



An essay on the

5-STEP PROCESS

By Phil Golding

What is laid out in these steps is a workable strategy for personal change. Those in my field of psychology know such a strategy works for two main reasons: Firstly, we live in a wonderful age where we can gain access to all the information that human beings have stored down through the ages. There have been scores of great philosophers and sages in every culture all through time. What they have written can now be studied and compared in what is called a meta-analysis. What has been discovered is that their writings and teachings all correlate in fundamental ways. It is like there is a set of “natural laws” that apply not only to physics, but also to the mind and its consciousness. This has been termed “perennial wisdom”, which simply means wisdom that endures. When you apply these laws to your life in a consistent way, any imbalance in the mind begins to heal. Personal calm, balance and power is inevitable, with happiness and fulfilment the result.

The second reason that we know it works is that enough of us have applied these laws of consciousness to our own lives and have experienced the benefits directly. There are still sections in the more orthodox psychology and medical profession that remain sceptical. There is a tendency to believe that evidence can only be gathered in a laboratory, but the real world does not exist in a laboratory. Those in my field regard life as the laboratory, although we still value orthodox scientific research. In addition though, we see ourselves as the experiment. We first apply these principles of personal change to ourselves, because if we can't put this to work in our own lives, how can we expect others to do the same, and how can we possibly know what it is really like. In my field of psychology we try to be less the out-of-touch expert and more the living example.

I personally had a difficult childhood for various reasons, which led to me falling into chronic depression, which I eventually traced back to the age of eleven. My depression

further complicated my life by restricting my ability to make wise decisions on my own behalf, or I avoided making decisions altogether. I was stuck and afraid to take a risk in life. The result was poor relationships and a career that did not reflect my true potential. At the age of 24 my chronic depression drove me to seek help.

Even though I soon learned to function well, whenever I took on a new challenge my chronic depression would be triggered once again. Finally, after eight years of personal growth work, that helped me in many other areas of my life, I decided to spend some dedicated time focusing on my depression and nothing else. Using all that I had learned, I surprised even myself by finally breaking the back of my depression in just a few weeks. The final key for me was a deep enough level of self-acceptance, which is the basis of Step 1 or the 5-Step Process.

I have experienced depression at times since then but I now know what to do about it. It can no longer take a hold of me. You could now say that I am immune to this chronic disorder. Of course I could have overcome my depression a lot sooner if I knew at 24 what I know now, but this was not the case. Besides, my experience has been my greatest teacher where becoming a psychotherapist is concerned. It has helped me learn that every problem can be turned into an opportunity. I now have the opportunity to help others find their way back to happiness and fulfillment.

A side benefit to my personal growth work was that as I continued to connect to myself, my natural interest in psychology began to blossom. Before I knew it was to be my career I was well versed in the subject. My own higher consciousness knew this was my calling well before the rest of me did.

Step 1. ACCEPTANCE

After recognizing that there is a problem, acceptance is the first step in taking action to do something about it. Even though this first step of acceptance is applied on many levels, where most psychological problems are concerned, self-acceptance is an important starting point.

Self-Acceptance: The opposite of self-acceptance is self-rejection, and self-rejection, more than anything else, blocks us in our efforts to overcome emotional problems and the negative mental patterns that keep the emotional problems on a

repetitive loop. As I said before, there is a strong tendency in our society to feel ashamed when we cannot psychologically function according to the “norms” of our society. Everybody suffers emotional crises from time to time, but when this crisis becomes prolonged for one reason or another, there is a perception that we are unworthy because of it. We cannot control another's misguided perceptions, but we can do something about our own.

We are like a priceless one-of-a-kind car that has broken down. It would not make sense to regard this car as not worth fixing or that the car is wrong or stupid for breaking down. When this priceless car breaks down it is then a matter of objectively and carefully taking it apart in order to correct the problem. It is useful to approach not only our body, but also our mind in the same way. Human beings are highly complex and at times delicate machines that need constant care and attention. The more primal level of our mind is a bit like a computer program that runs the machine. This program is our conditioning, our unconscious mind-habits that are often thrown together along the journey of our formative years in ways that do not always work that well. As a result, we easily get out of tune. Being human means we are going to break down once in a while. This is simply a fact of life.

Self-rejection can severely hamper our ability to look at this fact of life objectively. As a result, we may not make the needed effort to find the type of care that is appropriate for us. We must accept our right to be human, along with our genuine need to reach out for help when it is required. Our worthiness should be seen as something that is beyond question. If our mind thinks otherwise, than we simply have some reprogramming to do. It is the programming in our mind that is the problem, not our worthiness. Depression, for example, could therefore be said to be a state of confusion that is below our awareness, and causes painful emotions to be kept on a repetitive loop.

Acceptance of our “Higher Awareness”: In my 30 years of being on my path of personal development, and helping others with theirs, it has become clear to me that we are more than just complex machines. There is a more intangible or mysterious quality to the human being which I, and many other researches in this field, call

consciousness. To put it simply; consciousness enables a human being to observe him or herself - to be self-conscious in other words, in ways that animals are not. In other words, we

can observe ourselves from a higher perspective than our habit-bound primal mind, which is where all the problems develop.

Human consciousness is where we access our highest potential. To try to define the two sides of our human nature, you could say that we have a lower survival mind and a higher growth consciousness.

Lower Survival Mind: This level of the mind is where we find our fight-or-flight instincts as well as our unconscious childhood conditioning. This limited level of mind could be said to respond and operate from FEAR. It is often called our “survival consciousness” due to always being in the position of powerlessly struggling to survive against the elements of the world. When our lower survival mind is controlling our lives we allow our decisions to be based on what we fear. As a result, we tend to build protective walls around ourselves and see the world in a negative light, which may often be far from reality. Because we regard our fear-based thoughts as “true”, we don't question them and therefore live in the restricted boundaries of these limited perceptions. For example: We may have a fear of being criticized and in order to protect ourselves from feeling this fear, we isolate ourselves and become a “prisoner” to this fear. We survive, but we certainly don't live in the full sense of the word. This level of the mind, left to its own devices, is like a child left to fend for itself without a loving parent to take care of it. Not surprisingly, when this limited habitual thinking controls our mind, our life tends to be full of sadness, conflict and disappointment. Frequent poor health and fatigue is often a further consequence.

Higher Growth Consciousness: This could be said to respond and operate from LOVE. When we can connect to our consciousness-awareness, qualities such as compassion, wisdom, courage, insight, joy, serenity, and genuine intimacy can be experienced. This is the wise, loving parent within us who is able to look after the child that is our lower survival mind.

From the perspective of this conscious-awareness, we can see the world in a positive but realistic light and we feel attractive to others and comfortable to be around. We are able to feel our fears, process them and push through them rather than allow them to control us. This side of our consciousness allows us to grow and evolve. It also facilitates good health and vitality.

We all experience both these sides of our being in varying degrees. This is not right or wrong, it is simply the

experience of being human. We can learn to accept and care for the confused, fear-based self like a loving parent would care for their child. We can learn how to be more aware of our higher growth consciousness (the parent self) and operate at this higher capacity as a matter of routine, and particularly when we most need to.

The Challenge of Self-Acceptance

Where self-acceptance is concerned, if we have strong negative self-worth and self-rejection issues, then we find it hard to accept that we have a side to ourselves that is so beautiful and powerful. I believe, and it has been my long and repeated experience, that if you consciously make a solid commitment, and a consistent effort to accept your lower survival self and take care of it, like one would lovingly care for a child, then you naturally begin to open up to and experience higher states of consciousness. It is not about getting it right all time. It is more about having a go on a daily basis and learning each day from the experience. What we are doing is giving ourselves the love that we didn't get in our formative years, or at any other

time. This is how we reprogram our survival mind so that it takes its proper place as the constructive supporting foundation for our conscious-awareness, and not something that is continually undermining us. When we work as a team with a counsellor, who can also take on the role of an experience mentor, staying motivated to keep caring for ourselves is much easier.

Therefore, to be human is to have this higher growth consciousness available to us, which enables us to overcome all difficulties, if we give it a chance. It is my experience that it is within this side of our human nature that we find an ultimate meaning in life, and you are free to define that meaning for yourself. Countless individuals who have gone before us have found access to this higher part of themselves and they point the way for us to follow.

Step 2. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

For many of us, we have learned that being disciplined and responsible means oppressing ourselves with rigid and unrealistic standards that we can't possibly live up to. Step 1's principle of acceptance frees us from these old worn-out

perceptions and transforms responsibility into an act of loving, patient, and persistent caring for ourselves. After all, isn't this the sort of care we truly needed as children? Of course none of us had perfect parents and none of us are perfect parents. As adults, there is still parenting work left to do on ourselves. This is a fact of life from which no one can escape. Step 2 is about accepting this responsibility of care we now have for ourselves as responsible adults and acting on it for our highest good and for the good of those around us.

Step 2 gives us the opportunity to re-examine our attitudes and our tendency to blame and reject others and/or ourselves when we experience emotional pain. Emotional pain is not wrong. It is our mind trying to tell us something. In reality our vulnerable lower mind is calling out to our conscious-awareness for help. As conscious-awareness we need to pause, take a deep breath and look at what this emotional pain is trying to tell us. When we look at emotional pain at a deeper level, we find that there is a lot it can tell us.

Free Emotional Response: Free emotion occurs in the now moment and is simply a higher level sensory perception, not unlike sight, touch and hearing. Our emotions are continually giving us genuine information about our environment and those we encounter. This information helps us know how to appropriately act in any given moment. For example: you may walk too close to the edge of a cliff and you feel a wave of fear rush through you. This is your body/mind giving you an appropriate warning signal. Or on a more subtle level you may feel the presence of anger in the person you are trying to communicate with and your body/mind feeds you signals that causes you to feel wary. Of course our emotional responses can be pleasant, such as when we are being shown loving kindness by someone.

Trapped Emotional Reaction: This is old emotional pain that has become trapped within our body/mind's memory system. Much of this trapped emotional energy is left over from our childhood, when we did not always have the ability or opportunity to resolve situations that were psychologically damaging to us. As a result, we became confused and took on beliefs about ourselves and the world that are not true.

The most common dynamic here lies in the fact that as children we are spontaneously emotional. Emotions dominate the way our minds think. When children are happy they are overjoyed, and when they are sad it is the end of the world. Children are naturally emotional beings, which does not change

until we are well into puberty and beyond, when our rational mind gets a grip, for better or for worse, on our emotions.

Unfortunately, evolving into adulthood means that we forget what it was like to be a child. We don't have patience for a child who cannot act like an adult no matter how hard they try. When children are judged and rejected for being emotional and not being able to control their needs, it puts them in an impossible bind. They desperately need our love, but they can't stop being children without experiencing psychological damage. As children we certainly needed guidance, but this needed to come without rejection.

For children, this psychological damage comes in the form of believing they are fundamentally unworthy or wrong for simply being who they are, which cannot be true. Such a confused belief is in direct conflict with our own higher knowing, which we all naturally have, even as a child. However, children need our love so much that they choose to believe the rejection over their higher knowing. To survive, children begin to create roles and behaviours to please others, which becomes our persona. The more we created this persona, the more we lost touch with that higher part of our consciousness. As a result, children frequently experience anger, sadness, despair, shame, and in more extreme cases, disassociate from their feelings to survive.

As adults, we still carry around these mistaken beliefs, such as we are unworthy for one reason or another. This inner psychological conflict still remains, which is frequently triggered by our normal free emotional responses. When this happens, there is an over-reaction coming from the trapped emotions - a reaction that simply does not match what is occurring in the moment. This dynamic within us could be said to be the root of all conflict in our lives. This is because it distorts the way we respond to the world in a manner that can harm others as well as ourselves.

Like the free emotion, trapped emotional reactions can also be pleasant. These over-reactions can lead to addictions for example, or falling in love inappropriately. Therefore, trapped emotional reactions tend to be disconcerting because they have a habit of over-riding our ability to think rationally in that moment. We lose touch with reality, in other words.

Where depression is concerned, to use this again as an example, when we are blocked from our major sources of fulfilment, this triggers our belief that we are unworthy. When we are suffering from depression, like many other serious

emotional difficulties, we are barely aware of how deeply we are rejecting ourselves. It is a bit like when we were “naughty” as children and as a punishment our primary carers withheld their love from us as though we were unworthy of that love. As adults we unconsciously impose this dynamic onto ourselves and it is this self-rejection that keeps us down. We all display this psychological dynamic in some way in our life. To the degree this dynamic is active is the degree that we cannot function the way we would like.

Usually we try to compensate for our lack of love for ourselves by demanding more love from others, which creates a whole set of problems in itself. We can end up being emotionally dependent on someone while at the same time pushing them away. The real underlying issue though is our own relationship with ourselves.

It is this trapped emotional energy that we are endeavouring to heal or “re-parent” through counselling and therapy, while at the same time turning off the mistaken belief that we are unworthy. Therefore, every adult has a responsibility of care towards their own “emotional wounds”, and furthermore, my experience has shown me that every adult has the ability to give themselves this level of care. What we need is a bit of faith in ourselves, and helping us gain this faith is another role of counselling.

Step 3. LET GO & TUNE IN

Letting Go: Step 3 is about putting steps 1 & 2 into action. It is not until we really commit to seriously and persistently caring for ourselves in this way that we discover how deeply ingrained our

self-defeating thought patterns are. Rather than blindly and unconsciously acting out these patterns, we begin to see them as if for the first time, even while we are still in their grip. Our heads are full of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that are causing us to be out of step with life and out of tune with our self. Even though these mindsets are clearly hurting us, it can be difficult to let them go because they are, at first, all we know. When we look squarely at these self-defeating thought patterns, some fall away quickly because we can easily see they don't make sense. Other self-defeating thought patterns can be more persistent. They may have originally formed to help us survive and we think we still need them for protection, when in reality they are holding us down.

However, we are no longer a child who is powerless over his or her own life. As adults, we have the power to learn new ways and develop new choices. Life-skills need to be learned just like anything else, but we won't learn anything new if we are not prepared to let go of, or at least question, our old beliefs that keep us down. We primarily get lost when we blame the outside world for causing our emotional difficulties. If we don't do that then we assume we must blame ourselves. To move forward we must re-examine step 1 and 2 and recognize that there is no one to blame. We are not bad, we are just confused, and being confused is just a natural part of being human. But if we allow our confusion to rule our lives then we are not going to change for the better. Therefore, step 2 is about facing up to this confusion, taking it in hand and compassionately leading it back to reality.

When we are less inclined to judge ourselves for being confused, then we are more motivated to own it and do something about it. Therefore, what we are mostly letting go of is our judgements that somebody is wrong or bad for being confused. For those of us suffering from depression for example, we need to particularly let go of our judgements of ourselves.

Tuning In: When we are judging and rejecting ourselves, we are in conflict with ourselves. We have become our own worst enemy. Little wonder we spend our lives running away from ourselves. We are in a constant state of tuning out. We tune out because we are still stuck in that impossible childhood bind. We think we have to live up to some crazy standard that says we are not allowed to be human while at the same time not being able to be anything else. In order to deny our own humanness, we phase out, and we do it in countless different ways, and in ways that have become so ingrained into our society that we call it normal behaviour. Smoking, drinking and taking drugs are just a few ways. There are also many natural human behaviours that are used in a distorted way to hide from ourselves, such as sex, power, status, and entertainment. When we are depressed, our self-rejection is such that we can't find a way to escape from it, even when we try.

In the process of wanting to be free of issues like depression or anxiety, we don't realize that wanting to escape from it is part of the problem. We don't realize that we are just trying to escape from our own mind, which leaves us powerless to do something about it. We don't realize that our mind is calling out to our higher growth consciousness for help. If our

own child calls out in pain, we don't run out the door. We turn around and compassionately attend to the problem. The act of accepting our humanness and compassionately looking within activates the power and potential of our higher awareness to heal our wounded mind.

While we are rejecting ourselves for simply being human, we are always going to want to tune out from ourselves, and while we continue to tune out, we will never get beyond our self-defeating behaviour patterns. There are two main reasons for tuning into ourselves:

- 1. Connecting to our Inner-Child.**
- 2. Connecting to our Growth Consciousness.**

1. Connecting to our Inner Child

One of the most effective ways of looking at emotional pain, particularly trapped emotions, is to see it as our own child self stuck in a time-warp calling out for help. Being an adult means that this child (our own vulnerable conditioned mind) now belongs to us. We are responsible for our own self. After all, the pain is now coming from our own mind, which just gets stirred up by situations in the now. Being the only ones responsible for this pain now may not seem just, but everyone is in the same boat, even though not everyone accepts this fact, and those of us who don't are the ones who find happiness the most allusive.

Therefore, whenever we tune out, it is like we are abandoning our own self, which just perpetuates the emotional wounds that we carry around. By tuning in instead, it is like our child self is finally being heard. By giving ourselves the time and space to feel with self-acceptance in mind, we can grow in acceptance of our human emotions and gain more awareness of the confused beliefs that are keeping them active.

When we are not heard as children, when people don't take time to connect to us for whatever reason, we literally feel like we don't exist. Now we can validate our own existence, which is the root of self-empowerment. Stepping into this new way of being can take some guidance. Here counselling is once again important, because we will run up against our self-rejection mindsets time and time again. This is not a bad thing though, because each time we do, it is an opportunity to see through the confusion and see ourselves in a better light.

We are our own parent, and we are learning to parent ourselves. One of the wonderful spin-offs of building this type of relationship with ourselves is that everything we learn that

helps us to make a real connection with ourselves also works where connecting to our own partner and children are concerned, which is perfectly logical when you think about it. For many people, making a real heartfelt connection with themselves is one of the most special and profound events in their life. This in itself can be life-changing. For those of us who suffer chronic depression, this can be the very key that turns off the depression for good.

2. Connecting to our Growth Consciousness

In my experience, confusion sets in when, for whatever reason, we get out of touch with our higher growth-centered consciousness, or conscious-awareness. When we tune into ourselves in the spirit of compassionately accepting our humanness, we are learning to take care of our own mind. As we are doing this, and at first without even knowing it, we are also tuning into our conscious-awareness. This is because we are literally choosing to be the representative of love to our own mind. Our higher growth consciousness is our potential of love and we are learning to give this love to ourselves. When we put in the effort and persistence, we start to really feel our inner wisdom and power coming through, and sooner or later we find ourselves surrounded by feelings of deep unconditional love that seem to come from nowhere. This can be part of that heartfelt connection that I just spoke about.

Despite what many people say, you don't have to be "special" to experience this inner source of unconditional love and have this experience as a normal part of your life. It is as easy as taking the time to lovingly care for yourself on a daily basis. Sometimes we can have a peak experience of this unconditional love and people can get themselves lost trying to chase more and more of this. This is one of the reasons cults gain the power that they do. Behind this confusion is the desire to be "rescued" by someone else. We are still thinking that our emotional pain is bad and we are still trying to escape from it, rather than accepting it and lovingly and sensibly taking care of it.

As we pay attention to the task of lovingly caring for ourselves, our connection with our higher consciousness grows as it simply becomes a natural part of what we call common sense. Many people have this as a natural result of positive conditioning. The rest of us have to make the effort to learn it. We are reconditioning ourselves.

Step 4. LIVE IN THE NOW

One of the things we discover while we are learning to compassionately reconnect to ourselves, is how much time we devote to regretting the past and worrying about the future. Of course both activities are a complete waste of time. While we are caught up in this type of thinking, we are tuned out from the present moment, which is where we need to act. We are busy being lost in our fearful imagination, living in a false world where we are always a powerless victim. This type of thinking keeps our wounds alive and provides us with little space to grow.

The more we work the previous steps, the more we can see that the only space we can truly live in is in the present moment. Of course old wounds are still with us, so when we feel them in the now, we deal with them in the now. This is called learning from the past, which is the only thing we can truly do with the past, and it will keep hanging around until we do. We can also make plans and set goals for the future, but we cannot dictate the results. It would be a safe prediction though to say that our future won't be bright if we spend too much time worrying, regretting and rejecting ourselves.

Not living in the now is a product of not taking responsibility for our own lives – we still want someone else to fix it for us. This is just natural human confusion. As we learn to connect with ourselves and be in a state of tuned in rather than tuned out, we can act more on our own behalf in the present moment. As a natural result, we get more done, we have more peace and we experience more happiness. Our personal power and discipline naturally increases. Of course I am talking about genuine discipline – the sort of discipline that brings us freedom, not restriction.

The more we work these steps, the more we can act wisely in the moment, and the more access we have to our joy and creative intelligence. Our ability to find solutions to problems that once baffled us increases, and we become amazed at the choices that are available to us in life.

Step 5. LIVE THE PROCESS AS A WAY OF LIFE

Step 5 is about recognizing and accepting that life is a journey of continual growth. When we accept this level of responsibility for our lives “the sky's the limit”. It is our stuck child self that says we should be magically happy without

actually making the effort to learn what it means to be happy. This confused part of our mind is still waiting for mum and dad to finish the job, but this is not going to happen, and there is grieving we all have to go through around this. Our current loved ones can't do the job for us either. It is too much for one human being to take on that job for another.

Because of our lack of faith and trust in ourselves, we also have trouble trusting others. We only tend to give self-improvement programs half an effort at the most, and then say, “see, I told you it wasn't going to work.” Step-5 urges us to confront this confused thinking and finally see that it is this type of thinking that robs us of the life that we want.

We are freer to get serious about facing our challenges and healing our mind when we can accept that it is okay to be human. Accepting our humanness also means accepting that we have naturally got what it takes to overcome our problems, even though we don't at first know how to access our inner potential. If we never give up, and refuse to see failure as defeat, but instead just another opportunity to grow, we will find the personal power to manage anything that life can throw at us. In fact, feeling such personal power becomes exciting, and personal growth becomes a natural way of life



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