

JANE RANSOM

SELF INTELLIGENCE



**THE NEW SCIENCE-BASED APPROACH
FOR REACHING YOUR
TRUE POTENTIAL**

FOREWORD BY

**JACK CANFIELD, COAUTHOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL
BEST-SELLING CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL® SERIES**

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The anecdotes and dialogue in this book are based on Jane Ransom's extensive experience working with clients. Names and identifying information have been changed. Some case histories use composite characters to illustrate concepts.

**We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies.**

–EMILY DICKINSON

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FOREWORD

Jack Canfield

If you are reading this, count yourself lucky to have found this book. It contains some of the most fascinating information and material you will ever read. I have been teaching people a holistic model of personal growth and development for almost fifty years. I have read more than 3,000 books and have attended hundreds of seminars, workshops, and trainings. I have been a high school teacher, teacher trainer, self-esteem expert, psychotherapist, success coach, corporate trainer, professional speaker, and best-selling author. And yet, I found new information and helpful insights on almost every page of this book.

Jane Ransom is a self-described “science nerd,” a competent hypnotherapist, and in my opinion a great writer. She has the uncanny ability to look at tons of research and extract the most important useful concepts and processes that can be used to enhance your life. In chapter after chapter she sheds light on both the truths and the myths of human transformation.

Jane has synthesized all of her academic research and clinical experience into an original, holistic model of Self-Intelligence, a model that is based on up-to-date science, and, I was happy to discover, also validates my life’s work. Jane has spent seven years researching and testing her model, distilling and synthesizing scientific findings from many diverse fields, including research and insights from positive psychology, neuroscience, hypnotherapy, high-tech neurobiology, behavioral economics, and even game theory. Jane has mastered this knowledge, and she has used it to create dozens of transformational tools that you can put to immediate use in your life.

One thing that makes this book so accessible is that Jane uses all of the insights she has learned in the actual presentation of the material in the book. She uses powerful stories, pictures, and engaging humor (including cartoons) to actively engage all of your senses. She follows that up with practical action steps that you can take immediately to apply the principles that you are learning. All of this keeps you turning the pages . . . and remembering and applying what you are learning.

What I also love about this book is that Jane addresses many of the myths and misunderstandings that abound in the world of personal development, human happiness, and achievement. She approaches everything with an open mind, and yet with the integrity of someone looking for the real truth. I find that refreshing in a world where there is so much hype and hyperbole.

My staff and I sometimes joke that a person could spend all day working only on their inner self—reading, meditating, writing and repeating affirmations, visualizing, etc.—and ultimately end up getting nothing done. That’s why Jane and I both teach people the importance of setting realistic and measurable goals and then *taking action* to achieve those goals. We also stress that genuine success must be holistic—encompassing among other things our relationships, our health and fitness, our fun and recreation, and our happiness, as well as our careers and our finances, none of which can be improved by only focusing inward. Therefore, I’m pleased that Jane’s five-part model of Self-Intelligence addresses the whole person, from the hidden reaches of the *subconscious self* to the outer world *striving self*, which takes action to achieve those quantifiable goals.

I love that Jane is an ardent academic researcher, but she also happens to be a fine storyteller. To powerfully lock in what she is teaching you, she shares stories of transformation from her own personal life, as well as from the lives of public figures you will recognize, including how Michael Phelps used the power of visualization to win more Olympic gold medals than anyone in history, and how I used that same power to create a bestselling book series that has sold more than half a billion books. But mostly Jane writes about her clients, usually regular folks with regular problems, yet their case histories will fascinate you. And, although only one chapter in the book focuses on hypnosis, throughout the book you will get an insider view on Jane’s intriguing work as a professional hypnotist.

I first met Jane in 2010 at my annual Breakthrough to Success training, just two years after she’d opened her hypnosis office. During the training she half-jokingly confessed to being a “recovering intellectual” still relatively new to the world of self-transformation. Over the subsequent years while Jane was developing her multifold model of Self-Intelligence, I watched her learn to embrace her own multifaceted uniqueness. As a result, she’s now still a serious scholar, but she is also a playful presenter and a passionate agent of positive change.

I am excited knowing that this book will now enable her to help far more people than she's previously been able to serve, because I know that's her heartfelt aim and her true passion. Writing this book was the BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) that she set back in 2010 at the Breakthrough to Success training. Now, because she practices what she teaches, the book is a reality. It is the culmination of a committed seven-year journey. But her journey's not over—and neither is yours—for as long as we live, the path to becoming all we can be continually opens before us.

I wish you well on *your* journey and congratulate you on your decision to read *Self-Intelligence*. By implementing the strategies here, you truly can change your life. Therefore, don't just read this book. Use the tools that are offered. Take action and commit to the never-ending process of your own personal growth.

Best wishes for a meaningful and fulfilling journey.

Jack Canfield, cocreator of the *New York Times* #1 bestselling Chicken Soup for the Soul® series and *The Success Principles™: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*; founder of the Transformational Leadership Council

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Party!

Propped against the basement wall of my childhood home was a makeshift bookcase, where as an adolescent, I happened to discover, nearly hidden behind a pile of magazines, two tantalizing paperbacks. One touted so-called extrasensory perception or ESP—the author claimed to bend spoons with his mind—and the other extolled hypnosis as a surefire way to impress people. I devoured both books.

Well, I never managed to bend spoons using only my psyche. But I did learn how to hypnotize willing schoolmates, and became a hit at slumber parties. For us kids in rural Indiana, this passed as great entertainment. One friend in particular, named Susan, went into a trance very easily. Looking back, I recognize that she was what we professional hypnotists call a *high-hypnotizable*.

One night I told Susan under hypnosis that she was walking along the beach. After coming out of her trance, she reported having *felt* the soft sand beneath her bare feet. She had *seen* the glittering waves collapse into foam against the shore. She had *heard* the plaintive cries of gulls. She insisted that she had not merely daydreamed her walk on the beach. Somehow, hypnotized, she had *lived* it.

Feeling slightly jealous, having never experienced a trance myself, I asked her to hypnotize me by employing the same technique I'd used with her. She tried it, gently massaging my temples while counting backward. To my dismay, nothing happened. I began to suspect her of exaggerating her trance experience. After all, by then the proclaimed spoon-bender had been exposed on television as a fraud. Maybe hypnosis wasn't completely real either? Maybe it was just hocus-pocus. I decided that at best it was child's play, and moved on.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century. Web-browsing one lazy Sunday morning at home in San Francisco, I saw a mention of the first accredited college of hypnosis in the United States. This shocked me enough to google "hypnosis scientific research." The results amazed me. Among many other things, I found studies that showed hypnosis could help people to quit smoking. That hit home, because just months earlier my father, a heavy smoker, had died of cancer. Years before that, both my mother and stepfather also

had succumbed to lung cancer related to smoking. Shortly before he left this world, Dad told me that although he'd been able to finally quit drinking after a life of alcoholism, he hadn't managed to kick cigarettes. It was too hard. Now I wondered: Could hypnosis have helped?

I love the internet. It feeds my learning addiction. Soon I became convinced—due to hundreds upon hundreds of scientific studies—that hypnosis was quite real indeed. Rigorous research showed that by influencing the subconscious self, hypnosis not only could help people quit smoking, it could be used to treat everything from chronic pain to poor study habits . . . from eating disorders to phobias . . . from high blood pressure to sexual dysfunction. The news seemed almost too good to be true. But I was receptive to it because I'd recently read a book that opened my mind about, well, my mind.

It was *The Brain That Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge, one of the first books for nonscientists on *brain plasticity*. You see, in recent decades computerized brain-imaging technology has wrought a neuroscientific revolution by revealing that our brain “maps” are constantly shifting. We each have about 100 billion neurons, or thinking cells, that communicate with one another through synaptic connections. Contrary to earlier belief, those connections never get irreversibly set in place but instead remain *plastic*, that is, able to remap throughout our lives—which is why, it turns out, people at any age really can change. Brain plasticity grants us the astonishing ability to literally re-form our own brains by strategically choosing our thoughts, actions and experiences.

What that book hadn't told me—but what I learned while web-diving hypnosis research—was that the same neuro-imaging technology that revealed brain plasticity also had helped validate hypnosis as a powerful tool for remapping the brain. Scientists can look at the brain under hypnosis and see that it's a measurable phenomenon far beyond mere imagining. (We'll explore how you can use hypnosis in chapter 4.)

Helping My Self to a Science Smorgasbord

So it was that a decade ago, the skeptic in me surrendered to new science. Not only could people transform themselves, but hypnosis could help them. I knew I had a knack for it. I enrolled in the United States' first accredited hypnosis college to train as a master hypnotist and hypnotherapist, while earning additional certifications from the American Hypnosis Association in specialties such as smoking cessation and weight loss. In 2008 I opened an office in downtown San Francisco on Market Street near Union Square.

Soon I was helping people reach all sorts of goals, from kicking addictions to acing difficult exams to boosting their sports performance. It was exhilarating . . . and humbling. I began to feel in over my head. While hypnosis provided a magic bullet for some clients for some issues, it didn't always solve everything, and clients began bringing in problems I hadn't trained for. A client would come in to do one thing—say, quit chewing their nails—and then ask my help to do something else totally unrelated, such as improve their marriage or get a promotion.

Did I tell you that I love the internet? Each day I'd come home from my office to look up scientific studies, order books, take massive notes on whatever I read, and write out synopses of what I'd learned, thereby managing to stay a step or two ahead of my clients.

I began to accumulate what the philosopher John Dewey might have called a very big toolbox—all sorts of positive-change tools drawn from all sorts of disparate disciplines, from game theory to neurobiology to behavioral economics to various fields of psychology. Not only did this stuff work, but it was way-cool science. It felt to me like a fabulous party too good to miss, and in my nerdy, obsessive way I began sharing this brain candy with everyone. Or maybe oversharing.

“Do you know *everything*?” my client Larry said accusingly. “You're cluttering my mind. Can't you just connect the dots to make one pretty picture to hang on my refrigerator?” (All clients' names in this book have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

A sixty-five-year-old charmer, Larry was both a deep thinker and a playful tease. (You'll meet him again in chapter 15.) He liked to get my goat. Now he made a show of stretching out on his back in my office recliner, which was just big enough to hold his six-foot-two frame. He put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes as though taking in the sun. “Instead of 1001 brainiac facts to keep me up at night, how about just a quickie system to help me understand myself? As much as I enjoy this comfy chair, no relationship lasts forever. Give me something I can wrap my head around and take with me when we break up.”

He'd come in many months earlier to quit smoking, after which we'd tackled various other issues. He was a wonderful client, open-minded and proactive, and he was right: As we had moved from one challenge to the next, in my zeal to be helpful, I'd been throwing science at him willy-nilly. My big toolbox contained lots of valuable instruments, but it was a disorganized mess.

“You’re a heartbreaker, Larry,” I teased him back. “Okay, I’ll work on it.”

That evening in my home office, surrounded by an ever-expanding collection of articles and books, I pondered how to meet Larry’s request for a single system to, as he’d said, “help me understand myself.” I realized that despite the diversity of their challenges, all of my clients wanted to understand themselves. People came to me because they felt confounded by how hard it was for them to reach certain goals—goals they knew they could achieve.

They never asked for help to walk through walls or grow a foot taller or turn invisible. They wanted to kick a habit, conquer a phobia, improve a relationship, win a golf tournament, or up-level their lives in some doable way. Whatever the goal was, they knew they had it in themselves to succeed. And they knew it was something about *themselves* that had so far stopped them.

Honing a Holistic Five-Part Model

My clients wanted to understand and master the *self*. Could I help them to do that in more than a piecemeal fashion? Thousands of years ago, the Greeks had inscribed a maxim in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: *Know thyself*. Given that the mystery of the self might be as old as humanity, I wasn’t arrogant enough to imagine I could solve it. But I was lucky enough to recognize that a multitude of modern-day scientists, equipped with ever-advancing neuro-imaging technology, were discovering secrets of the self that the ancients never dreamt of. These scientists were providing pieces of the puzzle that had never previously come to light.

Already there were too many pieces for any one person to fully master. And more discoveries are being made every day at an ever-faster pace. I had no illusions about creating a grand theory of everything. I just wanted to design an accessible, holistic model to serve my clients.

I’d already found that it served them to think of the whole self as containing multiple sub-selves, including the *conscious self* versus the *subconscious self*. For example, Larry’s *conscious self* had, for many years, wanted to stop smoking . . . but Larry only succeeded after we used hypnosis to bring his *subconscious self* also on board. That very explanation enabled him to let go of guilt about his past inability to quit. (We’ll learn how guilt inhibits willpower in chapter 20.) Later, when we’d begun to address Larry’s relationship

issues, he'd wanted to know which self was at play; I told him that we'd be targeting his *social self*.

"My social self," he'd mused. "That may need upgrading. People so often baffle me."

I'd found early on that this approach empowered clients. It helped them to understand there was nothing wrong with *them*, per se—for we are all infinitely complex, multifaceted individuals. It was simply that some specific part of their whole self happened to need adjusting.

With clipboard, paper, and pencil in hand, I settled onto my sofa to make a list of the most effective science-based tools I'd been using in my practice, noting beside each one how I might describe which "self" that tool addressed. The list grew too fast. For there were seemingly endless possibilities—the spiritual self, the professional self, the romantic self, the artistic self, the public self, the private self, the creative self, the logical self, and so on and so on.

I decided to channel my client Lynn.

Lynn's a professional home-organizer. (You'll meet her again in chapter 17.) She had once shared with me her *organize-by-five* rule. "You've got to control chaos through categories, but unless you want more chaos filling your house and head, never try to impose more than five main categories. Doesn't matter whether it's a closet, a company, or a system of government. If you want to crush that chaos, you've got to be able to tick off the top categories on the fingers of one hand. Even my grandkids can do that. *Organize-by-five* works for everybody."

There's a long-standing theory in psychology, called Miller's Law, which says that most people can hold in their minds (specifically, in working memory) only between five and nine items at a time. Lynn's rule struck me as sound in that regard. Plus, the childlike image of counting fingers appealed to my penchant for keeping things basic (we'll visit the science on that in chapter 19).

The evening grew long as I labored to formulate a model of the whole self, comprising no more than five main categories whose proverbial umbrella would cover the rest. Holding in mind that, historically, conceptualizing the *self* was as much a philosophical ambition as a scientific one, I kept my goal modest. While the transformational tools I share with clients are science-based and backed by research, I am neither scientist nor

philosopher. I just wanted a practical model to help ordinary folks master their selves. “Pracademics” over academics, as they say.

Down the rabbit hole I went, working past midnight and falling asleep on the sofa. As I caught myself drifting off, I invited my subconscious to brainstorm while I slept (more about dream-programming in chapter 1). Over the next few days a five-part model of Self-Intelligence emerged. It isn’t a rigid model made of discrete pieces. In keeping with brain plasticity, the parts are flexible, overlapping, and interconnected. None of them stands alone, but all fit together to comprise an inviolable whole. Since then I’ve found the model helps with virtually any client issue because every aspect of personal change fits under the umbrella of the five sub-selves.

Along with the *subconscious self*, the *conscious self* and the *social self* are two others which seemed at first less obvious: the *embodied self* and the *striving self*.

The *embodied self* refers to your physical being, but not in the classic mind-versus-body manner. In fact, just the opposite. It denotes the continuous body-brain “loop” of mind and physicality that shapes you inside and out. This mind-body oneness has attracted recent scientific attention, including in neurobiology and in the field known as “embodied cognition.”

The *striving self* gets things done. I believe that irrespective of age, profession, or background, all healthy humans are strivers. By reading this book, you prove you’re a striver. Regardless of your personal aim—whether it’s to learn more about Self-Intelligence, or to make a specific change, or to completely turn your life around—you are taking action this very moment in pursuit of a goal. Any model of Self-Intelligence worth its salt must support you in becoming an ever more successful striver, ever more able to realize your dreams.

“What if all I want to do is lie on the beach?” objected Larry when I gave him an early-draft printout of the categories, including the *striving self*.

“Wear sunscreen,” I smiled. Larry sometimes professed to be a beach bum, but he ran a lucrative construction business. His *striving self* was highly functional.

“You give me this.” He theatrically waved the printout. “I wanted a pretty picture to hang on my fridge. Can you at least add phone numbers? I do like the idea of being able to call on any of these selves to get me out of trouble.”



**Self-Intelligence is the ability
to master one's whole self by
influencing the five main sub-selves
that govern well-being.**

Larry had immediately recognized that the model draws strength from its flexibility; each and any of the five sub-selves presents a portal to positive change.

The Self-Intelligence Model

Self-Intelligence is the ability to master one's *whole self* by influencing the five main sub-selves that govern well-being. Any of these five interconnected selves can be targeted to achieve positive change through the use of science-based tools. Each affects the others in a holistic process of personal transformation, which can be accomplished through:

1. programming the *subconscious* self;
2. conditioning the *conscious* self;
3. thinking through the *embodied* self;
4. integrating the *social* self; and
5. vitalizing the *striving* self.

If the model isn't crystal clear to you yet, please don't worry. It will come together as you read through the book's five parts (each addressing one of your sub-selves) and as you begin to use the powerful science-based Self-Intelligence tools offered throughout.

Meanwhile, it's enough to note that, as Larry observed, whenever you're "in trouble"—that is, feeling blocked, stuck in a rut, or otherwise off track—you have various selves to call on. Your multidimensional nature grants you tremendous flexibility (what neuroscientists might call *self-plasticity*), along with multiple ways to solve any problem.

Larry dropped the printout into his briefcase and got up to go. But the sparkle in his eyes suggested that he wasn't quite finished with me. "You say the positive changes I've been making all fit under one umbrella. You know I refuse to carry an umbrella. Too cumbersome!"

I rose to walk him out. Beside my waiting room exit was a bronze bucket holding several spare umbrellas for my clients' convenience. Although it was true Larry didn't carry an umbrella, he sometimes borrowed mine.

"Larry," I said, "Think Mary Poppins."

He bounced on his toes, turned, and gave me a hug. "A flying umbrella! Why didn't you say so? Everybody needs a flying umbrella."

An Invitation to Fete Your Potential

Over the years I've become convinced that everyone indeed needs Self-Intelligence. I've grown determined to spread the word. Mastering the self is better than magic. It's real. And yes, it's truly uplifting. It was in a seminar with my mentor Jack Canfield, author of *The Success Principles*, that I decided to write this book. Jack may not be best known for cutting-edge science, yet for forty-some years he's been helping people all over the world to achieve personal breakthroughs. In many ways, new science is now validating what transformational leaders such as Jack have been doing all along.

Whether you identify as a seasoned self-helper, a personal-growth newbie, or a previously skeptical intellectual, may this book empower you. May it expand your sense of who you can be and what you can do. The model of Self-Intelligence is yours for everyday application and long-term transformation. It's a big-picture, nonlinear model designed to be flexible.

Some of the topics here may appeal to you more urgently than others, and you should feel free to read the chapters out of order. See what sparks your interest, then follow that spark. Every chapter provides proven strategies that you can use immediately, along with solid science that may surprise you. For example, one way to lose weight is to get more

sleep (chapter 12). Want to build your self-discipline? Banish self-shame. (See chapter 20.) Prefer to catch fewer colds? Make more friends (chapter 13).

Is this book the final word on Self-Intelligence? Nope, and there won't ever be one. Your brain encompasses a network of more than 100 trillion neural connections. That's a thousand times the number of stars in the Milky Way. Your *self* turns out to be a mighty vast subject, which scientists will be studying for a very long time. Why, you could say this shindig never ends.

So let's start celebrating. While you're here, you'll meet some of my clients, plus I'll share a little of my personal story, so that you can shorten your learning curve by benefitting from my mistakes. In retrospect, I believe my biggest mistake lay in adopting a cynical attitude as a young adult toward self-help. Now we know that, due to brain plasticity, anyone can build their Self-Intelligence to attain lasting change. That's why you'll find your name on the A-list of invitees no matter where you were before on the transformational spectrum. There's exciting science here for all our guests, plus plenty of party favors in the form of quirky quizzes, scintillating sidebars, actionable takeaways, bite-size chapter summaries, and goofy cartoons.

Are you ready to have some brain fun, learn some new life moves, and open up some surprise ideas that you can actually use? Let's get this party started!

PART ONE

**PROGRAMMING
YOUR
SUBCONSCIOUS
SELF**

Neuro-imaging technology not only has confirmed the fact of brain plasticity, it also has created new scientific respect for the subconscious self. Because we can now spy on the secret life of the brain, we can discuss the subconscious as a real, even observable, entity. Of course, I'm particularly fond of the subconscious because I'm a hypnotist. But, as you'll discover in this part, hypnosis is just one of many tools you can use to directly program your subconscious self.

We'll investigate the extraordinary problem-solving power of your dreaming mind and how you can harness that power while you sleep. We'll talk about how to take your performance in a certain area from good to great by practicing visualization the scientific way. We'll discuss your brain's visual cortex, explain why what you *see* so deeply affects your subconscious, and explore what you need to do about it for greater success. Naturally, we'll pull back the curtain on hypnosis, my specialty and a scientific topic of great mystery.

Research indicates that you will more easily learn the scientific content here if you prime your subconscious self by asking questions beforehand. Thus, we begin every chapter with a quiz.

Remember, you can read the chapters in whatever order suits you best. While each one focuses on a particular topic, you'll find that ultimately those topics all interconnect, just as do the five sub-selves. Therefore, as you enjoy the specific stories and strategies shared in each chapter, you simultaneously will be building, within your mind, the big-picture model of Self-Intelligence.

**What you prevent yourself from doing and
force yourself not to do,
the dream will do
with all the lucidity of desire**

–SALVADOR DALI



CHAPTER 1

DREAMS

Wake Up to Their Power

Prime-your-mind Quiz

Research says you'll remember this chapter better if you test yourself now. How will the answer affect *you*?

Dreams can be particularly useful because they . . .

- a. enable the brain to stop thinking and to conduct cellular repair while engaging in random neural activity.
 - b. allow us to release repressed psychological urges, especially in the areas of sexuality and aggression.
 - c. process problems in a highly visual and disinhibited manner, fostering greater creativity than might occur when awake.
-

You've probably heard that some Silicon Valley high-tech companies offer ideal places to work. They provide free food, free gyms, perhaps even free time just to think up brilliant inventions. Such policies attract super-smart achievers—the geeks of the geeks. So it's not surprising that new employees feel intense pressure to prove their worth. If they succeed quickly, they enjoy prestigious assignments and social esteem. If they fail to impress, they may be sidelined, looked down on, or even resented as the weakest link.

When Mary first called me, she sounded mortified to be seeking help. “My team can't know about this. Some of them were on my hiring committee. For me to be seeing a hypnotist would create the wrong impression.” Once in my office, Mary explained that her team included software engineers creating an upgrade of a popular product. It was Mary's job to program a particular new feature.

“My code looks really awful right now,” she said. “It does some things okay, but I'm almost surprised it works as well as it does. It's really inelegant. I keep trying to force it because I can't afford to wait. Usually my code is much better than this. They hired me because I'm good. But to try adding onto what's there, to get it to do the rest of what it needs to do, will be like asking a donkey to be a racehorse. It's as if my mind's paralyzed

by what my team will think of me. There's really got to be some nice, economical way to write this code. If I had a lot more time, it would come. Ideally, I should just start over, but five months have gone by already, with only one month to nail it. I'm desperate."

Frankly, her one-month deadline scared me too. New hires in any profession tend to suffer performance anxiety, and if Mary had come in sooner, I could have helped her to get comfortable with her job in time to prevent a crisis. Instead, she had backed herself into a corner. Now she slumped in her chair, sighing, "There's probably nothing you can do."

No, I couldn't promise anything. But just maybe, I told her, she could solve this problem for herself in her sleep. "Think of it this way," I said. "We're going to program your subconscious to deliver your answer in a dream."

Historically, dreams at night have often saved the proverbial day. Dmitri Mendeleev spent years trying to systemize the atomic weights of the elements, until the periodic table came to him in a dream. India's late great math genius Srinivasa Ramanujan dreamt up many of his solutions. He said that a Hindu goddess regularly visited his sleep to give him answers. The chemist Friedrich August Kekulé discovered the tetravalent nature of carbon while dreaming, as well as the circular structure of benzene, which appeared to him as a snake biting its own tail. Two Nobel laureates, neuroscientist Otto Loewi and physicist Niels Bohr, both attributed their prizewinning discoveries to dreams.

Numerous great artists have credited dreams for directly inspiring some of their best work. These dreamers include painters Salvador Dali and Jasper Johns; poet William Blake; author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley; and musical composers from Beethoven to Billy Joel.

Thinking Through Dreaming

Despite dreaming's long track record as an idea-generator and problem-solver, for centuries the science of dreams remained in the dark. Dreams were difficult to test, allowing theories to proliferate without much evidence. Many people asked, "What are dreams for?" Freud suggested that dreams express forbidden desires, especially sexual and aggressive impulses. More recently, scientists hypothesized that dreams randomly generate images while our brains rest.

But now, new brain-imaging technology has illuminated the function of dreams. We've discovered that a dreaming brain is not on vacation but hard at work. Simply put, dreaming is just another form of thinking. As Harvard dream expert (and fellow

hypnotist) Dierdre Barrett points out, it's silly to ask what dreaming is for, because, like thinking in general: "It is for *everything*." (Check out her book on dreaming, *The Committee of Sleep*.) Thanks to positron-emission tomography (PET) scans, we finally know why in some cases we think better in dreams than when awake. But let's return for a moment to Mary, who experienced this benefit firsthand.

Prior to hypnotizing her, I asked Mary to write a description of the ideal code she wished to create—what it would do, how it might look, even how she would feel after completing it. (She wrote, "Elated!") Later, under hypnosis, she listened to me read her own words out loud. I also suggested that the insight she needed would come to her soon in a dream. Afterward, she took her written description home, with instructions to review it every night at bedtime. Then while lying in bed, she was to think about this ideal code, so that it would be her last thought before falling asleep.

One week went by with no results. Nevertheless, on her second visit she told me she'd been experiencing a strange sensation of hopefulness, which she couldn't quite explain. "I think we should keep trying," she said. So during her second session we repeated everything we'd done the first time. Four days later, on a Sunday evening, she emailed me the following:

Dear Jane,

Good news. Yesterday morning I woke early feeling anxious and certain I could not go back to sleep. But then I found myself sort of floating around the room where I grew up. On the floor was a toy I remember my cousin owning that I used to play with. It was a toy race car track that could be bent into curves and loops. Here I saw it splitting and looping and coming back together in many places. It was very elaborate, really gigantic and intimidating, but there was also something right about it. I felt that if I could understand the structure I would be okay. I kept floating around the form looking at it from all sides. Sometimes it seemed really complex but then it would seem obvious. Suddenly I understood the structure was the program I needed to write. In a way it was really simple, but it was also taking a whole different turn from what I'd been working on. It was really 'out there.' Anyway, I woke up and as you had told me to do in case of a dream, I lay in bed while I remembered it and went over it in my mind. Before getting out of bed, I drew a picture of the track in my

Some forgave themselves for procrastinating; others chastised themselves. Results showed that those who were *hardest* on themselves for procrastinating the first time became the *most likely* to procrastinate on later exams.

- Psychologists suspected that self-forgiveness would de-activate the what-the-hell effect. They decided to test their hypothesis. They brought weight-watching women into a lab, where research assistants encouraged them to eat donuts. (Really!) Then they gave half of the women a pep talk, reminding them that everyone overindulges sometimes. They exhorted that group to go easy on themselves. Next, *all* the women were served three big bowls of candy, ostensibly to do a taste test but really because scientists wanted to see who would eat more than they needed to and who would resist temptation. Sure enough, those who had not received any self-forgiveness message (and thus were still feeling guilty) overate again, consuming nearly three times as much as the women who got the pep talk. Only the pep-talk group—who'd been led to forgive themselves—resisted bingeing on the candy.

If berating ourselves doesn't work, why do we do it in the first place? It's because of the way we grew up. Children must be disciplined through mild punishment at least sometimes, because their brains' underdeveloped prefrontal cortices don't yet offer complete self-control. It's hard for parents to know how much correction is appropriate. Many overdo it. Most of us remember having been roundly shamed more than once as children. So it's not surprising that as adults we chastise ourselves for making mistakes.

Nevertheless, as the research proves, for us grown-ups with our fully formed brains, it is self-forgiveness, rather than guilt, that fosters improvement. This likely has to do, in part, with a primary need we have, as adults, for autonomy. On a subconscious level, guilt makes us feel bullied, whereas forgiveness protects our autonomy, leaving us free to *choose* to behave better.

Of course, even with kids, one should carefully balance any shame-inducing punishment with an encouraging dose of forgiveness. I have a confession. In my adolescence, I was a thief. My best friend and I loved to go to the department store, hide small items in our bags or under our sweaters, then sneak off without paying. Both of us had recently suffered traumatic home-life upheavals; perhaps that was why we so easily succumbed to shoplifting. Or maybe we were just being kids, with our underdeveloped prefrontal cortices. At any rate, one Saturday afternoon at the mall, we got caught stealing.

A security guard hauled us into a back office where we were subjected to a good-cop-bad-cop routine. First, an indignant man yelled at us until we began to cry. Then, a pleasant woman came in who spoke softly. She said that what we'd done wasn't so terrible—after all, we hadn't hurt anybody—and that she could see we were basically nice girls. In short, she forgave us. It was in that moment of forgiveness that I knew I would never shoplift or steal anything again. I believe my friend felt the same. (Today my former comrade-in-crime is an award-winning law professor known for, among other things, her integrity and public service.)

Whether dealing with children or adults, forgiveness fosters positive change. Next time you screw up, please bypass self-flagellation and, as best you can, go straight to self-forgiveness, in order to gain whatever education the incident offers. If you adopt a guilt-free habit of transforming blunders into learning, then a mistake is, and is not, a mistake—for every “mistake” becomes a path to wisdom. That is the zen of self-forgiveness.

Oh, one more thing. Did I mention that I'm setting you up for failure? Oops. The more challenges you embrace, the more errors you're likely to make and, if you are a well-meaning person who strives for the good (which I'm betting you are), you may not be able to fully refrain from guilt-tripping yourself now and then. Well, guess what? Forgive yourself for that, too. Doing so will benefit not only you personally, but also those around you, because self-forgiveness generates greater compassion toward others.

The Compound Effect of Self-Compassion

Ben, having grown up with a verbally violent father, found it impossible to completely kick the self-criticism habit. It also turned out that for nearly half a century, he'd been harboring a particularly painful type of guilt. While serving in Vietnam, he had killed people. Without telling me any details, he explained that it was all done under orders but continued to cause him deep remorse. Together, we worked on creating within him an all-inclusive, open-ended attitude of self-forgiveness.

Maybe you can guess what eventually happened. Without any specific prompting from me, Ben became more loving toward his wife, who then followed his lead and became more loving toward him. Ben also came to see his employees differently. While still holding them accountable to high standards, he grew far less critical and much more appreciative, which motivated them to do a better job.

You don't need hypnosis to begin forgiving yourself. You can download a free self-forgiveness audio session at self-intelligence.com, but you may also do this on your own.

Use Your Self-Intelligence

Let's spread the good news, sharing the gospel of self-forgiveness.



Want to sustain team motivation? Hold people (including yourself) accountable for their actions, but never shame them. The less blamed or shamed they feel, the more likely they'll be to step up. Regularly and sincerely praise others for their good work.



If you sluff off from exercising or eating right, don't label yourself a loser, because you're *not* a loser. Let go of the guilt. Simply resume your good habits so that you can genuinely congratulate yourself for your long-term commitment.



Guilt-tripping your loved ones might elicit short-term results, but eventually it will backfire. If you must confront your partner or family member about their behavior, keep your tone compassionate, and remember to come back around sometime soon with warm appreciation for all the things they do right. After all, happy intimate relationships require at least a five-to-one ratio of positive-over-negative interactions.



Research shows that people who are anxious about their finances often shop more in order to relieve their anxiety. Uh-oh! A good way to forestall the what-the-hell effect is by tracking your habits. Download a budget app on your smart-phone to record all your purchases. Tracking will boost your sense of competence and control, to help you stay the course to financial health.

Quiz answer: Research shows that one effective strategy to help you achieve your goals is to . . .

- c. let go of guilt or shame as soon as possible.
-

In a Nutshell



It may seem natural to beat yourself up when you make a mistake—but please resist the impulse. Feeling ashamed can trigger the *what-the-hell effect*, which leads to self-sabotage. Instead, forgive yourself. This will energize you to forge ahead to achieve your goals. It will also lead you to be kinder toward others, thus improving your personal and professional relationships.

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