason, I even call them “calibrations”. **Consider Part II to be like an encyclopedia of choices, along with special strategies for many of the categories included.** You will find reproducible worksheets to make your own custom calibrations at the end of each chapter in Part II. **Use the calibrations in Part II along with those you have created for yourself as specific points of reference.** Chapter 14, the final chapter of *Stage Climbing* contains strategies for resolving problems, making decisions and bringing many aspects of your *Stage Climbing* process together. All of the strategies in this book are timeless. They can be revisited anytime you determine that your *Stage Climbing* process is in need of a major overhaul, a minor tweaking in one stage or anything in between. *Stage Climbing* is a book you will want to come back to often or whenever you are facing a new challenge.

What follows is a five-step protocol you can use to become familiar with *Stage Climbing* and quickly begin your process:

Step 1- Learn the language of *Stage Climbing* through this Glossary. Here are the important terms you need to know:

Stage..... Stages are simply levels of maturity that pinpoint the degree to which you have evolved *in a given life area*. **Think of your stages as benchmarks or plateaus, which can explain practically any aspect of who you are or why you do what you do in that part of your life.** There are seven possible stages in any life category, numbered from one to seven (they are summarized in Step 2 below). You probably will identify various parts of yourself in each stage. For example, you could be operating at different stages with respect to your career, love relationship(s), as a parent, socially, spiritually and/or sexually. Our complexity as human beings makes this possible at any given time. These ascending stages are in reality the lenses through which you see your life and all of its challenges.

Default Stage..... The stage that defines how you typically---but not always---function with respect to a given aspect of your life. Consider this as a rough measure of your actual degree of maturity in any given life area. Your default stage may or may not be the same as your chronological age would indicate. If your default stage is lower than what is age appropriate, it can explain much about your patterns and where you may be stuck. Thus, **your level of maturity** (for that area of life, of course) is simply what you recognize as your default stage as compared to your actual age. **Generally speaking, the higher the default stage in an area of life, the better.**

Target Stage..... This is the stage from which you would most like to operate. **Think of it as a goal.** Your target stage in any life area is **the zone where you are most likely to be living life at your highest potential.** When you are operating out of your target stages, **you are using the best part of yourself to accomplish almost anything!** (Also, see *Life at the Target Stages*, at the end of this Quick Start Guide and Chapters 6 & 7 for more perspective on target stages.)

Hook..... Any part of you that is uncharacteristically in a stage higher or lower than what your default stage would indicate. Some hooks can be highly beneficial, while others extremely counterproductive. Thus, hooks can propel you forward or hold you back. **Think of your hooks as things you sometimes do, feel or believe that are anomalies or exceptions to how you normally operate via your default stage.**

Stage Climbing... A simple system for understanding just how complex you are. *Stage Climbing* uses deliberate strategies to help you develop new attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to move you forward to the higher or target stage, which you have chosen for one or more aspect(s) of your life. **Ideally, your target stage then becomes your default stage. This is the very definition of operating at what is now your highest potential.** The goal of *Stage Climbing* is literally to help you to “grow up” (or operate as a grown up) and in the shortest time possible, in those specific areas of your life where you believe you may have fallen behind. **Maturation to the point where you are operating at your highest potential is a natural process that often becomes stuck for various reasons.** *Stage Climbing* restores that natural process and brings it firmly under your control. By removing the hooks that block it, you can quickly advance to your **chosen** target stage. This book will offer you numerous strategies to do this.

Calibration..... A customized breakdown of the seven stages, each offering a different view or perspective for a specific issue or aspect of your life. Calibrations define each stage and help you pinpoint such things as **where you are now** (your default stage), versus **where you want to be** (your target stage).

Step 2- Learn the basics of the Seven Stages below:

Stages One through Four are our **normal** (or typical) **default stages from birth through late adolescence**. However, these first four stages are the ones you will most want to get beyond, as an adult. Your hooks there can be troublesome to any aspect of your life. However, as you learn more about the stages, you will find ways that certain lower stage hooks serve you well and can even be great resources and sources of enjoyment. Thus, there will be times when you will choose lower stage hooks for temporary and/or specific situations.

- Stage One-** Only possible stage during **infancy**; later can potentially render one profoundly **dependent** upon others and result in feelings of inadequacy and victimhood.
- Stage Two-** Typical stage for **toddlers**; thereafter, a life without internalized limits can result in **primitive** and undisciplined behavior, extreme self-centeredness, the tendency to act out and create much chaos for yourself and others.
- Stage Three-** Usual stage through **late childhood**; thereafter can morph into various degrees of an authoritarian personality and/or **rigid rule abider** who is extremely inflexible regarding rules and ideas.
- Stage Four-** Typical stage throughout **adolescence**; as an adult, can result in anxiety, depression, self-doubt, alienation, shame and a wide variety of neurotic and **approval seeking** behavior.
- Stage Five-** Typical stage for an **adult** in our society, where you often think of yourself as a **role juggler** or the sum of all your life roles. Your characteristic view of life at this stage is often **comfortable, dispassionate** or **neutral**. This stage offers the ideal attitudes and frame of mind to function best, while doing what is merely necessary to keep your life together and functioning in order to live in the higher stages. While a Stage Five frame of mind is important to have at times with respect to certain relationships and activities, it often results in disappointment when you expect higher degrees of fulfillment than this stage can deliver.

Stages Six and Seven are the **target stages** that most people aspire to. As you understand Stages Six and Seven, it will become clear that by removing anything which blocks that natural drive to be your best, you will quickly get to the zone where you can naturally and effortlessly operate at your **highest potential**. Most people view life at the target stages as life at its very best. **It is at the target stages that you feel the very best about yourself**. The target stages represent what you are here for or from a spiritual perspective, your life's purpose.

- Stage Six-** **Mature adult** (determined not by chronological age but by the way you conduct your life) with a strong integrity and sense of self. At Stage Six, you rise *above* your roles; and operate according to your own **unique internally generated values and passions**. To the extent that these become your driving forces; genuine spirituality, fulfillment and happiness result. This is the stage where you love, enjoy, excel and create in your own distinctive way.

Stage Seven- **The highest stage attainable.** You are beyond *needing* self-gratification; and find fulfillment as a result of your **benevolence** and your unique contribution to others, to the world and to how you can be an agent of change in some large *or* small way. At Stage Seven, your purpose outside of yourself has more importance to you than what is purely in your own self-interest.

Step 3- Understand the basic *Stage Climbing* drill:

- **Identify a hook, issue or an area of your life where you believe you are not functioning optimally:**

- **Identify the stage from which you are currently operating** with regard to the above hook, issue or aspect of your life:

Stage 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

- **Choose your target stage** (consider this your goal) from which you would like to be operating when addressing this issue or in this area of your life.

Stage 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

- **Looking at this issue through the lens of your target stage**, how do you now see it?

- **By using both the calibrations that appear in Part II and any variations of those that you customize to your own unique situation, identify the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that characterize your chosen target stage in the specific situation you have identified.** Sometimes, that's all you need to do. However, in other situations, more of the strategies in Parts I and II are needed to "hardwire" aspects of your target stage.

- **Apply whatever strategies and action steps at the end of each chapter in Part I may be needed to lock in your target stage** in order to make it your default stage with respect to that hook, issue or aspect of life. The purpose of practically all the strategies throughout this book is to help you do this.

- **With some practice and what you will learn as you read the book, this will soon become second nature.**

Chapter 14 has the complete strategies for breakthroughs in managing your hooks, making your target stage your default stage, and much more, using variations of this basic *Stage Climbing* drill.

Step 4- Read the bold print and boxes in each chapter of Part I.

However, be sure to refer to the text wherever you can use more clarification. Then read about and **apply the strategies at the end of each chapter that can be of any help to you with your unique challenges.**

Step 5- Read the introduction to Part II: Calibrating Your Stage Climb---“Where You Are Now Versus Where You Want To Be”

Then refer to the calibrations for the issue(s) you are trying to resolve and/or the aspect(s) of your life you would like to understand. These calibrations are one page each. They each offer you a glimpse of what life is at every one of the seven stages. In Part II, there is a reproducible worksheet for making your own custom calibrations at the end of each chapter (all worksheets can be downloaded at StageClimbing.com/worksheets). In addition, there are several worksheets in Chapter 14 to help you pick your target stages and further facilitate your *Stage Climbing* process.

Life at the Target Stages: How Good Can It Be?

I include this perspective in the Quick Start Section in order to give you a glimpse of **what's in it for you** to work on your Stage Climbing process. The mission of *Stage Climbing* is simple: **To help you live any aspect of your life at the target stage(s) you have chosen.** Your target stages represent the optimal life that either you are living already or can be living very soon. **You are in the target stage zone, whenever you are operating at your highest potential.** For most aspects of life, you will most likely aspire to Stages Six and Seven. Those stages also represent your unique and most authentic self. They are you at your best and happiest, because at Stages Six and Seven, you are guided by your passions, living beyond your ego and solidly aligned with your purpose. **Your target stages define you as a “grownup”.** They are where your heart *is*, as opposed to where you think it *should* be. In that sense, they can even define why you are here.

Any success, victory or windfall can trigger great feelings in you— *temporarily*. However, as you have probably noticed many times, a frame of mind that depends on external factors does not last, since you are always subject to the next life event or occurrence, and then the next one, and the one after that. The good news: **As humans, that state of fulfillment characterized by the target stages is in fact part of your natural state of being that will not fluctuate with external events.** In other words, you have **inside of you** all you will ever need to live a gloriously fulfilling life right now... No batteries are required. Getting there is where *Stage Climbing* fits into your life.

To the extent that you commit to living your life at the target stages, this could be a laundry list that defines your state of mind. Some of these items may not resonate with you; but chances are, most of them will. Therefore, the first step is to decide if you are you ready to:

- Never again, allow the expectations of others to govern you, except when they truly match those you have for yourself---in the privacy of your own mind.
- Have a strong and certain sense of self that allows you to overcome (and not be governed by) your confusion, self-doubts, fears, anxiety about the approval of others, depression and frustrations. Your own judgment and sense of what is right is no longer undermined or overpowered by the judgments of others. You no longer fear the future or death and you have a layer of emotional muscle that insulates you from the pain of feeling the negativity of others, even when it is aimed directly at you. You accept and never berate yourself. You are at

- peace, free of inner conflicts and *feel best about yourself*. Thus, self-defeating behavior is an unnecessary thing of the past. It simply no longer serves a purpose.
- No longer *blame* your parents, former love relationships, bosses, work associates or anyone else, including yourself, for the state of your life; be troubled by the past or hung up on expecting things from people that they will not or cannot deliver. Forgive all of those toward whom you still have anger or other negative feelings---including and perhaps most importantly, yourself.
 - View your self-confidence/self-esteem separately from your achievements. That is, to think of them as two parallel lines that do not meet and are never dependent on each other. Thus, your successes and failures no longer influence your opinion of yourself in any way.
 - Be aware of the infinite number of life choices available to you, feel empowered to make them and have an almost *childlike* openness to new experience.
 - Live by your passions, desires, purpose and strong determination. Recognize that your will and inner wisdom are the forces or engines that drive and motivate your life. Be passionate about your chosen activities and allow work and play to be equally joyous, your motivation to come from within yourself. External rewards are still nice, but secondary.
 - Experience life as easier and not a struggle. With much less effort than you may ever have imagined, be able to find a way to manifest almost anything you truly need.
 - Understand just how to relate to almost anyone you encounter, no matter how wise or wisdom free he or she may be. Be able to accept the right of someone else to have an alternative viewpoint, no matter how much you may disagree with it. At the same time, however, allow yourself to automatically and effortlessly discontinue or emotionally downgrade relationships with other people that are not harmonious and fulfilling. Attract---but never, need to *demand*---the love and/or support you want from those who matter most in practically any situation.
 - Have a deep and cherished internal commitment to use your natural gifts to the fullest. Know what your assets are and know how to maximize them; also understand your areas of weakness--- accept them and no longer allow them to lead you in the direction of failure. Thus, you can make the most of all you have.
 - Watch your potential keep rising higher and higher; and your best keeps getting better and better with only you determining the limits.
 - Connect to and leave your footprint on things much bigger and more important than yourself.
 - Be open on a spiritual level with purpose and gratitude, your guiding forces providing direction whenever you need it. Connect directly with God, your Higher Self or whatever you may call your source of higher power---perhaps, but not necessarily through religion. However, know that you have the ability to bypass religion and go directly to that source.
 - Be uniquely your own person and realize that your own happiness and destiny are in your hands exclusively.

If these characteristics seem farfetched or grandiose, remember that they all have one thing in common. **They are each traits that you are free to develop all by yourself, within yourself**; regardless of your status or station in life, how others see or approve of you, your standing in the community, your annual income or net worth, who you know, your educational status or anything else out of your ultimate control at this moment. That is how good your life *can be* at the target Stages Six and Seven. **You can choose to own any or all of these traits and keep them forever, beginning now.**

So how do you get there? Remember, it's a **natural phenomenon** to have that very state of mind you've been reading about. However, if you've become stuck along the way, the *Stage Climbing* process you are about to undertake could be the most important step in your journey to those target stages. In some or perhaps even most areas of your life, you may already be there. Yet, in other life areas, you --- as do most of us ---- may need to help the process along by learning about and clearing away the obstacles that block access to your target stages. While doing that, you will learn a brand new tool for understanding yourself and others, making life changes, managing your emotions, motivating people and a lot more.

[Page 112](#) picks up the discussion of the target stages and leads you to those strategies for getting there. However, **I urge you to keep these highly accessible and beneficial goals in mind**, as we focus first on the stages that you may need to climb in order to gain full access your most coveted target stages.

Part I

The Seven Stages: What They Are and How to Climb Them

“One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.”

-- Helen Keller

Introduction to the Seven Stages

In my psychology practice, couples and adults have always been my specialty. My previous books, *The Art Of Living Single* (Broder, 1988), *The Art Of Staying Together* (Broder, 1993), *Can Your Relationship Be Saved*, (Broder, 2002), and *The Secrets Of Sexual Ecstasy*, (Broder and Goldman 2004) in addition to my many articles and audio programs on such topics as anger, anxiety, depression, stress management, self-confidence, making major life changes and self-actualization strongly reflect that. Thus, whenever someone would ask me if I see children in treatment, I would politely decline and offer to refer the child elsewhere to a colleague with that specialty. However, the landscape of *Stage Climbing* prompts my response to that question to be a bit more tongue-in-cheek: **I treat children, but only those in adult bodies.** The serious side of that statement reflects a reality of why people seek help from someone in my field.

Many come to see me, because they cannot seem to find a suitable love relationship—yet I am not a matchmaker; or because their marriages are breaking up—yet I am not a divorce lawyer. I dispense no medication for people who are anxious or depressed; and I have no magical answers for those who consult me about the self-confidence issues that undermine their ability to pursue a dream or maximize whatever is most important in their lives. What I do have to offer them is help in consciously and mindfully seeing their problems through the eyes of the adults they are, and adopting the attitudes and beliefs that empower them to cope with and handle their lives optimally. Almost without exception, what brings people

to my office is what turns out to be the inability to call up those well developed, yet seemingly out of reach inner resources they often seem to have no difficulty using in other situations. Instead, they are in some way sending in a child to do the work of an adult; such as becoming too dependent on non-empathetic people while going through a divorce, surrendering to feelings of helplessness that lead to depression or being too passive and approval seeking rather than assertive with a colleague or boss. **The principles of *Stage Climbing* teach you how to choose and then consciously send in the best part of yourself to handle any given situation.** In my field, the closest thing we have to a “cure” is simply to be in charge of all your choices. **To the extent that you are the master of your choices, you are free to take whatever action is in your best interest---when possible and appropriate--- as well as find peace within yourself when accepting a situation that you don’t like is your only real option.** This power is perhaps the greatest gift you can ever give yourself!

Think of each of the seven stages that I am about to describe as distinct views of life, then realize how each of us is a unique blend of up to all seven of them and in every aspect of our lives. When you keep this in mind, you will appreciate just how complex you and I---as well as each person you have ever met or ever will---really are. **Your challenge is to understand each stage and then choose the stage(s) from which you want to operate in any given situation or part of your life.** The strategies in this book are designed to help you make and optimize those choices.

It is never the purpose of *Stage Climbing* to judge you or your values, or whatever stage with which you identify. However, I will emphatically present the downside as well as the upside of all the stages. As you read about the stages, be aware of what’s possible for you. Then honor where you are in a given area of your life. Once you do that, you will find that you’re free to recognize and then operate via the stage where you most want to be.

To stage climb is natural. You have been doing it since you were an infant. However, if the world is a classroom, as I believe it is, and living in that classroom is how you learn about life, you may sometimes need a bit of tutoring to help you when your organic or *natural process* becomes stuck or you are trying to

make a change. **I have yet to meet the person who— in at least one area of life and to some extent— does not have to help their natural maturation process along in some way, in order to reach their potential.** Virtually everyone has difficulty with something that *to them* may seem so easy for everybody else. For example, some people are generally happy and fulfilled career-wise, while leaving much to be desired with respect to their role in love relationships or their degree of self-confidence. Perhaps in your case, those things are okay, but you often find yourself worried about how others perceive you or are now bored with avocations you once considered fun. If there are people you *look up to* for what you perceive as their ability to master an aspect of life that's difficult for you, chances are you merely perceive them---whether or not with accuracy---as operating from a higher stage than you are. The same can be said for those you may *look down upon* as being representative of a lower stage in some life area or issue(s).

Why is it that most of us have experienced the notions of success, happiness, fulfillment and even spirituality as paradoxical and confusing? One major reason is that our capacity for those things develops within us or matures in stages, very much the way we physically mature in stages. Newborn babies weighing eight pounds or less possess the seeds of everything that they need to become full-grown adults. As babies grow, genetic predisposition will play a major role in their physical development and health. Of course, environmental factors, as well as simply how they choose to live their lives and care for themselves physically will become additional, crucial and long-term factors in physical health. The same is true of the ingredients for *maturity and mental* health. Each of us is born with certain seeds that give us an innately unique potential, along with talents and such things as emotional, spiritual and even creative parameters. As we evolve through our interaction with the world, it becomes our nature to find and then manifest all of our distinct preferences. This process is what Erik Erickson called “finding ourselves”; and it is the essence of maturity. (Erickson 1963)

Just as optimal body maintenance — barring death, disease or accident — will ensure physical maturity, and learning will promote intellectual maturity, the psyche has definite needs in order to mature as well. However, as we grow, certain parts of us are slower to develop than are others. *Stage*

Climbing is about recognizing those parts of you while optimizing your natural process so that you can reach your highest potential in any and every life area that you choose to pursue. In a sense, it's like going from some form of repression in your life to freedom, where you no longer blame anyone including yourself, for whatever you perceive about yourself as “not good enough” or what it “should be”. Instead, you know you own the awesome power over your destiny. This is true freedom; and each time you experience it with something new, you are changed forever!

To Get the Most Out of the *Stage Climbing* Process

- **In the pages ahead, you will read about each of the stages.** The first time you read about the seven stages, please read them in order. **Certain aspects of Stages One through Four can sometimes be painful to read about**, but you will soon learn how to make optimal use of the **hooks** there, which you choose to retain. The lower stages act as “shoulders” to stand on when growing. Stage Five may give you a perspective on some of the things in your life that don't provide you with as much fulfillment as you may want them to or expect. **The target Stages Six and Seven will clearly show you where the fulfillment is that may be eluding you and how to get there very quickly.**

- Remember that each stage pertains to you, every one of us and all of the people in your past and/or those in your life right now. As you read about the stages, be mindful of how the characteristics of all seven stages can explain a part or even many parts of yourself as well as those of virtually anyone else. **I strongly suggest that you reread this section after you have read about the first few stages, so that you can get the clearest possible perspective regarding how to apply the material to yourself and those around you in the most beneficial way.**

- Be especially mindful of how you or someone else in your life that you are close to or concerned about, responds to conflict.

➤ Notice any aspects of your life that you would like to change. The first step is to identify the parts of yourself that you will read about in the lower stages. We are or were all there! As you do this, **be aware that many of your best choices and goals will become clearer to you as you read ahead to the higher stages.** The seeds for those higher stages in all life areas reside in each of us, just waiting for us to activate them.

Your Default Stage

As you read about all seven stages, you will probably notice your tendency to identify with one particular stage more than any of the others, for each of the unique parts of your life (e.g. your relationships, parenting skills, career, and your approach to spirituality, etc.). **I refer to that particular stage as your default stage. Consider this to be currently your principal operating stage or the starting point in your Stage Climbing process for that aspect of your life.** Most importantly, your default stage tells you where you generally are now. Once you recognize this, you can then clearly determine where you want to be and select the right strategies to get there.

The best news is that you can actually have whatever default stage for any area of your life that you want. The stage you choose for your default stage is what I refer to as a target stage. You may find that in certain life areas you are already at your target stage (either through work you have previously done on yourself or through your natural *Stage Climbing* process), while other areas cry out for change in that direction. This book will help you clarify this and show you how to bring to fruition the changes you wish to make. **A great universal goal for yourself is to make your target and default stages the same.** In most aspects of life, the higher your default stage the better. A Stage Six or Seven default stage means that you have evolved optimally in that life area.

For merely the sake of simplicity and clarity, I will “personify” a stage, by speaking of Ones, Twos, Threes, Fours, Fives, Sixes and Sevens when referring to someone with a default stage characterized by any of the seven stages. However, please keep in mind that it’s extremely rare for even a single aspect of someone’s life to be accurately defined *solely* by one stage, or for anyone to

possess *all* of the traits associated with any one stage. Your default stage is simply your automatic position or the stage representing the level of maturity that now comes most naturally to you, most of the time in that specific area of life. **It is never accurate to infer that your default stage is always how you operate or the only way you can operate.** However, you will probably notice that when you think about certain people, you tend to brand them by what you perceive as their default stage in the area of their life where you are most connected to them.

Your Hooks

As you stage climb you'll invariably encounter parts of yourself that act as obstacles standing in your way of living or enjoying life at your chosen or target stage. I call these obstacles hooks. Multiple hooks in lower stages can be confused with your default stage. However, hooks are different. They are *anomalies* to the way you normally function. Think of them as your connections to stages *other than* your default stage. **Hooks are simply your thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors that are characteristic of stages other than your default stage in a given life area. Moreover, in order to be considered a hook, it needs to be identified to a specific stage.**

Beginning with those of Sigmund Freud himself, many theories have been proposed to address the question of why and how we develop what I call hooks. However, no *one* theory has stood the test of time or rigorous research. **I believe hooks develop for so many reasons---genetic/nature and/or environmental/nurture that too often an origin is not clear or even accurately traceable.** For this reason, I rarely spend a lot of time exploring the *origin* of a hook. Instead, I help people identify, understand, manage and remove them. As you will see, this is an extremely important part of the *Stage Climbing* process, as it is a key to resolving your issues. **The best news is that taking control of your hooks is very doable. Most of the strategies throughout this book will help you do this.** I also help parents raise their children in ways that will most likely help the child to complete the tasks of each stage in an age appropriate way so as not to create problematic hooks to the lower stages

that could have a negative impact later. I will have a lot more to say about the challenges of passing through each stage in the chapters ahead.

Sometimes a hook to a lower stage is like a “fly in the ointment”, explaining why you have difficulty enjoying life or some important aspect of it. Some hooks are blind spots, meaning that you don’t realize you have them, but others around you might. Other hooks, you---and perhaps only you--- are very aware of having. In this case, they might be some of the parts of yourself that you choose not to share with anyone else.

The question you need to ask yourself regarding a problematic hook is whether you are willing to do what it takes to “unhook” it---that is manage it, remove it or neutralize it. **I use the word hook as a metaphor, because these lower stage hooks to some extent, literally do hook you to a lower stage.** They are often what you recognize as your “hang-ups”. They can also work *for* you sometimes certain in specific situations---and when they do, enjoy and cultivate them---but as you will see as you read about the lower stages, more often they tend to hold you back. **This is important to remember: Each time you’ve gain control over a problematic hook---and this book will show you many ways to do that--- you have not only solved a problem, but also broken a pattern. And to break a troubling pattern is to change your life!**

However, not all hooks are bad! We also have hooks to the higher stages, which give us a peek or feel for what life can be like as we climb to our higher stages. These hooks help us to propel ourselves higher, literally as would a hook at the end of the rope, you are using to pull yourself up. So think of a hook as merely a part of you that is uncharacteristically in a higher or lower stage---or as an departure---from your present default stage. **Enjoy the hooks that benefit you and make a commitment to remove or at least neutralize the ones that don’t.**

Your default stage, together with your hooks are the prime ingredients that determine your attitudes, beliefs, much of your behavior and how you internally view your life. In other words, **at all times and with respect to any part of your life, you are operating from either your default**

stage or a hook to a stage higher or lower than your default. The effect that different hooks have on you can vary greatly. **As you recognize and become the master of your hooks, they simply become more choices.** However, the range of the effect of your hooks can be anywhere from minimal to all consuming. Thus, a hook can also be analogous to a drop of dark ink in a clear glass of water--- coloring your life greatly. On the other hand, a hook can simply be an occasional thought that if ignored, does not have to affect any aspect of your life at all.

In reading about the stages, reflect carefully on yourself at each stage. Think of a part of you with hooks in a given stage, now *or* when you used to live life that way. Also, make it a point to recognize where you now are--- honestly and introspectively. As you will see, each stage has its benefits as well as drawbacks. So **never, berate yourself regarding your default stage or lower stage hooks. They are what they are for many reasons.** Instead, acknowledge, accept, understand, and honor the reality that at any given time we are all doing the best we can. Then you are free to begin to make choices by asking yourself, "Is this where I want to be or is there something better?" You will see what the alternatives are, as you begin to learn and identify with each of the seven stages. At a later time, you may choose to re-read about all or some of the stages, keeping in mind only one aspect of your life (or someone else) that is of particular interest or concern. The more you are able to relate this material to your own life, the more powerful a tool you will find it to be and the better (and more naturally) you will be able to navigate your *Stage Climbing* process.

The choice is yours whether this book will become a life-changing event for you or merely a good read. All of my work has taught me that teaching powerful theory and state-of-the-art techniques is not quite enough. The action steps and your execution of them are the ingredients this process needs most to work its magic for you. **Start with the crucial assumption that with the right strategies and the will, there is very little you cannot overcome or achieve.** This will help you to begin to maximize the material and its impact on your life instantly, successfully and powerfully. I will provide the strategies; what you need to bring is the will and motivation. Then be relentless!

In this dialog between you and me, I provide many real life examples, but purposely avoid lengthy case studies. This is my way of helping you to keep the focus on yourself--- or whomever else you may be thinking about--- as you explore the seven stages.

CHAPTER 1

Stage One

Your Dependent Self

*“There’s a somebody I’m longing to see
I hope that he, turns out to be
someone who’ll watch over me ...”*

—George and Ira Gershwin

Picture yourself on a paradise island with people waiting on you hand and foot. You are **being taken care of** and don’t have a care or need in the world that is not being satisfied by someone else. People pay a lot of money for that feeling on a vacation. Kings have conquered countries to provide it for themselves, their families and a privileged few. **Having all your needs attended to by others can also be thought of as the definition of ideal infant care.**

These are but a few examples of Stage One at its very best. Even though it’s a great fantasy and sometimes when life gets overwhelming or stressful we wish for it, the fact is that few adults can or would consciously choose to remain in that state indefinitely.

Stage One begins at birth and is the stage of development during infancy. Thus, it is optimal to pass through this stage during the first year or two of life. **Stage One is the only possible default Stage for infants who are totally dependent on others for just about every need.** So in the Stage One world, oneself and those who play the role of caretaker and wish granter are truly all there is. Early on, infants perceive others as extensions of themselves, who exist merely to satisfy their needs.

Recently, I observed two excellent illustrations of typical Stage One behavior while walking through New York City’s Central Park. One was normal and appropriate and the other quite the opposite. The first was an infant sitting on its mother’s lap on a park bench, cooing and smiling at passersby who responded warmly. Just a few feet away, a disheveled street person sat on another bench making virtually identical

gestures as the baby (that he appeared to be unaware of), to the people who walked past him. Those passersby who had any response at all to this man reacted with disgust. The fact that the same people reacted to the same behavior in completely opposite ways was based only and obviously, on one thing — the appropriateness of the ages of the man and the baby to what they were doing. This extreme, yet obvious example illustrates an important aspect of *Stage Climbing*: what works at one stage of life, can be quite odd at another! Examples of this phenomenon can be found at every stage.

Stage One is the **Default Stage** in infancy (and sometimes old age and toward the end of life). It is also good to have hooks there when you choose or have no choice but to be taken care of by others, or simply let yourself receive without needing to give back in kind (e.g. when needy, sick or infirm; or even when letting yourself be pampered or on a vacation).

At each of the first five stages, I will discuss how the maturation process plays out naturally and organically. For the lower stages; proper care, nurturing, guidance and discipline are some of the major factors that influence how your default stage advances as you age.

At Stage One, parents and caretakers are obviously critical. “Ideal” parents and caretakers (to the extent that such a thing as ideal actually exists) provide Stage One infants something akin to unconditional love and nurturing during the first years of life, without expecting much in return. The exception might be that occasional smile or some other endearing form of acknowledgement. However, beyond infancy and most certainly, to the extent that adults become stuck emotionally in Stage One, they will characteristically continue to operate as though they and those who enable them were essentially the whole world. (For the sake of brevity, I will refer to people with a Stage One default stage or who are merely operating from Stage One as “Ones”, even though this may only characterize a single hook or aspect of their lives.) This is the darkest side of Stage One and is obviously such a distortion of reality that it could underlie symptoms as severe as those of the most extreme forms of mental disorders.

As a result of being stuck in this stage, Ones can become any of the following: chronically needy and dependent, severely narcissistic and self-centered, highly addicted and/ or dependent on harmful substances or even to an extent all of those things together. In addition, they will often live life in a state of severe dependency: perhaps even spending an entire lifetime seeking that “mother that was not there” or

one that was perceived to have consistently stifled their attempt to do things for themselves. For some Ones, the only relationships possible are those with which they are extremely enmeshed or where they can get away with remaining overly needy and self-involved.

Your **Ultimate Goal** at Stage One: To have all your needs met with minimal effort or obligation on your part

Many Ones are experienced by those around them as bottomless pits who are sorely in need of boundaries and most impossible to please in relationships. Also quite often, Ones characteristically feel entitled to anything they want. Thus, it's not hard to see how the relationships they form become the basis for those feelings of "entitlement". Moreover, many Ones marry their spouses in the first place—at least partially — because they were attracted to them not as the people they are, but to their ability to be a "good provider" or caretaker. For example, it's not uncommon for some men to marry women who they perceive as extensions of their mother: someone to cook for them, clean up after them, and take care of all life's annoyances, leaving them free to pursue their careers and hobbies. And, of course, there are the women who marry "up" — stereotypically younger women who marry older, wealthy men. Such Ones sometimes used to be referred to as "gold diggers". These types of relationships (and many other variations of them) are far from uncommon.

In the simplest terms possible, happiness at Stage One can be defined as having all of your needs met by others with no effort on your part. Perhaps a notable exception is that smile or some of the many variations of it that develop over time, similar to the way an infant relates to its mother and other caretakers. That first social skill which I sometimes refer to as a "Stage One smile" can be the thing that gets many Ones through life. As an adult, "mother" can have many aliases, such as a pathologically enabling spouse who preempts any attempt at self-sufficiency, a "sugar daddy;" a sheltered work environment or one that inadvertently condones or encourages laziness and non-productivity, such as many non-demanding (or even no show) civil service jobs; and in some cases even a shelter or mental hospital, which could metaphorically be thought of as a giant and reliable "mother".

Happiness and Success at Stage One- When life is easy with no demands or challenges to worry about and having a reliable and dependable provider of all necessities

In many cases, of course, such as with a major or chronic illness, disability or profound mental illness; self-sufficiency truly is impossible. In these cases, our Stage One hooks become healthy mechanisms that help us to cope. However, for others, Stage One hooks can foster a dependency on someone in their lives, the government, a charity or some other body or institution that takes care of them, with no thought about giving anything back or planning to regain self-sufficiency.

The extent to which you may be stuck in Stage One, is the degree to which some of these attitudes and beliefs about yourself may govern you:

“I am inadequate,” “I can’t do it”, “Life is too hard”,

“I am helpless.” (And thus,” I must be taken care of”)

“I must have someone else to satisfy me and care for my every need.”

“I have no choices or am incapable of taking the initiative, making my own choices or carrying out any significant change to make my life better.”

“I am unable to operate in any capacity other than as a victim.”

“I am and always will be unable to overcome my past or upbringing.”

“It’s no use for me even trying to make things better.”

“I must be certain that any decision I make be the right one or I won’t able to handle the consequences.”,

“What’s happened to me in the past (e.g., my childhood, etc.) makes living a happy and fulfilling life that I can now take charge of, impossible for me”.

If we think of a computer as a metaphor for the mind, our beliefs would constitute our operating system. It is our beliefs that create anger in us when someone treats us poorly, anxiety when faced with a difficult challenge or depression when we fail at something. **A major aspect of the Stage Climbing process is to change the attitudes and beliefs that underlie any unwanted hooks to the lower stages, to beliefs consistent with your target stage.** The more you do that, the more your “operating

system” will be an indicator of the choices you have made as an adult, rather than a collection of self-defeating assumptions that may have been with you since before you can even remember.

Typical triggers of key **Emotions** at Stage One:

Anger- Being abandoned (even when someone dies), neglected or deprived by whomever you depend on as your protector, provider or caretaker. Anger sometimes triggers feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and victimhood.

Anxiety- Fear of such things as abandonment (such as a relationship---even a bad one ending), physical or mental disability and extreme poverty; being, living and/or dying alone where you would be or merely feel unable to survive or change some dreaded fate.

Depression- The self-perception that results from feelings of grief, inadequacy, hopelessness or self-pity; loss, being abandoned or having to survive alone

Grief (over loss) - Self-pity can be quite intense along with anger (at who or what you have lost) over *your* difficulty about separating emotionally. You may also be in denial about (i.e., difficulty believing that someone is gone) or overwhelmed by loss resulting in conditions such as PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) or even major depression requiring intensive treatment.

Government programs, such as long-term unemployment benefits and welfare, can be godsend to many with a default stage in Stage One with respect to work ethic. However, as the saying goes, ‘there’s no free lunch’. A lifestyle grounded in dependency on others can have very high quality of *life* costs. Many people believe that one of the reasons programs such as the 1960s “war on poverty” was actually “won” by *poverty* is simple. By taking away the incentive to use your own powers and skills to rise out of poverty and become truly self-sufficient, discovering whatever you have uniquely to contribute to the world often gets put on the back burner---permanently. Many have told me they’ve found this same phenomenon to be true with alimony and other types of “conditional” entitlements, as well. However, **when the incentive to underachieve is taken away, then many will rise to the occasion and connect with their unique purpose and passion to pursue it, as we will discuss in the later stages.** Then, the drive to overcome poverty takes over, becomes second nature and is often the basis for a major life makeover.

Similarly to the reality of an infant, Ones usually lack the concept of being able to “get up and do something” to help themselves. Some Ones are actually at their best emotionally when they are sick and people cheerfully take care of them. Others at Stage One choose to stay in highly dependent and in abusive relationships that meet their most basic economic and fear-based emotional needs. Drug and alcohol addictions are common with Stage One adults who sometimes discover that by taking certain substances, they can easily feel glimpses of how life could be if only they knew how to get there. In this situation, substance abuse and other forms of self-medication act as anesthesia for the inevitable pain of feeling powerless. When upset, ones will often throw a “tantrum” to mobilize their energy and get attention--- or the opposite, which is to retreat into themselves---much like their infant counterparts.

Psychologists have long recognized that there is little, if any, correlation between maturity and intelligence. As you will see, **it’s possible to be significantly fixated or stuck in one or more life areas, at this or any stage — for various reasons of nature or nurture — yet still function remarkably well in other areas as an adult.** As we go through all the stages, it will become apparent that most of us retain certain hooks at each stage — including Stage One — even though our default stage may solidly be in the higher and even highest stages.

It’s important to note that sometimes we go back to our lower stages during periods of extreme stress or illness, when particular situations occur or at other times even by choice. Our hooks also serve to help us interact with or even to understand others with that lower default stage. Therefore, when we use our hooks or insights learned through them for those purposes, they serve us well. **It’s only when we believe that we are unable to choose to function at the higher stages; that our hooks become hang-ups that negatively affect our relationships, major life goals and attitudes.**

<p>Conflict is generally handled at Stage One by doing what is easiest, such as surrendering and/or allowing some person or force that you consider stronger or more capable than you to take over the situation, thus allowing you to wash your hands of any conflict.</p>
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Often, Ones cannot tolerate conflict and ambivalence. A typical Stage One reaction to conflict is to become absorbed in self-pity and feelings of helplessness. They don't see or even attempt to think about long-term solutions for the underlying issues that may have led to those painful feelings of victimhood in the first place. **When someone disagrees with them, Ones typically experience it as abandonment; and Ones cannot tolerate feeling abandoned.** They then will become frightened and sometimes combative. In order to survive, Ones can become most proficient at seeking even more pity and/or some type of rescue from others (for example, listening only to "fellow victims" who uncritically support their myopic point of view or by rebounding from one bad marriage to another). Some Ones even become proficient at terrorizing others into doing or providing for them by implying or expressing an intention to harm themselves if not cared for in accordance with their demands. Yet paradoxically, this kind of intense dependency usually breeds some degree of resentment in Ones toward the rescuer. Thus, relationships with Ones often consist of many double binds. **If this situation speaks to you, fortunately it can be turned around; but the first step is to recognize what is happening and why, then to commit yourself to change this pattern once and for all.**

Success at Stage One is generally defined as collecting or taking what is thrown your way without being called to task or challenged to pull your own weight. An attitudinal staple of Stage One is to ask, "What's in it for me?" without the awareness or desire even to consider giving anything back to a person or any aspect of the larger world outside of yourself.

What Motivates you at Stage One is whatever feels easiest, safest and most comfortable

Any of us who are parents can attest that one of the most difficult things to do is to give your children all you can without enabling them to feel entitled to it. As Warren Buffet wisely said of leaving a fortune to his children, *"I want to give them enough to do everything, but not enough to do nothing."* When parents are unable to perform this often-difficult balancing act, the result in a child can be a sense of entitlement. For example, a parent who repeatedly throws money at an adult child who is having financial problems is providing a Stage One solution that may be at best helpful in the short term.

However, it will not do much to change the pattern (or long-term consequences), as insisting that he or she resolves the issue without that level of parental help.

The best **Parenting** for an infant at Stage One provides unconditional love, nurturing, care and safety during the first year of life. Beyond infancy, the task is to teach them how to fend for themselves.

Sometimes the seeds for becoming those bottomless pits (unable to take responsibility and become adequately self-sufficient) are inadvertently planted and reinforced early on. However, it then becomes the child's challenge somehow to outgrow this. **The best parenting, of course, is about giving guidance that is age appropriate.** This means both accepting and tolerating (while certainly guiding) behavior that is typical of the stage that a child is in. For an infant at Stage One; that is nurturing, providing unconditional love and safety.

Teaching self-sufficiency to a varying and age appropriate degree becomes optimal thereafter--- even to adult children who are relating to their parents through their Stage One hooks! Immature behavior (that is behavior typical of a lower stage), warrants corrective measures that will help a child of any age to understand how “growing up” with respect to that behavior or attitude is to his or her advantage. Throughout the book, there will be many illustrations of this. **So the best parenting advice I can give is to parent at the stage that is most age appropriate for your child---not higher or lower. This book can be used as a source of guidelines to help you do that.**

The archetype of the princess (prince or “mama’s boy”) who is raised to have her every need served by others — rarely even eating or dressing by herself, although quite able-bodied and able-minded — is an example of normal Stage One behavior for an era of time when a climb out of it would be rarely even thought of, let alone attempted. **The problem is that feelings of helplessness, which stem from the underlying belief “I am inadequate”, become a predictable byproduct of not taking charge of your own life and destiny.** As time goes on, this can become more and more a reinforced part of the character of a One, where dependency is then the natural order of things and eventually can appear to be or feel like the only option.

Spirituality is either non-existent at Stage One or takes the form of the attitude that “God takes care of me and all of my needs; there’s nothing I need to do in return.” And indeed, whoever does take care of those with a default at Stage One (e.g.; parents, spouses, the government, a sheltered work or living environment of some type, etc.) may even be perceived as “God.” In addition, it’s certainly typical for Ones to give a great deal of power to spouses and other caretakers, who can sometimes even be extremely abusive without fearing the loss of the relationship. As many former Ones can attest, this is a very high price to pay for the illusion of a “safety net”!

Play at Stage One is a very self-involved process. Infants enjoy discovering and exploring their bodies and the sensations self-exploration gives them. In a similar way, **Stage One play for adults is any type of self-pampering: letting yourself be totally taken care of on that vacation at an all-inclusive resort or a luxury cruise, being pampered at a spa or even laying on a hammock in your backyard with a cold beer on a hot day.** I mention these because they represent healthy and desirable Stage One hooks that you probably would never choose to change. On the other hand, some people who work too hard, even find difficulty in granting themselves permission to relax or choose to let themselves enjoy these delightful Stage One hooks. (If I ever opened a travel agency that specialized in great pampering vacations, I would consider calling it “Stage One Travels.” On [page 217](#) of Part II, I include a tongue-in-cheek breakdown of vacations by all seven stages.)

Thus, fun activities and self-pampering where pure self-indulgence is the norm and spending your free time doing whatever you envision that members of the “leisure class” do are not only okay, but also very nice and rewarding diversions. **Many couples find that a custom blend of Stage One like activities--- where one partner pampers and nurtures the other without expecting anything in return, or they take turns doing it in their own unique way---to be an important and positive part of their relationship.**

Some Ones are actually envied by others! This is because they are seen to have a blessed and easy life free of conflict and hassle, where someone else provides for them and their every desire.

However, the question as to whether or not that life is a blessed or a very troubled one lies in whether their life and lifestyle is what they want, or one they are stuck in because of chronic feelings of inadequacy. The latter are a constant byproduct of the belief that there is no way out or that no other choice is possible.

Many of the “lived happily ever” stories in folklore have as an archetypal “happy ending,” moving from “slavery” to freedom and experiencing the joy of discovering how different things can be when you take charge of your destiny. However, many other stories with romantic themes that appear to end “happily” may — upon follow up — have the exact opposite conclusion when they result in such things as extreme dependency.

Stage One **attitudes about Sex**- “Putting out” is necessary to keep your partner happy and the relationship intact”. On the other hand, Stage One is also the stage that is most identified with sexual addiction, where a partner is somewhere between difficult and impossible to satisfy sexually (as is the case with most addictions) and therefore might put all aspects of his or her relationship (and/or life) at risk. Sex addicts characteristically believe that sex is exclusively about their own pleasure; and that sex partners are objects who exist solely for that purpose.

Finally, some people, regardless of how evolved they might have been previously, revert back to Stage One late in life as part of age related mental or physical decline, or even by choice in retirement. For example, being your own “caretaker” by providing well for your retirement later on is arguably one of the best things you can do for yourself. The vision and possibility of living a very easy and carefree “Stage One-like” existence in later years is often a great motivator for saving money long before retirement is an issue.

Nursing homes are often strikingly similar to nurseries when it comes to the normal behavior of both the residents and the caretakers. I observed this many times when my mother was in a nursing home. Stage One (in infancy) is the stage where trust begins to develop (Erikson,1963) This is a crucial ingredient for all of our relationships; and no matter how independent we may have been throughout life, it is possible that there will come a time when we will have to trust others once again to take care of us.

Thus, hooks in Stage One may be the very thing that helps many to make this sometimes difficult adjustment at the end of their lives. So never let them define you, but honor your Stage One hooks, as you may need them some day or perhaps even now should it be necessary to give up your independence due to a medical, psychological or economic reality.

Climbing Out of Stage One: What You Need to Know

First and foremost, it bears repeating: **blaming your parents or anyone else for what you perceive, as your predicament will only keep you stuck there!** So step one in passing through Stage One (or as you will soon see, certain other stages, as well) is to acknowledge and take responsibility for your hooks there without berating yourself any further for having them. In return for refusing to blame yourself or others, here is the good news: **Any initiative at all that you decide to take on your own is a step in the right direction to climbing to the higher stages.**

Becoming proactive and self sufficient in any area of your life where you may have previously defined yourself as being powerless or stuck, is the core of what it takes to dramatically begin the *Stage Climbing* process out of Stage One. You just have to remember to do it. The same applies to helping the Ones in your life to grow by supporting them in taking initiative. Although this statement more or less could apply to navigating, neutralizing and gaining mastery over your hooks at any stage, the act of taking initiative *itself* is generally less of an issue in the higher stages. In Stage One it's the greatest challenge, since that very lack of initiative along with the belief that, "no amount of effort I expend will make things better for me", is what chronically holds you back. This toxic belief along with the others discussed earlier in this chapter, is what becomes the self-fulfilling prophecies that keep your Stage One hooks in place and can even lock in a Stage One default in one or more areas of life.

Attitude that is most helpful for Climbing out of Stage One: "I can do it/handle it", "I am tired of being dependent and relying on others. I now want to begin taking charge of my own life", "Certainty does not exist". "Too hard implies impossible, which it isn't. Difficult is a challenge I can handle", "I choose to be free of my past, wherever it limits me". "I am no longer a victim".

For many, dependency can be extremely addicting and hard to give up — especially if someone enables you to stay dependent and/or serves as an ongoing obstacle to change, such as in a controlling or abusive relationship. Therefore, realizing how important it is to commit to and follow through on any step out of your comfort zone is more than half the battle. Freedom and perhaps worlds you would otherwise never know exist, are waiting for your discovery and lie on the other side of whatever wall keeps you stuck at Stage One. Listen to those moments of awakening when you realize that whether or not you achieve a desire or goal--- and certainly the degree to which you reach your highest potential in life--- is up to you and nobody else. **Sometimes it helps to visualize your life without the safety net that may be holding you back from taking the reins. Then do something---anything---that brings you even one small step toward your goal. In addition to the obvious benefits, each time you accomplish something you set out to do, you prove to yourself you can.**

I have seen many people in my practice for whom necessity or some form of adversity forced them to climb out of Stage One. The death of or divorce from someone on whom they heavily depended may have forced them to take on tasks, missions and goals they would have characteristically avoided if they could have somehow chosen to remain dependent. **Many people that I have seen in my practice have been shocked at what they could accomplish if only they tried.** For me this has often been an extremely inspiring phenomenon to watch. However, you do not have to wait for crisis or necessity to make this choice. The climb from Stage One is an option available to you any time you want to make it, as it applies to any aspect of your life.

Remember that you will retain hooks, however small, to whatever stage from which you climb. Sometimes your hooks to the lower stages are there for no other reason than to help you remember that period of your life, to empathize with others who are still there or simply to use them whenever it is your choice. **Just be sure that your hooks are there to serve you, never to rule you!** This is always the healthiest reason for us to retain and use our hooks to the lower stages.

Why Do We Retain Our Stage One Hooks?

When your Stage One hooks are not by choice, they can hinder your climb and pull you down. For example:

- The inability to see how life could be better (many Ones---as well as Twos and Threes do not realize that anything better for them exists.)
- The perceived ease of living some aspects of life at Stage One,
- Fear of both success and failure, which would be you telling yourself things such as, “If I take initiative and fail...I wouldn’t be able to stand it” or “If I see myself as inadequate, I won’t have to take responsibility for my failures”, also, “If I succeed at something, people will then expect more of me than I could ever deliver”.
- You have no real motivation, ambition and/or energy to leave your comfort zone, regardless of how much you tell yourself you “should” want to.
- You are hooked on the “rewards” of victimhood and are unwilling to give them up.
- Medical issues such as a major or chronic illness or disability. Severe depression and/or anxiety as well as other conditions caused by a chemical imbalance can also thwart your effort to apply the strategies necessary for change. Therefore, please note that these may first need to be treated medically. In many cases, until certain underlying medical conditions are treated and resolved, trying to remove related Stage One hooks might be experienced as amounting to little more than added frustration.

On the other hand, there are times or circumstances where hooks in Stage One enhance your life. Here are a few examples of Stage One hooks that can serve you in a positive way and when they might come in handy:

- When your choice is to be lazy, carefree or childlike in one or more areas of your life.
- The simple experience of the pleasure of being taken care of sometimes without the need to give back on a *quid pro quo* basis. This is often a nice win-win aspect of the best friendships and love relationships.

- Coping skills for being dependent or taken care of when this is necessary, such as when you are sick or incapacitated and/or have done everything within your power to learn about, make choices regarding, treat, handle and accept the reality you are facing.
- And, of course, when on vacation or enjoying down time!

If you have one or more Stage One hooks or identify with this stage as your default for an area of your life, read on for specific strategies to better understand or change the impact Stage One may have to you. You may choose to go there now or continue on to Stage Two and consider the action steps later or after you have read about all the stages.

Taking the Initiative: Climbing Out of Stage One

Stage One Action Steps You Can Now Take:

- **Identify** areas of your life where you see Stage One as being your default stage. (For example, the way in which you may relate to aging parents) Then list any areas where you may merely have unwanted hooks in Stage One. Title your list: **Things In My Life I Don't Like, But Feel Powerless to Change**.
- For each item you have identified, note **which** ones you would like to change and **why**.
- Always make sure you know exactly **what's in it for you** to make the changes you have identified. Without solid reasons that are your own (as opposed to somebody else's), you simply will not be motivated leave your comfort zone. This principle also applies with varying degrees to all the stages.
- Next, formulate a **simple goal** for each hook or aspect of your life you wish to change. In other words, if you could totally take your life into your own hands with respect to that hook, how would life be different or better?

- Now focus on **taking some steps** in the right direction. Make a long list under the heading: **If I were taking the initiative, I'd_____**. (For example, getting information about going to school or an independent financial opinion to help you evaluate the feasibility of leaving your marriage, updating your resume, etc.) Make your list as comprehensive as possible of things you could do to take some initiative with respect to those areas of your life you have identified as wanting to change.
- Using the calibrations in Part II as a guide, **challenge** those fears and anxieties that stand in your way of taking prudent action. Never let them hold you back. Settle for nothing less than taking control of your life. **Remember, each time you allow your comfort zone to overshadow your dream or goal; you are strengthening a Stage One hook.** Each time you take action in spite of a fear or anxiety, you are *Stage Climbing*.
- Fine tune and add to your list of **action steps** (ways you can take a desired initiative that you have been avoiding) — at least one for each hook that you have identified — that you are willing and committed to do immediately (even today if possible!). Remember, as soon as you begin to take those steps, your stage climb with respect to that part of your life has triumphantly begun. If you find this difficult, try as an intermediate step, simply **acting as if** you could or were taking charge. Visualize pulling it off masterfully! The more you do this, the easier it will become to commit to taking those necessary action steps.
- Stage One **Resources** include books, audios and websites that contain first person accounts of people overcoming extreme dependency on others and overcoming Stage One realities such as addiction. In addition, books and other resources for information about medication and basic mental health/mental illness issues may be pertinent. Many of these can be found at StageClimbing.com/resources. I urge you to dig into these resources for both guidance and inspiration for your stage climb and to help you manage any unwanted Stage One hooks.

CHAPTER 2

Stage Two

Your Primitive Self

“I did not have sexual relations with that woman...”

---Bill Clinton

That quote by Bill Clinton is the one that might perhaps be remembered more than anything else he said during his eight-year presidency. It is merely an illustration of how strongly Stage Two behavior can resonate by public figures from whom we tend to expect and look to for much more,

Imagine yourself once again the center of the universe---not unlike Stage One. Only this time, you have the impetus and momentum to get up off your chair and take anything you want. Imagine everybody else in your line of vision and beyond, having no feelings or needs---like expendable toys. There are no rules to follow, so no consequences for taking or destroying anything that stands in your way. Have a tantrum and the world satisfies you by delivering whatever it is you are screaming for. Then everything is just fine until you want something else; and when you do, no problem, just find a way to demand or take that too. It's all yours for the asking or taking. That's essentially the world or mindset of the toddler; and if our species required no other rules or standards for discipline, that would be humankind in a nutshell. Perhaps in very primitive times it was. Life would be good until some stronger or smarter “toddler” preyed upon you. Thus, **a good one-word description of the anarchy of Stage Two is primitive**. We were all there once---personally as a toddler and in prehistoric times as a species---and most of us on occasion still “revisit” this part of our life at times, by virtue of our Stage Two hooks.

Now, imagine a toddler with the physical and intellectual capabilities of an adult, and you have the somewhat unvarnished profile of a Stage Two default. What a life! For a more amusing rendition of adults celebrating Stage Two anarchy, rent any Marx Brothers or Three Stooges film. It's the ongoing spectacle of adults behaving like toddlers that makes them most hilarious.

Stage Two normally begins somewhere between the ages of one and two years old and optimally lasts about two years. Thus, we gradually pass through Stage Two throughout the fourth year of life. This is the stage of development where as toddlers; motivated by a combination of curiosity and our sudden ability to be mobile, we first began to discover our environment and to shift our focus toward what is going on *outside* of ourselves. **At Stage Two, we are naturally uninhibited, playful and joyous; and these traits become the Stage Two hooks we will most want to preserve throughout our lives.**

Toddlers, if given the opportunity and are ready to take it, can now become aware of other people in addition to those who act as caretakers. Since for the first time they are mobile, they also have the ability and a natural tendency to begin to “test the limits”.

Parents who are unprepared for this sudden change, sometimes become extremely frustrated and unglued in their attempts to deal with their child’s budding autonomy.

Stage Two is the normal **Default Stage** for toddlers. Your hooks there most come in handy if or when in prison; when you are cornered and forced to respond in flight/fight mode; or need to take unusually courageous, defensive, offensive or manipulative action in the moment without regard to long term implications in order to get through a crisis or immediate danger; when struggling to survive (for example, when stealing is the only option in order to feed your child). When engaging in delightfully uninhibited joy, fun and play, you are using the Stage Two hooks you probably want to cherish.

One of the most important and challenging tasks for parents of a child at Stage Two is to begin to teach the very basic rules of living in a civilized society. Ideally, this is done in such a way that when children predictably begin to rebel against those rules, they also learn about the impact and consequences of their behavior as well as the realities and demands of living in the world with other people. A parent needs to be watchful, while letting go just enough to allow the toddler to explore. Being mindful of safety while setting limits and encouraging exploration can be a daunting task for parents. This is the beginning of the development of will. It is also the first sense of power that a child feels. They certainly call it the “terrible twos” for a reason. In addition, it is at this stage where the very first and basic roots of conscience normally start developing, which will bring along with it the first installment of a child’s learning respect for authority. To the extent that parents can successfully teach toddlers to learn and accept reasonable limits without losing their zest for life, a healthy sense of autonomy can begin to

surface. This is one of the most important aspects of every youngster's development. **At Stage Two, children need to become aware that other people have feelings too; and learn that others are not extensions of--- or there merely to serve--- them. This is also the time to learn how to have fun, and to accept the reality that nobody gets everything they want all of the time.** Twos don't yet buy into this often-inconvenient and sometimes paradoxical fact.

The best **Parenting** for a toddler at Stage Two: To let the toddler explore, while teaching/setting limits and minding his or her safety. Most importantly (and at times most difficult), is not to act out *your* frustrations and emotions — especially anger — on your child. Remember, it is your job to teach that toddler civility. If that task is not accomplished now, later on, it will become much more difficult.

There are two possible consequences of insufficiently passing through this stage as a very young child. One is the danger of developing a deep sense of shame and self-doubt, which results when a toddler is deprived of the opportunity or simply fails to develop will. Then the child may even grow up to be an adult who is chronically afraid to exercise practically any kind of initiative at all---an emotional detour back to a Stage One default or the development of multiple and strong Stage One hooks and any or all of the consequences related to them.

Your **Ultimate Goal** at Stage Two is to have fun, experience joy and get exactly what you want, while staying under the radar and avoiding any scrutiny, punishment or other consequences.

On the other hand and more commonly, being stuck at Stage Two can result in a (varying) degree of disregard for rules and limits altogether. For toddlers, play normally involves learning about the world, *their* way and that means whatever is fun suits them. Toddlers love to explore; and they are not yet concerned with the consequences of their behavior. In addition, they are easily bored and tend to do and take whatever appeals to them in whatever way they can and/or feels best at that moment. With this in mind, **it's easy to see how strong hooks at this stage can manifest in extreme risk taking and rebellious behavior as an adult, without any regard to consequences.**

Remember, **it can be quite healthy and a lot of fun at any age, to hedonistically play hard and be this completely uninhibited. That's a great example of how we can call up our Stage Two hooks to serve us.** For example, many couples describe their best-uninhibited sex as a wildly enjoyable (and

certainly healthy and desirable) Stage Two hook. Thus, **in the higher stages, when you are having fun, experiencing pure joy and even making your work fun, you are choosing to do so under the guidance of your Stage Two hooks.**

However, adults with a Stage two default stage may become sociopathic or extremely self-centered and narcissistic with some similarities to those at Stage One. The difference is that narcissism grounded in Stage Two does not usually come with helplessness and inaction. Instead, there is an exaggerated sense of entitlement and power--- believing they can and “must” have or do anything they want and are entitled to act out in whatever way suits them, regardless of the effect their desires and actions have on other people or even what others think about them. Unlike those with a default stage or hooks in Stage One, older Twos will typically do whatever it takes; lie, steal, bully, distort or even commit violent acts to get what they want, believe they are “entitled to” or what their immediate and short-term desires crave. **Often Twos will do things simply because they can.** If you have ever raised or carefully observed a toddler, you can most likely see this connection.

Sometimes Stage Two hooks can also be profoundly self-defeating. This is especially true for someone with a higher default stage. For example, excessive gambling can wreak havoc on every area of your life, except for the part of you that gets the temporary adrenalin rush that the action triggers. The same can be said for drug and alcohol abuse as well as any other types of addictions such as sexual acting out, that *ignores the long-term cost of short-term gratification*. **Twos who use harmful substances do it for recreational purposes,** (as opposed to Ones who do it merely to self-medicate or provide themselves some relief from life or a painful aspect of it). **Whenever you do things you later regret as part of an addiction, look for the Stage Two hook if you want to understand that behavior logically.** Like toddlers, twos believe they must constantly have their boredom amused, as boredom is a type of discomfort they characteristically can't stand or have much difficulty tolerating.

The easiest way to satisfy your short-term needs is what you typically seek at Stage Two.

Indeed, Stage Two can be a very dark default stage to have. **With little or no regard for the feelings or rights of others, criminal behavior is common, to the degree there are strong hooks in Stage Two.** Embezzlers, con artists and other types of thieves and predators as well as even pre-meditated murderers (if there is also a tendency toward violence) have the most extreme hooks in Stage Two, which motivate them to pursue that type of behavior. The ultimate Two could be a serial killer who makes an equivalency, for example, between a minute of their own sexual pleasure and a human life they choose to take in order to get it. This is arguably humankind at its worst and would be considered the result of a rock solid default at Stage Two.

Opportunities to lure people in and/or reap rewards without paying the necessary dues or playing on a level field are some of the things that **motivate** you at Stage Two.

When adults with a default at Stage Two focus much of their entire existence on self survival and adopt one of the lifestyles just discussed, one obvious intervention is the criminal justice system. Prison is an institution that at its best — and not necessarily on purpose — is designed to promote an adult version of the kind of remedial discipline offenders may not have had during their early toddler developmental stage. At Stage One, the archetype of “mother” as caretaker is the most influential person; at Stage Two it is the “father” archetype or the disciplinarian. Thus, prison and the justice system take on the remedial role of one big and harsh “father”.

O. J. Simpson has often been cited as a person who while extremely functional in many aspects of his life, is quite dysfunctional and sociopathic in others. What we know of O. J. is an excellent example of someone who had the superb skills of a winner in his chosen field (football), yet was emotionally and behaviorally driven by huge Stage Two hooks (or perhaps a Stage Two default). The complexity and contradictions he has displayed, is the very reason so many people became absorbed in his case. If our most popular movies and TV shows or the crime novels we read are any indication, our society has always been endlessly fascinated by Stage Two characters and their impact on others. Perhaps this is because they seem to blend in so easily and appear to be so much like the rest of us, until their dark sides become apparent.

Some mental health professionals most familiar with this population have described Twos as the “ultimate or true free souls” – free of the need for self-discipline and where instant gratification and avoiding any pain of the moment is all there is. To accomplish this, Twos can skillfully be whatever they *have to be* at a given moment to get the result they need or want. **Like Ones, Twos are very focused on and preoccupied with their basic survival needs.** This is one reason why in prison, Twos function better than those at any other stage and feel most at home.

A Stage Two reaction to conflict is generally one of fight or flight, or a combination. That is, to lash out and/or run away--if at all possible. Thinking that the other person could have a valid point of view, particularly if it conflicts with theirs, is not within their realm. **Their intelligence and ability to charm, mimic sincerity and adapt can help a Two learn the system; but in reality, they believe only in fulfilling their own needs.**

Conflict is generally handled at Stage Two by using some form of deception, strong-arm tactic or doing whatever you have to do, sometimes even without limits to assure that you get your way. Thus, when acting on Stage two hooks, you might be extremely charming to manipulate someone, extremely brutal to bully or force them or any unique combination---that is whatever it takes to control, overpower and succeed in getting what you want.

Since conscience is largely undeveloped, happiness at Stage Two is simply getting what you want regardless of the effect your actions have on others or any segment of the world. Thus, many Twos live by that attitude, “the world is my oyster”---where being able to manipulate, control, bully, get around, and/or overpower people without any concept of a win-win situation is the only way to go. Most of us have a killer instinct that we use very rarely. Perhaps we reserve it for times such as when a mosquito is buzzing around our ears on a hot summer night, while we are trying to sleep. However, some Twos do not particularly care to differentiate between an annoying mosquito and a human adversary. The behavior of long-time Stage Two icons like Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, Al Capone, John Dillinger, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow and their fictional counterparts that so many of us find fascinating such as The Correlones (of Godfather fame) and Tony Soprano are only a few vivid examples of the way Twos can be capable of interacting with the world, when they are on top of their game.

Attitudes or Beliefs behind your problematic Stage Two hooks:

“I *must* always enjoy myself, have and do whatever I want, regardless of the effect I (or my actions) may have on anyone else (or even regardless of the *long term* consequences I cause to myself)”, “I don’t want to change”, “I will be/ do / say whatever I have to in order to get what I want at any given moment”, “Life, and especially any aspect of it that I am concerned with should/must be easy”, “I must always be treated well; and anyone who doesn’t is just asking for revenge”.

Success at Stage Two can simply be defined as getting away with something, whether it’s a scam of some type or merely putting something over on someone. Because there is so little sense of positive purpose, hard work is something that Twos avoid at all costs. In fact, just about all “for profit” *criminal* behavior generally has one thing in common— that there is very little time spent actually doing any work. As long as their short-term, immediate needs are met and whether or not at someone else’s expense; a strong hook in Stage Two can become a pass to feel perfectly free to act out. Lying, cheating and conning to deceive increasingly become second nature. **With a Stage Two default, in some cases, deception becomes the most comfortable way of life.**

Even when success is obtained, Twos ultimately and characteristically are almost certain to find a way to sabotage themselves and often unwittingly. This is because Twos have so much difficulty learning from their mistakes. When they are caught, they typically consider the punishment or other adverse consequences they may receive to be the problem, as opposed to a result of their behavior that prompted it. This lack of insight makes it probable that their behavior will continue to repeat itself. Usually— even if they are able to succeed temporarily by virtue of their intelligence — they will eventually fail. Therefore, in addition to being a very dark stage, Stage Two is also quite a self-destructive one.

Happiness and Success at Stage Two is simply getting away with something or achieving dominance over people. On the positive side, it’s sheer joy and the lack of unwanted inhibition.

Stage Two characters you may meet in the workplace include all of those who grab credit for successes they have little or nothing to do with, while dodging the blame for other things for which they may have been completely responsible. This happens typically with little regard for the impact their behavior has on colleagues, no matter how loyal or undeserving those colleagues may have been. Sometimes Twos even morph into unsavory executives whose practices are characterized by

bullying subordinates, illegal financial schemes, and other types of white-collar predatory behavior that can affect anyone in their orbit. Cases such as Bernard Madoff are high profile only because of the astoundingly high amounts of money he swindled. However, these types of practices are far from uncommon.

Showman P.T. Barnum famously said, "There's a sucker born every minute." By all accounts, his own default stage was in much higher than Stage Two. Yet Barnum's philosophy of why masses will come to seek entertainment through illusion, remains part of the "mission statement" of many Twos who are business people, politicians and others whose success depends on the ability to exploit and deceive others.

A Stage Two politician, for example, is out for whatever he or she can take or steal in the way of money and/or power with little or no consideration for their constituencies or the needs of anyone else other than their own. Like most Twos, they know just how to exploit, by imitating the desired emotions or necessary image and by projecting such traits as warmth — without possibly having a warm bone in their body — toward individuals, groups or crowds that give them money, power and acclaim. However, like Twos in any occupation, they can be highly abusive in private, when the cameras are turned off. Although most politicians probably rely on Stage Two hooks at times, successful politicians are likely to be much more complex as we will see as we explore the higher stages

Twos typically tend to marry or form relationships with those who are weaker, emotionally dependent and who will tolerate much while getting little in return. Twos are generally one-sided and non-empathetic, emotionally. (That is, until the partner of the Two somehow wises up and leaves the relationship.) **Twos usually view friends and lovers as resources for money, sex, power, cover and position or simply objects from which to suck energy.** However, no relationship is above being easily discarded when no longer needed, when someone tries to do some "remedial parenting" with them and set limits, when something or someone better comes along or when staying would require some type of sacrifice. Extreme sexual promiscuity under most circumstances is a Stage Two hook. Moreover, Twos

are often sexually promiscuous and deceptive about it, while requiring monogamy from their partner. **For a Two, being able to attach to another person as more than simply an object is unusual.**

In my practice, I have heard many who have been involved with Twos describe them as empty suits or hollow with little real interest in anything other than leaching--emotionally, sexually or materially-- off those who tried to be close to them. This is usually not obvious at the beginning, since Twos can be so charming when they have to be and even mimic virtually every emotion there is to get what they want. When someone they still want in their lives has had enough and is threatening to leave, Twos can often act contrite and quite conciliatory until that fed up person is back in their camp. However, as soon as the threat is over, a Two can be expected to return to that same old way of being until the next crisis. For this reason, it's not hard to see why there are many love relationships between Ones (who can often be easily manipulated through their severe dependency) and Twos (who are all too happy to use and exploit them and their vulnerability in any way they can).

What triggers these common **Emotions** in you at Stage Two:

Anger- Being caught, punished (or turned in), confined, or called upon to “pay the piper” and take responsibility for your behavior. Revenge is often the first response to adversaries. Low frustration tolerance or distress regarding anything that is not going your way will characteristically trigger an angry response.

Anxiety- The prospect of: losing your freedom, money or cover; being caught, punished or exposed for your deliberate Stage Two activities.

Depression- Having unpleasant (and usually unexpected) consequences for your behavior, from which you cannot escape

Grief- Loss may become yet another excuse for acting out and displacing feelings such as anger on to others

Spirituality in the internal sense is not yet present at Stage Two. Twos do not believe that God or a higher power of any type exists. It's not that they are atheists per se; they just have not yet gotten around to thinking and caring about or developing any spiritual principles at all. Thus, they believe that there are no consequences beyond the obvious, so long as you are not caught or exposed. In the case of Charles Manson, his cult members have described him as extremely charming and capable of presenting himself

as either normal or even profoundly evolved spiritually. This was until his true motives and intentions were exposed. Manson and others of his ilk are capable of projecting outwardly that they *are* God! **Many Twos who use religion as their way of manipulation to deceive others and as a means to an end, can mimic religiosity and “spirituality”, just as they can other things.** Acting piously or observing religious traditions for no reason except to make an impressive impact on or create a false sense of security for someone else, is never to be confused with true spiritual intentions---which do not fully manifest until the higher stages. Those who have managed to break away from some of the most repressive cults have often described “charismatic” cult leaders in that manner.

Your view of **Spirituality** at Stage Two is rather primitive: “There is no God”...”There are no consequences or rewards (karmic or otherwise) beyond the obvious that exist in this world, such as getting caught and punished versus getting away with something”...”What you see is what you get”.

However, just as having hooks in Stage One does not make you a “helpless person”, having Stage Two hooks does not mean you are a “bad person”. Never forget that since most of us have some hooks in all of the stages, it’s quite normal for most to display minor variations of Stage Two from time to time. You may occasionally cheat at cards or throw a tantrum that may even have been “cute” if you were a toddler for no good reason or when you did not get what you wanted. Perhaps you sometimes lie or exaggerate to achieve an end or to protect yourself from some unwanted consequence, purposely run a red light or evade a tollbooth (and maybe even blame the cop if you get caught), take some undeserved credit, are deceptively unfaithful to your spouse or run an aspect of your business in a dubious manner. These are choices you may or may not regret. Only you can decide on your own comfort level with your behavior; and only you in your heart of hearts know the reality of your limits when it comes to acting on your Stage Two hooks. **What would make Stage Two your default stage is the tendency to act that way most of the time, along with the inability to recognize that you can choose another way to be that will ultimately provide you with a better life.**

To the extent that an adult has not progressed beyond this stage, the bottom line is that he or she is at best emotionally capable of self-survival. The end of Stage Two is first signaled by the beginning

of conscience, where long-term consequences along with an awareness that others have needs as well, start to become a factor when choosing behavior and making other choices.

Climbing Out of Stage Two: What You Need to Know

It is somewhat unusual for people with a Stage Two default to seek help on their own accord or for that matter, to be reading a book like this. However, you the reader are likely to be thinking about some of your Stage two hooks as choices. Most of us are to some degree in that category and can manage our hooks once we recognize them, which is *quite* different than having a Stage Two default. However, the principles regarding problematic Stage Two hooks that you wish to change --- mild as they may be---can still apply.

Typically, genuine Twos have little or no anxiety or remorse, so unfortunately there often is little motivation to change. Twos are characteristically so comfortable blaming others for their problems that their lack of insight repeatedly tricks them into giving themselves a pass. At one point in my career, I spent part of my week doing evaluations and supervising treatment for federal offenders. They rarely took the initiative to seek therapy on their own. Instead, treatment was usually mandated either by the court or in some cases by someone with whom they were involved---such as a spouse---who was tiring of their Stage Two behavior.

In my experience, **Twos who thrive in therapy do so only when they can be shown how treatment or the changes that result from working on their issues benefit them, rather than those who stipulated or requested that they get help.** Thus, if they had wreaked a lot of havoc in their lives or been incarcerated, they sometimes valued treatment as part of a way to achieve their desire never again to be in that predicament.

Attitudes that are most helpful for climbing out of Stage Two: “Being excessively self-absorbed has thus far not gotten me what I thought/hoped it would, what I truly wanted or satisfaction around what I have gotten”, “Nobody has *everything* they want”, “I can’t always control how people treat me, only my reaction to them”, “Life is not always easy and I choose to accept that”, “There are long term benefits to me in treating others as I would like to be treated.

Many people whose default stage is higher than Stage Two, but with strong Stage Two hooks, are well aware of how those hooks are self defeating. If you have a history of failing relationships, losing jobs or losing money you can’t afford to lose gambling, for example; with your commitment to break this pattern, it can be quickly turned around. Therefore, **to dismantle embedded Stage Two hooks that are not benefiting you, begin by first making the decision and commitment to identify those hooks, take responsibility for them and make a commitment to choose different ways to live your life.**

Sometimes part of the process is actually to learn guilt and shame in order to help install or strengthen conscience. **This is the only stage where emotions such as guilt and shame are sometimes good sources of insight.** At the other stages, we consider those feelings quite the opposite and therefore strive to overcome them. **Learning about and recognizing the long-term consequences of thinking and behaving, as a Two is the most crucial step in motivating your climb out of this stage.** This means learning from your mistakes, rather than inventing excuses for them. Then resolve to walk down the path that is consistent with your long-term goals. For example, **consider modeling and showing genuine respect for some of the people who follow the very rules you may have fought up until now.**

Get involved with something larger than yourself. Allow people to help you without exploiting them or jumping to the conclusion that they have an ulterior motive to con *you* in some way. These are the attitudes that will help you to begin developing empathy, which is an awareness of how other people feel and how you would feel if you were the object of the same kind of actions you may be inflicting on others. You undoubtedly were taught the “golden rule” sometime in early childhood. Reconsider it as you work on Stage Two hooks: especially the “as you would have others do unto you” part. You will find many rewarding alternatives to everything Stage Two throughout this book as well as several strategies to consider and put to work for you at the conclusion of this chapter.

Why Do We Retain Our Stage Two Hooks?

Stage Two hooks have two things in common with hooks in Stage One: Both are meant to be temporary stages that we pass through early in life; and when we are operating out of them, there is often little motivation, awareness and/or confidence that better alternatives exist. These are the major reasons that Twos are so resistant to change. However, your Stage Two hooks still come in handy when:

- It is your choice (and hopefully under legal and safe circumstances) to engage in uninhibited, and highly joyous hedonistic play, consensual sexual variations unbothered by such things as guilt--- typical of a toddler's best and most fun filled mindset. This is your Stage Two hook at its best!
- Survival and taking care of yourself first, under unique circumstances, is job one. Examples include when living in a neighborhood environment where Stage Two behavior is the norm, a prison or a POW setting or anytime where you determine and believe that in order to survive, being whatever you have to be in order to handle the reality that the moment dictates is necessary.
- You believe or are unwilling to consider that you have other means of economic survival.
- You need to fend off guilt or shame at times when you actually have done something wrong or shameful and perhaps are under fire for it. Twos can be quite good at mentally "closing a door" when necessary, by simply refusing to look back or at themselves. Aligning yourself with the present moment is generally a good, healthy and highly desirable thing. However, most of us have an exceptionally difficult time doing that when something very glaring, immediate or painful is on our minds. Thus, compartmentalization of difficult painful feelings such as extreme grief, anger or anxiety can be a healthy endeavor, and certainly a good skill to learn. Twos seem to be able to do this quite naturally.
- It is your choice to manipulate or con someone. For example, good poker players depend on Stage Two hooks to win, as an important part of the sport!

- You are willing to accept the consequences, should they occur, but are betting they will not.
- You believe —as did “Robin Hood” — that you are acting for the “higher good”.
- The energy, drive and cleverness that often comes so naturally in Stage Two can certainly be put to use for noble and decent things in the higher stages, so feel free to honor that possibility. For some, the seeds of their passion that lead to good things can even be traced to Stage Two. For example, some of the most effective addiction counselors are those who were able to conquer their own addictions. They know all of the tricks and excuses. Thus, ex-offenders sometimes succeed in helping offenders with their Stage Two hooks, far better than other mental health professionals who have never “walked that walk”.
- Your rewards from Stage Two behavior outweigh any consequences. Thus, you do not see your hooks as problematic. **In other words, you just plain do not want to change.** Again, this is probably the most common reason people choose not to dismantle or neutralize the Stage Two hooks they recognize in themselves. If this is your choice, I urge you to remain open to reconsidering it often, especially if you are aware of negative consequences that result.

Learning Your Limits: Climbing Out of Stage Two

Stage Two Action Steps You Can Now Take:

- For your own eyes, of course, **Identify** and list areas of your life where you recognize hooks (e.g., a tendency to lie about certain things, gamble excessively or over indulge in recreational drugs, etc.), or a default stage in Stage Two (e.g., your tendency to conduct your career or advance at work by taking credit for undeserved things).
- Identify and list some potential **role models** who are getting it right in the areas of your life that you would like to change. What would you be doing differently if you were following their lead or the model they present? How would it be of benefit to you?

- Identify what you are **willing to change** about yourself--especially where the changes might not instantly feel gratifying, but could have long-term positive effects for you (e.g. having the type of relationship or career you want). As with Stage One, at Stage Two, becoming aware of your hooks and making a commitment to do whatever it takes to change them is the lion's share of the battle.
- Make a list of **everything** you can think of that could be called: ***"What's in it for me, personally to climb out of Stage Two?"***
- **Reflect** and answer for yourself: ***"Why must I always have what I want?"*** Do you know of any actual person first hand (celebrities or others you know only by legend do not count) who has everything he or she wants? How could your life be better if you just changed this one belief/attitude/demand?
- Consider **involving yourself** in some new form of spiritual endeavor that may have been missing for you up until now. This can be through an organized religion or just simply by discovering your own higher self as will be discussed as you read about the higher stages.
- Whether or not this is new to you, **consider the possibility** that there is a God or higher being, who melds out karmic rewards and punishments or that there are other consequences beyond the obvious ones. If that were the case, what might you change in your life and how might you operate differently with respect to the Stage Two hooks you have identified?
- With an open mind, read about some of the principles of the **spiritual path** that most interests you. Regard these teachings simply as alternative choices (not dictums) to consider and then possibly to make, whenever you are ready.

- **Think** about Twos you know or have known or tried to get close to. These could have been friends, lovers, business associates or co-workers. Perhaps they related to you through an extremely trustworthy facade, only to prove to be thoroughly untrustworthy. What did these people have in common? See if you can recognize how they may have affected you and even if you might still be susceptible to the manipulation of others like this. And if so *how? Are you still affecting others in this way?* With these insights in mind, reflect on other changes you would now like to make.

- Stage Two **Resources** include books on sociopathy, criminal behavior (white collar and otherwise) overcoming substance (e.g., drugs, sex, gambling, etc.) abuse, gangs, bullying, finding positive role models, developing spirituality and conscience development. First person accounts of people overcoming Stage Two habits and behavior can be very powerful. These and many other resources can be found at StageClimbing.com/resources.

At Stage Three (and beyond, of course), your view of the world becomes radically different.

CHAPTER 3

Stage Three

Rule Abider

“Always let your conscience be your guide.”

---Jiminy Cricket

Now imagine living in a world where everything is exactly as it "should" be. In this world, rules rule. In other words, all rules are effortlessly obeyed, all authority figures are placated, all norms are satisfied and you can easily stand up to the toughest scrutiny in any area of your life. There are no demands whatsoever being put upon you by any of the "powers that be", which you are not fully meeting or obeying. That same standard is also being met with respect to everyone who looks up to you as an authority. Thus, all rules you are in a position to impose on others are being followed as well. To the extent that you can visualize this "perfect" and seemingly "flawless" world, you are seeing not a scene out of George Orwell's frightening novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), but Stage Three at its very best. To fit in, you simply need to do and perhaps believe whatever is expected of you by the authority (or authorities) you support or fear. **As a Three, that ability and willingness to fit in and obey the rules means that life is good.**

The rest of childhood and up until early adolescence is when it's most normal for Stage Three to take place and be your default stage. This is the best time to learn, understand, tolerate, integrate and even fine-tune the many basic, yet complex rules of living in a civilized society that were first introduced and primitively set in motion during Stage Two. At Stage Three, children rarely see themselves yet as unique or one of a kind individuals; but are optimally moving in that direction. They seek and are most comfortable with solid structure. Although at times they can still be as self-centered and egocentric as children in Stage Two;

Stage Three is characterized by the ongoing development of conscience and the desire to fit in, be part of a group and connect with as well as relate to peers. You are now capable of some empathy toward others— at least with respect to *your* impact on them.

Stage Three is the normal **Default Stage** through late childhood. As an adult, your hooks there come in handy when in military type organizations or other situations where blending in and enforcing while not questioning the rules imposed on you is decidedly the best strategy; and whenever a task or mission requires that others obey you.

During Stage Three, people outside of home become important resources for the first time. Giving can now be a pleasurable experience. Peer friendships can now be chosen. A child's imagination also begins to develop richly during Stage Three. If the fruits of that imagination are encouraged and stimulated by parents and teachers, then this is the best possible scenario for creativity to expand and flourish throughout life. In addition, there is no better time for children to begin to discover that it's highly desirable to listen to their inner voices, which will become a lifelong source of and channel to the uniqueness, creativity and the motivation to take responsibility for taking charge of any aspect of life. At Stage Three, most children begin to develop hooks to the higher target stages. For example, talent in such things as music and sports begin to show up as well as an awareness of giving back through charitable activities.

Primarily, Stage Three is about learning and accepting certain rules that protect our world, save lives and teach about long-term consequences. Some are no-brainers, like to not break things, injure ourselves, maim, murder or rob people. It is our willingness to adhere to these and many similar rules that makes our species unique and puts us above the primitive nature of Stage Two. **Without our Stage Three nature, humankind probably would not have survived this long. However, the other side of our lifelong Stage Three challenge is not only to learn and understand the rules that apply to us and our world at various times, but also to question them when they no longer make sense.** For example, a hammer is a very useful instrument, but one with which you could also hurt yourself. The mind is a tool as well; and just like a hammer has its down side. One misuse of the mind is to maintain many rules that simply do not continue to work, and then to manufacture even more rules that come in the form of reasons why we and others must follow them. **At the beginning of Stage Three, the mechanism to**

distinguish, question, and dispute rules is barely developed, if at all. Ideally, this gradually changes.

In addition to parents and peers, critical others at Stage Three are teachers. Teachers are the professionals who are in a position to have the most important impact on children at Stage Three. Those who meet this challenge certainly and obviously make an indelible imprint on the students they teach and thus they can make an immeasurable contribution to the world via the infinite ripple effects that their influence generates. Sadly, however, some teachers do not fully rise to this crucial occasion. I refer here mainly to those who can teach such things as reading and math quite well, but are out of their league when it comes to encouraging creativity, critical thinking and the benefits of being an individual. Teachers who operate their careers with a Stage Three default often mistake the creativity of their students for defiance, rather than the higher stage hook that creativity is. At the extreme, overly repressive and punitive elementary school teachers can not only shut down creativity, but also unwittingly instill a hatred of school and even learning; as well as a broad fear of daring to be different. (This certainly happened to me early in elementary school where a few specific teachers tended to treat any *perceived* act of “defiance” harshly and acknowledged it in as degrading and humiliating a manner as they could get away with. I can remember once watching a prison movie as a child in first grade---where I had such a teacher--and “envying” the prisoners because they didn’t have to go to school. It wasn’t until much later on, that I was actually able to change my adversarial view of teachers!)

The best **Parenting** for a child at Stage Three: To provide a solid structure and resolve to do whatever it takes to patiently teach those complex yet basic rules of life. By providing loving guidance along with appropriate discipline, children have the best possible environment to learn all about what it takes not only to fit in, but also to thrive and begin to discover their uniqueness.

Threes rarely believe the old adage that, “rules are made to be broken”. **To a Three, a rule is a rule—simple as that. However, circumstances do not always support the black and white thinking that underlies this Stage Three notion.** Threes usually have much difficulty accepting or tolerating exceptions to rules. Thus, adult Threes, to the degree that Stage Three is their default, will characteristically tend to become something of an excessive conformist, a rigid rule abider and/or

authoritarian personality; letting the fear of punishment, authority and retribution dictate any---or at the extreme, even every---aspect of life.

Challenging rules or authority is generally out of the question. **Threes are often in a box. Closed to new ideas that question their deeply embedded rules; they seek people and situations, which merely reinforce their conformity to certain beliefs, lifestyle choices and ways to behave.** When Threes find more comfort in the rigidities they have adopted than any pain they experience as a result of being stifled by them, there is usually little reason or motivation to climb out of Stage Three. **Our “comfort zone” is what I have long referred to in previous books as a “comfortable state of discomfort”** (*Broder, 1988*). Think of that state as an internal force to be reckoned with when deciding to climb out of any stage, but especially the first three.

Your **Ultimate Goal** at Stage Three is to be conflict free.

Extreme right or left-wingers in politics, who conform to the strict dictums of an unbending ideology instead of thinking through the individual issues before taking a stand, are usually operating out of Stage Three. By contrast, choosing to be politically liberal, conservative or moderate because you have thoughtfully considered the alternatives and complexities of the issues important to you would be indicative of higher stages. Stage Three politicians typically see themselves as ruling---or at best, herding---rather than serving their constituencies. To succeed, they often rely on toady-like operatives and followers who provide them ongoing cover and validity. (This is still certainly a step up from Stage Two politicians who are merely there to exploit, deceive or defraud for power or personal gain.)

Threes are usually most comfortable in a highly structured environment such as the military, for example, where few personal decisions need to be made that require more than adherence to one rule or another. Moreover, just as the typical inmate in the criminal justice system is a Two, the typical prison guard most suited for that job would be a Three.

Conflict is generally handled at Stage Three by following a set of black and white rules that clearly dictates who is right and who is wrong.

Like most Stage Three attitudes; beliefs about gender roles, sexual behavior, making a living and certain stereotypes tend to be quite rigid and often defended with self-righteous anger. Prejudice, bigotry and intolerance are also Stage Three hooks. The old television character “Archie Bunker”, of course, was a Stage Three icon. For Threes, living without set rules about almost anything can be downright frightening and therefore unacceptable. Thus, they will typically look for and then adopt without question, a rule for everything: how to dress, what to eat, who stays home with the children versus who makes a living, whom to associate with and even what is acceptable to enjoy as a leisure time activity.

Not making waves, by doing whatever is expected of you and staying on the good side of whomever or whatever you consider the authority to be obeyed as well as your power to rule others are what **Motivate** you at Stage Three.

Most marriages and love relationships grounded in Stage Three that work well are governed by dictums that neither partner challenges. In fact, I have observed when working on difficult issues with many couples over the years, that there is often an unspoken agreement that the partners in a sense be “psychological clones” of each other. This means that they have the exact same or at best highly similar ideas and values with respect to family, finances, religion, sex, the roles of each partner and family member, child rearing and virtually all of the major issues that are staples of most relationships. Usually these are not rules they have evaluated and chosen, but those they have adopted uncritically— usually passed on from generation to generation. **It is the degree to which Stage Three is your default stage in a given area of life that determines how much disagreement you can tolerate, whether from a spouse or anyone else.** When one partner begins to climb out of Stage Three and challenges some of the basic assumptions by which the couple lives while the other partner remains attached to his or her rigidities, the relationship usually will not survive. Partners at any default stage can and certainly do grow apart; but when they do it for this reason, I look for the definitive Stage Three hook in one or both partners.

Love Relationships/Marriages, and how partners relate to each other at Stage Three:

Both the foundation and the climate for the relationship are grounded in dictums (often clichés or stereotypes) that are usually based on long standing rules and traditions; but in any case were not willfully chosen (e.g. how they met, religious or ethnic background of anyone who could be considered for involvement, who works, who stays home, the nature of their sex life, fidelity, rules like, “all marriages should/must last forever”, etc.). Disagreements often focus on who’s most compliant with whatever rules form the basis of their relationship. Control issues are usually settled by the “book of rules” as well.

It is at Stage Three that spiritual development really begins. However, just like most other things at Stage Three, spirituality is usually another set of rules to follow without question. Most often, they are the rules of an organized religion- the belief that God will take care of you, but only if you obey his commandments and/or the dictums of the religious branch or organization to which you belong. If not, you incur God’s wrath. Fundamentalist-type religious beliefs often appeal to Threes, as they leave little or nothing to question or chance. Those, as well as cult-type philosophies, which are mainly grounded in guilt and fear on the one hand and fitting in on the other, tend to give not-to-be-questioned solutions to virtually all inner conflicts.

Religion and spirituality are two entirely different things, although obviously they can be and for most people probably are highly connected. **I define spirituality as something personal and distinctive that is internal and within each of us. It is connected to our higher self (whatever form that takes), and our unique calling or life purpose.** However, what most organized religions emphasize is how humans are the same as opposed to how we are unique.

When religion is a choice that helps ground you at the deepest levels, it can become the mechanism for true spirituality to kick in. This is indicative of higher stages. On the other hand, religion by itself is an externally organized set of beliefs that define spiritual things as well as how life is to be lived. Thus, Threes often turn to the church for reliable help when trying to resolve inner conflicts (e.g., anxiety, depression or guilt) or relationship/marital issues (such as deciding whether to stay together or about sexual issues). It is at Stage Three that references to those predetermined beliefs as explained by the bible and clergy are probably the most comforting intervention.

The old cliché that says, “Never argue about religion or politics” is clearly grounded in Stage Three.

These are two areas where rigid Stage Three hooks will rarely allow enough flexibility, to recognize that there could be a valid alternative point of view that warrants any discussion at all.

What triggers these common **Emotions** in you at Stage Three:

Anger- Others who do not follow the same rules or have the same values and beliefs that you do. At its most extreme, this could include prejudice, hatred or bigotry. Anger at this stage often takes on or results from an attitude of “self-righteousness”.

Anxiety- Leaving your comfort zone, especially when “the rules” aren’t clear ...The possibility of being damned, punished or killed for doing or perhaps even thinking something different than whatever would be acceptable to a feared authority (real or imagined)...”Shades of gray”

Depression- Being unable to find the answers to a crisis or dilemma within the narrow boundaries of your comfort zone or the inability to get hold of a clear direction and/or feeling of reassurance from the “book of rules” to which you subscribe

Grief (over loss) - You practice traditional grieving rituals (such as those of your religion or community)...You may find yourself judging as wrong, others who grieve differently that you do

In authoritarian and totalitarian societies---which speak to the Stage Three hooks of those who live in them---it is the rules and dictums of the government, its dictator or other rulers that play the same or a similar role as the beliefs of a church or cult. What connects all these things to Stage Three is the absence of choice that one feels *internally* with regard to them. Of course, merely obeying out of the fear of retribution as opposed to your *belief* in the authorities is not necessarily indicative of Stage Three, as those who were forced to live in a highly repressive environment such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and other extreme totalitarian regimes have taught us.

To please authority and be pleased or appeased when *you are* the authority is what you are typically **Needing and Seeking** at Stage Three.

In Stage Three oriented extended families and social circles, age and position (e.g., being a patriarch or matriarch) grants authority automatically; as opposed to authority being earned. Interestingly, across all stages, the best predictor of a person’s career choice seems to be the field of his or her most influential parent. Sometimes not joining the family business or entering a certain career is considered as an affront to the elders in the family who might even declare such “rebels” as family “black sheep”. However, don’t

forget that as embedded as they may be, it's never too late to take a fresh look to those attitudes that no longer serve you.

Most common Stage Three attitudes about Sex:“Sex comes with a set of rules; and should only be done the right way (e.g. between married people, in the bedroom, missionary position, lights out, etc.)” ... Strong belief prevails that any form of infidelity is *always* — and perhaps unforgivably — wrong.

Threes will usually choose to resist change to their “status quo”, when maintaining it is at all possible. They’ll typically define happiness as the familiarity and the safety of fitting in with those most like them, in addition to the absence of conflict. Typically, a three will remain conflict free by consistently choosing to be what they “*should be*”, as opposed to what they *could be*; and by not making waves or in any way challenging the rules or the authority figures in their world who make or enforce those rules.

Attitudes or Beliefs behind your Stage Three hooks:

“I should/must or should not/must not (insert a rule or dictum that doesn’t serve you, but you feel compelled to obey, though you are not required to by any binding authority outside of yourself) _____”, “I must fit in by doing only what I should do and by being what I should be—that which is expected of me— or some dire consequence will result”, “Others should or must do (and even believe) things my way”.

Many Threes either are content with their lives, simply because they believe there is no other alternative or become programmed over time to give in to their anxiety automatically. Thus, they refuse to leave that all too familiar comfort zone. **In my practice, I have observed that those who seek treatment for Stage Three related issues, normally do so when that “book of rules” they have been living by no longer seems to provide them with solace, the answers or the solutions they are seeking to a daunting problem.** For example, an illness, severe loss or need to learn how to cope with some other involuntary change of circumstances (e.g., a spouse leaving or the rebellion of an older child) can be quite a wake-up call. Sometimes as a first step in helping them to work through these issues, the therapist guides them to find an exception or contradiction in their own rulebook that they can grasp, to begin the climb out of Stage Three in the necessary area of life.

To Problem Solve or when stuck or in crisis, here is where you would typically turn for help at Stage Three: The Bible, church, a trusted clergyperson or a charismatic leader who clearly spells out the rules and/or authority that needs to be adhered to in order to resolve your issue...Also, an exception or “loophole” in a rule you believe you must follow and someone (a trusted friend, family member or therapist) to help you adapt to a new way of thinking.

A definition of success at Stage Three is the ability to remain on the good side of anyone in a position of authority. Authoritarianism is the Stage Three definition of authority. An authority figure needs not have earned the authoritative quality, required by those in the higher stages (i.e., someone you choose to follow by virtue of your respect for them in their role). For example, a physician, an attorney, or any other titled professional can be seen as someone not to be questioned, merely by virtue of his or her title. For Threes, the rank, position or title— especially where someone or something holds a “hammer over you”---is what counts. Fear is often the main motivator; and Threes sometimes confuse fear with respect. As an extreme example, Fascist and dictatorial societies (e.g. Mussolini on the far right and the communism espoused by Marx, Lenin and Stalin on the far left) could not have succeeded as far as they did if the citizens didn't fear the ruler and look at their societal climate through the lens of Stage Three in order to survive (or at least act as if they did). The genuine dictator *demand*s respect, rather than *command*s it, whether or not it was earned. Mob behavior where groupthink supersedes individual morals is also governed by Stage Three thinking.

Happiness and Success at Stage Three: Living your life “properly” or righteously by staying within the black and white parameters of your world... Not drawing any negative attention to yourself, by fitting in and doing what you “should” as well as doing your part to cause others around you, to “toe the line” as well

Likewise, bosses at the workplace who operate from Stage Three generally use fear and intimidation to manage their subordinates with a “my way or the highway” attitude. Quite often in authoritarian organizations, Stage Three bosses experience their own superiors in the same way, never questioning someone of a higher position or rank. For many organizations (e.g., military, post office, police and fire departments and large construction or factory type operations), this form of “by the book” management is deliberately perceived (and often rightly so) as the only way to accomplish the organizational mission.

Threes have the most fun when doing the “right” fun activities exactly as they “should” be doing them. That is, fitting in by being like those in your peer group and feeling the support of whatever authority you (correctly or incorrectly) perceive as looking over your shoulder. An environment for fun and play is one that is safe, has a clear structure and unambiguous rules. Threes have a definite awareness of other people; and can usually relate well to members of their “tribe” who conform, have lots in common with them, similar beliefs and attitudes; and most importantly, share the same values and follow the same rules. In fact, if there were an easy definition of those who are most content at Stage Three (either as children in their normal stage of development or adults by virtue of their Stage Three hooks or default); it would be *happy conformists* who live their lives transparently and by “the book”.

Climbing Out of Stage Three: What You Need to Know

The good news is that the process of moving beyond this stage is a simple, though not always an easy one. The first step is to make that choice. Then the main challenge is to become aware of your Stage Three hooks; and recognize that there is a better way for you to live your life. Next, **take a risk or two that undermines whatever stifling rules and beliefs, you realize you’d be better off without.** Often, just the awareness of an oppressive Stage Three hook is all that’s necessary to quickly move beyond it. This is the *simple* part. However, **what may not be easy is the realization that you no longer fit in as effortlessly with certain friends, associates and family members.**

As you climb, look for alternative ways to both see and resolve conflicts. Thus, if the way you have always done something is not getting you the result you want, be open to new ideas (regardless of the area of life; e.g., work, marriage or friendships). **Dare to be different. Go out of your way to accept others who are different from you.** Work very hard at understanding their point of view and accept that other views exist and may be just as valid for someone else as yours are for you, even though you might not

agree with them. This principle also applies to those with whom you used to have much more in common than you do now.

Attitudes that are most helpful for Climbing out of Stage Three “I am ready to start examining the unquestioned rules I have lived by (and/or that I have demanded others live by), and even to consider being more flexible and open to new ideas that are now a better fit for me and my life”, “Fitting in is only one of many choices that are available to me”. “Other people have the same wide array of choices regarding how to live as I do”.

If living a fulfilling life is the product of the choices you make, then the more choices you have, the better. This is the greatest benefit of dismantling your Stage Three hooks. Thus, for the same reason, **do not insist on acceptance of your higher stage behavior from those who are operating at lower stages. They may not ever understand you. However, you can certainly choose to understand them.** Allow that sometimes you will forget that old friends and family members cannot relate to certain things about you. Preserving valuable relationships often necessitates your giving those people a pass and accepting the stubborn reality that they are doing the best they can.

However, **be mindful of how you react to people who negate your right to have a point of view different from theirs.** What you say and how you relate to them is not nearly as important as how you feel within yourself when they try to make you wrong for having your own opinion or your own way of doing things that disagrees with them. **You have the power to determine the importance to you of anyone in your life and how much influence they might have on your beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Climbing out of Stage Three is about honoring your own personal power.**

Make a special effort to look more to what people do; than to what they say or the title, position or rank they hold. Moreover, if you tend to judge people by the groups to which they belong (e.g., ethnic, racial, political parties, economic status, age, religion, sex and sexual orientation, or some other ideology, etc.) make a special effort to look beyond those factors and to the individual, instead. Whenever you do this, you are indeed moving beyond Stage Three.

Why We Retain Stage Three Hooks and When They Might Come In Handy

Here are some situations where your **Stage Three** hooks may serve you:

- You may prefer to operate out of Stage Three in certain areas of your life where that norm prevails. For example, if you were doing a stint in the military or any place where the decisions are made for you, Stage Three could be your *chosen* default stage— even if temporarily.
- When helping your children develop conscience; teaching them—without question— to learn the basic rules of behavior for living in our society and how to thrive in their school environment;
- When it is consistent with your spiritual beliefs to do so;
- Whenever you want to stay within your comfort zone and live by someone else's rules, as a way of eliminating any anxiety related to making your own choices and being responsible for them.
- In order to relate at times to certain family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers and others whom you choose to have in your life or who may not necessarily be in your life by choice;
- When you must follow someone else's rules (e.g., on an airplane when given safety instructions that must be followed or in an airport going through security, in the hospital when subjected to certain procedures, with specific aspects of your job, when doing your income tax, etc.), regardless of whether or not you like or agree with them, a hook in Stage Three could be the godsend that helps you handle a difficult environment or task, until you can go back to living life by your own default stage;

- When you believe you must be in control; and others had better follow your rules —regardless of any “control freak” image you may exude.

Awakening to New Ideas: Climbing Out of Stage Three

Stage Three Action Steps You Can Now Take:

- **Identify** and list the aspects of your life where you recognize yourself as having hooks in Stage Three (i.e., where you habitually or even blindly follow an obsolete rule that no longer works for you, no longer applies to you or possibly even conflicts with your life). In what life area(s) might Stage Three be your default stage (e.g., your marriage or parenting style or your role as a supervisor at work)?
- Be aware of and **challenge** your thinking whenever you tell yourself some variation of these two Stage Three mantras, “**I must fit in**” and/or “**I can do/be only what is expected of me**”.
- What have you always wanted to do with your life but resisted merely because you were **afraid** to “**march to the sound of a different drum**”? Make a complete list of anything that occurs to you in answer to this question, along with a list of those risks you *wish* you could now take.
- Look at each item on the lists you just made and **ask yourself**, “**What steps can I now take in order to pursue what I really want to pursue, even though it necessitates my being different or on an unfamiliar path and possibly out of my comfort zone**”?
- Next, make a commitment to **begin taking some of these risks** you have identified — perhaps very small risks at first, working your way up to the more important ones. The task is to do whatever it takes to bring yourself closer to the higher potential that you recognize for yourself.

- Make a special effort to be around and to **relate to people who are different** in some way from those to which you normally relate. At the same time, limit if possible, the amount of time you spend with and energy you give to people who insist that everyone around them must think as they do about such things as politics, lifestyle choices, religion and other areas (even sports or taste in fashion styles) where you may not agree, but still believe you have a valid point of view.

- **Pay special attention** to any tendency you have to employ a typical Stage Three reaction to conflict — where in a given situation, you passively feel compelled to follow an unchallenged rule or dictum that in reality does not fit for you. Make a strong personal commitment to resist the urge to go in any direction that is not compatible with the goals you have set for yourself or consistent with the life you want to live. If you are in an environment (e.g., your job or a relationship) where challenging the rules is just not possible, simply note this. At the appropriate time, look at and evaluate the long-term implications of staying in that environment. There will be much more perspective on this as we explore the target stages.

- Stage Three **Resources** include books on fundamentalist religion, cults, mind control, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, taking charge of your life, challenging your “shoulds” and “musts” and various management styles, etc. These and many other resources can be found at StageClimbing.com/resources.

You (as well as everyone else on this planet) are different from any other human being ever created since the beginning of time. Moreover, there will never be another exactly like you. Do something new each day to honor, rather than fight or ignore this wonderful reality!

At Stage Four, our unique identities unfold.

CHAPTER 4

Stage Four

Approval Seeker

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”

-Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FDR’s most recognized quote is actually a paraphrase of something that has been said by many notables and in numerous ways throughout history. It’s also the most important mantra that you need to remember about virtually all of your Stage Four hooks.

First, let’s look at Stage Four at its best: Imagine yourself being as famous as you could ever want to be, and being wildly admired and applauded— perhaps even routinely receiving standing ovations just for showing up! This level of admiration might come from those who are closest or most important to you (family, friends, neighbors, and others around you), by crowds of adoring strangers (as celebrities experience) or anything in between.

The idea of being universally well liked and attractive to others, being a celebrity or being a highly popular and admired luminary in your field or social circle are just a few examples of the many possible versions of that perceived reward for those with a Stage Four default. These feelings and experiences are highly appealing, for sure. However, are they as realistic or likely as you imagine them to be? What are you willing to do for them? How much energy do you wish to expend to achieve these things? And while we’re on the subject, how much money do you spend that you may not even have to buy things you don’t really need to impress people that in the grand scheme of things, hardly matter? Only you can answer these Stage Four questions. While the thrills that Fours seek are always possible for you to experience as fantasies---and you certainly don’t have to be Walter Mitty to imagine them--- what price do you pay in your life to get or strive for all of that admiration and recognition or perhaps even the degree of acceptance and approval that you tell yourself you need?

Your **Ultimate Goal** at Stage Four is to be accepted, admired, and respected by all of those who in any way matter to you; and you may not even have to know them personally.

Here is the other major Stage Four challenge: **Never judge yourself negatively about your Stage Four hooks. Instead, be mindful of what you are doing and consciously notice whether the reward is worth the effort that Stage Four hooks demand. Either way, I encourage you to resolve to accept yourself at least as much as you want other people to accept you.**

At Stage Three, you are naturally drawn and then tightly attach yourself to rules and “shoulds”, by which to live your life, in exchange for feelings of security. At Stage Four, many of those rules no longer deliver you the emotional security they once did. Thus, your natural tendency is to change direction, start questioning things and exploring new choices. While “breaking out of the pack” is highly desirable and often feels liberating, it also brings some new challenges right to the surface; such as the anxiety about being accepted, which was not a major issue when you unquestionably “blended in” and conformed at Stage Three.

Self-consciousness, at this stage triggers fears of such things as rejection, looking foolish, failure, and isolation; along with a variety of our other most common insecurities. These become the core anxieties that both constitute and underlie your Stage Four hooks. The preoccupation with love and approval from others and the drive to be or at least seem “perfect”, are all common examples of our challenges at Stage Four.

What other people think of you is in fact none of your business! Furthermore somebody else’s opinion of you is one of those things you can least control. Some people will like you because they see you as docile or in their eyes inferior to them in some way. Others could hate you, because they believe you are more successful or attractive than they are. Still others could like you for the very reason someone else dislikes you! For example, in the workplace, many of the hardest workers experience scorn or rejection from the others who resent having to live up to the higher standards these hard workers set. Thus, **how much of your life you wish to invest in what others think of you; pleasing and**

impressing others; being recognized, honored and /or accepted are certainly things most of us ponder at times. However, for Fours, these issues can be all consuming.

Stage Four is the normal stage of development during adolescence and up until early adulthood— from the ages of approximately 11 or 12 to around 21. **The psychological task of adolescence is to become secure enough within yourself, to establish a solid identity as a unique individual.** That uniqueness is a major ingredient for your foundation as a mature adult. Under the best of circumstances, you will build upon this trait for the rest of your life. Typically, adolescents can be obsessed with peer approval, fitting in with groups they select, learning how to make themselves attractive to those they wish to attract and most importantly at Stage Four, gaining acceptance from those around them. Quite naturally, a ready-made conflict develops between being that unique individual versus conforming and simply being like everyone else. **Much of the Stage Four conflict, as adolescence itself, is about determining whether to go with what is expected of you---which is typical of the Stage Three “surrender”---or to go your own way.** The latter will often work for you and lead you to good things. Other times it may not and perhaps bring you back to familiar and deeply embedded Stage Three type rules. However, as a Four, it's your choice whether and when you follow them. This ongoing dance continues throughout adolescence, until you “figure out” the right mix for you, which is a signal that you are ready to leave Stage Four.

Early love relationships are an important part of the adolescent ritual. In fact, it's been said that a perfectly sane human being goes through something akin to insanity under only two circumstances in life: during adolescence and when falling in love. Ironically, both of these are Stage Four challenges.

Stage Four is the normal Default Stage throughout adolescence. You are using your hooks here when enjoying the “buzz” or bliss of being adored in a new romance, when selling yourself and/or in a situation where the image you put out to others is important; and when it's your desire to fit into a chosen group where peer approval is required.

Parenting your adolescent child through Stage Four still involves clearly setting limits and dutifully enforcing them. However, the Stage Four balancing act that most challenges *parents* is then to step back

and watchfully allow your adolescent to make his or her own mistakes, while still being available to them, when needed, as both a safety net and their most reliable resource. Many parents of adolescents find this to be quite a difficult paradox. Kids will ultimately come to you as a resource for support, guidance and information to the extent that you let go a bit and respect their quest to discover certain things on their own.

At the same time, however, it's important for parents to administer effective discipline that focuses on addressing any behavior that crosses the line. Parenting Twos and Fours have this in common, even though most of the other challenges are as different as night and day. Those whose default stage as a parent is at Three, where they rule in a highly *authoritarian*, but not *authoritative* manner (of course, there are degrees of this) have the most trouble with their adolescents who may have outgrown this approach; and thus tend to rebel against and reject that parenting style. In other words, **parents who relate to their adolescents from Stage Three, can find dealing with their Stage Four kids akin to pure hell!** A typical adolescent response to such parenting is either to withdraw or act out; seeking whomever they can find outside the house to provide that much-desired modeling and validation. Depending on such factors as the degree of alienation from the home as well as the often-random resources available to the adolescent seeker, this can be anything from an extremely growthful experience, to a profoundly destructive one.

The best **Parenting** for an adolescent at Stage Four encourages self-exploration while carefully setting limits, letting go and allowing your adolescent make his or her own mistakes — all the while, remaining a source of love, support and guidance that he or she can turn to as needed. However, it is also crucial to provide discipline and “tough love” whenever an adolescent child crosses the line. This could be your last opportunity to be the principle source of influence for your child!

To the extent that you act on your Stage Four hooks or Stage Four becomes your default stage as an adult; anxiety, self-doubt and other forms of insecurity could be your biggest and most difficult life challenges. They can even become your principal, although generally negative, motivators. On the other hand, you might become as self-aggrandizing, highly conceited and braggadocios as the most common image of Donald Trump is, for example, about all the things he owns and has accomplished.

For some Fours, life is simply about others admiring or at the very least, thinking well of them. **Stage Four hooks can have the power to torment you to crave being loved and approved of by other people---no matter how insignificant or inappropriate they may actually be.**

That expedition for approval usually begins with parents and teachers. It can then move to peers at all levels---friends, co-workers, neighbors, eventually your children and virtually anyone else in your orbit. There is no limit to how much of your life, to the exclusion of everything else, you can devote to what virtually anyone you know of or who knows of you — either personally or by reputation — may think of you. For instance, a gay person who fears “coming out” might choose an opposite sex partner to spend his or her life with merely to blend in, or as an alternative to perceived rejection from family, friends or colleagues.

Awards, celebrity, prestige, validation, praise, love, recognition, respect and approval of you (often in a global way as opposed to merely a specific area of your life); impressing friends, acquaintances, colleagues and relatives (or even the general public) are some of the things that **Motivate** you at Stage Four.

Adolescence is the ideal time to learn how to handle conflict, since making mistakes then is normally far less consequential than it will be later in life. Perhaps **that’s why in many ways, conflict is the norm at Stage Four**. For example, if public speaking makes you nervous, think of how your anxiety about it might be a metaphor for how you see conflict. Public speaking usually turns up high on the list (often in first place) when surveys are done of “what people fear the most”. Public speaking anxiety is really a Stage Four hook. Your fear of and self-consciousness about rejection, ridicule or negative judgment by those who hear you speak, could at worst convince you to avoid these situations at the expense of a higher goal or reward for doing the speech, in spite of the anxious feeling it may trigger. The same is true for other varieties of performance anxiety, as well—whether triggered by taking a job interview or even connected with sexual performance.

Fours also tend to obsess about such things as being ostracized by a group (or even society) and what they can do to be seen by others as successful. **At Stage Four, anxieties about failing can cut very deeply into how you see yourself**. For example; an ended marriage, a financial setback, a lost job or

inability to reach an important goal can cause you to overreact by labeling yourself as “a complete failure”. **Berating yourself in a global way can then begin a vicious cycle that affects not just your self-image, but also your ability and willingness to get back into the ring and try again.** In the most extreme cases I've seen, harsh setbacks in Stage Four struggles can even trigger a tendency to give up on self esteem altogether and revert back to a Stage Two default, with extreme risk taking , profoundly rebellious or antisocial behavior along with a tendency not to care what anyone thinks at all.

Conflict is typically handled at Stage Four- By taking the road that produces the most validation from others and the least anxiety.

Self-esteem issues are generally little more than Stage Four hooks. In the best of all worlds, you would have established a foundation of self-confidence to build upon by early adolescence. It's during these years that you would both learn and understand (whether or not consciously) that **the “self” is much too vast, complex and full of strengths, weaknesses, contradictions and hooks to all seven stages to ever be able to evaluate as though it were merely one thing.** In addition to anxiety, symptoms such as depression (when not of the medical variety) are often Stage Four (as well as Stage One) hooks. Stress is that “*what if*” fear. *What if* whatever I dread (e.g., lose my status, job or relationship, fail at something important, experience rejection or humiliation, etc.) did occur? We popularly call it stress, but anxiety, depression and self-doubt are really the labels that are more appropriate.

At Stage Four, how you perceive what others think of you has a strong influence on what you think of yourself. Thus, if the assumption is that others will think less of you, then it is likely that you will think less of yourself. In the extreme, your hooks in Stage Four can even cause self-doubt to become a way of life and negatively color every aspect of it.

Peers and peer validation are therefore perceived as overly important at Stage Four. Much like Threes, but for different reasons, fours still have difficulty in truly tolerating those who are too different. But **at Stage Four, you will often tend to select friends who are most like you and then do practically anything necessary to please them, sometimes even at the cost of your own integrity.** For

example, you might find yourself using drugs, getting tattoos or participating in certain sexual activities merely for acceptance as opposed to your own desires.

What triggers these common **Emotions** in you at Stage Four:

Anger- Rejection or disappointment from others whose approval, validation or love is on some level important to you, jealousy in relationships or a betrayal by someone you thought was in your camp. Sometimes anger is turned inward to create depression or self-esteem issues.

Anxiety- Being rejected, embarrassed or seen as inadequate, “a failure” or of lesser worth by someone (or many, e.g. your peer group or even a segment of the public)

Depression- A major rejection or scorn by a person or a group whose opinion, you believe has importance to you...When your self-esteem takes a major hit or you put yourself down for some failure, real or perceived.

Grief (over loss) -Blaming yourself for somehow causing the loss as well as for any existing unfinished business that may remain

Membership in the group you choose to be a part of might be what you consider an essential goal. When you reach it, a clique mentality often develops, where you might become quite enmeshed with fellow members in Stage Three like groupthink. Maintaining group membership then becomes crucial, even if this means it's necessary to compromise or disregard some of your own values to do so. Additionally, since feeling accepted and approved of by others can become so strongly tied to your own self-acceptance, then shame and embarrassment feel especially devastating and may even trigger stronger feelings of inferiority with regard to others.

To “find yourself”...To “be somebody”... To “make something respectable of yourself”...To feel liked/loved and accepted by those in your orbit is what you are typically **Needing and Seeking** at Stage Four.

One typical Stage Four reaction to someone with whom you are in conflict is to mount a global and personal attack on that person rather than focusing on the problem that is at the center of the conflict. Another is to act rather unassertively and rush to compliance or perhaps avoid the situation altogether. In either case, the real issue would be glossed over and would remain unresolved. Fours often find that the act of confronting someone *assertively*--- or worse yet, the prospect of being rejected or berated by them can ignite a level of anxiety that transcends most other types of conflicts.

During adolescence, there is often a tendency to act in a cruel manner by bullying or berating others as a means of artificially pumping up your own self-esteem, or sometimes merely to be part of a group. **To have self-acceptance without having to berate anyone else is to say that you have successfully met a major Stage Four challenge.** If you are part of a family or group that operates in Stage Three, be aware of how you may sometimes have (or had) to *put yourself down* to Stage Three from the higher stages in order to blend in. This same phenomenon can apply to old friendships, sibling relationships, people you work with or a peer group that you have outgrown emotionally.

Happiness at Stage Four is belonging and feeling liked, loved, honored or at least recognized and accepted by those whom you value the most. For many celebrities who take themselves too seriously, the general public is part of that “Stage Four network”. Since your unique identity is still a work in progress at Stage Four, anything that triggers insecure feelings in you can feel quite painful. So in a way similar to Twos, Fours will often “be whatever they have to be” to gain acceptance or respect. **When Fours lie or mislead, they characteristically do it to impress others, unlike Twos who lie to deceive, avoid deserved punishment and for personal gain.** Many Fours live to go out of their way to seek prestige and fame, and love to feel popular and superior, even if they actually realize deep down that this is merely an illusion or a temporary state of mind.

Wanting to be an actor in order to be famous (a popular ultimate Stage Four fantasy), **as opposed to wanting to act because it is your talent, art and passion, is an example of Stage Four thinking.** The same can be said for the Stage Four attitude toward love and work. **Fours are much more concerned with being loved, than with loving another.** A teacher, for example, at Stage Four would characteristically be less interested in doing the work that teaching requires than in *being* a teacher for the stature and position it provides. A Stage Four politician is more interested in *being admired* and having high popularity than doing something meaningful for the people who elected him or her to power. Thus, the most gratifying part of the job is the prestige and admiration by constituents and others who are impressed by the office. I have seen many doctors and lawyers, for example, in my practice that disliked

the work they did, but admitted they were hooked on the prestige factor of their professions or even the degree of acceptance from their parents that they perceived for doing a certain type of work (i.e., *being* something rather than *doing* something). I once coined the lighthearted term ‘beaholic’ to describe this all too common Stage Four trait, where one is hooked or focused on their title and the image it exudes, while not really liking or living up to the actual underlying duties and responsibilities of their role.

Happiness and Success at Stage Four: Achieving acceptance, approval, fame and positive recognition; also, keeping personal relationships conflict free.

In the workplace, Fours tend to pay far more attention to how their contributions affect their own self-esteem, than the impact those contributions might have to the larger world outside of themselves. Gaining praise is often a top priority. Wise bosses who recognize the Fours among their subordinates use extra praise and validation as a major motivator. Fours work best either for or as a “benevolent dictator” type who motivates by setting up an environment characterized by warmth, affection and the feeling of “family” as opposed to the climate of fear, which is the prime motivator in Stage Three type organizations. Likewise, **Fours who would follow any type of charismatic leaders are often unrealistically idealistic and do so as a way to belong and feel cared for, rather than out of the Stage Three fear of whatever may be the consequences of leaving “the reservation”.**

As it is in Stage Three, religion is sometimes a remedy for conflict and insecurity. However, **unlike Stage Three, the purpose of religion is not to avoid “punishment”, but to get something positive.** Many Fours find such things as prayer and meditation to be excellent antidotes for their anxiety. Sometimes, this might be merely the result of the relaxation that meditation and prayer provide. On the other hand, there is now the capacity to reach for the deeper purpose achieved by handing your problems over to a loving God or higher power. In addition, religious communities and houses of worship often provide that much needed community where acceptance is a given. Fours may also experience a rift between their own developing values and those of an organized religion. **At Stage Four, it feels natural to start what for some is the beginning of a lifelong quest of questioning the values that have been instilled in you that you would not have previously dared to question.**

Your view of **Spirituality** at Stage Four consists of beliefs such as: “God is benevolent”...“If I do the right thing, God will love me”.

Stage Four hooks can trigger illusion. For example, you may see that which you are anxious about as being far bigger and more threatening than it really is. Things you are depressed about can feel far more catastrophic. **Whatever challenges your self-confidence can be experienced as far more difficult than it needs to be; and things that put you under stress, as far more consequential than the reality of the situation.**

At Stage Four, you are not yet in command of your life. You are still a passenger, not yet the driver. **You may find yourself having at least as much difficulty tolerating certain quirks in others as you have tolerating things about yourself.** Fours often suffer a great deal. Examples of this include; worry over appearances, feeling badly about things that are hardly important in the grand scheme of life and even turning your own anger toward something or someone else inward and toward yourself. In a way similar to the lower stages, **Stage Four hooks can also trigger the tendency to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.**

Some Stage Four Attitudes or Beliefs: What (some other person or people that in the grand scheme of things don't really matter) thinks of me is crucially important”, “Rejection by someone else is unbearable and a reason to reject myself”, “I must be loved or approved of by others and/or meet their expectations”, “I can only accept myself to the degree that I am accepted by others”, “I must do well at everything I do. Any result less than perfection is totally unacceptable”, “Failing at something (e.g. a relationship, a job, an exam, a sexual performance or to meet a goal) makes me a total failure (to myself, in the eyes of others or both)”, “I can't stand it when things don't go my way”.

To the extent that a marriage or love relationship is hooked in Stage Four, a good part of its foundation is insecurity. Issues such as **jealousy, the constant questioning of how much your partner loves you, and sexual performance anxiety can sadly overpower the positives.** Sometimes these relationships amount to little more than an alternative to loneliness or the insecurities of being single, rather than genuine expressions of desire for the other person. In other words, the relationship may not be very fulfilling; but there is sometimes too much insecurity to leave or possibly even think of broaching the troublesome issues head-on, which could “upset the apple cart”. A typical scenario is for

one partner to be a chronic “pleaser” who is filled with resentment at the other partner who doesn’t seem to reciprocate.

Paradoxically, many relationships between Fours can do very well, when both partners’ issues are “complimentary”, making them able to thrive together. Most romance novels as well as just about every MGM musical contain at least one Stage Four story line, such as jealousy or unrequited love. Fortunately, when both partners relate to each other at Stage Four and one begins to climb, the other may also be open to trying new attitudes, behaviors and lifestyle changes that could facilitate growth to the higher stages together — both individually and as a couple. This degree of flexibility is rarely possible at the lower stages.

No matter how solidly evolved you may be, Stage Four hooks in all aspects of life, are quite common. In fact, an adult without Stage Four hooks could be the rarest human specimen there is.

Climbing Out of Stage Four: What You Need to Know

The climb out of Stage Four simply challenges you to face down and let go of your fears, anxieties and insecurities. Few tasks in life can be more rewarding. Make a commitment to dismantle each hook that holds you back, that is diminishing the quality of your life, by causing you to fear things that present no real danger. **The main ingredients for your climb to higher stages are the self-confidence to succeed as well as undiminished self-acceptance, even when you are not successful.** These are merely attitudes that you can choose to adopt, right now.

Rising above or mastering situations that trigger your anxiety---and you know what they are---not only feels great when you do it, but also is the definition of success in gaining control of your Stage Four hooks. You will discover that taking risks, which at the very most could result in rejection or even failure, is indeed a “no lose” situation. For example, if the idea of asking someone for a date or

making a presentation produces anxiety for you, do it anyway. If you succeed, then taking this kind of risk the next time will be a bit easier. That's a no-brainer. However, **each time your risk results in that “dreaded” failure or rejection, you also win! In this case, you win by learning that you really can handle rejection when it occurs; and unpleasant as it may be, you will survive it!** Soon, you will no longer fear rejection or failure very much, regardless of how unpleasant it may briefly feel at the time. Taking prudent risks and asserting yourself can very quickly bring about a major transformation for you in important areas of life; but never taking the risk is the only *guarantee* I know of that you will *not* get what you want. As Mark Twain said, “At the end of your life you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did”. How true!

Often we fear what we simply do not understand. It is therefore important to learn as much as you can about every one of your hooks. For example, how have others successfully handled the challenges you are facing? There is no shortage of reading and audio materials that headline virtually every issue in existence. At StageClimbing.com/resources, you will find many of these highly effective self-help resources.

Attitudes that are most helpful for Climbing out of Stage Four- “People who won't accept me for who I am are no longer worth my time and attention”, “There is much more to life than putting boundless energy into fitting in and/or hoping others will admire and/or envy, love and/or approve of me”, “Love and approval from certain people may be nice, but not as essential as I have told myself it is”, “I give myself unconditional acceptance regardless of who else does or does not”, “I can only do my best, and I hereby let go of all versions of that impossible standard called perfection”, “Failing at something does not make me a failure”, “I can handle things even when I don't like them”.

Many families and peer groups unwittingly provide a breeding ground for low self-confidence and avoidance, by encouraging the “safe haven” of status quo. When this happens, the consequences of your hooks can continue to feel even more daunting. Thus, getting the help you need outside of your familiar circles of support is often the most important step. **Psychotherapy, personal coaching and group peer support; along with self-help are the best interventions to help adults climb out of Stage Four.**

Anxiety, can sometimes *feel* too intense to permit the kind of risk-taking and self-assertion that the Stage Four climb often requires. Therefore, **strategies designed to zero in on the anxiety directly (as well as**

depression resulting from such feelings as chronic frustration, for example), are most effective; and can have wide ripple effects that positively influence every aspect of your life. In the case of anxiety, hooks to Stage Four are removed by confronting each and every situation that makes you anxious, as well as the beliefs and attitudes you harbor that keep your anxieties in place. Even conditions such as agoraphobia (the literal definition of which is “fear of the marketplace”) is actuality the fear of leaving a safe environment, due to the irrational belief that some vague---but dreaded---misfortune will occur that you will be unable to handle.

Discomfort anxiety is the tendency to become angry, anxious, depressed or otherwise stressed out when things are difficult or frustrating. This includes the tendency to berate and undermine yourself. These, like all Stage Four struggles, can be effectively overcome with the right strategies---many of which are included at the end of this chapter---and a commitment to start using them now, or as soon as you want to see immediate results.

If the world is a “classroom”, psychotherapy is tutoring. There are many excellent and well-proven types of therapeutic interventions for feelings of anxiety, anger, depression, phobias and all of the possible conditions related to them. So **never, hesitate to get professional help to learn skills that you have not been able to master in that classroom of life.** This includes some basic skills in conflict resolution, coping with stress and anxiety, and assertiveness training. Life is full of conflicts. However, there is always an alternative to letting conflicts defeat you.

It should be noted that if you are still unable to see progress despite getting the help you need and committing yourself to using the self-help strategies that speak to you in order to make the climb (such as those in this book), there could be a medical reason such as chemical depression or anxiety, or even a thought disorder that needs to be treated *medically*. Psychotropic drugs, such as anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications, can be invaluable for endogenous or chemically related symptoms. Depression that is rooted in a chemical imbalance can feel quite similar to depression that is not. The same can be said for anxiety. These disorders need to be diagnosed by a professional. However, medication alone will

not resolve your Stage Four hooks and the underlying conflicts, beliefs or attitudes themselves! Once the medical issues are evaluated and treated, you can once again expect the strategies for working on your hooks to deliver results.

Remember, Stage Four fantasies can be quite compelling and desirable. If you crave adoration from others, your challenge is to determine consciously just how much of your life you are willing to devote to manifesting this and at what cost. And that approval you seek may or may not even be possible for you to get, no matter what you do. Few people would argue that it's nice to be loved approved of and accepted by others. However, it's rarely *essential*. So, if this has been an issue for you, **merely changing your expectations in the area of seeking approval can profoundly change your life. The best part is that, from now on you can give yourself at least as much acceptance and approval as you seek from others.** Then, what somebody else thinks of you will never again take on more importance than you want it to or it deserves.

Why We Retain Stage Four Hooks and When They Might Come In Handy:

- **A small degree of anxiety may be a good thing for you in that it could help keep you on your toes in certain situations where optimal performance is important.** For example, many professional performers will say that *some* anxiety gives their performance a positive edge. You may have noticed, that same phenomenon when taking a job interview, for instance.
- **Do not confuse anxiety with fear, even though they might feel the same way.** Fear can navigate you through a truly dangerous situation. It can be a life saving emotion when it is used to help ensure your physical survival. When there *is* an actual danger, fear can both alert us and arm our bodies to fight or flee most efficiently. No matter how far beyond Stage Four you have climbed, you will still have access to that channel if you ever need it. Anxiety is more about worry.

Most anxiety stifles us. However, even anxiety — a Stage Four hook—can sometimes be a benefit when it alerts you to a situation that cries out for more attention than you may be giving it.

- When “in love,” your Stage Four hooks can sometimes add to the romantic feelings of being unconditionally loved with the maximum degree of security you often experience. When this is at a fever pitch, life rarely *feels* better. (Just watch your expectations, as this phase of a relationship rarely lasts as long as you wish it would.) **So remember that if your Stage Four hooks are enhancing your life, enjoy them! Moreover, this is true of your hooks at all of the other stages as well.**
- When you need to use salesmanship skills strictly and deliberately to impress others or to make an appearance as part of a larger goal, this is also Stage Four at its best.
- **In any situation, you can always choose to listen to your Stage Four hooks and then determine that it’s in your best interest take the safe road.** When this is your choice, honor it until there is a better alternative.

Accepting Yourself: Climbing Out of Stage Four

Stage Four Action Steps You Can Now Take:

- Note the area(s) of your life where Stage Four might be your default. **Identify** and list all of the Stage Four hooks you can recognize —especially those you would like to eliminate.
- **Imagine getting all of the love and admiration** you could ever want from anyone and everyone on your radar screen (close people in your life and/ or even those who look at you from a distance). Imagine being a highly popular and sought out luminary in your field. How does that

feel? You can certainly create your ideal Stage Four fantasy in your own mind, whenever you choose. Take a minute to imagine just what in the areas of acceptance and approval for you would be ultimate. Here are a few other Stage Four questions to consider and reflect upon--- How much energy do you put into being loved, “applauded”, admired, revered, idolized, and into creating an image for that admiration? Is it worth it (especially if you can create the feelings it provides without expending the frustrating or desperate energy this requires)? If you had complete control of your Stage Four hooks, what would you do differently? What is preventing you from providing to yourself (in the area of acceptance) what you are seeking from others? Write out your reflections to these questions, refer to and revise them often.

- Imagine for a moment that you were **absolutely fearless** and immune to anxiety. (For example, you did not *fear* rejection from others, the prospect of looking foolish or even publicly failing at something you consider important, etc.) What are some things you would do differently, or life changes you would make that perhaps your fears or anxieties now put beyond your reach? Make a comprehensive list of whatever comes up for you, along with an idea or two for a strategy to take at least one *prudent* risk to counter each fear you listed. (For example, begin researching a job change you are wanting to make, asking your boss for a raise, asking someone out for a date, or bringing up a difficult issue that you have been avoiding with a friend or your spouse.)
- **What is the worst possible thing that could happen** if what you feared the most actually became a reality (e.g., a rejection by someone you asked out for a date)? Ask yourself, “Are the consequences really so dire that I need to continue avoiding it or living my life in deference to that fear?” If the answer is yes, then ask yourself “why”? Do not give up challenging these beliefs you have until you are satisfied that you are acting out of *choice*, rather than unwarranted fear or anxiety.
- Be aware of how you may be **confusing insight** (the healthy learning that results from both positive and negative life experiences) and **hindsight** (berating yourself for not knowing “then

what you know now”). Which of your hooks are fueled by hindsight? What do you *now* need to believe to replace hindsight with insight in one or more important aspects of your life?

- Try spending an hour at first, and work your way up to an entire day **acting as if** you were genuinely fearless. Consciously walk and even breathe as though you were fearless. First, try it on a day or at a time when there is not much going on, like during a weekend or day off that you can spend alone. Notice what comes up for you. Gradually extend this new mind-set to the times when it would matter most, such as during the week---perhaps to handle a “dreaded” work confrontation. Notice how much easier acting fearlessly becomes, as you are more familiar and comfortable with this attitude and posture. The great performers, such as Sir Laurence Olivier, often had stage fright but knew how to act as if they were in complete control, in spite of it. Soon the jitters would disappear, meaning that they “fooled” themselves as much as they were able to convince everyone else of their self-confidence!
- Next, **apply these tools to your biggest fear or anxiety**. First, identify it; and then allow yourself to visualize how your life could be different if this fear or anxiety were permanently gone. Once you have done this, make a detailed strategy to finally obliterate the power of that hook which underlies your anxiety. (Be sure to repeat this step for every major Stage Four hook you have identified, that you want to eliminate.) Then revisit the last exercise and spend time in the situation, specifically *acting as if* you were not afraid of the feared items that haunt you the most.
- **Put the spotlight on any and all of the remaining areas** that you are depressed about, anxious about, angry about, stressed about and that prompt you to question your self-confidence. Sometimes it especially helps to look at each of your issues separately and as though it were your only challenge. How would someone you truly *looked up to* handle the problem you are working on? What would have to change within yourself for you to be able to deal with it as masterfully as the person you most admire could? Whether or not he or she is even aware of your struggle (or aware that you exist), use that person as a model as you proceed to face anything

that triggers your anxiety or other types of upset. Working on these aspects of your life can be a major challenge; but conquering them will be extremely rewarding and well worth any effort it takes.

- Reserve your highest level of **respect** for people according to what they *do*, not merely what they say, how nice they are to you or the position they hold.

- **Forgive** those toward whom you hold anger. This can be a very liberating experience *for you*. Forgiving does not mean that you excuse their behavior. It simply means that you are *letting go of the pain you feel within yourself* with respect to them. This will free your energy for bigger and better things.

- Consider getting psychotherapy, coaching or other forms of **professional help** with any of the Stage Four hooks in your way that you cannot seem to handle by using the specific strategies in this book (including those in Chapter 14 that zero in on managing hooks across all seven stages).

- Stage Four **Resources** include cognitive behavioral self-help for anxiety, depression, anger, self-confidence and applications such as dating, beginning new love relationships, changing a job or career, making major life changes; and much more at StageClimbing.com/resources

At Stage Five, the balance of our life roles takes center stage.

CHAPTER 5

Stage Five

Role Juggler

“Be open to everything, but attached to nothing.”

---The Buddha

In our modern Western society, Stage Five is the most likely default stage for most aspects of the life we consider to be that of a “normal adult”. **Stage Five is also the stage at which we keep our lives working, sane and together.** As late adolescence morphs into early adulthood, we gradually begin to operate more and more areas of our lives out of Stage Five.

Sigmund Freud’s description of the “normal adult” is one who is able “to love, work and play” (Erickson, 1963). This is actually, where Freud’s developmental theory stopped; or is the stage that Freud would have seen---*in Stage Climbing* terms---as a target stage. That definition as paraphrased by many others over the years has come to mean keeping our lives balanced and our roles clear. It should be noted that Freud will always be known for many great things, but being a particularly happy man is not one of them. At Stage Five, keeping your roles in balance and problem free is often your definition of winning; but for reasons we will explore, **Stage Five often falls short on delivering the degree of happiness you want, expect or one that is of a lasting nature.**

Stage Five is also the most emotionally neutral or dispassionate of all the stages. Neutral, in that when making a life change (i.e., bringing something new into your life or taking something out of it), Fives are the most likely to evaluate objectively how it fits in with everything else and thus affects the big picture or life’s balance. For example, when deciding whether to buy a new house, it is your Stage Five self that runs the numbers to determine whether the purchase is financially practical, the house is in the right neighborhood and has access to quality schools. How you feel about the house itself is incidental at

Stage Five. **Other stages tend to be governed more by desire or emotions, be they positive (such as love or joy) or negative (like fear or grief).**

Normalcy, “peace and quiet” and abundance are what you are typically **Needing and Seeking** at Stage Five.

It is also the stage where we take care of logistics. Chores that you do not particularly enjoy, but that still need to be done are excellent examples of functions that are performed best from a Stage Five frame of mind. For instance, when commuting to work, you are probably operating out of Stage Five — in the role of traveler — as a means to an end. Managing your portfolio, doing your income tax, cleaning your house, taking out the trash, backing up your computer ---for most people who lack an intrinsic interest in such things--- or the best attitude for walking your dog on a cold rainy night when you'd rather be inside sleeping are a few examples of this. At Stage Five, you are not doing these chores so much out of a (Stage Three) fear or adherence to rules, but more as part of a larger choice you have made, such as maintaining your assets, having a clean house or enjoying a dog you love. **You might say we need a Stage Five frame of mind as our built-in “adult supervision” component in order get us through the day.**

Stage Five is the “normal” **Default Stage** for adults in our society: Normal starting in and then going beyond early adulthood. You are using your Stage five hooks when it's important to attend to and create a structure for necessary aspects of your life from which you may or may not get heartfelt enjoyment (e.g. managing finances, doing chores, taking care of health rituals, being around people you would rather not be with, etc.); in order to provide for yourself and/or family; to maintain balance in your life and lifestyle and sometimes so that you can support your highest (target) stage endeavors that you will begin to read about in the next chapter.

At Stage Five, you can now have mature relationships. Since you are finally capable of deep connection without being preoccupied by the love and approval that comes in your direction (as in Stage Four), you are able to choose to reveal much more of your true nature to those close to you without constantly fearing their judgment or rejection. This includes your spouse (or significant other), family and close friends, colleagues or anyone else that may be important to you. **You can now have deep bonds without becoming too enmeshed, submerged or obsessed with them. True intimacy can now**

develop and thrive. No longer do you expect your partner, friends, children or others around you to be or become clones of yourself.

The best **Parenting** you can give an adult child at Stage Five is where it is recognized that you had a certain number of years to influence your children by example. Chances are that whatever they have not learned from you — regardless of whether or not that was by choice — by the time *they* reach Stage Five, they will most likely choose to learn elsewhere. So let go of any need to control their lives. Allow and honor the right of your adult children to be independent and different from you. By doing this you will command respect.

However, the role in your life that a relationship plays--- including the void or slot it fills--- can be inordinately important. At Stage Five, those roles can sometimes be even more significant than the people who fill them. For example, if you are seeking a new and permanent love relationship, you might make it a mission to go out and meet suitable candidates in order to fill that slot or void. Then, perhaps you move toward becoming involved with the one that you liked the best. This is in contrast to higher stages where you would consider involvement only after meeting the person you believe you wish to spend your life with.

At Stage Five, you are comfortable in your own skin. You are also in a position to feel secure in a richer and deeper sense. With that, comes much awaited feelings of contentment, satisfaction, self- acceptance and a better recognition of your strengths and weaknesses. You no longer think of or judge yourself in global terms. The idea of taking risks is much less intimidating than it ever could have been in Stage Four or below. You have taken certain risks. Some have not turned so out well, but you realize that you have survived; and been able to use your failures as sources of insight, as opposed to hindsight-based excuses for berating yourself. Therefore, **you now see wisdom and value in leaving your comfort zone at times in order to flourish, in almost any desired aspect of your life.** Nevertheless, **to the degree that your default stage is at Stage Five and whether or not you consciously acknowledge it, you are often likely to think of yourself as the sum total of your roles.**

Your **Ultimate Goal** at Stage Five- To be content and have comfort and affluence (and/or whatever you believe is necessary for living a good and worthwhile life), as well as all of your roles optimally and satisfactorily covered

A Stage Five marriage or love relationship is about filling various roles as well; lover, friend, co-parent, tennis partner, confidant, a great roommate or travel companion, etc. In fact, arranged marriages, which are still common in some cultures and with few exceptions were the rule almost everywhere until early in the last century, are a Stage Five solution to the problem of finding a suitable mate in order to start a family and have children (who will grow into the role of helping with certain tasks, etc.). A more modern counterpart to that is a dating service or internet-matching techniques that look for role compatibility, first; with the hope that attraction, passion and real connection between the partners---today's most common requirements for a lasting relationship---will then follow. Those virtues are discussed in Stage Six.

Couples with Stage Five marriages, may feel a void once they become empty nesters. Sometimes this will put an unexpected strain on a marriage. A Stage Five solution may be to substitute grandchildren and find a way to live vicariously through them as well as adult children. However, **to command respect without demanding it and to accept that your adult children will be different from you is finally possible at Stage Five.** There is much more difficulty with and rigidity about things such as this in the lower stages.

Love Relationships/Marriages-- and how partners relate to each other at Stage Five: Each partner dutifully fulfills the other's spouse/ relationship slot and all that it entails (e.g. sex partner, financial partner, companion, co-parent, someone with whom to share and be intimate, etc.). However, partners are not necessarily governed by passion or strong attachment that transcends their roles, in many aspects of the relationship.

You can see how a couple that related well when each had a Stage Four love relationship default (e.g., providing each other with security and validation of each other's self-esteem) could be prone to growing apart at Stage Five. Moreover, many relationships and marriages that were never previously at risk may stop working for either partner when one climbs to Stage Five, and the roles become different or less compatible. The same holds true when a partner doesn't or is unable to fulfill his or her role well, such as breadwinner or parent. Stage Four relationships also encounter difficulty when a partner outgrows the need for constant validation and then realizes that in reality the relationship provides little else. At the

same time, **many marriages that started out in the higher stages, but are no longer passionate, choose to stay together for the roles they fulfill in each partner. This is far from uncommon. Such couples are often content with Stage Five as the default---and perhaps even the target--- stage for their marriage or love relationship.**

Most common Stage Five attitudes about Sex: “In addition to procreation, sex is a healthy, normal and nice way to have good sensations as well as an important part of any marriage or love relationship.” “Sex is not always orgasmic, but it usually feels good, satisfies my sex drive and is rarely an issue in the relationship.” Both partners generally agree on frequency, preferences regarding how to have sex and the way it is initiated.

Your career at Stage Five would operate under a similar philosophy. If the ultimate Stage Four career fantasy makes you famous, the definitive Stage Five dream is to be rich or at least as financially comfortable enough, to not have to be beholden to anyone (unless you choose to be). **Work fulfills the breadwinner role with external rewards such as money, to be able to afford the type of lifestyle you desire, acceptable hours, good working conditions or an easy commute, etc.** Therefore, the compatibility of your work with your other roles is generally your prime motivator. To the extent that your career is at a Stage Five default, you would probably choose to be spending your time in other ways if you did not need the money or such other things as the benefits, the group affiliation and connections that work provides. Thus, **your work is not yet a part of your soul, life purpose or a calling. Enjoying your work at Stage Five is optional, no matter how good at it you are.** At Stage Five, you also do not yet require a passionate connection the actual contribution your work makes to the world.

Some troublesome Stage Five attitudes or beliefs: “I can’t (or I don’t want to) handle (fill in the blank_____) in my life right now--- I am overwhelmed”, “I feel trapped with no way out”, “I must keep it all together and step up to the plate with respect to all of my roles and obligations (e.g. spouse, parent, breadwinner, etc.), regardless of whether or not those roles are working or provide me feelings of satisfaction or gratification---I have no choice.”

Boredom and discontent with your job or career is extremely common. When someone asks why you do your type of work, a typical Stage Five answer is likely to be “because that’s my job” or to cite the money, pension plan or other tangible rewards and/or lack of negatives your job provides you. For example, if you were a writer motivated at Stage Five, your reason for doing a certain project is not so much because you have something to say, as it is for what you are paid or as a means to get recognition

for additional work. Schoolteachers operating at Stage Five will most likely be more motivated by summers off, the benefit package, shorter hours and job security than the opportunity to influence and shape the lives of the students they teach. Teachers who are Fives see students as a means to the job benefits, rather than the other way around.

The idea of leaving a job you do not particularly like, but which provides more money and benefits than you could get at another job you may enjoy more, might feel unthinkable---or at least be a very difficult conflict---at Stage Five. (An exception might be if there was so much negative residue from the better paying job, that it taints other areas of your life or your overall sense of well being.)

What triggers these common **Emotions** in you at Stage Five:

Anger- Things or people you perceive as overwhelming you or throwing your life out of balance or control. Fives still have difficulty with forgiving adversaries as long as any remnants of an anger-producing situation remain.

Anxiety- Becoming unglued as your roles expand; or worry that circumstances will overwhelm or render you unable to fulfill them effectively.

Depression- Having an important role in your life (e.g., a relationship, financial situation or career) change (usually a loss) in a way that is undesirable to you and out of your control to reverse or correct; also a general or vague sense of boredom or unfulfillment

Grief (over loss) - Putting the pieces (and roles) of your life back together again, often by finding a substitute for whatever or whomever you have lost.

You can take on any number of roles, at Stage Five at the same time---for example: leader, follower, admirer, student, mentor, hero, or skeptic. Even hobbies take on a role you want filled in your life, such as that of killing excess time or providing a social outlet. Exercise helps you to maintain your role as a fit and healthy person. Sporting events, perhaps the role of providing a family activity for Sunday afternoons; and vacations can fulfill the role of helping you “recharge your batteries”. These are all examples of fine motives for these activities. However, the degree of your actual *enjoyment* of them is not necessarily factored in at Stage Five. Thus, a Stage Five vacation might be visiting a country you have never been to, seeing and busily doing as much as time permits; even though a heartfelt interest or

curiosity for the place may not be there. Another example is going to a resort you never really cared to visit, because you need somewhere to go for vacation and it's a bargain.

Money, benefits, privileges, respect from others specifically for how you handle your roles and responsibilities or a particular aspect of your life are what **Motivate** you at Stage Five.

Fives may still at times have a strong need for uniformity and status quo. Voids in your life that are caused by things beyond your control or created by an empty role, can be quite troubling. For example, going through a divorce, separation or the death of a loved one; loss of job, career, change in financial or social status, retirement or a serious illness; or loss of membership to an important group you belong to can trigger a panic surrounding the possibility that you and your existence are unraveling. Thus, despite how content you may *usually* be, a major setback can feel at times, as though your entire life is falling apart. When this happens, you might temporarily revert back to Stage Four and experience many of the same symptoms and feelings of anxiety, depression or anger that are typical of Stage Four conflict and thus familiar to you. However, during your most reflective moments, you know you have been here before and will bounce back as soon as the crisis is over. As a Four, you may not have been able to realize this or come back to normal without more difficulty. Therefore, even a full-blown emotional crisis is generally shorter, tends to feel much less devastating and easier to resolve. **Resolution quickly happens when the void becomes filled again or you realize that you can cope with it.**

Conflict is typically handled at Stage Five by evaluating whether and how the source of your conflict is related to your bigger picture, then by taking the action(s) that come as close as possible to rebalancing your life.

The most important role models to you at Stage Five often include heroes and mentors; usually those who are more advanced or successful in your same field, or who have already achieved certain goals for which you are now striving. Success, happiness and fulfillment at Stage Five normally result when you believe that you are handling all of your roles well, there are no major problems to deal with and you have met your abundance goals, or at the very least are getting all you are entitled to for your efforts. **Fives often speak of the good times as “feeling so normal!”**

Spirituality now has the capability of becoming more of an individual matter. There can be a spiritual element to your relationships. Also, you are now open to a heartfelt awareness of the world that is greater than you are (to be developed much more in the higher stages). **Unlike in the lower stages, the higher being you worship or your higher self is much more than an authority to fear or to please.** You can now truly experience your spirituality as a source of connection, love and benevolence. There is the capacity to give some thought to what in spiritual terms your place on earth might be. However, too often, other responsibilities and aspects of life may conflict with your ability to follow that inner voice, which does not become a constant and essential part of you until Stage Six.

At Stage Five, your religious values can be complex. **Your own values and those of your religion can coexist in certain areas, yet conflict in others.** In addition, you now have a tolerance for those whose thinking is radically different from yours, as long as it does not upset the balance of your roles, which is a major vulnerability at Stage Five. However, you might also experience spirituality as merely another role that you see in a more neutral way---as external, with little drive within yourself to match the activities or practices.

Your view of **Spirituality** at Stage Five: “Spirituality (often in the form of the organized religion that is most familiar), as well as observing religious traditions, is an important part of life”...”It provides a sense of well being”... However, the role of spirituality in life often is confusing and unsettled. In reflective moments, you might ponder such questions as “What is the meaning of life?” or “Is this all there is?” as well as questions about such things as afterlife, dilemmas about God’s role in tragedy and injustice etc.

The principles of most organized religions are generally a source of goodness, guidance and wisdom. Places of worship often fulfill the role of community and can provide much support when you are grieving over a death, in crisis or even as a place to celebrate a major life milestone; e.g., a wedding, baptism, bar mitzvah or child’s confirmation. It’s common for Fives to move in and out of their spiritual community, as the role that community plays becomes more or less needed. Remember — this is all within the definition of what’s normal, meaning most *commonly* believed or practiced in our society.

At Stage Five, you can now recognize and appreciate that growth and learning often comes from a difference of opinion or even through mixed messages. This concept is much more difficult or even

impossible to tolerate at the lower stages. However, when your roles conflict with each other or certain ones become incompatible, anxiety may still be the result. In my practice, I have had many people at this stage ponder the question: “Which role (or who) is the “real me?” Another question often asked as part of the struggle with Stage Five issues is that one Peggy Lee immortalized in her standard, “Is That All There Is?”

Fives can be very much like plate spinners and master jugglers. Consider all of your roles in life as plates that need to be kept in the air at the same time. As long as they stay up there, life is good. In some of the roles you play, you may be kind. Others may necessitate that you be rather cold. Just as you can have many roles, there is no limit as to how many personas you can have in Stage Five. One necessary skill in keeping it altogether is picking the right persona or sub-personality to optimize the role you are playing. Even Captain Bligh — the tyrannical captain of the *Bounty of Mutiny on the Bounty* fame — is acknowledged by history to have been a very loving husband and father, yet he is still known as one of the cruelest ship captains of all time.

Your political affiliations at Stage Five are most likely to be with the party you believe will nurture the roles you play. For example, you may vote for one party because they offer you tax cuts and more money in your pocket, or the party that provides the best government entitlement programs, depending on how it fits into your life. The principles or ideology that your political party stands for are not nearly as important to you as what it will deliver to you and yours directly.

If Stage Five is the norm in our society, it's fitting that the ideal Stage Five government model is a representative democracy. Here you can make a choice as to who represents you based on whatever reasons or emotions you choose to follow, without necessarily having to take the time to understand all the issues in depth or even develop positions on them. A Stage Five politician will tend to blend in and do whatever is necessary to get the job done and keep his or her constituents on board without making waves. Championing a passionate ideology is optional and secondary to winning an election.

Happiness and Success at Stage Five: Keeping all roles and relationships in balance and without problems... Being effective and not overwhelmed...Achieving affluence...Finding a hobby and making time for fun activities as another important way to balance life and “recharge batteries”... “Fun activities” are seen as providing a healthy alternative to work and chores.

Life today can become extremely busy for people with many different roles, such as an involved career, activities with professional organizations, hobbies and various other avocations, church or synagogue and raising children while keeping up with all of their other activities. These roles all speak to different needs; but as they grow, Fives often experience life as overwhelming to the point where enjoying them all becomes difficult, even if each one alone would be quite nourishing and enjoyable. Thus, **when overwhelm sets in, things you once thrived on can inadvertently become reduced to mere obligations or even stressors; and actually enjoying them as you once did becomes a luxury for which you no longer have the time or energy.** Too many activities and roles are often the factor that can be a drain to the quality of your life. For example, a marriage with too many extended family obligations and activities to tend to often leaves little or no time for partners to be lovers or enjoy solitary down time. **The main thing to remember about virtually anything Stage Five is to enjoy what you can, but not to expect more in the way of fulfillment than is there. Personal fulfillment is much more a function of the next two stages you will read about.**

When comfort (and even affluence), a nice and decent family life, an adequate community, religious involvement, the demands you put on yourself to “keep it all together,” and all or many of the staples of what we have come to believe constitute a good life just don’t seem to add up to fulfillment; you may find yourself yearning for something more. That something is what we will find at Stage Six, and beyond the boundaries of what is merely “normal”.

Climbing Out of Stage Five: What You Need to Know

At Stage Five, you are far less self-absorbed than in any of the lower stages. Thus, you are now freer to pay more attention to your hooks in the higher stages that you will read about next. Think of those higher stage hooks as glimpses of your potential: what life can soon be like.

A bit of history here is in order. When the human potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s took hold, the people it served the most, were Fives, who by societal standards “had it all” (e.g., a well functioning career, family life and relationship, etc.); but through their higher stage hooks, knew there was a richer, more fulfilling *inner existence* to be had. In reality, what they were looking for was the ladder to climb from Stage Five to the two higher stages. Such things as encounter groups and other types of personal growth opportunities--- that were extremely innovative at the time---were created to facilitate and encourage people to take the steps necessary to leave their comfort zones.

Attitude that is most helpful for Climbing out of Stage Five- “I want to be doing what I love and to feel rewarded internally (as well as externally)”.

The result was often one or more major life changes as well as a litany of new and unfamiliar, yet empowering attitudes. For example, long-term love relationships as well as career activities would now have to provide deeper levels of satisfaction and fulfillment, heretofore not necessarily a mandatory requirement. For many Fives, a radical makeover was in order, while for others just a bit of tweaking was all that was necessary. Most interestingly, all of this was accomplished by simply and non-judgmentally asking each seeker, **“What do you want to do?”** **The next step was to provide support and encouragement to go ahead and do it. In other words, keep the roles that work and provide satisfaction, then make whatever changes are necessary — major or minor — to the ones that do not.** Along the way, it was just as important to change certain attitudes and life philosophies so that you did not find yourself going backwards in that familiar direction of non-fulfillment. The result was a new world that will never allow things to be the way they were: opportunity and equality for women and minorities, and permission for everyone to follow their dreams and passions. Most essentially, **self-permission is what we came to know as the essential ingredient for living an optimal life or reaching your highest potential.**

The Buddha said it best in the quote with which I opened this chapter and what is arguably the most powerful statement ever made about how to reach your potential, “Be open to everything, but attached to nothing”. This is the core attitude that will empower you the most for climbing to

the highest stages that follow. Climbing out of Stage Five simply involves letting go of the roles that are not working, that you keep solely because of your attachment to them; and then trading them for new experiences that ignite or are consistent with your unique passions. Many are fortunate enough to find a mentor to help them do this, to the extent that change is what they want and help is needed to achieve it. For others, psychotherapy or coaching may be an answer.

The best therapy for Stage Five issues zeros in on improving higher levels of functioning, rather than merely focusing on personal and emotional problems. In other words, whatever helps you to follow the Buddha, in making choices and seeing them through to fruition is key to your climb beyond Stage Five. This process of choice and change along with whatever support you may need to see it through enables you to climb to the coveted Stage Six, which is the first of our two target stages.

A few words about psychotherapy: Over the years, I have trained thousands of therapists and have found that virtually all do best with or “specialize” in one stage or another —whether or not they even realize it. Some therapists do really well with Stage Three issues, some with Stage Four issues and others with Stage Five issues. **Therapists who are best with Stage Five issues are most comfortable in helping you to explore and facilitate major life changes you choose, as opposed to those you have to make for reasons beyond your control.** The types of problems you may need to face along the way, often present challenges unlike those at the lower stages. So picking the right therapist to work with in this case is crucial. Several websites and other resources for therapists and coaches to help you are provided at StageClimbing.com/resources.

Some people leave one marriage or love relationship (whether or not by their own choice), only immediately to rebound into another one; or quickly replace one lost job with another similar job — without even giving a thought to some exploration of whether a bigger life change may be in order. **Fives often err by replacing one role with another, and expect this to provide a permanent solution to their problem.** A reevaluation of the bigger picture will more likely help you to arrive at a much better and

comprehensive solution than by merely switching roles or players. This is the principal reason why rebound romances rarely work on the level of *long-term* fulfillment. **Part of the climb to Stage Six is learning to tolerate the emotional pain triggered by letting yourself feel a void in your life, until you can replace the missing piece with what you really desire.** That way you will break your pattern of just settling for whatever is available to you right now---be it a new relationship, job or anything else---in order simply to end the discomfort caused solely by the void in your life itself. Most importantly, you will have given yourself something much more than just another Band-Aid to get you through a transition or difficult situation.

Many have described life at Stage Five as literally one thing occurring after another with little to tie it together. To get to Stage Five, your task was to reduce depression, anxiety, stress, and anger, to increase self-confidence and your frustration for tolerance; so that you can function in your chosen roles. The climb to Stage Six, makes this all hard work even more worthwhile!

Why We Retain Stage Five Hooks and When They Might Come In Handy:

- Whenever the reality of your status quo and the roles it requires blend into your life well, or you simply choose the status quo after weighing all the alternatives;
- When you must or choose to be involved in activities that you find to be emotionally neutral at best (e.g., doing chores, dealing with certain family members or matters, commuting or paying the bills),
- When interacting with people you would never choose to be around under other circumstances;
- When handling obligations and unpleasant tasks or assignments, such as those aspects of your job or the rituals that being a student sometimes require (like doing expense reports, studying for an exam or writing a dissertation);

- When it is your choice to focus on such external rewards as earning money and other benefits to the exclusion of what you might *prefer* doing;
- When you need to adopt a persona in order to get something done that is not necessarily in harmony with how you prefer to come across.
- When comfort, security and satisfaction are enough for the fulfillment, you seek.

Rising Above Your Roles: Climbing Out of Stage Five

Some Action Steps To Facilitate Your Stage Five Climb:

- In what major areas of your life is your default stage in Stage Five? Also, identify what you see as your Stage Five hooks. As you have with previous stages, **note and list** them.
- Next, **identify** those hooks and default stage areas of your life that you would like to change (as opposed to those where you prefer to stay neutral or in a “Stage Five frame of mind”).
- For each item you want to change, **ask yourself**, “**If I were not attached to a role** (such as breadwinner, husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, boss, subordinate, fundraising chairman, friend or neighbor), **what would be the ideal situation for this aspect of my life?**”
Never forget that Stage Five can also be the target stage for such aspects of life as your marriage or career. If that is your choice, honor it.
- **Ponder** how you believe your life could be simpler, more enjoyable, more purposeful and less overwhelming. Start a journal and write thoughts about this, preferably on a daily basis.

- Many Stage Five issues such as being overwhelmed can be addressed by learning **time management skills**. Juggling a busy schedule, multiple roles and obligations (e.g. children, work obligations and numerous other roles) is daunting. However, don't let yourself fall into the trap of believing that there are no options. Which roles do you want to let go of? Which would you like to change? Which do you cherish? **Take this opportunity to clarify what's really important to you.** Then vow to stay with the important stuff and let go of as much as possible that is not adding to your life.

- To the extent that your default stage is at Stage Five in an aspect of life, you are generally still motivated more by external rewards than internal rewards. **Pretend** those external rewards, such as money, or prestige were not a factor. Ask yourself, **“What roles do I then choose to keep?”** **In addition, remember, sometimes trading one role for another is indeed the best solution to a dilemma. Thus, keeping Stage Five solutions in your arsenal can be quite useful.** You will serve yourself well, by regularly asking yourself what it is that you wish to keep (regardless of the externals) as you navigate your climb out to the target stages.

- In light of the above assessment, most simply put — **what is it that you want to do/change?** What action steps are you *willing* to take to bring about the changes you want? **What are you fearing** or telling yourself that could prevent you from succeeding?

- Next, **set specific goals** as to what you would most like to accomplish with respect to everything you have identified. **How would life be different if you could optimally reach your goal?**

- **Resolve to do as little as necessary of whatever you have chosen to discontinue.** Expect some discomfort. Whenever you give up a role, the **void** alone can bring about some uneasiness. Don't get discouraged. Assure yourself there is something far better for you ahead, even if you do not see exactly what it is now. **Act as if the void is a temporary one soon to be replaced by**

whatever it is that you really desire in its place (or resolve that ultimately you don't need whatever you have chosen to give up, in any form).

- What **sources of help** (e.g., a mentor, support group, coach, or therapist, etc.) would be most beneficial to you right now in order to explore and/or facilitate the life changes you want to make, but may be having difficulty doing on your own? **Take a step or two in the direction of getting that help and support.** Visit StageClimbing.com/resources for additional ideas.
- Remember, Stage Five is the most neutral or dispassionate stage. Our Stage Five chores and activities are often the “necessary evils” and/or means for enjoying or maximizing life at the higher stages. **If you don't expect more satisfaction from doing them than is there, you will be less likely to fight them, procrastinate or waste more time. Plan frequent “Stage Five sessions”** to handle as many of these necessary, but not necessarily fulfilling chores as possible so that you can clear your schedule for whatever really matters to you.
- Stage Five **Resources** (visit StageClimbing.com/resources) include literature such as self-help books and audio programs on relationships, careers, life changes, financial issues, time management, stress management and places you can find therapists, coaches and many other sources of help.

At Stage Six, we rise above our roles and enter the zone of our first target stage.

Understanding and Maximizing Our Target Stages: Six and Seven

Now that you have read about the first five stages, it's time to reap the rewards! But first, I suggest you read or reread, "**Life at the Target Stages How Good Can It Be?**" on [page 21](#) in the Quick Start Guide. It's a quick read that will serve to remind you about why this process leading to the target stages is so worthwhile to pursue and how life at the target stages can indeed be your ultimate breakthrough in so many ways. In other words, you will serve yourself well by having the perspective and motivation to **do whatever it takes to make Stages Six and Seven—where your highest potential resides---** your default stages for any and every important area of your life.

The stages below Six and Seven, may at times have been difficult, to read about. However, they were necessary in part, so that you could become familiar with all of the factors that may be blocking you from full access to your highest target stages. **The task now is to take the next and arguably most important step in your *Stage Climbing* process: make a commitment to yourself to become your target stages in whatever part of your life you choose, while retaining the chosen lower stage hooks that serve you.** Remember, when you are operating out of your target stages, you are using the most unique, evolved and purposeful as well as arguably the *best parts of yourself* to achieve almost anything! On a spiritual level, **you are attuned to your calling or purpose and the source of infinite wisdom that defines it.** On a personal level, **this is where you love others most deeply and--- just case that's not enough----feel best about yourself.** In other words, these stages best characterize why you are here. The next two chapters will give you the tools you need to arrive at and live in these target stages Six and Seven, regardless of whatever circumstances in your life you bring to the table.

So it's now time to start thinking about what your highest potential would mean to you. Or to phrase the question another way (as many people I've worked with have), "**What do you really want to be when you grow up?**" The target stages contain the blueprint to clarify and bring it all to fruition. You need only to commit to making it your reality.

CHAPTER 6

Stage Six*Passion Is Your Path*

“I have learned that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with an unexpected success....”

—Henry David Thoreau

In my practice, we are usually working on the climb to Stage Six, when a client tells me, some variation of the following: **“I have ‘everything going for me’, but I don’t feel happy or fulfilled”** or **“I should be happy, but I am not”**. For most people, Stage Six is the very definition of genuine connection, happiness and fulfillment. We all have hooks there, and life often feels at its absolute best when we are operating out of this stage. **As you read on, you will discover that a Stage Six default---the path to your highest potential---in any area of your life resides within you and is accessible right now or whenever you choose to claim it.**

Think about our evolutionary process as human beings. For much of our existence, we worked to survive, and married to procreate and share our chores. When there was free time, we would likely sleep and do other things for our ultimate survival. Instead of spending time hand- washing clothes, we are now free to watch a football game while the machine does it for us.

The quest for enjoyment and fulfillment as we know it today is relatively new in our evolution; but merely to say that this great concept has caught on is certainly an understatement! Today we ideally marry for love, and strive to do the type of work that is most personally gratifying. An entire book could be written (and many have been) simply on things we do and industries that have been conceived with no other goal but to gratify, fulfill and make or help us to feel happy. This is all possible now ---to the extent it is---simply because we have the time, skills, technology and resources to give attention to those parts of ourselves that seek higher levels of gratification. **For most people who live in developed countries, fulfillment**

has now become more of an issue than survival. And I would argue that this is the result of the organic *Stage Climbing* process of civilization itself!

So where does your own climb optimally lead you? **The fulfillment that comes to you as a result of doing what you were born to do is a great definition of our frame of mind at Stage Six. Our passions are what help us find this zone within ourselves.** Stage Six is the first of our two universal targets in *Stage Climbing*. Regardless of whether or not you are already there, you will probably agree that a Stage Six default is worthy of your aspirations in just about any area of life. **Life is a wonderful occasion. Rising to that occasion means becoming far bigger than your roles. That is the breakthrough to Stage Six. I also see this stage as the major part of a new and apt definition of positive mental health.**

Stage Six is the first of the two Target Stages. A Default Stage here breaks you out of the pack starting in early adulthood, through the prime of life and beyond. Hooks at Stage Six appear all throughout life. Whenever you are doing what you truly enjoy, loving others in your life (or doing “labors of love” for them); being uniquely creative or when in acting in accordance with purpose, calling and the core that holds all of the diverse areas of your life together; as well as whenever you are feeling the best about yourself and motivated by your passions and desires, you are operating out of Stage Six.

Stage Five has your roles defining you. At Stage Six, all of that changes. You know you are something different from the sum of your life roles — something much greater. You are no longer ruled by your ego, either. Instead, **your inner voice now takes command and guides you.** The roles you play now revolve around you instead of becoming, controlling or defining you. This is the essential distinction between Stages Five and Six. **Your unique calling, talents and passion along with the self-permission to pursue them to the fullest are what launch you to Stage Six.** Instead of shifting your personality to meet the demands of each role you play---although you can certainly still do that when you choose to--- you are now in touch with a strong, consistent and solid layer of integrity within you that holds them all together. This is your core, or at least the seed of it. It has been there all along; but at Stage Six, you are finally allowing it to take center stage and permitting yourself to live by it.

