

5 Days to a Healthier Better You

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A Note from the Author:

By now, you likely have a strong idea as to whether or not counseling can help you get from A to B. You may have dealt or be dealing with something difficult that has left an uneasy and unwelcoming mark on your life. Hopefully, you feel empowered and committed to find healthy ways to get your life back.

Getting your life back may seem like a pretty broad statement to make. Before you immediately dismiss the idea, consider this: Individuals, families and couple's continue to seek support from counseling as a means to live a lifestyle that they truly yearn for. Everyone can use a little extra support in handling and managing life's challenges. One way that continues to make positive differences in everyday life is through professional counseling.

As mentioned earlier, you have already – most definitely decided to take a swim in counseling. You may be looking for answers that are literally hiding deep within. You may be seeking out a way to heal from past or current wounds. It's important to thoroughly understand that your reason for counseling is valued, respected and most importantly --- important to you and the counselor.

As a therapist, maybe even your therapist, I can without a doubt tell you that your presenting concern is of the most importance to me. For the sole purpose that seeking help during troubling times is often not easy nor is it what first comes to mind.

Counseling builds heavily upon the utilization of understanding, awareness and problem solving when supporting clients during their healing process. Issues related to depression, trauma, or even addiction can be processed and thoroughly understood as how they have or are currently impacting your life and that of those you care about. The process of therapy allows you to create awareness in understanding who you are and how external factors impact you. This means that you can, if you allow yourself the opportunity, gain an understanding to learn how it is that you can manage your emotions, feelings, cognition and overall being. By doing so, life itself will be more stable because you have control.

Fun fact about me:

I value counseling to the degree that I have for over 3 years continued my commitment to receiving counseling services. "Personally speaking, counseling provides me with the opportunity to measure my goals and find creative ways to balance my life. "It has and continues to help me live the healthy lifestyle that I desire.

This book provides you with a 5 day countdown of effective case study proven strategies that help improve your lifestyle. The content is clear and direct with a practical approach. By now, you already want and desire some sort of change in your life. The 5 day approach will provide you with a life that has you in control - that is less stressful.

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I want to thank my wife Elizabeth, my daughter Nola and my son Alexander for the love, compassion and support they provide me daily. My family's role in this book and in life continues to be the driving force for me and all I am. Lastly, I would not be on this path if it were not for God's grace and endless blessings.

5 DAYS TO A HEALTHIER BETTER YOU

DAY ONE

Congratulations to you. Please take a moment to really thank yourself for taking the initiative to do something for you. How often do you spend time and energy serving others? I'm sure that within your role and with all the hats that you wear in your life, you often forget about self-care. It's not really your fault. Most people for one reason or another have this habit of taking on more and more roles in their life. This causes people to feel overwhelmed, stress, anxious and even frustrated to the point of burnout.

Your first day task will be to treat yourself to whatever it is that you may want. Treating yourself literally means that you find some activity or thing for you. Below are a few examples:

- For parents: Mothers and fathers you may find that treating yourself means a mini-vacation without the kids. Drop your babies off at a relative's or local daycare for a few hours. Go out to a local Starbucks or even a day-spa. When you are there, please do not think about your child. They are okay.
- For 9-5 workers: Use one of those PTO days you have been saving. Or after work do something that you desire to do but are typically "too busy for". The options are endless. I really want you to find something that will bring a smile and sense of relief to your face.
- Take a much needed nap. You are not too old or too busy for a well-deserved nap. Wake up revitalized and focused.

One common feeling that most people experience when treating themselves is "guilt". You may experience that you do not deserve this or that it is not fair for you to be doing the activity or thing. Please remember, that you are human. If you are not healthy and happy then your overall attitude and self will impact those around you in a negative manner. People around you, your kids, relatives, co-workers, or partner will notice how much happier, healthier and stable you are once you have treated yourself.

At the end of Day one you should be experiencing a strange feeling of relief, balance, and happiness taking over. It's as if you have taken a deep breath at the beach, "it feels good". Tomorrow, you should notice a sense of focus and restoration.

Great job on completing day one!

4 days to go until you are closer to a healthier and stronger you!

DAY TWO

Congratulations to you. If I were with you today, I would give you a high five and pat on the back. I believe in you and I want the best for you. If you are able to reach a state that fills you with happiness and empowerment than life it will approach you as a gentle wave.

Day two is about awareness and understanding. Please grab a sheet of paper and something to write with. On the sheet of paper please write down your routine for the day. I know that this is an odd task. Please do so. Start from the minute you wake up to the minute you go to bed. Make sure to include small and large acts that you do. Below is an example:

- 8:00am - Wake up
- 8:30am - Shower and personal hygiene
- 9:00am to 9:30am – Breakfast with partner/self/family
- 9:30am to 10:00am – Drive to work
- 10:00am to 1:00pm – Work
- 1:00pm to 2:00pm – Lunch
- 2:00pm to 6:00pm – Work
- 6:00pm to 6:30pm – Drive home from work
- 6:30pm to 7:15pm – Dinner with partner/self/family
- 7:15pm to 10:00pm – Relaxation; television time
- 10:00pm – Prepare for bed

Remember the time frames are relative - don't stress out over perfection.

Now that you have organized your daily schedule, do a quick run through just to make sure that you have not left anything out that you may want to add in.

Remember the end goal of this book is to help you in 15 days become a better – healthier - stronger person.

Using the schedule above, I am going to provide you with opportunities of improvement. Below are activities that you can include:

- In the mornings before getting out of bed make a to-do-list. This can be something real short, simple and to the point. The main goal of the list is that it should be something you can complete that day. A to-do-list provides a sense of responsibility and later accomplishment as you complete the tasks.
- Add a recreational activity, family activity or individual activity after works that you or if applicable those around can enjoy. This can be going to the gym, taking your family to the park, reading a book, or taking an art class. At first, it is typical and downright normal for you to feel that this will be a burden to you. That is why it is critical to analyze how your life is now. Ask yourself the following questions: “Do I feel that I am

Living the life I want right now, this very moment?" The first option is that after a time practicing the activities you will notice the benefits. The second option is no benefits and you are right back where you started.

- While driving to work consider music options, audio books, or podcast that can help improve your life. I understand that this is a broad statement. First think about what you enjoy listening to and make this task a trial and error until you find something that fits.

By the end of day two you should have achieved the following:

- A sense of accomplishment as you wrote down your schedule and found strategies to add pleasurable and empowering activities in it.
- You may have a sense of relief from the breakdown of your schedule.
- A sense of direction as to what you should be doing next.
- You are gaining control over your life. You are in the driver's seat!

Please remember, as I cannot say this enough. It is vital for you to actively practice the recommendations in order for this book to help you.

DAY THREE

Again, congratulations! Each and every step that you have taken deserves recognition. I understand how difficult it can be to make changes. Remember the changes are often not easy or the first option that people want to take.

Day three focuses on helping you be more rational, logical and less overwhelmed. As mentioned in day one, we wear many hats and play ample roles in life. Some are parents, employees, friends, siblings, or uncles. Having all of these hats can make us feel at times overwhelmed and consumed by the roles that those around us need us to play. Unfortunately, I am not going to tell you to end some of your roles.

Today I want to encourage you to breakdown the hats you wear into the tasks and responsibilities that you complete on a daily basis. To do this you first will need to write down the tasks that you are required to complete per day. Let's make this easy, practical and to the point by focusing on tomorrows expected tasks and responsibilities.

Below is an example of a typical day that may relate to you:

- Prepare breakfast for the family
- Drive the kids to school
- Pick up laundry

- Run errands
- Go to yoga class
- Clean and organize the house
- Prepare lunch
- Pick kids up from school
- Prepare dinner
- Clean after dinner
- Organize and clean prior to bed

If the day above does not relate to you, please take time to write down your day into tasks and responsibilities.

Above are 11 tasks and responsibilities that are to be completed. I don't know about you but they seem like a lot for one person to do in one day. The manner in which you approach your day can greatly impact your attitude and overall mentally for that day. In addition, the approach if positive will directly help you in how you feel and act. A happier and more stable you mean that the day will run smooth.

You have 11 things to complete. First let's break down the content into groups. At the end of each group you will have the opportunity to provide yourself with a reward. Your reward can be yoga class, reading a book, watching a 30min television show, or simply enjoying a hot cup of coffee for 20minutes. The options are endless and entirely up to you. Just be mindful of the time spent on the reward. Too much time can easily distract you from the tasks while not enough time can make you feel uneasy and robbed from the experience of the reward.

Below is an example of the same chores and responsibilities mentioned above with the modified changes.

- Prepare breakfast for the family
- Drive the kids to school
- *Reward: Enjoy a nice latte at your favorite coffee shop.*
- Pick up laundry
- Run errands
- *Reward: Go to yoga class*
- Clean and organize the house
- Prepare lunch
- *Reward: Enjoy a short television show*
- Pick kids up from school
- Prepare dinner
- *Reward: Sit back in a quiet place and dive into your favorite novel.*
- Clean after dinner
- Organize and clean prior to bed

- *Reward: Reflect back on your accomplishments of the day. Reward yourself as you see fit.*

You have successfully completed day three of five. Two days to go until you are stronger, healthier and closer to your ideal self. By this point you should have already begun to notice changes in your daily stress levels, your ability to remain focused and with feelings of control over your life.

DAY FOUR

Give yourself a hug. You fully deserve the recognition. The reason is simple and I hope that you can notice it. To change is a very difficult task as most people are stuck in their ways and often find the process of change to be lengthy, difficult and unfamiliar. You have already completed three of the five days!

Day four focuses on the root of all evil - money. I am neither a financial advisor nor an accountant; however, I am a professional counselor and one who focuses on reducing and managing stress. Money for most people is a trigger in life. Money may trigger people to feel anxious, frustrated, happy, excited, depressed, sad, and angry and many more feelings.

We are going to focus on helping you create control over yourself which in turn will help you manage your emotions when triggered by money. In a very simple way we are going to follow the 3 steps below to help reduce stress triggered by money.

- Step 1: Awareness of the origin of the stress.
- Step 2: Awareness of how the stress impacts you and those around you.
- Step 3: Priorities to create awareness and control over your money.

Step 1: You are experiencing stress because of money. I want you to grab a sheet of paper and something to write with. Next find all your bills and payments that you or your family is responsible for. Make sure to document your information by monthly expenses. Somewhere on the page write down your yearly and monthly income after taxes (if applicable add your partners). Below is an example

- Mortgage \$1500.00
- Car payment \$300.00
- Electricity \$100.00
- Water \$30.00
- Cell phone \$120.00
- Etc....

- A. Total expenses per month:_____.
- B. Your monthly earned amount after taxes (rough estimate is okay):_____.
- C. Total in the difference between A and B:_____.

Step 2: Now that you have the information written and out in front of you, how do you feel? Try answering the questions below:

- Before writing down my financial information I felt _____ about my money situation.
- After seeing what I have written down I felt _____ about my money situation.
- My money situation is impacting my personal life by _____.
- My money situation is impacting those I care about by _____.
- My money situation is impacting my mood by _____.

Step 3: Time to prioritize and make executive changes that are focused on improving your overall life. This is not an easy process and it may not be one that you are going to be on board for right away. I encourage you to focus on your responses to step 2. Making a change in your finances can help reduce stress and provide you with relief. I am not going to ask you to cut your expenses and completely change your lifestyle as that would create a stress of its own. Instead, review your expenses from step 1. Below are strategies to implement when reviewing your expenses from step 1. You can pick and choose.

- If you are eating out more days than you should be, reduce the amount by one day per week or four days per month. This should save you roughly \$10.00 per month or \$120.00 per year. Once you have reduced the days keep moving forward in a gradual and comfortable rate.
- Are you shopping for extras? These can include clothes, shoes, or things that you may not necessarily need. If so, try to give yourself a monthly cash budget. You could allocate \$50.00 per month or a number that is lower than what you are currently spending. Anything lower can serve its purpose.
- If you decide to act on the first recommendation of not eating out, great. I want you to put the money that you would have spent on food in your house somewhere safe. At the end of the month see how much money you have. How do you feel from seeing the money you have saved?
- Analyze your phone, internet or cable plan. Are you using everything that you are paying for? Are you using all your data or not? If not, change your plan to a lower data plan and save the difference. Apply the same technique to your internet and cable.
- Use automatic payments.
- Make an effort once a day per week or even per month to review to your finances. Add this as a reminder on your calendar to help prioritize its importance.

- Reward yourself with a savings account. The money you save from reductions on food or random splurges can be added to your savings account.

Once you have begun this process, make sure that you provide yourself with time to reflect on the positive changes in your life. Revisit the following questions below after a month of actively practicing the recommendations discussed earlier.

- My money situation is impacting my personal life by_____.
- My money situation is impacting those I care about by_____.
- My money situation is impacting my mood by_____.

The goal of step 3 is to help you create control and awareness over your finances. You have already achieved awareness in steps 1 and 2. Step 3 kicked things into high gear by giving you the wheel and allowing you to control your finances. If you have followed each step and made an effort towards change you should be reaping the rewards.

DAY FIVE

Thank you for your willingness to be open to improve your lifestyle. More importantly – for investing in yourself.

Day five places you steps away from the finish line! How do you feel at this point? Are you experiencing positive changes in your life? Small or big, change is change!

- At this point I have noticed that my personal stress has changed by_____.
- At this point I have noticed the following positive changes:
_____ In my mood and attitude.
- My ability to handle stress and difficult situations has changed by_____.

The focus on day five will be a bit deeper than those discussed in the days prior. If you can right now (if not try and do this later) find a quiet place that is distraction free. Please have a sheet of paper and something to write with nearby. While you are in your quiet and distraction free location please take four to five deep respirations. Think about your life.

- Have there been any experiences that has caused you trauma - a trauma that continues to impact you today?
- Are you currently experiencing stress from a past conflicting event or relationship?

Below are a few examples that you may relate to:

- Childhood trauma related to abuse.
- Relationship trauma.
- Bad breakup that left scars.
- Conflict within your family.
- Relationship conflict.
- Personal trauma related to upbringing.

Before we dive in, I want to encourage you to truly weigh your experience and understand what service you may better benefit from. If you are experiencing a deep wound or one that you experience troubling emotional distress from when open, please seek professional counseling.

As mentioned earlier, day five will focus on a deeper weighted experience that continues to negatively impact your life. As you are in your quiet and distraction free place try to focus on the experience. On your sheet of paper write down on the top of the paper the experience. Take a few deep breathes to gather your focus.

Next, write down in bullets all the ways that your experience has negatively impacted you. Think about symptoms that you may have or past experiences. It is completely okay if you cannot remember all of them. Please do not stress yourself because of this. Simply write the ones that come to mind.

Now that you have this list in front of you take a few moments to reflect over it. You may during this time experience emotional discomfort. If you need to, please take a few breaks followed by deep breathing to gather yourself. If for any reason you feel that you cannot continue the activity, it is okay. I encourage you to seek professional counseling.

Return to your list and pick one out of the many that you wrote. I encourage you to pick one that you feel comfortable on making changes to. The one you select should be one that can be solely focused on and worked to change in a positive manner. The change you decide to make is going to depend on you. Below is an example for guidance:

- The issue: "I am experiencing conflict within a family relative. The conflict is causing me daily stress and basically burdens my day when thinking about it or when I am together with the family".

The positive changes I can make:

- Allocate a specific day/time to reflect about the given subject versus feeling out of control and allowing the conflict control you.

- Reflect on the pros and cons of you spending time and energy thinking about the conflict. Is it worth your energy and time?
- Are you willing to address it? If so. Let's identify your options. I encourage you to find a form of communication that you are comfortable with: texting, emailing, phone conversation, hand written letters, or face to face conversation. Before addressing the conversation practice with someone you can confide in.
- Reflect on how your life can change as a result of you addressing the issue. This process pushes you to think about the entire process from the beginning to end. How does it end for you? Are you happier after addressing it?

The goal from this point forward is to tackle the list one by one. As you make positive changes on your list you will experience relief, control and feelings of empowerment that will help guide you through the process of change. Again, if at any time you experience emotional discomfort please seek professional counseling.

Remember the focus of this activity is to help bring light to the negative experience that continues to impact your life in a destructive manner. Whether you do this with the support of the book or through professional counseling you can work towards achieving this.

Thank you so much for investing in yourself as this is one of the most valuable and rewarding things you can do. Think about programs like P90X or Insanity that are aimed at helping individuals achieve a healthier and more satisfying level of physical health. This book provides the same framework as it is aimed in helping you achieve a healthier stronger self.