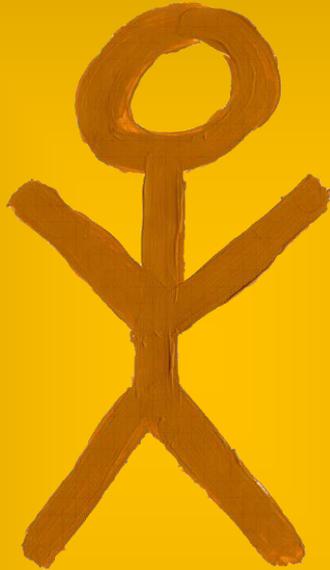


WAKING UP



**Stress Management
Principles for Effective Living**

Dr. Brian Liebreich

WAKING UP

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For the person who's been told, "It can't be done," this is for you.



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Porch

“For of all the sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been.”

John Greenleaf Whittier

The creak of the old rocker was so loud, it echoed across the front lawn. Back and forth, forward and back. The woman shifted in the chair as it swayed, her hands resting easily on the arms of the rocker, the blue veins and arthritic fingers offering clues to her age.

The porch was her favorite place to sit and spend an afternoon. This had been her home for decades, and in the later years of her life, it was a haven for rest and reflection, and for waiting. A cup of tea sat on the table beside her, a thin trail of steam rising in the cool air. Her robe kept her warm and comfortable.

She looked over at the rose bushes lining the walkway. Her husband had always tended the roses, and thanks to that nice young boy next door, they still looked hearty. The sounds of laughter and a bouncing ball made her turn in her rocker, and look toward the green house across the street. Two small children giggled as they ran and played along the grass. It was a quiet, peaceful moment.

She continued to watch them. She, too, had been young once. What happened? Slowly, a soft, dense feeling of sadness began to settle over her. Her breath quickened a bit, and she shivered. Her robe felt heavy across her shoulders, and she was suddenly tired and cold.

She wished it had been different.

She glanced back at the roses, and saw they needed trimming. And the garden could use some weeding. She sighed. She wondered if the neighbor boy would remember to come by this

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week, or if he'd forget again. Who was going to do the yard work? And she still had to take care of the dishes, left undone from the night before. She leaned back in her chair. She felt so very tired.

She thought the kids were supposed to stop by today. They didn't give her a time, but she hoped they'd come through. She didn't want to wait too long. The afternoons passed slowly, and it seemed like she'd been waiting for a long time already.

She would have liked the kids to come over more often. After all, she was alone, and they knew that. Were they due to come by today or tomorrow? What was today, Thursday or Friday? Each day felt the same to her.

Thoughts wandered back. If only...

She didn't want to think about that. Yet, the thoughts came, and she didn't know what to do with them. If only those kids would show up, she could think of something else.

She had so many questions and regrets about the course of her life. The decisions she made and even worse, the indecision that kept her from experiencing more joy. Her fear of rejection, failure and risk limited her possibilities. What had her life been about? She dwelt on missed opportunities. Tears welled up in her eyes as she pushed the thoughts away once again.

It all seemed such a struggle. What was going to happen to her? Where would she live? How would she die?

She took a sip of her tea. It was cold now. She didn't like cold tea. Some days, it seemed that nothing was right. Everything was so difficult.

She thought about going inside, but decided to sit on the porch for awhile longer. Probably nothing good on television anyway, and the dirty dishes weren't going anywhere.

She glanced up at the sound of an approaching car, and her expression brightened. But the car drove past, and she realized it wasn't them. She sat back in her rocker. She wished the kids

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would arrive soon. It had been a long wait, and she was getting a headache. That would figure.



INTRODUCTION

“The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up.”

Paul Valery

We all want a satisfying life. We spend endless amounts of energy pursuing what we believe will make us happy. None of us want to be the distressed woman stuck on the porch. But too many of us ask ourselves at the end of the day, “Is this all there is?”

Some days, we get up in the morning and make a promise that today will be different. We won’t let things bother us, we won’t put things off, and we will save time for ourselves. Then we head out into the world with the same skills and mindset that were insufficient yesterday, and will be again today.

Many people live their lives wearing blinders. We are blind to new ideas, and our perspective of the world is limited. We begin to believe that our view is the only one there is. This narrow focus reduces anxiety by lessening what may be an overwhelming array of thoughts and feelings that can “attack” us at any time.

This is our “survival” mode, and it leaves us with a comfortable cushion of protection from the slings and arrows of full, human experience. The padding is seductive in its ability to lull us to sleep. Thus, many people “sleepwalk” through their lives, distant from their family and friends, their goals and values, their capacity to feel joy and peace.



This protective shell surrounds us all from time to time, but while we feel protected, we are, in fact, incomplete. In the survival mode, we are nowhere near our physical presence, that is, we are not in the here-and-now. We think about the weekend while we are at work, and wish we were home when we are away. We are not present in the moment.

We all “check out” of situations at times, withdraw our energy and turn our attention to some past disappointment, but we all experience periods where we are very much in the moment. These brief awakenings show that it is possible to be in the here-and-now. But we must focus on this, and practice it to give it power and sustainability.

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

Henry David Thoreau

Many people don’t change. Ever. Or the change occurs when a traumatic event allows for no other options. Sometimes, change happens when we are frightened enough. Otherwise, we wait, and for what? When the time is right? When our relationships improve, and our finances become stable? Difficult issues exist in the future just as they do in the present. Waiting for our obstacles to disappear, waiting for the risk to be minimal, is a common, convenient excuse to delay and avoid necessary change in our lives.

We are very good at fooling ourselves. We cling to our problems, and get what we can out of them. We stay in unhappy relationships to avoid intimacy, and remain in unfulfilling jobs because we are afraid to fail. We may feel we are unworthy of leading satisfying lives. We feel as though we are not ready for change.



When the pain of change is less than the pain of staying where we are, there is sufficient energy and motivation to make a change, but even then, it is only from the avoidance of pain that the change is made. It would have been more effective and meaningful to understand one's values, develop goals from those values, and design the landscape of one's own life experience.

*If you want your life to be different, you will need to **do** something different.*

“If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’re going to keep getting what you’ve been getting.”
Zig Zigler

We really do know quite a lot about what will make us happy. The information is readily available to us, but too often we are left to search for it on our own. Unfortunately, some of the steps we take to improve our situation only make it worse. The concepts and skills we will study and practice here can be integrated into our lives, resulting in greater moment-to-moment satisfaction regardless of circumstances.

This is what Waking Up is all about, becoming more aware. Awareness is the capacity to see things as they really are, not how we want or perceive them to be. This concept is a crucial first step toward happiness and satisfaction. When we are aware, we are able to see with clarity the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that drive our behavior. When we notice destructive, negative patterns of behavior, we can make positive and healthy changes.

To make lasting change, we must be open to the possibility there is something we don't know, and if explored, may be helpful to us. The answers we seek are available if we are ready to listen and learn.



“We are always getting ready to live, but never living.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

We take it as fact that a good diet and regular exercise are essential components to a healthy lifestyle. To these, I would add stress management. If we wish to reduce stress and improve the level of satisfaction in our daily lives, we need to develop and regularly practice stress management skills.

Simply reading a stress management workbook won't be helpful. Likewise, a book on golf won't be very useful if one never dresses in funky clothes, picks up a club, and takes a swing. Information isn't assimilated into our lives automatically. Ultimately, we have to **do** something! We must be participants in the process of improvement and change.

One of the many benefits of participation is the very act of being fully engaged in the game of life. Our efforts bring either success or failure, and while failure is never welcome, it is as much a gift as success.

Failure is our best attempt that didn't work out the way we hoped. It is only one possible outcome. It is also an opportunity to make needed adjustments, and we should become comfortable with this because we will always make mistakes. Always. Failure is an inevitable part of change. It takes courage to make a change and try something new. The process of improvement must continue despite setbacks if we hope to achieve goals that are significant to us.



“That’s why many fail – because they don’t get started – they don’t go. They don’t overcome inertia. They don’t begin.”

W. Clement Stone

Waking Up reviews several concepts and skills, and chapter vignettes, or fictional descriptive sketches that are interspersed throughout to give the reader a clearer picture of how we all struggle with these issues:

- Focusing on the here-and-now
- Meditation
- Accurate reality testing
- Asking for what we want
- Establishing goals based on values
- Maintaining optimal health
- Developing support and structure
- Commitment

You will be asked to practice the material covered in each chapter daily, and explore how these concepts relate to your own situation and behavior. It is likely that your reaction to these practice sessions will be similar to how you approach other new things in your life. Responses may range from excitement and anticipation, to anxiety and skepticism, to frustration and derision. Notice your reactions, your thoughts and emotions, as you work through the exercises in this book. Are your reactions typical for you? Are they helpful, or do they interfere with your ability to move forward toward lasting change?

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It requires practice to understand the concepts and develop the skills to apply them to your own life. These concepts can be helpful to everyone, and many people receive considerable benefit fairly quickly, but to what degree, depends entirely upon the individual. Like anything in life, the more energy you expend, the more you receive in return for your effort.

“A journey of a thousand begins with a single step.”

Lao-tsu

Are you ready for change? Are you ready to do what is needed to bring about that change?

If so, the first step is to acknowledge that things are not as you would like them to be. Once you have decided to make a change, the next order of business is to simply “stop.” Stop and assess your life. Take an inventory of all aspects of your life. Look at what is working for you, and what isn’t. Where are you presently with your relationships, your work, your hobbies, your community, and your own self? What is satisfying for you, and what is not?

Are you ready to make a fundamental change in your life? Are you ready to learn these concepts and practice the skills that can help you lead a less stressful, more satisfying life?

“If not now, when?”

Hillel

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If you are living a life that is unfulfilling, perhaps the time has come to ask yourself why, and what you intend to do about it. What expectations do you have for your life? What are you doing for yourself, and what are you doing for those who share your life? What exactly are you waiting for anyway? To win the lottery? To grow old? Sure, your circumstances may change, and they may or may not be more satisfying, but at some point, you need to ask yourself if you wish to be the Captain of your ship, or simply at the mercy of all around you.

“When the student is ready, the teacher will come.”

Ancient Buddhist Saying

*Remember, if you want your life to be different, you will need to **do** something different.*

When one is completely engaged in the present moment, fully committed to goals that are based on values, there is a sense of satisfaction, and a feeling of peace that resonates through our daily lives.

The only time we have is now. The only time to take action is now. Let's get started. Let's Wake Up!

Brian Liebreich, MD
April, 2003

Chapter 1



Awareness

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Mowing the Lawn

He plodded through the garage, and squeezed past the kids' bikes. Frustration set in as he wrestled the electric mower from its awkward position in the back of the corner. He dragged it around to the front of the house, and moved to the narrow strip of grass between the sidewalk and the curb. His neighbor called to him and waved. "Hey, beautiful spring day, isn't it? Couldn't ask for better weather to work in the yard!" He smiled back but he didn't mean it. He gripped the bar tight and started the mower.

He hated to mow. He hated yard work. It was such a pain. Why did he have to do it all the time? Why couldn't she do it once in awhile, or one of the kids? He had plenty of more important things to do this weekend. The monthly report had to be in by Monday, and it was nowhere near done. He knew sales were down, and he dreaded seeing the latest numbers. He was sure to be blamed. He pressed down on the mower, and his shoulders tightened.

He was in an easy rhythm now, going row by row, but his thoughts were elsewhere and his expression was hard. He had so much to do, and here he was, cutting the grass! Who cared about the grass? He still had to do the taxes and go through all those receipts. Oh, and he'd forgotten to call the bank. He just wanted to get the job done as quickly as possible. He never had time for himself anymore, always doing for others. And now, he was going to miss the last half of the game!

The lawn wasn't large so it didn't take long. He brought a broom and the recycle can around from the back, and bent down to release the catch on the mower. He dumped the clippings into the bin, and swept up the sidewalk and driveway. He stopped and, for the first time all day, saw what was in front of him. The yard did look good, he thought, so colorful and neatly trimmed.

He pushed the mower back up the drive and looked over at his neighbor still working in the yard, tending, weeding, and planting. She was so absorbed in digging in the dirt that he couldn't help

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but he was struck by the difference in her attitude compared to his own. He looked back again at his mowed lawn. He realized he hadn't enjoyed a second of it, being outside, working in the yard. His focus had been elsewhere, his mind on other, more important things.

When had he become so distracted? Was he always so stressed and preoccupied? It didn't used to be that way. There was a time when he enjoyed gardening, and felt satisfaction in the effort and the result. There was a time when he took pride in the tasks before him. Now, he often felt tense, and activities that used to be pleasurable only frustrated him. Surely, there had to be a better way.



AWARENESS

Awareness includes the capacity to be present and awake in the here-and-now. This is a skill to learn and practice.

Tom Seaver: “Hey Yogi, what time is it?”

Yogi Berra: “You mean now?”

Our lives consist of a series of “now” experiences.

At any given moment in time, anywhere in the world, no matter what we are doing, our senses are responding to an enormous amount of stimuli. If we are fortunate enough to be of healthy body and mind, we have the capacity to be aware of a constant flow of physical sensations, emotions, and internal thoughts.

But it is virtually impossible to notice or put a name to everything we are feeling and thinking and experiencing. Consider this for a moment as you imagine yourself walking along the street on a bright, spring day:

You are aware of your clothes, and the touch of the fabric on your skin. You feel the irritating scrape of your shirt collar tag along the back of your neck, and make a mental note to cut the thing off when you get back home. You feel the tightness of your shoes at the end of a long day, and hear the distinctive slap of your soles on the sidewalk. And you’re sure you can almost make out the pop and crack of your knee joints with every step you take.

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Our senses are sending us a continuous stream of feedback about our physical state. When we are aware of it, we take note of it, think about it, and even comment on it. Now, let's add the sights and sounds of our environment:

You pass a store window and see your reflection. The wind has picked up and so has your pace. You take care at the busy intersection, and watch and listen for traffic. You turn sharply at the sound of a car horn, loud enough to startle you and the flock of birds perched on a wire. The signal light changes and you're off again. A warm breeze sends the sweet and spicy scents from the corner restaurant out to greet you right there on the street. The aroma is so strong you can taste it.

Five senses. Sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. But that's only the beginning. During every moment, we are bombarded with internal sensations. There is the constant drumbeat of our own thoughts and emotions. Every feeling – sadness, embarrassment, frustration, elation – is processed and recorded. Every thought is experienced. *I need to complete that assignment. Why did she say that to me? I hope tonight's party will be fun.*

A single moment in time is a rich and full photograph, an accurate depiction of that moment in our lives in real time. That one moment contains every internal and external sensation, every thought and feeling as well as all the characteristics of our environment. It contains the full view of our history and our experiences. And it is our complete and personal log of all we fear and hope for in our lives. It is, if you will, a briefcase loaded with experiences and possibilities, and we carry it with us each moment of every day of our lives.

When you think about it, really think about it, there is no real past or future. Rather, there are only successive moments in the present. That is an awesome fact. We are always in the here-and-now. We can only be in the here-and-now. Five minutes ago has now passed, and it cannot be retrieved. Five minutes



from now is not here. Five minutes from now might as well be never.

“Time is not a line, but a series of now points.”

Taisen Deshimaru

Awareness involves the capacity to be present and awake in the here and now. This is also called *mindfulness*. This is a skill to learn and practice. And it does not come easily because old habits are not easy to break.

We routinely ponder the past and worry about the future. We get so caught up in what has been or what may be that we don't fully experience or appreciate the present moment. We reach back to the past, and wonder what went wrong, what we could have done differently. We look beyond the present to glimpse the future, and think about what changes we'll make and what can be different.

It is so tempting to shift our attention away from the present moment. We do it all the time. We just move our focus from our present activity, and place it elsewhere. The failed relationship. The job we didn't get. Any number of things we cannot change. At that moment, we are no longer in the here and now. We are no longer in the present moment.

When we are not in the present, we are thinking about tasks not at hand. We are sleepwalking, looking instead to the past or the future. And when that happens, *we live as if we were in that moment*. We begin to experience emotions related to what we are thinking about. We may feel tense, anxious, and depressed. We may feel dissatisfied because we cannot change what is happening, and the reason we cannot change what is happening is because it is *not happening now*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Liebreich is board certified in both Psychiatry and Psychosomatic Medicine.

After completing medical school at the Oregon Health Sciences University, he completed his Residency in Psychiatry at Boston University Medical Center.

He has over 20 years of experience treating stress-related illnesses, working with individuals and organizations to embrace tools that empower personal growth.

Currently, he is the Medical Director of Behavioral Health for a large metropolitan hospital in Portland Oregon, and lectures widely on the role of stress in illness and health, and the many ways patients can be proactive in living a healthy, authentic and satisfying life.

Visit www.wakingup.net or contact Dr. Liebreich at wakingup@wakingup.net



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need to do something different*

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