

LIFE
from
A *to* Z

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Life from A to Z; 20 Minutes a Day: A Guide to Creating a Better You
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About This Book

THIS BOOK WILL EMPOWER you to better yourself. We are each a work in progress.

Once I decided to write this book, I began by looking at hundreds of self-help books. Many were good. But there was very few that offered practical activities to effect change.

I wanted to write a book that you could employ in a useful way.

My goal was also to make this book fun, familiar and practical. With these concepts in mind, I based my book on the A, B, and C's. We are all familiar with the alphabet and it relates to a simpler time. Each letter has an article for a concept with a different theme. Following the article are activities that you may do to strengthen the idea in the article. You may read this book in order or pick and choose which idea (letter) you wish to think about and work on more.

I suggest that you begin with the first two sections. Articles A and B have core themes. A is for *Attitude*. You determine your attitude and it will set the stage for your life. B is for *Balance*. Each of us is composed of four parts, the physical, cognitive, spiritual and emotional, which need to be in balance for us to be whole. These two ideas run throughout the book.

Another re-occurring theme is a flower. We are also a product of nature. We start out as a bud and have to slowly open to the sunshine. The petals represent the different aspects of us. We too, get rained on but need that also to grow and bloom. Life is a process.

The title is my promise to you.

Life from A to Z; 20 Minutes a Day: A Guide to Creating a Better You.

ATTITUDE

ATTITUDE IS THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR in determining how we live our lives. Attitude is the lens through which we see the world, and the lens can be tinted rosy, gray or in-between.

We don't see things as they truly are.

We see things as *we* are.

Perception is very individualized. Two people can look at the same situation and see two completely different events. For example, a child is repeatedly seeking the mother's attention. One mother might see her toddler's repeated attempts at getting her attention as annoying, while another might see the same situation as a blessing: She has a child who loves to engage her to learn, to speak, and to play. Attitude dictates the perception of reality.

Attitude is eighty percent of any situation. Environment and biology make up the remaining factors.

We control our attitude. Happiness is a choice. Feeling victimized is a choice. Doing nothing is a choice.

We have the power to choose our attitude, and therefore our feelings and our behaviors.

We have choices. We always have at least two choices: doing something or doing nothing. Yes, doing nothing is a choice that has consequences like any other option.

Do not underestimate your power. We do have the power to control attitude — and therefore, our lives.

Life is a process. Each of us is like a flower that starts out as a bud. Slowly, with nurturing, the flower blossoms petal by petal. This process takes time and focus. It is a lifetime process.

Storms happen, but it is that very rain that waters the flower. The sunshine will come out again. We may need to prune a little, and to provide nutrients. But we are meant to bloom, to open up. We are meant to be a beautiful flower.

Because the mind controls our feelings — and therefore our actions — attitude is the single most important factor in opening up and meeting your potential. Actions define who and what we are.

A positive attitude lets you feel that you can succeed. You must be patient with yourself — nobody is perfect, but you can strive to improve. As long as you keep going in one direction, you will arrive at your respective destinations — even if you have a few detours.

Also, once you realize that you are a work in progress, it is easier to accept yourself for who you are. If someone criticizes you, you won't feel defensive. If you criticize yourself, you won't feel helpless and hopeless because you know everyone has their faults. Everyone can do better, a little at a time. By seeing life as a process, you can more easily accept any setbacks. When you feel yourself stagnating, keep looking ahead. As in skiing, look forward at the trail, not at the trees lining the path.

When you catch yourself in a negative mood, ask yourself “why?”. Switch your thinking to another track: Think about the positive aspects of your life. Walk away from negative thinking; avoid those who support negative views. Search out and stay with positive people.

Taking control of your life is a process. Like learning a new dance, you must practice. A strong positive mental attitude is built the same way physical strength is gained: by practice and repetition. Over

the years you may have unknowingly developed a habit of negative thinking. You may believe this negativity is the way the world treats you, when in fact it is the way you expect to be treated.

Only you can change right now.

Realize that you choose what to perceive. You must make a conscious effort to change how you perceive any situation — and how you respond. As you become more positive and proactive, this way of thinking will start to become natural to you. You will see your attitude begin to blossom.

How you perceive your situation is critical. You cannot always change your world, but you can change how you see it. And it is this very attitude that will attract more and more positive things into your life.

A college student, Megan, had to get extra money for school. She took a part-time job selling shoes in a department store. The first week, Megan thought the job boring and dreaded going to work. But then she decided to make a choice about her attitude. Megan thought about what she could learn on the job. She started to notice how the manager handled problems. She studied the promotions and marketing for her store and considered whether or not they brought in customers. She thought about listening and trying to help her customers find what they wanted. Megan learned about the different types of footwear and which might be better in certain situations. She began to enjoy her job; not only her learning experience and personal growth, but what she could give to others. Her attitude had changed. Her “boring” job became a positive situation.

Life is truly what you make it. You can choose to look at a situation as a hopeless victim or as somebody who can learn and grow. You have the power.

- Would you like to change your life?
- Would you like to live the life you want but thought you could not achieve?

- Have you tried but failed to do the things you desire?
- Do you look around at others and feel they had a better break than you?
- Do you feel helpless in achieving your goals?
- Do you feel anxious at times?
- Do you feel depressed at times?

If you answered, “yes” to any of these questions, please read on.

This book can facilitate your progress into creating a better you. Try the activities, research for yourself, become mindful of your choices and appreciate your gifts.

Life is, after all, what you make it.

Make your dreams come true.

ATTITUDE

Activity 1: How to Improve Your Attitude Today

Below, describe a situation that you are not happy about and would like to change. Example: I have problems with my boss's tone.

Write about why you are not happy about the situation. How do you feel in this situation. Example: I feel like she is rude and disrespectful.

Think about this situation. Ask and research to try to discover the facts. What might have caused it? What may be the reasons behind it? (Remember there are always at least three sides to any situation — one person's opinion, the other person's opinion and the truth.)

Write your thoughts.

Example: My boss is too busy to stop and have small talk or explain things. Or maybe, she thinks I am so smart that she does not need to go into details since I already know. Or maybe, my boss believes it is unprofessional of her to talk too much. Or maybe, she has not considered her shortness to be rude and has no intention of hurting my feelings.

What can you do to make the situation better for you? Example: Ask questions directly to my boss so I can get more clarification and discussion. Or, I could ask her if she has any suggestions to improve my job performance. Or, I could just think that this is the way it is and it's okay.

Write some actions you may take in a productive way.

ATTITUDE

Activity 2: Self Improvements

Create a positive mental environment at home and at work for your attitude.

Try Post-It Living Reminders to better your attitude.

- Find an inspirational quote and post it.
- Put your goals for today on the bathroom mirror. (“I’m going to have a great day.”)
- Post some positive qualities about yourself.
- Sing and listen to music when possible.

Before going to sleep think about the day’s events to better your attitude.

- Think about what you did well. Give yourself credit for it.
- Think about a goal. Come up with a plan to do so.
- Forgive yourself for messing up and smile about doing better. Life is a process. If we learn from our mistakes, it is good.
- Think about what you have to be grateful for and/or say a prayer. Go to sleep believing tomorrow will be a good day.

- Balance your life throughout the day. For something that you feel bad about — equal that with something that you feel good about.

Put up some pleasant pictures to better your attitude.

- Add a snapshot of a person who inspires you or someone who cares about you, like a relative, teacher or friend.
- Surround yourself with enjoyable objects and memories.

Colors are also important for your attitude. Blues and greens can be calming. Look around your environment and do changes that make you feel happier.

Lighting makes a big difference. Poor lighting is depressing, so for the mere price of a light bulb you can make change your mood. The new bulbs today offer warmth or coolness to the light. Experiment with different colors.

Lack of sunlight in the winter can be depressing. Try a sun lamp to see if this improves your mood.

Clean up the clutter. I once read an article suggesting we can get rid of a third of our stuff. I did this and don't miss any of it. Go through your closets, drawers, books, and garage. You can put it in a consignment store, sell it on EBay, or give it to a charity that will put it to great use. Think of space in your environment as a commodity. Trade in that old pile of old magazines for pristine space.

Clean up the mess. Dirty dishes and dust everywhere are de-energizing. Put on some good music and get to work!

Music itself can be very powerful on mood. Find the songs that uplift you. I work in an office that has Satellite radio. The staff and customers like the variety and no commercials.

Open the windows for a better attitude. Fresh air and sunlight are wonderfully energizing. Get outside, even for a short break, and take a stroll.

Note how you place things in the room. Research Feng Shui. Place the more pleasant pictures or objects in clear and constant view.

Have comfortable furniture at home and at work. A good desk chair can make a big difference. A proper mattress and good sheets make sleep so much better.

Stretch for a better attitude. Bend backwards and forwards several times a day.

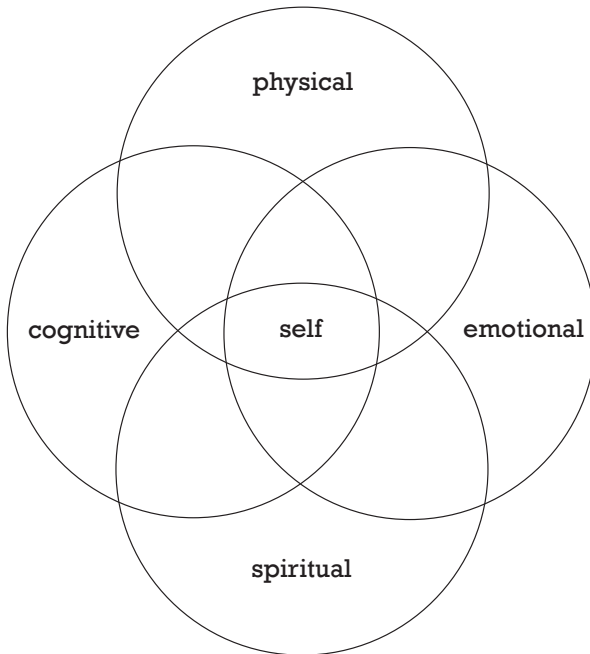
Concentrate on your breathing. Your stomach should push in and out with your breathing. Take deep breaths. Be mindful of your breathing throughout the day.

Be mindful that you have power. You can control and improve your attitude and therefore yourself!

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

BALANCE

Balance An Ideal Model



SINCE THE DAY YOU LEARNED to walk, balance has been crucial to your life.

There are four aspects of a person; spiritual, physical, cognitive and emotional. Each aspect plays an important role. It is important that all four aspects are in our lives with actions and thoughts. Too much emphasis on one or another part of you is not healthy. When we are out of balance, we trip and fall.

Spiritual

The spiritual aspect involves appreciating the order of the universe and being at one with nature. Spirituality need not necessarily be based in any religion. Feeling an integral part of something larger than oneself is the key and helps define each of us in relationship to the world we live in — giving us a sense of guidance and purpose.

Spirituality is also about the Golden Rule — treating others as you want to be treated. Each person should be treated with dignity and respect — defining “a higher order.” This higher order gives rules for appropriate behaviors and consequences for ignoring them.

Spirituality gives us an opportunity to trust something outside ourselves — to help find our way, to solve our problems and to watch over us. It’s a source of comfort and a connection to others. Spirituality facilitates healing, both physical and mental. (Read “R” “Relaxation Time” for more information.)

Physical

The physical aspect is the body. Your body is the container for you.

If you were given just one car for your entire life, you would take very good care of it. On this road of life, your body is your one and only vehicle.

Listen to your body. Be aware of aches and discomfort, and remedy them. So many of us put ourselves, our bodies, at the bottom of the list. We wait until something breaks and we are then forced to attend to it. Everyone knows the mantra of “watch what you eat, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.” Far too many of us ignore it. However, like the car, prevention is always less expensive and less painful.

A vast majority of us intend to live a healthier lifestyle tomorrow — just not today. To be in balance, we must make the healthy body a part of today. (Read sections “E” and “X”; “Eat Right” and “Exercise” for more information.)

Cognitive

The cognitive aspect is your brain.

Aristotle said, “That which is not used will wear away.” Just as we must exercise muscles to keep them from atrophying, we must exercise our minds. Research is showing that using our brains maintains — even grows — brain cells. New cells are formed when you learn new things. And now research is proving that old brains can learn just as well as young ones.

Exercise your brain by reading, writing, doing puzzles, seeing new things, imagining new ideas, fixing things, doing art, sewing, etc. One purpose of challenges in our lives is to give the brain a workout.

The mind controls the body. (Read “Q” “Question and Learn” for more information.)

Emotional

The emotional aspect — our feelings — is also important to Balance. Emotions are the reactions we have to life’s situations. We can choose our emotions, and we can control them. (Read “Y” “You Are In Control”, “H” “Hot to Cool” and “W” “Worry No More” for more information.)

Nobody can “make you angry” or “make you happy.” You actually choose to feel that way. Allowing yourself to stew over something just wears you down. You must recognize the reasons for the feelings, and then decide if you wish to accept the situation as it is or do something about it. Either way, you are in control.

Gaining control of your feelings about various situations can be achieved in many ways. You may gain more emotional control through self-therapy, professional therapy, and/or psychotropic medications (if

indicated.) You may gain emotional strength by seeking knowledge on the subject, by reading or by talking with others.

The keys to emotional control are being mindful and practicing. It does get easier. Like playing a musical instrument or training for a sport, emotional control can be challenging at first. Start with the basics and gradually move up. Practice. You can strengthen your emotional aspect.

The following are two stories of people out of balance and the problems imbalance caused.

John was always using his emotional side to make decisions. He thought about how he felt about a situation and then acted. He did not research and think about things. John and his neighbor had been good friends for several years. However, one day his neighbor stated that John had put a fence on part of his property. John was very upset and called his neighbor rude names. John left trash on his neighbor's yard just to spite him. He lost a friend. A few months later while cleaning, John found the house diagram plans. He noted that he did indeed put up the fence in error. John would have done the right thing by investigating before acting.

Susan was a workaholic. Her favorite place was at the office, where she felt productive. She used only her cognitive side. In order to believe anything, she needed proof. Susan said that she was not a religious person. She was out of touch with her emotional and spiritual aspects. On a rainy day, her nine-year-old niece was killed in a car accident. Susan became depressed. She wasn't even sure why she felt so hopeless and helpless, being so out of touch with her emotional side. She had no idea what to do. Then, Susan began talking to friends about her sadness. She cried and laughed while talking about the memories of her niece. She found herself taking long walks and attending lectures about spirituality. Slowly the pain began to subside. Susan was

comforted, and eventually able to accept the death. She also realized that there is more to life than just work.

Remember: Nobody ever said on their death bed that they should have spent more time in the office.

As you bring one aspect into balance, the other aspects align better. The four sides of an individual are like the petals of a flower. Having each petal open (and stay open) is a process that takes time and nurturing. But it is good when each petal is open and can feel the warmth of the sunshine.

Balance is the key to harmony in our lives.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you spend too much time at work and not enough with loved ones?
- When was the last time you took a walk in nature?
- When have you tried to get facts about a decision before making it?
- Do you feel you *react* to situations rather than *act*? Reaction is more emotional than cognitive.
- Do you think about your body and how it looks more than you would like to?
- Do you spend more time and effort on your body than on developing your mind?
- Do you think so much that it paralyzes your actions? Analysis can lead to paralysis.
- Do you spend as much time or money on yourself as you do on others?

If you are concerned with at least two of your answers, do the activities that follow.

BALANCE

Activity 1: Mapping Out Your Balance Perspective

How do you spend your time?

- Log a week of your time in half hour increments. Write down what you are doing throughout the day.
- The total of your waking time is: _____
- Consider your daily activities. Identify the activities that were spent in each of the four aspects of Balance (spiritual, physical, cognitive and emotional). Add up the amount of time spent in each area:

The following are some examples of each aspect:

- Spiritual; walking in nature, going to services, reading from religious text
- Physical; exercising, playing a sport, using your body
- Cognitive; reading, listening to a lecture, having a discussion with others using facts, working a desk job
- Emotional; reacting, talking about how somebody treated you, remembering times of your life

Add up total of each of these four categories that you did:

- Spiritual _____
- Physical _____
- Cognitive _____
- Emotional _____

On the next page, draw your four aspects in circles (see Balance an Ideal Model, Diagram on Page 13):

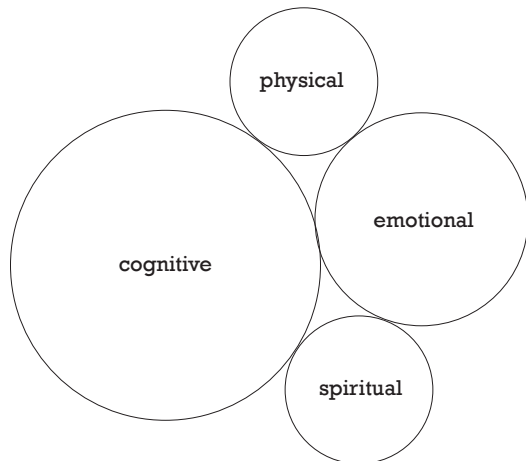
Spiritual, Physical, Cognitive, Emotional

Indicate the amount of time you spend in each area by the size of the circle you draw. For example, if you spend the least amount of time in physical pursuits, make this the smallest circle.

Here is an example:

Total week hours awake = 112

- Spiritual: 8
- Physical: 14
- Cognitive: 52
- Emotional: 38



Draw your four aspects of balance below

BALANCE

Activity 2: Improving your Balance

Look at the circles you drew. Where are you doing well? Where could you improve?

What is your strongest side?

1. Write down what you are doing well. List at least three activities that you are doing to feel strong about this aspect or reasons for feeling strong about this aspect.

2. List at least three ways in which you could improve this side.